

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 251

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 251

[Prev Chapter](#)[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 251:

I flinched.

“If you continue to work with me,” Lochlan continued, his voice devoid of any attempt to soften the blow, “you might encounter many more parties like that one. And some will be significantly worse.”

My mind flashed back to the high-stakes gambling on the Singaporean yacht and the depraved orgy of last night. A gallery of grotesque memories.

I processed this grim future, a cold knot tightening in my stomach. “But you don’t appear to like those kinds of parties.” At least he had the decency not to take any of the offered dancers to bed.

“Then why did you go?”

“Because that, for now, is how the game is played. I do not have to like it. But before I possess the requisite power to erase the game entirely, I’m forced to participate in it.”

“So,” I said, the grim reality settling over me like a shroud, “there’ll be more of this if I stay on as CAO.”

“Yes.” He was brutally, impeccably honest. “I have ambitions. Velos Capital is merely the beginning. I intend to go global. That necessitates consorting with men of power and wealth, and if a portion of them prefer to conduct meetings at orgies, or will not sign a deal unless it is concluded over a strip poker table, then I will oblige them.”

“Is that why you never hired a female CAO before?” The question left my lips before I could stop it.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “That is a significant part of the reason.”

“Then why did you hire me?”

He was silent for a long moment.

“Because you were too good to pass up,” he said finally, his voice low.

We walked on.

The cool morning air did nothing to quell the strange, restless heat still simmering in my blood—a lingering phantom from the diffusers or from his proximity, I couldn’t tell.

We kept walking until I stopped short, my heart lurching into my throat as I realized where our path had led.

Toby’s villa loomed before us.

“What the hell?” I demanded, my voice tight with panic. If he thought for one second I was going back in there, he had another think coming.

“It’s empty,” Lochlan stated calmly. “Toby Saltzman and his guests have cleared out.”

“Where did they go?”

“A small minority of the guests have returned to their homes, I presume. The remainder, and Toby, well, they are currently facing questions from the Madeira police.”

“What, they’re arrested?”

“The police raided the place late last night on an anonymous tip regarding illicit substances in the villa. They found a substantial quantity of cocaine, MDMA, and several other controlled substances—all grounds for arrest here.”

“Drugs?” I repeated, stunned.

Lochlan nodded.

“Who called the police?”

Lochlan didn’t answer.

“Did you call the police?” I pressed.

[Prev Chapter](#)[Next Chapter](#)

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 252

Chapter 252:

He remained silent.

“So you didn’t go to the party to participate,” I said, the pieces clicking into place with dizzying speed. “You were going to blow the whistle.”

He gave a noncommittal, almost imperceptible nod.

“But Toby’s your business partner. Won’t he be mad at you?”

“He won’t know it was me. And it won’t matter if he does find out, as by then he will likely be languishing in a Portuguese jail.”

“Oh,” I said, the simplicity of it all dawning on me. “Oh, wait—what about the deputy mayor? Is he...?” I couldn’t bring myself to say dead.

“He has been admitted to a private clinic for treatment of blunt force trauma to the head,” Lochlan informed me. “The reason he provided to the attending physician was that he became inebriated, slipped, and struck his head.”

“He didn’t mention me?”

“First of all, he doesn’t know your name. Secondly, I doubt the deputy mayor wants the true reason for his injury to become public knowledge any more than you do.”

I thought about it, and it made perfect, cynical sense. The deputy mayor was hardly going to announce he’d been concussed by a vase because he’d tried to rape a woman.

I breathed out a huge, shuddering sigh of relief. So I didn’t have to spend the rest of my life as a fugitive from the law. Phew.

“Thank you,” I said.

Lochlan said nothing.

I felt marginally better, the crushing weight of potential murder charges finally lifting.

“Once Toby’s crimes are formally charged and he’s convicted, his share of the resort reverts to Velos Capital,” Lochlan continued. “There’s a clause in the partnership agreement stipulating this exact kind of situation.”

I listened, absorbing the calculated brilliance of it.

“Which means,” he said, turning to look at me directly, “if you stay on, you won’t ever have to deal with Toby Saltzman again.”

“But there are many others like him, aren’t there?”

Lochlan did not sugarcoat it. “Yes.”

“Can I think about it? About the job?”

“By all means.”

He then looked at me, his expression uncharacteristically earnest. “I want to apologize for last night. I was not aware of the aphrodisiac laced within the aroma diffusers, but that is no excuse. I put you in danger, and for that, I am profoundly sorry.”

My mind treacherously conjured the memory of last night—of what had almost happened between us in the steamy bathroom—and I swallowed hard.

I wanted to say it was fine, but it really, truly wasn’t.

I had almost slept with my boss.

No, that was too gentle a term.

I had practically attacked him, my libido hijacked by whatever chemical cocktail was in that diffuser, and it was not a memory I ever wished to revisit.

Come to think of it, I probably owed him an apology too. I had been the one more out of control, more visibly affected, and if not for his heroic restraint, I’d have likely used him as a human dildo without a second thought.

.
.br/>.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 253

Chapter 253:

But I couldn't bring myself to form the words. What would I even say? Sorry, boss, for almost jumping your bones, but it's your fault for bringing me there in the first place, so I suppose we're even?

We turned and began walking back to the villa in a silence that was thick with everything left unsaid, a heavy blanket of almosts and what-ifs. As we approached, I saw a familiar figure waiting on the terrace, looking as though he'd been teleported directly from his Thames-side office.

Timothy Ratliff, Lochlan's unflappable business secretary, was there.

He usually dealt with London affairs from the headquarters, a ghost in the machine. His presence here, so early, meant he had probably been summoned on Lochlan's orders this very morning. To do what, I wondered. To replace me?

My stomach gave an unpleasant lurch.

He nodded a crisp greeting in my direction. I managed a limp, exhausted nod in return.

"There's a tour around the resort scheduled later this morning," Lochlan said, his tone returning to its usual business-like cadence, as if the last five minutes had never happened. "Would you like to come?"

"No, thank you," I said. "If I may be excused, I need some time alone."

"I understand."

I climbed the stairs, locked myself in my bedroom, and stared at the resignation letter on the desk, its stark black and white lines a simple question to which I no longer had a simple answer.

The next three days passed in a bizarre semblance of normality, the kind where everyone pretends the elephant in the room is just a particularly tasteful piece of furniture.

Timothy, with his quiet efficiency, shouldered most of the workload, and I just sort of tagged along like a paid tourist, hovering on the periphery without a clear purpose. Lochlan, to his credit—or perhaps as a form of exquisite punishment—gave all new assignments directly to Timothy.

I didn't protest. What would I say? Please, sir, may I have some more corruption?

Whenever we had to get in a car to ride to another part of the resort, I'd make sure to call shotgun. If that wasn't possible, I'd rather take the second car or, God forbid, walk than be trapped in the intimate confines of the backseat with Lochlan.

He noticed this, of course, but he said nothing.

And my thoughts? They were a bloody mess.

A large, screaming part of me wanted to get the hell out of this place, to put as much distance as possible between myself and the toxic, patriarchal sewer that was high-stakes business. Resigning felt like the only way to preserve a shred of my sanity.

But then Lochlan's voice would echo in my head, blunt and unforgiving. "This is inevitable."

He was right, the bastard.

Despite all of London's professed social progress, the city's glittering towers were still propped up on invisible glass ceilings and secret handshakes in rooms that smelled of cigar smoke and entitlement. Being objectified, being lusted over, being openly propositioned as if I were a particularly well-appointed dessert on a menu—that was apparently par for the course if a woman wanted to play in the big leagues.

I had just been incredibly, naively well-protected by Cary in the past, swaddled in cotton wool and never subjected to the full, grubby reality.

I hated this environment with the fire of a thousand suns.

But I had to admit, if only to myself in the dark of night, that I loved the work.

Sure, Chief Administrative Officer was just a glorified title for a high-end secretary to some people, but I revelled in the feeling that I could actually make things happen. My coordination, my instructions, had a direct hand in projects that tangibly impacted life in London. The building of new apartment blocks, the licensing of riverside cafés, even the recent collaboration with City Hall on a new underground station construction.

I enjoyed the sense of accomplishment, the thrill of control, and, yes, the sheer pleasure of issuing orders and bossing people around. Was I really ready to give all that up for the sake of principle?

No.

And let's be brutally honest—there was the super nice penthouse, the company car, the fat salary, and the legendary year-end bonus I'd heard so much about.

If I left Velos Capital, would I ever find a better company?

More importantly, would I find a better boss? One who, despite dragging me through hell, had also orchestrated that hell's architect being carted off by the police and had apologized for the bits he couldn't control.

It was a depressingly low bar, but one I wasn't sure anyone else would even bother to clear.

On the fourth morning, I found Lochlan alone in the dining room, picking at a plate of fruit.

The words were out of my mouth before I could lose my nerve. "Boss, I'd like to stay."

He looked up from his papaya, and a slow, genuine smile softened the usual severity of his features. "Of course," he said, as if there had never been any doubt.

Later that day, Cameron returned from whatever shadowy assignment Lochlan had given him. When it was time to leave the resort, Lochlan asked Timothy to stay behind to keep an eye on things—a task I had a sneaking suspicion was originally supposed to be mine.

Lochlan was standing by the car when Damon waved us goodbye. He winked at me, his smile easy.

"Call me the next time you're here," he said, his tone leaving little to the imagination about what form that call might take.

I just smiled noncommittally, storing the offer away in a part of my brain labeled Never Gonna Happen.

Getting into the car, I took my now-customary spot in the passenger seat, leaving Lochlan and Cameron to the back. The driver started the car without a word.

The journey was profoundly quiet. It wasn't a peaceful silence, though. It was the kind of quiet that feels like the prelude to a storm, or the hollow aftermath of an explosion, the air pressure so low it felt suffocating.

I didn't doze off, sitting rigidly upright the entire time.

The car eventually left the mountains behind, and as the sky began to darken, the distant, glittering necklace of the city's night lights came into view.

Lochlan took a phone call, spoke in low, brief tones, and after hanging up, addressed the driver. "Change of plan. We won't be going directly to the airport."

.

.

•

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 254

Chapter 254:

Lochlan gave the driver an address that sounded like one of those exclusive, members-only clubs.

I shifted slightly in my seat. A detour? Would we make it back to London tonight?

“Hyacinth.” Lochlan’s voice, devoid of any discernible emotion, came from the backseat. “If you wish to return to London immediately, you are welcome to take the corporate jet.”

My neck stiffened.

If I wished to?

Sure, I’d like nothing more than to leave this awkward mobile prison, but the idea of commandeering the multi-million-pound company jet all by myself was just... it felt too presumptuous. As long as I was still on the payroll, I would perform my duties, and that included enduring this painfully quiet car ride to its mysterious conclusion.

“No, thank you, boss,” I said, staring straight ahead at the road. “I’ll stay.”

Lochlan said nothing, and we continued the journey in silence for another twenty minutes until we arrived in Funchal.

The city spilt down the mountainside in a cascade of terracotta roofs and whitewashed walls, its old-town charm doing little to soothe my frayed nerves.

We pulled up outside a discreet, beautifully restored townhouse. A small, polished brass plaque by the heavy oak door read A Cidade.

It looked less like a club and more like the private home of an excessively wealthy aristocrat.

Lochlan murmured something to Cameron, who gave a curt nod and remained in the car.

I wasn’t sure if I was meant to follow, until Lochlan came around to the passenger side and held the door open for me.

I scrambled out, feeling awkward and overly conscious of his proximity.

“This is a personal visit. It won’t take long,” he said, his tone suggesting I should find this reassuring.

“Then maybe I’ll just wait here with Cameron,” I offered, already glancing across the street for a promising-looking café where I could while away the time.

“I have another assignment for him,” Lochlan said, and as if on cue, the car pulled away from the kerb, taking a stoic Cameron with it.

I was stranded.

I eyed the entrance to A Cidade with deep suspicion. It would be an exaggeration to say I had full-blown PTSD, but I was certainly suffering from a severe case of party-related aftershocks, and the idea of following my boss into another dimly lit, exclusive den so soon after the last one made my skin crawl.

My gaze was still desperately scanning for an escape route when a voice boomed from above.

“Hey there!”

I looked up.

Leaning over the iron railing of a second-floor balcony was a man built like a Renaissance sculpture of a particularly well-endowed god. He was impossibly tall and broad, stuffed into a black shirt that was unbuttoned so far down I could trace the defined lines of his abdominal muscles. He had strikingly handsome features, a strong jaw, and a sun-kissed complexion that screamed outdoors, not office.

He radiated a raw, almost feral sexuality, the kind of potent hormone cocktail you could probably smell from the next parish over.

The contradiction was that he was dressed in a crisp shirt and tailored trousers, giving him the bizarre air of a business executive who’d just been in a fistfight.

He was smoking a cigarette and watching Lochlan and me with undisguised amusement.

He whistled, a low, appreciative sound, when his eyes landed on me, and I instantly, profoundly wished I’d taken the corporate jet.

The man from the balcony grinned. “Bring her up, Loch! I want to meet your girlfriend!” He then disappeared back inside before I could even open my mouth to correct him.

“That’s Desmond Lockwood,” Lochlan said, with the faintest sigh of resignation. “A... friend of mine.”

I nodded, then something clicked in my memory.

Lockwood. Where had I heard that name?

Right. The rumoured boyfriend. The reason the female staff back at the office had dismissed the idea of Lochlan having any interest in me.

Despite my freshly acquired trauma regarding “social visits,” my curiosity was now piqued to a dangerous degree.

I followed Lochlan inside.

A manager greeted us with obsequious respect and led us to a lift. “Mr Hastings, Mr Lockwood is in his private suite on the second floor.”

Lochlan thanked him and stepped inside. I followed, positioning myself slightly behind and to his left—my default subordinate-and-not-girlfriend spot.

The second floor arrived quickly. Lochlan strode towards a central door and pushed it open.

The room was a sprawling, opulent suite, and seated at a round table in the centre of it was the man from the balcony. His chest muscles were, indeed, very much on display and looked like they had been carved from granite. Someone clearly doesn’t skip chest day, my inner commentator noted, with a mix of admiration and alarm.

Lochlan walked directly up to him, his gaze chilly. “Button your shirt.”

“I’m hot,” Desmond protested, his face splitting into a wide, irreverent grin. He gestured down at his own chest. “This isn’t for me, you know. It’s for the general public. A free service. Aren’t you boiling? All trussed up in that three-piece suit like you’re attending your own funeral. We could go for a swim. I’m told the water is lovely.”

“The only body of water I’m interested in is the one you will be thrown into if you do not fasten those buttons,” Lochlan replied, his tone utterly deadpan.

Desmond clutched his chest as if struck by a bullet. “After I flew all the way to this beautiful island just to see your grumpy face? That hurts, Loch. That cuts deep. You’d wound me so cruelly after such a grand romantic gesture?”

I stared, utterly mesmerized.

What in the holy hell am I listening to? Are they... is this... flirting? Are the office gossips actually right?

- .
- .
- .

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 255

Chapter 255:

Under the continued frost of Lochlan's stare, Desmond finally raised his hands in surrender.

"Alright, alright, I'll do it, I'll button up. See? Now come and give me some sugar, Loch." He puckered his lips in an absurd, exaggerated pout.

Before Lochlan could even utter a single word of refusal, Desmond lunged forward, invading his personal space to perform two loud, extravagant air-kisses mere inches from Lochlan's face, accompanied by a pair of theatrical "mwah, mwah!" sounds.

Okay, I thought, the office gossip mill might not be a complete fiction factory after all. The evidence is mounting up.

Lochlan pushed Desmond's face away with a firm hand. "Finish fastening your shirt."

Desmond, chuckling, did up three more buttons, which somehow managed to make him look both more respectable and even more provocatively handsome.

His playful, assessing eyes then landed on me. "Aren't you going to introduce me to your girlfriend?"

"This is Hyacinth Galloway, my Chief Administrative Officer," Lochlan said, the title pointedly formal. "Not my girlfriend."

Desmond circled the table and came to stand before me. He smelled fantastic—of expensive soap and clean, woody cologne. He stared at me for a long, unnerving moment, his head tilted in genuine curiosity. "You look familiar. Have we met before?"

“I don’t believe so,” I said politely, while inwardly rolling my eyes. Oh, brilliant. The oldest, dustiest line in the entire book. Next he’ll be asking if I come here often.

Lochlan also murmured a quiet warning. “Desmond.”

Desmond ignored him, giving a slight, charming bow and extending his hand. “A pleasure to meet you, Hyacinth. I’m Desmond Lockwood.”

“Nice to meet you, Mr Lockwood.” I offered my hand for a businesslike shake.

He bypassed it entirely, instead taking my fingers and pressing a light, lingering kiss to the back of my hand. His lips were warm.

A bit much, but points for theatricality.

“Call me Desi,” he said, his eyes crinkling at the corners. “All my friends do.”

I retrieved my hand and surreptitiously wiped the back of it on my trouser leg.

“Why don’t you take off that jacket? You look hot,” he said, his gaze sweeping over me with open appreciation.

Lochlan’s voice held a sharper edge of warning. “Desmond!”

He raised both hands and backed away. “Just a suggestion! The air conditioning in these old places is notoriously temperamental. The locals believe a bit of heat is good for the soul.”

I just smiled and said nothing.

He was being outrageously forward for a complete stranger, yet strangely, I didn’t feel threatened or offended. Maybe it was because when he looked at me, there was none of the blatant, predatory lust I’d seen in Toby Saltzman’s eyes.

Desmond clapped his hands together. “Right, let’s sit. And order. I’m absolutely starving.”

A waiter appeared as if summoned by magic, and Desmond launched into a rapid-fire order in fluent Portuguese.

Soon, the table was gloriously laden with dishes that made my stomach rumble in happy anticipation. There was a rich, dark cataplana stew brimming with plump clams and spicy chorizo, a platter of succulent grilled piri-piri chicken, and a salad of smoky roasted peppers and juicy olives.

In stark contrast, the dish placed in front of Lochlan was a perfectly grilled, minimalist piece of sea bass atop a bed of steamed greens, with a side of quinoa.

- .
- .
- .

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 256

Chapter 256:

Of course, I noted. Desmond knows his friend well enough to know he'd rather chew on cardboard than indulge in anything remotely fun or flavourful.

"Don't be shy, Hyacinth, help yourself," Desmond said, gesturing expansively at the carnivorous feast before us.

"Thank you," I replied, and meant it.

As I loaded my plate with chicken and ladled a generous portion of the fragrant stew, I felt a surge of camaraderie towards the man. He might be a walking, talking hormone factory, but he clearly appreciated proper food—the kind with fat and carbs and soul. A man who ordered like this, with such unapologetic gusto, was a man after my own heart.

I kept quiet through the meal and simply enjoyed the excellent food, allowing myself to relax a fraction. This wasn't a business dinner where I was expected to perform or take notes; I was just a spectator.

"How's Aunt Jennifer?" Desmond asked, shoveling a forkful of stew into his mouth. "Still striking fear into the hearts of undergraduates?"

"She's currently dividing her time between lecturing and writing her latest book," Lochlan replied, the corner of his mouth twitching almost imperceptibly.

Desmond barked a laugh. "She's not still insisting on using you as her primary case study, is she? What does she call you in this one, 'Subject L'?"

Lochlan sighed, a rare, wholly genuine sound of exasperation. “Regrettably, yes. Her publisher finds the insider’s perspective on ‘the modern corporate psyche’ endlessly fascinating.”

“I’ll look forward to reading all about Subject L then. And Uncle Holden?”

“He has retired.”

Desmond gasped, feigning a heart attack. “No! Holden Hastings? Retired? He’s not even sixty!”

“He’s fifty-eight,” Lochlan confirmed. “He felt he had devoted sufficient time to the business world. Now that I am installed, he felt at liberty to explore other aspects of life.”

“And what aspects are those?”

“Currently, he’s sitting on the judging panel for a competition to find the best new ice cream flavour. All the contestants are primary school children.”

Desmond threw his head back and laughed, a rich, full-bodied sound. “I bet he’s having the time of his life.”

“Of course,” Lochlan said dryly. “It’s merely a socially acceptable excuse to consume his body weight in sugary dairy products each afternoon.”

A wistful look crossed Desmond’s face. “God, I wish I had your dad for a father, Loch.”

I eavesdropped openly. Desmond was, despite all the air-kissing and the shirt unbuttoned to his navel, a rather likeable sort.

Suddenly, Desmond’s expression shifted, the levity evaporating as if he’d just remembered something important. “The Mount Anvil project. You’re really not going to budge on it?”

“What prompts this sudden interest?” Lochlan asked.

My ears pricked up at the mention of work.

The deadline Lochlan had given Cary to take the revised deal on the Mount Anvil loan or leave it was fast approaching. If Cary took it, Mayfair Global would bleed significantly. But if he didn’t, the company would suffer heavy damage—not just financial but reputational, as the market would interpret it as Velos Capital abandoning them, a clear sign we had no faith in their future.

That would spell disaster.

I found myself wondering what Cary's father, that intimidating man from my one brief, unpleasant meeting, would make of it all.

Desmond leaned back in his chair. "Mrs Grant is a cousin of my Uncle Aaron's second wife." I noticed the unconcealed note of contempt when he said "second wife."

.

.

.

Chapter 257:

Lochlan raised an eyebrow. "What a remarkable coincidence." He glanced at me, but I showed no reaction.

Mrs Grant was a title I no longer answered to; she was Tanya Grant, Cary's mother, and thinking of her still left a bitter taste in my mouth.

"She came to see her the day before yesterday," Desmond continued. "Which is precisely why I had to flee the city. Needed a bloody holiday."

"So," Lochlan said, "the Grant family is seeking a financial lifeline from the Lockwoods? And does your Aunt Gloria now hold the purse strings?"

"Don't call her my aunt," Desmond snapped, his affable mask dissolving for a second. "She's not my aunt. She's the mistress my Uncle Aaron was keeping on the side, the one who got pregnant and forced her way into the family home. He divorced Aunt Marin for her." His voice dropped to a low, furious growl. "But that wasn't enough for her, was it? Not long after, Aunt Marin died in a car crash. Their five-year-old son was in the car with her. And she was nine months pregnant with a little girl."

I shifted uncomfortably in my chair, wondering if I should make my excuses and leave. This sounded like a family skeleton that was meant to stay firmly locked in the cupboard.

Lochlan said, "There's no evidence linking Gloria to the accident. The police investigation found no grounds for suspicion."

"Like fuck she wasn't involved!" Desmond's agitation was a palpable force. "I know it in my guts, Loch. I was there. I remember the flowers she sent to the funeral, the smug bitch. I know it was her."

He must have sensed my unease because he looked directly at me, his expression softening marginally. "Don't worry, Hyacinth, it's practically an open secret in Manchester. She thinks she can bury it all under a pile of designer clothes and buy herself

a new circle of friends with expensive gifts, but the old families, the ones that matter, they'll never truly accept her. She'll always be the gold-digger who crashed her way in."

"She'll get what's coming to her," Lochlan said, a rare note of quiet comfort in his tone.

"Yeah, her and my dear Uncle Aaron," Desmond sneered, the bitterness back in full force. "They're a pair made in hell, deserve each other. Did you know I almost died three times in the last year alone?"

Lochlan went very still. "What?"

"Oh, don't look so shocked. Of course they've tried to kill me. Grandpa went over Aaron's head and named me the primary heir. The greedy bitch and her spineless, cheating husband weren't exactly thrilled about that." He gave a loose, nonchalant shrug, as if discussing a minor inconvenience. "So if you one day read my obituary in the news, do me a favour and tell the police to start their investigation with those two."

"You should hire more security," Lochlan said, his voice deadly serious.

Desmond just shrugged again, and a frustrated, humourless laugh burst from him. "I'm telling you, being born into this family is a fucking curse. Who the hell even wants to be the heir? And the money? I don't give a toss about any of it!"

Lochlan nodded. "Yes, I know. Your lifelong ambition is to be a hunter in the Amazon."

Desmond laughed and kicked out lightly at Lochlan's chair. "I was six years old when I said that! You still remember? Aww, you do love me." He puckered his lips. "Give us another kiss, then."

Lochlan pushed his face away with a weary hand. "Focus. You need to watch out for Tanya Grant."

"Why? What's she gonna do?" Desmond asked, still grinning.

"Every favour has a price. If Gloria agrees to help Tanya, it will be because there's something profitable in it for her, not because they are distant cousins."

"I know that," Desmond said, his flippancy returning. "But I don't care. Let them have their little schemes."

"You should care," Lochlan countered, his tone sharpening. "Because what Gloria wants more than anything is to remove you from the playing field. And if she doesn't wish to dirty her own hands..."

Desmond barked a laugh. “You think she’ll ask Tanya Grant to kill me? Come on, Loch. Tanya’s just a society wife. She doesn’t have the guts, or even the resources. I doubt the woman would know where to hire a hitman if her life depended on it.”

“Don’t dismiss it out of hand,” Lochlan said quietly. “In my experience, society wives are often more ruthless than you give them credit for.” He glanced at me then, a silent question in his eyes, asking for permission to drag my own sordid history into the light.

I gave a slight, resigned nod. “It’s fine. You can tell him.”

Desmond’s interest was immediately piqued. “Tell me what? Hyacinth knows Tanya Grant?”

I met his curious gaze. “I more than just ‘know’ them. I was married to one of them.”

The excellent food now sat like a lead weight in my stomach.

“If you’ll both excuse me,” I said, pushing my chair back. “I just need to pop to the toilet.”

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 258

Chapter 258:

“Careful, Loch,” Desmond drawled, not even trying to hide his amusement. “If you stare any harder, you’ll burn a hole straight through that very fine jacket of hers.”

I withdrew my gaze from the doorway through which Hyacinth had just departed.

“You like her, then?” Desmond asked, leaning back in his chair with a knowing smirk that had been irritating me since we were two years old.

I took a measured sip of water, considering the merit of a lie before deciding the ensuing interrogation would be more tedious than the truth. “Yes,” I said, and pre-emptively answered his next question. “And no, I haven’t asked her out.”

“Why not?”

“She’s not interested.”

Desmond barked a laugh. “How the hell can you know that if you haven’t even asked? You can’t just will these things into existence through sheer force of personality, you know. Sometimes you actually have to use your words.”

“My assessment is not based on conjecture. She has made it abundantly clear that she has sworn off billionaires, a category which regrettably includes me, following her previous relationship with Cary Grant.”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Desmond groaned, rolling his eyes. “That’s just a generalisation. You’re a completely different proposition from that egomaniac. Look, I could put in a good word for you. Sing your praises. Tell her a couple of amusing childhood anecdotes and she’ll finally see what a catch our Pudding is.”

“Don’t call me that,” I warned, the old nickname sparking a familiar, low-grade annoyance.

“Fine, fine,” he said, holding up his hands in mock surrender. “But your mother’s going to be thrilled to hear about this. She’ll have a field day. One more fascinating case study for her next book. I can see the chapter now: ‘Even the Great Businessman Can Be a Chicken When It Comes to Voicing His Feelings.’”

I met his gaze with a placid one of my own. “If you breathe a word of this to my mother, I will feel compelled to share a corrective piece of information with her.”

“What’s that?”

“I believe she would be very interested to learn the exact age you were when you last wet the bed. It was not nearly as young as she was led to believe, and I’m certain she would want to amend that particular data point in her earlier work on childhood development.”

Desmond’s smirk vanished. “Christ, that’s low. Alright, you win. My lips are sealed. So, what can I actually do for you, then?”

“I need a favour.”

“Anything for my best friend,” he declared, spreading his arms wide. “So, what’s the master plan? Shall I be your wingman? I could hire a mariachi band to surprise her at dawn outside her window. Or, I know, I could get a skywriter to spell out your proposal over London, though I can’t promise he won’t misspell ‘Hastings’ as ‘Pudding.’ My genius is your command, you grumpy bastard.”

“There’s a prevalent rumour regarding you and me,” I began, ignoring his suggestions. “That we are involved in a homosexual relationship.”

Desmond laughed with mock outrage. “That’s a bloody slander on my impeccable masculinity!”

“Nevertheless, a significant number of people seem to believe it.”

“So, you want me to clear the air with Hyacinth? Tell her you’re not gay? You can count on me,” he said, puffing out his chest.

“No. I want you to do the opposite.”

I watched as his brain processed this, his eyebrows climbing towards his hairline. “You want me to do what now?”

“I want you to help reinforce the notion. To convince Hyacinth that the rumour is true.”

“Are you insane?” he spluttered. “If she thinks you’re gay, she’ll never consider sleeping with you. Or, what, is the grand plan here to be platonic pen pals?”

“I will resolve that particular complication at a later time. At present, I need her to feel safe in my presence.”

I gave him a brief summary of the events at Toby Saltzman’s villa, omitting the more intimate details but conveying the essence of the traumatic experience she had endured.

Desmond let out a low whistle. “No wonder she’s jumpy. She didn’t grow up in our world, Loch. You’re lucky she hasn’t handed in her resignation and fled the country.”

“I am aware. The introduction to that aspect of my life was... premature. But she will have to become acquainted with the full reality of my world sooner or later.”

“So now you’re doing damage control by making her think you’re gay? Therefore, not a threat? Not going to jump her bones in the office?”

“Something to that effect,” I conceded.

My mind, treacherously, supplied a vivid memory of the party’s aftermath—of Hyacinth in her bedroom, her skin flushed and her eyes dark with a desire that was not entirely her own. The image of her in the tub, wet and pleading, was seared into my memory.

God knows I had wanted to take her right then, to strip away the barriers between us and satisfy the raw, burning need she ignited in me.

.
. .

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 259

Chapter 259:

But I had exercised restraint.

I didn't want our relationship, whatever it might become, to be founded on a chemically-induced lapse in judgment. I wanted her clear-headed and willing.

Desmond's voice pulled me from the reverie. "I don't think it's a good idea, mate. If she crosses you off the list of potential dates, she might just go and find someone else."

"I will ensure that she does not."

"Does Hyacinth know you're such a control freak?" he asked, clicking his tongue.

"She doesn't. And I would prefer to keep it that way."

He sighed. "Fine. I'll help you, because you're my best friend. But it's going to cost you."

"Name your price."

"I want a front-row seat to the Lochlan and Hyacinth romance show. I want details. All the steps, the progress, the grand gestures. I want to be kept informed."

"I'm not going to provide you with a live commentary of my personal life," I stated flatly.

"Fine. Then you'll have to find some other willing bloke to fake being your boyfriend. Good luck with that."

I relented. "I will inform you if there's any significant progress."

"Deal!"

He sprang to his feet and, before I could protest, grabbed my arm and dragged me from the dining table towards a group of plush sofas in the corner of the room. He pushed me down onto one and sat beside me, his thigh pressing firmly against mine.

I immediately shifted, creating a sliver of space between us, my entire body stiff with discomfort.

Desmond smirked. "Oh, this is just the beginning, mate. We need to get you comfortable with the act."

"There will be no kissing," I said, the words leaving no room for negotiation.

“But how am I supposed to convince her I’m your boyfriend if we don’t engage in a little public display of affection? A peck on the cheek? A loving cuddle?”

“No kissing,” I repeated, my tone firm. “Think of something else.”

“Fine,” he huffed, though his eyes still sparkled with mischief.

The moment we heard the faint sound of the door handle turning, Desmond moved with startling speed.

He launched himself from the sofa and straddled my lap, settling his weight on my thighs. His arms wrapped tightly around my neck, and he buried his face against my chest, adopting a posture of exaggerated, cloying affection.

Every muscle in my body locked in protest. It was an invasion of personal space so profound it felt like a physical violation.

I looked up, my own expression undoubtedly a mask of frozen horror, to see Hyacinth standing in the doorway, her hand still on the knob.

Her eyes were wide with shock.

“S-sorry,” she stammered, her face flushing a deep red. “I... I think I left something in the toilet.” She turned on her heel and fled the room almost as quickly as she had appeared.

I shoved him away the instant the door clicked shut.

Desmond collapsed into howls of laughter, rolling off my lap and onto the sofa cushions. “Very Brokeback Mountain, eh?” he wheezed, wiping a tear from his eye. “I missed my calling as an actor. How did she react? She must’ve been properly stunned.”

“She was shocked. I believe the objective was achieved.”

“Good. But that’s not enough, mate. A single scene does not a convincing relationship make.”

I stood up, intent on leaving this absurd situation behind. “I really think it’s sufficient for now.”

“You still want to keep her close, don’t you? You want her to believe it. And come on, if you leave now, where else are you going to find an obliging mate like me to help you sell the act?”

I paused, his words hitting their mark. “What do you have in mind?”

Desmond smiled, a slow, cunning grin that promised further torment. “You’ll find out soon enough.”

.
.
.

Chapter 260:

I hid out in the toilet for as long as humanly possible until I couldn’t justify dragging it out any longer.

When I finally slunk back towards the private room, I made a point of knocking, very loudly, just in case I was interrupting anything else I’d rather not see.

“Come in,” Lochlan called out.

I strained my ears, trying to decode his voice for any trace of lust, or a telltale huskiness that might suggest I’d interrupted him mid-make-out session. It sounded as cool and even as ever.

I pushed the door open a sliver and poked my head in.

Lochlan was sitting on a sofa—the one furthest away from where Desmond was sprawled like a big, lazy cat. Lochlan’s face was its usual granite mask, no signs of flushed lust or, thank God, any smudged lipstick.

Desmond’s shirt had miraculously come undone again, revealing that frankly ridiculous torso. Somehow I doubt that happened by accident. He grinned at me. “Took you long enough. Did you get lost?”

“No,” I said, stepping fully inside. “I was just wandering around, admiring the club. It’s very... historical.”

He shook his head. “Nah. You’ve got a beautiful face. I’d have asked you out for coffee if—”

Lochlan coughed.

Desmond smirked at him, then winked at me. “Don’t mind me. I was just kidding.”

Lochlan stood. “Let’s go.”

It was past nine by the time we emerged from the club. The night air was a relief.

Desmond, however, was reluctant to let Lochlan go. He slung a familiar arm around Lochlan's shoulders, pulling him close. "Come on, don't be like that. I've got a winery nearby. Let's go back to my place for a proper drink."

"I need to get back to London," Lochlan said.

Desmond leaned in, his head nearly resting on Lochlan's shoulder. "Oh, come on, don't you miss me like I've missed you, honey? Don't you want to spend the night with me?"

Honey?

I immediately became deeply fascinated by a crack in the pavement, pretending I had suddenly gone deaf.

"Hyacinth," Desmond called, dragging me back into their... whatever this was.

I turned to face him, trying very hard not to stare at his hand, which was still wrapped intimately around Lochlan's shoulder. Poor boss. His entire body was a rod of tense, embarrassed muscle. He must be mortified by this PDA from his very affectionate boyfriend.

"About me and Loch," Desmond said. "Do me a favour and don't tell anyone, okay?"

I nodded vigorously. "My lips are sealed. I won't tell a soul at the company."

That much was true. I made no promises regarding Portia, however. She was my best friend; I'd literally die if I couldn't share this absolutely monumental piece of gossip with someone.

"Thanks." Desmond then turned back to Lochlan, his expression softening. He reached up and cupped Lochlan's cheek, his thumb stroking his jawline. "Take care of yourself, honey. Call me when you land."

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 261

Chapter 261:

I sidled away from the lovey-dovey couple, giving them what little privacy the pavement afforded.

The car finally arrived. I would have gladly climbed into the front passenger seat, but Cameron was already planted there like a stoic garden gnome.

Reluctantly, I slid into the backseat.

“Bye, Hyacinth!” Desmond leaned in at the car window. “Look me up next time you’re in Manchester!”

“Goodbye, Mr Lockwood,” I said, with as much professional finality as I could muster.

Lochlan got in after me, but not before Desmond pulled him into one final, crushing bear hug.

The journey from the club to the airport and then onto the private jet took us well past midnight. I felt thoroughly drained, both physically and mentally, as if I’d been put through a wringer this past week.

Once we were settled on the plane and the engines began their low thrum, Lochlan broke the silence.

“Hyacinth.” He waited until I looked at him. “I feel I must reiterate my apology. The events at Toby Saltzman’s party were a profound failure of judgement on my part. I give you my word that such a situation will not occur again. I will ensure it.”

The formality was almost comforting. “I believe you,” I said. And I found that I actually did.

He gave a single, curt nod. “Thank you. There is one other matter. Regarding Desmond.”

I hurried to cut him off. “You don’t have to say another word. I told him my lips are sealed, and I meant it. It’s nobody’s business.” Your secret is safe with me.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Actually, I was thinking he didn’t have to act so secretive about it. Being gay was no big deal nowadays, and a man with his power and position shouldn’t be afraid of how others looked at him.

But then I thought, maybe it wasn’t the public he was hiding from. Maybe it was his parents. A man with his impeccable manners probably had a very traditional upbringing, with parents who held very traditional views.

It was a surprisingly humanizing, and slightly sad, thought.

My gaze drifted, landing unbidden on his lips.

I wondered if he'd told his boyfriend Desmond about what had almost happened between us that night in the villa.

The memory of it rose up, sharp and unbidden. Lochlan's kiss hadn't been methodical or gentle. It had been pure, undiluted want. A hard, desperate clash of lips and teeth and tongue, a messy, wet, consuming fire that had felt like it could burn down the world. It was the kind of kiss that got under your skin—a taste of something you knew was bad for you but created an itch that was hell to scratch.

An addiction after just one hit.

Back then, my sanity had been a thin thread, pulled taut by desire, wanting to pull away and sink under all at once. Time and air had felt suspended in that endless, pulling conflict.

I grabbed the cashmere blanket and pulled it right over my head, hiding my burning face from view.

Could someone please tell me how long the bloody aphrodisiac took to fully leave one's system?

Why was I still thinking about that night? It was seriously becoming a problem.

.
. .

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 262

Chapter 262:

A gentle pressure on my shoulder stirred me from a deep, blanket-induced coma.
“Hyacinth, we have arrived.”

I slowly sat up, peeling myself off the leather seat. I'd been sweltering under the cashmere blanket for the entire journey, and now I felt clammy and vaguely dissociated, as if my soul was still trying to catch up with my body somewhere over the Bay of Biscay.

The flight attendant had already retrieved our luggage and handed it to Roy, who was waiting on the tarmac with his usual unflappable smile.

Once we were settled in the car, Roy glanced at me in the rearview mirror. “So, how was the week? Had fun in Madeira?”

I managed a slightly strained smile. “It was... well, it was certainly an experience.”

That’s one word for it. At least both boss and I are returning with our virtue technically, if not entirely mentally, intact.

“Glad to hear it was smooth,” Roy said.

I let my gaze flick to the rearview mirror. Lochlan was in the back, arms crossed, eyes closed, his face a complete blank slate. I felt a small, private wave of relief. The Granite Mask was firmly back in place.

“I’ll drop you at Lauderdale Tower first,” Roy announced. “It’s on the way to the boss’s house.”

“Thank you, Roy,” I said, the thought of my own bed a siren’s call.

When we arrived, Lochlan insisted on carrying my suitcase up to my floor, despite it weighing practically nothing and me being perfectly capable of managing my own wheeled baggage. I figured it was just an excuse for a spot inspection, making sure I hadn’t converted the corporate penthouse into a party flat.

We had just stepped out of the lift when a tall, lanky figure sprang from the shadows like a ninja in silk pyjamas.

“High C! You’re back!” Portia engulfed me in a bear hug that smelled of gin and toothpaste. “I’ve missed you. And I’ve got to tell you—”

“Um,” I said, extracting myself, “I’m not alone.”

She let out a tiny squeak when she saw Lochlan materialize behind me with my suitcase, then promptly fled into the guest room, slamming the door behind her. Thirty seconds later, she emerged, fully dressed, with a full face of makeup and her hair artfully tousled. She beamed at Lochlan. “Well, hello there, Lochlan.”

“Good evening, Ms Pierce,” he replied, impeccably polite.

Remembering this was technically a corporate property, I felt a need to explain. “Portia’s been staying here while I was away, just to keep an eye on the place.”

“That’s perfectly fine,” Lochlan said.

Portia took the suitcase from him. “So, how was the trip? Any fun in the sun?”

“It was adequate,” Lochlan said.

“Adequate,” Portia repeated, smirking. “Right. Well, can I offer you a drink? You must be parched.”

I fully expected him to decline and make a swift exit, but to my utter astonishment, he inclined his head. “Thank you. That would be agreeable.”

We moved into the living room. I did a frantic sweep, scooping up a stray bra from the sofa and a pile of legal briefs from the coffee table and hurling them into Portia’s room before he could get a proper look.

Lochlan’s gaze travelled around the room. “It seems some modifications have been made.”

I looked around too, seeing it through his eyes. My own touches were there—the warm throws and the framed print of a Cornish fishing boat—but they were now competing with Portia’s... aesthetic.

This primarily consisted of two large, anatomical diagrams on the wall, one of a man and one of a woman, in full naked, flayed glory, meticulously detailing every muscle, bone, and blood vessel.

I gave an awkward smile. “Yes, well. Portia has a... a keen academic interest in the human form.”

.
.br/>.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a posessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a posessive husband!

Chapter 263

Chapter 263:

“I see,” he said, his tone giving nothing away.

Portia called out from the open-plan kitchen. “Right, drinks! We’ve got vodka, gin, a very nice Sancerre, some suspicious-looking kombucha, and, oh, a can of Irn-Bru from 2019. What’s your poison?”

“Sparkling water would be fine, thank you,” Lochlan replied.

She came in and set a glass of water in front of him, a juice for me, and a plate of heavily cheesed nachos. "Try these," she said, thrusting the plate towards Lochlan. "I used Colby Jack. It's the king of melting cheeses."

"Boss doesn't eat cheese," I said quickly.

Portia's eyebrows shot up. "Lactose intolerant?"

"No, it's just... not part of his approved nutritional intake," I explained, trying to head off the inevitable sarcastic commentary on his ascetic lifestyle.

Before she could make a derogatory remark, I steered the conversation back. "You said you had to tell me something?"

"Yeah," she said, but then she glanced at Lochlan, hesitating.

He began to rise. "Perhaps I should take my leave."

"No, don't go, you stay," Portia insisted, waving him back down. "I'll go."

She leaned in close to me, whispering. "There are packs of condoms in my bedside drawer if you need them. Ranging from L to Magnum. Different flavours, too. Just don't use up the strawberry ones. I'm partial to them."

Judging by the faint tightening around Lochlan's eyes, he had heard every single word. My face flooded with heat. "Portia!"

"What?" she said, all wide-eyed innocence.

"What is it you wanted to tell me?" I ground out, desperate to move on. Anything, literally anything, was preferable to a discussion about condom sizes and flavours with my boss sitting three feet away.

Portia hesitated for a few seconds, then just blurted it out. "Cary's getting married. The bride's not Vanessa."

"Oh," I said. It didn't exactly send shockwaves through my system.

"And," Portia added, delivering the real payload, "Vanessa is pregnant."

"Oh." This time, yeah, I was surprised. My eyebrows definitely moved.

"Is the baby... his?" I asked.

"I don't know, but that's what she's claiming," Portia said. "And now that she's pregnant, she's been granted bail. She's out. The court informed me as your solicitor."

“She’d have gotten bail anyway,” I said flatly.

“Yeah, probably,” Portia agreed. “It’s a fucking joke, the whole system is rigged for rich c—” She caught sight of Lochlan and hastily amended her statement. “I don’t mean you.”

Lochlan simply gave a polite nod. “I understand.”

“Anyway,” Portia continued, turning back to me, “I hear she and her family have had a massive falling out. Not just a row, I’m talking a proper physical blow-up. Her family doesn’t want her to marry Cary, what with them being business enemies now, but she’s dead set on it. She’s insisting the baby is his. They wanted her to get an abortion, she refused, hence the fisticuffs.”

I just nodded, taking it in.

“So I hear she’s moved out of her family home,” Portia went on, relishing the gossip. “She shows up at Cary’s company every day, telling anyone who’ll listen that she’s carrying his heir.”

“What’s Cary doing about it?” I asked, almost feeling a flicker of pity for him.

.
.br/.

Chapter 264:

“Cary’s saying the baby isn’t his and has demanded a DNA test, but that can’t be done for at least another four weeks. And it’s not like he can manhandle a pregnant woman out of the building, so he’s basically stuck with her for now.”

“I wonder what his fiancée has to say about all this,” I mused.

“That’s what I want to know too,” Portia said. “But I don’t even know who the poor cow is. I suppose we’ll all find out when the wedding’s officially announced.”

Lochlan’s voice cut through the speculation. “I may be able to answer that.”

Portia and I swiveled our heads to look at him.

“Her name is Elizabeth Forbes,” he stated. “She’s an acquaintance of mine. Her family is based on the Wirral, but she works here in London.”

Portia's eyes lit up. "How close an acquaintance? Do you think you might get an invitation to the wedding?"

Lochlan gave a single nod. "It's a distinct possibility."

Portia clapped her hands together with gleeful, uncontrollable schadenfreude. "Brilliant. Can I be your plus-one?"

"Portia!" I hissed.

"What? You can't go, obviously, you're the ex-wife. No one in their right mind invites the ex to the wedding. But I want to be there, front and centre, when Vanessa shows up with a baby strapped to her chest to crash the entire spectacle."

"You really think that's what she'll do?" I asked, the mental image both horrifying and darkly compelling.

"I'm counting on it," she said, her eyes gleaming. Then she turned her mischievous gaze back to Lochlan. "You know, I've got a better idea. Maybe Hyacinth should go as your plus-one after all."

"No," I said. "I'm not going."

"Oh, come on!" Portia cajoled. "What better revenge on an ex than showing up looking utterly sensational on the arm of a man who is, objectively, ten times the human being Cary is? It's poetic justice."

Lochlan offered a slight, polite smile. "Thank you for the compliment."

Portia batted her eyelashes at him. "If you want to thank me, just invite me to your wedding."

I elbowed her sharply in the ribs and hissed at her to shut up before she could do any more damage.

"I will inform you both should an invitation materialize," Lochlan said, deftly sidestepping the entire minefield. "Good night." He rose with his usual unnerving grace.

I saw him to the door, mumbling a sheepish "goodnight" before closing it and leaning against it with a sigh of profound exhaustion.

Portia was already back on the sofa, digging into the neglected nachos with gusto. I left her to it and went to deal with my suitcase, hauling it to my room and throwing a load of travel-worn clothes into the washer.

A long, hot shower later, I finally fell face-first into my own blissfully soft, familiar-smelling bed. I lay there, eyes closed, breathing in the scent of my own laundry detergent like it was a healing balm.

Portia came in after a while, lay down next to me, and started scrolling through her phone. After a few minutes of silence, she nudged me.

“So,” she began, her voice uncharacteristically tentative. “Cary’s getting married. You really don’t have any... I don’t know, any nasty little feelings about it?”

I kept my eyes closed, my voice muffled by the pillow. “I do have a feeling, actually. I feel it’s good riddance, and the best of luck to his unfortunate bride.”

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 265

Chapter 265:

Portia laughed, and I could hear the relief in it. “Okay, fine. Good. Forget about Cary, then. Let’s talk about the new man in your life.”

“I don’t have a new man in my life,” I grumbled.

“Oh, really? Then who was the devastatingly hot guy in a five-thousand-pound suit who so gentlemanly carried your suitcase up here? The postman?”

“That was my boss,” I said, “being his usual, impeccably polite, chivalrous self.”

Stories you won’t put down on .com

“Lochlan is seriously delicious,” Portia pressed, undeterred. “I don’t believe for a second you aren’t even a little bit tempted.”

My mind treacherously replayed snippets of the past week, and I felt a telltale warmth creep up my neck. “Actually...”

She squealed, jolting upright. “I knew it! Spill! Now!”

I knew I was going to regret this, but the need to confide in someone, to verbally exorcise the madness, was too strong.

So I told her. I gave her the abridged, Hyacinth-version of the events at the villa—the aphrodisiac, the... situation.

The first thing she asked was: “What was in that diffuser?”

I rolled my eyes, even though she couldn’t see it with my face still planted in the pillow. “That’s what you want to know?”

“Yeah!” she said, with utter seriousness. “It sounds fantastically potent. I want some for my next booty call.”

“I don’t know what it was. But I know who you can ask.”

“Who?”

“Toby Saltzman. He’s probably in a Portuguese jail cell right now, but I’m sure you could arrange a visit. Offer him your legal services, he’ll probably tell you for free.”

Portia actually considered this for a second before dismissing it. “Nah. Too much effort.”

She let out a sigh. “You should’ve warned me it was this juicy. I’d have brought a bottle of wine before you started.”

“I’m telling you this so you understand what a perfect gentleman my boss is,” I insisted, finally rolling over to look at her. “He could have taken advantage that night. God knows I was... willing for him to take advantage. But he didn’t. He had every opportunity and he stopped.”

“But he wanted you,” Portia stated, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

“That was the drug,” I countered, the rational part of my brain clinging to this explanation. “His reaction was biological, a chemical response he couldn’t control. He’s not interested in me that way. In fact, he has a boyfriend.”

I told her about the charming and impossibly handsome Desmond Lockwood.

Portia’s face fell with profound disappointment. “Damn it. I really thought my gaydar was pretty good. I really thought he wasn’t.” Then she looked down at her nightgown. “But at least that explains why he looked away when he saw me in the negligee. I wasn’t even wearing a bra. Any red-blooded man with the right sexual preference would have looked. I mean, really looked.”

“Well,” I said, spreading my hands as if the case was closed. “There you go.”

And I was disappointed too, a small, stupid pang of it, but I tried very hard not to analyze that feeling too closely.

“Too bad,” Portia mused. “You should’ve drunk the wine.”

-
-
-

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 266

Chapter 266:

I stared at her. “What?”

“The wine at the party. You said it was drugged, right? That was probably your only chance to sleep with him without any consequences, and you missed it.”

“No, thank you,” I said, with feeling. The thought was both appalling and, in a twisted way, terribly logical.

“Well,” Portia sighed, “there are other fish in the sea. Non-gay fish. Probably not as gorgeous or suave as your Lochlan, but I guess it’s time you forget about him.”

“Yeah,” I said, the word coming out more wistfully than I intended.

“How about that stripper guy?” she suggested, ever helpful. “Leonard, was it?”

“Leo,” I corrected. “Yeah. I should call him.”

“Let me know how it goes,” she said, waggling her eyebrows.

We chatted and caught up properly on the past week, and eventually, lulled by the familiar comfort of each other’s company, we fell asleep.

I was shaken awake some time around four in the morning.

Portia was leaning over me, her face eerily illuminated by her phone screen.

“I still want to know what was in that diffuser,” she whispered.

I groaned, shoved her away, and buried my head under the pillow.

The next morning was a special kind of torture.

I'd managed about three hours of broken sleep after Portia's late-night interrogation, and dragging myself out of bed at seven felt like a violation of my human rights.

By the time I was in the headquarters building at eight, brewing a pot of coffee so strong it could probably strip paint, I was running on fumes. When I finally made it back to my office, clutching a mug of liquid that tasted more bitter than my prospects, I saw that Lochlan was already in.

Of course he was. The man probably ran on a secret power source.

Kai's office door was open too, a welcome sight.

I popped my head in. "Hey. How are you? How's your aunt?"

Kai looked up from his screen. "I'm good. She's much better, thanks. I've hired a full-time nurse for her, takes the pressure off."

"That's great to hear," I said, and I meant it.

"So," he said, leaning back in his chair. "How was the trip to Madeira? All sun, sea, and successful deal-making?"

"It was... fine," I said, deploying my most masterful understatement. "We probably won't be doing business with Mr Saltzman anymore, though."

I gave him the heavily sanitized, PG-rated version of events—the one that ended with Toby being led away in handcuffs, and conveniently omitted the part where boss and I had nearly torn each other's clothes off in a pharmaceutical haze.

Kai let out a low whistle. "Saltzman was always a sleaze. Sounds like he had it coming." His eyes grew more serious. "Are you okay, though? That kind of thing can be... intense. You weren't scared? It didn't leave you feeling... off?"

"I'm fine," I said. "Really."

He studied me for a moment, then nodded, seeming to accept it. "Don't worry. I'm back now. Next time we go on a trip, it'll be me, you, boss, and Cameron. I'll make sure you're not put in a situation like that again."

"Thanks, Kai."

He glanced towards the door, then leaned in closer, his voice dropping to a whisper. "Look, while I'm on the subject, there are a few other names you should have in the back of your mind. People we do business with, powerful people, who are... let's just say they have reputations that make Saltzman look almost charming. Just make sure you're never alone in a room with them."

- .
- .
- .

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 267

Chapter 267:

“Sure. Who are they?”

He listed a few names—a rogues’ gallery of businessmen, a couple of politicians, and a dignitary or two. Men with old money and even older attitudes, the kind who thought their wealth and status made them untouchable.

I listened intently, filing each name away in a mental folder labelled Potential Predators. This was crucial intelligence.

A knock came from the open doorway.

I pulled back to see Lochlan standing there. His gaze swept over the scene—Kai at his desk, me bent over it, our heads close together.

“Morning, boss,” I said, my voice slightly higher than usual.

“Morning, boss,” Kai echoed.

Lochlan’s expression was unreadable. “Kai, could you come into my office for a moment, please?”

“Sure thing, boss,” Kai said, rising.

As he passed me, I mouthed a silent “thank you.” He gave me a nod. “Any time.”

The week had bled into a grey, monotonous sludge. The Madeira debacle was receding into the past, taking on the quality of a fever dream, which made the return to paperwork and procurement forms feel all the more stifling.

By Friday afternoon, the urge to do something, anything, that wasn’t work-related had become a physical itch.

At precisely 4:35 PM, I stood before the imposing expanse of Lochlan's desk. "I'll be leaving a little early today, boss, if that's okay with you."

He didn't look up from the financial timesheet he was annotating with his precise, sharp script. "Oh? Is everything quite alright?"

"Everything's fine. I have a date."

His hand stilled, the fountain pen poised mid-figure. Then he looked up at me. "A date?"

"Yeah. Dinner. With a friend."

"Portia?"

"No. Believe it or not, I do have other friends, you know."

"I see," he said.

Another long pause stretched out, filled only with the dull hum of the city fifteen storeys below. He looked down at his paperwork, but I could have sworn his focus was elsewhere.

Finally, he gave a curt nod. "Very well. Enjoy your date. And your weekend."

"I will. You too, boss," I said, and made my escape before the atmosphere could get any more bizarre.

I went home, changed out of my corporate armour into something date-appropriate, and applied a bit more makeup than was strictly necessary for a "friendly" dinner.

When I met Leo at the Holborn tube station, he was already there, leaning against the tiled wall, people-watching.

"Hey, you," he said, his grin easy.

"Hey," I replied, feeling the residual tension from the office begin to melt away. "I've booked a table at The Ivy."

He let out a low, impressed whistle. "Blimey. That's... proper posh."

He gave a self-deprecating little shrug. "And here I was, all set to take you to the street food market in Shoreditch for the best jerk chicken in London."

.

.

•

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 268

Chapter 268:

“We can do that next time,” I said, looping my arm through his as we walked towards the taxi rank. “This is my treat. A proper apology for standing you up twice.”

We took a cab to the restaurant, and I watched him glance around the elegant, Art Deco interior with open, appreciative curiosity.

We were seated at a plush banquette and ordered. I went for the seared scallops followed by the roasted monkfish. Leo, after a moment of visible hesitation scanning the prices, chose the duck liver parfait and the ribeye steak. I selected a bottle of Sancerre.

“So,” I asked, after the wine had been poured. “How did the exhibition go? Did you manage to sell your painting?”

He took a sip of wine, his expression turning wry. “Nope. Not a single bite. It’s like my art has a force field around it that repels buyers. A talent for invisibility, that’s my real gift.”

“Someone will recognise your talent eventually,” I said, the words feeling pathetically inadequate even as I said them.

“Yeah, maybe,” he said with a hollow laugh. “The problem is, most famous artists only became really valuable after they stopped breathing. Look at Van Gogh, or Modigliani. And given the choice between posthumous fame and being able to afford the heating bill now, I choose the latter every time.”

We fell into easy reminiscence after that. We traded stories about our time at London South Bank University, argued about which classroom building was the most haunted, complained about the lousy dormitories with their radiators that sang opera, and debated which professor had been the hottest—a title which Leo insisted, with baffling conviction, went to Dr Armitage, the sixty-something geology lecturer with an uncanny resemblance to a startled owl.

Before I knew it, our plates were clean. We ordered dessert, and I was pleasantly surprised to see Leo’s eyes light up at the sight of the chocolate profiteroles.

“I didn’t peg you for a dessert person,” I teased.

“What can I say?” he said, a little shyly, pushing his fringe back. “I have a catastrophic sweet tooth. And it’s the weekend, so I’m allowing myself a cheat day. Just one, though. Got to keep this figure for the... you know, the job.”

“You look perfectly fine to me,” I said, and the words brought back a hazy, alcohol-fuelled memory of the first time we’d met. I’d been too drunk to remember most of the lap dance, but the sensory imprint of running my hands over the hard, defined planes of his stomach was one my fingers had apparently filed away for safekeeping.

When the bill came, Leo immediately reached for his worn leather wallet. “Let’s go halves, yeah? This was... a lot more than a bag of chips.”

“Absolutely not,” I said firmly, taking the leather folder. “I said it was my treat.”

But as I opened it, the waiter glided over. “That won’t be necessary, Miss Galloway. Senior executives of Velos Capital have a house account with us. The company will take care of the bill. We just need your signature.”

“Oh,” I said, momentarily thrown. “I didn’t know that.”

A warm little glow of professional privilege spread through me.

Leo let out a low whistle. “Must be nice, working for a massive company like that. How’d you even land a job like that?”

“I saw they were hiring and sent in my CV,” I said with a shrug. “The usual story.”

He shook his head, a bemused smile playing on his lips. “It’s just wild, though. Your degree’s in landscape architecture, right? And now you’re some high-ranking executive. It’s quite the leap.”

There was something in his tone, a faint note of disbelief, that prickled at me. It was the subtle implication that a girl with my background had no business in that corner office.

He must have sensed my silent frost because he hastened to add, “No, I just mean, it’s brilliant! It shows that you don’t always have to stick to your degree subject, you know? That real talent will out. It gives the rest of us who picked, well, let’s be honest, fairly useless degrees, a bit of hope.”

“Yeah, well,” I said, the words coming out clipped. “I was already working in a similar role at another company before this.”

“It’s just amazing,” he continued, either oblivious or choosing to ignore my closed-off posture. “You’re only, what, three years older than me? And you’ve already climbed so high, while I’m still stressing about my midterm essays. I bet your first job wasn’t just entry-level, either.”

I had no desire to talk about my current job, and even less to discuss my previous one, which was inextricably linked to a certain ex-husband.

I stood up. “Let’s go.”

As we stepped out onto the pavement, the cool night air was a bracing shock after the restaurant’s cloistered warmth.

Leo, maybe in a bid to recover, turned to me. “Well, since you’ve been so generous, let me treat you to a film. I know a place.”

He led me to a tiny, independent cinema tucked down a Soho side street. “A mate of mine runs the projector here,” he explained as he paid for our tickets.

We watched a re-release of an old French romance. The protagonist was a starving painter in Montmartre, which felt a little on the nose.

“That’s the dream,” Leo whispered to me halfway through, pointing at the screen where the artist was mixing paints in a sun-drenched garret. “Minus the whole dying of tuberculosis part. I could do without that.”

Later, walking along the Thames embankment with the city lights glittering on the black water, he let out a long, weary sigh. “Paint is bloody expensive, you know? A single tube of decent cobalt blue costs more than my weekly food budget. Modigliani died broke. Van Gogh sold one painting in his lifetime. Sometimes I think I’m completely mad for even trying.”

“You’re not mad,” I said softly, my breath misting in the cold air. “You’re passionate. It’s... admirable.” And I meant that, too.

If I hadn’t met Cary, if Mum hadn’t got sick and the medical bills hadn’t started piling up... maybe that would be me. Struggling, yes, but free. Free to make messes and mistakes. Free in a way I hadn’t been in years.

“What about you, Hyacinth?” Leo stopped and turned to look at me, his eyes reflecting the fractured gold of the city lights. “What’s your dream? You studied landscape architecture. Do you ever dream of designing gardens for stately homes? For royalty?”

I opened my mouth. A polite, deflecting answer was right there.

But nothing came out.

.

.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 269

Chapter 269:

The question had struck a chord so deep and so dormant I'd forgotten it was there.

My dream? When Mum got sick, my dream became simply "keeping her alive." Then it became "surviving Cary." Now... now my dream was just leaving that life behind and keeping my head above water in this new one.

A dream felt like a luxury I hadn't been able to afford in a very, very long time.

"I don't think I have one anymore."

Leo looked at me with those big, soulful artist's eyes, full of a pity that made me want to squirm. "That's the saddest thing I've ever heard."

I forced a laugh, the sound brittle in the night air, and pulled out my phone. "Let's not get maudlin. Can you hand me the ticket stubs? A memento of a lovely night."

I snapped a picture of our smiley faces and our hands holding the little slips of paper and posted it to my story.

Proof of a normal life. See? I can do this.

We walked back towards Lauderdale Tower, a comfortable silence settling between us.

"You know," Leo said, kicking a pebble along the pavement, "I really needed this tonight. The club... it drains you. Being looked at like a piece of meat for cash. It's nice to just be seen as a person for a change."

"I know the feeling," I said, the ghosts of Toby Saltzman's and a dozen other men's leers flickering at the edge of my memory.

We were crossing a dimly lit side street when an electric delivery bike whipped around the corner. It was silent and unnervingly fast, mounting the kerb directly in our path with a sudden, terrifying urgency.

“Look out!” Leo’s arm shot out, grabbing my waist and yanking me back with a force that stole my breath.

We stumbled, colliding with a cold, cast-iron lamp post, his body pressing me against the metal to shield me from impact. The biker sped off into the night without a backward glance.

“Are you okay?” Leo breathed, his face inches from mine.

His body was warm and solid against me, radiating a youthful, frantic energy.

“I’m fine,” I whispered.

The initial shot of adrenaline was fading, leaving a strange, buzzing tension in its wake—a static charge in the air between us.

It was the perfect movie moment. He was handsome, he was kind, he had just saved me from being mown down by a soulless machine, and now he was looking at my lips with a hopeful, questioning intensity.

He leaned in.

I closed my eyes and let him kiss me.

His lips were soft, hesitant at first, then growing more eager. It was a nice kiss. A perfectly adequate, pleasant, even sweet kiss.

But my brain didn’t register “nice.”

Instead, it flashed back to the villa in Madeira. To a bathroom filled with steam. To Lochlan’s mouth crashing against mine with a hard, desperate, consuming hunger that had terrified and thrilled me in equal measure.

I pulled back gently, forcing a smile onto lips that still tingled with a memory far more potent than the present reality. “We’re nearly there.”

Leo looked a little dazed, but happy. He took my hand as we walked the final block to the Tower.

When we reached the lobby, Leo stopped dead, his eyes widening as he took in the expanse of marble floors, the glittering chandelier, the impeccably uniformed doorman standing sentry.

“Whoa,” he muttered, his voice full of undisguised awe. “You live here?”

“Corporate perk,” I said.

.
. .
.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 270

Chapter 270:

We stood awkwardly by the revolving doors, pretending not to notice the doorman’s discreet, appraising gaze.

“So,” Leo said, scuffing his shoe on the pristine marble. “This was great.”

“It was,” I agreed, and it had been, for the most part.

I hesitated. I knew what the protocol was, what Portia would be screaming at me to do from the sidelines. I should ask him up. A nightcap. Get him out of your system, she’d say. Use the Magnums.

I looked at him. He was sweet. He was cute. Maybe this was exactly what I needed. A normal, uncomplicated shag with a normal, uncomplicated man. A reset button.

“Leo, would you like to—” I began.

“I’ve learned a new dance routine,” he said at the exact same time.

We looked at each other and both smiled, the tension broken.

“New routine?” I asked.

“Yeah.” He nodded, pushing his fringe back with that characteristic flick. “For the... club, you know. A cowboy theme. They call it the Lonesome Rider.”

I pictured it instantly. Leo in low-slung jeans, a leather waistcoat, wielding a lasso. The slow saddle grind, the shedding of clothes piece by piece until he was wearing nothing but

a cowboy hat and a pair of boots. My pulse picked up a treacherous, interested beat, and I gulped. “That sounds... nice.”

“Maybe I could show you?” he said, looking at the floor. “You could, you know, give me some feedback. In private.”

I nodded, my decision made. “Okay. Yes. Why don’t we—”

My phone rang.

I checked the screen. LOCHLAN.

I groaned internally but answered. “Good evening, boss.”

“Where are you?” His voice was clipped.

“I’m home, at the Tower. Why? What’s going on?”

“We have a security flag. A Priority One alert. Suspicious login activity on your corporate account.”

“What? I haven’t touched my work laptop or my phone in the past two hours. How could—”

“I need you at the office. Now. I’m sending Roy. He’s two minutes away.”

“But I’m with—”

“This is not a discussion, Hyacinth.” The line went dead.

Damn it. Damn it all to hell.

I looked back at Leo, who was watching me with a hopeful expression.

“I’m so sorry,” I said, wincing. “Work emergency. A proper five-alarm fire. I have to go. Right now.”

“Oh.” His face fell. “Right. Of course. Some other time, then?”

“Of course, yes, definitely,” I said, already turning away. “I’ll call you.”

I turned and ran towards the waiting black sedan that had just pulled up to the kerb.

“Evening, Hyacinth,” Roy greeted me as I slid into the back seat.

“Evening, Roy.” I caught my breath. “What’s going on? What’s this all about?”

-
-
-
-

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 271

Chapter 271:

Roy shrugged, his eyes on the road as he pulled away from the kerb. “No idea. Boss just told me to pick you up and drive you to the office. But it must be urgent, judging from his tone.”

I pulled out my phone and tapped on the V-Link icon. It was the secure intranet we used to access files remotely, login via fingerprint or password. I was pretty damned sure I hadn’t so much as glanced at it since stepping out of the office that afternoon.

I burst into Lochlan’s office twenty minutes later, slightly breathless and feeling decidedly abnormal. “Boss? What’s happened?”

Lochlan was sitting behind his vast desk, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. “We caught the anomalous activity in time. Sit down. We need to reset your credentials and review the access logs.”

The head of IT, a severe-looking woman in her fifties named Brenda whose stare could probably freeze a running processor, held out a hand.

I wordlessly handed her my phone, feeling like a chastened pupil in the principal’s office. She plugged it into a laptop and started typing at a speed that bordered on the violent.

I watched her, a nervous, sick feeling churning in the pit of my stomach. This was bad. This was the kind of bad that got people escorted from the building by security, their personal effects in a cardboard box. Or worse, sued into a smouldering crater.

“Boss, I swear I never told anyone my password,” I said to Lochlan. “I’m meticulous about it.”

“I do not believe you were negligent,” he said, his gaze still fixed on his own monitor. The calm, uninflected certainty in his voice was somehow more alarming than anger would have been.

After a few more minutes of furious typing, Brenda spun her laptop around with a flourish. “Right. Got it.”

The screen was lit up with a stark, alarming red header: V-LINK CONNECT SECURITY ALERT.

Unusual Login Detected (IP Address: 77.231.89.XXX — Traced to Unsecured Public Network, North London).

Last Accessed Files: [CONFIDENTIAL] Velos Capital — Mount Anvil Revised Bid Strategy
[CONFIDENTIAL] Clarendon Properties — Client 10-K Financial Database
[CONFIDENTIAL] Preliminary Bid — Blue Capital Holdings Acquisition

Login Time: 20:05 GMT.

I stared at the screen, the words swimming before my eyes.

20:05. What was I doing at 8:05 p.m.?

I was walking home with Leo.

“Luckily,” Brenda announced, “whoever it was didn’t get past the first gate. They tried to access these files, but the confidential ones require a separate password. They didn’t have time to crack it. I saw the system flag the attempt and shut down the access remotely before they could do any real damage.”

Lochlan gave a curt nod. “Excellent work, Brenda. Thank you for coming in on a Friday night. This will be reflected in your next review.”

She beamed, a terrifying sight. “No problem, boss. This is more fun than my Friday night telly, to be honest.”

She turned her frosty gaze to me. “Right then, let’s get you sorted. We’ll change your password, eh? And for next time, I’d strongly recommend using the fingerprint lock exclusively. That password of yours... a date, was it? Doesn’t seem to be your birthday, though. You wouldn’t make a rookie mistake like that. What was it?”

I thought of the password I’d set in a moment of bitter triumph—the date Cary finally signed the divorce papers. I felt my cheeks grow warm. “Just change it,” I said, avoiding the question.

She helped me set up a new, fortress-strength fingerprint lock and downloaded a firewall app that looked like it could defend against a cybernetic siege. “Bring your laptop in on Monday, and I’ll give it the once-over. Right ho, I’ll shove off then.” She packed her things with the same brutal efficiency and left.

Suddenly, it was just me and Lochlan in the vast, silent office.

I swallowed, the sound unnaturally loud. “I’m sorry, boss. I truly don’t know how this could have happened.”

“It’s fine,” he said, leaning back in his chair. “This is not the first time someone has tried to access our files. Velos Capital has its fair share of enemies.”

I still felt terrible. “Could Brenda trace who did it?”

“The login IP was traced to an internet café with public, unsecured wifi. It could have been anyone.”

“I swear I’ll be more careful,” I said, the words feeling useless.

“Hyacinth.”

I braced myself, my mind racing through the consequences. A formal warning. A dock in salary. Please, just don’t fire me, I prayed silently to the gods of corporate mercy.

“I’m sorry your date was interrupted.”

What?

Of all the things I was expecting him to say, that was at the very bottom of the list.

“Oh. It’s... it’s fine,” I managed, thrown completely off balance.

Lochlan seemed to hesitate. “Forgive me for prying, but how much do you know about this man Leo?”

A part of me wondered how he knew Leo’s name. Had I mentioned it before? I couldn’t remember.

“Not much, to be honest,” I admitted. “We’ve met a couple of times. Went for coffee. Tonight was the first proper date.”

Something in the careful, neutral tone of his voice made a cold dread trickle down my spine. “You don’t think... Leo has something to do with this, do you?”

I hastened to defend him, the words tumbling out. “I don’t think so, boss. Leo doesn’t even know I work for you, not specifically. And I never let him touch my phone. I sure as hell didn’t tell him my password.”

Lochlan stopped me with a gentle, raised hand. “I’m not casting suspicions. I’m merely observing that the timing of the login is highly coincidental, don’t you think?”

.
.br/.

Chapter 272:

“Well, yes,” I said, “but I’m a hundred per cent sure he was with me at that exact time. He wasn’t even on his phone. Besides, we were near Lauderdale Tower, hundreds of miles away from that IP address. And he’s an art student, for God’s sake. I doubt he’d know the first thing about hacking.”

Lochlan looked at me for a long, unreadable moment. “I see.” He stood. “We are done for the night. Let me drive you home.”

“No, thank you, it’s fine, Roy can—”

“I’ve sent Roy home. I have already pulled him away from his family long enough on a Friday night.”

“Oh. Right. I can just grab an Uber,” I said, my company car sitting uselessly in the garage at the Tower.

“It’s on my way,” he said, in a tone that brooked no argument.

He led the way out of the office before I could protest further.

As he passed me, I caught a scent. Fresh cologne.

Come to think of it, boss was dressed too nicely for a Friday night spent wrestling with firewalls. The crisp, dark shirt, the perfectly tailored trousers. No tie, but that was practically casual for him.

Had he been on a date too?

I got into the front passenger seat of his Continental GT, the leather sighing as I sat down. It felt deeply unnatural, like I’d accidentally taken the throne. Being chauffeured by Roy

was one thing; being driven by the big boss himself was another level of corporate weirdness. I felt like I should be taking notes or at least offering to navigate.

He pulled out into the London night, the city lights streaking the windows with liquid gold. The silence was thick enough to chew.

“So,” he began, his eyes fixed on the road. “How was your night?”

Ah, the obligatory small talk.

“It was fine,” I said, aiming for a breezy tone that probably landed somewhere near mildly constipated. “We went out to dinner, then a film, you know, the usual.”

“I see,” he said. And he said it in that way of his, where two simple words could convey an entire encyclopaedia of unspoken judgement. I see that you engage in pedestrian courtship rituals. I see that your taste in men is questionable. I see that you are a mere mortal with a mundane social life.

I searched for a topic less awkward than my love life. “So, who do you think hacked my phone?”

“I have several suspects in mind. I will look into it.” He glanced over, his profile sharp in the dashboard glow. “And it was not your fault. Don’t think that for a moment.”

His reassurance was so blunt it was almost comforting.

“I was just thinking about the first file the hacker tried to access. Do you think it could be... Mayfair Global?”

“I have considered that, but it seems unlikely.”

I thought about it and had to agree. Cary had turned down Lochlan’s—or rather, my—stringent terms for the restructured loan and gone somewhere else. He’d have no use for our file.

Unless...

“What if he’s after our proprietary risk analysis and valuation model?” I thought out loud. “The restructured loan terms we offered him had a significantly raised interest rate. That might have led him to think we know something more about the project’s risk than he does. That there are things we’re not telling him. He might want to find out for himself from the files.”

Lochlan was silent for a moment, his hands flexing on the wheel. “That is possible,” he conceded. “Do you know if Cary has the means to carry out such an attack?”

I shrugged. “My work back at Mayfair Global revolved mostly around scheduling his meetings and picking up his dry cleaning. It didn’t bring me into much contact with the IT department. If he has someone capable of such cyber-espionage, I wouldn’t know.” I paused, trying not to make it sound personal. “But I wouldn’t put it past him. Cary hates losing, and the fact that we—that Velos Capital—gained the upper hand on the Mount Anvil project must have rankled. I wouldn’t put it past him to want revenge in some form.”

Lochlan nodded. “I’ll put a team on it. We’ll get to the bottom of this.”

We fell into a contemplative silence after that. He drove with a quiet, unnerving competence, and before long, we were pulling up outside my building.

“Goodnight. Thanks for driving me home, boss,” I said, unclipping my seatbelt.

“Goodnight, Hyacinth.”

I stood on the kerb and gave a little wave as the sleek car purred away into the darkness. Leo was, of course, long gone. The memory of our date already felt like a distant one.

I smiled a goodnight at the doorman and went up to the penthouse.

As the lift doors opened, I stepped out and paused.

The living room lights were on.

A cold trickle of unease ran down my spine. I was almost certain I’d turned them off when I’d come home to change.

Cautiously, I stepped past the foyer into the living room, and my hand immediately dived into my clutch, my fingers closing around the cool cylinder of pepper spray. I aimed it at the middle-aged man sitting comfortably on my sofa, watching television and looking very much at home.

He had a full head of silvering hair and a bearing that was vaguely, naggingly familiar.

“Who the hell are you?” I demanded, aiming the spray like a gun at him.

The man turned his head, startled, then stood. “Who are you?” he countered, looking more bemused than threatened.

“I live here. You’re the one on my sofa. I’m calling the police.”

“No need, no need,” he said, holding up his hands in a placating gesture. A wide, charming smile spread across his face. “I’m your boyfriend’s father.” He actually had the nerve to wink. “Maybe your future father-in-law.”

I blinked. “What the hell?”

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 273

Chapter 273:

He struck a pose, patting his stomach. “Ignore the belly, just focus on the face. Look at the aristocratic profile. Don’t you think my son takes after me?”

My grip on the pepper spray tightened. “Who the hell is your son?”

“Why, Lochlan, of course.”

“What?” The word came out as a squawk.

“Um,” he said, his confidence faltering for the first time. “Aren’t you his girlfriend?”

I lowered the spray a few inches. “No, I’m not. He’s my boss.”

“I knew that,” he said. “But I thought... well, guess I thought wrong.”

“What made you think I’m his girlfriend?” I asked.

He swept an arm around the living room. “This is his place. I thought since you obviously have access to this place, you must’ve moved in with him.”

“What, no. This is... yeah, boss—I mean, Mr Hastings—did live here, but he’s moved out. He’s given this corporate flat to me.”

“Corporate flat?” he repeated, a chuckle bubbling in his voice.

“Yeah, it’s a company perk. Why?”

“Nothing, dear. Nothing at all.” He chuckled again.

“Can I ask what you are doing here?”

“Well, Loch has so many properties, it’s hard to keep track. I thought he was still staying here, came to have a talk with him, but it turned out I was wrong. Sorry to barge in like that, but my palmprint’s still in the system, and I got in fine. That’s why I thought, you know, he still lives here. I’ll ask the building manager to remove my prints from the system.”

I nodded.

He took out his phone and dialed, then turned the screen to me. Lochlan's face appeared, the arch in his eyebrows evident even from where I was standing.

"Loch, my boy! Why didn't you tell me you've moved out of Lauderdale Tower? I came here tonight to surprise you but must've given this lovely girl here a fright."

I waved at the screen with an awkward smile. "Hi, boss."

Lochlan's voice was clipped. "Hang on." He slowed the car to a kerb, then focused his attention back on the call. "Father, get out of there. I told you I'm at Lonsdale Tower."

"Well, how was I supposed to know? It sounds just like Lauderdale. Maybe you should've written it down."

"Hyacinth, my apologies," Lochlan said, his gaze shifting to me.

"It's fine," I managed.

"I love what you've done with the place," Lochlan's father interjected cheerfully. He tilted his chin at the two large, framed anatomical diagrams of a man and a woman on the wall right behind the television and winked. "Bold choice. Very educational."

"Thank you," I said drily. "My friend did that."

He laughed, a great booming sound that seemed to fill the room. "I'd sure love to meet your friend!"

"Father," Lochlan's voice cut through, raised and firm. "Get out of there. Stop harassing my employee."

"Fine, fine, I'm on my way out."

"Goodnight, um, Mr Hastings," I said, hoping to speed the process along.

"Please, call me Holden." He stopped at the threshold and turned back to me, his eyes twinkling with mischief. "Why don't you come over for dinner tomorrow?"

I was too surprised to form a coherent refusal.

"It's my sister's birthday," he continued. "Just a small family thing at the house. It'll be fun. Lots of food, great company. Say, seven o'clock?" He didn't wait for an answer. "Marvelous. I'll have Loch pick you up. See you then."

Then he was gone.

I stood in the living room, still holding the pepper spray, so, so confused.

.
.br/.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 274

Chapter 274:

My phone rang.

“Hi, boss,” I answered.

“My apologies again. My father can be a bit... overfamiliar sometimes,” Lochlan said.

“It’s fine. He seems nice, actually.” I took a breath. “He, um, he invited me to dinner tomorrow. At your house. For your aunt’s birthday. I don’t think it’s such a good idea, boss. I mean, it’s clearly a family occasion. It’s very nice of him to ask, but I don’t want to intrude.”

“You should come.”

“What?”

“My father doesn’t give up easily. If you say no, he’ll just continue to hound you until you cave. It’s a trait that served him well in business and has, unfortunately, been carried over to his personal life.”

“Um, can’t you just tell him no for me?”

“If it were only that easy,” he replied, and I could almost hear the weary sigh he was too polite to vocalize.

“But—”

“Do you have plans tomorrow?”

“No, but—”

“Then would you please come? As a favour to me. If you don’t, he’s just going to pester me incessantly. And he hasn’t made his millions by giving up easily. Besides, my Aunt Agnes’s cook, Elara, will be preparing the meal. She’s a culinary artist. I’m told her beef Wellington is a religious experience, and her lemon tart could broker world peace.”

Damn it. Boss sure knew my weakness. My stomach gave a small, interested gurgle at the mere description.

Out loud, I said, “Still, I don’t think... I mean... I don’t even know your aunt. I don’t have a gift for her birthday. It’s awkward.”

“I will prepare the gift,” he said smoothly.

I didn’t know what else to say. The path of least resistance was suddenly paved with promises of exquisite food.

“Hyacinth, please.”

The “please” did it.

“Alright,” I said, the word tasting of defeat and, God help me, a little bit of anticipation.

“Thank you. I will pick you up at five thirty. Good night, Hyacinth.”

“Good night.”

I hung up and stared at my phone. A family dinner with the boss’s family. What could possibly go wrong?

I spent a restless night tossing and turning, my mind cycling through a highlight reel of potential disasters. I imagined a woman with glacial poise who would assess my every syllable and find it wanting, a dinner table the size of a small aircraft carrier, and me using the wrong fork for the fish course, if there even was a fish course.

Holden seemed lovely, in a force-of-nature kind of way, but what about Lochlan’s mother? She was probably a former ballerina or a retired spy who collected rare orchids and judged people based on the alignment of their cutlery.

Saturday morning found me in the gym, pounding a treadmill as if I could outrun my own poor decisions.

The afternoon was worse—a torturous session of standing in front of my wardrobe, agonizing over what to wear. How does one dress for “small family thing” when the family in question could probably buy and sell several small nations? Smart casual? Was that a dress? Trousers? How much makeup was too much? Too little? Did “great company” mean I had to be witty?

I could feel a nervous sweat breaking out just thinking about it.

I was midway through holding a black dress against myself and pulling a face in the mirror, contemplating whether it screamed “sophisticated employee” or “trying too hard,” when my phone rang.

Lochlan’s name flashed on the screen.

My heart did a little flip-flop of panic. This was it. My last chance to back out. I would feign a sudden, violent stomach flu. I could even make retching sounds if necessary.

I took a deep breath and answered.

“Boss, hi,” I said, my voice a little too high. “I was just about to call you, I’m feeling a bit—”

He cut me off. “Hyacinth, there’s been an emergency. A situation has arisen at the Cambrian Mountains. You’ll have to come with me.”

.
.br/>.

Chapter 275:

“Right then. Your boy, Leo. Real name’s Jason Rivers. Twenty-two. Fine Arts student at London South Bank.”

I stared at the photo he had cued up. Hyacinth, smiling in a carefree, unguarded way she never did at the office, was holding up two film ticket stubs. Next to her, “Leo” grinned with wholesome, boy-band charm.

“Pays the bills by taking his clothes off at a club called The Bronze Standard,” Kol continued. “Parents vanished when he was eighteen. He’s the sole provider for his twelve-year-old sister. No other relatives on the radar. He’s devoted to the sister.” He glanced at his notes. “Clean record, mostly.”

“Mostly?”

“Petty theft. Shoplifting, mostly. A few tins of premium paint from an art store, some groceries. Got caught twice, received a warning both times. No jail. More desperate than malicious, by the look of it.”

A cold, metallic taste of rage coated my tongue.

She had sworn off billionaires because we were supposedly too much trouble, too corrupting. Yet she was dating a petty thief who stripped for a living because he was, what, more authentic?

Kol concluded, “No evidence I’ve found yet that links him to the hacking, but I’m still looking. There was a deposit of five thousand pounds into his account about a week after he met Ms Galloway. Unusual, for a student in his circumstances.”

“Did you track down the origin of the funds?”

“My team’s still tracing it. I’ll let you know the moment we have a source.”

“Keep an eye on him. Inform me immediately if he attempts to contact Hyacinth again.”

“Will do, boss.” He stood, gave a mock salute that I chose to ignore, and left the room.

I stood and walked to the window, looking out at the grey London skyline. The clouds hung low and leaden, threatening snow. The weather mirrored my mood with unoriginal fidelity.

Cameron entered after a single knock. He handed me another tablet without a word.

I studied the images. Photos of Toby Saltzman’s villa in Ponta do Sol. Men enjoying lap dances from entirely naked women. Close-ups of men with their mouths around dancers’ nipples, of women kneeling between spread legs.

This was the scene that had so disgusted Hyacinth she had fled.

I wondered what she would think if she saw what was upstairs.

I swiped through more photos. The second floor was a series of themed rooms. One had mirrors on the ceiling, another featured a St Andrew’s cross and an array of S&M props, others were littered with sex toys of every conceivable design.

The third floor was more of the same, with the added element of drugs arranged on silver platters like canapés at a hellish garden party.

Cameron spoke, his tone flat. “We have identified most of the guests at the party upstairs. Here are their dossiers.”

I flipped through the digital files. Sir James Althorpe, MP. Richard Vance, media mogul. Count von Hessler, German industrialist. A handful of powerful journalists and so-called influencers.

Almost all had been quietly bailed out after the police raid.

I wasn't necessarily going to use this material for overt blackmail, but it was advantageous to have it. When the time came to expand Velos Capital, these dossiers would ensure certain doors opened without unnecessary resistance.

"How's Saltzman?" I asked.

"He's posted bail and is unlikely to go to trial. As you know, the country has decriminalized the possession of drugs. His lawyer will argue the quantity was for personal consumption, not trafficking."

I sneered. "Hundreds of tablets for personal consumption? He'd have to be consuming them until he's a hundred and fifty to justify that volume."

Cameron said nothing. He wasn't a man to venture personal opinions, which was one of the reasons I valued him.

"Send a copy of the more salacious photos to his wife. Anonymously, of course."

That would ensure that even after Toby escaped a prison sentence, he'd be far too busy salvaging his marriage to contemplate coming after me.

Cameron nodded. "Yes, boss."

The clock on the wall ticked to eleven. The office building was empty. I went to the breakroom to make my own coffee.

While waiting for the machine to finish its slow, gurgling work, I transferred a generous tip to Noel Pritchett. The building manager at Lauderdale Tower had reliably relayed the doorman's message to me last night, allowing me to intercept Hyacinth at the most opportune moment. His discretion was a commodity, and I paid accordingly.

When I returned to my office, I found my seat occupied.

"Father. What are you doing here?"

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 276

Chapter 276:

"I should ask you that," Holden said, swiveling in my chair with a child's delight. "It's Saturday. What are you doing here in the office?"

“I have work.”

“I know, but work’s never finished. You’re not a robot.” He leaned forward. “Did you speak to Hyacinth? Is she coming tonight?”

“She agreed, reluctantly. You put her in a difficult position.”

“Nonsense. I’m helping you. You like her. I can tell.”

“She’s my employee.”

“Do you give all your employees the use of your penthouse?” he countered, a knowing glint in his eye. “Which, by the way, she still believes is a standard corporate perk.”

That observation silenced me.

“She’s a catch. And you need to move fast, son,” Holden said, his tone losing its jocular edge. “Because tonight isn’t merely a birthday dinner for Agnes.”

I narrowed my eyes. “What have you done?”

“Not me. Your mother. She’s getting tired of what she calls your ‘procrastination.’ Says you’ve been evaluating the market without placing a bid for too long. So she’s taken matters into her own hands.”

“What do you mean, ‘taken matters’?”

“She’s invited the girls from that candidate pool you didn’t reject outright. You know, the ones from the file. She’s determined to make you choose one tonight.” He chuckled. “Says you’re not leaving the house until you’ve picked one.”

My jaw tightened. “I’m not doing that. She can’t make me.”

“I know, I know. I tried to talk her out of it. But you know how stubborn your mother is. You get that streak from her, son. That’s why I asked Hyacinth to come. Strategic play, see? If she sees so many women vying for your attention, she’s bound to get a bit prickly. And I don’t need to tell you, jealousy is the best catalyst. Lights a fire under everyone.”

“No. She won’t be jealous. She’ll be disgusted.”

I could already see it: Hyacinth’s sharp eyes taking in the line of women, her mouth tightening with that specific disdain she reserved for the wealthy. She would see my mother’s orchestrated pageant and lump me in with every other privileged man who allowed women to be paraded for his approval.

It would confirm every cynical belief she held about people like us.

“Any reaction’s better than no reaction at all,” Holden argued.

Before I could dismantle his flawed logic, my phone rang.

The caller ID showed Stefan St John, the operations manager for our renewable energy portfolio. A weekend call was never good news.

“Hastings,” I answered.

“Sir, sorry to bother you on a Saturday, but we have a critical incident,” Stefan said, his voice strained. “Turbine seven at Black Ridge has thrown a blade. It took out the substation for the entire northern array. We have a full site blackout and a significant debris field. The local council and the Health and Safety Executive are demanding immediate answers.”

“I’m on my way,” I said. “Secure the perimeter. No press, no council officials on site until I’m there.”

“Oh, I was just reporting in, sir. You don’t have to come down yourself. We can manage the initial—”

“I’ll be there,” I repeated. “Have all the inspection reports and supplier contracts ready.”

“Understood, sir.”

I hung up and grabbed my coat.

Holden raised an eyebrow. “Trouble?”

“Catastrophic failure at the wind farm. It requires a decision on the ground.”

I shrugged into my coat.

“Can’t they just fix it? Do you really have to go?”

“If I don’t, the site director will dither for a week while the costs spiral and the story leaks. My presence forces action.” I was already striding towards the door, dialing Cameron. “Please tell Mother I’m sorry I won’t make it to dinner.”

Cameron answered on the first ring. “Sir?”

“Prep the helicopter at Battersea immediately. Destination is the Black Ridge operations base in the Cambrian Mountains. File for a direct route. I’ll be there in twenty minutes.”

“Understood. It will be ready.”

I ended the call, my thumb hovering over Hyacinth's contact.

•
•
•

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 277

Chapter 277:

Roy drove me to the heliport at Battersea with the serene focus of a man who considered navigating London traffic a form of meditation. I, on the other hand, was vibrating with a low-grade, surreal anxiety.

One moment I'm contemplating which earrings scream "I'm a fun, normal person who won't embarrass you in front of your wealthy relatives," the next I'm being whisked towards a private airfield because a billion-pound fan has broken in Wales.

The corporate life, I reflected, was never dull. It was, however, deeply weird.

Minutes later, I was buckling myself into the butter-soft leather seat of an AgustaWestland AW139 that probably cost more than my entire neighbourhood.

Lochlan was already there. He'd traded his usual Savile Row armour for a thick, charcoal cable-knit jumper and a heavy, waxed jacket that looked like it had been inherited from a particularly stylish fisherman.

He looked... rugged. Practical. Competent.

It was an outrage, frankly. A man shouldn't be allowed to look that good in a boardroom and in what essentially amounted to mountain-man chic. It did terrible, traitorous things to my pulse, which was already skipping ahead without my permission.

"I apologize for the abrupt change of plans and for ruining your Saturday evening," he said, his voice calm over the growing whine of the engines.

“Don’t be silly,” I shouted back, forcing a grin that felt a bit manic. “It’s my job. Crisis management is in the job description, right after ‘fetch coffee.’”

Besides, he’d saved me from the seven-circle hellscape of a Hastings family dinner audition.

Lochlan gave a tight nod, which I translated from Boss-Speak to mean, “Your attempt at levity is noted and appreciated.”

Then he did something that made my carefully constructed grin freeze solid.

He moved forward—not to the plush passenger seat next to me, but into the pilot’s cockpit, slipping on a headset.

“Hang on,” I blurted out, leaning forward. “Are you... flying this thing?”

He glanced back, his hands already moving over switches with ease. “Yes. The scheduled pilot is stuck in traffic and would not make it here for another two hours. The weather window is closing.”

“Right. Brilliant. And you’re... qualified for this model?” I asked, aiming for casual and landing squarely in panicky interrogation.

“I am,” he said, his voice a study in placid assurance. “Please ensure your harness is secure. We will be taking off shortly.” He turned back, speaking to the control tower in a stream of calm, technical jargon.

A small part of me was worried. I’d seen him dissect a financial report, but what did I know about his airborne abilities? For all I knew, his pilot’s licence was a gift from his father for his tenth birthday, tucked between a pony and a small island.

The helicopter lifted off with a stomach-lurching surge, banking sharply towards the west. The London skyline sprawled beneath us like a glittering grey and gold model, shrinking with unnerving speed.

It was breathtaking. And also nauseating. My knuckles were probably leaving permanent indentations in the leather.

Once we were level, he handed a tablet back to me. “The file on the Black Ridge project is loaded. Familiarize yourself with the details. It will help when we are on site.”

Right. Work. The anchor of normality.

I clutched the tablet like a talisman and started to read.

The Black Ridge wind farm in the Cambrian Mountains was, as I knew, one of Velos Capital's new trophy projects. Government subsidies, guaranteed off-take contracts, the works. The internal rate of return projections were eye-watering, flirting with triple digits.

- .
- .
- .

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 278

Chapter 278:

No wonder Lochlan was personally scrambling to deal with a broken blade.

I tried to focus on the numbers, but my attention kept drifting. The view from the window was astonishing—a patchwork of fields and winding rivers under a vast, dramatic sky. And then to the dark, bruised-looking clouds massing on the horizon like an angry mob.

They seemed to be getting closer rather faster than I would have liked.

For a while, the journey was deceptively smooth. Just the thrum of the rotor, the stark beauty of the landscape below, and the silent, focused presence of the man flying us. It was almost peaceful, if you ignored the fundamental insanity of the situation.

Then, with the swift, vindictive force of a slap, everything changed.

The first sign was a sudden, violent jolt that slammed my teeth together. The sky, which had been a gloomy grey, turned an opaque, swirling white in the space of a minute. Snow, thick and furious, smeared itself across the windscreen. The helicopter, which had felt as solid as a rock, began to buck and shudder like a spooked horse.

“Okay,” I said aloud, to nobody in particular. “That’s not ideal.”

Lochlan’s voice came through the headset, still calm, but with a new, razor-sharp edge of concentration. “We are encountering severe weather. The systems indicate this is a localized blizzard cell.”

“Is that... bad?” I asked, my voice sounding embarrassingly thin in my own ears. My heart was trying to jump out of my chest.

“It’s suboptimal,” he replied, which was possibly the most terrifying understatement I had ever heard.

The helicopter dropped suddenly, my stomach lurching into my throat. I let out a very undignified yelp.

“I’m going to attempt to find a clearing and land,” he said, his words clipped. “We can’t outfly this.”

“Land? Where? We’re over mountains!” I squeaked. All I could see was a maelstrom of white.

“There’s a valley to the west. The terrain scanner is still functional. I need you to be quiet now, Hyacinth.”

The command was absolute.

I shut my mouth, biting down on the stream of panic that wanted to erupt. I became a statue, strapped into my expensive leather seat, watching as Lochlan wrestled with the controls. His shoulders were rigid with tension.

The noise was horrific—a deafening roar of wind and engine and protesting metal. Warning lights began to strobe a frantic red on the console, painting his profile in apocalyptic flashes.

This was it. I was going to die in a helicopter crash in Wales with my billionaire boss.

The tabloid headlines wrote themselves. CITY GIRL AND TYCOON IN TRAGIC ALPINE-STYLE DRAMA. They’d probably imply we were having an affair.

Then the helicopter screamed.

It wasn’t just a shudder. It was a violent, metallic shriek of protest as a savage gust caught us broadside. The world outside the windscreen, already a blinding white void, spun in a nauseating cartwheel.

My body was thrown hard against the harness straps, the breath punched from my lungs.

For a horrifying second, we were completely sideways, and all I could see through my window was not sky, but a sheer, dark wall of rock and ice streaking past, terrifyingly close.

The cliff face.

.

•
•
Chapter 279:

It materialized from the blizzard like monstrous teeth of stone, rushing towards us.

There was no time to scream. There was only that yawning, jagged maw of rock and the deafening, juddering scream of the engines as Lochlan fought the controls.

He didn't shout. A raw, guttural sound was torn from him—a fusion of effort and fury—as he hauled back on the cyclic. Every muscle in his arms and back stood out in sharp relief under his jumper.

The helicopter groaned in response, the rotor thrumming with a pitch that promised catastrophic failure.

The cliff face didn't recede. It just loomed larger, a definitive end written in ancient stone.

Time didn't slow. It fractured.

The tail rotor grazed something with a sound like a giant sheet of steel being torn in two. The aircraft yawed violently, the cabin tilting at an impossible angle. My head cracked against the window, a burst of white light behind my eyes.

So this was it. The grand finale.

I always thought I'd have more time, or at least a better backdrop.

The crushing certainty of it was weirdly peaceful. My life didn't flash before my eyes in a poignant montage—just a few stark, insistent images elbowing their way in.

My parents, probably watching some inane telly right now, blissfully unaware their only child was about to become a red smear on a Welsh cliff.

My grandma, who'd outlived two husbands and a war, only to get a phone call about me.

Portia, my best friend, who'd be furious I died in such a clichéd, dramatic way. "Couldn't you have just tripped on the kerb like a normal person?" she'd wail.

I hadn't lived long enough. I hadn't seen the Northern Lights. I hadn't learned to play the cello.

I hadn't told my boss to throw away his kale and just eat a bloody steak, for once in his tragically disciplined life.

A sudden, absurd serenity washed over me. In the face of the granite wall, all the petty grievances dissolved. I forgave Cary.

Just like that.

The cheating, the mercurial temper, the domineering attitude that made me feel like a poorly trained pet. I forgave him for all of it. Because without his money, his connections, his intervention when my mother was sick, she wouldn't be here. And that, in the final calculus, made the rest of the misery worth it.

Funny how imminent obliteration clarifies your priorities.

I glanced at Lochlan, a final look.

The emergency lights cast hellish shadows on his face, highlighting the sheen of sweat on his forehead, the absolute, ferocious concentration as he wrestled physics itself to keep us alive.

A strange pang of sorrow—for him—cut through my own fear. He was trying so hard.

And I felt a sharp, regretful tug of pure lust.

If I'd known this was my last Saturday on earth, I'd have tossed every scrap of professional caution to the howling wind. To hell with what anyone thought. I'd have found out what that mouth tasted like, what those hands felt like without a desk between us.

Too bad I was going to die virginally ignorant of Lochlan Hastings, in the biblical sense. The universe's final, cruel joke.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 280

Chapter 280:

Then, by some miracle of engineering and sheer, stubborn will, the helicopter pulled up.

The scream of the engines reached a new, desperate octave. The rock face, which had filled the entire windscreen, began to slide downwards, replaced by the churning white void of the sky.

We clawed our way up, the machine shuddering as if it would shake itself apart.

The cliff edge vanished beneath us.

Be the first to read on .com

We were over the plateau, but we weren't flying—we were falling with a semblance of control. The descent was a controlled plummet, a stomach-churning drop through the blinding white.

The ground, when it finally appeared, was a vague, snowy slope rushing up to meet us far too fast.

I squeezed my eyes shut, a pathetic, childhood instinct.

There was a colossal jolt, a screech of tearing metal, a sensation of spinning, and then a final, wrenching impact that threw me against my harness hard enough to see a whole new constellation.

Silence.

A deafening, ringing silence, broken only by the howl of the wind outside and the ominous tick-tick-tick of cooling metal.

I was alive.

Miraculously, unbelievably, alive.

The universe, it seemed, had a few more jokes left in it.

I opened my eyes.

The cockpit was canted at a sickening angle. Snow was already beginning to drift in through a cracked window, settling on the digital corpses of the instrument panels.

"Boss?" My voice was a hoarse whisper, barely audible over the ringing in my ears.

He was already moving, unhooking his harness.

"Are you injured?" he asked, turning to look at me. In the eerie glow of the emergency lights, his eyes were dark pools of focused intensity, scanning me for damage.

"I don't think so. Just whiplash, I think. And a profound reassessment of my life choices."

I fumbled with my own harness with trembling fingers, my hands feeling thick and stupid.

"We need to evacuate. The storm's not abating, and the aircraft is not secure."

“We can’t stay here?” I asked, my limbs suddenly weighing a ton. The thought of moving was obscene.

The wind chose that moment to rock the fuselage with a groan, a reminder that our metal cocoon was fragile.

“No. The risk of hypothermia is too great without sustained power for heat. There’s a bothy—a mountain shelter—approximately one mile north-northwest according to the last terrain fix. We need to reach it.”

He reached behind his seat and pulled out two heavy backpacks, handed me one along with a powerful torch. “Put on every layer you have. We will be walking directly into the storm.”

What followed was a special kind of hell.

.
. .

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 281

Chapter 281:

Climbing out of the wrecked helicopter into the full fury of the blizzard was like being punched in the face by winter itself.

The wind stole my breath, a greedy, invisible thief, and the snow, driven horizontally, felt like needles against any exposed skin. I couldn’t see more than two feet in front of me. The world had been reduced to a roaring, white prison.

Lochlan, a dark, solid shape ahead, moved with a grim purpose that was both reassuring and mildly offensive. How dare he be so competent?

He clipped a line between our belts. “Do not let go of this!” he shouted over the gale. “Stay directly behind me!”

The hike was a brutal, surreal nightmare. Every step was a war against physics, a desperate heave through deepening drifts that seemed to suck at my boots with malicious intent. The cold seeped through my fashionable but utterly inadequate wool coat within minutes, a deep, aching chill that whispered promises of numbness and worse.

My mind retreated into a numb, focused rhythm, a mantra for the nearly dead: put one boot in front of the other, follow the rope, follow the dim shape of him.

Just as I was beginning to believe my legs would give out and I would become a permanent, ironic statue in the Cambrian Mountains, the dark shape of a small, stone hut materialized from the white chaos.

The bothy.

It looked like the most beautiful palace in the world. I would have wept with joy if my tear ducts hadn't been frozen shut.

Lochlan wrestled the door open against the wind's resistance and we stumbled inside, collapsing into a heap of snow and exhaustion on the stone floor. He shoved the door shut against the screaming storm, plunging us into a dark, frigid silence so complete it felt like a physical thing.

The only sound was our ragged, synchronized breathing, fogging in the air before us in pathetic little puffs.

We were out of the blizzard. We had not, against all odds, become helicopter-shaped ice sculptures.

The relief was a tidal wave, and in its wake came the delayed shock—a bone-deep tremble that had nothing to do with the temperature. The dread and fear, held at bay by adrenaline, came crashing down belatedly.

We had nearly died. Several times.

"Are you alright?" Lochlan's voice was low, cutting through the silent panic starting to buzz in my ears.

"Fine," I managed, my voice oddly bright. "Couldn't be better. Just topping up my adrenaline reserves. They were getting low."

There was a heavy pause. He mistook the brittle tone for accusation.

"I apologize," he said, the words formal even here, surrounded by stone and howling wind. "For the decision to fly out. I reviewed the meteorological reports. I was aware of the precipitation forecast, but I believed we could outpace the front. It was an error in judgement."

The apology was so stark, so devoid of excuse, it disarmed me.

“It’s fine, really,” I said, meaning it. “I’m not complaining. I’m just... monumentally glad to be alive. Thank you. For not letting us become a modern art installation on that cliff.”

He gave a curt nod, then stood, his movements stiff with cold.

He examined our sanctuary.

It was grim. Bare stone walls wept with damp. A tiny, grimy window was already being reclaimed by the storm outside. An empty, soot-blackened fireplace yawned like a dead mouth. A rough wooden platform promised a night of medieval discomfort.

.
. .
.

Chapter 282:

It was drier than outside, and marginally less windy. That was the sum total of its charms.

He unzipped his backpack and pulled out a crinkly silver thermal blanket. Then he draped it over my shoulders where I still sat in a heap on the floor.

I struggled upright, my muscles protesting. “Thank you.”

“We need to get a fire going.” He turned his attention to the fireplace, peering into its depths with a frown. It was utterly empty, not even a forgotten ash.

I rummaged in the backpack he’d given me. My fingers, clumsy with cold, closed around a solid object. I pulled out a heavy-duty lighter. “We have ignition!” I announced.

“All we require is fuel.” He searched the rest of the cabin, which took all of thirty seconds given it was roughly the size of a generous prison cell.

There was no firewood, no old crates, nothing.

“Stay here,” he said, and before I could muster a protest, he pulled the hood of his jacket up and vanished back out into the white roar.

The door slammed shut behind him, and the silence rushed back in, now feeling oppressive.

I was alone. Truly, utterly alone.

The howl of the wind took on a new, personal menace. I tried to peer through the filthy window, but he was gone, swallowed whole in a matter of seconds.

The torturous slow passing of time began. Every second stretched out, filled with the terrifying possibility that the one solid, capable thing in this chaos had just walked to his death for a handful of twigs.

My bravado shriveled. The cold seeped deeper.

Finally, after an age, the door banged open.

Lochlan—or rather, a snowman who vaguely resembled Lochlan—staggered in, carrying a bundled armful of wet, snow-clad twigs and a few thicker branches.

“Where did you get that?” I asked, amazed.

“I noted a copse of stunted trees approximately two hundred metres to the east during our approach,” he said, dumping his haul by the hearth and shaking off a small avalanche.

I was genuinely impressed. While my brain had been chanting “left foot, right foot, don’t die,” his had been conducting a geographical survey.

We set to work, a silent, shivering team. Picking out the drier twigs was a lesson in optimism, as they were all uniformly drenched. But eventually, with the help of some paper from the depths of the backpacks sacrificed as kindling, we nurtured a tiny, sputtering flame into life.

It wasn’t a fire. It was the idea of a fire, a fragile, dancing orange promise in the gloom.

But it was heat. It was light.

At least now I could see his face in the flickering glow, all sharp planes and soot smudges.

We sat huddled on the dusty rug before the meagre hearth, prisoners of the flame.

Lochlan then pulled the ultimate billionaire survival flex from his backpack: a chunky satellite phone. He dialed, the electronic beeps alien in our stone-age setting.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 283

Chapter 283:

I listened as the call connected.

“Cameron.” His voice was all business. “Yes. The emergency transponder should have activated upon impact. Confirm you have our coordinates.” A pause. “Good. The aircraft is a total loss. We have taken shelter in a bothy at the transmitted location.” Another pause, longer this time, as he listened to the voice on the other end. “Understood. Do not attempt extraction until the storm has fully passed.” A final pause. “Yes. Keep me informed.”

He hung up and looked at me. “The helicopter can’t risk an approach in these conditions. The earliest feasible extraction is tomorrow morning, once the blizzard has moved through.”

“So we just need to tough it out for one night here,” I said, forcing a cheerfulness I didn’t feel. “That’s doable. Hey, I used to sleep out on the beach with nothing but a shovel and a bucket.”

But that was in summer, and I had my cats for company, and my grandma’s warm cabin with the kettle always on was a mere several hundred metres away.

Lochlan nodded, accepting my bravado at face value, and we lapsed into a silence punctuated only by the crackle of our pathetic fire and the relentless moan of the wind.

Dinner was a gourmet affair of chalky protein bars and bottled water, consumed in a state of mutual, exhausted focus. We ate in silence, with the howling wind providing the background music for our dismal feast.

Then, when the last crumb was gone and the water bottles were recapped, the real problem presented itself.

We had only one thermal blanket.

The maths was brutally simple. We would have to huddle together for body heat on the dusty rug in front of the guttering fire.

I could see the hesitation in the rigid line of Lochlan’s shoulders. It was almost endearing, this last-ditch stand of propriety in a stone hut at the end of the world. He was probably mentally reviewing the HR handbook, searching for a clause on appropriate survival cuddling.

Oh, for God’s sake. My teeth were beginning to chatter in earnest.

“Look, it’s fine,” I said. I lifted the edge of the crinkly silver blanket in what I hoped was a no-nonsense invitation. “Get in. Before we both freeze solid and they find us as ice sculptures.”

He moved then, with a stiff economy. He slid under the blanket, lying on his back beside me, maintaining a careful six-inch gap of rug between our bodies.

He was trying so hard to be a gentleman it was physically painful to witness.

We lay there side by side like a pair of corpses awaiting identification, Lochlan’s body so rigid I wondered if he’d somehow started rigor mortis early.

The cold, however, was a democratizing force.

It seeped up from the stone floor and down from the frigid air, bypassing the pathetic barrier of the blanket and attacking my bones directly. My body began to shiver violently. The six-inch gap felt like a yawning chasm of stupidity. My flesh, wiser than my brain, understood that the only source of real heat in the room was currently lying next to me like a plank of offended wood.

Sod this.

Initiative had got me this far in life, and it wasn’t going to fail me now.

I rolled onto my side, closing the mortifying gap, and snuggled up firmly against his side. The solid warmth of him was immediate and profound.

“Boss,” I said, my voice muffled by the blanket and his jacket. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but I kind of desperately need your body heat right now.”

For a moment, he didn’t move.

Then, with a sigh that seemed to come from the very depths of his being, an arm came around me, pulling me closer until I was firmly tucked against him. The rigidity melted, replaced by a tense, conscious effort.

I breathed out, but the bravado was fading, replaced by a shocking, primal awareness.

The length of him was pressed against me. The firm wall of his chest under my shoulder blades, the solid line of his thighs behind mine.

My earlier, deathbed regret flickered to life—a warm, dangerous ember in the pit of my stomach.

Hell. We were alone. We might still die of exposure. There was nobody here to judge, no HR department, no one else would know.

Why shouldn't I?

Emboldened by cold and a sudden, fierce thirst for life, I let my hand, which had been tucked between us for warmth, sneak upward. It slid past the rough waxed canvas of his jacket, under the thick cable-knit of his jumper, until my freezing fingers found the warm, smooth skin of his stomach.

He jerked as if electrocuted, a full-body shiver that had nothing to do with the temperature. A sharp, bitten-off inhale hissed above me.

He didn't push my hand away.

That was all the permission I needed. The floodgates burst.

My earlier, tentative seeking became deliberate exploration. My palm flattened against the hard plane of his abdomen, learning the heat of him.

His own hand, which had been resting cautiously on my arm, slid down, his fingers splaying over my hip, gripping through the layers of my clothes.

Our legs, already close, tangled further—a desperate search for more contact, more warmth that was rapidly transforming into something else entirely.

Our breathing, which had been shallow with cold, grew deeper, more laboured, syncing in the dark, cramped space under the silver shroud.

Suddenly, his voice cut through the thick, heavy silence, strained and oddly formal. "There's something you should know."

My heart stuttered. "What?"

.
. .

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 284

Chapter 284:

"I'm not gay."

I blinked into the darkness. Of all the things he could have said at that moment.

“Oh,” I managed. Then I felt it—the hard, undeniable proof of his statement pressing insistently against the back of my thigh through our layers of clothing.

A hysterical bubble of laughter threatened to escape.

Thank God, I thought.

That little, absurd confession seemed to act as a key, turning in a lock we’d both been pretending didn’t exist.

The careful, glacial pace shattered. His arms tightened around me, rolling me onto my back.

In the faint, dancing firelight, I could see his face above mine. The polite, composed mask was gone, utterly incinerated. He looked at me not as a boss, but with a raw, hungry intensity that stole the air from my lungs. A starving man looking at a feast.

A triumphant, giddy thought soared through me: So I hadn’t imagined it. The attraction, the way he looked at me, the desire... it was real.

His mouth found mine, and any last pretence of gentlemanly distance vanished in the heat of it. This wasn’t a polite exploration—it was a claiming, a reciprocation of a hunger I’d been denying for months.

My hands pushed his jacket off his shoulders, wrestled with the hem of his jumper. He broke the kiss long enough to yank it over his head, and then his skin was under my palms, hot and smooth and alive.

The thermal blanket became our world, a crinkling, silver cocoon shielding our frenzy from the biting cold. Clothes were shed in frantic, awkward pushes and tugs, not discarded so much as strategically relocated to pad the unforgiving floor.

His mouth trailed from my lips to my jaw, my throat, lower. When his lips closed over my nipple, a ragged moan tore from me, the sound swallowed by the howling wind outside. I arched against him, my fingers digging into his shoulders, then sliding down the powerful muscles of his back.

His weight settled over me, a delicious, comforting anchor. I wrapped my legs around his hips, the thin, damp barrier of our last remaining underwear a maddening frustration.

“Boss,” I whispered, a plea and a command.

“Call me Lochlan,” he growled against my skin.

I was lying on the makeshift mattress of our discarded clothes, and a profound sense of rightness settled over me. This should have happened a long time ago. I'd wasted so much time, hiding behind the "billionaire" label, lumping him in with Cary.

But Lochlan was different. I'd known it from the start and fought it every step of the way.

His hand slid between us, his fingers hooking in the lace of my knickers. The sound of the fabric tearing was obscenely loud.

He was going slowly, so slowly—a gentleman even in his desperation—but I didn't want a gentleman now. I needed him, raw and unfiltered.

I reached down between our bodies, my hand closing around him through the cotton of his boxers, feeling the thick, hard length of him. He groaned, a deep, shattered sound, and his hips jerked against my hand.

He was poised at my entrance, the heat of him a brand even through the last shred of fabric, his body trembling with the effort of his control.

Then I heard it.

It was the unmistakable, beating pulse of rotor blades.

A helicopter.

We both froze.

My mind, so wonderfully empty a second before, split into two warring factions. One, the sensible survivor, wanted to whoop with joy. The other, the woman who had just been on the precipice of something catastrophic and glorious, wanted to scream at the sky.

Maybe it's some rich tourist on a disastrous sightseeing tour, I pleaded silently with the universe. Maybe it's a mountain rescue for someone else. Maybe it will fly right past.

But the sound didn't fade. It grew, homing in on our stone refuge with infuriating precision.

Lochlan sighed above me, a sound so soft and resigned I might have imagined it. He straightened, the warmth of his body leaving mine, and the cold came rushing back in a cruel, instant wave.

"It's for us," he said, his voice already shifting, the gravelly hunger smoothing back into its usual controlled cadence.

"Oh," I said. The single syllable hung in the air, pathetic and revealing.

Then it was a frantic, silent scramble. We rolled apart, the air suddenly thick with awkwardness instead of passion. We picked up our discarded clothes from the dusty rug. I yanked my jumper over my head, my face flaming.

Dressing had never felt so much like admitting defeat.

The rotor wash beat against the bothy walls, a definitive announcement. A moment later, a familiar, stoic voice shouted through the door. “Mr Hastings? It’s Cameron.”

Lochlan, now fully dressed, opened the door.

Cameron stood there, a monolith in tactical gear dusted with snow. His eyes swept the scene and landed on me, my hair a wild mess, my clothes hastily rearranged. “Miss Galloway.”

I nodded back, aiming for professional composure and probably landing somewhere near “guilty schoolgirl.”

His gaze flickered between us for a fraction of a second longer than necessary—a microscopic crack in his impenetrable facade—before he addressed Lochlan. “The primary blizzard cell moved through faster than forecasted. The window was clear enough to attempt extraction. I judged the risk acceptable.”

“Your judgement was correct,” Lochlan replied, already stepping past him. He turned and extended a hand to help me over the threshold. A polite, CEO-to-employee hand.

I took it, my skin buzzing where it touched his, and stepped out into a world that had gone from white chaos to a stark, moonlit stillness. The wreck of our helicopter was a dark, mangled shape in the distance.

We left the bothy behind without a backward glance. It felt like fleeing the scene of a crime.

Cameron took the controls. His voice came through the headset, neutral. “Back to London, sir?”

.
.br/>.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a posessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a posessive husband!

Chapter 285

Chapter 285:

“No,” Lochlan said, his eyes fixed on the landscape below. “To the Black Ridge site.”

Cameron gave a single nod, and the helicopter banked away. The flight was short. We reached the sprawling operational base of the wind farm in under twelve minutes.

Stefan St John, the operations manager, was waiting, his face a picture of relieved anxiety. He thrust thick, proper overcoats at us. Lochlan shrugged his on and turned to me. “You should remain in the office and rest. You’ve had a significant shock.”

“No,” I said, the word coming out sharper than I intended. I softened it with what I hoped was a professional smile. “I’m coming with you. That is, after all, why I came all this way. Isn’t it?”

He held my gaze for a moment, then gave a nod. “Very well.”

We headed for the damaged turbine. I would be the main point of contact for the Health and Safety Executive and the local council, and I needed the facts at my fingertips.

Stefan’s efficient secretary materialized at my elbow, and I started firing off orders. “Secure all records. Maintenance logs for Turbine Seven for the last twenty-four months, all inspection reports, every line of operational data from the moment it went online. I want it all in a digital dossier in the next hour.”

We walked the debris field, my boots crunching on frost-hardened grass. It was a relief when we confirmed the shrapnel had missed any protected land.

Back in the heated site office, I commandeered a desk. I called the turbine manufacturer in Germany to confirm warranty clauses and outline the beginnings of a liability claim. Then it was the insurers, a lengthy, detailed conversation where I painted a picture of an unavoidable act of God while carefully laying the groundwork for a multi-million-pound claim.

Drafts of press statements were written and discarded, calls were made to our PR team in London. The office hummed with purpose. Staff came and went, clutching memos and printouts. Lochlan was a vortex of calm authority at the centre of it all, surrounded by engineers and site managers.

Work kept me busy. Work kept my mind preoccupied. Work was a blessed, familiar wall I could build between myself and the memory of the bothy—the feel of his hands, the taste of his mouth, the devastating rightness of it before the world so rudely interrupted.

It worked, until it didn’t.

By eleven p.m., the crisis had been contained, plans were in motion, and the site was quieting. Stefan showed me to a small, utilitarian dormitory room. “Best we have, I’m afraid,” he said apologetically.

“It’s perfect,” I lied.

I washed up hastily in the tiny attached bathroom, scrubbing the day’s grime and soot from my skin, but not the feeling. I dragged my exhausted body to the narrow bed.

I was so tired I felt hollow, but sleep was a traitor.

The moment I closed my eyes, I was back on the dusty rug. The firelight was on his face. His hands were on my skin.

This time, there was no drug, no compromised judgement. Both of us had been utterly, painfully conscious. Both of us had been willing.

And yet.

I sighed into the darkness, hugging the stiff blanket close. The heat that bloomed in my belly now was pure frustration.

I stared at the ceiling, listening to the distant hum of the generator, and silently, vehemently, cursed the always, infernally efficient Cameron for choosing that precise moment to be a hero.

The morning dawned brittle and bright, the storm having scoured the sky clean.

The flight back to London in a replacement helicopter was a trip in excruciating politeness.

Lochlan was, as ever, impeccably composed. He reviewed reports on a tablet, made two brief, calm calls to the office, and asked me once if the temperature was comfortable.

It was maddening. The air between us crackled with everything left unsaid, a live wire draped in velvet.

My mind was a chaotic committee meeting where no one was in charge.

One faction—the Professional Caucus—insisted we should collectively agree to forget the bothy ever happened. It was a lapse in judgement, a heat-of-the-moment madness born of adrenaline and shared trauma. To acknowledge it would be to invite catastrophic, career-ending awkwardness.

The other faction, the Wanton Idiot faction, was screaming for details. What was he thinking? Did he regret it? Did he lie awake too, replaying the feel of my skin?

His face, that handsome, infuriating mask, gave nothing away. I might as well have been trying to read a brick wall.

We touched down at Battersea heliport. Cameron, the unwitting architect of my frustration, stood by. Lochlan dismissed him with a quiet word.

“I will drive Miss Galloway home,” he said, and it wasn’t a suggestion.

The silence in his car was different. Thick, but not uncomfortable. Laden, like the air before a thunderstorm.

He navigated the London streets with his usual precise control, and I watched the city I knew so well slide by, feeling like a stranger in it.

Then he spoke, his eyes on the road. “There’s a function at The Lanesborough on Tuesday evening. A charity gala for the Royal Academy. I would like you to be there.”

My heart gave a stupid little jump. I tempered it with caution. “As your staff?” I asked, my voice carefully neutral. “To manage donors?”

“No,” he said, and the single word seemed to hang in the air, perfectly enunciated. “As my date.”

.
. .
.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 286

Chapter 286:

Inside, a full-scale riot of joy broke out. Confetti cannons fired. A brass band started playing. I mentally told them all to shut up.

But the cynic in me, the survivor, needed confirmation. This was too important to misunderstand. “You mean... like a date?”

He glanced over, a fleeting look that held a world of patience and something else—something warm and sure. “Not like a date, Hyacinth. It is a date.”

My heart was now doing a series of weird, gymnastic flips in my chest. It was undignified.

Then he did something that nearly short-circuited my brain entirely. He reached across the centre console and took my hand. His fingers were warm, his grip firm but gentle. The contact sent a jolt straight through me.

“I have waited long enough,” he said, his thumb brushing over my knuckles. “I hope, perhaps now, you have finally had sufficient distance from Cary to consider moving on. With me.”

The words were so careful, so considered. They dismantled me.

“You’ve been waiting? All this time?”

“Yes.” He said it simply, as if it were the most obvious fact in the world. “I didn’t want you to feel I was taking advantage by asking you too soon after your divorce. And I didn’t want you to say yes because you believed I was merely a convenient rebound. I want this to work. To be a proper, lasting relationship. That is, of course, if you want the same thing.”

My feelings were a tangled, fluttering mess. Aflutter. That was the word.

I’d never been asked out like this before.

Cary didn’t ask, he commanded. He presented himself as a fait accompli.

Lochlan was... God. Who said chivalry was dead? Who claimed politeness was overrated? Who said being considerate made you look weak?

I looked at his profile, the strong line of his jaw, the focused intensity in his eyes even as he drove, and I had the insane urge to reach out and touch his face. To make sure he was real. To verify that a man like this—a prime specimen of male perfection not just in looks, but in manners, in intelligence, in sheer, unwavering integrity—actually wanted me.

He slowed the car at a traffic light and turned to look at me properly. “Do you want the same thing, Hyacinth?”

I blurted out, “Of course I do!”

A smile touched his lips, a real one, transforming his usually solemn face. It was like watching the sun break through on a grey day. Devastating.

Then, practicality, my old frenemy, reared its head. “But... what about work?”

“What about it?”

“Isn’t there a rule? Against office romances?” I felt like a prig even saying it, but it needed saying. I’d built my career here. I wouldn’t let anyone, not even him, undermine that.

“There’s no such written policy,” he said, matter-of-factly. “But I understand your concern. If you are worried about gossip, we can be discreet.”

“I’d like that,” I said, relieved.

“But I would prefer if we were open about it,” he continued. “I have no desire to keep you a secret.”

I felt that so profoundly it hurt. After Cary, who’d loved secrets and games, it was a balm.

.
. .
.

Chapter 287:

“But I... people will talk. They’ll say I got the job because I was sleeping with the boss.”

He nodded. “I anticipated that. My proposed solution is this: we don’t actively publicize it, but we don’t go to great lengths to hide it either. We allow the situation to evolve naturally. In time, people will deduce we are together, but by then, your competence and results will have established your merit beyond any doubt.”

He paused. “I did also consider transferring you to an equivalent senior role at a subsidiary. A clean break, professionally. But I discarded the idea.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want you to be far away from me.”

A laugh bubbled up in my chest, part joy, part sheer disbelief. “You’ve really thought this through, haven’t you?”

He guided the car to a smooth stop outside Lauderdale Tower. “I have thought very little else through,” he said, his voice low, “since the day I decided I wanted you.”

The car was idling. My heart was pounding.

“Which day was that?”

He leaned in, his scent of sandalwood and cold air filling my senses. “Get some rest,” he murmured, his lips brushing my cheek in a kiss so soft it was almost a whisper.

I turned my head. I caught his mouth with mine.

It wasn’t a gentle goodnight kiss. It was the kiss we’d been interrupted from having. It was searing, and deep, and full of all the promise and frustration of the last twenty-four hours. His hand came up to cup my jaw, and for a glorious, spinning moment, there was no car, no London, no past. Just this.

We broke apart, both of us breathing unsteadily.

“Will you come up?” I asked, the words leaving me in a rush.

He rested his forehead against mine, a ragged breath escaping him. “I want to. You have no idea how much I want to. But you need rest. It has been one very long weekend.”

He was right. I was running on fumes and exhilaration.

“See you Monday then,” I said, my voice husky.

“See you Monday.” He smiled again, that rare, heart-stopping smile.

I got out of the car and watched it glide away until it disappeared around the corner. When I turned, I was grinning so widely my face ached.

Patrick, the evening doorman, raised a knowing eyebrow. “Good news, Ms Galloway?”

“The best news, Patrick,” I beamed, feeling like I might actually float. “The absolute best.”

I bounded into the lift with a spring in my step that hadn’t been there yesterday. The mirrored walls showed a woman with flushed cheeks, sparkling eyes, and a smile she couldn’t contain. I looked like someone had replaced my blood with champagne. It was ridiculous. It was wonderful.

I practically danced into the penthouse.

Portia was sprawled on the sofa like a contented cat, some gruesome horror film flickering on the television.

She glanced up as I entered. “Good, you’re home. I’ve got news.”

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 288

Chapter 288:

Then she stopped, the remote lowering in her hand.

She squinted at me. “Blimey. Did you win the lottery? Find a forgotten Picasso in a charity shop? What?”

“No,” I said, the grin refusing to budge.

“Then what’s got you grinning like a Cheshire cat on nitrous oxide? I can practically see your back teeth.” She muted the film, where someone was silently being chainsawed, and sat up.

I couldn’t hold it in. I rushed over and crushed her in a hug. “Oh, Portia, you will not believe what just happened.”

She patted my back. “Alright, calm down, you maniac. Try me. Did you finally shag the boss?”

I released her and didn’t even wait to sit properly, perching on the edge of the sofa like a nervous bird. The story of the blizzard, the bothy, the almost-but-not-quite, and then the car ride poured out of me in a breathless, slightly incoherent rush.

She took it all in, her lawyer’s face giving nothing away until I finished. Then she just nodded once, slowly. “I knew it. I knew he wasn’t gay.”

She gave my knee a firm pat, stood, and marched into the kitchen. She came back with a bottle of expensive-looking red and two glasses. “This,” she announced, “calls for a celebration.”

She started pouring, then paused, pointing the bottle at me. “Will you stop that grinning? You look unhinged. It’s unnerving.”

I cupped my cheeks, trying to force my face into something resembling sober adulthood. “Sorry. Can’t help it.”

“You’re like a schoolgirl who’s just been asked to the prom by the captain of the rugby team. It’s pathetic.” She rolled her eyes, but there was a fondness there.

“Well, it is a first date,” I said.

“Took him long enough to finally get round to it. The man moves with the speed of continental drift.” She handed me a full glass.

“He was being considerate.” I took a gulp of wine.

“Don’t rush to defend him before your first proper date has even happened,” she warned, shaking her head. “You’re smitten. You’re utterly lost. It’s tragic to watch.” But she said it with a wide smile.

I hugged a velvet throw pillow to my chest, sinking back into the sofa. “I don’t know how to describe it to you. It’s just... it felt perfect. The way he asked. The way he’s thought about everything. It’s... perfect.”

“Fine, fine,” she sighed, clinking her glass against mine. “Your love life is perfect. No need to rub my nose in it.”

“You could have that too if you’d only stop long enough to look at a single tree instead of buzzing around the entire forest like a deranged bee,” I retorted.

“No, thank you. Lochlan’s great, genuinely. But I’m not giving up my forest. Now, drink up.” She took a decisive swallow. “Oh, I was about to tell you something when you wafted in on a cloud of bliss. Gossip from the Cary Grant front.”

The name was a faint, cold drizzle on my sunny parade. It took me a moment to switch gears.

“Oh?”

“Vanessa’s lost the baby.”

“What? What happened?”

“Slipped and fell on an icy step last week, apparently. Miscarried.”

“God, that’s awful.” However manipulative she’d been, that was a horrible thing.

“It is. Streets are a death trap this time of year. It happens.” Portia shrugged. “But there’s another layer to the rumour mill. Word is it was Liz Forbes who made it happen.”

.

.

.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 289

Chapter 289:

“What? You mean she pushed her?” I sat up, horrified.

“No, nothing so crudely actionable. Vanessa fell by herself. But Liz Forbes was apparently the reason Vanessa rushed out of her house like a banshee that day—no coat, wrong shoes. The day the Abrams Group went into liquidation.”

“The Abrams Group is bankrupt? Since when?”

“Since about four days ago. It’s been a spectacular collapse. Clients poached by competitors, key suppliers suddenly terminating contracts, creditors calling in loans, and a very timely tax investigation landing on their desk. The whole house of cards came down in a matter of weeks.”

“Wow.” It was all I could manage. The Abrams Group had been a solid, mid-tier player. For it to disintegrate that fast spoke of a coordinated attack.

“Yeah. And the whisper is, it’s Liz Forbes’s family pulling the strings behind the scenes. Exerting pressure in all the right places to make sure the Abrams were ruined.”

“But why would she do that?”

Portia shrugged again. “Who knows? Maybe because the Abrams are Cary’s enemies. Maybe she sees it as helping her future husband by obliterating his rivals. A pre-wedding gift. She’s from one of those old, quiet-money families. They know how to break things without getting their hands dirty.”

“That’s... terrifyingly efficient of her,” I murmured.

“Vanessa lost the baby before any DNA test could happen. We’ll never know if it was Cary’s. Neat, isn’t it?”

“And Cary? How’s he handling all this?” I asked, almost against my own will.

Portia let out a short, humourless laugh. “What’s to handle? The woman who’s been hounding him is out of the picture, in hospital. His business rivals are bankrupt. He’s about to marry a woman with the strategic cunning of a chess grandmaster and the family connections of a minor royal. I’d guess he’s feeling pretty bloody pleased with himself.”

I drank my wine in silence. The world outside my new, shiny bubble of happiness was still its same ruthless, messy self.

Portia watched me for a moment. She slammed her glass down on the table. “Right. Enough about the tragic and the treacherous. We have to go shopping.”

I blinked. “What? Now?”

“Yes, now.”

“Portia, it’s nighttime. I’ve just survived a helicopter crash. I’m wrung out.”

“You need a dress for your first date with your billionaire boss. It’s a charity gala at The Lanesborough, for God’s sake. This is not a pint at the local. You have to impress.”

“I have dresses,” I protested weakly.

She pursed her lips, giving me a look of utter professional disdain. “Darling, you have garments. I’m talking about a dress. The kind that makes him forget his own name. Yours are all last season.”

“Fine,” I sighed, defeated. “But can I at least have some dinner first? I’m starving.”

“Absolutely not,” she said, standing and pulling me to my feet with alarming strength. “You need to stick to a strict diet of air for the next forty-eight hours. Lose the water weight, de-bloat. It’s for the greater good.”

“I don’t want to go on a diet! I want a cheese toastie!”

“And you can have one after you fit into the dress I have in mind.” She was already dragging me towards the door, grabbing her coat. “And tomorrow... you are coming to the clinic. You’re getting the full works. Facial, microdermabrasion, a massage to work out the tension in your muscles, and for the love of all that is holy, a bikini wax.”

I dug my heels in. “A wax? Portia, it’s just a party! It’s not like I’m going to sleep with him!”

She turned. “It’s always good to be prepared,” she said archly. “And don’t you dare sit there and tell me you haven’t been thinking about it.”

.

.

.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 290

Chapter 290:

Kai stood before my desk, tablet in hand, as the Monday morning light cut across the floor. “You wished to see me, sir?”

“Yes. Contact the atelier of Elspeth Vaughan on Mount Street. Inform them I require a selection of evening gowns for Ms Galloway’s consideration. They have her measurements on file. Have the selection delivered to Lauderdale Tower by six o’clock this evening.”

“Of course, sir. Any particular style or—”

“Her discretion,” I said, cutting him off. “Just ensure the selection is varied. Once she has made her choice, have them relay the details to you. I will require a dinner suit to complement it.”

He nodded, making a note. “A coordinating tie and pocket square as well, sir?”

“Naturally.”

“Very good.”

“And send Roy in on your way out, please.”

A moment later, Roy appeared, his cap in his hands. “Morning, sir.”

“Morning, Roy. I need the Bentley prepared for tomorrow evening. A full detail. It must be immaculate.”

“Right you are, sir. Pick up from Lauderdale Tower?”

“At seven thirty. Also, arrange for a bouquet to be delivered to Ms Galloway’s flat tomorrow afternoon. White peonies.”

A slow, knowing smile spread over Roy’s face. “Peonies. Got it. Not roses, then?”

“No.” Peonies suited her better.

“Consider it done, sir.” He gave a little nod and turned to go.

When the office was quiet again, I placed another call.

Alain Deschamps answered on the third ring, the sounds of a busy kitchen in the background. “Alain. Lochlan Hastings.”

“Mr Hastings. An honour! I was looking forward to seeing you tomorrow night.”

“I have a specific request. For my table on the balcony, during the speeches.”

“Certainly. Our canapé selection is—”

“I require two servings of your truffle and wild mushroom risotto. With the parmesan crisp. And a side of the hand-cut chips. This will be off-menu.”

There was a brief, telling silence on the line. “The risotto, sir? For the gala? It is... rather substantial.”

“That is the requirement, Alain. I trust you can accommodate it.”

Hyacinth despised the delicate, unsatisfying morsels that passed for food at these events. I had no intention of letting my date go hungry.

The Michelin-starred chef relented. “But of course, Mr Hastings. It will be waiting for you.”

I was just ending the call when the door opened and she walked in.

The sight of her, even dressed for work, even with the shadows of a late night under her eyes, sent a simple, unequivocal charge through me.

“Good morning, boss,” she said, her voice bright.

“Good morning, Hyacinth,” I replied, and we looked at each other.

Then we both smiled.

The day’s work began, but everything had shifted on its axis.

She was still impeccably professional, efficient, and sharp. Yet now, when she leaned across my desk to point at a clause in a contract, she did not hesitate to enter my personal space. When our fingers brushed as I passed her a file, she did not pull hers away as if scalded.

The contact was brief, electric, and consciously permitted.

There was a new lightness to her, a glitter in her eyes that I would have labelled happiness. Anticipation.

It was a look I wanted to see every day.

I noted the fatigue marking her face. “You didn’t sleep well.”

“Barely a wink,” she confessed with a wry twist of her mouth. “Portia dragged me across half of London last night, and when the shops closed, she commenced an online siege. I’m a victim of retail tyranny.”

“Shopping for Christmas presents?” I asked, my mind already turning to the holidays, to the possibility of her at Hastings Hall.

“No,” she sighed. “For a dress. For tomorrow.”

“I will have a selection delivered to you this evening,” I said.

.

.

.

Chapter 291:

“Oh. You don’t have to do that.”

“I want to.”

She smiled. “Thank you. Though Portia will be furious. All her efforts, wasted.”

“Then invite her,” I said, opening a drawer. I retrieved a spare, heavy cardstock invitation and slid it across the desk. “You can give this to her.”

Her face lit up. “Really? She’d be thrilled. Thank you.”

“Come with me during the lunch hour.”

“Where to?”

“My place.”

“Oh?” Her eyebrows rose, and a faint, charming blush touched her cheeks. “In the middle of the day?”

I was about to clarify my intentions when a secretary knocked and entered, scattering the moment. Hyacinth slipped away quietly.

At twelve o’clock, Roy drove us to Lonsdale Tower.

Lunch was waiting in the penthouse. She ate with an appetite I was pleased to see, her earlier fatigue seeming to lift.

“I should be glad you find eating with me enjoyable,” I remarked, “given your documented disdain for my dietary habits.”

“Not disdain,” she corrected, spearing a roasted vegetable. “Just... it’s all so disciplined. So healthy. It makes me feel like a slob in comparison.”

“Nutritious food doesn’t have to be bland.” I pushed my own plate, which held a fillet of miso-glazed black cod, towards her. “Care to give it a try?”

She did, taking a careful bite. The fish, marinated for two days, was sweet, rich, and caramelized, flaking apart at the touch of a fork. Her eyes widened slightly. “Wow. That’s actually nice.”

“I’m glad you like it.”

She swallowed and muttered, almost to herself, “I’d still like it better if it were a steak.”

I hid a smile.

Now that she saw me as a potential partner and not just her employer, the filters were coming down. She was being more open, more challengingly, wonderfully herself.

After lunch, as staff silently cleared the dishes, I led her to the front door. I took her hand, turned her palm upward, and pressed it firmly against the biometric scanner set into the wall. The system chimed softly, registering her print.

“Isn’t this a little too... soon?” She hesitated.

“I don’t want there to be any doors closed to you, Hyacinth,” I said, meaning it in every conceivable way.

She leaned in and kissed me on the cheek.

We held hands on the lift ride down.

Roy drove us back to the office. In the underground car park, she said, “I’ll go up first.”

I nodded, watching her walk towards the lift, the swing in her step echoing the lift in my own chest.

Once Roy and I were alone in the car, I placed a call.

My father answered on the second ring. “Right, listen. Your mother’s on the warpath. You dodging her little dinner party has made you public enemy number one. She’s plotting something, I can feel it. Consider yourself warned.”

“I need a favour,” I said.

“Anything for my favourite son. What’s the damage?”

“The Van Cleef brooch. The sapphire and diamond one, the wheat sheaf. It’s in the Hall safe.”

There was a beat of silence. I could almost hear the cogs turning. “Your grandmother’s brooch? The one she always said was for the girl who finally snared one of us?”

Another pause, shorter this time. Then, a low, delighted chuckle. “Oh. Oh. Well, well! This is splendid news! So you are finally using the big guns, eh? I will dig it out of the safe myself and have it whizzed over to you today. Don’t lose it, or your grandmother will haunt us both.”

“I won’t.”

I entered the office with a sense of equilibrium, the pieces of the future slowly aligning into a picture I very much wanted to see.

It was short-lived.

A knock, and Cameron entered. His expression, usually one of impassive granite, was set in even harder lines.

“Sir, an item was delivered to your desk an hour ago. Anonymous sender, hand-delivered by a courier with no verifiable company identification.”

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 292

Chapter 292:

“What is it?”

He slid a single, sleek black envelope across the desk. It was heavy, expensive stock. No return address. “I’ve had it scanned. It appears to contain a wristwatch and some photographs. Nothing explosive or bioactive.”

I opened the seal. The contents spilt onto the blotter.

First, a watch. A vintage Cartier Tank, the gold case worn soft at the edges, the sapphire on the winding crown chipped.

Garrett Morello's watch. The one he was wearing the night he drove his car off the bridge.

Beneath it, a photograph. A picture of a grave. Garrett's grave in Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn. Resting on the simple granite headstone was today's edition of The New York Times.

I turned the photograph over. Scrawled on the back in an elegant, looping cursive I recognized immediately was a message:

Visiting old friends before I come to make new ones. My flight to London leaves in 24 hours. Catch me if you can.

A cold, familiar dread—a feeling I hadn't entertained in years—began to pool in my gut. The room felt suddenly airless.

I looked up at Cameron. "Trace it. Find the courier. Pull all CCTV from the building lobby and surrounding streets for the past two hours. I want to know who delivered this."

"Yes, sir."

"Assign a discreet security detail to Hyacinth. Twenty-four-hour coverage, effective immediately. I want eyes on her at all times. She is not to be approached or alarmed."

"Understood." He left, closing the door softly behind him.

I pressed the intercom. "Timothy, in here, please."

My business secretary entered. "Sir?"

"I need you to arrange immediate use of a Gulfstream G650. File a flight plan for New York, Teterboro Airport. I want to be wheels up within the hour."

"A G650, sir? But our corporate jet—"

"Reach out to Jacob Pearson at Apex Aviation. Tell him I'm calling in the favour he owes me. I'll meet the pilot at Farnborough in forty-five minutes."

"Right away, sir." He departed, already tapping at his phone.

I didn't call Hyacinth.

A warning would only frighten her, and I had nothing concrete to give her except a fear I had long hoped was buried.

I boarded the plane within an hour.

A flight attendant approached. “Can I get you anything, Mr Hastings? A drink?”

“No, thank you,” I said, my gaze fixed on the dossier I had pulled from the encrypted drive.

Seven hours of flight time stretched before me, and I intended to use every minute.

I placed a call as we climbed to cruising altitude.

Marcus Burset answered, his voice a low rumble. He was a former federal prosecutor, now a “consultant” with ties that reached into places official channels couldn’t. “Lochlan. This is unexpected.”

“Soraya Warren,” I said, dispensing with pleasantries. “She’s out. I need to know how, and I need to know where she is.”

There was a slow exhalation on the line. “Warren. Yeah, I heard she walked. Sentence was fifteen for racketeering and fraud, but she served five. She was released from Danbury three weeks ago.”

“How? Early parole?”

“Not parole. Her sentence was commuted. She walked out clean, no strings.” His tone was carefully neutral, which told me everything. “The official record is sealed. Word is she cut a deal, gave up something—or someone—big enough to make a lot of powerful people very happy.”

“Do you know where she went?”

.
.
.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 293

Chapter 293:

“If I did, you’d be the second call I made, after my bookie. She vanished. Hasn’t shown up on any of the old radar screens. Not in finance, not in her usual haunts. It’s like she evaporated.”

“Could you find out if the commutation has any travel restrictions attached?” I said.
“Specifically, if she’s allowed to leave the country.”

“I’ll see what I can dig up. But if the deal was as high-level as it smells, those restrictions might have been waived too.”

“Just find out, Marcus.”

I ended the call and stared at the photograph of the grave.

If she was still in the US, I could still contain this.

We landed at Teterboro as night fell over New Jersey.

Sherry McCullers, the head of our New York office, was waiting on the tarmac. “Good evening, sir. The car’s ready.”

“Thank you, Sherry. I will go alone. I need you to do something else. Put the entire New York office on a discreet high-alert status. Review all new client inquiries, any unusually lucrative deal flows, and monitor for any attempts, however subtle, to probe our systems. Assume a sophisticated, hostile actor is looking for a point of entry.”

She nodded. “Of course. Can you give me more specifics on the nature of the threat?”

“That is the problem,” I said, moving towards the waiting car. “I can’t.”

Soraya’s attacks were always... elegantly unexpected.

“Just assume everything is a potential vector,” I said.

The drive to Green-Wood Cemetery was silent. The Gothic arches and towering monuments were spectral in the twilight.

I found Garrett’s plot easily. The copy of the Times was still there, weighted with a stone, fluttering slightly in the cold breeze. A flag on conquered territory.

I found the caretaker in his small, warm lodge. The old man looked up from his tablet as I knocked.

“I’m looking for the person who left this,” I said, showing him the newspaper.

Recognition flickered in his eyes. “You’d be Mr Hastings, then.”

“Fella came this afternoon. Didn’t know him. Well-dressed. He left the paper, gave me two hundred dollars to leave it be and to give you a message if you showed up.” The caretaker shifted, uncomfortable. “He said, ‘You lost this round, Loch.’ That’s all.”

The cold dread solidified into a block of ice in my chest.

I’d been played.

Soraya was not coming to London in twenty-four hours. She was likely already there.

My phone vibrated.

Marcus. “The commutation was clean, Lochlan. No parole, no travel restrictions. She’s a free citizen. And whatever deal she cut, it’s buried so deep I’m getting warning looks just for asking. She’s gone ghost.”

“Thank you, Marcus.”

I hung up and turned to the chauffeur. “Back to the airfield. Now.”

In the car, I called Cameron. “The team on Hyacinth. Are they in place?”

“Yes, sir. Two-person detail, rotating shifts. They report no suspicious activity. She returned to Lauderdale Tower after work with her friend, Portia Pierce. No tails observed.”

“Maintain the coverage. Double it. I want a driver on her tomorrow, someone from your team, not Roy. I’m returning immediately.”

Next, I called the pilot. “File a return flight plan for London. I want to be airborne within the hour.”

As the city lights streaked past the window, the anxiety was a live wire in my system.

Soraya blamed me for Garrett’s death. Her last words to me, spat across a courtroom as they led her away in handcuffs, echoed in my mind now with fresh, chilling clarity.

“You took my love, Lochlan. I’m going to take away yours.”

.

.

.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 294

Chapter 294:

“Cary.”

The voice was a husky purr from the woman draped across my bed.

She was all honey-blond hair and pouting lips, some model or other from a recent launch event. Willing. Eager. She arched her back, inviting a kiss I had no intention of giving.

I pushed her shoulder, rolling her onto her back. She pouted, a practised expression of faux offence.

Fine. If words were too much, then actions would do. I took hold of the thin strap of her silk dress and yanked it down, the material yielding easily. She didn't bother with modesty, sticking out her chest with a pride that was both admirable and tedious.

My hands moved over her, taking inventory. The perky swell of her tits, the smooth, honey-toned skin of her stomach. I slid a hand into her lace panties, finding her already wet.

She ground herself against my fingers, letting out a low, theatrical moan.

I placed both hands on her shoulders and pushed down, a silent command.

She caught on fast, sliding off the bed to her knees on the expensive rug. Her fingers made quick work of my trousers. She ran her tongue over the tip of my cock, then took half my length into her mouth, then swallowed me whole. Her technique was expert, a blend of suction and teasing flicks of her tongue.

I leaned back, bracing my hands on the mattress, my head tilted towards the ceiling.

My body responded, a predictable tide of sensation. Pleasure, sharp and building.

But my mind was a perfect, blank void. I felt the heat, the tightening in my groin, the mechanical climb towards release, but it was as if I was watching it happen to someone else.

She sucked me hard until the orgasm ripped through me. I thrust into her mouth, finding my own rhythm, and came with a low groan.

She knelt there, looking up at me, running her white-stained lips together.

I hauled her to her feet and pushed her back onto the rumpled sheets. I stripped off the rest of our clothes. What followed was efficient, athletic. Hard, driving movements from me, cries and breathless encouragements from her.

She wrapped her legs around my waist, screaming for more as I came again, a weaker, secondary wave that left me feeling drained rather than sated.

I got up without a word and walked barefoot into the ensuite. I tossed the condom into the bin and braced my hands on the cool marble sink, looking at my own face in the mirror.

Flushed skin, damp hair, the physical evidence of passion.

The eyes that looked back were flat and disgusted.

“Cary?” Her honeyed voice called from the bedroom.

I walked out, still naked.

She was already pulling her dress back on. “Sorry, darling, I’ve got to dash. Another date.”

She came up to me, trying to plant a kiss on my lips. I turned my head. She shrugged, kissed my cheek instead, and smiled. “This was fun. Call me, will you?”

I said nothing. I simply opened the bedroom door. She scooped up her heels and padded downstairs.

I heard the front door open just as she reached the bottom.

Liz Forbes walked in, placing her keys on the hall table. She looked at the nearly-dressed woman clutching her shoes. “Hello.”

The woman froze for a beat, her cheeks flushing. “Hello.”

“Don’t forget your coat.” Liz nodded towards the cashmere puddle on a chair.

The woman grabbed it and hastened out into the night.

Liz looked up at me where I stood naked by the second-floor railing.

“You’re home early,” I said.

.

.

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 295

Chapter 295:

“One of my patients cancelled at the last minute.” She set down her briefcase. “Alcohol is not a particularly effective coping mechanism. Neither is a binge of anonymous sex.”

“You’re not my therapist anymore,” I reminded her.

She shrugged. “Merely an observation.” She dropped the subject, as she always did.

Dinner was eaten in a silence Liz was perfectly content with. We had nothing to say to each other beyond the necessary exchange of information about the Abrams Group’s final dissolution and her family’s relentless planning for our wedding.

Yes, our wedding—one where I, the groom, had no hand in any of it.

Her family had taken over everything, from the medieval chapel venue to the guest list to the type of roses. Liz was happy to let them. She said it kept them occupied and stopped them from bothering us about more substantive matters, like when we’d try and have a baby.

Her laid-back permissiveness wasn’t just for her family. It extended to me.

Since our engagement was announced, we’d moved into this new, jointly purchased house in Chelsea. I’d left Lauderdale Tower behind.

We had separate bedrooms. In fact, we didn’t even live on the same floor. This house had three storeys. I took the second, she took the third.

I brought a different woman home most nights. Some she ran into, most she didn’t. She never said a word.

Just as I never said a word about her long absences most evenings.

I knew she was with her girlfriend, the woman she actually loved and wanted to protect, even from me. She refused to introduce us, a boundary I respected because it was part of our unspoken contract.

Everything was perfect. Everything was empty.

My rivals were eliminated. Vanessa was out of the picture, hospitalized and broken. The company was entirely under my control now that my father had retreated to Geneva, satisfied the mess was cleaned up. I'd even secured a new, less demanding loan for the Mount Anvil project without Velos Capital's punitive terms.

By every metric, I was winning.

Yet I couldn't fill the hole gaping in my chest. It was a raw, aching void. Not alcohol, not the relentless focus of work, not a string of women whose names I couldn't be bothered to learn, could touch its edges.

The engagement to Liz Forbes was mutually beneficial. It gave me the appearance of having moved on, of having secured a wife deemed suitable by the public, by my parents, by the cold calculus of social advancement.

My mother was thrilled I was marrying a woman with a title in her family. She was busy holding teas and spa days where she could boast to her circle.

My father was simply relieved the "distraction" was over, that I could focus on what mattered—making money and expanding his empire.

Everyone assumed I had moved on from Hyacinth. That I had forgotten her.

Only I knew the truth. Me and the bottle of Macallan that waited in my study every night.

After dinner, as I pushed my chair back to retreat upstairs, Liz spoke. "There's a gala at The Lanesborough tomorrow night. The Royal Academy thing. We need to attend."

I was about to refuse.

"It's important for appearances," she continued, pre-empting me. "And my parents will be there. They'll expect it."

I nodded. "Fine."

After what she and her family had orchestrated with the Abrams, it was a minor favour to return.

This would be only the second time I'd meet the Forbes clan.

The first was a carefully staged weekend at their estate, where I presented myself for inspection. I'd worn the mask so long it felt like my own skin. The ambitious, successful scion with the right pedigree and the right prospects. I'd discussed stag hunting and portfolio diversification with her father, and listened to her mother's opinions on interior design with a feigned interest I could muster in my sleep.

As I'd nodded along to Katherine Forbes's monologue about restoring Venetian plasterwork, my mind had drifted, unbidden, to Jenna Galloway. Hyacinth's mother. The woman whose life I'd bought with my money.

I remembered a cold December afternoon three years ago, meeting her for the first time in that modest, warm sitting room. She'd been nervous, grateful, and she'd given me a gift. A knitted sweater, thick and cable-stitched, in a dark grey wool. She'd made it herself.

I'd thanked her with perfect, polished politeness and accepted it. When I got home, I'd tossed it into the back of a closet. I couldn't remember if I still had it.

.
.
.

Chapter 296:

I checked my reflection in the mirror.

The navy silk dress was a silent masterpiece, the kind of garment that felt like a second skin and a full suit of armour simultaneously. It was, I had to admit, perfect.

Portia appeared behind my shoulder, her expression one of grudging admiration. "Okay, fine. You look damn nice. I hate that his dress is better than the one I picked. It's morally offensive."

"It's the thought that counts," I said, my fingers drifting to the sapphire and diamond brooch pinned at my shoulder. It was an exquisite, intricate thing, a cascade of tiny wheat sheaves that caught the light and fractured it into cold, blue sparks.

"That thing looks like it came out of a vault that requires a retinal scan and a blood oath," Portia observed, leaning in. "Family heirloom, is it? He's really pulling out all the stops."

A slow, stupidly pleased smile spread across my face as I met my own gaze in the mirror. I looked happy. It was a strange, foreign expression on my face, and I rather liked it.

Portia rolled her eyes so hard I heard it. “Oh, for God’s sake. Don’t start glowing, you’ll ruin the makeup.” She straightened up. “Right, I’m off.”

“Where are you going? Lochlan’s sending a car to pick us up.”

“That car probably comes with your precious Lochlan inside,” she said, grabbing her clutch. “I have no desire to be a spectator to your pre-date, loved-up eye contact. It’s nauseating. Besides, I’ve got to pick up my date.”

“You still haven’t told me who your date is,” I reminded her, turning from the mirror.

“That’s because I don’t know,” she said breezily. “I haven’t decided if it’s the barman from last night or the cute pilot I met at the clinic this morning. Both promising, both disposable.”

“Then who, precisely, are you going to pick up?”

“I’ll let fate decide. I’ll give them each a call. Whoever’s free tonight and can scrounge up a tux at a moment’s notice shall have the honour.” She winked. “Survival of the fittest, darling.”

“What if they both have a tux?”

“Then I’ll take one to the gala and go home with the other later. It’s called efficient time management.” She blew me a kiss and bounded into the lift, disappearing with a final cackle.

“You’re impossible,” I said to the empty space where she’d been.

My phone chimed with a new text. It was from Leo: Hey. You around this week? Fancy that coffee?

A small, sharp pang of guilt pierced my bubble of anticipation.

I’d been earnestly considering dating Leo precisely because he was so gloriously, blessedly normal. He existed in a world of student loans and tube strikes, a world entirely separate from the gilded, complicated cages of Cary and Lochlan. He was my rebellion against the billionaire.

And yet, the moment Lochlan had looked at me with those serious eyes and asked me on a proper date, every one of my new, carefully constructed rules had gone up in smoke. I’d caved. Instantly. Shamelessly.

I winced, typing out a reply. Hi! A bit manic this week. Not free tomorrow, but how about Thursday evening?

I had Friday night and the weekend wide open, but a hopeful part of me had already blocked that time out in mental ink, wondering if Lochlan might want to do something.

It was pathetic. I was pathetic. And I didn't care.

Leo replied almost instantly with a "Great!" and a thumbs-up emoji.

I sighed, tucking the phone away. I would have to think of a nice way to let him down gently.

Chapter 297:

The intercom buzzed, announcing my ride.

I took a final, steadying breath and headed down. The sight that greeted me on the kerb gave me pause. The Bentley was familiar, but the driver holding the rear door open wasn't.

He was a broad-shouldered man in a dark suit, with a neat haircut and an alertness in his posture that screamed "security" far more than "chauffeur." He touched his cap. "Good evening, Miss Galloway."

"Um, evening. Where's Roy?"

"He's off duty tonight, Miss. I'm Declan." His smile was polite but didn't reach his eyes, which were busy scanning the quiet street.

"Nice to meet you, Declan." I slid into the car.

A stab of disappointment, sharp and childish, hit me as I confirmed the spacious seat was empty. Lochlan wasn't here.

I thought about calling him but stopped myself. I'd be seeing him in half an hour. No need to be clingy.

But a niggling unease began to coil in my stomach, separate from the disappointment.

I hadn't seen him since we returned to the office after lunch yesterday. He hadn't been in at all today.

I'd asked Kai, who'd looked uncharacteristically flustered and said boss had taken an urgent trip out of London. He didn't know the destination. He'd added, apologetically, that boss hadn't used the corporate jet, so it was likely a personal matter.

The explanation had left me feeling cold.

I was in charge of his schedule, both business and personal. I was the keeper of the calendar, the arranger of flights, the knower of things.

And I knew nothing about this.

He hadn't called. He hadn't texted.

Where was he? What was so urgent it required a last-minute, secretive international trip? And—the question that tightened my throat as the car glided through the Mayfair streets—would he make it back in time?

The Bentley pulled up in front of The Lanesborough.

“We're here, Miss Galloway,” Declan said.

I got out. The scene was a painting of wealth: a line of silent, black luxury cars, a river of silk and black tie flowing up the steps under the flash of paparazzi cameras. The Bentley purred away, leaving me standing alone on the famous pavement.

I smoothed the skirts of my beautiful, expensive dress—the dress he had chosen—and took a breath.

I looked perfect. I felt anything but.

I walked up the steps. The vast, hushed foyer swallowed me whole. The air was thick with the scent of money: lilies, beeswax, and discreet perfume.

I reached the receiving line. A velvet rope, a severe-looking table, and a gentleman in tails who possessed the disapproving air of a man who had once turned away a duchess for wearing the wrong shade of beige.

I approached, my social smile feeling brittle. “Good evening. I'm Hyacinth Galloway. I'm with Mr Hastings.”

His gaze performed a swift, inventory-taking journey from the hem of my gown to my face, and then settled pointedly on my empty hands. “Good evening, Miss Galloway. May I see your invitation card?”

My smile faltered. “Oh. Mr Hastings has it. I'm his guest.”

“I see.” He did not see. He saw a problem. “I'm sorry, but we cannot admit entry without the corresponding physical card or a digital confirmation. Mr Hastings did not provide one for you?”

Chapter 298:

The polite panic began a slow crawl up my spine. “No. I’m his plus-one. He’s running slightly late. If you could just check the master list? Under his name?”

He inclined his head a millimetre. “Certainly, madam. But the list is rather extensive.” With a gloved hand, he gestured me to step aside, behind a velvet rope partition—a tiny island of shame for the improperly prepared.

A couple swept up behind me. She was a vision of inherited emeralds and frosty blonde hair, he a monument to distinguished grey temples and a Royal Academy pin. They presented a thick, engraved card. The usher took it, nodded as if to an old friend, and they were ushered through with a murmur of welcome.

“Terrible crush this year,” the woman remarked to her companion. She paused, and her cool, assessing gaze rested on me, the solitary figure banished to the sidelines. One perfectly shaped eyebrow twitched upwards.

A humiliating heat flushed my chest and neck. I was standing in the most exclusive hallway in London, dressed like a princess, feeling like a gatecrasher who’d won her outfit in a raffle.

The usher finally opened a heavy, leather-bound tome. He ran a finger down the page with agonizing slowness. I watched his lips move silently. H. Hargreaves. Harrington.

He started again at L. Lackington. Le Marchant.

The emerald couple lingered just inside the doorway, pretending not to watch.

Finally, his finger stopped. “Ah, yes. Here we are. Hastings, Lochlan.” He looked up, his expression shifting to one of mild surprise, as if he hadn’t truly believed me.

I thrust my driving licence at him.

“Plus-one noted, Miss Hyacinth Galloway.” He closed the book with a definitive thud. “My apologies for the delay. You may proceed, madam. The reception is in the Belgravia Room.”

The apology was salt in the wound. I offered a tight smile, slipped past the rope, and stepped into the dazzling brilliance of the ballroom.

It was a scene from a film. Crystal chandeliers dripped light onto a sea of black tie and jewel-coloured gowns. The low hum of cultured conversation mixed with the delicate strains of a string quartet. Waiters circulated with trays of champagne flutes that looked like they’d been blown from dreams. It was breathtaking.

And I had never felt more like an imposter.

Lochlan was nowhere to be seen.

The clock in my head was ticking so loudly I was surprised no one else could hear it. I snagged a flute of champagne from a passing tray, the bubbles doing nothing to settle the sick feeling in my stomach.

I was adrift in a room of strangers, all of whom seemed to know each other with the easy confidence of shared boarding schools and country estates. I was a tourist in the land of the permanently privileged.

“Well, this is all terribly serious, isn’t it? I half expect someone to start auctioning off a minor dukedom.”

I turned.

The woman who had spoken was leaning against a pilaster, watching the crowd with an expression of amused detachment.

She had long, honey-blond hair styled in perfect, old-Hollywood waves. Her eyes were a striking, vivid green, enhanced by a sweep of dark eyeliner that made them look like jewels set in a classically structured face with high cheekbones and a narrow, elegant chin.

A gold and green necklace with a prominent central emerald rested against her collarbone, matched by dangling earrings that caught the light. Her dress was in shades of gold and deep forest green, and she wore it with the regal ease of someone who had never once doubted her place in any room.

She was, in a word, spectacular.

I felt the attention of every man within a twenty-foot radius subtly pivot in her direction, like sunflowers to a particularly glamorous sun.

“Hello,” I said, faltering, unsure if this vision had actually been addressing me or just commenting to the universe at large.

“Hello. I’m terribly bored,” she announced, her gaze swinging to meet mine. Her smile was warm and conspiratorial. “And you look refreshingly bored too. I thought perhaps we could be bored together.”

A laugh escaped me. “Sure. Why not. I’m Hyacinth.”

“Soraya,” she said, extending a hand. Her grip was firm, her skin cool. “Soraya Warren. So, is this your first time navigating this particular circus?”

I winced. “Is it that obvious?”

“Only to a fellow outsider,” she said, her green eyes twinkling. “Don’t worry. They’re just people. No different from you and me, really. They just have better tailors and more ancestral portraits.”

“I don’t feel much like ‘just people’ right now,” I admitted with a self-deprecating shrug. “I feel like I’ve wandered into a National Trust property after hours.”

“Mingle with them for five minutes,” Soraya advised, taking a sip of her champagne. “You’ll have them all figured out. They’re terribly predictable.”

“Is that so?”

“Absolutely. Every event like this has the same three tribes.” She gestured discreetly with her glass. “First, The Old Guard. Also known as The Patrons.”

I followed her gaze to a cluster of older guests. The women wore vintage, impeccably cut gowns in muted colours, their jewels not flashy but heavy with history. They spoke in low, measured tones, interacting in a tight, closed circle. They looked like they owned the building, which several of them probably did.

“Discretion is their watchword,” Soraya murmured. “They fund all this and consider loud conversation a social misdemeanour.”

“Noted. Avoid loud conversation.”

“Second,” she continued, “The Corporates.”

My mind immediately supplied Lochlan’s image.

If he were here.

Chapter 299:

“Hedge fund managers, tech investors, global CEOs,” Soraya listed off. “Impeccable Savile Row armour. Their conversations are deals, mergers, and market volatility. They’re here to donate, but mostly to network. They’re the flashiest and, paradoxically, the most anxious.”

I spotted a group that fit the description perfectly, laughing a bit too loudly, checking watches every other sentence.

“And the third group?” I asked, intrigued.

“The Creatives. The Artists and Curators. The necessary guests.” She nodded towards a man in a velvet jacket and a woman with a colourful silk scarf knotted in her artfully disheveled hair. “They provide the ‘eccentricity.’ Largely ignored by the Old Guard, but

feverishly fawned over by the Corporates. They are, incidentally, the only people here who are genuinely interested in the art.”

I was impressed. “So, which tribe do you belong to?”

She smiled, a mysterious, cat-like curve of her lips. “Oh, none of them. I’m not old enough to be Old Guard, not nearly rich enough to be a Corporate, and sadly, I have no artistic talent to excuse my eccentricities. I’m a free radical.” She tilted her head. “And you? You came with someone, I take it?”

“I did,” I sighed, the anxiety returning in a cold wave. “But he’s... running late.”

“A man of his own schedule. How familiar.” She rolled her eyes, a gesture so relatable it put me completely at ease. “My date abandoned me the moment we walked in. Saw a duke and just had to go and kiss arse. Would you mind keeping me company for a while?”

“I’d love to,” I said, meaning it. She was a lifeline.

We chatted easily. She pointed out the event chair, a formidable RA Trustee, and regaled me with a hilarious anecdote about the woman’s lifelong feud with a certain type of orchid.

I saw people milling around tables displaying various items.

“The silent auction,” Soraya explained, following my gaze. “Works donated by RA members and supporters. You don’t have to buy anything, but some pieces are rather good. Last year, a stunning little Erté sketch went for a song.”

I nodded, but my eyes kept straying to the entrance.

Soraya noticed my restlessness. “Don’t worry,” she said gently. “Dinner isn’t called until eight. Plenty of time for your knight in shining Armani to arrive. Why don’t you call him? Give him a nudge.”

She was right. I pulled out my phone and dialed.

“Hyacinth.”

The voice came simultaneously from the phone in my ear and from a spot directly behind me.

I turned.

Lochlan was standing there, resplendent in his tuxedo, phone in hand.

He wasn't looking at me, or at my beautiful dress, or with any of the warmth I had seen in his eyes just yesterday.

His gaze was locked on Soraya.

"Lochlan!" She called his name in pleasant surprise, then glided up to him. "Goodness, haven't seen you in a long time."

I glanced between the two of them. They knew each other?

Soraya leaned in for a hug. Lochlan didn't push her away. He just stood there stiffly.

Soraya pulled back, turned to me, and said, "Small world."

She saw my questioning look and gave a light laugh. "Loch and I go way back." She paused, letting that hang in the air for a delicious, torturous second before adding, "But don't worry, that's all in the past. A long time ago."

My mind immediately supplied a vivid picture. Them together. Him and this stunning, razor-witted creature. What on earth had made him give up a woman like that?

A flash of something hot and ugly—jealousy wearing its cheapest dress—licked through my veins.

Lochlan's voice was tight, a violin string wound too far. "What are you doing here, Soraya?"

She waved a hand, breezy as a summer afternoon. "I came with a friend. It's been a while since I'd stepped foot in the Lanesborough. Brought back fond memories."

She turned her striking green eyes back to me, smiling. "I've been chatting with this lovely girl, Hyacinth. You've picked a good one this time, Lochlan. Your girlfriend's very nice. Not pretentious in the least. Very likeable."

I smiled back at her.

"She's not my girlfriend," he said.

My smile froze. My body froze. The world did a little tilt-and-swirl, like a snow globe given a vicious shake. I clutched the champagne flute so tightly I was amazed the crystal didn't scream in protest.

A high-pitched ringing started in my ears. Soraya's voice seemed to come from miles away. "Really? Oh, my mistake, then. I thought, since she's wearing your grandmother's brooch..."

“It’s a loan,” Lochlan interrupted. “She’s just an employee. I needed a plus-one for tonight and she happened to be available.”

Employee. Available. Loan.

They kept on talking, their mouths moving, Soraya’s easy smile not slipping for a second, Lochlan’s expression impenetrable.

But I couldn’t hear a word of it. The ringing in my ears was too loud, a white-noise tsunami drowning out all reason.

I thought I must be dreaming. I had to be dreaming. This was the only logical explanation. Because in my flat, the arrival of the dress, the brooch, the car ride—everything until this precise moment had possessed the soft, promising glow of a dream. Now it had curdled into a nightmare. It had to be.

How else could you explain a man asking you out on a date, going to all the trouble—the flowers, the dress, the bloody heirloom brooch—only to publicly eviscerate you in front of the most captivating woman in the room?

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Billionaire Boss Nah, Just a possessive husband!

Chapter 300

Chapter 300:

“Hyacinth. Hyacinth.”

Hands shook my shoulder gently.

I snapped out of my nightmare, blinking.

Soraya was looking at me with concern. Lochlan was watching me too, his dark eyes giving nothing away.

“Are you okay?” Soraya asked. “You look a little pale.”

Be part of our community on .com

“I’m fine,” I said, and my voice sounded almost normal. A miracle, really, given that my internal world currently resembled a bomb site.

I was about to say, “May I be excused,” to flee to some dark corner and properly decompose, but Soraya spoke first.

“Dinner bell’s gone off,” she said, nodding towards the general movement. “Time to move to the dining hall.”

Lochlan took hold of my elbow. His touch was firm, impersonal—a security guard escorting a loiterer. He steered me towards the door.

I went limply, my mind a numb, staticky blank. He led me to a prime table near the front, a place of honour that felt like a pillory.

Soraya sat at the same table, and a short while later was joined by a man in a tux, her date for the night, who had apparently finished his aristocratic arse-kissing. The man introduced himself. Something with a “C.” Charles? Christopher? It didn’t matter. His name, his work, none of it registered. I was a doll propped up in a chair, stuffed with sawdust and shock.

Lochlan looked at me occasionally with those impenetrable eyes, but he said almost nothing to me throughout dinner. He chatted with Soraya and the other guests. I watched his mouth form perfectly enunciated words and felt like I was watching a very dull television programme with the sound off.

At some point, someone made a speech. I saw their lips move, saw polite laughter ripple around the room. I didn’t hear a word. My personal sound system was still playing that high-pitched tone of pure humiliation on a loop.

When dinner was served, I ate mechanically. It was something to occupy my mouth so I wouldn’t be expected to make small talk, so I wouldn’t accidentally open my mouth and let out a sound that was half-sob, half-hysterical laughter.

Soraya asked me solicitously several times if I was fine. I managed to say something like “Yes, perfectly,” but I couldn’t remember the shape of the words in my mouth.

She was being nice. I hated it.

When the live auction began, the auctioneer’s cheerful voice finally gave me an out.

I stood. “Excuse me.”

Lochlan looked at me, a brief, assessing glance, and gave a single, curt nod. He said nothing.

I fled. I didn’t know where the restroom was and I didn’t care. I just picked a random hallway and ran down it. Anywhere. Anywhere that took me away from the dining room, from Lochlan’s casual humiliation, from the exquisite nightmare of my own naivety.

“Hyacinth?”

I almost rammed headfirst into a solid wall of muscle and expensive wool. I looked up, my vision blurry, to see a familiar, clean-shaven face. It was more gaunt than I remembered, the angles sharper, but the eyes were the same.

Of course. Because my night couldn't possibly get any more bloody surreal.

Cary Grant righted me, his hands on my shoulders. He looked down, his brow furrowing. He wiped a thumb roughly over my cheekbone. "You're crying."

I hadn't even realized. Brilliant. Now I was a messy crier in front of my ex-husband. Top marks for dignity, Hyacinth.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

- .
- .
- .
- .