

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 211:

I shrugged, choosing my words with care. “No, not about the boss per se. He is brilliant. And reliable. And let’s be honest, he’s ridiculously easy on the eyes. But personally, I wouldn’t date a billionaire. Not after...” I trailed off, but both Kai and Roy knew what I meant.

The spectacular drama of my divorce was common knowledge.

“Boss is different,” Kai argued. “He’s not like, you know, the others.”

“I know. Boss is in a league of his own. But it still doesn’t change the fact that he belongs to a certain class, a world I have no business getting mixed up in. Remember Vanessa Abrams?”

Both Kai and Roy pulled a face. My abduction by that woman was also common knowledge.

“She only went after me because of Cary, even after he’d turned her down. And I’m sure every billionaire, or even multimillionaire, attracts their fair share of obsessed fans and stalkers and jealous ex-girlfriends. Vanessa was probably just a minuscule sample.”

I shook my head at the memory of her unhinged face. “No, thank you. I’ve learned my lesson. No matter how wonderful the man is, all that baggage just isn’t worth the trouble. I’d rather have a peaceful life with a normal man than a thrilling one that comes with a security detail and a constant fear of being set on fire.”

Kai asked, “So what kind of man is worth the trouble, then?”

“A nice, simple, un-powerful man,” I said without hesitation. “Someone whose wallet doesn’t inspire crazies, and whose idea of a dangerous ex is a woman who kept his favourite mug. Someone whose biggest drama is what to watch on telly, not a deranged heiress with a penchant for arson.”

Kai looked thoughtful, while Roy seemed to file the description away as a potential benchmark for his daughter.

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After lunch, I returned to my office, my spirits somewhat lifted by the catharsis of conversation. I was about to knock on the boss’s door to continue our work when a secretary stopped me.

“He’s out,” she said.

“Oh,” I replied, turning. “With whom?”

“Not sure. He left just before lunch.”

“Did he say when he’s coming back?”

The secretary shook her head. “No idea, but probably not for another hour or two. He asked me to book him a table for two at a restaurant nearby. Probably taking a client out.”

I nodded. Needing a strong coffee to shake off the oncoming food coma, I headed for the break room. My hand was on the door when I heard my name.

“So Hyacinth Galloway finally graces us with her presence,” a male voice was saying. “I have to say, the rumours didn’t do her justice. That suit jacket doesn’t quite hide the fact she’s built like a classic pin-up. A proper hourglass.”

“Tell me about it,” another man chimed in with a low chuckle. “It’s a tragedy, all these layers. If it was summer, we could get a proper look at the assets. Make a more accurate assessment, if you know what I mean.”

I felt a cold wave of nausea wash over me.

At Mayfair Global, I'd been Cary's rumoured girlfriend, then rumoured wife; a title that acted as a shield, a deterrent. No man would have dared reduce me to a collection of body parts in a casual conversation. They'd have been out on the street before they'd finished the sentence.

This was the flip side of my newfound freedom: I was now fair game.

A woman's voice, sharp with disdain, cut through. "You're disgusting, the pair of you. Do you hear yourselves?"

"What?" the first man said, defensive. "We're just appreciating the new CAO. It's a compliment."

"It's objectification, you idiot. No wonder she left her last husband if he's anything like you."

"Well, it's no secret why she landed here, is it?" the second man retorted. "One look at her and it's obvious how she 'convinced' the boss to create a position for her. He stalled the Mount Anvil loan, then publicly eviscerated the Adams family. He's never moved that fast for anyone. She's got to be a witch. A very effective one."

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 212:

I leaned my head against the cool wall.

So that was the narrative. I hadn't been hired for my competence, my experience. I was a siren who had bewitched the CEO. Wonderful.

"Oh, please," a second woman interjected, her tone dripping with scorn. "You think this is about some great romance? Open your eyes. The boss is clearly, utterly, and completely gay."

The world seemed to tilt slightly on its axis.

“What are you on about?” the first man grumbled.

“It’s obvious! He’s never been photographed with a woman. He’s impeccably dressed, perfectly spoken. And need I remind you of Mr Lockwood?”

There was a collective, knowing sigh from the women.

“Mr Lockwood,” the first woman breathed, her voice full of reverence. “When he brought that bouquet of peonies to the office last year? The way they looked at each other? That was not a business meeting. That was a reunion.”

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“Exactly,” her friend agreed. “They have a shared history, a deep understanding. He and Hyacinth? That’s just kindness. Pity, even. Boss probably felt sorry for her after that nasty business with her ex and the kidnapping. He’s a gentleman. But his heart belongs to Lockwood. It’s the only thing that makes sense.”

The men were sputtering, utterly defeated by this flawless feminine logic. “You’re all mad.”

Standing in that corridor, the full weight of my own idiocy settled on my shoulders.

Of course he wasn't attracted to me. Not if he was gay.

I felt a right fool. Had I become so egotistical that I'd constructed an entire, silent romance from the raw material of basic professional courtesy?

It seemed I had.

The disappointment was a sharp, quick sting—a punctured daydream. I firmly decided not to examine that feeling any further.

Instead, I latched onto the overwhelming relief that followed.

This was liberating. I could fly with him to Frankfurt, share a car for a week, even check into the same hotel without a single flutter of anxiety about rumours or awkwardness.

If half the company was convinced the boss was gay, then I was arguably the safest female employee on the planet to work as his right hand.

It was the ultimate professional shield.

My gaze sharpened, zeroing in on the two men through the glass. I committed their faces to memory; I would have their names and departments by the end of the day.

Filing a formal HR complaint now would make me look fragile, a troublemaker who couldn't handle banter. No, that wasn't my style.

But I could be exceptionally exacting when it came to their future work. I would make sure their paths to promotion became needlessly, frustratingly complicated.

I pushed the door open and walked in.

The conversation died a sudden, suffocating death. Four faces stared at me, frozen in various stages of guilt.

"Afternoon," I said, my voice cool and even as I moved towards the coffee machine.

I made a point of looking directly at each of the two men, holding their gaze for a fraction of a second too long—a silent promise of future inconveniences. I gave them a smile that didn't reach my eyes. "Don't stop on my account. I do so love office gossip. It really makes the day fly by."

The two women muttered incoherent apologies and fled. The men, looking distinctly uncomfortable, shuffled out after them without a word.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 213:

I scanned the society pages of the morning edition with a methodical eye. There was no announcement, no discreet notice of an engagement between Dr Liz Forbes and Cary Grant. I frowned.

Liz had no reason to lie to me; if she said she'd secured Cary's agreement to marry her, it was as good as done. So where was the news?

I dialled her number. After the requisite pleasantries—opening with congratulations on her latest paper, “Cognitive Reframing in High-Stakes Negotiation,” published in the Journal of Behavioural Psychology—I steered the conversation with deliberate care. We

discussed her therapy practice, her parents, and the inevitable lecture circuit her publication would trigger.

“With all those new demands on your time,” I ventured, “I imagine the engagement party will have to wait a while.”

“Indeed,” Liz confirmed, her tone crisp and efficient. “It’s fortuitous we have not set a date. I must first find time to bring Cary home for parental inspection. Only after my mother, in particular, grants her seal of approval can we formally announce anything.”

“I see,” I said, the pieces clicking into place.

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“And what of you?” she asked, a teasing lilt entering her voice. “Seeing anyone?”

“No,” I replied, though the image of a certain someone—hair sleep-ruffled and face flushed from her morning dash—flashed unbidden in my mind.

“You know, for a man so dedicated to his work, you might consider being seen with a woman occasionally,” Liz jibed. “If only to stop a certain rumour from solidifying into accepted fact.”

“What rumour would that be?”

“The one about your exclusive interest in your own gender,” she said, laughter in her voice.

It called to mind my mother’s contingency file from Sunday dinner. It seemed the speculation had even reached her ears.

“Let people say what they wish,” I stated. “I do not bow to public opinion.”

“That is precisely why I’m so fond of you, Loch,” she laughed. “Honestly, you would’ve been my first choice for a boyfriend, if I were not gay.”

“I’m flattered.”

“It’s merely the truth. I shall inform you when the engagement party is fixed.”

We concluded our conversation, and I set the phone down.

I knew Liz; she invariably got what she wanted.

But to ensure Cary Grant was permanently removed from the field—to guarantee he could no longer cast a shadow over Hyacinth’s life—I required a more comprehensive strategy. Cary and Liz’s union was one of pure convenience, him leveraging her family’s influence to fend off the Abrams.

Therefore, the pressure from the Abrams family had to be maintained, even intensified, pushing him to the altar as his only recourse.

And Vanessa—she needed to be a persistent hound at his heels, consuming any energy he might have for thoughts of Hyacinth.

I summoned Kol Donovan. The investigator from Wilson Allied, who had failed to prevent Hyacinth’s kidnapping, was notably eager to remain in my good graces.

“Yes, boss?” he said, appearing in my office with prompt efficiency.

“A change of tack regarding Vanessa Abrams,” I began. “I want you to engage independent experts to reaffirm the diagnosis of clinical insanity—the one initially provided by the Abrams’ own hired professional—to facilitate her release on bail.”

Kol’s eyebrows lifted a fraction. “You’re sure? Your last instruction was to counter that professional opinion, to keep her locked up.”

“I’m sure.” Vanessa could only be useful if she was on the outside, a persistent thorn in Cary’s side. “Furthermore, I want you to plant the idea in her mind that Cary is on the verge of marrying another woman. Use rumours, online gossip, a friend of a friend. You know the methods.”

“Sure. I know what to do.”

“Monitor her and the Abrams family closely. If their intentions turn towards Hyacinth, you inform me immediately. But if their plans involve Cary or his company, you are to observe and report only. Do not intervene.”

“I’m on it, boss.”

After dismissing him, my phone rang. It was my father.

“Quick, hurry, come down to The Gilded Spoon across the street,” he said, his voice a boisterous whisper.

“You are at my building? Why not come up?”

“I just ordered you a Chocolate Avalanche Supreme. I doubt you want your staff to see you tackling that. It has six scoops and an entire chocolate brownie stuck in it.”

“I don’t want an ice cream. Furthermore, Mother has banned you from eating them, and it’s nearly winter.”

“I know. That’s half the fun, isn’t it? Eating ice cream in winter. And why do you think I came all the way here? Your mother would have quite a lot to say if I ate this at home.”

“I’m coming down.”

I found him easily in the café; he was the only adult customer with a monumental frozen confection before him.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 214:

I took a seat. He pushed the second, equally extravagant sundae towards me. “This one’s for you.”

“No, thank you.”

“All the more for me, then.” He took a large spoonful. “You should loosen up once in a while, you know. Have a cheat day. What’s the fun in living if you eat like a monk and live like one?”

I recalled Hyacinth suggesting the very same thing. I had been over this ground with my father countless times.

“To each his own,” I said simply. “What are you doing here?”

“Came to see how you are. Your mother sent me. She’s worried about your injury.”

“I’m fine.”

“I know, but a mother always worries.” He licked his spoon thoughtfully. “You asked me to have your mother cancel the date with the artist.”

I nodded.

“Do you want to reconsider?”

“No. Why?”

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“Because the woman you actually want to take out on a date... I’m afraid I have bad news, son.”

“What is it?”

“I went up to your company café just now, to scrounge a coffee and mingle with the young crowd. You know how important it is to stay in touch if you want to keep a young mindset.”

“I know, Dad.” My father prided himself on his youthful spirit, adopting the latest vernacular and encouraging his own staff to call him Holden.

“I confess, I also went to check out the lady who might have stolen your heart.”

“Dad.”

He chuckled, a rich, warm sound. “You can’t fool your old man. You’ve always been chivalrous, but I doubt you would take a knife for just any woman. Naturally, after I heard about that, I did some digging.”

“Dad,” I said reproachfully.

He held up his hands. “Hey, can’t blame a father for prying, especially when it’s my son who has not dated in—well, it feels like ages.” He continued, despite my glare. “Hyacinth. A pretty name. And a pretty face, too.”

I groaned inwardly. “Please tell me you did not approach her and introduce yourself.” I could only imagine the excruciating awkwardness of such an encounter.

“No, of course I didn’t. She was having lunch with Kai and Roy. I didn’t want to intrude.”

I felt a wave of relief, but it was short-lived.

“My table was behind the tray return point. They didn’t see me, so I eavesdropped.”

My shoulders sagged in defeat. “Of course you did.”

“Hey, it’s a public place. It’s not like I sneaked up on them. It just sort of happened.” He leaned forward, his expression turning uncharacteristically solemn. “Anyway, that’s why I have bad news for you, son.”

“What is it?”

He relayed, with dramatic emphasis, the conversation he had overheard. He repeated her declarations verbatim: “never date a billionaire,” “not worth the trouble,” “attracts their fair share of obsessed fans and stalkers.”

He concluded with her stated preference for a “peaceful life with a normal man... a nice, simple, un-powerful man.”

I fell silent.

The irony was a sharp, cold blade. Here I was, meticulously engineering Cary’s permanent exile from her life, and I had already been disqualified on principle.

I had been struck from the list before I had even declared my candidacy.

Dad patted my shoulder heavily. “I’m sorry, son. It seems our Hyacinth is once bitten, twice shy. After her marriage to that Cary character, she’s probably sworn off all billionaires. And you, my boy, are at the very top of that list.”

I didn’t know what to say. The entire architecture of my plan felt suddenly pointless.

Dad finished both bowls of ice cream and patted his stomach contentedly. “Hey, at least she considers you easy on the eyes. That’s some consolation, isn’t it?”

I eyed him for a long moment. “I’m telling Mother about the ice cream.”

“What? This is the thanks I get for spying for you?”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 215:

I knocked on the boss's door and entered, balancing the tray of coffee.

Lochlan had been quieter than usual since returning from his mysterious lunch, wearing that particular pensive look that usually preceded a corporate acquisition or the strategic dismantling of a rival.

I didn't pry. A wise woman knows when to appreciate the silence.

I set the tray down on the low coffee table. Lochlan rose from behind his desk, a study in controlled movement, and walked over.

"Thank you. You didn't have to do this. Claire is in charge of refreshments."

"I know," I said, my tone breezy. "But I've been chained to my desk for so long, a coffee run is good exercise."

I didn't mention that I'd volunteered for this mission specifically to burn off the calorific evidence of Roy's wife's brownies. I had demolished two of the delicious, chocolatey warheads, and my conscience—never mind my waistline—demanded restitution.

"Hyacinth?"

"Yeah?" I looked up.

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Lochlan tapped a finger against his chin.

I fixed him with my best professional smile, the one that said competent and unflappable, while my internal monologue scrambled: What? What is it? What are you telling me?

He gestured for me to come closer.

"You have—"

I obliged, leaning in a fraction.

He leaned in, too. His tall frame blocked the light from the window, and the air around me seemed to still and fill with the clean, sharp scent of his cologne.

Then a long-fingered, impeccably manicured hand reached out and brushed against my cheek.

The contact was startling—a brief, warm stroke of his thumb that sent a jolt through my system, raising goosebumps all the way down my neck. I flinched back, my eyes wide with something like alarm.

“What—”

“You had a smudge,” he said.

He showed me his finger, where a tiny speck of brownish powder sat on the pad of his thumb.

The brownie.

Oh, for heaven’s sake. I should’ve checked a mirror.

“Thank you,” I managed. “But next time, you could just tell me. A simple pointing gesture would suffice.”

Lochlan resumed his seat, the picture of composure. “I did. You failed to comprehend the non-verbal cue.”

I was rendered speechless.

And really, could anyone blame me for my previous, misguided assumptions? This kind of intimate, hands-on approach was wildly misleading.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 216:

Then again, perhaps my frame of reference was wrong. Maybe, in the world of impeccably dressed, gorgeous gay men, this was the equivalent of a friendly clap on the back.

If Portia had done it, I would've just laughed and wiped my face. The problem wasn't his action—it was my own historically terrible judgement when it came to interpreting male attention.

I was about to make my escape when he spoke again.

“Could you ask Kai to come in? I need assistance changing the dressing on my bandage.”

“I can do it,” I said, the offer out of my mouth before I could reconsider.

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I would never have volunteered so readily before today. To a heterosexual woman and a heterosexual man, such a task was fraught with unspoken boundaries, a dance of inappropriate proximity.

But now, armed with the liberating intelligence of his sexuality, it felt no more significant than helping a friend.

Besides, it offered a prime opportunity to safely admire a flawless specimen of male architecture, much like one would appreciate a Michelangelo sculpture in a museum. All aesthetic appreciation, zero complicating desire.

Lochlan stared at me, his coffee cup halted midway to his lips. “You would do it?”

I nodded, feeling efficient and noble. “I’ve done it before. And besides, I owe you.”

It was the understatement of the century.

He considered me for a long moment over the rim of his cup, his gaze so deep and assessing I felt like a balance sheet. Finally, he gave a curt nod. “Very well.”

He set down the cup and led the way to an adjoining room—a sleek lounge carved from the corner of his office, complete with a minimalist sofa, a well-stocked minibar, and a bed that looked more functional than luxurious.

I opened the medical kit with a professional snap, laying out the fresh bandages and antiseptic.

He lay face down on the bed.

“Take off your jacket,” I said, my voice all business.

This time there was no flutter of anticipation, no bashful heat creeping up my neck. This was a clinical procedure. Mostly.

Lochlan did so, and I carefully lifted the back of his shirt. As I worked to remove the old bandage, I allowed myself a purely academic assessment.

The man was put together like a luxury sports car. His back was a broad plane of muscle that tapered to a lean waist, the skin stretched taut over the powerful lines that framed his spine. The wound—an angry red mark lower down—did little to detract from the overall impression of formidable strength. His shoulders were solid, his arms well-defined even at rest.

If he were into women, and not a billionaire, he could have had his pick of the entire female population based on this blueprint alone. It was almost a shame, really, such a masterpiece going to waste. Almost.

I finished taping down the new dressing with efficient precision, lowered his shirt, and handed him his jacket.

As he was buttoning his coat, an impulse seized me. I stepped forward and wrapped my arms around him in a brief, firm hug.

Lochlan froze. I mean, he went completely rigid. I could feel every muscle in his back lock tight against me. His hands, still fumbling with the buttons, formed an awkward barrier between my chest and his.

“What was that for?” he asked, his voice a low rumble, as I finally pulled away.

“That was a thank you,” I said, beaming up at him. “For saving my life. I know I said it before, but words seem inadequate. A hug is also inadequate, frankly, so I will also promise to work my arse off for you, boss. You are the best boss anyone could ask for, and you can count on me to give my absolute best for this company.”

Lochlan simply stared at me—utterly, completely, and magnificently lost for words.

I gave him a confident smile, clenched my fist in a triumphant little pump, and walked out of his office with a spring in my step.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 217:

“You have a seven o’clock dinner with Toby Saltzman of Saltzman Homes,” I said, consulting my tablet. “After that, nothing scheduled for the rest of the evening.”

“You’re to come with me,” Lochlan said, not looking up from the report he was reviewing.

“Oh, but I thought Kai was supposed to go.” I checked the schedule again; Kai’s name was clearly pencilled in, not mine.

“He had to leave early. A family emergency.”

“Right.” I tried to keep my voice neutral.

“Unless you have something planned?” Lochlan asked, his gaze lifting to study me.

I kind of did. Leo had texted, asking me out to dinner. I'd said yes. It was just a friendly thing, a thank-you for the coffee, but still.

Lochlan must be a mind reader. "A date?"

"Not really, but... well, yes. Sort of. But it's fine. I'll cancel."

"You don't need to do that."

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"But I will," I said, my tone firm.

I wasn't about to abandon my boss right after I'd pledged my undying loyalty and promised to work my arse off for him just this afternoon.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. Sure."

After I left his office, I shot a quick text to Leo, apologising and promising to make it up to him.

He replied with an understanding smiley face and said it was fine, which just made me feel slightly worse. He was so... reasonable.

I popped into the restroom to double-check for any lingering brownie smudges and touched up my makeup.

As Roy drove us to the restaurant, I read up on Saltzman Homes. A privately owned property developer, large in scope, specialising in residential construction across the capital. They were considered solidly mid-tier within the development mega-market.

Velos Capital and Saltzman Homes were co-developing a resort project, a deal signed before Lochlan's tenure. Typically, this kind of meeting could be handled by a VP instead of the big boss himself.

"Mr Saltzman is an old friend of my father's," Lochlan explained. "Practically an uncle."

I nodded. That explained how he'd secured a meeting on such short notice. The old-boy network was alive, well, and presumably charging everything to expenses.

We walked into the private dining room, and my carefully applied composure very nearly cracked.

The room didn't just contain Toby Saltzman and his secretary. It also contained... Cary and Armond Abrams.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Lochlan's jaw tighten by a fraction of an inch.

Ah. So Uncle Toby was here to play mediator. This should be a delightful evening.

I stared at Cary, my body tensing for the inevitable explosion.

But all he did was stare back, his expression an unreadable mask of what I hoped was profound regret, but was probably just indigestion.

Armond, on the other hand, looked like he'd swallowed a wasp. Good.

Toby Saltzman was the picture of a certain type of rich London businessman: middle-aged, expensively dressed in a slightly too-tight suit, with a superficial charm that didn't quite reach his calculating eyes.

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 218:

Something about him set my internal alarms jangling.

“Ah, here’s Lochlan!” Toby’s face was ruddy-cheeked; it was hard to tell if it was his natural complexion or the result of several pre-meeting gins.

He stood and, instead of a handshake, leaned in for a hug and a heavy pat on Lochlan’s back.

I didn’t need to look at my boss to feel the wave of rigid discomfort that rolled off him; he despised uninvited physical contact from anyone, regardless of gender.

“Uncle Toby,” Lochlan said, his voice a polite ice chip. He gave a curt, dismissive nod in the direction of Cary and Armond.

Armond stood, smoothing down his tie. “Mr Hastings, my apologies for this... unorthodox introduction. I’ve found my own requests for a meeting have been... unsuccessful. I asked Mr Saltzman to facilitate this, hoping we might find some way to work together.”

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He raised his glass in a weak semblance of a toast.

Lochlan’s response was arctic. “There’s no need. When I said I was cutting all ties with the Abrams Group, I meant it. I don’t work with kidnappers.”

“That’s an unfortunate misunderstanding—” Armond began, his smile strained.

“The police don’t appear to think so,” Lochlan cut him off, his tone lethally calm. “Your sister is being prosecuted by the Crown for kidnapping and attempted murder. There’s no misunderstanding there—only a failed crime.”

Armond visibly tamped down his temper. “Yes, Vanessa has done some stupid things. But she isn’t right in the head. She wasn’t in control of her own actions. Luckily, no real harm was done to Miss Galloway.”

He glanced at me, expecting... what? Gratitude?

I met his gaze with a level, unblinking stare, while inwardly I was giving him a gesture so vulgar it would make a docker blush.

What, did he expect me to graciously forgive his sister because her attempt to douse me in petrol and set me alight had been, in his words, “unsuccessful”?

Dream on. And who was he to decide no real harm was done? I still woke up some nights smelling phantom smoke.

I decided to stir the pot. I said, in a deliberately loud and clear voice, “Sir, the doctor said you’re not to touch a drop of alcohol while you’re recovering. That stab wound is deep and requires a long healing process.”

I directed this concerned comment to Lochlan, but I made sure every syllable carried across the table to Armond.

Armond glared at me. I gave him a sweet, vacant smile in return.

Lochlan ignored him and turned his attention to Toby. “Uncle Toby, you should have informed me you were bringing friends.”

He said it with a polite smile, but his eyes were frozen tundra.

Toby, either too drunk or too arrogant to notice, waved a dismissive hand. “I would have, but I was afraid you wouldn’t come!” He tilted his glass towards Cary. “Young Cary here has been worrying himself sick over this project. Look at him—he’s grown thin with the stress.”

Cary seized the opportunity, leaning forward. “Lochlan, about the Mount Anvil project loan... I’m asking you to reconsider. I’ve cut all ties with the Abrams Group. It’s now a project wholly owned and controlled by me.”

“Cary!” Armond hissed, turning a look of pure betrayal on his former partner.

Well, well. The rat was leaving the sinking ship, and the other rat was not pleased.

Cary ignored him completely, his focus entirely on Lochlan. “I know previous... events... have caused you concern. But I can guarantee you, nothing will impede this project’s progress. I won’t allow it. The profit potential, once completed, is significant for all parties. It’s simply good business.”

His arrogance was a fragile shell, and I could see the desperate pride beneath it—the sheer humiliation of having to ask for a favour from the man who now employed his ex-wife.

Lochlan swirled the untouched wine in his glass, his expression unreadable. The silence around the table stretched, thick and tense enough to slice.

After a long, punishing moment, he turned towards me.

“What do you think, Hyacinth? Should I give him another chance?”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 219:

All eyes snapped to me.

Cary's were wide with a mixture of shock and outrage that his fate was being handed to his ex-wife. Armond's were pure venom. Toby just looked baffled, his ruddy face creasing with confusion as to why the boss was consulting his assistant.

I let the silence hang for a beat, savouring the sheer absurdity of the moment.

Well, well. The king has handed the sword to the jester and asked who to behead first. No pressure.

I met Lochlan's gaze, my expression professionally neutral. "Sir, while the personal conduct of its former partners is... regrettable, the Mount Anvil project itself has always been sound. The initial feasibility studies were robust. The location is prime, and the demographic projections support a high-yield return."

Cary leaned forward, a fraction of his old arrogance returning. "Exactly. It's a goldmine."

"It could be," I corrected, my tone cool and analytical. "For Velos Capital's subsidiary bank, the current risk profile is now unacceptable, given the severe reputational damage incurred. However..." I turned back to Lochlan, "...if Mayfair Global is now the sole entity, without the toxic association of the Abrams Group, and if the loan terms were restructured to properly mitigate that revised risk, it could become a strategically profitable venture for us."

“Restructured how?” Lochlan asked, playing his part in our unspoken duet perfectly.

I laid out my terms with clinical precision. “A two-hundred-and-fifty basis point increase on the interest rate. Personal guarantees from Mr Grant against his entire portfolio of non-corporate assets. Velos Capital takes an additional fifteen per cent equity stake in the project, a seat on the Mayfair Global board for direct oversight, and we insert a ‘Bad Actor’ clause that gives us the right to seize the asset in its entirety should any further scandal involving Mr Grant or his company arise.”

It wasn’t just ruthless; it was a corporate evisceration, designed to leave Cary on a desperately short leash while Velos Capital held the whip.

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Cary’s face went slack with disbelief, then flushed a dark, mottled red. “Fifteen per cent? A board seat? That’s not a loan, it’s a hostile takeover! You know the profit forecast has already jumped twenty per cent since the new city hall policy was announced. Velos is already making a killing!”

For the first time, he wasn’t talking down to me. There was no condescension, no expectation of immediate obedience. He was arguing with me, point for point, as an equal. An opponent, even.

The realisation was so jarring it momentarily stole my breath. This had never happened, not once in all the years I’d known him.

At Mayfair Global, his tone had been one of command, his directives issued with the absolute certainty that they would be carried out.

That dynamic had seeped into our home, into our very bedroom. He was always the domineering force, and I—the trophy wife he’d effectively purchased with a prenup and a salary—was expected to fall in line.

Now, here he was, his fortune and pride on the line, forced to actually debate with me.

And the most liberating thought shot through me, clear and brilliant as a lightning strike: This is what was missing. This is why it failed.

It wasn’t just about his infidelity or his arrogance. It was the fundamental, corrosive imbalance of power.

To have a good marriage, you shouldn’t marry up or marry down. You should marry an equal.

“Policies change with the wind, Mr Grant,” I shot back, forcing my mind back to the present. “And from where I’m sitting, Mayfair Global no longer has the political capital or connections to hedge against that risk. That’s precisely why you need Velos. And it’s only fair we get paid for shouldering the burden you created.”

He stared at me, his chest heaving slightly. The storm in his eyes had cleared into something colder, more calculating. He finally turned to Lochlan. “And you agree with this... this piracy?”

Lochlan’s expression didn’t flicker. “Hyacinth’s view is my own. Those are the terms. Take them, or leave them.”

Cary’s jaw worked. He looked from Lochlan’s impassive face to my resolute one, understanding there was no room for manoeuvre. “I’ll have to think about it.”

“You have until close of business Friday,” Lochlan said, his tone leaving no room for appeal. “The capital cannot remain in limbo indefinitely.”

Cary said nothing, simply reached for his wine glass and drained it, his posture collapsing into a morose slump.

I watched him, my triumph feeling hollow and sharp.

Armond, meanwhile, was glaring at Cary as if he’d personally driven a knife into his back.

I bet when they finagled this dinner, Armond had no idea Cary was planning to throw him overboard.

Good for you, Cary. It only took a near-death experience and financial ruin for you to see sense.

As coffee was served, Armond—seeing his last ally crumble—grew increasingly desperate. “Hastings,” he began, his voice tight. “My sister... she’s unwell. I will have her committed to a secure, private institution. She will never come near Miss Galloway again. You have my word. Is that not enough?”

Lochlan placed his napkin on the table, the gesture final. “No, Mr Abrams, it is not. Your sister belongs in a prison, not a pampered sanatorium. Your proposal proves you still fail to grasp the severity of her actions. You are still coddling a criminal.”

“She’s my sister!” Armond burst out, his composure cracking. “I can’t just throw her to the wolves!”

“Then we are done here,” Lochlan said, starting to rise.

In that moment, Armond’s polished mask slipped entirely. His eyes narrowed, and his voice dropped into a low, venomous register. “There’s a saying, Hastings. ‘A wise man knows when to show mercy.’ You really don’t want to see this escalate. You wouldn’t want your workers, your projects... to start suffering unfortunate accidents, would you?”

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Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 220:

The sheer audacity of the threat, delivered right to Lochlan's face, sent a bolt of pure fury through me.

How dare he? And damn Cary for ever getting into bed with a man like this. I felt a stab of regret for not having my phone's recording app running; this would have been beautiful evidence for a restraining order, if not an outright arrest.

Lochlan, however, didn't even flinch. He merely looked bored.

It was Toby who had the strongest reaction.

He'd been drinking impassively and ogling me with a poorly concealed, lascivious gaze all evening, but now he coughed, spluttering a fine spray of burgundy onto the pristine

tablecloth. “I swear, Lochlan, I had no idea he was like this,” he blustered, wiping his chin with a napkin.

He then turned on Armond, his face hardening with a sudden, surprising authority. “Boy, who in God’s name do you think you’re threatening? Do you have any idea who you’re talking to? You threaten one of his people, and you’ll be praying you still have a roof over your head when he’s done with you.”

He shook his head in disgust and muttered, just loud enough for everyone to hear, “Stupid, stupid boy.”

I filed that away for later dissection. What did Toby know about Lochlan’s background that I didn’t? Something that made a man with rumoured underworld ties seem like a petulant child.

Armond opened his mouth to retort, his face a mask of humiliated rage, but Lochlan raised a single hand—a gesture of utter dismissal that was more powerful than a shout.

“Issuing a threat only makes you look weak when you lack the power to carry it out. It’s the resort of the immature. Perhaps you should go home and consult your father on how to proceed like an adult.”

Then he stood. “Uncle Toby, a memorable evening. We will have to discuss the resort project another time. When there are no irrelevant third parties present.”

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The jab was thinly veiled, but Toby, chastened, just nodded, not looking offended in the slightest.

On the way out, I excused myself to the restroom, needing a moment away from the toxic masculinity and the lingering scent of desperation.

When I emerged, smoothing down my jacket, I almost walked straight into Cary.

He was leaning against the wall, his eyes glazed and unfocused. He straightened up, deliberately blocking my path.

“Move,” I said, my voice flat.

“Hyacinth,” he slurred, “you have... changed.”

I said nothing. What was there to say?

Of course I had changed. The old Hyacinth had died a thousand tiny deaths when she was set up, betrayed, kidnapped, and almost set on fire by his deranged lover. That woman was gone. This new model came with a sharper edge and far better insurance.

His eyes were wistful, tracing the lines of my face. “It’s a good change. You look... good.”

“Thanks,” I said, the word clipped. “Will you excuse me?”

He didn’t appear to hear, lost in a world of his own making. “You drove a hard bargain in there. Did well. You were always good at the negotiating table. A sharp tongue.” He smiled, a self-mocking twist of his lips. “I just never expected to be on the receiving end of it.”

I thought back to all the times I had watched him, standing silently behind him as he negotiated with others, absorbing his take-no-prisoners tactics like a sponge.

So, my three years with him had not been a total waste. I had learned from the best, and now I had surpassed him.

“You’re drunk,” I stated. “You should go home.”

“I’m not marrying Vanessa,” he said suddenly, the words sloppy but vehement.

I remained silent. His marital plans, or lack thereof, were about as interesting to me as the traffic report for a city I had no intention of visiting.

“I know you won’t come to my wedding,” he continued, “and you probably won’t invite me if you get married.” He paused, swaying slightly. “I just wish you happiness.”

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