

The Billionaire Alpha's Surprise Baby

Billionaire Alphas of Aspen

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Chapter One

Ava

The vacation rental is a complete disaster when Jules and I arrive to clean it. The floor is caked with muddy boot prints, dishes are piled in the kitchen sink, and there's something red and sticky dripping from the ceiling.

"What the hell?" Jules mutters, staring up at the gooey mess.

"Blender margarita explosion," I sigh, nodding at the dirty appliance sitting on the kitchen counter.

A trail of white feathers leads into the living room, and my insides clench with dread. Someone — or, more likely — something ripped into the oversized down throw pillows that once adorned the couch.

"I guess they had a dog," I say.

"You mean a rogue demon from hell," Jules grumbles, shaking her head at the trail of muddy paw prints leading in from the back patio. "Ugh. I hate pet-friendly rentals."

"Same," I groan, cringing as I extract something pink and lacy from between the couch cushions.

Jules and I work for Crisp N Clean — a local maid service. Mainly, we spend our time cleaning vacation rentals and getting them ready for the next wave of wealthy interlopers who come to Aspen to ski. It's seasonal — which is what I was after when I took the job — but it's also backbreaking, infuriating work.

You'd think that people spending upwards of five hundred dollars a night to stay somewhere would leave the place in good shape, but in the four years I've moonlighted as a maid, I've learned that it's often the wealthiest clients who leave things the filthiest.

Jules is already on her phone with the owner of the rental, who will charge the guests for damages while we get paid the same. She hangs up and shakes her head, which tells me we're not going to get any extra time to turn over the rental.

"I'll get the sheets and towels," I sigh.

Jules nods and holds out her fist in the universal rock-paper-scissors gesture. I pump my fist three times, holding “rock.” Jules beats me with paper, which means that I’ll be starting in the bathrooms while she tackles the kitchen.

Steeling myself for the worst, I grab my caddy full of cleaning supplies and scurry into the back room to strip the beds and collect all the dirty towels. We typically have just under four hours to turn over a three-bedroom condo, which is just barely enough time to do all the laundry and get the place presentably clean.

Once the linens are in the washing machine, I trudge back to the bathroom, where I’m greeted by the sight of a used condom lying in the middle of the floor.

Swallowing down the sick feeling in my throat, I reach for my rubber gloves and glimpse the photo I have taped to the inside of my supply caddy. It’s a National Geographic shot of Ha Long Bay in Vietnam, where ships navigate around huge mossy rock formations that accent the still turquoise water at sunset.

It’s one of the many places on my bucket list — and one I’ll get to see on my trip through Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos. It’s the reason I’ve been working two or three jobs at a time ever since I graduated from high school.

When my mom got pregnant with me and my dad left, she got stuck in Pueblo and never left. Growing up, we never had extra money for things like vacations. I’d never even left the state of Colorado until my school trip to Costa Rica my senior year.

Watching her struggle has made me determined never to be stuck anywhere, which is why I’ve been working my ass off these last six years to earn my degree and save up enough money to travel the world before I start my career.

I’ve nearly finished scrubbing the weird ring of scum out of the bathtub when my phone pings. Gingerly, I fish it out of my back pocket with my thumb and forefinger and glance down at my notifications.

“Shit,” I mutter.

I totally forgot that I agreed to pick up another shift at the café, which is my other seasonal gig. I’m supposed to be at my other job in half an hour, and Jules and I aren’t even close to finishing this rental.

“Jules?” I call, cringing as I imagine the level of bribery it’s going to take to make up for flaking out on her this afternoon.

“What?” she yells.

“Don’t hate me . . .”

Jules groans as if she already knows what I’m about to say, which is absurd since I’ve never asked her to cover for me before.

I shuffle into the main living area with my tail between my legs. “So . . . I forgot that I picked up Leah’s shift at the café this afternoon . . .”

Jules is standing on a barstool scrubbing the rum-infused goo off the kitchen ceiling, but I’d be able to see her eye roll from space. “How much time you got?”

I grimace. “Like, fifteen minutes?”

She groans again and glances at the clock. “Fine. But you have to de-feather the living room before you go. And you owe me big.”

“Yes!” I cry in relief. “Of course. Anything you want.”

“I mean it,” Jules warns. “You work too hard, girl.”

“Pot, meet kettle,” I retort.

No one — and I mean, no one — works as hard as Jules. Crisp N Clean isn’t her only gig. She just started her own high-end cleaning business, and she still sometimes fills in for her flaky cousin over at Happy Helpers.

“Whatever,” says Jules. “You need some fun in your life! When’s the last time you got laid?”

I swallow as a surge of heat flushes my cheeks.

The thing about working multiple jobs and taking online classes is that it leaves little to no time for dating. Jules knows my social circle begins and ends with her, and she can probably guess that men aren’t beating down my door when I spend my days swapping out one sweaty uniform T-shirt for another.

“Uh-huh,” she tuts. “That’s what I thought.”

Her expression is so smug that I’m tempted to knock her right off that barstool.

“You and me. Friday night. We’re going out.”

“I don’t know . . .” I begin. “I have an early shift at the café on Saturday . . .”

“Nope. That’s my stipulation,” says Jules. “Girls night. We go hard. And you have to actually make an effort to have some fun — or you can scrub the floors yourself.”

I sigh. Jules has me over a barrel, and she knows it. I can't afford to lose this job at the café — not if I want to be able to eat while I'm schlepping across Asia.

"All right," I say. "Just . . . nothing too crazy."



I breakevery traffic law getting to the café for my shift. I walk through the back door two minutes late — sweaty, anxious, and reeking of Pine-Sol. I didn't see the owner's car parked in the alley, though, so it's possible that no one will notice my tardiness.

"Where have you been? We are swamped!" barks Philip as I scurry to the front of the café, tying my apron strings as I go.

So much for nobody noticing.

For once, Philip isn't just being dramatic. There's a line of patrons stretching all the way to the entrance, and at least four customers are impatiently milling around the pickup counter, waiting for their orders.

"Sorry," I mumble. "Traffic was a nightmare."

Philip shoots me a withering look.

He knows I'm lying. It's the middle of the week, which tends to be the slowest, and we haven't had any snow in days.

"I need two small flat whites, one medium mocha with oat milk, and a medium dirty chai."

I nod and jump behind the espresso machine, pulling the milk out of the refrigerator and knocking out the portafilter.

I've just gotten the milk steamed for the first two drinks when a pale snotty-looking guy approaches the counter. "Excuse me, miss, but this drink is absolutely revolting."

He holds up a cup for my inspection, as if I can identify every latte by sight.

"What did you order?"

"A cappuccino with coconut milk." He wrinkles his nose. "It's completely flat. No foam at all."

I sigh. A cappuccino is easy when it's made with cow's milk, but any kind of plant-based milk just doesn't froth the same way.

“I’m sorry about that,” I say, pulling my very best barista smile. “I’ll remake it right away and bring it out to you.”

The man doesn’t say thank-you. He just plops the drink on the counter and rolls his eyes, strutting back to his seat by the window.

I shake my head and try to refocus on the task at hand, finishing off the flat whites and grabbing another steaming pitcher to try to coax some air bubbles into the dreaded coconut milk.

“Can you make this?” pipes a voice to my left.

It’s a tween in nineties-throwback jeans and short furry boots. She’s waving a phone in front of my face, which is playing some viral video of a latte I’m sure I’ve never even heard of.

“Uh . . . just a sec,” I say, starting some more milk as I pour the drink I’m working on.

I can practically feel cappuccino guy glaring at me from across the counter, so I finish in a hurry and walk around to bring him his drink.

“Ava!” Philip shouts. “We’re out of almond milk!”

I turn to tell him there’s more in the back, but as I do, my elbow collides with something solid and unmoving.

I gasp as hot liquid sloshes out of the cup, spilling over onto my hand and wrist and splashing —

Jerking my head around, my eyes go wide. I’m staring up at a tall, so-handsome-it-should-be-illegal guy with the bluest eyes I’ve ever seen. He’s got these full kissable lips, finely chiseled features, and a ring of honey-brown curls framing his perfect face.

The guy looks like a freaking Greek god — if gods wore Cartier watches retailing for more than a small two-bedroom home. An unsightly brown stain is spreading across the man’s crisp white button-up, revealing the outline of hard muscular pecs.

Horror seizes me as I look him up and down. My coconut-milk cappuccino is dripping onto the floor — and the guy’s expensive leather shoes.