

Her CEO Stalker and Her Second Chance Mate

Chapter 3

Adelaide

I woke to blinding sunlight from the open curtains of my room, each aching pain in my body a reminder, a memory I forcibly pushed aside. I opened my personal laptop and checked the date; two weeks had gone by since that day at the office. My fingers drummed on the table. Where do I go from here? I couldn't report him. He had my keys, except for the spare I kept in the gnome next to my front door. He wasn't one of those cute gnomes, but rather, something Mama always insisted on keeping. A guardian, per se, to keep the riff-raff from feeling too comfortable crossing the threshold of your home. She was superstitious as all heck. She'd buy a pack of gum just so her total wasn't \$6.66, even when she was pinching pennies. My gnome was more like a gargoyle, with fangs and sharp claws. His eyes were carved to look like some little beast.

Back to the subject at hand, I now had no job, and I couldn't count on my next paycheck making it into my account. It was probably going to be monitored. I knew how the Creedon worked; he had tabs on all his supporters' and his competitions' accounts. This way, he could ensure they weren't dealing behind his back. Completely illegal, yes, but when you padded the Feds and politicians' pockets with money, you could get away with almost anything. I'd start by closing accounts, then I would download the company files and ditch the laptop. Something told me to keep copies of everything Creedon did.

I couldn't go to an ATM, there would be video evidence. Same with going into a convenience store. My fingers drummed again. Bingo, I needed to find someone who looked nothing like me to pull the money out for me. But who? He had my phone, which had my contacts in it. I couldn't involve Misty. I did, however, have to contact her soon. I'd walk into the busy part of town and see if I could find someone who didn't appear like they would weasel me out of my hard-earned money. The bonus I would have earned for the deal I solidified was trash at this point. I had been so stupid falling for that man's charms; he was a wolf in sheep's clothing, seeking a naive lamb. I wouldn't be that lamb any longer, or ever again, I vowed to myself.

I pushed up from the chair, using the table as support. Every muscle in my body ached, I had to move, pack up whatever I could carry, and be ready to run at a moment's notice. Uncle Jake, God rest his soul, had taught me a few things about survival. I'd become soft these last several months, reaping the benefits of a cushy corporate life; a steady paycheck from the promotion to assistant. I had wanted to rise to make a difference. How had I lost my way...Creedon...that's how. I let myself believe the fairy tale. The poor girl and the "GOAT" of a tech company enterprise. I wanted to get technology in front of underprivileged kids. I even had a financial plan that detailed how to work with the

donations, how that could be written off on the company's taxes, and the analytics for how the press had the potential to affect the company positively. All that work was now flushed down the shitter, and now, all I had was my used and broken body as a reminder that dreams didn't come true.

I made my way into my bedroom and flipped my laptop open. I signed in and logged into my bank, transferring my savings over with a wince. All the appreciation I would have gained was gone in an instant. I moved it into my main account and closed the savings. I grabbed the largest backpack I owned and pulled open my drawers. Creedon had no idea how I used to dress, so I left everything that screamed of my current life and started pulling out cut-off shorts and jeans, tanks, tube tops, and halters, tossing them on the bed with the band tees and the fishnets. Corporate Adelaide was dead. I closed my eyes with a sigh. I didn't know if it was relief or resignation.

I packed my laptop, the few random snacks I had around the small apartment, and clothes; I compressed everything tightly after picking a few things to wear today. I made my way into the bathroom, brushing my teeth, then setting the toothbrush and toothpaste aside. Mama raised me frugally, I'd pack that shit, too. I let my eyes rise to the mirror.

Purple and green bruises marred my once porcelain skin, my left eye was still and angry red and quite swollen, and the finger marks around my throat were evidence of the abuse this man had forced me to endure. A man whom I had once thought I could love, had inflicted this upon me. A tear fell, but I responded by pulling out my cosmetics bag, and getting to work, covering my face with a new one. I worked the contour and eyeshadow to my advantage with dark greys and black, fighting the swelling that lay there until I looked back at a woman who once stood on her own two feet and needed no validation. This was just a mask for now, but I'd find her again...one day.

Pulling on the fishnet stockings and combat boots I had retired upon entering the corporate world, felt surreal. Completing the outfit, I donned a bondage skirt from my high school days, along with a random cropped tee. I needed different eyes to notice me today. I couldn't appear as they knew me; I needed to attract someone who stood against everything Creedon had shown himself to be.

Going back into the bathroom, I winced as I grabbed the leave-in conditioner the salon had insisted on, rubbing some into the tangled mess that was my hair and brushed it out, yanking at the tangles with little regard for the damage I was incurring on it. I should dye it the first chance I get. That hurt my heart. I got my blond hair from my mother. I forced the tears down, French braiding it back tightly into two plaits, before walking back through my room and snatching the oversized hoodie on the bed. I pulled it on and looked up catching myself in the mirror.

I barely recognized this girl, I hoped he wouldn't either. One last thing I did was snatch open my bedside table drawer and grab my debit card. I kept it there so I wouldn't frivolously spend, a trick Mama had taught me, along with the handful of pictures I had managed to salvage. You didn't keep your plastic on you; cash was king. I looked once more into the mirror. I couldn't hide the harsh necklace of bruises around my neck.

Rather, I might need them for a plea, so I left them. I stifled a sob, I had thought my life was going somewhere. Now, here I was, left with nothing.

I snatched up the jeans I had taken from CreedonCreedon, and something skittered across the floor. I snatched it up wondering why, of all places, that was there, before pocketing it to investigate later. Men put the most random things in their pockets.