

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 11:

Cary marched straight to the doctor. “How is she?”

“She’s fine. Just a minor abrasion and some bruising.” The doctor wrapped up the bandaging and handed me a prescription.

I thanked him and stepped outside.

Cary followed like a shadow, rushed to pay the bill ahead of me, and snatched the medicine from the pharmacist, playing the role of the world’s most attentive husband.

I said nothing.

Outside, I searched for my keys in my wallet, but Cary grabbed them from my hand.

He threw an arm around my shoulders, guiding—no, shoving—me toward the parking lot.

He yanked the passenger door open and practically pushed me inside.

The door slammed shut, muting the outside world.

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“You blocked my number,” he snapped, glaring. “You drove through a downpour like a maniac and nearly got yourself killed. This is your revenge?!”

I stared at his infuriated, handsome face... and suddenly, I laughed.

My day had been heavy and awful, but his absurd logic cracked something open.

He seriously thought I risked my life just to guilt-trip him? Wow. The ego on this guy.

“Relax. I’m not suicidal,” I said, reaching out. “Now give me back my wallet.”

He placed it out of reach. “Fine. I lied about the trip. But if I told you the truth, you’d just get jealous again.”

“How considerate,” I said flatly. “You figured it out—your mom invited me over to remind me, once again, that I’m not good enough for you. She’s been running that same show for three years. If you really want to fix things, start with her.”

“I’ve always been your trophy wife. I don’t get jealous of your flings.”

My head throbbed again. I’d talked too much.

Cary paused, then said, “I told you—Vanessa is just a friend. Our families go way back. My mom treats her like the daughter she never had.”

“Well, congrats on the new family member.” I pulled the jacket tighter around me. Suddenly, I felt cold.

“That’s it?” Cary’s voice lowered. “Can you swear you won’t go off on my mom again?”

“I swear, as long as none of you throw the first punch,” I shot back. “Yes, our marriage is contractual. But that contract doesn’t say I have to take the blame for things I didn’t do.”

“Got it.” Cary’s voice softened. “I’ll make sure what happened today won’t happen again.”

But I had no idea what exactly he meant.

That he wouldn't parade Vanessa in front of me?

That he'd tell Tanya to quit her childish games?

I didn't have the energy to ask. I just wanted to go home and collapse.

"Can you start the car for me?"

I moved slightly and brushed the collar—his scent hit me again, that warm sandalwood.

That's when Cary noticed the jacket.

Tailored. Expensive. Clearly not mine.

"Whose jacket is that?"

Seriously? That's what he was asking?

"You know what?" I snapped. "I gained a new family member today, too. The guy who gave me this jacket—he's my half-brother."

Cary's face darkened.

He yanked the jacket off me and threw it out the window.

"What the hell is wrong with you?!" I shouted, opening the door to retrieve it.

He grabbed my arm and yanked me back in. Then he leaned down—and kissed me.

I clenched my jaw, refusing to respond.

But he pried my lips open, his kiss fierce and unapologetically aggressive.

Only when he finally pulled away, panting, did he growl, "Don't play games with me. I told you—jealousy wasn't part of our deal."

I couldn't even be bothered to respond.

The jacket now lay in a puddle, drenched and ruined.

I'd promised to dry clean it before returning it. Now what?

That night, I came down with a fever.

Cary stayed home.

He made soup, fed me, brought me blankets—he did all the things that made me momentarily believe he might still care.

But by midnight, my fever still hadn't broken.

I lay there, dizzy and miserable.

Cary's phone buzzed on the nightstand.

12:35 a.m.

The vibration was loud in the silence, almost unnerving. The screen lit up.

One letter: V.

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Chapter 12:

I didn't say a word.

Cary kept a calm face, but a visible hint of discomfort tightened the skin around his eyes. His phone wouldn't stop buzzing. It went from calls to chats and finally to a barrage of texts, one after another—endless and relentless on the screen.

“Aren't you going to answer that?” I said.

Cary finally reached for the phone, turned it off without checking the screen, and dropped it back onto the nightstand. He touched my forehead. “Still a bit warm. Go back to sleep. I'll stay here with you.”

I rolled over and shut my eyes.

An hour later, my breathing had evened out.

Cary picked up the phone again, switched it on, and stepped out onto the balcony. I heard his voice, low and hushed. “You okay? Don't be scared. I'll be there soon.”

Then he came back inside, grabbed a jacket, and left.

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I opened my eyes the second the door clicked shut.

I had never actually fallen asleep.

I wasn't even sure what I was clinging to anymore. Once a man's heart changes, it's like a fruit with a rotten core. It only gets worse from there.

At half four in the morning, Cary came back.

Seeing me still asleep, he let out a breath of relief. He felt my forehead; it was no longer feverish.

He headed into the bathroom.

A while later, he came out in a robe, climbed into bed, and wrapped his arm around my waist from behind.

Once he was asleep, I gently moved his hand off me and sat up.

My gaze fell on him. Those features still looked so perfect. The lips. The defined jawline. And then my eyes fixed on the line of faint bite marks along his collarbone.

It felt like someone had stabbed me right in the chest. My eyes darkened with disgust at the body that had been defiled by the touch of another woman.

In that moment, a crazy thought flashed through my mind. Maybe if I pressed a pillow over his face, it would all be over.

Cary found me in the kitchen.

I had an apron on and was setting out breakfast for two.

“Come and eat,” I said to him.

“Your fever just broke. You should’ve stayed in bed and rested.” Cary walked over and tried to check my forehead, but I subtly leaned away.

“It’s just a cold. Nothing serious.” I undid the apron and sat down at the dining table.

Cary looked down at his empty hand, a bit thrown off.

“I need to talk to you about something,” I said.

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Chapter 13:

“What is it?” he asked, taking a sip of juice.

“I want to quit my job.”

My words caught Cary off guard. Before he could ask why, I smiled and explained, “I’ve spent the past few years buried in work. I’m worn out. I figured it’s time I try living the pampered life of a trophy wife.”

Cary narrowed his eyes at me, trying to figure out if I was being serious. “You’re not messing with me, are you?”

“Do I look like I’m joking? What, you think I’m some kind of masochist who doesn’t know how to enjoy life?” I shot back.

He considered it for a beat, then nodded. “All right. You staying home is fine. It’s time for us to try for a baby anyway.”

I just smiled instead of answering.

Yeah, right. You want me to stay trapped at home as your baby-making machine while you sneak off with your precious V each night? Dream on.

“Once I file my resignation, I’m going around Europe with Portia. It’s been ages since I’ve taken a trip.”

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“Won’t she be too busy with work to travel with you?”

“Super busy. But I’m sure she’ll make time for me,” I replied sweetly.

Cary was quiet for a moment, as if something had clicked in his head. “A trip could be nice. I’ll make the arrangements for you. You don’t need to worry about a thing. Just relax and enjoy.”

I kept that easy smile on my face and said nothing.

Yeah, you handle the booking, and I’ll handle never coming back.

With the bruise on my forehead still glaringly obvious, I took a few extra days of leave. I didn’t want to go into the office looking all pitiful, especially right when I was quitting.

With more free time, I started slowly packing up. Clothes, shoes, bags—all the little personal things. Each day, I brought a bit more to my new place.

Today a box, tomorrow another. The once-full wardrobes were clearly thinning out. Anyone paying attention would have noticed.

But Cary was completely clueless.

I even burned our wedding photos right in the backyard, and the guy didn't look up once. He was too busy chuckling at whatever was on his phone and texting back like he was having the time of his life.

If he'd bothered to glance up for even one second.

I stood there, watching him through the glass.

Only when the lighter's flame began to sting my fingers did I finally let go.

The fire caught quickly, licking up the gasoline-doused photos. The image of our smiling faces—my joyful one and his eyes full of me—flickered in the flames. They twisted into something unrecognizable and then turned to dark ashes.

A sudden tightness in my chest made it hard to breathe. Watching the ashes disintegrate, my vision blurred with tears.

"What are you burning?" Cary finally realized something was up and came outside.

I tilted my head back, stuffing my emotions down hard. "Nothing important," I said calmly.

I turned toward him, my eyes slightly red but my smile soft. “Just some useless junk.”

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Chapter 14:

Cary eyed the metal barrel spewing black smoke, his nose wrinkling. “Why not just bin it like a normal person?”

“Burning it feels more final,” I said.

His brow furrowed, but he didn't argue.

We stood in silence in the gloom of the garden as the daylight bled away behind the rooftops.

Friday morning, the garage called to say my car was ready. I was about to text the receipt to Roy when I remembered the jacket.

I'd promised to have it cleaned and returned, a promise that was now impossible to keep.

I tapped out a message to him: [Here's the receipt for the repairs. Awkward question, but any chance you could give me your boss's measurements? Height, weight, waist, inseam, that sort of thing.]

The text made me sound like a perv, but I had little choice. I could've just bought a new jacket, but the original was clearly bespoke. What if a replacement didn't match the trousers?

Might as well buy a whole new suit.

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Roy didn't reply.

I chose to believe he was busy getting the information, not that he'd dismissed me as a weirdo.

At the next junction, my phone rang. It was the finance manager, querying some figures.

Since the cut on my forehead had mostly healed, I did a U-turn and headed for the office.

My return after so many days off prompted a small, cheerful reception from my team. Guilt pricked at me. I still hadn't told them I was leaving, and my departure would land them with the hassle of breaking in a new boss.

I sorted the data with finance, then holed up in my office, ploughing through a backlog of work. It was late afternoon by the time I drafted my resignation letter, planning to hand it in before I left for the day.

On my way to the break room for a glass of water, I overheard a conversation that turned my stomach.

"Heard it from the secretaries. Vanessa Abrams from Abrams Group started today. Boss gave her the office next to his."

“She’s no secretary, that’s for sure. So, is this a merger or a marriage?”

“But I thought Hyacinth was his girlfriend. Have they split? What’s going to happen to her?”

The group fell silent, then dissolved into hushed whispers over their coffees, speculating on Vanessa’s new role, my inevitable misery, and Cary’s breathtaking coldness.

I lingered outside the door, just listening.

After a moment, I walked back to my desk with the empty cup, sat down, stared into space for a bit, then snatched up the printed letter and headed for the stairs.

No time like the present to make a clean break.

As I neared the executive suite, Miles hurried over, looking deeply uncomfortable. “Ms. Galloway, boss is in a meeting. It’s really not a good time.”

I feigned disappointment with a soft “Oh,” and turned to leave. The moment his shoulders relaxed, I spun on my heel, sidestepped him, and shoved the office door open before he could react.

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Chapter 15:

I immediately hated myself for it.

My mind was made up to walk away, so why this self-destructive need to confront him?
Why put myself through another scene just to feel worse?

But logic is a poor match for raw emotion. Sometimes the urge to know is just too strong.

“Aaaaah!”

A piercing shriek ripped through the office.

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Vanessa, clad only in a towel, was draped over Cary. The door crashing open had startled her.

The smile vanished from Cary's face, freezing into a mask of shock.

Miles clapped a hand over his eyes. "Ms. Galloway, please, this isn't... it's not what it looks like. Ms. Abrams got dust all over herself moving files. She just had to shower off. I didn't want you to get the wrong idea, that's why I—I..."

I shot him a look caught between pity and contempt. "Miles, you've got a solid degree and a good CV, yet here you are, playing pimp. What a spectacular waste."

I stepped into the room.

Vanessa tried to stand up straight without losing her grip on the towel. "What is your problem, Hyacinth? You can't just burst in here! Cary, for God's sake, fire her!"

I walked to the desk and placed the letter squarely upon it. “My resignation. Effective immediately. I’ve a trip to plan and packing to do, so I’m not coming in next week. But I’ll ensure a smooth handover.”

Cary couldn’t bring himself to look at me. “Do what you want.”

I glanced from Vanessa back to him. “Right then. I’ll leave you to your... meeting.”

I turned and walked out.

I’d barely made it into the corridor when Vanessa’s shrill voice lashed out behind me. “So you caught us. So what? Do you actually think you matter? Cary doesn’t love you. He’s with me now! We’ve spent nights—”

“That’s ENOUGH!” Cary’s voice boomed, cutting her off.

I took a slow, steady breath and turned back. “No, let her finish. I’m curious to see how far she’ll go.”

I fixed my gaze on Vanessa. “You can preach about love all you like. It doesn’t change what you are: the other woman. The mistress caught with her knickers down. The slag and the scum. You deserve each other.”

“How DARE you call me a slag?!” she screamed, and launched herself at me.

I didn’t move. I met her charge with a sharp slap across her face.

As she recoiled and came at me again, I grabbed her towel, yanked it away, and shoved her hard onto the floor, pinning her there.

Before I could even stand up straight, a powerful force grabbed me and hurled me sideways.

I stumbled, my lower back cracking against the sharp corner of the desk.

The pain was so sudden, so vicious, a cold sweat instantly slicked my skin and stole the very breath from my lungs.

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Chapter 16:

Cary quickly shrugged off his jacket and crouched to drape it over Vanessa's naked body.

Vanessa was in full meltdown, sobbing, yelling, demanding I leave.

"Hyacinth, get out!" Cary roared.

Finally snapping out of his shock, Miles rushed to my side. "Are you all right?"

I clenched my jaw, my eyes swimming with tears I refused to shed. "Cary, you make me sick."

I shook off Miles's helping hand. My legs could barely hold me, but I forced myself to walk away with whatever dignity I had left.

As the door swung shut, I heard Miles say to Cary, “Boss, I think she’s really hurt her back in that fall.”

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Then the door clicked closed.

“Portia, I don’t think I can last another twenty hours, let alone twenty days. I just... I can’t stand the sight of him anymore,” I whispered into the phone, huddled in the corner of the lift and barely holding it together. My voice shook, threatening to break.

I couldn’t go back to my team looking like this—physically hurt and emotionally shattered—so I bit down the pain and drove straight to my new flat.

I heard footsteps on the other end of the line. Portia was already moving. “Where are you?”

I gave her the address.

“I’m on my way. Don’t you move.”

I ended the call, leaned back against the wall, and closed my eyes. My long hair fell over my face like a curtain, blocking out the world. It felt like my thoughts had been sucked into a black hole, dragging me down deeper and deeper.

I had no idea how much time had passed.

“Excuse me.”

The lift was so quiet that the sudden, deep, cool male voice made me jump.

I jolted, snapping my head up in a panic.

What I saw first was broad shoulders in a black suit, then an Adam’s apple. My gaze traveled up and collided with a pair of icy, unreadable eyes staring right back at me.

It was him.

I recognized the man—the one whose suit jacket I had—well, Cary had ruined. The one whose chauffeur probably thought I was a weirdo. I didn’t know his name, and now I was locked in a staring contest with him.

I straightened up awkwardly, embarrassed to realize I'd been huddled against the lift panel for who knows how long. Had he said something? He looked like he was waiting for a reply, but I had no idea what.

A flicker of impatience flashed in his eyes. He stepped further into the lift and immediately filled the space. He was tall, six foot three or four at least, and he blocked out the overhead lights.

And then he leaned toward me.

I instinctively raised both arms defensively. "What are you—"

He took hold of my elbow, nudged me gently aside, and placed his palm on the fingerprint scanner.

It finally clicked, snapping me out of the foggy daze I'd been stuck in.

The lift hadn't moved at all because I'd never pressed a button. And worse, I was completely blocking the scanner. No wonder he'd had to nudge me aside.

God. This was beyond awkward.

The lift started rising.

When the screen hit the fifth floor, I finally reached out and touched the scanner, sneaking a glance to see what floor he was going to.

Penthouse.

I shifted slightly to the side, trying to make myself invisible. The air was so tense it felt frozen.

Just then, a phone buzzed. A second later, that same cool voice slid into my ears. “What is it? Mm? Measurements? She wants to know—”

I felt his eyes on my back, burning a hole through the fabric.

Turning slowly, as if my neck were on a rusty hinge, I looked at him, utterly mortified, and offered the most placating, pleasant smile I could muster. “It’s not what you think.”

I have no recollection of the rest of the conversation, if you could even call it that.

All I remembered was the lift door sliding open mercifully and me making a mad dash outside, all the while feeling his eyes burning into my back.

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Chapter 17:

When Portia arrived, I was lying face down on the bed like a limp rag doll.

“Still alive?” Portia crouched beside the bed and gently flipped me over.

I opened my eyes.

The embarrassing scene in the lift had somehow taken the edge off my earlier emotions. My mind felt clearer. I quietly walked Portia through everything that had happened at the office, keeping my voice steady the whole time, like a detached bystander.

But Portia wasn't calm. She was fuming.

"You're still at the company, and that jerk couldn't wait to parade that bitch around? Having sex in his office in broad daylight, and then he has the nerve to push you? He must be out of his damn mind! Shameless doesn't even begin to cover it!"

Portia paced, spun around, and paced some more until I was worried she'd wear a hole in the rug.

"Hyacinth, they're throwing it in your face now. Are you really sure a quiet divorce is all you want?"

I tried to sit up but gave up the second a sharp, unforgiving pain shot through my lower back. I flopped back onto the bed.

"I've already decided to leave him. He'll know I'm the one walking away, discarding him. He'll know I've kicked him aside, like trash."

Portia sank down on the edge of the bed and stroked my hair gently. “Talk tough all you want, but look at you now.”

“I lost my temper, all right?” I gave a mocking little smile. “But I won’t lose it again. Only three weeks left. I don’t care what they do. Even if they strip down and get it on right in front of me, I won’t even flinch.”

“You sure about that?”

“I’m su—I’ll try.”

Portia sat with me for a while, then headed out to the pharmacy and came back with some medicated patches for my back.

Night had fallen properly when Portia’s phone rang for what felt like the hundredth time.

“You should answer it,” I said as she stabbed the reject button. “Pathetic. Now he’s worried?”

Portia muttered, grabbing her phone and stepping onto the balcony before answering, full sarcasm mode on. “Cary Grant, stop blowing up my phone. Hyacinth’s getting out of your hair— isn’t that what you’ve always wanted? Now you and your little tramp can do whatever you want.”

I didn’t catch what Cary said.

Portia retorted, “Can’t. No clue where she is. Maybe she couldn’t take it anymore and jumped into the Thames. Wanna go check?”

She hung up on him and came back inside. “I hope he drowns.”

Her phone rang again almost immediately.

“I’ll take it,” I said.

Portia handed me the phone reluctantly.

I answered, my voice cold. “Stop harassing Portia.”

There was a moment of silence. Cary’s breathing grew heavier through the phone.

“37 Bellamy Gardens, Knightsbridge.”

That was the address of Portia’s clinic. My grip on the phone tightened. “Are you threatening me?”

“If I don’t see your face in fifteen minutes, there’s going to be a fire at 37 Bellamy Gardens.”

Fuck.

I wanted to yell, to curse, to call his bluff.

But Cary Grant never bluffed.

Biting my lip, I gave him the address of my new flat, then hung up.

I handed the phone back to Portia. “I have to go.”

“Go? Where? This is your place now.”

“Back to Cary.”

Portia swore violently, but I didn’t have a choice.

Minutes later, I pushed open the lobby door. He was waiting outside.

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Chapter 18:

I got in the car.

The driver started the engine and wisely raised the privacy shield.

Alone in the backseat with Cary, the usually spacious car suddenly felt claustrophobic.

“How’s your back?” he asked.

If his tone hadn’t sounded so much like a boss demanding a progress report from a subordinate, I might have almost been fooled by his concern.

“I’m not dead, as you can see,” I said, matching his aloof coldness.

I didn’t need to look at him to know he was scowling. That seemed to be his default expression lately whenever we were alone.

“Don’t take that tone with me.”

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“Sorry, sir. Yes, sir. Thank you for asking, sir. My back’s fine, sir.”

The next second, his strong fingers were on my jaw, pinching and turning my face toward his with irresistible force. We were so close we were breathing each other's air, and the annoyance in his eyes was plain to see.

"What's wrong with you?"

"I could ask you the same thing."

My retort threw him. He frowned. "Nothing's wrong with me."

"Oh? I thought you might have had an accident on the way here, or got hit in the head. Because other than that, I can't explain your sudden concern for me." I waved a hand in front of his face. "Or has something happened to your eyes? Are you mistaking me for Vanessa?"

"You're not Vanessa."

"Ain't that the truth?" I sneered. "I'm not Vanessa, your sweetheart, your precious V, so you can save your concern."

"But you're still my wife."

Only for another three weeks, I thought.

Out loud, I said, “Yes, I’m your wife. I’m Mrs. Grant. So I have to stay in Mr. Grant’s house. I can’t have my own place. I can’t spend a night out without tarnishing the precious Grant name.”

Cary studied my face, his frown deepening. “You’ve grown a hell of an attitude. What’s gotten into you?”

“Nothing. I just realized something.”

“What?”

“I may be the CEO’s invisible wife, but I’m still human. I can still get hurt. And when I’m hurt, I fight back.”

“So this little act of running away is because your feelings got hurt.” He said the word feelings as if it were something dirty, beneath him. “As I recall, the last time you were in this car, you declared you don’t love me. If that’s the case, why all this drama about hurt feelings and jealousy?”

“I don’t love you, that’s right. And it’s not about hurt feelings. You physically hurt me.” I looked him straight in the eyes and repeated, “You physically hurt me. You pushed me into that desk.”

He had the grace to look at least uncomfortable, if not genuinely guilty. “It was an accident.”

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Chapter 19

“Was it? Sure didn’t feel like it. If there hadn’t been a desk in the way, the force you shoved me with could have launched me out the window.”

Cary leaned back, creating some space between us. “I was agitated. Vanessa was hurt, and your presence there wasn’t helping.”

“So your solution was to shove me out the window?”

“I didn’t shove you out the window.”

“Not for lack of trying.”

He took a deep breath, visibly reining in a temper that wasn’t used to being challenged—least of all by me.

“I wanted you to leave,” he said. “If you’d stayed, Vanessa would have unleashed her anger on you. It would have turned into a fight.”

“She already hates my guts, and I doubt I’d be the one to lose in a fight.” I clenched my hand. “So you pushed me. For her.”

“Not for her,” he corrected sharply. “For her brother. For the business his company will bring to ours.”

So he hadn’t hurt me over another woman—not for personal reasons, but for business.

I barely had time to decide if that was any better before his next words shattered what little comfort I might have found.

“This is the last time I warn you,” he said, switching back to the tone of a CEO delivering an ultimatum. “Stay away from Vanessa. If you provoke her again and I lose the deal with her brother because of it, there will be hell to pay.”

It took me a moment to find my voice again. When I did, it was flat. “Got it.”

“You keep rubbing your lower back,” he observed. “If you are in pain, I’ll ask the driver to detour to the hospital.”

“No. I’m fine.”

The truth was, I was in pain, but not the physical kind.

“The nearest hospital is just blocks away.” He was oddly insistent.

“I said no.” Softening my voice, which took a considerable effort, I added, “Portia bought me some medication. I should reimburse her.”

“Leave it to me. How much?”

I named a figure high enough to cure paralysis, let alone a sore back. I was leaving him soon anyway, so I might as well take the opportunity to fleece him one last time.

Cary didn’t bat an eyelid as he wrote out a cheque.

I took it without a word.

When we reached the house, I spoke first. “I need a shower.”

I fled into the bathroom before Cary could offer an opinion.

Standing under the scalding water, I finally let the tears I'd been holding back all the way home fall.

When I came out, I wiped the steam from the mirror and wrote with my finger: 21 days left.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

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Chapter 20:

I listened to the water running in the bathroom.

I pictured Hyacinth naked under the spray, her hands running through that thick, luxurious hair of hers. I imagined water sliding down her smooth, flawless skin, and I felt myself getting hard.

I stared at the bathroom door.

We'd never tried shower sex before.

She'd probably say no. I knew she was pissed off with me; her tone in the car had been dripping with sarcasm.

But then, we'd never fucked while she was properly angry with me, either. That could be a new experience.

Would she use her nails? Would she bite and claw and squeeze?

I took off my suit jacket, tossed it onto a chair, and was undoing my belt when my phone rang.

Fuck.

I cursed as I answered the untimely call.

"Cary, apologies for calling so late. I hope I'm not interrupting your evening."

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Armond Abrams's smooth, suave voice killed my libido stone-dead. I glanced at the bathroom door again, then took the call out onto the balcony, sliding the glass door shut behind me.

“Not at all, Armond. Your call is always welcome.”

“Vanessa came home crying earlier.” He jumped straight to the point, just like he always did. “She’s locked herself in her room. I can’t get the full story out of her, but I do know she visited you today.”

His tone wasn’t accusatory, but I knew how to read between the lines.

“There was a minor incident at the office,” I said. “A member of staff accidentally spilled coffee on her.”

“I see. That would explain why she changed her clothes.”

“Yes. The staff member apologized, then I fired her.”

It was only half a lie. I hadn’t fired Hyacinth, but it was true she didn’t work for the company anymore.

“Oh, that really wasn’t necessary,” Armond said, though it was perfectly clear he felt it was.

His reputation for holding a grudge was second only to his reputation for making money. If I hadn't claimed to have fired the person responsible, he'd have demanded a name, and losing her job would have been the least of her problems.

"It was a stupid mistake," I said flatly. "And I don't need people who make those kinds of mistakes working for me."

"Well, it's your company," Armond said, sounding pleased. "But I do hope Vanessa won't have a repeat experience in the future. She's coming to work for you, after all, and I'd hate for my sister, the apple of my eye, to be ill-treated."

"It won't happen again," I promised.

"Good." He switched to talking about the upcoming project, promised to set up a meeting with the mayor soon, then said goodnight.

I hung up.

My lie would be exposed if Vanessa told her brother the truth, but I was betting she wouldn't. She wouldn't want to explain to him how she'd ended up naked in my office, or how she got hit. Still, Armond was sharp, and he had a habit of digging until he found the root of a problem.

On the off chance he discovered it was Hyacinth who made Vanessa cry—and not just cry, but actually hit her—I called Shane Patton.

The moment the private doctor picked up, I gave the order. “I need you to make a house call here tomorrow. Check on my wife. But whatever you find, I need a report stating severe injuries. Spinal trauma, risk of paralysis, that sort of thing. Understood?”

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