

Knocked Up by the CEO/

Chapter 6

Marshall walked into BlueSea at 7:20 p.m., holding the white peonies Kimberly had picked out earlier. The restaurant was dimly lit, classy, full of quiet conversations and polished silverware. He spotted Anna right away and braced himself. All he had to do was survive this dinner

As soon as she saw him, she jumped up from her seat like she'd been sitting on pins

"Marshall!" she squealed, her heels clicking as she rushed over and threw her arms around him like they were in some rom-com reunion. "Oh my God, you look amazing! I've been counting down to this all day."

He gave her a stiff smile and gently pulled back, holding flowers. "These are for you," he said

Anna took them with a dramatic gasp. "Peonies? Fancy. You remembered I like white, didn't you?"

He hadn't. Kimberly had picked them, but he just nodded. "Yeah."

"You haven't ordered yet, have you?" he asked, settling into the chair, already regretting this dinner

"I was waiting for you. Though..." she made a face. "I did have to send my water back twice. Smudges on the glass. You'd think a place like this would train its staff."

A young waiter approached their table with a nervous smile. "Good evening. Welcome to BlueSeal. Can I start you off with something to drink?"

Anna didn't even look at him. "Dom Pérignon 2010, not the '12. I can taste the difference."

The waiter nodded politely. "Of course, ma'am. And for you, sir?"

"Just water for now," Marshall said quietly.

Anna rolled her eyes dramatically. "Water? Marshall, we're at BlueSeal, not some diner. Get the wine list."

"I'm fine with water," Marshall repeated, his jaw tightening slightly.

The waiter hurried away and Anna turned back to Marshall with an exaggerated sigh. "So," Anna leaned forward, all smiles now. "Tell me everything. How's the company? Your mother mentioned something about Texas?"

For the next ten minutes, Marshall found himself giving her a full business update while she nodded and threw in just enough questions to look interested. She was smooth, charming and good at making him feel heard. It almost made him forget how badly he'd wanted to cancel tonight

The champagne came but this time with an older server, clearly a pro

"Dom Pérignon 2010," the woman announced, holding the bottle for inspection

Anna acted like she was verifying a diamond. "It's better be cold. I hate lukewarm champagne."

"It's at 38 degrees, ma'am. Perfectly chilled."

The woman did the whole fancy wine thing. She showed the cork and poured a little for tasting. Anna swirled, sniffed, tasted and scowled

"This isn't cold enough."

Marshall raised an eyebrow. The glass was literally frosted over

“Ma’am, I assure you...”

“Are you telling me I don’t know how champagne should be served?”
Anna’s voice lifted just enough for heads to turn

The server, her name tag said Julia, kept calm. “Of course not, ma’am.
I’ll get a fresh bottle.”

Marshall felt heat rise to his face as other diners turned to stare. "Anna,
the champagne is fine."

"No, it's not fine, Marshall. I have standards." She snapped her fingers at
Julia. "Go. Now."

Julia walked off and Anna turned back like nothing had happened.
"Now, where were we? Oh yes, the Texas expansion. You know my
cousin lives in Dallas and she says the market there is absolutely
booming for luxury goods...”

Marshall’s eyes trailed back to the bar. The staff were huddled together,
whispering fast, throwing quick looks in their direction like they were
figuring out how to handle a bomb without setting it off

“Are you even listening?” Anna snapped

“Hmmm? Sorry.”

“I was saying... we should go to Dallas together. You check out the
market. I visit my cousin. Win-win.”

Julia came back with a new bottle. Anna went through the same routine
as before, acting like this was the biggest decision she’d ever make.

“Better,” she finally said. “You can pour.”

“Thank you,” Marshall told Julia quietly

She gave him the first real smile he had seen since walking into blueSeal

Anna raised her glass. “To new adventures.”

Marshall tapped his water against her glass. “To new adventures.”

She sighed contentedly. “Much better. Honestly, service standards these days are awful. If people like me don’t hold them accountable, who will?”

“Service seemed fine to me.”

Anna laughed. “Marshall you’re too nice for your own good.”

The first waiter came back, smiling but cautious. “Ready to order?”

“I’ll have the lobster. Make sure it’s not overcooked. There is nothing worse than rubber lobster.”

“Of course, ma’am. How would you like it prepared?”

“Properly,” Anna said, like the question itself was dumb. “I’m sure your chef knows how to make lobster without me having to spell it out.”

The waiter’s smile twitched but held. “Absolutely. And for you, Sir?”

“Salmon. However the chef recommends.”

“Excellent. I’ll get that in.”

As the waiter left, Anna rolled her eyes. “Did you see his face? Like I’m the problem. Honestly... service workers have gotten so entitled.”

“Entitled?” Marshall blinked

“Yes! If they can’t do their job right the first time, it’s on them.”

Marshall didn’t bother arguing. No point. She was on a roll now, ranting about how people nowadays had no pride in their work. Standards were

slipping. The world was falling apart because nobody knew how to do their job right. On and on she went, completely missing the irony

Their food showed up not long after, and to be fair, it looked perfect. Marshall took a bite of his salmon, barely tasting it. His eyes drifted to the table beside them where a couple in their sixties sharing dessert, laughing at something only they understood. On the other side, a family of four was busy keeping their toddler entertained with crayons while passing plates around, chatting softly, and actually enjoying each other's company.

All of it felt... simple. Normal. Easy.

Meanwhile, here he was. Sitting across from someone who could turn ordering dinner into a hostage situation.

"Earth to Marshall," Anna said, waving a fork at him. "You've been zoning out all night."

"Long day," he muttered.

"Well, try to stay with me, okay? I was saying, we should start thinking about Cabo. Presidents' Day weekend. I know this amazing resort, private villas, full spa, oceanfront. It'll be perfect. We deserve a break."

He blinked. "Cabo?"

"For our next trip," she said like it was already booked. "You need to unwind. You've been too wound up lately. Your mom agrees with me, by the way."

He almost choked on his water. "My mom?"

"Mm-hmm." She nodded like it was the most casual thing in the world. "We talk. She's worried about you. Says you work too much, don't take time for yourself, don't prioritize your personal life. And honestly? She's not wrong."

Marshall sat back, processing. Anna leaned forward, tapping her nails against the stem of her champagne glass. “You need someone to balance you out. Pull you away from the grind. Remind you there’s more to life than conference calls and quarterly reports.”

He didn’t answer because she wasn’t entirely wrong. He did work too much. He did use the business as an excuse to avoid... this. All of this

But looking at her, with her perfect nails and her perfect lobster and her endless complaints about waiters and butter temperatures... he couldn’t shake the quiet thought creeping in the back of his head.

Is this really the balance I need?

Anna was still talking. Something about checking flight options but he’d stopped listening. His gaze drifted past her to the window. Out to the harbor. To the quiet sway of boats anchored under the city lights.

Twenty minutes later, as the plates were cleared and dessert menus arrived, he cleared his throat. “I should probably get the check.”

Anna blinked, surprised. “Already? We haven’t even looked at dessert.”

“I’ve got an early call tomorrow. Tokyo office.”

She pouted. “A call you can’t push?”

“Yep.”

She sighed like he’d just personally ruined her entire week. “This is exactly why you need me to help you unplug.”

He didn’t answer. Just waved the waiter over. The bill landed on the table, and of course, it wasn’t cheap. He pulled out his card but paused before handing it over. “Add twenty-five percent to the tip,” he told the waiter.

The kid's face lit up like Christmas. "Absolutely, sir. Thank you so much."

Anna's head snapped toward him like she'd heard something offensive. "Twenty-five? Marshall. Seriously?"

"They were great."

"They did their job. Not great. Just... adequate." She shook her head like he was some naive little puppy. "You're letting people take advantage of you."

"It's my money," he said quietly, signing the receipt without looking at her.

"For now," she muttered under her breath with a little laugh, but it landed heavier than she probably realized

They gathered their things and headed for the exit. "Thank you for the flowers," Anna said as they waited for the valet

Her car pulled up first. The valet held the door while she got in. A few seconds later, Marshall's car pulled up right behind.

The drive home took Marshall twenty minutes. Twenty minutes of silence, just him and his thoughts, replaying every second of that dinner on a loop

By the time he pulled into his driveway, one thing was clear

But God... how was he going to tell his mother?"

The next morning, Marshall was reviewing reports when his office door open. He looked up and there she was—Stormy. Like some part of the day that refused to settle.

Marshall set the tablet down. "Well... if it isn't my favourite walking weather report."

Her head jerked up. “Sir?”

“Stormy.” His mouth tilted lazily. “Still fits.”

“Didn’t think you were serious about that nickname,” she mumbled, moving closer. Her knuckles whitened around the black card like it was radioactive

“Oh, I’m always serious,” Marshall said. “Especially when the forecast involves you.”

She stopped in front of his desk, then like it was burning her fingers, she placed it on his desk. His black card

“I... um ... I came to return this,” she mumbled, her eyes glued to the floor

Marshall stared at the card, then at her. "Did something happen? Was there an issue with..."

She shook her head. “No... no, no issues. I just... I just... I don’t think I can hold onto it anymore.”

His brows pulled together. “Kimberly... what’s going on?”

Her fingers fidgeted with the hem of her shirt. “I think... I... um... might’ve gone overboard.”

He leaned back. “Overboard how?”

She peeked up at him, biting her bottom lip. “You said... twenty-four hours of free will, right?”

“Yeah. I did.” His mouth tugged slightly. “Why?”

“And you meant it?” She pressed. “Like... properly meant it?”

“I meant it.” He folded his arms. “What did you do, buy a yacht?”

“Not exactly.” She bit her lip. “More like... two hundred thousand dollars worth of not-a-yacht.”

His brow twitched. “Okay... then what? A car? A house?” He shrugged casually. “If that’s it, that’s fine. Was your money for twenty- four hours so breathe.”

Kimberly nodded slowly, but her face didn’t match someone who just bought a new car or house. Her eyes dropped. “Yeah... not quite.”

Marshall narrowed his gaze, sitting up straighter. “Not compelling you... but if you don’t mind, can you just say what you bought that’s got you acting like this?”

She took a gulp of air. “I bought... I mean, I paid for... it's not really buying, it's more like paying off...” She groaned and buried her face in her hands. “I'm making this worse, aren't I?”

“You're not making anything worse. Just tell me what happened.”

Kimberly looked up at him, her eyes glassy. “My son needs surgery.”

Marshall blinked, stiffening. “What kind of surgery?”

Kimberly let out a shaky breath. “It’s... spinal surgery.”

Marshall’s arms slowly unfolded. “Spinal?”

She nodded quietly. “Yeah. There was... an accident. The doctors said if we don’t fix it now...” Her voice cracked. “It’s his only chance of not ending up... you know... paralyzed. A vegetable.”

“How old is he?”

“Five.” Her lips trembled but curved into a soft smile. “Landon. His name’s Landon.” Her eyes glazed but not from sadness, just mom’s stuff. “He’s the sweetest boy. The kind that says ‘bless you’ even when a

stranger sneezes. Loves animals. Thinks he's a superhero. Honestly... he's perfect."

Marshall caught himself smiling. "You talk about him like he's made of sunshine."

"I mean... he kinda is," she chuckled weakly, wiping her cheek. "He drives me crazy... but he's my whole world."

Marshall exhaled, piecing it all together. "So that's why you were in the hospital. The day I met you... twice."

Kimberly nodded, brushing her hair behind her ears. "Yeah... been practically living there the past few weeks."

"When's the surgery?"

"Tomorrow. 8 a.m"

Marshall grabbed his calendar off the desk, scanned it and sent it down. "Alright. You're taking the rest of the week off."

Kimberly blinked. "Sir... what?"

"You heard me." He leaned forward, elbows on the desk. "Take the week off."

Her eyes narrowed, suspicious. "Is this... your way of firing me? Because if it's..."

Marshall burst out laughing. "No. God, no. Relax."

Her face softened, but only a little. "Then why are you being... nice?"

"Because..." he shrugged like it was obvious. "You're a mother. And no mother's going to sit behind a desk typing schedules while her baby is in an operating room. You wouldn't be able to concentrate even if you tried."

Her lips parted slightly. “You sure?”

“Positive.” Then he grinned. “Besides... I won’t even be in the office till Monday.”

Her eyes flicked up. “Oh.”

“Yeah.” He smirked, lying straight through his teeth. “So... what would my assistant even be doing while I’m not here?”

Kimberly shook her head, half-laughing. “So it’s just my luck, huh?”

“Exactly,” he said, leaning back. “Pure luck.”

She inhaled slowly, blinking like she couldn’t believe this was real. “Thank you. Thank you so much. I don’t even know how to... thank you.”

“You don’t have to,” Marshall said. “Just go be with your son.”

Kimberly smiled, a real one this time. “Landon is going to love hearing that mommy’s boss is cool.”

Marshall laughed under his breath. “Don’t let that get around. I’ve got a reputation to protect.”

She chuckled. “Deal.”

As she reached for the door, Marshall called after her, “Stormy.”

Kimberly paused, turning halfway, wearing that look. The one that said that’s not her name without her having to say it out loud

He tapped the black card still sitting on the desk. “Next time... try not to scare me with it.”

A grin tugged at her lips. “I will do my best, Sir.”

