

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 151:

Lochlan might have claimed he didn't like women—or men, for that matter—but I didn't believe for a second that nothing had happened between Jaclyn and him.

She'd pursued him in Singapore with the single-minded determination of a heat-seeking missile, even casting her imaginary rival.

The most likely scenario was that they had been involved, but for some reason, Lochlan had unilaterally ended it, leaving Jaclyn desperately in love while he—well, perhaps he got off on her misery. Maybe he enjoyed watching her suffer.

I was happily constructing an entire epic of love and betrayal in my head, but I kept it to myself.

Out loud, I said, "Well, don't worry. These things have a way of working themselves out. Maybe the next well-bred young lady he meets will be the one to capture his heart."

Roy laughed. "I hope so. When the boss gets married and goes off on his honeymoon, maybe I'll finally get that long vacation I've been dreaming of."

“Then I wish you luck on behalf of us all,” I said.

“Does that mean you’re hoping for a long vacation too?”

A low, cool voice spoke from the direction of the lift.

I jumped, spinning around to see Lochlan standing by the open lift doors.

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Good God—how long had he been there? What had he heard?

Roy looked like a rabbit caught in headlights. I bet I didn’t look much better. Two employees caught red-handed gossiping about their employer, and the air was thick with sheer awkwardness.

Lochlan’s wintry gaze settled on Roy. “If you have time to gossip, you have time to run that errand.”

“Right, right. I’ll hop right to it.” Roy leapt into the lift. “Enjoy your weekend, boss. Bye, Hyacinth.”

“Bye,” I managed, giving a weak wave as the doors closed, trapping me in the penthouse with my impeccably timed boss.

Lochlan walked into the living room. “There are a few things I need to take.”

“Of course,” I said, my voice slightly too high. “This is your place. Take whatever you need.”

He walked into a room I hadn’t ventured into, a space that looked like a cross between a library and a home cinema. He emerged a moment later with a small stack of items in his hands, then made straight for the door, showing no inclination to linger. It was clear this was just a retrieval mission.

As he reached the foyer, I opened my mouth, intending to apologise for our conversation, but I panicked and the wrong words tumbled out. “Um, I just made breakfast. Would you like some?”

Lochlan turned, his beautiful, deep-set eyes curving in a look that was not quite a smile. “No, thank you. I’m rather busy. I have a date to get to. Wouldn’t want to miss my chance to meet the next well-bred young lady—you know, the one that will capture my heart, as you so fervently wished.”

He left without a backward glance.

“Enjoy your weekend.”

I replayed every single word I’d said in my mind, conducting a frantic forensic analysis. It had all been perfectly polite, full of nothing but good wishes.

No chance he’d fire me because of it.

As for enjoying what was left of my weekend... I sighed and sat down to a solitary breakfast.

It would have been a perfectly peaceful, if slightly chastened, start to the day, if I hadn’t received that message from Alaric Grant.

It had come in last night, and the memory of it lay over the luxurious penthouse like a pall.

“Hyacinth, you and Cary need to sit down and talk this through calmly. Avoiding him isn’t a solution. Come to Wentworth Estate tomorrow evening.”

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The message had been delivered with a tone of avuncular authority—kindly on the surface but utterly inflexible beneath. Technically, he was my father-in-law, or rather, my ex-father-in-law, a man I’d met precisely once in the entire three years I was married to his son.

I hadn’t known he was back in London, and I certainly hadn’t expected him to appoint himself chief mediator in the messy dissolution of my marriage.

But I couldn’t figure out a way to tell him no without saying some extremely uncomplimentary things about his progeny, so, yes, I’d caved.

I told myself it was a necessary pain, just one last ordeal to get through before I got my life back completely.

Maybe Alaric was more sensible than his son. Maybe he could see my side of it and persuade Cary to sign the damn papers and leave me in peace.

With that faint hope fuelling me, I got online, found the service I needed, called the hotline, and six hours later, I was ready to go.

My car pulled up outside Wentworth Estate, a place as grand in scenery and acreage as its name suggested.

Tanya Grant lived here, and Cary and I had visited intermittently over the years, like tourists occasionally visiting a stately palace.

It was never a home to me—or even, I suspected, to Cary.

This time, I felt sure it would be the last.

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A liveried servant showed me the way in while another went to park my car. I entered the dining room to find a table laden with enough food to feed a small regiment, but only one person sitting there.

Alaric Grant looked as handsome as the photos in the business magazine profiles I'd skimmed.

He had never been present during my contract marriage, always overseas, expanding an empire I barely understood.

Yet the man rising to his feet before me was shockingly familiar, a ghost of Cary's future.

His hair, thick and silver-streaked at the temples, gave him a distinguished air. There was no denying his handsomeness; the magazines hadn't lied.

He possessed a strong, almost imperious jawline—a feature Cary had inherited with aggressive precision. But on Alaric, it was softened, not by age, but by an almost deceptive restraint. His eyes, though, were what truly held me.

They were a startling grey—intelligent and assessing—with a subtle netting of lines at the corners that hinted at long hours of intense focus, rather than careless laughter.

He carried himself with an unmistakable gravity, a silent authority that filled the space between us.

Cary had the same commanding presence, but his was an open challenge, a blatant demand for obedience.

Alaric's was more insidious, woven into the fabric of his posture, the quiet confidence in his gaze. It was a power so ingrained it didn't need to assert itself; it simply was.

This man, I realised with a tightening in my chest, was the original mould from which Cary had been cast—the same type of man who saw control not as an option, but as his inherent right.

Handsome, yes.

Formidable, absolutely.

And I was instantly on guard, every instinct screaming a warning.

I knew this type of man. I'd just escaped one of them.

I glanced around. Cary wasn't here. Nor was Tanya.

“Please wait outside.”

Alaric’s first words were directed not at me, but at the two broad-shouldered bodyguards flanking me.

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I didn’t even let the echo of his order fade. “No.”

Alaric’s head turned towards me with a slow, deliberate precision that was more intimidating than a sudden movement. The grey of his eyes seemed to frost over. “I assure you, Hyacinth, you will come to no harm here.”

“With all due respect, that’s not a risk I’m willing to take based on your assurance alone,” I said, my tone sweetly acidic. “I don’t think I’ll come to harm—I know what happened the last time a Grant summoned me with an equally polite pretence of ‘talking things over.’ If you’re unaware of the details, I suggest you have a conversation with your wife.”

A muscle in his jaw ticked, a tiny, furious pulse. His displeasure was a physical force in the room, cold and sharp. He was a man whose every word was law, and I had not only disobeyed—I had openly challenged him. The restraint it took for him not to react more violently was remarkable.

Cary would have thrown a priceless vase against the wall by now, I thought.

“What we need to discuss is extremely private,” Alaric said, his voice dropping to a low register that was meant to sound reasonable but felt like a threat. “I’m sure you wouldn’t want a third party to hear the particulars of your... situation.”

I hesitated, glancing at my hired muscle. They were stoic, professional.

“You two,” I said to the guards, “don’t go far. If I shout for help, I want you to come running. Is that clear?”

Both men gave a simultaneous, grim nod.

Alaric's lips thinned. "My housekeeper will offer you refreshment in the morning room."

The guards glanced at me once more, and at my slight nod, they finally left.

The moment the doors closed, the atmosphere became exponentially more charged. Alaric gestured to the lavishly set dining table. "Please. Sit."

"Thank you for the invitation," I said, forcing a politeness I didn't really feel, "but I'd rather skip dinner, if you don't mind. I'd prefer we just talk."

His composure was fraying at the edges. I could see it in the renewed tightening of his jaw, in the way his hand, which had been resting casually on the back of a chair, now gripped it. He rose smoothly, a predator uncoiling. "Very well. We'll use my study. It's more conducive to a private conversation."

"No," I said again, the word simple and absolute. "I'd prefer somewhere more open."

I had no intention of being ushered into a smaller, more soundproof room with a man who radiated such a potent aura of danger.

A flash of pure irritation crossed his features before he banked it. “Fine,” he bit out, the word clipped. “We’ll use the living room.”

He didn’t wait for my agreement this time. He simply turned and walked, expecting me to follow the implicit command. After a beat, I did, trailing him into the vast, opulent living room.

“Please sit.” He gestured to the sofa opposite his and made no move to shake my hand—a small mercy for which I was grateful; the thought of touching him was vaguely repulsive.

I sat.

“I heard you just returned from Singapore,” he began, as if we were old pals discussing holiday destinations. “Pleasant enough place, if you can stand the humidity. I was there myself last spring. How did you find it?”

“Oh, it was a riot,” I said, my voice flat. “The highlight was definitely your son’s surprise appearance. It really added that special something to the trip.”

He ignored the barb. “A change of scenery is always beneficial. Helps to put things in perspective.”

“It does,” I agreed. “And my perspective is crystal clear. The scenery would be vastly improved if your son would stop blocking the view and just sign the divorce papers.”

The polite mask slipped a fraction. “Must you be so intractable? Is one minor transgression truly unforgivable?”

“A ‘minor transgression’?” I let out a short, humourless laugh. “Is that what we’re calling it now?”

“A man in Cary’s position is a target for every social climber from here to Knightsbridge. The Abrams girl was a nuisance, nothing more. He has ended it.”

“How terribly decisive of him,” I drawled. “And I’m supposed to welcome him back with open arms because he’s finally managed to shake off one of his ‘nuisances’? What a romantic proposition.”

“This isn’t about romance,” Alaric snapped, his patience visibly thinning. “It’s about reality. I know you initially asked for a substantial settlement. I’m prepared to quadruple it. Five hundred million. You will live here, at Wentworth Estate, as the undisputed Mrs Grant. We’ll host a reception that will silence any gossip. You’ll want for nothing.”

I feigned a moment of consideration, letting him see the gears turning.

He really does think everyone has a price. And what a price.

“A gilded cage is still a cage,” I murmured, almost to myself.

“It doesn’t have to be,” he pressed, sensing a chink in my armour. “You’re a modern woman. I understand you need more than just... decoration. A purpose. I will see to it that you are appointed Senior Vice President of Strategic Development at Mayfair Global. A real position, with real authority. You can prove your worth, earn your own respect, and no one would ever dare look down on you again. Think of the life you could build. Think of the life your children would have. A Grant heir wants for nothing. The best schools, the best connections, a future of unparalleled privilege. Surely you care about that? About your legacy, and your self-worth?”

I let his words hang in the air, watching the smug certainty settle back into his features. He thought he had me.

I looked down, a small, conceding smile playing on my lips. “You’re right,” I said softly, looking back up at him. “I do care about my self-worth. And about having a real, tangible impact.”

His eyes gleamed with victory. “I knew you were a sensible woman.”

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“So here’s my counter-proposal,” I continued, my voice sweet and deadly. “You can keep your five hundred million. And the SVP title is a lovely thought, but frankly, it sounds like a lot of work for middling rewards.”

I paused for effect, watching his smile freeze into a rictus of horror. “I’ll stay. I’ll be the perfect, silent, smiling wife. I’ll even pop out a Grant heir or two. But in exchange, I want a fifty-one per cent stake in Mayfair Global. I want a seat on the board, and I want to be installed as Chief Executive Officer.”

The silence in the room was absolute. You could have heard a pin drop on the Persian rug.

“You see,” I explained, my tone one of helpful clarification, “if I’m going to prostitute myself for the sake of my ‘self-worth’ and my future children’s ‘legacy,’ I might as well own the brothel. Then your son can fuck whoever he wants. He could have an orgy in our marital bed, and I’d be too busy in the CEO’s office counting my dividends to even notice.”

The colour drained from Alaric’s face, then flooded back in a wave of furious crimson. The controlled mask shattered completely, revealing the sheer rage beneath. He slammed a hand down on the coffee table with a crack that made me jump. “Hyacinth! You can’t

possibly be serious! Fifty-one per cent? Do you honestly believe you are worth that much?"

"I see that's a 'no,' then." I let out a heavy, theatrical sigh of regret. "What a pity. In that case, you'll just have to persuade your son to finalise the divorce with this greedy woman. Look on the bright side: I've just saved you five hundred million. And your wife has always wanted a more suitable daughter-in-law. This is her opportunity. If she's grown tired of Vanessa, I'm sure she can find someone else. And I'm sure your son would appreciate a fresh new face."

"I only want you."

I turned.

Cary stood in the doorway, his face like thunder.

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"I heard what you said," he stated, his voice a low rumble. "We can negotiate."

Alaric looked as if he'd been slapped. "Forget it, Cary! She's making outrageous demands! There is no way, absolutely no way, I will ever agree to this. And you will not agree to it either." It was an order, delivered with the full force of his paternal authority.

Cary's gaze didn't waver from me. "This is my private business. Stay out of it."

Alaric, utterly unused to being defied, even by his own son, swelled with fury. "I will never allow her to be my daughter-in-law! Do you hear me?"

Cary ignored him completely, his focus entirely on me. "Let's talk."

"No," I said immediately. The word was automatic.

Honestly, how many times does a woman have to block a man's number for the message to get through? I thought. Maybe I should have invested in a carrier pigeon with a simple "piss off" note tied to its leg.

"You know this has to be settled between us," Cary said, his tone deceptively calm. "If you don't want me to keep calling you, or waiting for you every day outside your building, you'll give me half an hour now."

I weighed my options. They were all terrible.

"Fine," I bit out. "Then talk."

“Not here.” He gestured dismissively towards his fuming father. He started walking towards the back of the house. “We’ll go into the garden.”

I didn’t want to be alone with Cary, but the prospect of being left in this room with an apoplectic Alaric was somehow worse. At least in the garden, I could scream for my bodyguards if things went sideways.

I followed him, my senses on high alert. But Cary didn’t stop in the garden. He kept walking, leading me down a gravel path towards a side gate.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“My car’s parked this way.”

“I’m not getting in a car with you. If you want to talk, we talk here. In the open.”

“I don’t want to do it here,” he said, not breaking his stride.

I stopped walking. “I said I’m not getting in a car with you.”

He spun around so fast I took a step back. His eyes were bloodshot, the veins in his neck standing out. He was a man on the very edge of his control. "Do you hate me that much?" he shouted, the sound low and guttural, strained through a sieve of pure fury.

"No," I said, and it was the truth. Hate would have required a level of emotional engagement I no longer possessed. "I just don't want to be alone with you."

"Why?"

"Do I really need to draw you a diagram? Do you need a reminder of what happened in your study?"

He stiffened as if I'd struck him. "That was an accident. I didn't mean to hit you."

"Yet you did," I replied, my voice cold. "And you never once apologised for it."

"I'll apologise now," he said, the words ripped from him. "I'm sorry. I never intended to hurt you."

"It doesn't matter now. But you can see why I'm reluctant, can't you? What if you have another 'accident'?"

A muscle in his jaw throbbed violently. His hands clenched into white-knuckled fists. Then, with a movement so swift it was a blur, he reached to the small of his back.

My eyes widened in shock and horror as I stumbled back a step. “Gun!” I shrieked.

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But Cary didn’t point the gun at me.

He grabbed my wrist, yanking me towards him, and shoved the cold, heavy metal into my hand. “Take it.”

My fingers curled around the terrifying weight of it. He showed me, his movements brusque, how to release the safety, where to place my finger to pull the trigger. My mind was reeling, a cacophony of panic and confusion.

Why does he have a gun? Did he bring it because of me? Was he planning to use it on me?

But a deeper, more stubborn part of me refused to believe that.

He wouldn't.

Then why? Was his safety under threat? From whom?

He didn't answer my unspoken questions. He just asked, his voice raw, "Now you have the weapon. You can kill me or maim me with one pull of the trigger. Do you feel safe enough to get in the car with me now?"

I was still processing the shocking reality of it. A gun. A real, lethal firearm was in my hand. I'd only ever seen props on film sets. The cold, deadly weight of it was both repulsive and mesmerising.

Stunned into speechlessness, I didn't protest when he took my free hand—the one not clutching the terrifying object—and led me through the side gate.

In a daze, I got into the passenger seat of his car. He locked the doors with a definitive thunk, slammed his foot on the accelerator, and we sped away.

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As the car pulled out, it passed another vehicle—a white sedan—coming in the opposite direction.

“Cary!”

A voice shrieked from the back seat of the other car. Vanessa Abrams had her face pressed to the window, her features contorted into a perfect mask of frantic desperation. And sitting right beside her, her expression a perfect mix of surprise and prim disapproval, was Tanya Grant.

What a delightful little tea party I was missing.

Cary couldn’t have missed it. He must have seen them; he must have heard the shriek, pitched at a frequency only dogs and truly unhinged women could produce. But he didn’t so much as glance their way. His gaze was fixed ahead, cold and focused in a way that felt distinctly unhinged.

“Vanessa is here,” I pointed out, my voice dripping with false helpfulness. “Looks like she wants to talk to you.”

Cary gave no reaction whatsoever. Not a twitch.

From the rearview mirror, I watched the pantomime unfold. Vanessa was shouting for her driver to stop. She practically fell out of the moving car, stumbling onto the gravel before breaking into a run, one hand clutching her phone, probably dialling Cary’s number.

She chased us all the way to the main road, her figure growing smaller and more pathetic as Cary accelerated, her screams fading into the hum of the engine. She looked, quite frankly, like a complete and utter lunatic.

I found myself wondering, idly, what she was doing here with Tanya, before I gave myself a firm mental shake.

It was none of my business. Not my circus, not my deranged, shrieking monkeys.

What was my business, however, were the two very large, very expensive bodyguards I had left sipping tea in Alaric’s morning room.

I pulled out my phone and dialled the lead guard. “Hi, it’s me. Just to let you know I’m fine. I’ve left the estate with Cary Grant. I’ll send you my live location. Yes, voluntarily. For now.”

I ended the call and made a show of activating the location sharing.

Cary heard every word but said nothing.

While I was about ninety per cent sure he wouldn't actually harm me, and I was currently clutching what felt like a very persuasive equaliser in my lap, it never hurt to have a backup plan.

Or two large, intimidating men who knew where to find your body.

I glanced at the speedometer. The needle was quivering near 140 kph and showed no signs of retreating. My stomach did a little flip-flop of protest. I tightened my grip on the seatbelt.

"Would you consider maybe not breaking the sound barrier?" I asked, aiming for a reasonable, conversational tone and probably landing somewhere near strained politeness. "There's no rush for whatever fresh hell you have planned."

"You're scared?" Cary's voice was flat, his eyes locked on the road devouring itself under our wheels. "I thought you were afraid of nothing."

I mentally composed a detailed and highly unflattering ode to his entire family lineage. Vanessa was clearly insane with love, but Cary, in this moment, seemed just plain insane. A different flavour of crazy, but equally potent.

I knew you shouldn't poke a bear—or a rabid, speeding billionaire—but I couldn't help myself.

“If you don't value your own life, that's your prerogative,” I said, my voice tight. “But I'm rather fond of mine. I'd prefer not to be a passenger in your suicide mission.”

“A passenger.” He murmured the word, then let out a bleak, hollow laugh that was far more frightening than any shout. “You're still my wife, in the eyes of the law. If we both die today, they'd bury us together. Husband and wife. For eternity.”

A cold dread, entirely separate from the speed, trickled down my spine. “I have no intention of dying today, thank you very much.”

Abruptly, Cary wrenched the steering wheel. The car swerved violently, throwing me against the door, and veered off the main road onto a narrow lane barely wide enough for two cars to pass.

My heart attempted to leap directly out of my throat. I grabbed the handle above the door, my knuckles white, forcing myself to breathe.

Outside, the world had narrowed to a tunnel of overhanging trees, their branches clawing at the fading light. The sky was deepening into that melancholic blue hour, the time when the line between day and night blurs.

The so-called witching hour. It felt fitting. The tense, eerie atmosphere was complete, and the man beside me felt like a stranger—a cold, focused demon wearing Cary’s familiar skin.

I found my voice, sharp and demanding. “Where the hell are you taking me?”

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“You’ll see when we get there,” Cary replied, his tone flat and final, as if that were the end of the discussion.

It was not.

“Pull over. Right now. You wanted to talk, so talk. This stretch of anonymous tarmac is as good a place as any.”

He said nothing. His silence was a wall, and my words just bounced off it, useless.

A fresh wave of irritation, closely followed by a spike of genuine fear, washed over me.

I wasn’t idiotic enough to try to wrestle a maniac for control of a speeding vehicle, but I had to make him stop. At this rate, our final destination was either going to be the twisted embrace of an ancient oak tree or a dramatic, albeit brief, flight over a cliff edge.

The gun was a cold, heavy comfort in my lap, a paradoxical promise of safety and menace.

My fingers tightened around my phone. As I mentally scrolled through my options for summoning help, my brain, traitorously, didn’t land on the police.

It landed on Lochlan. That man who seemed to possess a preternatural ability to materialise when my life, safety, or reputation was dangling by a thread.

I'd come to rely on him without even realising it, a fact that was both reassuring and intensely annoying.

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Even now, with him utterly oblivious to my current predicament, some irrational part of me knew that if I called, he would somehow find a way to cut through the chaos and find me.

But then a sharper, prouder thought followed: what gave him the obligation to keep rescuing me? Why should he have to?

"Who are you thinking about?" Cary's voice was a low growl, cutting through my thoughts. He'd seen my distraction, and some primal, possessive instinct had sparked into life.

So it wasn't just women who had a sixth sense for this sort of thing; jealous men had their own nasty little intuition.

I glanced at him, feigning nonchalance. "I'm thinking about when you're finally going to stop this car. I'm calculating how much fuel you have left and wondering what our plan is for getting back to civilisation when you've stranded us in the middle of nowhere."

Cary didn't dignify that with a response.

We had long since left the familiar sprawl of London behind, the scenery morphing into something more rustic. I caught glimpses of cockle sheds and small, forlorn-looking boats sitting on vast mudflats.

London wasn't near the sea, so this had to be an estuary. Leigh-on-Sea, maybe.

I checked the live tracking on my phone. Yes, definitely Leigh-on-Sea. Famous for its shellfish. Not, as far as I knew, famous for being a popular body-dumping ground.

A small, morbid consolation.

Checking the time, I saw we'd been driving for nearly an hour and a half. It was past nine, and proper darkness had settled in. Finally, with a sputter and a sigh, the car coasted to a halt on a dirt track that was the very definition of the middle of nowhere, the tank utterly drained. Through gaps in the trees, I could see the dark, shimmering expanse of the Thames Estuary.

Cary got out without a word. I followed, my feet crunching on the gravel.

The air was filled with a chorus of insects and the distant, rhythmic croaking of frogs—sounds that were both peaceful and deeply unsettling when you were in the company of a man who had just driven you to a remote location like a bat out of hell.

The world was pitch-black, punctuated only by a few pinpricks of light from distant cabins.

A chilling thought insinuated itself into my mind: was he actually going to kill me out here?

My grip on the heavy gun tightened until my knuckles ached.

Cary didn't stop until we reached a small, weather-beaten cabin tucked away among a cluster of bushes stunted by the coastal wind. It was dark, no lights on.

He produced a key, unlocked the door, and flipped a switch. A warm, yellow light spilled out.

He turned. "Come in."

I stood firm on the doorstep, wary. "What is this place?"

“A converted fisherman’s hut,” he said, his voice quieter now, almost hesitant. “I bought it for you. As a gift. For our wedding anniversary.”

Our wedding anniversary. The phrase felt foreign, a relic from a life I had already packed away. It was familiar, yet utterly strange.

“It’s in four days,” Cary reminded me, his gaze intense.

Right. Technically, we hadn’t been married for three years yet. It had been two years, three hundred and sixty-one days. In four days, it would be three whole years.

The precision of it felt absurd.

Warily, I stepped inside and scanned the room. It was small, undeniably cosy. The walls were clad in pale, bleached timber, giving the whole space an airy, beach-hut feel. A comfortable-looking sofa was piled with cushions in shades of blue, grey, and cream, like a collection of sea-worn stones.

Then I noticed the details, and a sharp, sweet ache bloomed behind my ribs, so sudden it stole my breath.

On a low, rustic coffee table, a stack of worn children’s books about mermaids and sailors lay beside a smooth, oval-shaped stone—a perfect wishing stone, just like the ones my grandma and I used to hunt for on the beaches of Mousehole.

Next to it, under a glass cloche, was a delicate sandcastle model. It was imperfect, one turret slightly lopsided, the ramparts a little uneven, but clearly painstakingly made by hand.

On a narrow shelf above the sofa, nestled amongst old nautical charts, were several antique glass fishing floats, catching the light. And in the corner, almost hidden, was a small, child-sized wooden pail and spade set, painted a cheerful, defiant yellow—identical to the one I'd dragged across every beach in Cornwall as a girl.

"I know how much you loved your grandma's cabin in Mousehole," Cary said, his voice low. "You'd always wanted a place like it. I know I probably didn't get all the details right, but... this is as close as I could get."

I stared at him, the sentimental ache instantly flash-frozen by a surge of violation. "I never told you about my grandma's cabin."

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Our marriage hadn't been the kind for sharing cosy childhood memories. We exchanged demands, not dreams.

"I... went through your phone," he admitted, not quite meeting my eyes. "I saw the old photos."

I glared at him, the icy anger a welcome shield against the confusing warmth of the gesture. "And you think that's supposed to make me what? Grateful? That violating my privacy to recreate a childhood memory somehow makes this all better?"

"It was one time," he said, a desperate edge to his promise. "I won't do it again."

I stifled the strange, unwelcome feeling welling in my chest and kept my voice cool and detached. "No, thank you. You can keep the hut."

It was too little, and it was so, so late.

Cary didn't look surprised by my refusal. He'd probably expected it.

He walked to the window, cranked it open, and lit a cigarette. In the dim, golden light of the cabin, his face was all sharp angles and shadows, the occasional glow of the ember highlighting the stark planes of his cheeks.

He was still devastatingly handsome, pulling at his tie with that familiar, impatient gesture, running a hand through his hair until it was artfully dishevelled.

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In another life, this scene would have been pure, potent seduction. He was the same domineering, ruinously attractive billionaire who could make any woman's heart stutter with a single, arrogant glance.

But he wasn't my husband anymore.

He was just a man who had driven me to a secluded cabin under duress, trying to buy back a ghost with a stolen memory.

I took a steadying breath, burying the storm of emotions under a layer of practised calm. "So," I said, my voice cutting through the quiet. "What now?"

Cary took a long drag on his cigarette, the smoke wreathing his head like a troubled thought bubble. He never used to smoke in front of me. Another small, telling fracture in the man I thought I knew.

He gestured with a tilt of his head. "There's a file on the table."

Curiosity, that old killer, got the better of me.

I finally stepped fully inside, the wooden floorboards creaking under my weight, and went to the table—a thick slice of tree trunk that had been sanded and polished. I picked up the stark white folder.

Prenuptial Agreement.

A sharp, disbelieving laugh escaped me. "Isn't it a little late for this? The horse has not only bolted, it's set the stable on fire and moved to another country."

"You always laughed at me for living my life by contracts," Cary said, his voice rough from the smoke. "For thinking everything could be solved with terms and conditions. But I still believe a contract is more binding than any words. It proves intention."

“And what intention is that?” I asked, my voice dripping with scepticism. “To financially hobble me further?”

“You don’t believe me when I say I didn’t cheat on you,” he stated, not as an accusation, but as a simple, weary fact. “And I can’t blame you for that. I’ve done plenty of other things I’m not proud of. I can’t expect you to just take my word for it that I never slept with another woman after I married you.”

I felt a familiar impatience rise. “We have been over this. I told you, I don’t care anymore. Sleep with the entire chorus line of the Royal Ballet for all I care, or take a vow of celibacy. It’s no longer any of my business.”

“But it is your business,” he insisted, his gaze intense. “You no longer trust me. I get that. But you can trust this.” He nodded at the document in my hands.

With a sigh of pure exasperation, I flipped open the agreement. My eyes scanned the dense legalese, then snagged on a number, a percentage. I read it again. And again. My breath hitched.

“This... this says you’re giving me twenty-nine per cent,” I muttered, my voice barely a whisper. “All of it. Your entire stake.”

“Yes,” he said, the word absolute. “I heard what you said to my father. I can’t give you fifty-one per cent of Mayfair Global. He owns thirty per cent; he’s the largest shareholder. I own twenty-nine. I can’t make you CEO, either. Not because I don’t think you’re capable—God knows you are. But that kind of appointment needs board approval, and with my father holding the majority, I’d never get the motion passed. But I can make you

CAO, the same job you have now at Hastings' company. You'd be running the place, in everything but name."

I set the agreement down on the rough-hewn wood, the pages feeling suddenly as heavy as lead. I said nothing.

What was there to say?

Cary continued, his voice relentlessly calm. "The agreement also stipulates that if I'm unfaithful to you during our marriage, you walk away with everything I own. My houses, my cars, my bank accounts, my Mayfair Global shares. Everything."

"I don't want your money," I mumbled, the protest automatic, but it sounded hollow even to my own ears.

"I know," he said, and the simple acknowledgement was more shocking than the contract. "You told me that before, and I didn't believe you. I believe you now. The money isn't the point. It's just the only tool I have to show you that I mean every single word of this."

He stubbed out the cigarette in a seashell ashtray and walked towards me. His tall frame seemed to fill the small cabin, enveloping me in his shadow. He stopped close—too close—but he didn't touch me.

"You don't have to believe my words," he said, his voice a low, raw thrum. "But you can believe the binding power of this contract. I had it drafted by a lawyer. It's already

notarised. You can get your own lawyer to look it over, have it witnessed by whoever you want. It will be legally, brutally binding.”

I looked up, forcing myself to meet his bloodshot eyes. They were fixed on me, unblinking, stripped of all their usual arrogant armour.

I swallowed hard, the sound unnaturally loud in the quiet room.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 158:

I knew this man.

I knew how much he loved his work, his company, the intoxicating feeling of control it gave him. I knew, viscerally, how much he hated giving up control—surrendering anything he considered his.

Which meant, with a terrifying, crystalline clarity, I understood exactly what this piece of paper represented. It was a guillotine, and he was handing me the rope.

If he ever cheated again, he would be utterly, completely ruined.

“I know I’ve made a fucking catalogue of stupid mistakes,” he said, his voice thick with a fatigue that seemed to go right down to his bones. “I’m stubborn, I’m proud, I played idiotic games that only pushed you further away. We started on the wrong footing. I thought I’d bought you with money, so I could do whatever I wanted. It was the stupidest, most wrong-headed thing I’ve ever done. I just... I want a fresh start. A real one.”

My legs felt weak, suddenly incapable of supporting me. I had to sit down.

I groped blindly behind me for the armchair and sank into its deep cushions. The gun, forgotten in my hand, slipped from my grasp and clattered onto the wooden floor. Neither of us looked at it.

Cary didn’t press me. He didn’t move. He just stood there, watching me, waiting. Waiting for an answer, for a judgement, for a sentence that would either condemn or relieve him.

My mind was in chaos. Cary being stubborn and arrogant—I could handle that. I was an expert in that particular field. Cary being violent, drunk, angry, bossy—that was all familiar territory. I had the maps; I knew the landmines.

But this Cary—this soft-spoken, determined man laying his soul bare with the cold, hard calculus of a legal document—this was uncharted and deeply, deeply unsettling.

My heart thudded violently against my ribs, a frantic, trapped bird beating against the cage of a future I had already decided to leave behind.

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“I need a drink,” I said, the words scraping out of my dry throat. It was the only thing I could think to say that wasn’t “yes” or “no” or “go to hell.”

Wordlessly, Cary moved to a small sideboard. He poured a generous measure of red wine into two glasses and brought them over. He sat on the ottoman opposite me, so close our knees were almost touching in the intimate space.

I took the glass and downed half of it in one go, the rich, dark liquid doing little to calm the storm inside.

My phone rang. The screen showed the number of one of the bodyguards. A tether to reality. I answered.

“Are you okay, Miss Galloway?” His voice was professional and steady, and carried a note of worry.

“I’m fine,” I said, my own voice surprisingly even. “You can go home. Your services are no longer required for the evening.”

“Are you sure?” he asked, a hint of caution in his tone.

“Yes. Quite sure. Thank you for your service.” I ended the call before I could change my mind.

Cary leaned forward and refilled my glass from the bottle he’d brought over. I drank again, more deeply this time. The wine was a barrier, a delicious, ruby-coloured delay tactic.

Drinking seemed to be the only activity that could successfully prevent me from having to form coherent sentences, from having to make a decision that would irrevocably alter the course of my life.

We drank in silence for a few minutes, the tension slowly morphing from one of confrontation to something else—something more dangerous and familiar.

He reached out, his fingers gently brushing a stray strand of hair from my cheek. I didn't flinch.

Emboldened, he took my free hand, his thumb stroking slow, soothing circles on my palm. His voice was a soft, low murmur, seductive in its simplicity. "Hyacinth."

He brought my hand to his lips, pressing a warm, open-mouthed kiss to my knuckles.

I didn't protest. The wine, the exhaustion, the sheer emotional whiplash of the evening had left me defenceless.

He leaned in further, his lips brushing my cheek, a whisper of a touch that sent a shiver down my spine.

Then he found my lips.

It wasn't a demanding kiss, not like before. It was a question—soft, exploring, painfully tender. He paused, his mouth a breath away from mine, giving me every chance to pull back, to shove him away, to end this.

I didn't.

Instead, my hand, as if with a mind of its own, came up and curled behind his head, my fingers tangling in his hair, pulling him back to me.

The moment I did, the kiss deepened, transforming into something passionate and hungry, yet still laced with a devastating tenderness. It was a language our bodies had always been fluent in, a deep, cellular memory of three years of intimacy. All the arguments, the hurt, the betrayal—it all fell away under the sheer, overwhelming familiarity of his touch.

My rational mind was screaming that this was a catastrophic idea, a surrender, a step back into a gilded cage.

But my body—my treacherous, memory-soaked body—was telling a different story. It was telling me it needed this, that there was no harm in one last taste of an addiction I was supposed to have quit.

Cary's hands—those large, capable hands I had always secretly adored—moved with a knowing expertise. One cupped the back of my head, angling me for a deeper kiss, while the other slid down my back, leaving a trail of fire in its wake.

My jacket was gone; I didn't even notice him removing it. The late-autumn chill of the unheated cabin began to seep in, and I shivered as the cold air hit the bare skin of my throat.

I glanced down, realising the buttons of my collared shirt were undone, the fabric falling open. Goosebumps erupted on my arms and chest, and I instinctively pulled Cary closer, seeking his warmth, his solidity.

We were a tangled mess of limbs nestled in the large armchair, with Cary half-kneeling on the floor before me, worshipping me with his hands and his mouth.

His touch was everywhere, rediscovering the landscape of my body, charting the familiar territory of my waist, the curve of my hip, the sensitive skin of my inner thigh.

I was half-undressed, lost in a dazed, tipsy haze where the only things that felt real were the pressure of his lips and the skilled movement of his hands.

My own hands were fumbling with the buckle of his belt, the metal cold under my frantic fingers, when a sound shattered the moment.

A sharp, firm knock echoed through the small cabin.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 159:

We froze, breaking apart, our ragged breaths loud in the sudden silence.

The spell was broken, reality crashing back in like a cold wave.

A voice—calm, authoritative, and utterly unmistakable—came from the other side of the door. “Hyacinth?”

The sound of my name, spoken in that particular tone, was like a bucket of ice water. I snapped back to myself with a jolt, my hands flying to my clothes in a frantic, clumsy dance. I rehooked my bra with fumbling fingers, yanked up the zip on my trousers, and did up the buttons of my collared shirt, my cheeks burning. I ran a hurried hand through my hopelessly messy hair.

“I’m coming!” I shouted towards the door, my voice embarrassingly breathy.

Cary stood slowly, his face a thundercloud. “Fuck off!” he roared at the closed door.

The man outside said nothing. His silence was somehow more intimidating than any retort.

I patted my heated cheeks, knowing I must look a complete state, but there was no time for repairs. I took a step towards the door, but Cary’s hand shot out, grabbing my arm.

“Don’t,” he growled.

“It’s my boss out there,” I hissed, trying to peel his fingers away.

“It’s the weekend. He’s not your boss right now. He’s just a man who doesn’t know when to fucking bow out of a private conversation.”

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I finally wrenched my arm free. Then, catching sight of his face, I reached up and used my thumb to hastily wipe a smudge of my lipstick from his lower lip.

Cary seized my wrist—not roughly, but firmly—holding my thumb in place against his mouth. He lowered his voice to a raw, desperate whisper. “Send him away, Hyacinth. Please. I just need tonight. Just the two of us.”

His warm breath ghosted over my skin, making my heart stutter dangerously.

He had never, ever begged me for anything before. The residual heat of lust was still coursing through my system, a treacherous current pulling me under.

I stared at his lips—the ones I’d just been kissing—and felt the gentle pressure of his hand on my wrist, a hand that had been exploring my body moments before.

I pulled away forcefully. “I can’t.”

I strode to the door before I could change my mind, yanking it open. “Boss... what are you doing here?”

The question was out before I could stop it. How on earth had he gotten here so fast?

Lochlan’s gaze took in my undoubtedly flushed face and dishevelled state in one comprehensive, unnerving sweep. His voice, when he spoke, was several degrees colder than usual, though that might have just been the chill night air.

“Wilson Allied is a subsidiary of Velos Capital.”

“Oh? I didn’t know that.” Inside, my mind was reeling. No wonder the name had seemed familiar when I was searching for private security services online. Of course it was his. Bloody typical.

“When you dismissed the bodyguards, they followed protocol and reported their concerns,” he continued, his tone impeccably professional.

“I told them I was perfectly fine,” I insisted, a defensive edge creeping into my voice.

Aren’t they a bit too diligent? Or just spectacularly nosy?

“Your last known location was an isolated cabin miles from the city centre,” he stated, his eyes flicking pointedly over my shoulder to where Cary stood, a brooding statue of fury. “It was late at night, and you were in the company of a man with whom you have a documented, and from all accounts, acrimonious history. They would have been remiss in their duty not to report it.”

“Well, I’m fine,” I said lamely. “They really shouldn’t have worried.”

And they certainly shouldn’t have escalated it straight to the CEO. I suppose I should be grateful they didn’t call the armed response unit.

“Are we going to stand on the threshold and discuss corporate policy all night?” Lochlan asked, his politeness a sharp, refined weapon.

Flustered, I stepped back. “Sorry. Please, come in.”

The cosy cabin, which had felt so intimate moments before, suddenly became claustrophobically small with three adults inside.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 160:

What followed was a brutal, inelegant brawl in the cramped confines of the cabin.

Cary was bigger, his swings longer and more powerful, fuelled by a lifetime of getting what he wanted through sheer force of will.

But Lochlan was quicker, more precise, using the limited space to his advantage—blocking and landing sharp, punishing blows of his own. A small table splintered. A lamp crashed to the floor. It was a symphony of grunts and the sickening thud of fists meeting flesh.

“Stop it! Both of you!” I shouted, but it was useless. They were two stags locked in combat, blind to anything but each other.

Driven by a surge of pure panic, I physically threw myself between them, grabbing at Cary’s arm to yank him back. A hard elbow connected sharply with my stomach. A gasp of pain escaped me, and I doubled over.

The fight stopped instantly.

Both men froze, staring at me as I clutched my midsection, winded and furious.

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That was all the opening I needed. I straightened up, wincing, and grabbed Lochlan's hand.

"Let's go. Now."

I didn't look back at Cary. I just pulled Lochlan out the door and into the cold night air, breaking into a run until I saw the sleek, dark shape of his car parked a little way down the track. He clicked the key fob, the lights flashed, and we scrambled inside. He started the engine.

I turned to him in the dim light, my own pain forgotten. "Are you okay? Are you hurt?"

"I'm perfectly fine," he said, his voice icy, but I saw him flex his right hand, the knuckles already swelling.

I reached over and switched on the cabin light. The illumination revealed a dark, angry bruise blooming high on his cheekbone, and a faint trickle of blood at the corner of his mouth.

"We need to find a clinic," I said, my stomach twisting with a fresh wave of guilt. "You need to get that looked at."

He didn't argue, just navigated the dark lanes until we found the main road of a small, sleeping town. The only signs of life were a brightly lit convenience store and, mercifully,

a small clinic with a flickering “24-Hour” sign. It looked more like a converted cottage than a medical facility.

Inside, the air smelled faintly of fish and old wood. The only person there was a woman who had been napping at the reception desk, her head pillowed on her arms. She jolted awake at the sound of the bell, revealing a face etched by sun and sea, crowned with a shock of brilliant white hair. Her hands, as she rubbed her eyes, were leathery and strong—the hands of someone who worked with rope and nets.

“Can I help you?” she asked, her voice a gravelly murmur.

“My... friend. He was in a fight,” I explained, a little worried by her age and the general part-time vibe of the place. “Is there another doctor on duty?”

She gave a dry chuckle. “I’m Doctor Shaw. And around here, I’m the only game in town. I’m a part-time sawbones and a full-time fisherwoman, but I assure you, my credentials are in order.”

She stood, her movements surprisingly spry, and gestured for Lochlan to follow her into a small examination room. “Right, come on then. Let’s have a look at you.”

She pointed to the examination table. “Lie down.”

Lochlan did so, his posture stiff.

“Jacket and shirt off, please,” Doctor Shaw instructed, washing her hands at a small sink.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 161:

Lochlan hesitated. “Is that entirely necessary?”

She clicked her tongue, a sound of pure impatience. “Young man, you’ve been in a scrap. I need to palpate your ribs and abdomen to check for internal injuries. I can’t do that through Savile Row tailoring.”

Lochlan's jaw tightened. He cast a fleeting, almost self-conscious glance in my direction, then slowly began to unbutton his jacket, followed by his shirt.

I found myself wondering, not for the first time, if the man owned a single item of clothing that wasn't impeccably tailored. Who gets into a fistfight in a full suit and tie on a weekend?

As he shrugged out of his shirt, my breath caught slightly. All those early-morning gym sessions had definitely paid off. The man could have raked in a killing as an Armani model if the whole billionaire CEO thing ever fell through. It was a frankly magnificent display of lean muscle and clean lines.

I also marvelled, anew, at the fact that this man—who always appeared so gentlemanly and city-sleek—could also throw a mean right hook.

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My thoughts flickered, unbidden, to Cary. Was he injured too? Sitting alone in that dark cabin?

And a more unsettling thought followed: if Lochlan hadn't shown up, would I have gone all the way? Would I have slept with my ex-husband tonight?

Doctor Shaw began her examination, her strong, capable fingers pressing and probing his torso with brisk efficiency. She checked for instability in his ribs, palpated his abdomen for any guarding or tenderness that might suggest internal bleeding.

I stood by, trying to look professionally concerned while secretly admiring the landscape of my boss's admittedly superb physique.

Satisfied, Doctor Shaw straightened up. "Wait here."

She bustled out of the room, leaving us in a suddenly very quiet, very intimate space.

I tried very hard not to stare at Lochlan's half-undressed state, which made him appear both vulnerably human and intensely, distractingly sexy.

The doctor returned a moment later holding an ice pack wrapped in a thin tea towel. "Right. No broken bones that I can feel, no signs of internal bleeding. But if you're still worried or the pain gets worse, get yourself an X-ray in the city tomorrow. For now, this is the best I can do."

She slapped the ice pack unceremoniously over a darkening bruise just below his left pectoral muscle, on his ribs. Then she beckoned me over.

"Here, hold this in place for him, dear. I'll go dig out the painkillers. They're locked up in the back—had to start doing that to prevent the local young thugs from helping themselves."

She was still muttering to herself as she disappeared again.

So, I was left holding an ice pack to my half-naked boss's chest. My fingers brushed against warm skin, and I could see the steady, calm rise and fall of his breathing.

The room felt incredibly small.

I looked away, clearing my throat, groping for something—anything—to say. “I’m... sorry about tonight.”

“It’s not your fault,” he said, his voice low.

“Isn’t it?” You wouldn’t have gotten involved in that fight if it weren’t for me.” I took a breath, choosing my words carefully. “And I’m grateful, truly, for your concern. But you really shouldn’t have driven all the way out there. You’ve surely got your own life to live. You could have just called me.”

He turned his head on the paper-covered pillow, his gaze sharp.

“You want me to stop meddling.”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 162:

“No, it’s not that,” I backtracked, flustered. “I just mean... you’re my boss. It’s the weekend. This is beyond the call of duty. I can take care of myself.”

“I did call you,” he pointed out, his tone frosty. “Several times. You didn’t answer. Can you blame me for fearing the worst?”

I fumbled in my pocket for my phone and pulled it out. The screen was stubbornly black. “Oops,” I said, wincing. “It’s dead. Sorry.”

Embarrassed, I scrambled for a change of subject. “I thought you had a date tonight. How did that go?”

“Perhaps, instead of concerning yourself with my romantic engagements, you should pay a little more attention to yourself.”

“What?”

“Your third button,” he said, his eyes flicking down to my chest and back to my face. “It’s undone.”

I looked down. I’d left my jacket in the cabin and was wearing only the thin collared shirt. Sure enough, the third button—the one right in the centre of my chest—was gaping open, offering a rather telling glimpse. A hot flush crept up my neck as I hastily fastened it.

“Cary Grant is wrong about a great many things,” Lochlan said, his voice dropping again, “but he’s right about one.”

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“What’s that?”

“As your employer, I have no legitimate right to interfere in your private life. The only people with that right would be your parents, or your partner.”

I listened, my heart beginning to beat a little faster, unsure where this was leading.

“What if,” he continued, his gaze holding mine, “I were no longer just your boss? What if—”

The door swung open.

“Found them!” Doctor Shaw announced, brandishing a small bottle of pills. “Strongest over-the-counter I’ve got.”

I stepped back quickly, letting the moment shatter, my hand falling away from the ice pack.

The doctor took over, instructing Lochlan on the dosage.

But my mind was racing, tumbling over his unfinished sentence.

We left the clinic shortly after, the cold night air a bracing slap after the stuffy examination room. Lochlan moved with a slight stiffness, and a wave of guilt washed over me.

“Let me drive,” I offered.

He simply handed me the keys without a word.

He settled into the passenger seat, leaning over to input an address into the GPS tablet on the dashboard. For a moment, he was inches from me, his scent of clean cotton, expensive soap, and the faint metallic tang of blood from his split lip filling my space.

I stiffened, my hands gripping the wheel a little tighter.

I followed the directions on the screen, the silence in the car thick and heavy. When I finally pulled up, I stared at the elegant facade, its windows glowing warmly against the dark street.

“Are you sure?” I asked, confused. “This is a restaurant.”

“Quite sure,” he said, unclipping his seatbelt.

He got out. Bewildered, I followed suit. A valet materialised and took the keys from my hand. Lochlan was already heading for the entrance, and I hurried after him.

A maitre d' greeted him with a warm, knowing smile. "Mr Hastings, a pleasure. Your usual table?"

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 163:

"A quiet table for two, please," Lochlan replied.

We were led to a secluded booth. I sat down.

“I thought we were headed home,” I said, my confusion finally bubbling over.

“When the call from Wilson Allied came through,” he explained, picking up the menu, “I was in the middle of dinner.”

“Oh.” I blinked. “Well, sorry for interrupting. Let this be my treat, then.”

He didn’t argue, his attention on the menu.

I picked up mine, my eyes scanning for something comforting and substantial after the evening’s drama. I was mentally already slicing into a rib-eye steak when I heard Lochlan give his order to the waiter.

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“To start, the asparagus spears. Lightly steamed—no butter, just a squeeze of lemon. For the main, the pan-seared cod. Cooked with zero oil, please. Dry-fried. A side of plain quinoa and the seasonal greens. No salt.”

He then politely declined the sommelier’s offer of the wine list.

I stared at him, my dreams of lobster thermidor evaporating into a cloud of steamed vegetables. With an internal sigh of profound resignation, I closed my menu.

“I’ll just have the grilled chicken breast and a side salad, please.”

So much for my decadent, soul-soothing meal.

After the waiter left, Lochlan looked at me. “You seemed disappointed. Is something wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong,” I said, fiddling with my napkin. “It’s just... I just realised this is the first time it’s just the two of us having a proper meal together.”

“And that makes you uncomfortable?”

“No, not uncomfortable, just...” I glanced at him, a reckless impulse taking hold. “Will you promise not to fire me if I tell you?”

“I don’t make promises I can’t keep,” he said, his expression unreadable. “And I cannot promise anything until I’ve heard what you have to say.”

Well, that was reassuring.

I felt awkward, but the words were already queuing up on my tongue. “Well, it’s just that we kind of... dread eating together with you.”

“By ‘we,’” he asked calmly, “do you mean you, and Kai, and Roy, and the rest of the senior staff?”

I nodded, wincing. “Well, yes. But we don’t mean anything by it. It was just... office chatter. Harmless gossip.”

He inclined his head, a silent command to continue.

I took a steadying breath. “Every time you order something that looks like it was foraged by a fitness monk, the rest of us feel like human grease traps for even thinking about chips. You don’t say a word, but your quinoa radiates judgement.”

Lochlan was silent for a moment, processing this.

“I had never considered it from that perspective,” he said, and he sounded genuinely thoughtful. “What I order is simply efficient fuelling. Protein, complex carbohydrates, high fibre. It is what my body requires to maintain optimal function.”

“I know. And I admire that, really. But sometimes, a little decadence is good for you. Maybe not for the body, but for the soul. Even the most rigid diet plans have cheat days built in.”

He looked at me, and for a second, I saw something unguarded in his eyes.

“I can’t afford to slip up,” he said, his voice low. “I cannot have cheat days.”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 164:

I was about to ask him what he meant by that when the waiter arrived with our food, placing the starkly presented, virtuous plates in front of us.

We ate mostly in silence, sticking to sparkling water. When the bill came, I reached for my wallet, but Lochlan shook his head. “There’s no need. I have a house account here.”

“Oh. Well, then I suppose I owe you a meal,” I said, the words feeling inadequate.

As we left, I saw Roy waiting patiently by a familiar black car. I glanced questioningly at Lochlan.

“Roy will drive you home,” he said.

“What about you?”

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“I’ll be fine.”

The valet pulled up in the car we had arrived in. It seemed our strange, shared journey was over.

“Goodnight, boss,” I said, feeling a confusing mix of relief and disappointment.

“Goodnight, Hyacinth.”

I got into the car with Roy. “Thanks for coming out so late on a weekend,” I said, buckling up.

“Not a problem,” Roy replied cheerfully, pulling away from the kerb. “Triple overtime for this little trip.” He glanced at me in the rearview mirror, a teasing glint in his eye. “So... a dinner date with the boss, eh?”

“It wasn’t a date. Boss just... helped me out of a difficult situation, and we both happened to need dinner afterwards.”

Roy chuckled, a rich, knowing sound. “Right. Of course. Got it.”

I swiftly changed the subject. “How was the football game with your kids?”

That was all the prompting he needed. He launched into a blow-by-blow account of his day, ending with his four-year-old son’s epic, floor-based tantrum over a signed football.

I listened with half an ear, admiring his easy dedication to his family. He was a good man, a proper family man, just like my dad. The kind of solid, dependable man my teenage self had once imagined as the ideal husband.

He dropped me at the lobby with a wave.

Back in the penthouse, I changed into my pyjamas, poured a large glass of wine, and curled up on the bay window seat, watching the city lights glitter like a handful of fallen stars someone had tossed across the night sky.

My mind churned, replaying the fight, the clinic, the dinner, and that tantalisingly unfinished sentence. “What if I were no longer just your boss? What if...”

Before I went to bed, I dug out my now-charged phone. My finger hovered over Cary’s number.

With a deep breath, I unblocked it and began to type out a message, finally telling him my decision.

My first day at the headquarters of Velos Capital felt like stepping onto the bridge of a starship. The building was a sleek, glass-and-steel monolith in the heart of the City, a cathedral of commerce where the air itself seemed to hum with the sound of money being made.

I received a warm welcome from my new colleagues, though I was under no illusions. The respectful nods and careful smiles were a direct reflection of the man who had hired me, not any inherent awe for little old me.

This was made painfully obvious when the HR manager offered to show me to my office, only for Lochlan to materialise and smoothly intercept.

“I’ll see to it,” he said.

I followed him through the hushed, carpeted corridors. He was back in his element, encased in another impossibly elegant bespoke suit, the only dissonant note the small, clean cut on his lower lip. A souvenir from last night. No one, of course, had dared to ask about it.

He showed me into an office that was a study in minimalist efficiency. Floor-to-ceiling windows offered a stunning, almost cinematic view of Canary Wharf. It was modern, uncluttered, and filled with the kind of technology that probably cost more than my first car.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 165:

“You’ll be working closely with me, so it made sense to have you next door,” he explained, his manner perfectly polite. “Kai and the team of twelve executive assistants assigned to this floor will report directly to you.”

He was friendly, but there was a strange, new distance to him.

He was formal, correct, but more aloof than I had ever seen him. It was as if the man who had shared a strangely intimate dinner with me, who had driven out to a remote cabin on a Sunday night, had been neatly packed away and replaced with the CEO prototype.

The shared experiences of the previous night might as well have been a dream I’d had.

I had to secretly marvel at his ability to compartmentalise, to draw such a stark, impermeable line between work and everything else. It was a professional skill I deeply admired and knew I needed to learn, even as a small, irrational part of me felt oddly hurt by the chill. After last night, I thought I’d caught a glimpse of the man behind the title.

A sharp knock on the door broke the silence. A woman in her early thirties stood there, her posture radiating capability.

“Ah, perfect timing,” Lochlan said. “Hyacinth, this is Rebekah Branson, your dedicated executive assistant. Rebekah, Hyacinth Galloway, our new Chief Administrative Officer. I’ll leave you both to get acquainted.”

Then he was gone.

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Rebekah introduced herself with a firm handshake and a brisk, no-nonsense smile that seemed to be the default setting for everyone here.

She presented me with a binder so thick it could have been used as a doorstop, containing my schedule, company hierarchies, key contacts, and security passes. She then proceeded to give me a whirlwind tour of the building, her commentary efficient and precise.

The orientation day passed in a blur of new names and procedures. I didn’t see Lochlan again, though whenever I passed his closed office door, I imagined him inside, a king holding court behind his giant desk, the events of the previous night thoroughly archived and forgotten.

When I got home, feeling pleasantly drained, the building manager requested to come up to the penthouse. I granted him access, curious.

Noel Pritchett came straight to the point. “The rental agreement for your flat on the thirteenth floor has been terminated, Miss Galloway. We have processed a full refund for the remainder of your annual lease, which has been transferred back to your account.”

I was genuinely surprised. “But I ended the rental prematurely. I was expecting to forfeit the three-month deposit. It’s in the contract.”

“Yes, that is typically the case,” he agreed. “However, as you are an employee of Velos Capital, and this building is a company asset, Mr Hastings has waived the penalty. He noted that your corporate accommodation should have been arranged from the outset.”

He cleared his throat. “Furthermore, the penthouse is provided rent-free and utilities-free for the duration of your tenure as CAO. Someone will be by later this week to collect the last of Mr Hastings’s personal effects.”

I thanked him, my mind reeling, and saw him to the door.

The moment it closed, a thrill shot through me.

This was huge. No rent. No utilities.

A massive, unexpected financial weight had just been lifted from my shoulders. And this brought me significantly closer to the target I'd set for myself, the sum of money I was determined to pay back to Cary.

He might have refused the card I'd tried to give him, but I was bloody well going to pay back every last penny.

It was the only way to truly burn the bridge between us.

I did a slow, triumphant tour of the spacious penthouse. The idea of a housewarming party popped into my head. I could invite Portia, maybe a few of the less-terrifying ex-colleagues from Mayfair Global.

I called Portia immediately.

"Before you say anything," she cut in, her voice buzzing with excitement, "you've seen it too, then?"

I was completely lost. "Seen what?"

"I'll send you a link."

A second later, my phone buzzed.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 166:

I drove home drunk, defeated, and bleeding.

Every ache in my body felt like a fresh insult. I hadn't expected that pampered bastard Lochlan to know how to throw a punch like that. The fucker had a mean right hook hiding under all that polished civility.

My father was waiting in the study, a glass of amber liquid in his hand. He didn't look up from the financial reports spread across his desk. "It didn't work, then."

I said nothing, heading straight for the decanter to pour myself a very large whisky.

"It's time to cut your losses, Cary. Move on."

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"No," I snarled, the word ripping out of me.

He finally deigned to look at me, his gaze sweeping over my bruised knuckles and split lip. "I'm beginning to think your mother is right. Not about Vanessa being a suitable wife, but about Hyacinth being entirely unsuitable."

"You said nothing when I married her three years ago," I shot back, the whisky burning a path down my throat.

"That," he said, placing his glass down with a precise click, "was because I assumed you had the situation under control." He looked genuinely disappointed—a look I knew well. "You're my son. I thought you would have learned through example how to manage your private affairs."

“So you want me to be a cheating bastard with a harem?” I sneered.

“You’re missing the point, boy. The point is control. I don’t let my personal life interfere with my business, and I certainly do not allow a woman to disrupt how I run my empire. Your mother is aware of some of my arrangements. She remains quiet, docile, and very understanding.”

A familiar, sickening rage boiled in my gut. He always talked about her like that—like she was a well-trained pet, a manageable asset, not a person. Not his wife.

I remembered being a teenager, finding out about one of his overseas “love nests.” I’d raised hell, confronted him, screamed at him.

But it was my mother who had begged me to stop. She’d pleaded with me, told me she knew and she didn’t care. The memory was a thorn that had festered in my heart for years.

“She’s ‘understanding’ because if she files for divorce, she walks away with nothing,” I spat, the truth of it tasting like ash. “Thanks to that prenuptial agreement you forced her to sign.”

And then it hit me—an epiphany so stark and shameful it winded me.

I had learned from my father. I had tried to control Hyacinth exactly the same way he controlled my mother. I’d used money, contracts, and dominance.

The only difference was, I had failed. Miserably.

And that failure—her defiant strength—was the very thing that made me want her more than ever.

“Hyacinth isn’t a pushover,” I said, the fight gone from my voice, replaced by a grim certainty. “She won’t play the contented trophy wife in a gilded cage. Your methods don’t work on her. My methods don’t work on her.”

My father gave a curt nod. “I saw that tonight. She’s greedy.”

I didn’t correct him. Coming from him, “greedy” wasn’t an insult—it was a form of respect. It acknowledged a worthy adversary.

“The contract didn’t move her. The money didn’t sway her. So you tried another tactic,” he continued, his voice like chips of ice. “And you failed at that, too, didn’t you?”

I stiffened. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, really? So you didn’t try to appeal to her softer, womanly emotions by showing her that sentimental little cabin? You didn’t get down on your knees and beg for a second chance? You didn’t try to get her pregnant to tie her to you?”

My face burned. “Are you having me followed?”

He shrugged, a nonchalant admission. “I’m only in London for a week. I don’t have time to watch you play a game of hearts. I need you to clean up this mess and get back to work.”

I wanted to hurl the glass at him. “Stop fucking meddling in my life!”

“I wouldn’t have to if you were capable of handling it yourself, and it is patently obvious that you are not.” He leaned forward, his eyes boring into mine. “What was the problem? Have your charms finally lost their potency? Or was it the interference of that man, Hastings?”

Fury—white-hot and blinding—erupted in me. Fury at his intrusion, and fury at the humiliating truth in his words.

Yes, I had pleaded with her. I had spoken to her in a tone I’d never used with anyone—humble and raw.

And she had been softening. I felt it. She hadn’t pulled away from my kiss. She hadn’t slapped my hand away when I touched her.

She was warm and wet and ready for me, and that fucking bastard Hastings had ruined everything.

“Like I said,” my father’s voice cut through my thoughts, cold and final. “The reason is irrelevant. Only the conclusion is: she’s not a good match for you. She’s too strong-willed. She will fight you on everything. You won’t have a peaceful life. I’ve met with Vanessa Abrams. She’s spoiled and useless in a boardroom, but she has two distinct advantages. She’s devoted to you—obsessed, in fact. And she comes from a rich, powerful family that could be very useful allies.”

“No,” I said, the word a flat, hard refusal. “I’m not marrying her. And you do not tell me what to do.”

Dad simply shook his head, a man dealing with a stubborn, irrational child. “Now you are just being obstinate. I’ve spoken with your mother. She meddles and she is short-sighted, yes, but she ultimately has your best interests at heart. She knows what needs to be done.”

A cold dread trickled down my spine. “What did you tell her to—”

A thin, unpleasant smile touched his lips. “You’ll find out soon enough.”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 167:

The business dinner ended with the usual procession of polished smiles and strategic compliments.

As the group spilled out onto the pavement, Kai stole a glance at my expression and murmured, “I shall check the car,” before slipping away into the crowd.

It was not subtle, but subtlety was hardly required. He knew precisely when I preferred to be alone with her.

Hyacinth fastened the buttons of her coat, covering the dark green dress she had worn to dinner.

I found myself repressing a sigh. The dress had suited her far too well, skimming her waist and drawing the eye to a figure that demanded attention.

I had certainly noticed it. So had half the men at the table. In particular, Charles Denham, a senior partner from Inverness Row, had spent the entire starter course staring openly at her arse. When she stood to excuse herself to the toilet, his gaze had tracked her with wolfish enthusiasm.

I had watched him calmly while weighing whether I preferred to break his wrist or simply ensure his firm lost next year's tender.

If she were mine, no one would dare look at her like that. The thought arrived with such clarity that I forced my hands to remain in my pockets, lest something in my posture betray it.

"Is something troubling you?" I asked her.

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She blinked, as if startled to find me studying her. "I beg your pardon?"

"You have seemed distracted for several days."

She apologised automatically, as if she had committed some grave professional error. "I'm sorry if my focus has slipped."

“Your focus has not slipped. Your work has been excellent.” I paused, watching her more closely. “I simply noticed a change.”

I always noticed changes in her. I noticed too much.

For instance, the faint flush on her cheeks from the wine she had taken on my behalf. She had spent the entire dinner intercepting refills meant for me, drinking more than she should in some misguided effort to protect me from overindulging in front of potential partners.

I had never once asked her to do so. Yet she insisted on it, as if it were her personal duty to shield me from the excesses of others.

I found it both unnecessary and strangely gratifying.

And then there were the private observations I never allowed to surface: the way her hair brushed her collarbone when she bent over her tablet, the shape her dress made when she sat down. The memory, unbidden but relentless, of Sunday night. I had tried to dispel it, but it returned each time with greater clarity—her, flushed and tousled in that cabin doorway, her shirt gaping open, lips swollen from Cary Grant’s mouth.

Every night since, I had dreamt versions of the same scene, but the man with her was not Grant. It was me. It was my hand tugging her shirt loose, my mouth marking her throat, my name she whispered when her eyes gleamed with desire.

I forced my thoughts back to the present.

She let out a breath, resigned. “Everyone else already knows, so I guess it’s pointless pretending.”

She handed me her phone. Our fingers brushed, and the brief contact sent a pulse of heat through me—ridiculous, yet undeniable.

The statement on the screen bore the Grant family crest. Tanya Grant’s handiwork. A carefully packaged lie claiming her son and Vanessa Abrams had always been destined to marry; that Hyacinth was a gold digger who had seduced Cary, manipulated him, leeches off him, and refused to let go. Vanessa was recast as a delicate victim, Hyacinth as an ambitious interloper.

There were fabricated text messages. A conveniently ambiguous corridor photograph of Hyacinth with another man. An edited audio of Hyacinth demanding fifty-one per cent of Mayfair Global.

A crude narrative, but loud enough to cause damage.

A precise, controlled anger settled in my chest.

I returned the phone. “What do you intend to do?”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 168:

Outwardly, the question was neutral. Inwardly, it irritated me that she had not brought this to me sooner. Was I only her employer? Not a confidant? Not even someone she trusted enough to consult when her name was being dragged through public filth? The thought lodged uncomfortably.

“Nothing,” she said.

That surprised me more than the statement itself. That she would allow this to circulate for days without retaliation. That she would endure the humiliation silently. Or worse, that she might still care what Cary or his family thought of her.

I studied her. "That does not sound like you."

She looked away. "I'm not a public figure. People will forget soon."

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Or she did not want to strike back at the Grants. Perhaps she still saw them as family. The idea sparked a flicker of resentment I quickly extinguished.

"There is a straightforward way to dismantle their claims," I said.

She raised an eyebrow in question.

"Be seen with another man. A man whose standing eclipses Cary Grant's. No one will believe you are pining for him if you are clearly associated with a superior prospect."

I delivered the words calmly, but the underlying thought was anything but calm. I pictured her on my arm at the opera, the gallery, the autumn charity gala. Her dress

brushing against me, her scent filling my lungs, her presence a clear signal to anyone watching: she is with me.

The idea filled me with an entirely inappropriate degree of satisfaction.

She laughed dismissively. “No. I’m not jumping into a relationship just to fix Tanya’s lies. I’m not hiring a boyfriend.”

A shame. I would have been a very effective choice.

Roy pulled up. The ride was quiet except for the pulse of the city passing by the windows.

When the car stopped outside her building, I walked her to the entrance. For a foolish second, I waited—hoping she might invite me up. A drink. A conversation. Some thin excuse to prolong the moment and let me step once more into the penthouse I used to occupy.

The idea of her in those rooms, on those sheets, had become a familiar torment.

But she only offered a polite good night before slipping inside.

Once the car pulled away, I turned to Kai. “Contact the head of commercial lending at Weatherbys Bank. Suspend the second tranche of funding to the Mount Anvil development. Effective immediately.”

Kai hesitated. “Sir, that will cripple the Grant subsidiary.”

“I am aware.”

“And the explanation?”

“A reassessment of lending risk. Their parent company is embroiled in a public relations scandal. Their long-term viability is uncertain. A prudent delay is necessary.”

Kai nodded slowly. He did not ask what had motivated the decision.

He did not need to.

As he bent his head to his tablet, I turned back to the glittering London skyline—a city full of predators, a city where reputation was currency.

Hyacinth might refuse my personal solution, but she would have my protection nonetheless.

And the Grant family would learn the cost of touching what was under my care.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 169:

The dining room was a fucking tableau of everything I despised. My father, Alaric Grant, and my mother, Tanya, were presiding over a cosy dinner with the beaming Abrams clan. Vanessa was practically grafted to my mother's side, clinging with a simpering insistence.

My mother was smiling—a tight, brittle stretch of her lips that didn't reach her eyes. She looked like a marionette with its strings pulled too tight.

Seeing them like that, I knew with cold certainty that Vanessa had something on her. There was no other explanation for why Tanya would tolerate the woman who had once landed her in a police cell.

I just didn't know what the hell it was.

My father was deep in conversation with Armond Abrams, Vanessa's brother. The patriarch, Tyler Abrams, was notably absent, which lent credence to the rumours about his failing health.

It was the only reason Armond was stooping to this farce of a partnership.

"Where on earth is Cary? He's still not answering his calls. He isn't with that Hyacinth, is he? That shameless little slut!" Vanessa's voice was a petulant whine, dripping with a jealousy that was as performative as it was unhinged. She had fully embraced her role as the wronged party.

And the Abrams family were playing right along. They were all there, speaking about Hyacinth with a disgusting, self-righteous vitriol, as if they had collectively forgotten it was Vanessa who had been the very public, very deranged other woman.

"That Hyacinth is nothing but a glorified whore, selling herself to the highest bidder. Cary never should have fallen for her tricks."

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“She has that look about her, doesn’t she? All sly and manipulative.”

“Honestly, even speaking her name feels vulgar.”

They were in full flow, a chorus of condemnation, when someone finally noticed me standing in the doorway.

Vanessa’s eyes lit up like a fucking Christmas tree. “Cary!” She sprang from her chair and rushed towards me.

I threw up a hand—a clear, hard stop. The disgust on my face was a solid wall. I sidestepped her completely, ignored the rest of the Abrams, and strode directly to my parents.

I fixed my gaze on my mother. “Who gave you the authority to spout those lies?”

Tanya stared back at me, her pupils trembling slightly. The Abrams family fell silent, their faces darkening. My words were aimed at my mother, but the message was for every person at that table.

“No one told me to do it,” my mother said, her voice strained as she lifted her chin in a pathetic show of defiance. “I did it because things have gone too far. Vanessa deserves her reputation restored. If you two are to have a proper wedding, we have to manage the narrative. It’s an unfortunate necessity, for the good of everyone.”

I narrowed my eyes, studying her. After the charity gala disaster, she had cursed Vanessa’s name nonstop for getting her arrested. What the hell had happened in a few months to cause such a drastic change?

My father cut in, his tone brisk and final. “What’s done is done. There is no use criticising your mother now. The important thing is to focus on the next steps.”

Before I could respond, Daphne Abrams chimed in. “Exactly. It takes two to tango, doesn’t it? Tanya, my daughter can be wilful, but your son is not exactly an innocent party. He can’t let a young girl shoulder all the blame. Besides, Vanessa believed that Hyacinth was just an ex-girlfriend. She had no idea he was secretly married all this time. The real fault lies with Cary for hiding his marriage. This whole ordeal has been devastating for my daughter, and the Abrams name is suffering. He must make this right.”

“I’m not getting a divorce,” I stated, my voice cold and flat as steel. “And I will never marry your daughter.”

Vanessa’s face bleached of all colour. Daphne Abrams looked as if she’d been slapped. The atmosphere in the dining room plunged into a deep freeze. Every face was rigid with shock. The previous cheerful chatter now seemed like a grotesque joke.

The entire wedding party was agreed, save for the one person who actually mattered. The groom.

Armond Abrams stood and dragged me aside, his voice a low, urgent hiss. “What is this, some belated attempt at playing the devoted husband? It’s too late for that. Hyacinth must despise you and your entire family by now. You have no future with her. My sister is obsessed with you; she won’t have anyone else. Marrying her is the most logical move for you, for your business. It’s nothing but advantage.”

My reply was hard and absolute. “I said I will not marry her. That’s final.”

“You—” he spluttered, anger getting the better of him. “You led her on, and now you think you can just discard her? That’s a fucking cowardly move.”

I pried his fingers off my arm, walked back to the table, and made my announcement to the room. “The marriage is not happening. I will not agree to it. As for the joint project, I’m happy to continue. If you wish to pull out, that’s also fine with me.”

I turned my gaze to my mother. “Come with me. We need to talk.”

Vanessa stood frozen, but the rest of the Abrams looked ready to tear me apart with their bare hands.

“Cary, who the hell do you think we are?” one of them snarled. “You think you can just snap your fingers and this all goes away? If you don’t make this right with my sister, the project is the least of your worries. Our families will be enemies from this day forward!”

“If the Grant family dares to retract their public statement, we will make sure Hyacinth and her entire family disappear from London!” another threatened.

“If anything happens to my daughter, I will ruin you!” Daphne shrieked. “All of London will know you for the heartless bastard you are!”

The accusations flew, each one more heated than the last. My father looked like his head was about to explode. My mother remained in that strange, detached stupor.

I let out a cold, dismissive laugh. “Do whatever you want.”

I didn’t bother listing the facts. I didn’t remind them how Vanessa, under the guise of a business meeting, had slipped something into my drink. I didn’t describe how she had stripped naked in my office, using every trick she knew to get me into her bed.

She was not an innocent. And I was not a victim.

We were both guilty. But I was the only one who seemed willing to admit it.

The heavy tension in the dining room shattered as my business secretary, Miles Holloway, strode in, his face grim.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 170:

“Boss, you’re not answering your phone,” Miles approached.

“What’s wrong?”

“Weatherbys Bank is suspending the second tranche of funding for the Mount Anvil development. They are insisting on a full reassessment.”

I frowned. “What the hell are you talking about? Have you spoken to the Vice President? What’s their reason?”

“I have,” Miles replied, his gaze flickering towards the silent, watching Abrams family. “She said the order came directly from Lochlan Hastings at Velos Capital. The official rationale is,” he continued, reciting the words precisely, “that the recent, significant negative publicity surrounding the borrowing entity presents a credible future risk to the project’s profitability and its ability to service the debt. Therefore, a full risk reassessment is required.”

A cold jolt went through me. The back of my neck prickled.

Everyone in the room was stunned into silence.

The timing of Lochlan’s move was chilling. It was as if he had a god’s-eye view of this very room, as if he had known this dinner would end in a stalemate and had decided to strike the first financial blow preemptively.

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I forced myself to focus. Was this a petty, arbitrary power play, or was it a calculated business move based on sharp, ruthless insight?

If it was the latter, the man was far more dangerous than I had given him credit for.

I turned my head and met Armond's gaze across the room. If the Mount Anvil project failed, both Mayfair Global and the Abrams Group would suffer catastrophic losses. We were shackled together in this.

Armond's face was thunderous. The rest of the Abrams wore similar expressions of grim realisation.

A cold, mocking laugh cut through the silence.

Everyone looked at Vanessa. She was staring directly at me, a twisted smile on her face as she slowly walked towards me.

"Seems like Hyacinth has already found her next target. She's already spread her legs for Lochlan Hastings. Why else would he stick his neck out for her like this?"

My face turned to ice. "Shut up."

I had my own suspicions, of course, but I refused to give them voice.

Hyacinth was not like that. Even if she was done with me, she would not jump so quickly into another man's bed.

But the thought of it—of Lochlan's relentless, public defence of her, and the possibility that she might one day come to see him as more than just a boss—left a bitter, acidic taste in my mouth.

"You think she's so pure, so incapable of betrayal?" Vanessa sneered, seeing the conflict in my eyes.

I looked at her, a cold sneer twisting my own lips. "The one who betrayed our vows was me. She has always been a good woman. It is I who failed her."

She was brilliant, resilient, and strong. She never lost her temper unnecessarily. She was everything, and I had repaid her with lies and a desperate, pathetic need for control. I had sabotaged my own happiness.

Vanessa's expression contorted with rage. "So she's the saint, and I'm the villain? Then what was all that time we spent together?"

"What do you think it was?"

Vanessa let out a piercing scream, snatched a steak knife from the table, and pressed it to her own throat.

The Abrams family surged forward in a panic, scrambling to wrestle the blade from her.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 171:

I couldn't bear to watch another second of this tiresome performance. I turned on my heel and walked out without a backward glance.

She had pulled this same stunt countless times. If she wanted to die, then she should just get on with it.

“Cary!” she shrieked after me, her voice raw with tears and fury. “Come back! You will regret this! You will!”

I didn’t look back.

My mind was still a chaotic storm when I arrived at Dr Liz Forbes’s office later that night, the alcohol in my system conjuring up a painful, vivid montage: Hyacinth in our bed, her skin warm under my hands; the shattered look in her eyes in my study when I slapped her; Hyacinth in that cabin, dazed and pliant, on the verge of surrendering to me.

And Hyacinth, walking away from me, choosing to leave with Lochlan.

At the end of our session, Liz regarded me with her usual professional detachment. “Have you completed the background check I suggested? On my credentials?”

“Yes,” I said, my voice rough.

“Good. Then I have a proposal. A way to get Vanessa Abrams and her entire family off your back for good.”

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I looked up, intrigued despite myself. “What is it?”

“Marry me.”

I simply stared.

“On paper,” she clarified, her tone utterly matter-of-fact. “Don’t worry, I’m not in love with you. I require a husband—a nominal one—to relieve certain familial pressures. In return, my family’s social standing will be more than sufficient to make the Abrams family reconsider their current tactics.”

“Why?” I asked, wary.

“The same tedious story. Family expectations.” She paused, then delivered the next line with clinical calm. “I’m gay. My family is hyper-traditional, and that is a fact they will never allow to become public. Marriage is the only way to make them stop interfering in my personal life. And you are the most suitable candidate I have encountered.”

“Why me?”

“You are in love with another woman, and I’m in love with another woman. There will be no messy romantic entanglements between us. It will be a marriage in name only. As for financial motives,” she added with a faint, arrogant smile, “you have seen my background. You know I have no need of your money.”

I gave a short, conceding nod. My research had confirmed it. Her mother's family, the Fenwicks, were solid, old-money aristocracy, their influence far more deeply entrenched and respectable than that of the Grants.

"Our interests align, and we have no conflicting goals," she continued. "Furthermore, your public profile is prominent enough, and your professional accomplishments are respectable enough, for my notoriously snobbish family to grant their reluctant blessing."

"Our interests do not fully align," I countered, the anger simmering again. "I want Hyacinth back."

Liz Forbes didn't flinch. "I'm sorry to be so blunt, but that is not going to happen."

My face darkened. "I thought that was what I was paying you to do."

"You are mistaken. As your therapist, you are paying me to help you find a measure of peace, to understand the root of your destructive behaviours, and to help you manage your violent outbursts. I never contracted to be your relationship coach, or to help you win your wife back."

"Then you are fired," I snapped.

She remained perfectly calm. “Why don’t you think it over, instead of reacting with impulsive anger, as is your habit? When the alcoholic haze lifts, you will see that my proposal is, objectively, the cleanest and most efficient solution to your most immediate problem. It’s your best way out.”

She stood, indicating the session—and my temporary employment of her—was over.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 172:

“Has Tanya Grant had a full frontal lobotomy?” Portia snarled, flinging her briefcase onto a nearby armchair with enough force to make me wince.

Her face was a thundercloud, a deep furrow of permanent offence etched between her brows.

I handed her a drink I'd mixed—a potent concoction meant to match her mood. “My thoughts exactly,” I said, the understatement of the century.

I'd invited Portia to the penthouse for a small, pathetic attempt at a housewarming, but she hadn't even glanced at the panoramic views or the obscenely expensive furniture. The Grant family's latest circus was a far more compelling attraction.

Portia crossed her arms, pacing a trench into my new rug. “She can issue a statement, so can we. The ammunition we have is more explosive than hers.” She spun on her heel, fixing me with a look. “But if we go down this road, you and Cary will be burning the last bridge. There'll be no going back from this.”

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I shrugged, a gesture designed to look far more cavalier than I felt. “The Grant family torched the bridge, sold the land, and built a sewage plant on it. I'm just refusing to swim in the effluent.”

Collapsing onto the sofa, Portia leaned forward, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial hiss. “My point is, Cary might not have known about that statement. It doesn't track for him to be so all over the shop—crying and begging you to come back one minute, then slinging mud at you the next.”

I shook off the unbidden image of Cary in that cabin, on his knees, his eyes pleading, his voice soft enough to break a less fortified heart. “Even if he didn’t personally post the letter, he still built the mailbox. He’s the architect of this entire mess.”

It wasn’t as if I hadn’t tried to give Cary a graceful exit. If he had just signed the bloody divorce papers, we wouldn’t have all these delightful new complications.

Everything Vanessa Abrams did, everything Tanya Grant was doing—while seemingly aimed at me—ultimately sprouted from the fertile ground of Cary’s stubborn refusal to let go. He could damn well lie in the bed he’d made.

Portia said, “But when I first showed you the statement, you said to ignore it.”

“Yeah,” I sighed, the memory rankling. “But that was before my boss essentially called me a coward.”

Portia’s eyebrow did its best impression of a startled caterpillar, nearly vanishing into her hairline. “Lochlan scolded you?”

“Not in those exact words, but the message was received, loud and clear.”

He’d said I was distracted, asked if I needed help, and even hinted— with that infuriatingly calm charm—that he could play my fake boyfriend.

The disapproval radiating from him when I'd announced my plan to do nothing and wait for the scandal to die down had been so palpable it felt like a physical whipping, a silent, stinging rebuke.

So, yes, I would have let the whole thing slide if not for my boss and his silent, judgy, and annoyingly attractive disappointment.

Portia clicked her tongue, drained her glass in one impressive swallow, and slammed it down on the coffee table. After a moment, she nodded, a grim determination settling on her features. "Right, that's it. We're going nuclear. If they want a war, they've got one. I'm your divorce lawyer and your best friend, which makes me the most qualified person in the world to tell this story."

We got down to business. We listed every point in Tanya's statement that needed shredding, every weak spot we could attack, every piece of evidence we could wield like a blade.

By the time we had our arsenal assembled and were preparing to record a video on my phone, the intercom buzzed.

Portia was on her feet in an instant. "I'll go see who it is."

She marched to the intercom panel on the wall. A glance at the screen and she recoiled. "For fuck's sake! Cary Grant! He has the nerve to show up here! Hyacinth, call building security."

“He lives in the same building,” I reminded her, my voice weary. “I can’t exactly have him turfed out.”

“Then I’ll just ignore him,” she declared, stepping back.

“No, wait.” An idea sparked. I opened the voice memo app on my phone and tucked it snugly behind a sofa cushion, giving her a significant look.

Portia understood immediately, a wicked grin spreading across her face. “Oh, I like it.” She did the same with her own phone, then pressed the button to send the lift down.

When the lift doors slid open, Portia didn’t even have a chance to deliver a pre-prepared insult. Cary simply brushed past her and stormed into the penthouse.

“Hyacinth.” He charged into the living room, his gaze landing on me, still seated on the sofa.

I didn’t rise. I didn’t see the point. Offering a seat implied welcome, and he was about as welcome as a wasp at a picnic.

His throat worked, his voice coming out rough. “My mother’s statement. I didn’t know.”

I kept my face a blank mask. “And? What’s that to me?”

Cary moved to sit beside me. I immediately stood and relocated to the armchair opposite. He didn’t follow, just watched the space I’d vacated. “I’ll issue a statement myself tomorrow. I’ll set the record straight.”

“Set the record straight?” I echoed, the sarcasm dripping from each syllable. “How exactly will you manage that? Will you call your mother a liar? Or will you finally admit you were shagging Vanessa Abrams?”

“I’ll tell the public there’s no engagement, no relationship with Vanessa, that you are my legal wife. And that photo of you with a man at a hotel is a complete fabrication, a malicious lie.”

I sneered—a sound I was perfecting just for him—and almost laughed out loud when I saw Portia flip him the bird behind his back. “You’re wrong. I’m not your wife.”

Cary leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, his intensity filling the room. “Yes, you still are. If we reconcile, show a united front, all this noise will die down.”

I let out a loud, derisive laugh. “Haven’t I made myself perfectly clear in my text?”

He looked like a man waiting for a final sentence, his pride and his pain warring in his eyes. “I want to hear you say it.”

I stared him down—no hesitation, no softening. “Fine. You want it directly? Here it is. No, I will not sign the prenup. No, I have no interest in being the CAO of Mayfair Global. And no, no matter what you offer, I will not be your wife.”

His eyes flashed with raw pain. “But that night at the cabin... you were softening. You were close to forgiving me.”

“Yes,” I admitted coolly. “And that was a moment of weakness.”

Portia jumped in. “Cary, for God’s sake, you cheating with Vanessa is a fact. The filth your mother is spouting is the fiction. You either tell the whole sordid truth, or you piss off and stop haunting Hyacinth.”

Cary’s gaze never left me. “Is that what you want?”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 173:

I nodded, feeling a strange, hollow exhaustion. “If you have a single shred of decency left for me, then do the one thing you’ve never been good at: clean up your own mess. I’m sick to death of being tangled in your web with Vanessa. I want out.”

Cary gave a heavy, resigned nod.

Portia adopted her best lawyerly tone. “Cary, just so we’re crystal clear, you are confirming that your mother Tanya’s accusations against Hyacinth are complete fabrications?”

He shot her a look. His blue eyes, usually so bright, were clouded and turbulent, like a storm gathering over the sea. He nodded. “Yes.”

I pressed on. “Your mother was nearly sent down because of Vanessa’s scheming, and now she’s her chief character witness. Don’t you find that wildly convenient? Do you think the Abrams family put her up to it? Or, specifically, Vanessa?”

“Perhaps. It’s possible. I don’t know,” he said, the words clipped.

“So you admit that’s the most likely scenario,” Portia stated, leading him like a witness.

Cary sighed, the sound full of weariness. “Yes.”

I went in for the kill. “So, connecting the dots, your jilted mistress, Vanessa, holds a grudge, and to clear her own name and destroy mine, she enlisted your mother. They collaborated to fabricate these lies, and your mother issued the statement. Is that correct?”

“Yes.” Cary exhaled deeply, the fight seeming to drain out of him. Seeing Portia open her mouth to continue, he raised a hand. “You’ve got more than enough on tape now. That should do the job.”

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Portia and I exchanged a look.

So he knew. Of course he knew. The CEO of Mayfair Global was not an idiot. Our questioning had been transparently eager. I just hadn’t expected him to play along so willingly. Well, he was finally doing one thing right.

I looked at Cary, my feelings a complicated, unpleasant knot in my chest. “This has to end. If it doesn’t, Vanessa will never stop coming for me. Today, it’s your mother. What will it be tomorrow? You may not be pulling the trigger, but I’m still the one getting shot. It amounts to the same thing. Think about that.”

I delivered the speech without any emotion, the words flat and final.

Cary didn’t argue with his usual fiery opposition. It was like watching a terminal illness finally reach its end. All the passion, the stubborn refusal, the sheer bloody-mindedness, had slowly bled away, leaving only a heavy, silent acceptance.

Before leaving, he paused at the door, not looking back. “You’ll see the press release soon.”

The door clicked shut behind him, and the penthouse seemed to exhale, the tension dissipating like smoke.

Portia immediately fumbled for her phone, her fingers dancing across the screen with the glee of a cartoon villain. The sound of Cary’s voice, resigned and defeated, filled the space between us.

“So,” she said, pausing the recording with a triumphant tap, “do we release this little masterpiece now, or are we taking the high road, which is, frankly, a boring and poorly maintained path?”

I wandered over to the floor-to-ceiling window, looking down at the ant-like traffic weaving through Mayfair. “Let’s wait. If he doesn’t release a statement of his own soon, then I’ll release the recording. It’s the nuclear option, and I’d rather not scorch the earth if he’s finally decided to be a decent human being.”

Portia snorted, coming to stand beside me. “So you still have a spot of softness for him. A little mouldy patch of sentimentality in that cold, cynical heart of yours.”

I shrugged, neither admitting nor denying it.

What was there to say? Cary was, after all, the man I’d shared a bed with for three years—a man I used to look up to before he revealed himself to be just another fallible idiot with a handsome face.

The ghost of that admiration was a stubborn stain, one that no amount of scrubbing with bitterness seemed to entirely erase.

“Right, enough of this maudlin rubbish,” I declared, shaking off the thought. “You haven’t even seen the place properly. Drink tour?”

“Always,” Portia agreed, hoisting her refreshed glass.

I led her on a circuit of the penthouse, which was less a home and more a monument to Lochlan's obscene wealth and surprisingly good taste. Portia clicked her tongue appreciatively at the panoramic views, whistled at the marble finishes, and nodded in firm approval when I pointed out the spare bedroom I'd deliberately furnished with her in mind.

"This is all mine whenever I want it?" she asked, running a hand over the silk duvet.

"Within reason. If you're planning a month-long bender, give me some notice."

She whistled again, louder this time, when we reached the master bedroom. "Bloody hell, High C. This is bigger than my entire flat."

She winked, a lascivious gleam in her eye. "So, this is the inner sanctum. Go on, tell me. Imagine Lochlan used to sleep here. What kind of pyjamas do you imagine he wears? I'm betting on commando."

I felt a faint heat rise to my cheeks, which was utterly ridiculous. "I don't have to imagine," I said, my tone deliberately dry. "He still has some of his clothes in the closet. He's having someone collect them this weekend."

Portia's eyes widened with unbridled joy. "No!" she gasped, and before I could stop her, she darted to the walk-in wardrobe and pulled the door open. She began riffling through the hanging clothes with the reverence of an archaeologist discovering a new tomb.

“Portia, for God’s sake, leave the man’s wardrobe alone. He’ll have my hide.”

“Oh, hush,” she murmured, her attention caught by a set of dark silk pyjamas. She pulled them off the rack, held them up, and then, to my absolute horror, brought the fabric to her face and gave it an appreciative sniff. “Mmm. I can imagine him wearing this, and me ripping it off him.”

I burst out laughing and slapped her shoulder. “You’re utterly drunk and depraved.”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 174:

What I wouldn't tell her was that the first time I'd discovered Lochlan's clothes hanging neatly beside my own, I'd had a startlingly vivid fantasy involving those exact pyjamas—and a rather different outcome.

Some thoughts were best kept to oneself, lest they give your best friend ammunition for a lifetime of teasing.

"Drunk and randy," Portia confirmed, tossing the pyjamas back onto a shelf with a sigh. "Right, let's go out. It's Friday night. Time to hit the clubs, find you a post-divorce shag you've long needed, and find me a well-hung stud to make me forget about Lochlan's unattainable schlong."

I muttered under my breath, "And my mother thought you might be gay."

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"What was that?"

"Nothing," I said brightly. "But sorry, honey, I can't come with you. I'm driving out to Mousehole tonight."

"Your grandma's place? Why on earth?"

“I miss my gran,” I said, and it was the simple truth. “And it’s the weekend, so I figured, why not? The sea air will do me good.”

Portia sighed, a dramatic, world-weary sound. “Hyacinth, you can’t be serious. You can’t spend a Friday night alone in a car on a lonely road. It should be spent in the strong arms of a muscular stud, or at the very least, in a sticky-floored bar with a questionable man buying you drinks.”

“I know, I know,” I said, patting her arm. “But it’s a long drive, and I want to start off as early as possible. Besides, once Cary issues his own statement, Vanessa and Tanya are sure to flip out. They might do something desperate and come looking for trouble, and I’d rather not be here for that particular shitshow.”

Portia nodded, seeing the sense in it even through her alcoholic haze. “Fine. Abandon me for a little old lady and the promise of scones.”

Then her expression turned sly. “So, if I can’t drag you out, can I bring my date back here? Your sofa is bigger than my bed.”

I rolled my eyes. “Be my guest. Just try not to break anything valuable, and for the love of God, clean up the condoms when you’re done. I don’t want my cleaner to resign in disgust.”

“Of course,” Portia said, with the solemn dignity of a queen accepting a treaty. “I am a paragon of discretion and hygiene.”

After I waved Portia off—already thumbing through dating apps on her phone with the focus of a general planning an invasion—I slid into my car and pointed it away from London. The roads out of the city were less clogged than those funnelling the desperate back in, a minor miracle in the general chaos of Friday night.

For a while, I thought I spotted several cars that seemed to be my constant companions, making the same turns as me with a persistence that felt personal.

I dismissed it as probably just paranoia, a lingering hangover from my life with Cary, back when he used to have men tail me wherever I went.

I drove with the window down, the night air whipping in, a cool autumn breeze doing its best to scour the city grime from my lungs. It carried the faint, sweet scent of some unknown flower—a ghost of a garden in the urban sprawl—and the streetlights stretched ahead in a wavering line, a river of artificial gold leading to what I hoped was sanity.

I found myself hoping, with a desperation that was almost pathetic, that by the time I returned, Cary would have finally got the message scribed on a bloody great billboard and we could truly be done. A girl can dream.

Gran's place was in a fishing village in Mousehole, one of those spots where the sea is your front garden and the sound of gulls is the local soundtrack.

My parents had been down since Wednesday, no doubt enjoying the peace and quiet—a commodity that had been in short supply in my life lately.

When I finally pulled up, it was well past midnight, but the lights were on, and everyone was waiting up for me like I was a teenager who'd missed curfew.

I was enveloped in a series of hugs that smelled of salt, talcum powder, and unconditional love: Gran Alison, a woman who'd never met a problem that couldn't be solved with a strong cup of tea; my mum and dad, looking tired but relieved; and Uncle Sam, my mother's older brother, whose handshake could still crush rocks.

After a quick, reheated dinner that tasted better than any Michelin-starred nonsense, Gran shooed me off to bed with the authority of a woman who knew the healing power of a proper night's sleep.

I woke to the distinct feeling that the world had softened around the edges. Midmorning light streamed into the room, and for a glorious moment, I had no idea who I was supposed to be angry with.

I padded over to the balcony and pushed open the sliding door, breathing in great gulps of salty, invigorating sea air. It was the kind of air that promised to fix things, or at least make you forget they were broken.

In the distance, I could just make out Dad and Uncle Sam on Sam's fishing boat, tiny figures against the vast grey-blue of the sea.

Down in the front yard, Mum was helping Gran hang fish to dry on a line. I waved, and Gran shouted up that breakfast was waiting in the kitchen, her voice carrying on the breeze.

“I’ll be down in a minute!” I called back, deciding to seize this rare moment of peace for a bit of token exercise.

I stayed on the balcony, stretched out the city knots in my muscles, and commenced a half-hearted attempt at some warm-up activities. It was mostly for show, a performance for myself to prove I wasn’t completely falling apart.

When I dropped into a squat, the solid balcony wall shielded me from view below.

And that’s when I distinctly heard both my mother and my gran sigh—a synchronised sound of weariness that cut through the morning calm. It was the kind of sigh that had weight and history behind it.

What was that sigh all about?

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 175:

I held my position, curiosity now piqued more than my hamstrings.

My mother's voice, tight with a frustration I rarely heard, floated up. "...can't stand seeing her treated like this, and we're utterly powerless."

There was a pause, the rustle of fish being handled. Then Mum again, her tone shifting—lower, more tentative. "...what if... we told... they could... protect."

Gran's response was immediate and sharp, the sound of a fish being slapped onto the line with extra force. "No. That was decided long ago. When they... she's to be kept away."

"But she isn't safe!" Mum's voice cracked. "We raised her. She's my whole... and look at her now. If they knew... someone like Tanya Grant wouldn't dare."

"...a nest of vipers," Gran's voice was a low, urgent whisper, but it carried. "...just unpleasantness. If she... could lose far more."

Mum let out another heavy sigh, this one filled with resigned defeat.

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“Not another word,” Gran said, her tone brooking no argument. “Especially not... You don’t breathe a word. Do you understand?”

Mum murmured something, her voice thick.

I stayed frozen in my squatting position, the muscles in my thighs beginning to complain, but my mind was racing faster.

Who in God’s name were they talking about? Who was this mysterious “they” who could offer protection? Did my grandmother have some powerful friends I didn’t know about?

I straightened up slowly, my body protesting the sudden movement. Peering over the balcony rail, I saw Mum wiping her eyes with the back of her hand, and Gran’s face was set in a stern, unyielding mask.

They both looked up as I moved, and forced smiles appeared on their faces so quickly it was like watching curtains snap shut.

It all made me desperately curious, of course; I could almost taste the secret they were so determined to keep from me.

But then, everyone deserves a vault for their private thoughts. I certainly hadn't shared the full, unvarnished truth of my Lochlan fantasies with Portia, and she was the person I told everything.

Besides, if whatever they were hiding was truly my business, Mum or Gran would undoubtedly spill the beans eventually.

I headed downstairs, walked into the yard, and slipped an arm through each of theirs, linking us together. "I've decided to cook lunch, and I found a truly decadent beef recipe online that promises to be either a triumph or a disaster."

"Oh, lovely. We'll taste your masterpiece," Mum said, reaching up to cup my cheek with a hand that smelled faintly of salt and fish. Her smile was genuine now, if a little wobbly. "I used to offer to teach you cooking, but you always said no. I'm amazed you've found the time, with how busy your job keeps you."

I smiled back, a carefully constructed facade of breezy nonchalance. "I work hard precisely so I can have more salary, and with more salary, I can enjoy more good food." It was a virtuous, if gluttonous, cycle.

What I didn't tell them was that a significant part of my newfound culinary motivation stemmed from a deeply petty place—namely my boss Lochlan and his infuriatingly disciplined adherence to a kale-and-quinoa existence.

It had sparked a rebellious, contrary streak in me. I found myself perversely wondering if, one day, I dangled a plate of something sinfully, gloriously unhealthy in front of him—something dripping with butter and cream and calories—would his resolve crack?

It was a foolish fantasy, but it kept me entertained.

Gran chuckled, interrupting my delightful daydream. “Enjoying cooking is a wonderful thing. It means I can stop worrying about you living on takeaway alone. I’ve seen those documentaries about what goes into those meals.” She scrunched up her nose in disgust. “Homecooked food beats takeout, always. No contest.”

I gave her arm an affectionate squeeze. “I completely agree. But my skills are still rudimentary at best. If I want to experience the truly best homecooked flavours, I should probably just pack you up and take you back to London with me.”

Gran let out a full-throated laugh. “You always did want to take a piece of Mousehole with you. When you first left for the city, you begged to take Skipper and Pebble. Now you want to shove your old gran in a suitcase?”

She launched into stories from my childhood, and I let the familiar warmth of them wash over me.

Skipper was that pointy-eared Maine Coon mix who conducted her life as if she were single-handedly responsible for hunting for the entire family—a tiny, fluffy general.

Pebble was the dumpy-legged domestic shorthair with a calico coat who lived in perpetual terror of loud gulls and the mournful sound of the foghorn.

Uncle Sam had bought them for me when I was small, a pair of living, breathing toys. When I left for London to study, my parents had put their foot down: no cats in the big city.

I only got to see them during holidays, and every time I arrived or left, they would be sitting on the front step, a silent, furry welcoming or farewell committee.

Then, one time, I came back, and they were gone. Just gone.

I knew what it meant, and I cried for what felt like weeks.

Uncle Sam, the pragmatist in the family, had tried to jolly me out of it. “A cat’s only good for a decade or so, love. We’ll get you two new ones.”

But I refused, point-blank. I never wanted another pet. I was too afraid of the inevitable, gut-wrenching sadness that came with losing them. I couldn’t bear to set myself up for that kind of heartbreak again.

It was that way with Skipper and Pebble.

And it was the same with Cary.

The truth was, I was a coward when it came to loss. I'd rather pre-emptively avoid the attachment than face the messy, painful reality of it ending.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 176:

By midday, with the dubious assistance of an online cooking video playing on my phone, I had produced a semi-respectable spread: a slow-cooked beef bourguignon that smelled better than it looked, roasted potatoes with an alarming amount of garlic, and a simple green salad I'd assembled mostly for appearances.

Dad and Uncle Sam returned from their trip, smelling of sea spray and triumph, with a cooler box full of glistening, freshly caught seafood that immediately made my efforts look rather pathetic.

We sat down to eat, and once the plates were mostly cleared, I decided to address the elephant in the room.

"So," I began, aiming for a light, conversational tone, as if discussing the weather, "I'm getting a divorce. Barring any last-minute acts of God or stupidity from Cary, it should all be finalised soon. I'm the one who asked for it, and it's what I want. So please, don't sit there thinking I'm some poor, helpless victim. A marriage takes two people, and I was a willing participant when I walked into it. I'm an equally willing participant walking out. And don't you dare worry about me being bullied. I'm hardly the type to turn the other cheek. Anyone who tries to give me grief gets it back with interest."

I delivered this little speech with a cavalier shrug, painting myself as the picture of unflappable, modern independence.

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My four audience members nodded along with supportive smiles, a perfectly choreographed display of "whatever makes you happy, dear."

They were trying so hard, bless them, to pretend they hadn't seen the torrent of online vitriol, the headlines splashed across gossip sites, the entire sordid mess playing out in public. In this day and age, with the internet being what it is, their performance was both touching and utterly transparent. I watched their careful, clumsy acting and felt a sharp, acidic pang of guilt.

Here I was, a fully grown woman, needing my family to perform this pantomime just to spare my feelings. What a truly dreadful daughter I was.

I made a silent vow then and there never to let my life become such a spectacle that they felt they had to protect me from it again.

I stayed in the village until Sunday evening, when I reluctantly pointed my car back towards London, the prospect of Monday morning looming like a judgement.

I convinced my parents to stay on for a few more days, a small buffer against the chaos I knew was waiting for me. I wanted everything with Cary settled, the dust properly swept away, before they returned to the city.

They agreed, of course, as they always did.

Before setting off, I finally mustered the courage to switch my phone back on and face the digital mob.

The online discourse, as expected, had continued to ferment in my absence.

True to his word, Cary had released his clarification video. There's nothing quite like the leading man himself stepping into the spotlight to personally set the record straight—a move that never fails to make an audience sit up and take notice.

The tide had largely turned. I was no longer being universally painted as the scheming, gold-digging harlot who had broken up a fairy-tale romance.

Now, the spotlight of public scorn was shifting, and it was Vanessa Abrams who was squirming in its heat.

Naturally, there was a stubborn contingent of contrarians who clung to their narrative. These self-appointed guardians of truth, who believed themselves the only sober guests at a world drunk on lies, were championing Vanessa's cause.

A wealthy, privileged woman like Vanessa, they argued, was capable of a more “pure and passionate” love. She might have been an “unwitting” mistress, they suggested—her feelings so overwhelming that she couldn't extricate herself once she was in too deep. Her willingness to sacrifice her pride, even to harm herself, was proof, they declared, that her love for Cary was all-consuming—a grand, tragic romance.

And then there was the truly baffling argument: if Vanessa had truly tried to frame Tanya Grant, why on earth would Tanya now be speaking up in her defence? The very idea was contradictory, they said. It defied all sense.

I let out a short, derisive laugh and closed the browser tab.

Let them talk. As long as their vile speculation remained focused on me and didn't so much as brush against my family, they could write whatever fan fiction they pleased.

Next, I scrolled through the messages and emails that had accumulated over the weekend. I automatically filtered out the seemingly concerned but actually nosy messages, those transparent attempts to glean gossip disguised as sympathy.

But I stopped when I saw an email from Harper Spiller, my former subordinate at Mayfair Global.

The email was sent three days ago, right around the time I was driving out of London. In it, Harper explained that the joint project between Mayfair Global and the Abrams Group—the Mount Anvil development—was in crisis. The loan had been blocked by Weatherbys Bank.

I immediately texted her: [Tell me more about the Mount Anvil situation.]

Harper called me back instantly, her voice a mixture of relief and faint accusation. "You're finally responding. I thought now that you'd left Mayfair Global you wanted nothing more to do with us former colleagues."

“I switched my phone off. I’ve only just switched it on,” I said, cutting to the chase. “What’s going on?”

“After you left, I was put in charge of liaison for the Mount Anvil project,” Harper explained, the words tumbling out. “But the project’s being halted. Weatherbys is cutting off the funding. They’re saying they need to reassess the risk.”

“What risk?”

Harper hesitated. “You’ve seen the stuff online?”

“If you’re talking about Tanya’s statement, yes.”

“Yeah, that,” she sighed. “A whole Pandora’s box opened. All kinds of rumours started flying, then the boss himself issued another statement, which just poured fuel on the fire. Some are saying Mayfair’s joining forces with the Abrams because Cary is marrying Vanessa, others are saying it’s the exact opposite and the two families are at each other’s throats. Anyway, I suppose I can sort of understand Weatherbys’ concern. If the two collaborating parties can’t sort their own mess out, the bank doesn’t want to take the risk of issuing a loan that might not be recoverable.”

I nodded slowly, though I still didn’t understand why she was telling me all this.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 177:

Harper soon answered my unspoken question.

“I know you’re working for Mr Hastings now. And Weatherbys is owned by Velos Capital.” She paused, her voice turning pleading. “I know this is asking a lot, but could you maybe help me ask around? Find out what it would take for Weatherbys to change their mind? If the funding isn’t released soon, the project goes belly up, and I’m out of a job.”

“I’ll try,” I said, the promise feeling foreign on my tongue. “Though I’m not in charge of liaising with Weatherbys.”

“That’s all I ask. For you to try. Thank you so much, Hyacinth.”

I hung up, my thoughts churning.

Weatherbys was owned by Velos Capital, and Velos was run by Lochlan. So... did the decision to cut off the funding have something to do with him?

And a more startling thought followed: did he do it for me?

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I texted Harper another question. [When exactly did the funding get cut off?]

Her reply came quickly. I stared at the date on the screen and realised it was the day after Lochlan and I had that discussion about Tanya's statement—the day he'd looked at me with that clear, cutting disappointment when I said I planned to do nothing.

So he thought I was a wimp, and he'd acted on my behalf?

He'd stepped in and had my back without me even knowing.

I started the car. Under the clear evening sky, the vast blue sea stretched into the distance, a few seabirds skimming the surface.

I had to admit, however grudgingly, the feeling of having someone in your corner... it felt rather good.

The drive from the village back to London takes about four and a half hours. By my calculations, I wouldn't be home until nearly eleven at night.

Despite the long drive ahead, my mood remained buoyant. I felt a sudden, fierce surge of loyalty. I silently vowed to move heaven and earth for Boss Lochlan. He had my undying, if slightly dramatic, devotion.

By seven in the evening, I needed a break. I pulled into a service station, used the facilities, and was walking back across the car park when a man standing on a patch of grass nearby, talking on his phone, made me pause.

There was something about him. I was sure I'd seen him at the first service station I'd stopped at. A faint sense of unease had prickled at me then, and now I knew why.

Three nights ago, when I'd driven back to the village, I'd stopped at a convenience store for coffee. This man had been in there. My nerves tightened instantly.

I slid my hand into my coat pocket, my face carefully neutral, and got into my car with an air of calm I didn't feel.

I didn't drive off immediately. Instead, I locked the doors, pulled out an eye mask, and reclined my seat, pretending to sleep.

I'd left a generous gap at the bottom of the mask. To anyone watching, I was a tired traveller catching a nap. In reality, I had a perfect view of the car park.

The man was still there, smoking a cigarette. He looked to be in his thirties, of average height and build, with a tanned complexion. It was late autumn, but he wore only a long-sleeved T-shirt under his open jacket and jeans. He was utterly unmemorable.

He chatted on his phone, laughing at something, but his gaze kept flicking, again and again, towards my car. I didn't move a muscle, just kept playing possum.

After a few minutes, he finished his call and got into his own vehicle. It was a common, forgettable hatchback, a dull silver colour—the kind of car you see a hundred times a day and never notice. He sat there, cracking open a can of drink and taking slow, leisurely sips. It all seemed perfectly normal.

Perhaps it was just a coincidence—the same person travelling out of London late at night three days ago, and now returning to London at the same time?

What a load of rubbish. I didn't believe in that kind of coincidence.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 178:

About half an hour passed. I didn't move. The silver hatchback didn't move either.

That confirmed it. He was following me.

But who on earth had sent him?

Could it be a hired hand from the Abrams family?

But if he was a hired thug, why hadn't he made a move in all this time?

My mind swarmed with questions. I was unsettled, unsure what to do.

I considered calling the police, but what would I say? A man in a service station is drinking a soda and I don't like the look of him? They'd laugh me off the phone.

No, I had to handle this myself.

I still had a good three hours of driving left to London. He'd followed me for days without making a move. Maybe if I just drove on normally, pretending I hadn't noticed a thing, he would continue to bide his time. It was a gamble, but sitting in that service station indefinitely wasn't an option.

Decision made, I started the car and pulled back onto the motorway.

As if connected by an invisible string, the silver hatchback eased out of its parking space and followed at a discreet distance.

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He was good, I'll give him that. He didn't tailgate. Sometimes he'd even disappear from my rear-view mirror for a few minutes, only to reappear later, having changed lanes or fallen back behind a lorry.

If I hadn't been actively looking for him, I never would have noticed the pattern.

The man was a professional.

The next hour of driving was some of the most tense of my life. My palms were slick with sweat on the steering wheel, every muscle in my shoulders coiled tight.

It was only as I finally crossed into the London city limits, merging into the thicker, more forgiving traffic, that I allowed myself to relax a fraction.

As I neared the vicinity of Lauderdale Tower, I saw my chance. On a relatively clear stretch of road, I suddenly accelerated, my foot pressing the pedal down with a determination that bordered on reckless. I shot through an amber light that turned red a heartbeat later, not slowing for a second. I swung the car into the Tower's entrance, and in my rear-view mirror, I saw the silver hatchback neatly blocked by the cross traffic.

A petty, triumphant thrill shot through me.

The Tower has notoriously tight security. There are guards at the gate, and every vehicle entering is either pre-registered to a resident or stopped for detailed visitor registration.

I was safe.

I drove down into the underground car park, the familiar, dim coolness a welcome relief. I pulled into my assigned space, killed the engine, and sat for a moment in the sudden silence, my heart still hammering a frantic rhythm against my ribs.

I grabbed my bag from the passenger seat, got out, and immediately called Portia.

“Portia,” I said as I walked towards the lift lobby, “you’re not going to believe the day I’ve had. I think I’ve been followed. Some bloke in a silver hatchback tailed me all the way from—”

Out of nowhere came a sharp gust of movement from behind. A brutal, chopping pain exploded at the base of my neck. My vision flickered. My body went limp, a marionette with its strings cut. My phone slipped from my numb fingers.

I felt a strong arm catch me before I hit the floor. In the last shred of my consciousness, I was aware of a hand deftly snatching my falling phone from the air.

Then, nothing.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 179:

I sat upright on the antique velvet sofa in my parents' drawing room, a position I maintained out of habit rather than comfort. The room was a pleasantly cluttered space filled with odd, expensive objects that defied any conventional decor. A bronze Roman bust sported one of my father's garishly colourful cashmere jumpers, this one featuring a whimsical cat motif, while a telescope stood perpetually aimed at the London Eye, as if awaiting some celestial event that never arrived.

My mother, Jennifer, sat opposite me, holding a thin leather portfolio. My father, Holden, was nursing his fourth scotch of the evening.

"Right," my mother began, her tone the same one she used to open her university lectures. "We have refined the initial pool based on a thorough compatibility assessment. These seven candidates exhibit the most promising traits for long-term stability, given the particular demands of your career."

I suppressed an inward sigh. I had long accepted that parents, upon reaching a certain age, inevitably adopt matchmaking as a favoured pastime. I tolerated it as a necessary familial ritual, but even my patience had its limits.

“Mother, as I’ve stated previously, my focus remains primarily on Velos Capital,” I replied, keeping my voice even and polite.

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Father—who has always insisted I call him Holden—roared with laughter and slapped his knee with a sound that echoed in the high-ceilinged room. “Ah, son, the work will always be there! You’re too damn efficient for your own good. You need a little fun to scramble your circuits! Your mother and I met through matchmaking, remember? Best investment your old man ever made!”

He leaned over and clapped me heavily on the shoulder, a gesture so forceful it nearly winded me. “It’s the most efficient way, mate!”

“Precisely.” My mother nodded. “Now, Loch, consider this first file—Bonnie Mikaelson. Daughter of the Chief Justice. A brilliant academic record from Cambridge, and she now runs a successful venture capital firm. From a macro perspective, this pairing would offer significant mutual advantages.”

I barely glanced at the glossy photograph. Bonnie Mikaelson possessed a stiff, elegant beauty that I had always found profoundly tedious. “No, Mother. Her professional

ambition is, I believe, excessive. She would likely view any domestic arrangement as a secondary logistical obstacle.”

“See, there’s your judgement at work,” Holden said, taking a hefty gulp of his scotch. “You’re too harsh! Give the girl a chance! She’s a real looker, son!”

I nodded politely. “Duly noted, Father. But my answer remains no.”

My mother methodically placed Bonnie’s file into a folder she had labelled “Rejected.” “Moving on. Now, speaking of professional ambition leading to suboptimal outcomes.” She raised a cool, questioning eyebrow in my father’s direction.

Holden instantly winced. “Don’t start, old girl.”

“Jaclyn Lemon,” my mother continued, her voice dry. “She was deemed a suitable candidate by your father, who, I believe, described her as ‘a bit of fire who would light a rocket under my passive lad.’”

Holden grumbled into his glass. “She was fun! And I thought the posting in Singapore would give you two some quality time together. You’re always stuck in an office, son!”

I picked up my teacup, the porcelain cool against my fingers. “Jaclyn, as you are both aware, exhibited gross incompetence in managing the Singapore subsidiary. She was terminated because her performance was demonstrably detrimental to Velos Capital’s interests, Father. Not because she made certain... advances.”

Holden threw his hands up in mock despair. “Well, I wish you’d been less efficient about it! Her parents haven’t stopped calling me! She’s back in London, heartbroken, apparently. You shut down her wooing, and then you fire her? Mate, that’s just cold-blooded!”

“It was a matter of fiduciary responsibility,” I stated calmly.

This was entirely true. I had fired her for incompetence. The fact that she had persistently attempted to climb into my bed was an irritating, though ultimately secondary, complication. I should, of course, never have allowed Father to appoint her in the first place.

My mother adjusted the remaining files. “The current data suggests we pivot to candidates with less direct professional integration. How about this artist? Her psychological profile suggests very low emotional volatility.”

I glanced at the next file. “I will agree to one dinner with the artist, Mother.”

Just to get my parents off my back.

“Good lad!” Holden cheered, raising his glass in a toast before taking another large swallow. “See, old girl? We’re getting somewhere!”

I expected the meeting to conclude, but my mother produced another, thinner file from her portfolio, this one labelled “Contingency.”

“Lochlan,” she began, her tone shifting almost imperceptibly—a signal that she was about to broach a subject she considered delicate. “I have to ask this, purely from a standpoint of data validation. If the female pool is not yielding results, are we perhaps miscoding your sexual orientation? Are you gay? If so, your father and I would be absolutely supportive.”

I suppressed another, deeper sigh. “No, Mother. I’m not gay.”

She nodded, accepting the answer but not yet closing the matter. She opened the file. “But you spend a considerable amount of time with that Lockwood boy. Your longest holiday to date, according to our travel logs, was a ten-day trip to Switzerland with him. That particular data point suggests a pattern I cannot responsibly ignore.”

Of course she tracked my travel logs. I had long been the primary subject of her unsanctioned sociological study.

“Lockwood is a highly capable Chief Investment Officer,” I explained. “We were analysing the performance of a high-net-worth portfolio acquisition in Davos. It was strictly business, Mother.”

“A notably long business trip for two unmarried men, Lochlan,” she pressed, her sharp eyes studying my face for any micro-expression that might betray me. “From a sociological perspective, sustained proximity in high-stress environments is a significant predictor for certain types of intimate relationships. It is simply an observation of correlation.”

I was saved from formulating a response by the welcome sound of my phone ringing. A glance at the caller ID revealed it was Portia Pierce, Hyacinth's best friend. This was an unexpected development.

"Please excuse me," I said, rising to my feet with a sense of relief. "I must take this call."

Holden waved a dismissive hand, his focus already returning to his scotch. "Go on, son. Duty calls. But at least you agreed to one date!"

I walked out of the room, my mind instantly discarding the files on Bonnie Mikaelson and "the Lockwood boy," and turning instead to the one woman I could never admit I wanted.

What would my mother's algorithm calculate for a recently divorced, fiercely independent, and sarcastically witty subordinate who was now, rather inconveniently, sleeping in the bed I used to occupy?

I answered the phone before I could entertain that thought further.

"Lochlan."

Portia's voice was uncharacteristically strained. "Sorry to bother you on a Sunday evening, but do you happen to know where Hyacinth is?"

“No,” I said. It was a lie. I knew she had driven to her grandmother’s in Mousehole for the weekend. “Is something the matter?”

“I think something has happened to her.”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 180:

“Explain, please,” I said, the words clipped and formal even as a cold, sinking sensation began to solidify in the pit of my stomach.

Portia's voice was tight with anxiety. "Hyacinth returned to London. She entered Lauderdale Tower half an hour ago, and our call cut off mid-conversation. Now she isn't answering any calls, no matter how many times I try."

"Have you tried the landline in the penthouse?" I asked, already moving with a controlled urgency out of the drawing room and towards the front door, my mind cataloguing possibilities and discarding them just as quickly.

Internally, a storm of self-recrimination was building. If I had disregarded her stubborn independence and insisted on a dedicated security detail, as I had been tempted to do so many times, we would not be having this conversation.

"I didn't know there was a landline," Portia admitted.

"I will call it and get back to you," I stated, and ended the call.

Roy, waiting by the car, raised a questioning eyebrow at my abrupt exit. I held up a hand to forestall any questions and immediately dialled the penthouse landline. It rang incessantly, a hollow, mocking sound in my ear.

No one picked up.

On the slender chance her mobile had merely lost signal and recovered, I tried Hyacinth's number.

It didn't connect.

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My next call was to Noel Pritchett, the building manager. He answered on the second ring. "Mr Hastings. What can I do for you?"

"Noel, a matter of some urgency," I began, my tone measured despite the adrenaline beginning to course through my system. "Miss Galloway, in the penthouse, has gone incommunicado shortly after entering the building. I need you to go up to her residence immediately and confirm her whereabouts."

"Of course, sir. I'll go up right now."

"If she's not there, I need you to check the security feed for the underground car park. That was her last known location."

"I'll get right to it, sir," he assured me before hanging up.

I then called another number, my patience wearing thin beneath a facade of icy calm. The man answered after a few rings.

“Where is she?” I demanded, dispensing with any preamble.

Kol Donovan, the private investigator from Wilson Allied, sounded surprised. “In her penthouse, I would assume.”

A flash of pure, white-hot anger surged within me. I had hired professionals to avoid precisely this kind of assumption.

“I do not need you to assume,” I said coldly. “I need you to know.”

This was the consequence of my restraint, my idiotic adherence to boundaries. If I had acted like the possessive bastard I sometimes felt myself to be, she would be safe.

“Well, I saw her car enter Lauderdale Tower about forty minutes ago,” Kol explained, somewhat defensively. “I followed to the entrance but didn’t go in, as you know I can’t enter without prior registration.”

I simmered at his incompetence. Was this truly the best Wilson Allied had to offer?

“Are there lights on in the penthouse?” I asked.

“Give me a second to check... no, no lights on that I can see from this angle.”

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Message from Noa: Have a really really nice day dear readers. God loves you and Noa wishes you all the best. (—_—O)

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 181:

“Is there anything else unusual to report?” I pressed, every instinct telling me that the situation was fundamentally wrong.

Kol hesitated. “Yeah. I think my team isn’t the only one tracking Miss Galloway. There was another car that followed her to Mousehole and back—a silver hatchback. I think Miss Galloway figured out she was being followed because whoever was in that car, the absolute idiot, spooked her. She was jumpy throughout her drive back to London, but the driver didn’t follow her into the tower.”

I had a pretty good idea who had sent that particular idiot.

“Your priority is to find her. Now,” I commanded, ending the call.

I slid into the back seat of the car. Roy closed the door and quickly took his place in the driver’s seat.

“Hyacinth made it inside the tower,” he said, a note of confusion in his voice. “How could she just vanish? The security there is notoriously strict.”

I pondered this, the gears in my mind turning relentlessly. “The security is strict for outsiders, not for residents. What if the threat was already inside?”

Roy was surprised. “A resident? How?”

“Cary Grant purchased a flat in the tower specifically to be near Hyacinth,” I explained, the words tasting like ash. “I just granted Kol access to enter. Where there’s a will, there’s invariably a way.”

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And my will to protect her had been fatally tempered by a respect for her autonomy that now seemed like a catastrophic error in judgement.

Kol called back moments later. “I’ve been to the car park. No visible signs of a struggle. Miss Galloway’s car is there, locked, no obvious disturbance. The silver hatchback is still parked down the street, and I’m confident the driver never entered the tower. But I did see a black sports car leaving the car park just as I was entering.”

“And that’s suspicious, why?” I asked.

“I can’t point to anything overt,” Kol admitted. “But in my line of work, you develop a kind of sixth sense. I just felt something was off about that car.”

“Did you see who was inside?”

“I’m not sure if there were passengers in the back. As for the driver, I only caught a glimpse of a black hat and part of his nose and lips. It was a man. I took down the licence plate number.”

Kol texted me the number immediately.

“I will have someone run it,” I said, already forwarding the details to a contact who could bypass the usual bureaucratic delays.

Portia called again. “I’m on my way to the Tower now.”

I relayed the update.

“A suspicious vehicle?” Portia’s breath hitched. “She told me she was being followed. Do you think it’s the same person?”

“No,” I stated, the certainty in my voice absolute. “That individual is still outside the tower. It’s almost certainly someone employed by Cary Grant.”

The irony was not lost on me that I was using the same methods, yet failing where he had merely irritated her.

“How do you know that?” Portia asked, surprised, but she had no time to dwell on it. “Okay, fine. Whatever the case, I’m going up to her penthouse to see for myself. Maybe this is all a false alarm.”

Although she said the words, I could hear the same bleak lack of hope in her voice that I felt curdling in my own chest.

We both knew it was not a false alarm.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 182:

Portia called back minutes later, and the tremor in her voice confirmed everything.

“She’s not in the penthouse. I pressed the intercom like a madwoman; no one’s responding. The guy you said was hired by Cary... how can you be sure it wasn’t Cary who took her? He has a history of this. When they were married, he used to have men follow her wherever she went.”

I forced myself to remain calm and analytical, though the image of Hyacinth in the hands of some unknown assailant was fuelling a silent, raging inferno within me. “Because that man never approached her and never entered the tower.”

Portia was clearly panicking, her thoughts spiralling. “Maybe they had someone on the inside! Maybe it’s a coordinated effort, and Cary already has her. I have to call him.”

She hung up before I could respond.

Noel called back, his voice laced with apology. “Sir, I’m sorry to report that the surveillance footage from the relevant period has been... compromised.”

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I felt a fresh wave of fury, cold and sharp, but my voice remained level. “Explain, please.”

Noel detailed his findings. He had reviewed the camera feeds for the building's car park and found no visual record of Hyacinth's car entering, nor of any other vehicle movements during that timeframe. Yet, the footage from the main entrance clearly showed her car driving onto the premises. Furthermore, her vehicle was physically present and locked in its designated space.

The implication was clear. Her car had entered the tower and then effectively vanished from the digital record.

"The feed was deliberately interfered with," Noel concluded.

"You employ security personnel to monitor these feeds in real time," I stated, the sentence a quiet accusation.

Noel hastened to explain. "The car park is particularly quiet, sir, and during this time of day it's virtually dormant. The feed could have been blocked for hours without the guards noticing the static."

I didn't have time to scold Noel or the guards, as Portia called again. "I spoke to Cary. Bastard claims he doesn't know anything about Hyacinth being missing. I've already notified the police."

When I arrived at Lauderdale Tower, Portia was there, along with two police officers, Noel, and several members of the management staff. The normally serene car park was now a hub of agitated activity.

Portia was recounting events to the officers, with Noel interjecting technical details. I left them to navigate the official channels and went directly to Kol.

“I’ve spoken with the staff here,” Kol informed me. “I showed them my credentials, explained I work for you. They’re assisting me in trying to identify the black car.”

The police were conducting a physical search of the car park. Noel and his team were busy contacting residents. The Tower’s occupants were all wealthy individuals, and the car park was a showroom of high-performance vehicles, which made the police hesitant to proceed too forcefully.

Noel approached me, perspiration beading on his forehead. He informed me he was in the process of contacting every resident in the building to ascertain if the suspicious black sports car belonged to them.

I acknowledged the logic of his method, but it did nothing to quell the intense frustration I felt at the painfully slow pace of the investigation. Every second spent on bureaucratic procedure was a second Hyacinth spent in danger—a danger my inaction had facilitated.

Half an hour later, Noel reported back that the licence plate of the black car was not registered to any tenant here.

“Contact them again. I want to know if any of them had a guest with a black sports car tonight,” I demanded, my tone leaving no room for debate.

Noel, in turn, began barking orders at his team.

Soon, reports filtered back. Residents uniformly confirmed they had not had any guests driving a black sports car that evening. There were, of course, numerous complaints about being disturbed on a Sunday night—a triviality I noted to address later.

I entered the security control room and reviewed the footage personally. I instructed the guard to rewind and play the last twenty-four hours at high speed.

There was no sign of the black sports car.

The vehicle was like a ghost.

“Go back further,” I commanded.

The guard complied. What we discovered was staggering.

The car had actually entered the tower three days prior.

The footage from three nights ago showed the vehicle arriving late in the evening. A man in a black hat emerged, carrying a box. He passed through the secure door and went

upstairs, returning later to get back into the car—which then never left, at least according to the manipulated records.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 183:

The footage clearly showed him accessing the 18th floor.

I accompanied Noel to the 18th floor. He requested access via the intercom. The tenant, a Miss Gilbert, viewed the footage we showed her on a tablet and exclaimed, “Oh, that’s the guy who delivered my takeaway!”

I felt a cold disdain for the woman's naivety. Hyacinth would never have been so careless as to allow a stranger to deliver food directly to her door.

"Who is he? Do you have his contact details?" I asked.

Miss Gilbert shook her head, bewildered. "I don't know. I was home that night, and my friend ordered the food for me. Normally, the concierge receives all deliveries, but my friend said this chef said the nigiri must be served at body temperature, so he insisted on delivering it to me personally. I let him in."

"What's your friend's name?" I asked.

"Lexi Abrams."

It confirmed my suspicion. The Abrams family was involved.

I immediately departed for the Abrams residence, with Portia riding alongside me.

Portia unleashed a torrent of colourful language in the car. "It has to be Vanessa who took her! Lexi Abrams is her sister. They're all cut from the same filthy cloth."

I said nothing.

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If Cary had taken her, the situation would be containable. But the Abrams family—with Hyacinth in their hands—the potential for harm was immeasurably greater.

The cold, calculating part of my mind began assembling the worst-case scenarios, each one a fresh lash of guilt for having failed to prevent this.

I turned to Portia. “You must now act in your capacity as Hyacinth’s legal representative. I want you to make a public statement online, directly addressing the Abrams family. Demand Hyacinth’s immediate release and state that you’re in possession of evidence.”

The objective was to amplify the situation, to galvanise public sentiment and create a pressure they couldn’t ignore.

Portia nodded. “I’ll do it right now.” She was already pulling out her phone, her fingers flying across the screen. “I’ve already invested in a network of online influencers and commentators for... other purposes. They’ll be put to good use now.”

Inside the car, Portia recorded a brief, impassioned video. She demanded Hyacinth’s safe return and implicated the Abrams family directly.

The moment she posted it, the response was instantaneous. The video spread like wildfire, and the online community, already invested in the ongoing saga between the Abrams, the Grants, and Hyacinth, seized upon this dramatic new development with voracious excitement.

I watched the video gain traction, then accessed my phone. Using the official Velos Capital account, I reposted her message and added a concise, unequivocal statement of my own: “Should any harm come to Miss Galloway, Velos Capital will cease all current and future business engagements with the Abrams Group, effective immediately.”

The corporate threat was a blunt instrument, but in certain circles, it carried the weight of a declaration of war.

The car slowed abruptly.

“Boss!” Roy’s voice was hushed and urgent. “The car ahead... is that it?”

I looked through the windscreen. There, perhaps fifteen metres in front of us, was the black sports car. It matched the licence plate number Kol had sent me.

“Don’t lose it. But don’t get made.”

Finally. A target.

“Understood.” Roy eased off the accelerator, letting another car slip between us.

I had Kol on the line in seconds, relaying our position and direction. “Bring the police. Now. We’re following the vehicle.”

We trailed it for a tense fifteen minutes, until it turned into a gated community. Our car was stopped at the barrier.

“This is... Hyacinth’s old house,” Roy whispered, stunned.

I grabbed my phone and dialled.

“Cary,” I said the moment the line connected. “Listen carefully. They have Hyacinth. And they’ve taken her to your old house.”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 184:

Consciousness returned like a faulty elevator, lurching and unpleasant.

My first sensation wasn't sight or sound, but smell. A thick, cloying, nauseating stench of petrol that saturated the air—my clothes, my skin, my hair. It was in my nostrils, my throat, a toxic perfume that promised nothing good.

My head throbbed in protest, and a sharp, specific pain pulsed at the base of my neck.

I frowned, forcing my eyes open against the gloom.

I was sitting on something soft, my wrists and ankles bound tightly with what felt like industrial-grade tape.

As my vision adjusted, familiar shapes emerged from the darkness. The huge expanse of the front window, the specific angle of the sofa, the placement of the doorway. A cold, sickening recognition dawned.

This was the house I'd shared with Cary.

I'd lived here for three years. I knew the creak of every floorboard, the stubborn lock on the patio door.

Could it be Cary who'd orchestrated this?

But the man who'd grabbed me in the car park didn't move like him, didn't smell like him.

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And a small, stubborn part of me—the part that remembered the look in his eyes during our last conversation in the penthouse, that sort of resigned acceptance—refused to believe he could stoop to this.

Yes, he was controlling, domineering, bossy, arrogant, and yes, he'd had men follow me more times than I could count, but actual physical harm? Tying me up and dousing me in petrol? That seemed a step too far, even for him.

Unless, of course, he'd had a full-blown psychotic break since then—which, given the week I was having, wouldn't entirely surprise me.

I tried to shift, to sit up properly, but my body was leaden. I couldn't even twitch a finger. A panicked attempt to shout produced only a muffled groan against the tape sealing my mouth.

So, I was trussed up, doused in flammable liquid, and dumped in my own past. Fantastic. My body was a prisoner, but my mind, cruelly, was becoming razor-sharp.

Click, click, click.

The sharp, precise sound of heels on a hardwood floor. A petite figure settled herself beside me on the sofa. Even in the poor light, I knew her. The ridiculous, entitled posture was a dead giveaway.

Vanessa.

I stopped struggling. What was the point? Instead, I sat as straight as my bonds allowed and fixed her with the iciest stare I could muster.

Inside, my heart was trying to beat its way out of my chest, but on the outside, I was a statue. A very, very flammable statue.

“I waited three whole days for you to come back,” Vanessa mused, her voice a conversational purr as she played with a sleek metal lighter. “If you hadn’t scuttled out of London like a frightened little mouse on Friday, we could have wrapped this up days ago.”

The lighter flicked open. A flame sparked to life. She closed it. Open. Flame. Closed. The little fire danced at her fingertips, a tiny, hellish metronome.

One slip, one deliberate toss, and I’d be the human equivalent of a Christmas pudding. A very well-done one.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 185:

Vanessa leaned in, the flame illuminating her face. It was a pretty face—or it used to be.

Now it was twisted into something ugly and skeletal, a mask of pure obsession.

“You should have just died at Kingfisher Park,” she hissed, bringing the fire close enough for me to feel its heat on my cheek. “But no, you had to fight. You had to try and take what’s mine. Did you really think you could win?”

I looked at the flame, and yes, I was terrified. My heart wasn’t just beating; it was performing a full-blown drum solo of sheer panic.

But I’d be damned if I let her see it.

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“Scared?” she whispered, her eyes wide with delight as she saw the fear I was trying so hard to suppress. She traced a slow, terrifying circle around my head with the lighter. “Don’t be. It’ll only hurt for a little while. And when you’re just a charred, ugly lump, Cary will be so disgusted he’ll vomit. He’ll need me to comfort him.”

She threw her head back and laughed, a high, brittle sound that had no place in a sane world.

Abruptly, she stopped. She reached out and ripped the tape from my mouth, the sting a minor annoyance compared to everything else. She pinched my chin, her fingers digging in. “I’ll tell you what. Beg. Beg me like the little bitch you are. Beg for your life, and maybe I’ll reconsider.”

I just stared back at her, my gaze flat. I said nothing. No begging, no pleading.

Behind the stoic facade, my wrists were working furiously against the tape binding them, a desperate, hidden struggle that yielded nothing.

The bloody stuff didn’t give an inch.

A part of my mind, with that bizarre luxury for irony that kicks in when you’re about to be murdered, couldn’t help but compare it to my last kidnapping in Singapore.

At least Marcus had used rope; you can fray rope with enough friction.

But what the hell was I supposed to do with this industrial-strength adhesive?

Still, my fingers kept searching, rubbing and twisting against the binding, hoping to find a weak point, a tear—anything.

I knew this psychotic cunt wasn't going to let me walk away. I was probably going to die, and that was a terrifying, universe-shrinking thought.

But if that was the case, I was absolutely not going to spend my last moments as her performing poodle.

My refusal seemed to piss her off more than any insult could. She snarled and slapped me hard across the face. "Too proud to beg? Fine! I'll have my men take turns with you first! Then we'll chop you into pieces, slice you up, and burn this whole fucking house down with what's left of you inside!"

My cheek burned. I still didn't speak. I just worked my jaw, tasting blood where my teeth had cut the inside of my mouth.

She grabbed a fistful of my hair, yanking my head back, her mood swinging violently into a grotesque parody of reason. "Can't you see I'm giving you a chance?" she crooned, her voice suddenly soft and wheedling. "I'm offering you a way out. It's just a little noise. It won't kill you. It doesn't even hurt."

I lifted my eyes to meet her frenzied gaze. "Here's a thought, Vanessa. Once you've murdered me for a man who doesn't want you, what's your next grand romantic gesture? Stalking him through the divorce he'll inevitably file? Or just skipping straight to poisoning his next girlfriend?"

She froze.

The unadulterated rage that contorted her features was almost beautiful in its purity.

She drew back her hand for the first slap, and as it connected with my cheek, I saw my opening.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 186:

With every ounce of strength I had, I lunged forward and smashed my forehead directly into her face.

A sickening crunch echoed in the room, followed by Vanessa's piercing scream. She stumbled back, clutching her nose as blood began pouring between her fingers.

"You bitch!" she shrieked, her voice garbled and hysterical. "You broke my nose! You filthy whore broke my fucking nose!"

The victory was short-lived. Enraged beyond reason, she launched herself at me, her weight slamming me back against the sofa. She straddled me, using her knees to pin my shoulders, and the slaps began again—harder now—punctuated by closed-fist punches that felt like they were cracking bone. This wasn't just punishment anymore; it was a psychotic, frenzied demolition.

I lost count. My face went from burning to completely numb, my mouth filling with the warm, metallic taste of my own blood. I heard her panting, the sound ragged and full of venom.

"I'm going to kill you," she spat, "but I'm going to make you wish for death long before you get it. Murder's a crime? Who fucking cares? There's no evidence. The whole world can suspect me, but without proof, they can't touch me. After you're gone, your husband will be mine. Everything you had will be mine. We'll rebuild on this very spot, on your ashes. We'll get married. We'll have babies. We'll be so, so happy."

I actually laughed then, a choked, bloody sound. "And you don't think I'll come back as a ghost to haunt your tastefully redecorated hellscape?"

"If you haunt me," she whispered, leaning so close I could see the madness shining in her eyes, "I'll hire a medium to trap your spirit in a jar. I'll make you watch every single time Cary fucks me. I'll make you watch me take everything that was ever yours."

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“Well,” I managed, spitting a mouthful of blood onto the expensive rug, “you’ve certainly thought this through. It’s still utterly deranged and pathetically clichéd, but points for thoroughness.”

Her response was another flurry of blows until, finally, she seemed to tire herself out. She straightened up, breathing heavily, looking down at me as I slumped in my seat.

A nasty, calculating look crept into her eyes. “You’re trying to stall,” she sneered. “You think someone’s coming to save you? No one’s coming. No one would ever think to look for you here. By the time they find you, you’ll have tragically taken your own life. I even wrote your note for you.”

She tilted her head. “You know what? I’m bored of this. I’m not going to torture you anymore. I’m just going to finish it.”

She took a few steps back, the lighter flicking open in her hand once more. The little flame sprang to life, obedient to her will.

“I was wrong before,” she mused, her voice taking on a dreamy, unhinged quality. “Hurting myself didn’t make him stay. But hurting you—destroying you—that will leave him with no one else. He’ll have to come back to me. He’ll have no other choice.”

I stared at the lighter.

This was it. The grand finale. My life was going to end in a blaze of psychotic glory, all because of a man.

She held the lighter aloft, her eyes glued to my face, drinking in what she thought was my final terror.

And she was right. I was absolutely terrified. My heart was a trapped bird beating itself to death against my ribs.

With a sudden, dramatic flourish, she tossed the lighter into the air—a perfect, lazy arc aimed right for the petrol-soaked floor at my feet.

In that split second, a raw, animal survival instinct I didn't know I possessed surged through me, fighting through the chemical haze in my veins. I threw myself sideways, a desperate, lurching movement that accomplished nothing more than sending me tumbling off the sofa and onto the floor with a painful thud.

It was pathetic. It was useless.

I squeezed my eyes shut, bracing for the searing heat, the unimaginable pain.

So, this was how it ended. Not with a bang, not even with a whimper, but with the stench of premium unleaded and my ex-husband's poor life choices.

If I did become a ghost, my first order of business wouldn't be haunting Vanessa; it would be haunting Cary for being the world's most troublesome accessory to murder.

I heard Vanessa's sharp, excited gasp—the prelude to her triumph.

But the triumph didn't come.

The expected whoosh of ignition never happened. Instead of the clatter of metal on hardwood, there was a soft, almost inaudible sound—a catch.

My eyes flew open.

A dark figure had materialised from the shadows. In the space between one heartbeat and the next, a hand had shot out and snatched the lighter out of the air, mere centimetres from the ground, snuffing the flame in its palm.

“Who the fuck are you?” Vanessa shrieked.

The figure on the ground didn't answer her and began to rise.

With a cry of rage, Vanessa lunged—not at the figure, but at me. She snatched a knife from the coffee table and drove it down towards where I lay helpless on the floor.

Everything happened too fast. I saw two dark shapes hurling themselves towards me. I braced for the impact of the blade.

It never came.

Instead, a new scent flooded the air, metallic and sharp, cutting through the petrol fumes.

Blood.

A guttural cry—a woman's—was cut short by the heavy thud of a body hitting the floor.

Then, a weight descended on me, shielding me. My face was pressed against a firm chest, the fabric of a suit jacket rough against my skin.

A familiar, clean scent of sandalwood and something uniquely him cut through the chemical haze.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 187:

“Boss?” I breathed, the word muffled against the solid wall of his chest.

The fabric of his shirt was a strange anchor in a world that had just been trying to set me on fire.

Lochlan let out a sharp, pained hiss. “You can let go now.”

I looked down. My hands, still bound at the wrists, were fisted in his ruined shirt. My nails, through the fine Egyptian cotton, were digging hard into the unnervingly solid muscle of his abdomen.

I unclenched my fingers immediately.

He pushed himself up, his movements uncharacteristically tight and careful, and with a brisk efficiency that was utterly mesmerising, he sliced through the tape on my wrists and ankles with a pocket knife. Freedom had never felt so good.

Then, one hand clamped firmly over his lower back, he moved to where Vanessa lay wheezing on the floor. With the same grim practicality, he used the remaining tape to secure her wrists and ankles.

Poetic justice, I supposed, though it felt far less satisfying than it should have.

The next instant, the world exploded into noise and movement. Cary burst through the doorway, his face a perfect tempest of shock, horror, and a gut-wrenching kind of anguish.

“Hyacinth!”

Portia was right behind him, a fiery avenger in a designer dress.

“Hyacinth!” She made to rush to me, arms outstretched.

“Don’t!” I yelled, my voice scraped raw. “I’m covered in petrol!”

She skidded to a halt, her eyes wide with dawning horror. “Right. Water! I’ll find water!” she shouted, spinning on her heel and darting out of the room.

Soon, the welcome, piercing wail of police sirens filled the air. Someone found the light switch. Harsh overhead light flooded the room, bleaching the scene of its dramatic shadows and revealing the full, grim reality.

That’s when I saw it clearly: the dark, wet stain spreading across the back of Lochlan’s trousers.

He’d been stabbed. He’d literally taken a knife in the back that was meant for me.

The weight of that knowledge settled in my stomach, cold and heavy.

While a stoic-faced police officer took my statement, Portia returned with an armful of wet towels and began carefully dabbing the petrol from my face and arms, her hands trembling with a potent mixture of fury and relief.

Lochlan, noticeably paler but with his composure perfectly intact, handed the lighter to another officer.

“You’ll find my fingerprints are on it, I’m afraid,” he said, his voice calm and lucid as he described his timely intervention. “But the knife on the floor should provide you with the primary evidence you require.”

“Vanessa, you psychotic bitch! You tried to burn her alive!” Portia screamed, and before anyone could stop her, she delivered a sharp, satisfying kick to Vanessa’s shin.

The police officer holding the handcuffed woman scowled and pulled her back.

Vanessa was already switching gears. It was a performance only the truly, clinically insane could manage. The rage vanished, replaced by a mask of wide-eyed innocence. She was suddenly in tears, snot running down her already bloodied nose, pleading directly to Cary.

“Cary, it’s not what you think! She made me do it! That whore set this whole thing up to frame me!”

A medic started tending to me, her touch clinical and gentle.

My face hurt, my head throbbed, the back of my neck ached from the initial blow—every part of my body felt like it had been used as a punching bag.

If I'd had an ounce of strength left, I'd have grabbed that knife from the police evidence bag and plunged it into Vanessa's deranged heart myself.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 188:

A dark thought, but an honest one.

“Hyacinth.” Cary stayed by my side as the paramedic worked, his voice weak and shattered. “I didn’t know. I didn’t know she’d—”

“Of course you fucking didn’t know!” I exploded, though it came out as a raspy croak. “You didn’t personally give her the access code to your house, you didn’t actively lead her on to make her think you were star-crossed lovers, you didn’t deliberately harass me for months after the divorce to make her believe that if she just eliminated me, she’d have you all to herself! You just created the perfect fucking conditions for it, you oblivious asshole!”

Cary flinched as if I’d struck him. Good.

Portia stroked my hand soothingly. I gave her a pat, a weak signal that I was, against all odds, still in one piece.

Though I really wasn’t.

My face was hurting like hell and I probably looked like I’d gone ten rounds with a heavyweight boxer. If the police hadn’t been here, I’d have returned every slap and punch Vanessa had given me with interest, and I wouldn’t have stopped until next Tuesday.

And all of this—every bloody second of this nightmare—was because of Cary and his toxic, all-consuming presence. I glared at him through my swelling eyes.

His shoulders sagged in defeat. He just stood there, numb and hollow.

I was loaded into one ambulance and Lochlan into another.

Vanessa was dragged away by the police. She was whining that Lochlan had kicked her and broken her ribs, demanding hospital treatment, but she was moving far too easily for someone with that particular injury.

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The officers, to their credit, weren't indulging her.

Last time it was hiring a bunch of thugs; this time it was attempted murder. The Abrams family's lawyers were going to have their work cut out for them.

I didn't care if she was hurt. In fact, a very large, very dark part of me wished she were dead.

My injuries, aside from the drug cocktail she'd given me, were mostly surface-level bruising. A spectacularly colourful and painful collection, but ultimately superficial.

Lochlan, however, had been properly stabbed in the back. The knife had missed his internal organs, thank God, but it had sliced a nasty gash that required several stitches. He was bandaged up and sentenced to several days of quiet rest, with regular dressing changes.

I felt a crushing wave of gratitude, followed immediately by a sickening sense of guilt.

By now, it was the deep, quiet part of the night.

We were in different rooms in the private wing of the hospital. In my room, Cary sat in a chair by the bed, while Portia slept, exhausted, on the sofa in the corner.

Cary had been quiet ever since we arrived, this man who was usually a roaring, tempestuous bastard. He seemed shrunken—silent and morose.

And I truly had nothing left to say to him.

I didn't even have the energy to curse him out, and even the hatred felt like a distant, faded thing. All my emotions towards him had been bleached out, leaving nothing but a flat, grey emptiness.

“You should go home. Portia’s here,” I said. It was the first thing I’d said to him in hours. My tone was flat and calm, the kind you’d use with a stranger who’d asked for the time.

Cary’s eyelids fluttered shut for a second. His voice was husky. “I’ll stay. There’s nothing for me at home. Someone should watch your drip.”

I looked at him for a few seconds, then gave a slight, indifferent shrug. I closed my eyes, too weary to argue.

The soft glow of the bedside lamp fell across my battered face. He just sat there, watching me, for the rest of the night.

At some point, I felt the weight of his head come to rest gently against the pillow near my shoulder, and then the hot, silent tears began to fall, dampening my hair.

I pretended to be asleep, because any other reaction was more than he deserved.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 189:

I lifted my head.

The soft glow from the bedside lamp washed over Hyacinth's face, and I had been watching her like that the entire night. At some point, I had rested my head beside hers on the pillow, my face buried in the curve of her neck. The tears would not stop falling, soaking into her hair with a quiet, shameful persistence. My choked sobs.

My bitter regret.

My utter inability to let go.

That night, I was no longer the handsome, polished CEO, nor the domineering scion of the Grant family.

I was just a man who had broken his promises and lost the woman he loved.

I wanted so desperately to turn back time. I would have torn out my own heart and laid it bare in my hands if I thought it would make her believe me—if it would prove that I would never make such a fucking mistake again.

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But I knew, with a certainty that felt like a death sentence, that we were past that point. There was no going back.

The night was long—so long that it allowed every memory of us to surface and haunt me.

I remembered the first time I saw her, in that hospital.

She was sitting on a bench, clutching a medical bill so tightly her knuckles were white. Her eyes blazed with a stubborn fire, but there were no tears.

She looked so young, university age, with her hair pulled up in a high ponytail that showed off a long, slender neck. Her face was heart-shaped and seemed to glow with a fierce, defiant light, like a beautiful, proud swan. Her gaze flicked to me, just for a second.

The feeling that shot through me was like a firework exploding in my chest.

I must have her, was my first, primal thought.

Immediately after, the practical calculation followed: she would make the perfect wife for me. She was the ultimate “fuck you” to my interfering mother. Here was a woman who was rational, logical, tough, and resilient. She understood what it took to survive in this cutthroat world, and I saw that in her eyes from the very first second.

I remembered our first time, the night she signed the contract. When I took her to bed, it was clearly her first time. Yet she lacked the usual shyness or panic of a virgin—none of the nervous fumbling of a university girl experiencing it all for the first time.

All she showed was a calm, almost chilling acceptance of her fate.

When did I first notice the change in her?

Was it the first time I took her out for dinner—a proper date with just the two of us—and I surprised her by ordering her favourite dish?

Or was it the first time she took the initiative in bed, pulling off my tie and unbuckling my belt before straddling me, riding me with a certain gleam in her eyes that I understood perfectly? It was the look that said she took a deep, possessive pleasure in the knowledge that I was hers and she was mine.

Or was it that visit to her parents', when I brought those carefully chosen gifts—a packet of seasonal seeds for her father's garden and a curated seafood cookbook for her mother? She had that same gleam in her eyes then, a gleam that had set off alarm bells in my mind at the time. It was a warning sign that we were veering dangerously far from the cold, stipulated terms of our contract, and that I needed to do something to wrench us back on track.

And when did that gleam finally fade? When did she stop looking at me like that? When did she stop loving me?

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 190:

Too many memories came rushing back, one after another, and I was drowning in them. The more beautiful they were, the more I clung to them—and the more agonising the pain became. We had given each other the best years, the best versions of ourselves. I should

have been the one to hold her hand and walk with her into the future. It should have been me.

But.

Why did I have to go and ruin everything with my stupid, fucking pride?

The night was also short.

So short that dawn was already threatening to break, and I was left feeling greedy, desperately wanting to stretch this single night into eternity, to make time stand still right here in this quiet room.

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When the first grey light of morning began to seep through the window, I left.

Staying by her side would not help her. My presence would only irritate her, a constant reminder of the pain I had caused.

Goodbye, my love.

Goodbye, Hyacinth.

You were my love, my heart, my only passion.

I made too many mistakes.

And it's far too late to correct any of them.

The door sighed shut behind me, sealing Hyacinth away from the mess I had made.

The corridor was cold and silent, a stark contrast to the tempest inside my head.

I pulled my phone from my pocket. The screen lit up with a barrage of notifications: seventeen missed calls from Vanessa, and countless more from various Abrams numbers.

A fresh wave of contempt washed over me. I swiped them all away without a second thought. They were irrelevant. They were noise.

My thumb scrolled through the contacts until I found the number. I pressed dial and lifted the phone to my ear, listening to the ringtone echo in the sterile quiet.

She picked up on the third ring.

“Cary? This is early. What is it?”

Her voice was calm, professional—a lifeline thrown into my chaos.

“Good morning, Doctor,” I said, my own voice rough from the night’s vigil. I leaned back against the wall, the cool plaster a faint anchor through my jacket.

I closed my eyes, seeing only Hyacinth’s face in the lamplight. “About that proposal of yours,” I began, the words feeling like stones in my mouth.

I took a shallow breath, the weight of a hundred ruined possibilities pressing down on me. “I’ve made up my mind.”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 191:

Dawn was just beginning to smear its weak, grey light across the window when Cary finally left.

I opened my eyes and watched him go, my head still on the pillow.

I hadn't been asleep. You'd think after the day I'd had, I'd be comatose, but my brain was still whirring—a useless engine with nowhere to go.

It felt eerily similar to watching him walk away that night on the balcony, a lifetime ago, when he'd gone to take Vanessa's call. That was the moment the last little flicker of hope I'd been stupidly nursing had finally snuffed out.

This time, as I watched his back disappear, I didn't feel a thing. It was just a fact. The three-year-long rollercoaster of Cary and Hyacinth had screeched to its final, messy halt.

We were done.

All the screaming arguments, the whispered apologies, the love and the searing betrayal—it had all evaporated into the sterile hospital air.

The future was a blank, terrifying, and mildly intriguing page.

My eyes itched with tiredness, and my heart felt like a sponge that had absorbed an entire ocean of drama and was now, finally, being wrung out.

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My injuries were, in the grand scheme of things, thankfully superficial. I was cleared to leave the next morning, once I no longer smelled of petrol.

Portia handled the discharge paperwork with the terrifying efficiency of a general deploying troops. As we walked out of my room, I hesitated outside Lochlan's door.

It was packed. There were serious-looking people in serious suits, and a distinguished older couple who were undoubtedly his parents.

I stopped dead. The last thing the man needed was me—his recently-divorcing, scandal-magnet Chief of Staff—barging in and fuelling the gossip mill. I could play the appropriately grateful employee tomorrow, when the crowd of important people had buggered off.

After the hospital, I went to the police station to give a fuller statement.

The update was predictably infuriating. The thug from the car park had been caught, but was claiming he was just a friend of Vanessa's acting alone.

And Vanessa herself was playing the amnesia card, while her family was, shockingly, trying to get her off on mental health grounds.

Some things never change, though the fresh stab wound in my boss's back might actually make that old trick a bit harder to pull this time.

I went home, feeling gritty and drained.

That afternoon, Portia relayed a message. "Cary's willing to sign," she said, perched on the arm of my sofa. "And he's offering a settlement. Two hundred million. The bastard is at least a generous bastard."

I nodded, the calm feeling less like peace and more like numbness. “Okay. Tell him to come over. Let’s get it done.”

“You’re sure you’re ready?”

“I’ve been ready for months, Portia. I’m just finally able to make it official.”

She sighed, a real, heartfelt sound. “It’s such a shame, you know? He’s a cheating, domineering asshole, but my God, the man knows how to write a cheque. If only he could have kept his dick in his trousers, you two could have been one of those power couples they write mildly intimidating profiles about in the Sunday Times.”

“And live miserably ever after? No thanks.”

“Well,” she said, leaning forward with a glint in her eye, “the fairy tale’s over. Time to consider a different genre. Like a thriller. Or an epic. And I know just the leading man. Lochlan.”

“My boss? Absolutely not.”

“Oh, come on. You should’ve seen him in the car, Hyacinth. When we were following that black sports car. It wasn’t just professional concern on his face. It was... visceral. He looked like he was about to tear the city apart with his bare hands to find you. That is not how a CEO looks at a replaceable employee.”

A part of me—a traitorous, weak part—did a little flip at that. But the rest of me, the part that was still scrubbing the last traces of Cary Grant from the corners of my soul, shut it down.

“Portia, no. I’m not jumping from one complicated man to another. I need... space. I need to remember what my own mind feels like without his voice in it. I’m not interested in a relationship. Not now. Maybe not ever.”

Portia held up her hands in surrender. “Fine, fine. No relationships. I can respect that.”

Then her expression shifted to one of pure mischief. “But what about just spectacular, no-strings-attached sex? We could go out. Find a different gorgeous man to take home every night for a week. Trust me, it’s a fantastic way to reboot the system. I speak from extensive and highly enjoyable experience.”

I couldn’t help it; I let out a proper laugh, the first one that felt real in days. “Thank you for the... creative suggestion. I’ll bear it in mind.”

Cary arrived at the penthouse looking like he’d been through a war.

I took him in with a cold, clinical eye. The bloodshot eyes, the stubble, the whole tortured-soul aesthetic—it was a good effort. Part of me wondered if he’d practised it in the mirror. It was almost convincing, but all I could see was the trail of destruction he’d left in his wake, a path that had nearly ended with me as a human torch.

He looked at my face, at the fading bruises and swelling, and had the decency to flinch.

He came alone. He sat, signed the papers without a word, and pushed them across the table. I signed my name with a hand that was perfectly steady. I slid them to Portia, who tucked them into her briefcase like they were state secrets.

“I’ll file these Monday,” she announced. “It’ll be official by lunchtime.” She beamed at me. “Congratulations, High C. You’re a free woman.”

I gave her a small, tired smile. It was really over.

Cary opened his mouth, but nothing came out.

I stood up. The meeting was over.

He didn’t move.

Then he said it. “If I sent you an invitation to my wedding... would you come?”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 192:

I just stared at him.

For a solid three seconds, I was certain my ears had finally given up on me. Was he genuinely standing in my penthouse, fresh from signing our divorce papers, and asking if I'd attend his wedding? The sheer, unvarnished gall of it was almost a work of art. I had to give him points for breathtaking nerve.

Portia exploded before I could even form a sentence. "Are you clinically insane? You want to rub your happy day in her face after your last girlfriend tried to turn her into a human bonfire? You're a piece of work, Grant. You and Vanessa deserve each other in some specially reserved circle of hell."

“It’s not Vanessa,” he muttered.

I found my voice, and it came out cold and flat, the way you might read a disappointing weather report. “The answer is no.”

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I realised I genuinely didn’t care who the unfortunate bride was. It was no longer my circus, and he was definitively no longer my monkey. The finality of that thought was like a key turning in a lock.

It was over.

Portia sneered, her hands planted on her hips. “Oh, I get it now. So that’s the sudden rush to sign. You needed to be free to marry the next one. Christ, my capacity to be disappointed by you is truly bottomless.”

Cary stood slowly. “I hope we can be friends.”

“We won’t be,” I said, my tone leaving no room for negotiation. I’d already decided his massive settlement was going straight into a charitable trust. I didn’t want his money. I

didn't want a single thread of him still tied to me. This was my clean break, and I was taking it.

"I wish you happiness," he said, and for a split second, it almost sounded like he meant it.

"Thanks."

He hesitated, then his face clouded over again with that familiar, possessive scowl. "But don't date Lochlan. He's a snake."

I laughed, a short, sharp bark that hurt my bruised face. "A snake? You're one to talk. You lied to my face for months. Your pathetic obsession nearly got me killed. Lochlan has shown more basic human decency in a single week than you managed in three years. Don't you dare compare your particular brand of slithering to his."

A pathetic, desperate hope flashed in his eyes. "So you're not with him?"

Portia chimed in, her voice sweet as poisoned honey. "Not yet. But give it time. He's taller, richer, better-looking, and hasn't, to my knowledge, ever inspired a homicidal maniac. It's a rather compelling shortlist, don't you think?"

I sighed, the weight of the whole ridiculous conversation pressing down on me. "Is it a crime to just be single? Is that not a valid life choice anymore?"

Cary looked almost relieved, the daft idiot. “So you’ll be alone?”

I didn’t answer. I just looked at him, imprinting this final, hopeless image of him in my mind, and said, for the very last time, “Goodbye, Cary.”

The lift doors slid shut, neatly slicing his expectant face from my view. The silence they left behind was golden.

Portia immediately clapped her hands together. “Right! Celebration time!”

This involved her producing a bottle of ridiculously expensive champagne at three in the afternoon. Frankly, it was exactly what the doctor should have prescribed for post-divorce, post-attempted-murder recovery.

She popped the cork with a triumphant thwack and poured two dangerously generous glasses.

“Right,” she declared, snatching the remote. “Let’s commence Operation: Erase Cary Grant.”

I kicked off my shoes and curled up on the sofa, the cool leather a comfort. “Is this where we objectify fictional men to restore our faith in the male form?”

“It’s the most critical part of the entire healing process,” she stated, navigating straight to Bridgerton. “We need something visually sumptuous and intellectually undemanding. With a severe and deliberate shortage of dry clothing.”

The Duke of Hastings appeared on screen in all his brooding glory.

“Ah,” I said, taking a long sip. “Him.”

“Look at those thighs,” Portia purred appreciatively. “That is a man who knows his way around a drawing room and a bedroom. See? That’s the energy you need to attract. Confident, smouldering, and proficient in period-appropriate undressing.”

I watched as the screen version of masculine perfection stood in the rain, his white shirt becoming delightfully transparent. “Okay,” I admitted, feeling a genuine, non-metaphorical flush of heat. “That’s... effectively persuasive.”

“Persuasive? Darling, that’s a public service announcement for the benefits of testosterone. Drink up. By the end of this season, I want you forgetting Cary’s name and mentally practising how to untie a cravat with your teeth.”

“Lochlan wears silk ties,” I mused, the champagne definitely loosening my tongue. “Dark grey. They’re always perfectly knotted. Very... neat.”

Portia froze. She slowly, deliberately, put her glass down and paused the show. “Does he now. Forget the Duke. Details. Now.”

We drank and gossiped and watched terrible, wonderful television until the early hours. Portia eventually crashed in the guest room, and I pointedly did not ask what she’d gotten up to in there the previous Friday.

The next morning, my phone yanked me awake with the subtlety of a fire alarm. It was the police.

Vanessa had apparently had a “medical episode” in her cell—a suspected seizure—and her lawyers were successfully pushing for her release on medical bail.

A medical episode. How terribly, predictably convenient for her.

I spent the whole morning in a foul mood, stewing over the fact that Vanessa Abrams was once again slithering out of real consequences.

The kidnapper—the one who’d knocked me out and bundled me into a car—was sticking to his story. He was just a “friend,” secretly in love with Vanessa, and had acted entirely alone.

The police found no direct messages from her ordering the hit, no money transfers, just pages and pages of Vanessa’s melodramatic whining. “If only Hyacinth would disappear,” that sort of thing.

And as for why she showed up at the house? Oh, she was just there to “talk her friend down.”

What a fucking ridiculous pile of horseshit.

I was the victim. I knew she was the mastermind. But in that house, it had been just her and me. No recording. No concrete evidence. It was my word against that of a professionally pathetic heiress.

Frustration itched under my skin. I grabbed my laptop, the need to do something overwhelming.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 193:

My last self-defence class had proven utterly useless against a professional-grade chop to the neck.

I clearly needed to find a new one—preferably taught by someone who understood that real-life attackers don't announce themselves before they try to kidnap you.

The bitter truth was, the simple, efficient wrist lock Lochlan had casually taught me had been infinitely more practical than anything I'd paid good money to learn.

Speaking of Lochlan.

A complicated wave of guilt and gratitude washed over me.

With a sigh, I opened my laptop and found a florist, ordering a large, tasteful arrangement for his hospital room. A generic "Get Well Soon" card felt woefully inadequate—like using a teacup to bail out a sinking ship—but it was a start.

Kai had already emailed, granting me the week off. Another generous, top-down gesture from the boss.

Well, this time, I was going to take full advantage of the unexpected holiday.

I was even toying with the idea of driving back to Mousehole to reclaim some sanity when a bleary-eyed Portia started pounding on my bedroom door.

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I opened it to find her in a nightdress that left little to the imagination, though her face was a pure thundercloud. “They let her out,” she snarled, bypassing any notion of a greeting. “Medical bail. That fucking family.”

“I’m not surprised,” I said, feeling the anger solidify into a cold, heavy stone in my stomach.

That was just how it worked for people like the Abrams. The justice system was a series of inconvenient hurdles their money and lawyers could easily clear. It reminded me of that night at Verve, with that drunk, coked-up idiot—Rick. Whatever his surname was.

He’d been so loud, so obnoxious, slurring about how he’d wanted to fuck me since the day we met.

And Cary had barged in, with Vanessa fluttering behind him, and had threatened to erase Rick's entire family from the map if he didn't apologise.

I could still picture the blood draining from Rick's face, his terrified, bloody apology.

Come to think of it, I'd never seen or heard of him in London again.

That was real power, I thought wryly. The real irony was that back then, I'd been the one sheltered by it.

Portia yanked me out of my thoughts. "Right, we're going out. Bar-hopping. I'm horny, I'm furious at the entire legal system, and I need the therapeutic comfort of a well-hung stud to convince me there's still some good in this world."

I was tempted, I'll admit. The idea of losing myself in loud music and completely anonymous male attention was deeply appealing.

But I pointed a finger at the spectacular, technicolour bruise blooming across my cheekbone. "I think I'd probably scare them off, Portia. I look less like a potential hook-up and more like a cautionary tale."

She sighed, her shoulders slumping in defeat. "Fine. You're probably right."

She trudged back to the guest room, presumably to wash her rage away with expensive face cream.

Alone again, I picked up my phone. Enough of this passive waiting. I needed a distraction, and there was one person I definitely needed to see.

I texted Roy. [When would be a good time to visit the boss?]

His reply was immediate. [Any time's a good time for you.]

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 194:

I stared at the message, my mind inevitably circling back to Lochlan. I'd lost count of the number of times he'd saved me.

Snow White only had to marry her prince once after he saved her from a poisoned apple. Based on our recent history, I'd probably have to marry Lochlan a good ten times over to even begin to settle the debt.

Strangely, even with the ink barely dry on my divorce papers, the idea of marrying a man like Lochlan didn't feel repulsive.

Not at all.

He was rich, undeniably good-looking in that suave, urban way, and it was blatantly obvious his gym sessions had honed a body that would be very nice indeed to touch and explore. The man was probably an absolute stud in the bedroom.

And I was pretty sure the attraction wasn't one-sided. I'd noticed the lingering gazes, the very subtle but unmistakable efforts to spend more time with me, both inside and outside the office.

I wasn't being an egotist; he was definitely into me.

But it wasn't just the mutual physical pull, which was a bloody potent one.

He was unfailingly polite, polished, well-mannered, and considerate. Being with him felt easy, like stepping into a warm room on a cold day. His professional mentorship had been invaluable. He was a protector, a provider, a steady hand, a confident anchor. Just like—

Just like Cary.

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The thought hit me like a bucket of ice water, sobering me up instantly.

Is that it? Is this inexplicable, unignorable pull towards Lochlan just because he's a newer, shinier version of Cary?

Oh, dear God. The realisation was horrifying.

I marched straight to the guest bedroom, finding Portia mid-tooth-brushing, foam dripping from her chin.

"Portia?"

“Yeah?” she garbled around the toothbrush.

“Let’s go bar-hopping tonight. Let’s find a man each to take to bed.”

Portia spat a mouthful of white foam into the sink. “You’re serious?”

I nodded. I was deadly serious.

I would not—could not—fall for another man like Cary.

Sure, Lochlan was all quiet politeness where Cary was brash noise, but strip that away and they were the same breed: rich, impossibly in control, supremely confident men who’d grown up in a stratosphere entirely separate from my own.

Maybe my attraction to Lochlan was purely, desperately physical.

Or maybe—and this was worse—I was just seeing him as Cary’s more polished, more palatable body double.

Either way, I was not starting anything with Lochlan Hastings. Not now. Not after I'd just clawed my way out of one turbulent relationship with a dominant billionaire.

I just needed a release, a distraction.

Another man—any other man—would do perfectly well to siphon off this pent-up energy before it made me do something truly stupid, like developing feelings for my boss.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 195:

The private hospital room was silent save for the soft tap of my fingers on the laptop keyboard.

The work was a necessary distraction—a familiar landscape of numbers and strategy that kept my mind from circling the one subject it seemed determined to fixate upon.

I paused to take a sip of water, the simple action sending a dull throb through the stitches in my back.

I glanced at Roy, who was arranging a stack of financial periodicals on the bedside table. “How is she?” I asked, the question casual, as if it had just occurred to me.

He knew exactly who I meant. “Hyacinth? She was discharged this morning. Doing well, from what I understand.”

I frowned, lowering the glass. “This morning?”

“She did come by earlier,” Roy added, perhaps sensing my displeasure. “I believe she intended to visit, but the room was rather occupied at the time. She thought better of intruding.”

“How considerate of her,” I remarked, my tone even.

The fact that she had been so close, only to turn away, was an irrational irritation.

I had wanted to see her, to ascertain for myself that she was truly recovered. My internal reaction was disproportionate—a flicker of heat that had no place in a professional assessment. The memory of her weight against me, the scent of petrol and her fear, was disconcertingly vivid.

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My parents had been the occupants in question.

My mother had studied me with her cool, academic gaze, the concern in her eyes unable to be fully concealed by her analytical demeanour.

My father had been characteristically voluble, swearing with colourful vigour that he would see the Abrams family dismantled for this.

I found my thoughts drifting, unbidden, to what they would make of Hyacinth.

My mother would undoubtedly perform a swift, silent assessment of her background, her demeanour, her suitability from a sociological perspective.

My father, I suspected, would be charmed. He appreciated spirit and good manners in equal measure, and Hyacinth possessed both in a compelling combination that would undoubtedly meet with his enthusiastic approval.

I dismissed the thought immediately. It was a pointless line of inquiry. Why would their opinion of her matter?

The fact that my mind had even ventured into such territory was telling, and I did not care for what it told me.

Roy spoke up. “She asked when would be a good time to visit.”

A sense of anticipation, sharp and immediate, cut through the lingering frustration. “Now is acceptable,” I replied.

The response came moments later. “I told her. She didn’t reply.”

The anticipation curdled into a distinct and unwelcome disappointment. It was an entirely unreasonable response. She owed me nothing. Yet the feeling was there—a hollow sensation beneath my ribs.

Later, Roy brought in the floral arrangement. The flowers were tasteful, expensive, and utterly impersonal. The card attached was the standard, pre-printed sentiment one receives from a corporate well-wisher: “Get Well Soon.” Nothing more.

The disappointment deepened, taking on a harder edge.

I had not expected effusive gratitude, of course.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 196:

But a handwritten note—some small, personal acknowledgement of the singularity of the circumstances—would have suggested a shift in the nature of our association. This felt like a gesture from a subordinate to a superior, a transaction. It reinforced the very boundary I had begun to find frustrating.

Kai arrived shortly after, his expression sober. “An update, sir. Vanessa Abrams has been released on medical bail.”

I felt my jaw tighten. “Find me two independent medical experts. I want a counter-opinion prepared that challenges the necessity of her release. I want her remanded back into custody.”

The Abrams family’s manipulation of the system was predictable, but I would not allow it to stand. Not this time.

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“Understood,” Kai said, making a note. He hesitated. “And the statement Velos Capital released during the crisis—regarding the severance of all ties with the Abrams Group if Hyacinth was not returned safely. Does that still stand?”

“It does,” I confirmed without hesitation. “Make the necessary preparations for a full divestment.”

As Kai left, I considered the Abrams situation with cold detachment.

The company was a ship already taking on water, adrift without the strategic guidance of its patriarch. The intelligence my network had gathered pointed to systemic weaknesses and poor investments. Their eventual collapse was a foregone conclusion.

My decision to withdraw Velos Capital was simply sound business, accelerating an inevitable process.

If the Abrams family chose to interpret it as a personal vendetta—as retribution for what was done to Hyacinth—then that was their prerogative.

The phone on the bedside table buzzed. I accepted the call, shifting slightly against the pillows and ignoring the corresponding twinge in my back.

“Lochlan,” Liz Forbes’s warm, familiar voice came through the line. “I heard about the incident. A stabbing? Really? I hope you’re recovering well.”

“Liz. Thank you for your concern. It’s a minor inconvenience, nothing more,” I replied, my tone politely dismissive. The wound was a persistent, throbbing reminder of fallibility, but one did not admit to such things.

“Well, I do hope you’ll be sufficiently recovered to attend my wedding,” she said, a smile evident in her voice.

“So, you have finally selected a candidate?” I asked, though I had a fair idea of the answer.

“Of course. And thank you, by the way. Your tip about Cary Grant turned out to be... even better than I had hoped. He’s surprisingly direct. It’s refreshing.”

“There’s no need for thanks. I merely pointed you towards a potentially compatible option.”

Liz laughed, a light, musical sound. “Oh, Lochlan, still the same. Always layering your purposes. One never knows which motive is the true engine.”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean.”

“Don’t mistake me—I’m not accusing you of hypocrisy. I’m admiring the efficiency. You pointed me at Cary Grant. I get a perfectly acceptable husband who satisfies my family’s old-fashioned requirements, thus granting me the freedom to continue running my life as I see fit. And you... well, I’m certain it serves a purpose of your own. I just couldn’t discern what it was until I met her. Hyacinth is her name, isn’t it?”

“Miss Galloway happens to be my employee, yes.”

The word “employee” felt deliberately inadequate on my tongue, a shield.

Liz laughed again, seeing right through it. “”Employee.” Is that right? Well, whatever your dividend is from this particular arrangement, I’m genuinely grateful. I’ll send an invitation once we’ve set a date.”

“I look forward to it,” I said, and ended the call.

So, that obstacle was finally out of the way.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 197:

I woke up feeling like a bag of smashed crabs, my head throbbing in time with what I suspected was my own heartbeat. It had been the wildest night I'd had, both pre- and post-divorce. Actually, scratch that. It was the wildest night of my life. Full stop.

Portia had dragged me to a male strip club—the kind of place where the air is thick with pheromones and cheap champagne, and the definition of personal space is legally dubious.

Portia, God bless her unfiltered soul, had been a force of nature, egging me on to stuff crisp twenty-pound notes into a dancer's minuscule G-string with a cheerleader's enthusiasm.

She'd even convinced me to join a conga line that snaked through the club, led by a man whose oiled pectorals seemed to have their own gravitational pull.

It was raucous, unapologetically randy, and exactly the kind of brain-scrambling distraction I'd needed.

I almost went home with one of them.

His name was Leo, and he was a walking paradox—a sculpture of perfectly defined muscle with the soulful eyes of an art student, which, it turned out, he was.

During a lap dance that redefined my understanding of pelvic mobility, he'd confessed he was dancing to pay his tuition and support his younger sister, their parents having done a spectacular vanishing act.

He was sweet, hot as hell, and he'd given me his number.

Portia had laughed at me later, calling me all talk and no action. "You had the lust in your heart but not the guts in your knickers!" she'd crowed.

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I'd said, "I'm tempted, but..."

I didn't finish the sentence. The truth was, talking to Leo had thrown me back to my own uni days, three years ago, when my mum's severe heart condition had left us staring at medical bills that seemed to multiply in the dark.

I'd entertained the same desperate idea. A quick, clandestine way to get cash, because uni girls fetched a premium at certain venues.

I'd almost done it if Cary hadn't shown up in his stupidly expensive suit and derailed my life with his own particular brand of destructive salvation.

Now, standing on the other side, I knew what Leo needed most wasn't a complicated one-night stand with a recently divorced, emotionally fragile mess; it was cold, hard cash that could actually solve his problems.

“Is that why you tipped him so much?” Portia had asked. “You’re too soft. Maybe what he needs is the cash plus the comforting sex of a woman who sees him as an equal, not a lowly plaything.”

“Fine,” I’d relented. “Maybe I’ll take him to bed next time.”

I finally dragged myself out of bed mid-morning, popped some pills for the hangover from hell, and got washed and dressed. Before leaving, I checked on Portia, who was still comatose in the guest bedroom, and slipped out quietly.

I texted Roy. [Is it okay if I come to visit the boss?]

His reply was almost instant. [Sure. Here’s the address. Need me to come fetch you?]

[No thanks, I can find my way,] I typed back, frowning. [But it’s not the hospital? Has he been discharged already?]

Roy texted back to say the boss had insisted on checking out against the doctor’s advice.

Apparently, the constant stream of visitors at the hospital had driven him to distraction. The address was one of his private residences.

[Then maybe I'll come another time if he doesn't want to be disturbed,] I offered, feeling a bit like I was intruding.

[No need,] Roy replied. [You're welcome any time.]

So, I took a taxi to the address, a discreet, towering glass monolith in the heart of the City. I gave my name to the security guard, who nodded and let me pass without a second glance.

I went up to the penthouse, thinking absently that the man clearly had a type when it came to real estate.

Roy was waiting for me when the lift doors opened, his smile warm and genuine. "How're you holding up, Hyacinth?"

"I'm fine," I said, which was mostly true. The bruises Vanessa had left were now a faint, yellowish shadow, and I'd caked on enough foundation and concealer to build a small fort. I held up the bags in my hands.

Roy's eyes crinkled. "You didn't have to bring anything."

“It’s just some fresh fruit and a hamper of organic superfoods,” I said. “Kale chips, turmeric root, that sort of thing. You know, fuel for the famously disciplined constitution.”

Roy laughed, a rich, hearty sound. “I do indeed. I’ll put these in the kitchen.”

I handed over the bags. “Where’s the boss?”

Roy gestured down a left-hand corridor. “In the main bedroom. Just down there—the door straight ahead. You go on in. I’ll see to this.”

“Right,” I said, and headed down the hallway.

It wasn’t until I’d knocked and entered, taking in the sight of Lochlan propped up against a mountain of pillows, wearing a dark blue robe, the whole room saturated with the clean, spicy scent of him, that the reality of the situation hit me.

Oh. I was alone. In his bedroom.

This was... perhaps not my most brilliant idea.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 198:

I started to back out, my hand going to the door to pull it wider, to let some metaphorical fresh air into the suddenly charged space.

“Close the door,” a cool voice came from the bed. “Unless you’re aiming for me to catch my death of cold.”

Right. Of course. I blinked, muttered a quick “sorry,” and pulled the door shut with a soft click. So much for a hasty retreat.

I walked over to the vast bed, stopping a good two metres away—a respectful, hopefully non-suggestive distance. “Boss,” I began, my voice overly bright. “How’re you feeling?”

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I asked the question and then... nothing.

My boss, my literal saviour, didn't even acknowledge I'd spoken. I just stood there, awkwardly, the silence stretching out like a physical presence.

Why do I get the feeling that the boss is... mad? At me?

But what for? Had I used the wrong brand of kale chips? Or had he belatedly realised he'd taken a knife for his Chief of Staff and was now regretting the impulsive move?

I didn't have a clue, and short of telepathy, all I could do was stand there and wait for him to deign to speak.

He was reading something on a tablet, his eyelashes lowered, casting faint shadows on cheeks that looked paler than usual, probably from blood loss.

From the moment I'd knocked to now, standing like a forgotten lemon at the foot of his enormous bed, he hadn't so much as glanced in my direction. His entire posture was a masterpiece of closed-off composure.

The dark blue robe was tied with a proper, prim knot, not a hint of skin showing, and for all I knew he was wearing a full three-piece suit underneath the bloody thing.

It was all entirely, infuriatingly chaste.

And yet my brain, freshly corrupted by a night of oiled pectorals and gyrating hips, decided now was the perfect time to embark on a detailed fantasy.

The theme last night had been “Wall Street Wolves,” and wouldn’t you know it, my boss had actually been one. I wondered, with a sudden, vivid clarity, what he’d look like on that stage.

How would Lochlan Hastings remove his suit?

Not with frantic, theatrical rips, but with that same deliberate, unnerving calm—his eyes locked on mine while his fingers slowly worked the buttons of his shirt.

And when he got to the trousers... would he reveal a tiny, sequined G-string underneath?

No, absolutely not. Boss wasn’t the G-string type.

He'd be wearing something disgustingly proper and expensive, like bespoke navy boxer briefs, tailored to hug the powerful lines of his thighs and the very substantial bulge that I was now, God help me, actively visualising.

I blinked violently, as if I could physically shake the image out of my head.

I blamed the hangover.

It had to be the toxic cocktail of cheap champagne and moral decay still sloshing around my system, making me imagine my impeccably polite, currently stabbed boss as a headline stripper.

It was the only logical explanation.

After about a minute—which felt like a hundred hours in awkward-time—he finally looked up. His gaze was cool and direct.

“Don't you think your concern is a little belated?”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 199:

Ah. So that was it. The lateness of my visit.

I felt a spike of irritation but shoved it down. What was his problem? Had someone replaced his usual calm detachment with a dose of pure crankiness?

I launched into my explanation. “I actually wanted to come and see you much earlier, but you had so many visitors at the hospital. I thought if I just barged in, it might start some awkward rumours, so I decided it was better to wait until you were discharged.”

Especially with that distinguished couple who were clearly his parents. If I’d shown up—the woman who got their son stabbed—the questions would have been relentless and deeply uncomfortable.

“Rumours?” Lochlan lifted his eyes, the look in them unreadable. “What gives you the confidence to assume your mere presence would lead people to form... impure notions about our association?”

My face went completely blank.

His words were convoluted, but the meaning was crystal clear. He was putting me firmly in my place, letting me know I was wildly overestimating my significance if I thought anyone would ever connect us romantically. I was so far beneath his notice I didn’t even register on that particular radar.

Typical. It was the same attitude he’d had that day on the golf course, when he’d taken one look at my dress and dismissed me as a gold-digger before even glancing at my CV.

Some things never change, even after taking a knife for someone.

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The room plunged into a deeply unnatural silence.

My cheeks burned, though now it felt less like shame and more like pure, undiluted irritation mixed with hangover nausea.

What the hell had gotten into him? Was there some secret billionaire rule that getting stabbed turned you into a colossal prick?

“I... do apologise,” I said, layering the words with just enough contrition to be polite while my inner monologue composed far less polite responses. “It was presumptuous of me. It won’t happen again. I hope you have a speedy recovery. I’ll just... remove my insignificant presence from your vicinity.”

I backed out of the room, my escape anything but graceful, nearly clipping my shoulder on the doorframe in my haste to get away from the inexplicable Arctic chill.

I emerged from the bedroom and made a beeline for the front door, my heels clicking a determined rhythm on the marble floor.

“That was quick,” Roy said, emerging from the kitchen, his expression one of genuine surprise.

“The boss is... deeply engrossed in his reading,” I managed, my smile tight. “And possibly suffering from one of those monthly man days every magazine warns us about. Best not to disturb.”

Roy’s eyes widened slightly, a chuckle threatening to escape.

“Right. See you soon, then.”

“Yeah,” I muttered, already halfway out the door. “Can’t wait.”

The moment I slid into the back of a taxi, I let out a frustrated breath. The smug, handsome, infuriatingly unpredictable face of Lochlan Hastings swam in my vision.

Right. That was quite enough of that.

With determined fingers, I dug into my purse and pulled out the slightly crumpled napkin with a number scrawled on it.

Leo. The art student. Uncomplicated, handsome, and most importantly, not my boss.

I typed out a message before I could overthink it. [Hey Leo, it’s Hyacinth from last night. Fancy that coffee sometime?]

I pressed send, leaned back against the seat, and stared out at the London streets. If Lochlan wanted to play the aloof, untouchable CEO, that was perfectly fine by me. I had better, and far less complicated, things to do.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 200:

I regarded the closed bedroom door with an air of detached coldness, maintaining the expression long after she had gone. After a prolonged moment, I tossed the tablet aside and leaned back against the headboard, massaging my temples with my fingers as I closed my eyes, a restless agitation churning within me.

A self-deprecating smile touched my lips. The way I'd acted earlier—how profoundly juvenile.

I retrieved the tablet again, subjecting myself once more to the images Portia had so publicly posted.

The social media feed was a garish tableau of a male strip club, all neon lights and gyrating, half-naked male bodies.

There she was, captured in pixelated glee. Hyacinth.

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Her grin was wide and unrestrained, her eyes glazed with alcohol, her cheeks flushed with a hectic colour. She was drinking with abandon, a picture of post-divorce liberation.

One photograph in particular arrested my attention.

A young man, clean-shaven and infuriatingly handsome in a fresh-faced, just-out-of-university way, was giving her a lap dance. Her hands—my God, her hands—were roaming over the strong, oiled planes of his naked back with a familiarity that sent a jolt of pure, white-hot possessiveness through me.

I swore under my breath and flung the tablet aside once more, the device skittering across the duvet.

The rational part of my mind—the CEO—was appalled at this lack of control.

The moment I learned her divorce from Cary was final, the very same day I received Liz Forbes's call confirming their engagement, I had considered the primary obstacle removed.

The path, I had thought, was clear. I could finally act.

The plan was to proceed with deliberation. Perhaps begin with a dinner invitation. Gauge her receptiveness before suggesting more intimate arrangements, should she not exhibit any aversion to the idea.

Were it not for Vanessa's deranged intervention, I might already have done so.

My only point of deliberation had been whether Hyacinth would appreciate frank directness or a more subtle courtship.

I had even, as a matter of prudent risk assessment, contemplated the contingency of rejection and its potential to create professional awkwardness.

I was not prepared to lose a Chief Administrative Officer of her calibre.

Mingling business with personal pleasure was a practice I typically detested, yet I was prepared to break my own rule. For her, it seemed a necessary exception.

I simply required a little more time to make the necessary arrangements, and to allow her space to process the finality of her divorce.

I had not anticipated her chosen method of processing would involve a male stripper rubbing his pectoral muscles against her chest.

A knock came at the door.

“Boss, lunch is ready,” Roy called.

When I emerged to eat, Roy served the soup while musing, as if to himself, “Miss Galloway looked like she might have been on the verge of tears when she left. Probably went home to have a proper cry.”

I said nothing.

I picked up my fork, then set it down again with a soft click. “Are you attempting to make a point?”

“I wouldn’t dare,” Roy said, placing the soup beside me. “I just find it difficult to understand. You took a knife for the woman. Why would you then say something to make her cry and chase her off?”

I was momentarily lost for a response. I picked up the fork once more, moved the food to my lips, then lowered it again. After several abortive attempts, I could not prevent the question from escaping.

“Was she truly upset?”

“Maybe you should go and see for yourself?” Roy suggested innocently.

I maintained an impassive silence.

Roy then directed my attention to the refrigerator, which was now fully stocked. “She brought all of this. Shows she’s very considerate, doesn’t it?”

I offered no reply. Instead, I said, “I need you to arrange for a full-time nurse.”

“I can look after you,” Roy offered.

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