



Dirty Billionaire

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Billionaire Romance, Adult

Description: Finding the love of your life is a rare thing.

Losing it, inevitable. We're not immortal after all. But when that day arrived much earlier than I'd expected, it ripped my heart and soul apart. I promised my wife, I'd be strong and keep the kids close.

And love again.

I lied. I never will. She was it for me.

So when Penelope catches my eye with her grace and beauty, I resist. Powerfully. I don't want to share my body, my life, or my heart with anyone else. And I won't subject my children to seeing their mother replaced.

Except... I can't get Penelope's stunning green eyes and seductive curves out of my mind.

When another man appears on the scene—one I don't trust—I either have to step aside or let her walk away into his arms.

Dirty Billionaire is the fourth and final book the steamy Montgomery Billionaires series. This later in life, billionaire romance will appeal to readers who like spicy books with strong storylines, dominant heroes, witty dialogue, heart-clenching moments, and a delicious later in life, happy ever after.

Total Pages (Source): 66

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

CHAPTER ONE

WARD

I'M NOT SURE WHAT SEMI-retirement means exactly, but that's my official status.

I'm a few months from turning fifty and recently stepped down as the CEO of Montgomery Enterprises—the company I built from the ground up.

It was a big life decision.

Actually, it wasn't.

When Tina, my wife and mother of my children, died a few years ago, it shocked us all. It had broken my heart into tiny shards. Tina and I had plans to grow old together and do a million things.

God, I have so many regrets.

During our life together, I worked long and hard while she raised our children.

At the time, it seemed like a sound plan. Bella and the boys were our priority, and my company was thriving. In fact, it is now a billion-dollar empire that provides us the freedom to live a life that most people couldn't fathom.

I don't take it for granted, but I did take the time with my wife for granted and that is

one thing money can't buy.

Time.

Or time fucking travel.

Grief changes you. It's turned me into a philosophical man, wondering if you can really live your life always worrying it may end. Or if those you love might never walk through the door again.

That would make you crazy.

I enjoyed every part of growing my company, seeing two of my adult sons step into it and thrive. It was as much a creative expression of myself as a financial success.

Would I swap it all to get Tina back?

One day I say yes.

Another, I would answer no.

The heart and brain are at a constant tug of war. Some days I feel numb, others I go about my life feeling happy and normal. Then guilt whacks me over the head.

I'm well aware my own life could be taken from me in an instant, and that can send me on a spiral now that I have tiny grandchildren who I want to see grow.

I also wish Tina was fucking here to see them.

Ah, my good friend, anger. It's always close at hand, and there's always something to be fucked off about when it comes to the loss that we all live with each day.

Or rather, she doesn't live.

We were supposed to have forever.

Tina was the love of my life. The moment I met her and stared down into Bella's, my stepdaughter's eyes, I fell for them both.

Then she blessed me with my sons Knox, Atlas, and Levi.

They've all got beautiful partners. Knox married Payton, and she recently gave birth to their son, Daxon. Atlas and Molly are pregnant with twins. Levi's now engaged to Kaylee, his college sweetheart.

Bella married Blake Dufort, and they have a daughter, Jamie, who looks so much like Tina.

She's missed it all and I've had this weight on my shoulder to be both their mother and father.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

Fuck, it's hard.

I celebrate with them. I tell them how proud I am. Then I climb into bed and the tears stream down my face.

Tina should still be here with me. With all of us. Beside me, grinning stupidly at each other at how proud we are for creating such wonderful little people.

Our offspring.

God, she would've loved to see Levi's face when his name was called out in the NFL draft. Tina was the one who told me to let him play with that ball when I thought he should focus more on math.

"Not all our kids are going to end up in the boardroom with you, darling."

She was right.

While Levi's team didn't win the Super Bowl this year, I have no doubt in the years to come they will.

Montgomery's always win after all.

The question is, who the hell am I now?

A father and grandfather, yes. A businessman with the majority shareholding in my company, who still attends every board meeting and is closely watching the CEO I

put in place while Knox matures enough to take over.

He's still a little mad with me for not automatically giving him the position, but he wasn't ready. Also, I may have projected a little. I felt his focus should be on Payton and their little bundle of joy. I want to tell them to enjoy every second with their partners and forget their careers, but that's not how I raised them.

I can't put my shit on them. They lost their mom too. I am not the only one grieving her.

In fact, I think they're faring better than me.

It's been over two years now and people have starting asking me about dating.

Daring fuckers.

I clench my teeth and tap the indicator with my finger, turning the Bentley onto my road. The gate technology recognizes me and is open by the time I reach my mansion.

Dating.

Pfft.

Fuck that. I'm forty-nine and in great shape, so my doctor tells me. It's obvious. I have a strong muscular body, all my hair and teeth, and go to the gym almost every day.

One of my daughters-in-law told me my salt-and-pepper hair and short beard is sexy. To which my children replied gross.

Dating is just a topic I'm not happy discussing.

That doesn't mean I'm not attracted to women. I am. Very. I was when I was married to Tina despite being unconditionally loyal to her.

My focus is on the kids.

Having someone else in our lives feels...wrong.

Not having Tina in our lives feels fucking wrong. When consciousness hits me in the morning, I no longer roll over and pull her against my chest, waiting for her sleepy groan, which always made me smile. I no longer slide her annoying silk sleep pants aside and slip my thick cock inside her.

And I no longer get to wait for her face to lift and lips to meet mine as I watch her come.

I can't remember how many times we worried we might get a later in life surprise, but Levi was our last child.

I would've been happy.

I love my children more than life.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

Now, I wake up, roll onto my back, stare up at the ornate ceiling of my bedroom and wonder if today will be the day I feel ready to love again.

Or if I ever will.

After twenty-something years, I really doubt it's possible to love again. Not in the way I did with Tina. I've surmised that it's likely to be more of a companionship than true love.

Is that even what I want?

I park the Bentley and climb out, lifting my sunglasses onto my head.

"Afternoon sir," Hank, my butler, says, stepping out of the front door and holding it open for me.

"Hank." I nod at him then turn back to the driveway. "I thought Bella would be here already."

"Mrs. Dufort, Bella, had to leave. Jamie was unwell, so she said she would message you," he says. "It was very noisy."

I laugh as I slap him on the shoulder. "Babies are noisy, Hank."

They also fill the home with delicious joy, smelly diapers, and a whole bunch of washing. To be fair, I never dealt with much of that. We were able to hire help, and Tina was a hands-on mom.

I'm disappointed to not see my daughter, but Bella is an excellent mother, and I know she will have done right by Jamie.

I pull my phone out of my pocket and dial.

"Dad, I'm sorry." Bella answers and I can barely hear her through the screaming.

"Is Blake home?" I stop walking.

"Yes. The doctor is on the way," she says. "I'll call you tomorrow."

"Or if it's serious."

"Yes. Love you, Dad." She hangs up.

I try not to worry or show the kids, but the thought of losing any of them is so much more pronounced now.

Esmeralda greets me as I walk into the kitchen and drop my keys.

"Afternoon...or nearly evening, sir." Esmeralda smiles.

"Looks like it's just me tonight." I tell her. "Jamie is unwell."

"I heard." Esmeralda grins. "Great lungs that kid has."

I roll up the sleeves of my shirt and glance at my Rolex. It's not even six but it's cold outside, even for early February, and the board meeting dragged on today.

"I'll have an early dinner. In the library, Esmeralda."

“Certainly. I’ll bring it through in about ten minutes,” she replies.

Walking through the enormous house, I wonder for the hundredth time if I should sell it. The echoes of my wife are in every tile on the floor, on every painting on the wall. In the kids’ rooms. The living areas. In our bedroom.

Jesus, how could I date?

How could I bring another woman home to our house or into our bed? I know for a fact I can’t. I have spent a sum total of one night with another woman since Tina died.

Penelope.

Beautiful Penelope.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

We went to her house and spent hours pleasuring one another. It's tormented me ever since.

I crave her body. I crave her mouth on my shaft again. I want to see those green eyes of hers pleading for release.

And I despise myself for all of it.

CHAPTER TWO

PENELOPE

"NO. TELL THEM IF THEY want accreditation from us, then they need to be audited." I tell my farm manager. "What don't they understand about certification?"

Jesus.

"They say they meet the government standards and that should be good enough." Tucker shrugs.

I roll my eyes and adjust my laptop monitor. The glare from the floor to ceiling windows behind me is bad today. If I just pulled my blinds...but I'm too busy to even stand up and do that.

Stupid busy, I call it.

Running a non-profit organization is not for the fainthearted. We don't have the

budgets that corporations do which would allow us to hire a full team. So, we all work ten times harder.

I might be the CEO, but that doesn't mean I do less work. Quite the opposite.

Then there're all the networking and events to make sure we get donations from key wealthy individuals and keep the door open to opportunities.

People do business with people, as my father once taught me.

He was right.

I don't think he ever expected me to end up working for a non-profit, but it's what my heart wants to do.

I'm fortunate to be able to choose it. I have a trust fund that allows me to make decisions other people may not be able to.

"Well, it's not enough, Tucker. Consumers want to know their animals have been farmed humanely. That's what the blue heart logo we provide them with for their packaging means. No audit. No logo."

I feel like a stuck record.

"So tell them?" Tucker asks, scratching the back of his head.

Oh, my god.

Tucker is new, so I know he's just looking for direction, but I am so busy and my patience is thin.

“Yes. No. One of my team members will. But in the future, if someone stops you going on a farm, tell them they either get audited or they don’t. The end.”

“Got it. Okay.” Tucker nods, and when my marketing manager joins us, I let out a sigh of relief.

She understands how it works.

“Jenny, can you please give the owners at CluckaDale Farms a call? They refused to let Tucker on the farm today to be audited.”

She frowns. “They have to.”

I know!

I nod and stare at the email I’m trying to write. We’re lobbying the government for better conditions for farm animals—like many charities around the world are constantly doing—and I have to get this in by tomorrow.

I glance up when no one says anything, lifting my brow in question.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

“Why do they even want accreditation if they don’t understand they need to be audited?” Jenny asks.

I need her to take the lead on this.

I’m clearly not the person to ask. The farmers are.

Please go and do your jobs, people.

“Exactly.” I nod, tired. “Tucker went all the way out there today, only to be turned away. Please find out who originally spoke to them and make sure that our onboarding process is tighter.”

As in, there should’ve been no discussion because the expectations were made clear in the first place.

“Recommend you get payment first,” Tucker helpfully says. “I can’t not charge you. As much as I’d like to.”

All our auditors are contractors. Which means the longer he stands here, the more hours he’s going to put on our invoice.

I get it.

But I need to make sure this never happens again.

“Thanks, Tucker. We’ll call you when we have another audit to be booked. Jenny,

can you please call the farm and sort this out?”

Part of me wants to tell CluckaDale to take a flying leap, but we do this to help the animals.

They have both layer hens and poultry chickens on their farm, and while I know their animal welfare is pretty good, there are changes that will need to be done to meet our standards—high welfare standards.

It’s likely why they don’t want to be audited.

The cost of farming is hurting everyone.

But this is about quality of life for the animals and something I am very passionate about.

Once they meet the standards, which are basically a list of things like making sure the animals have enough water, food, shelter, and other things pertinent to that species, they can put our charity’s blue heart logo on their packaging.

Then consumers can see it when they buy their eggs, chicken, meat, and other produce in the supermarket. Our marketing efforts educate them on what it means. That the logo indicates our auditors have been on the farm and approved them.

The animals lived a happy life.

No audit. No logo.

CluckaDale knows this, and it sounds like they’re just trying to skirt the process.

No way.

“See you next time, Penelope,” Tucker says, wandering off.

I lean back in my chair.

“He’s right. We should bill them first. I’ll find out who booked it,” Jenny says, rubbing her fingers along her chin. “The website is very clear.”

“Tighten the process,” I say, then push away from the desk and unplug my laptop from all the cords.

I’m not going to be able to focus today.

Tonight, I’m attending a networking event and Ward Montgomery is going to be there. The man I spent a scorching night with a few months ago.

He’s so emotionally unavailable I should’ve lost interest by now. Yet, every time I hear his name or speak to him, my body lights up like a Christmas tree.

The things he did to me...my god.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

He might be eight years older than my forty-one years, but his body sure doesn't show it. Ward has one of those powerful jawlines, well-defined abs, and towers over me with wide, confident shoulders.

This isn't the first time we've seen each other since, and it won't be the last. We dance around each other, his broodingstares burning me from across the room, his deep whisky-sounding voice sending shivers through me when he's nearby.

I shudder now in anticipation.

"I'm going to work from home, then head to the event from there," I tell Jenny.

"Okay, have fun. I'll sort out the CluckaDales." She disappears and leaves me to my thoughts.

I don't know why I can't move on from the sexy billionaire. Well, apart from the fact I've never orgasmed so hard in my life.

Do I want another night with him?

When I learned that his wife had died years before, it explained why he ghosted me after our night together. If that makes me sound clingy, I make no apologies. I'm not a one-night type of woman.

When we met, there was immediate chemistry, and our conversation cemented it. Ward is charming and intelligent.

When he asked me to leave with him, it was not a hard decision.

We went to my place, and I thought he made that choice for my comfort.

If we'd both been younger, I might have considered he was a man after a quick fuck, but Ward Montgomery is a charming, successful, and respected man in our society.

I never once thought he would take what he wanted, then I would never hear from him again.

I wasn't left wanting, not at all. He thoroughly pleased every inch of my body. Even my toes were buzzing for days.

That man and his mouth...

So, while I waited to hear from him and slowly realized my mistake, I was filled with a range of emotions. Shame for being so stupid. Disappointment because Ward is an incredible man, and I'd been so attracted to him. Anger at him for not being more honest about his intentions. Last, I was annoyed with myself for being naïve.

Apparently, I didn't learn my lesson.

Ward got my number and called me a month ago.

"Penelope." The timbre of his voice and surprise at hearing from him had almost made me drop the phone.

"Hi," I'd replied. While I waited for him to speak again, I'd bitten my lip. The silence had felt heavy and thick with opportunity and questions.

"Believe it or not, I used to be quite charming." I'd heard the smile in his deep voice.

I wanted to tell him he was. That he'd taken my breath away with his beautiful, steely blue eyes and intoxicating presence. How his large hand had led me where he wanted me—in and out of the bedroom—and I shivered even now at the thought of his heavy roped cock.

“I don't need to be charmed, Ward,” I'd whispered.

But I did need more of what he had done to me. Much more. More orgasms, more of his mouth and more access to his powerful body so I could run my hands over his hard edges.

“What is it that you want, Penelope?” he asked.

Perhaps I should have launched into a speech about how I'd not heard from him in months after our night together and calling me for a booty call was out of order.

How I was looking for a meaningful relationship. That in hindsight, we weren't suited. He'd had his children. I wanted a baby and while at my age, it was unlikely, it wasn't impossible.

With a man who also wanted the same thing.

I didn't have to ask Ward if he did. He had four children, grandchildren, and was a widower.

I was the one with expectations that were unreasonable.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

So, perhaps that's why I answered with, "You know exactly what I want."

Ward was silent for a long moment while I'd pressed my eyes closed and cursed under my breath.

"I don't know the rules of the game anymore. I was married..."

"I know." I didn't want to hear it.

"You have my number," Ward replied, then after another moment of silence, he added, "I really enjoyed our time together."

Click.

I dropped the phone from my ear and stood staring at my Christmas tree.

I enjoyed our fucking time together?

Was he serious? I'd almost handed myself to him on a silver platter and he'd hung up!

What did he call for? To leave a goddamn review?

Five stars. Enjoyed our time together.

Ugh.

Since then, I'd been so mad and cursed his name every time I removed my dildo from my drawer, thinking about him as I came.

Days later, on New Year's Eve, I met another man. James. He's closer in age to me, with no children, and there's no questioning his interest.

We kissed.

I enjoyed it, but it didn't create the same kind of fireworks I shared with Ward. Still, I went on a few more dates with James, and then it seemed to fizzle out.

It was the night of the Super Bowl when I knew for sure James wasn't the man for me. I'd been at my brother's house. Every year I'd join Eric and his friends, drink horrible beer, and watch the game.

I might work for a charity, but I come from a wealthy family. Which means I have the luxury of a car and driver when I want. Hence, I drank way too much beer that night.

And accidentally rang Ward.

Accident. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

"Penelope," Ward answered in a purr.

I could hear he had the game on in the background and was with other people, then suddenly felt stupid. I hadn't planned what I was going to say or thought about why I was ringing. I just wanted to hear his sexy voice.

Perhaps it was all the testosterone in the room and on the TV.

“I don’t know why I’m ringing.”

“Yes, you do,” Ward replied in his deep husky voice. My toes curled as the background noise grew quieter.

“Where are you?” Ward asked.

“My brother’s. Watching the game.” I hiccuped. “Oh god. I’m not that drunk. Just a little bit. Enough that we can pretend tomorrow, I didn’t call you.”

“I’m not going to forget.” He rasped.

My panties moistened, and I whacked my palm on my head. This was such a bad idea.

“Ugh, why is your voice so sexy?”

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

Trust me, I've had nightmares about speaking those words ever since.

Ward chuckled roughly like you'd imagine a mountain man would while I stared up at the ceiling, wishing I wasn't in my brother's bathroom with soaked panties.

"I know it's not going to happen again, but I wanted to tell you it was the single most orgasmic night of my life."

Stop talking.

"Penelope. Christ. I enjoyed every damn minute," Ward told me, and I could hear the frustration in his voice. "Reallyfucking enjoyed it."

Stupid beer made me keep talking.

"The way you parted my thighs and licked me, Ward. No man has ever made me come so fast."

Oh, my god.

In the days following, I've woken up at least three times with heart palpitations, replaying that moment over and over and goddamn over.

His groan filled the phone. "Fuck. If my mouth was on you right now, you'd be shuddering and dripping."

Fortunately, I wasn't drunk enough to keep the conversation going. I wasn't about to

have phone sex with my brother down the hallway, and my fingers were getting really close to slipping inside my jeans.

No damn way.

“Shit. I can’t do this here. If the guys hear—”

Another deep growl sounded in my ear. “What guys?”

“My brother’s friends.”

He’d growled again.

“Ward, I’m going home. Come over. I need this. I need you to touch me.”

“Go home now.”

The phone had gone dead, and I’d said my goodbyes, racing home.

I swear the adrenaline had helped sober me up. I changed into something sexy and brushed my teeth.

Then waited.

And waited.

Ward never showed up.

He never messaged. He never called. He simply ghosted me.

Again.

I will never let a man do that to me again.

It's been two weeks. Tonight will be the first time we see each other since Ward stood me up.

I don't plan to play fair.

I'm going to wear the dress. The dress every woman owns. The one that's going to make him wish he never said no to me.

Silently or otherwise.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

Then I'm going to return the favor.

CHAPTER THREE

WARD

I SIP MY WHISKY ASI watch Penelope step into the venue. Then almost choke.

My fucking god.

I've seen her naked, with candlelight flickering over her beautiful olive skin, but still the sight of her tonight takes my breath away.

"You all right, Montgomery?" A guy slaps me on the back.

I lift a napkin to my lips and follow her with my eyes as she walks into the black-tie fundraiser. Her long, black, figure-hugging dress shimmers in the low light, the curves of her breasts perfect.

Motherfucker.

It's backless and finishes just above the round of her smooth bottom. Vintage Chanel.

I should know. I'm in the fashion industry.

Iamthe fucking fashion industry.

Penelope's family comes from old money, and when I learned who she was the night we met, I expected the opposite of what I found. Her long dark hair, bright green eyes, and slim figure make her attractive, but it's what's underneath that intrigues me.

"So, let me try to understand this. You think you can change the way people shop and eat via this program?" I asked after she'd shared the workings of the animal welfare charity she ran.

"Not at all. Consumers themselves will," Penelope replied. "We're not asking them to change their diets, simply the product they choose."

I tilted my head. "Explain."

Comfortable in her own skin, Penelope accepted another flute of champagne as the server passed and took a sip, in no hurry to answer.

I liked that.

A lot.

"Well, our job is to educate them via marketing that the logo on the chicken or eggs, for example, means the animals lived a happy life. Simply put. They can then choose those eggs or the product where the layer hens lived in cages."

"So no cages?"

"No cages at all in our standards. They are cruel," she replied firmly. "It's a win-win for everyone. The farmers choosing to care more for their animals get more business, more animals live happier lives, and consumers don't have to spend hours trying to figure out which one is the best."

I thought about standing in the grocery aisle myself searching for free-range eggs.

“Isn’t it just looking for free range?”

“God no. That’s just another marketing term. There is no legal definition.”

My brows lifted.

“Most people would be horrified if they saw the conditions some animals lived in. This way, our auditors check on them regularly and we can trust the blue heart logo on the packaging represents a good choice.”

“So, farmers pay for the use of the brand.” I nodded.

“It covers the auditing, marketing, and administration. We are non-profit, remember?”

I couldn’t fault it personally.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

Aside from the fact it didn't give them the money or influence to lobby for policy changes. Truechange.

Farming is big business. Worth billions.

She smiled at me. "I can see where your mind is going, Ward. Trust me, this is a different way of doing things. We take the power away from the corrupt senate—not sorry—and put it back in the hands of consumers."

Now I was really listening.

"Change happens at the checkout. People vote with their wallet, as we say. More farmers are joining and having to improve their farming methods, otherwise people buy their competitors' products."

Penelope smiled, and I could see her passion for what she was doing.

"It's not about hurting farmers—we are open to everyone joining. If they can meet our standards. It's simply eliminating the hidden animal cruelty from the consumer which has gone on long enough."

Incredible.

"Do you think it will work?" I'd asked next.

"Yes. I know it does. Other animal welfare organizations are doing it around the world with huge success." She smiled broadly and took a sip.

Pride poured from her.

God, she was beautiful. Smart, beautiful, and intelligent. If I'd been a younger man—a different man—I might have fallen in love on the spot.

Perhaps I did in my own way.

Penelope Goldsmith had captured my attention, and I was having trouble looking away, completely charmed by her.

“You put me to shame, Ms. Goldsmith. All I've done with my life is to create beautiful clothes.” I smirked, glancing down into my liquid gold.

It was a dick thing to say. Verity & Co. clothing walked along the runways alongside the biggest names in the world. Were worn by the most beautiful men and women on the planet.

And had made me one of the richest men in the country. Give or take a few hundred million.

But who was counting?

“Many of your dresses hang in my wardrobe, Mr. Montgomery,” Penelope said. “They make me very happy to wear. We all have our part to play in this world.”

I sipped my drink as I imagined her naked, stepping into one of our designs...and me ripping it off her so I could ravage her. The image had taken me by surprise, my cock thickening in my designer pants.

The chemistry had flowed both ways so powerfully. Her eyes dilated, a slight blush of arousal on her cheeks.

“My sons are now in charge. I’m semi-retired.” I think I said it to let her know I was no longer a young man. Not that she was a spring chicken, but I knew she was unmarried. How, I cannot remember.

“Come on now. You’re way too young to retire.” She teased.

I couldn’t have stopped the smirk if I’d wanted to as she flirted.

“Please, call me Ward. There’s more to life than working.” I lifted a shoulder. “I admire your passion, given the options available to you, but don’t you have other dreams?”

Her eyes drifted across the room. Then back to me. “I have dreams. Don’t we all?”

Our eyes remained locked as invisible flames lapped at us. At that moment, I desperately wanted to know what she craved.

Pleasure?

Material things?

Love?

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

More status and recognition?

To taste this woman, I might have gone to great lengths to give them to her. Especially the pleasure, and I was cocky enough to know I could.

For hours.

“Sometimes we don’t know what they are.” I rasped.

“Then perhaps we just need to make the most of what is in front of us until that new dream makes itself known.” My voice was husky then, giving no doubt to what I meant.

I could blame the five whiskies I’d had, but either way there was no possibility of me walking away from Penelope Goldsmith that night, even if I’d been stone cold sober.

Thoughts of Tina slipped into the back of my mind as I led Penelope outside. When her eyes lifted, I knew what her answer would be, but I asked it anyway. “Can I give you a ride home?”

“Will you be coming in for a nightcap?” Her cheeks heated.

I nodded to Luke, my driver, who opened the Bentley door, and led her over.

She hesitated before climbing in and waited for my answer. My hand ran down the side of her hip as I waited for guilt or my grief to change my mind.

It never came.

“Yes. I’d like that,” I replied, and by the time I closed the door and Luke pulled out into the traffic, I had my mouth on hers.

Fuck the night cap. It was Penelope I had wanted to taste.

And I did.

With my tongue slicing through her sparkling wet folds while Penelope lay on her bed, my black tie wrapped around her wrists.

I’d felt like an animal as my large hands held her thighs wide open, not an ounce of emotion in sight. Just pure lust and desire.

A far cry from the lovemaking between my wife and me for decades.

But I...liked it.

While also feeling a hint of shame at being a man using a woman’s body. Even as I thrust my cock inside her and her bright, knowing eyes allowed me access to every inch of her body.

Afterward, I thought I’d forget about our night together, writing it off as a delicious and debaucherous night together. But that hasn’t been the case.

I crave her.

My fingers itch to touch her again. To claim her soft lips and tug her against my chest, showing the world that I was the man who made her scream.

I had another chance and...fucked it up.

On the night of the Super Bowl, Penelope had phoned. She was a little drunk, and I was ready to make her come on the phone—and myself— but she stopped it, telling me she was at her brother's.

By then my cock was hard and our chemistry was tugging me to her.

I had to see her again.

I had to part her thighs and drink her liquid pleasure, then stuff her full of my shaft.

We'd agreed to meet at her place, and I'd run out the door, not caring if Knox and Levi had heard me.

Until I did.

Levi's questioning face became a bigger and bigger image the closer I got to Penelope's house. My cock deflated and my senses returned.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

Once was sex.

Twice was...more.

I didn't want more.

I wanted to be married to my wife and have her alive again. I wanted my family to be a unit and not to have to consider if my children would be okay with this.

Instead of messaging her, I took a different turn and drove home. Then drank way too much whisky before jerking off in the shower and going to bed.

I am a father. I don't care if they are now adults; I have to be responsible. Who I bring into their world needs to be the right woman. If I ever do.

They all still grieve, and this will be another stage in their process that will hurt them.

Whether I like it or not, me loving another woman will hurt my kids. Sorry, but I never signed up to do that. My job is to protect them.

So, I can't.

The image of someone sitting at Tina's place at our dining room table and the faces of my kids looking back at me makes me want to punch something.

What? Life? I can't punch fucking life. The intangible motherfucker. There is no one to blame. Nothing to hate. Just raw grief which never seems to leave. Like an

unwanted guest, it's always hovering in the shadows.

That was two weeks ago, and I have had regrets. I wish I had shown up and spent a few dirty hours with Penelope, making each other feel good.

Or called her to cancel.

That's the sort of thing a respectful man would do. I taught my boys to treat women well and yet something happened, and I froze.

"I thought you would have merged companies, Ward." The surrounding conversation brings me back to the present.

"Not at all," I reply, lifting my Macallan to my lips as my gaze returns over and over to the sexy woman in the black dress.

Like forbidden fruit, I want her.

I want to fuck her—need to fuck her—so hard it fucks every ounce of this unwanted desire out of me once and for all.

She isn't going to forgive easily. A woman like Penelope with such high self-worth wouldn't. I expect to have to work for it.

The thought just makes me desire her more.

Men. We are predators at heart, I'm sure of it.

"Excuse me." I nod at the people around me and make my way across the room.

I'm almost at Penelope's side when an arm snakes around her and my brows shoot to

the roof of my head. The hand belonging to a tall, well-dressed man settles on her hip and brushes the curve of her ass.

A rush of anger surprises me as it fills my chest.

I watch as Penelope lifts her face to his, and he kisses her cheek.

Motherfucker.

Then she turns and our eyes meet.

I know my gaze is fierce, but I can't stop it. I might not have any right to feel like this, but I'm seconds away from ripping his arm off her and threatening to steal his last breath if he touches her again.

Fury has me clenching my whisky tightly.

Penelope gasps as the glass smashes.

Fuck.

Three servers come rushing toward us, picking up the broken pieces and wiping me down as she takes a step back.

But our eyes never leave one another.

“Ward.” She breathes as I step toward her.

We’re inches apart and I force myself not to cup the back of her neck and clamp my mouth down on hers.

I clear my throat.

“I wanted to apologize.” My voice is rough as I steer her farther away from the glass.

This time it’s my hand on her hip.

Penelope nods gracefully and I love that she didn’t ask me what for. She knows. I know. We both know exactly what I’m apologizing for.

“Why?” Penelope asks instead.

I glance around, then at the man who had his hands on her. He’s watching us, but not with the look of a man enamored with her, and when he catches me watching, he simply turns to chat to another guest.

Good.

He's no threat.

She deserves the truth, but all my excuses die on the tip of my tongue as I stare down into her bright green eyes.

Penelope wants more than I am offering. That is clear. But I'm a greedy man and want one more night.

Then I will be free of this obsession.

CHAPTER FOUR

PENELOPE

I KNEW WARD WAS GOING to be here, but I didn't know James would. The way he wandered over and manhandled me like we were still dating was a little infuriating. Thankfully, I turned my face, so his kiss landed on my cheek.

Suddenly, I was prompted by a powerful, invisible force to spin around.

A forced called Ward Montgomery.

The moment I did, the world vanished and all I could see was him. Like some ridiculous Hollywood movie where everything fades and the spotlight is on the main character.

Until the glass exploded in his hand.

The entire room stopped and stared.

“Why?” I ask when he apologizes for standing me up two weeks ago.

I wasn’t expecting him to do more than watch me from across the room tonight.

Perhaps I underestimated him. An apology is deserved, but the damn chemistry between us is choking me.

“Is that your date?” Ward asks, narrowing his eyes at James.

I’m tempted to say yes and slip away, but I can’t. The words won’t come out. I spent hours getting ready to catch his attention, and now that I have it, I feel as powerless as I ever do with this man.

But that doesn’t mean I’m going to be easy.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

I'm not easy.

I have had two one-night stands in my entire forty-one years. One in my early twenties and the other with Ward. My family is highly respected in the Philadelphia society, and I usually conduct myself much better than this.

I've dated powerful and interesting men. Just never met the one to settle down and have a family with.

Ward asked me the first time we met if I had other dreams besides my career. I do. I want a baby. The clock has been ticking and possibly already run out of batteries, but the need to be a mother is palpable.

Thing is, you can't go around talking about it. It makes people uncomfortable.

It makes men uncomfortable.

Especially if you are a single woman.

I've had an amazing life. I run a non-profit because it's my passion to help animals, but I'm also a lawyer and have a master's in political science.

Yet, love seems to have passed me by.

"I was wrong. I should have phoned you." Ward lowers his chin, and I hear the authenticity in his apology.

Yet, that isn't what I asked.

"Why did you...I know you're attracted to me." I sip my glass of Cristal.

"Of course I fucking am." He grates out. Those broody eyes of his shoot away and he mutters thank you to the server who delivers him another glass of Macallan.

Then they slam back to mine as my heart thumps inside my chest.

I want to yell at my body for wanting this man who left me needy and wanting. Feeling rejected and humiliated.

"Perhaps you need more time to self-reflect." I sip my champagne angrily and step back. "It was lovely seeing you again, Mr. Montgomery."

I notice the blood on his hand as my eyes dip.

Goddamn him. I reach out and take his hand, surprising both of us.

Ward glances down as his blood coats my fingers, and I grab the napkin I'd tucked into my dress. As I wrap it around his hand, he tugs me closer with his other hand and my eyes lift to his.

"Come home with me," Ward whispers roughly.

I swallow.

Oh, how I want his big masculine body wrapped around mine. To feel his skilled hands running over my body. The way he lifted me with such ease. I don't know a woman alive who wouldn't have her breath taken away by this man.

“Ward Montgomery, isn’t it?” James steps up next to me and extends his hand. Then notices our hands entwined with the napkin. “Damn. They don’t make crystal glasses like they used to, do they?”

James laughs as I move a few inches away.

“In your day?” Ward arcs a brow and I glare at him, surprised by the acid in his voice.

He’s jealous.

Oh my god.

“Do you need someone to look at that? Pen, is there a medical kit somewhere?” James asks, using a nickname I hate.

I lift my own brow. I’m not his personal assistant. Ward looks amused, clearly happy to see the tension between us.

God, I can’t believe I was about to weaken and go home with him.

Page 15

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

“He’ll live.” I let go of Ward's hand and introduce them. “James Goldman, meet Ward Montgomery. Now, if you will both excuse me, I need to use the restroom.”

Without waiting for a response, I grab a handful of my skirt and stride away.

Come home with me.

How dare he ask that? After not showing up on the day of the Super Bowl when I was throbbing with need and expectation, how dare he!

Because the truth is, I want nothing more than to be fucked into absolute compliance and exhaustion by him again.

WARD

IT TAKES ME ALMOST seven long minutes to extract myself from James and two of his business associates.

Penelope hasn't returned.

The good news is that James doesn't seem bothered by that and hasn't asked me how I know her. So, I've arrived at two conclusions: he's either an idiot or they're not seeing one another.

I lie. Three.

Penelope is coming home with me tonight.

I have no expectations she'll invite me to her home, which leaves me with the choice of a hotel or taking her back to my place.

Fucking up once was a mistake. I'll not do that again. A hotel feels tacky and is a privacy risk for both of us. Journalists hover around looking for gossip.

While neither of us is that exciting, it would still be a story for a slow news day.

Rubbing my jaw, I glance around the room looking for Penelope's long, dark hair and electric eyes.

Fuck, has she gone?

I say goodbye to the hosts and get my coat, messaging Luke to collect me as I walk around the perimeter of the crowd.

I can't see her.

Damn it.

As I step outside, I finally spot her. In the reflection of the sliding glass doors, she walks toward me, digging into the pockets of her long black faux-fur coat, and almost trips.

I spin and reach for her.

"Woah, there," I say roughly, the feeling of her body in my arms sending rockets of desire through me.

God, I've missed touching her.

Her gasp, as her hands grip my arms and her mouth parts, has my cock standing up in an instant.

“Damn you, Ward.”

“I know. I feel it too.” I tug her a little closer as my heart thuds in my chest. “Now, I’ll ask you one more time. Will you come home with me?”

Penelope’s gaze lingers, dropping to my lips, then back up. I feel her body shaking, not from the cold, but from desire.

“Please.”

“Yes.”

My limo pulls up as a smirk hits my lips, thrilled I get to enjoy this gorgeous woman one more time. Before we part, I will be clear with her about future expectations. I will never hurt her again.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

When we slide into the back seat of the limousine, I widen my legs and place a hand on Penelope's thigh. She parts them without hesitation and the split in the skirt gives me full access.

Fuck me.

I hiss as I find her without panties.

"Jesus." I moan, turning and swapping hands. "Was this for me?" She's so wet my two fingers enter her with ease.

She arches. "God, Ward."

"Tell me this was for me." I growl deeply.

"Yes," Penelope confesses as I pump my fingers in and out of her with pure intention.

Then I pull them out and circle her clit while she grips my shoulder and moans. "Oh god."

I've died and gone to heaven, I'm sure of it.

How did I not know that she was craving me and wet all night, wanting my touch?

Wanting my cock.

Wanting me.

Not that it was a sure thing. A man has to work to spend a night with a woman like this and I know how lucky I am to have my hand between her legs.

Damn lucky.

“You’re a naughty girl, Penelope.” I lick my fingers and return them to her pussy. “Standing among all those people with no panties on, dripping with need for me.”

“Yes.” She moans, but I don’t think she knows what she’s saying as her body trembles.

I want to rip the Chanel dress from her body and suck her nipples, but even I know that’s sacrilege. Not to mention showing my animalistic side.

Stay in control.

“I will have to punish you for this.” I use my thumb on my other hand to work her clit as I continue fucking her with my fingers. “I’m going to take you to the edge and make you wait for your orgasm.”

What I want to do is lift her onto my hips and have her slide her wet pussy around my shaft, then ride me until she clamps down and pulls the come from my body.

“Please, Ward. Please.” Her fingers dig into my shoulder and her hips lift off the seat, eager for more.

Fuck.

I want more of her. All of her. I move both of us along the wide seat of the limo and lift her hips so I can get my mouth on her.

Then run a long sweep of my tongue over her wet pussy.

Yes.

“Jesus, god!” Penelope cries.

“I could fuck you right now.” I growl, swallowing her juices. “Lift you onto my hard cock and fill this sexy body with my come.”

Actually, I’ll come right now if I don’t get control of myself.

I clamp onto her clit and slide more fingers inside her. It takes another ten seconds before her screams are filling the private space of the limo and she’s shuddering around my mouth.

I’m like a caged tiger.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

I've waited weeks to have her back in my arms and it feels like we have a ten-hour drive home.

Fortunately, it's not.

CHAPTER FIVE

PENELOPE

I'M NO STRANGER TO wealth, but Ward's mansion is stunning. The moment we pull up, the grand structure makes an impact and even in my aroused and distracted state, I can appreciate the architecture.

He opens the door, says something to the driver, and then takes our coats, hanging them somewhere.

I don't know.

I'm busy trying not to drip on the expensive rugs. My thighs are soaked from his mouth and my orgasm. I feel like a hussy but don't care.

"Come." Ward takes my hand and leads me up a wide, sweeping staircase.

I don't think I've ever felt so aroused and desperate to have a man fuck me in my life. It's the most incredible sensation which seems to have stopped most of my brain cells from functioning.

Ward leads us into a room, and I immediately know it's not his. There are no personal items anywhere.

This is a guest room.

If it wasn't for the enormous desire flowing through my veins, I would turn and leave, but even before I can consider it, Ward shuts the door behind us and presses me up against the dark wood.

"I'm going to fuck you so damn hard that no man will ever be good enough for you," Ward growls, running his mouth along my neck.

Oh fuck.

"Bold claims." I barely get out, my voice shaky and weak.

Reaching around, he unzips the vintage Chanel dress and it drops to the floor, leaving me naked except for my shoes.

"Leave those on," Ward orders, tugging at his bowtie and shrugging off his jacket.

I pant as his shirt is tossed across the room, and then he unzips his pants.

How is he so toned and bulky at his age? Forty-nine isn't ancient, but not many men years younger than him have his physique.

I'm not complaining in the least.

I step closer, running my hands up over his pecs and broad shoulders.

He pinches my chin. Dark, desire-filled eyes hold me in place.

“Get on the bed.”

Ward guides me backward, and my legs bump on the edge of it, forcing me to sit. Wearing only my red-soled Louboutin stilettos, he maneuvers me so that I climb up on my knees, facing him.

“Do you know how many times I’ve stroked my cock, thinking of your sexy body?” he asks, fisting his long and engorged member and pinching my nipple.

“Fuck.” I jolt, every touch sensitive.

“Time for your punishment, Penelope.” Those dark eyes of his glower down on me. “Take me in your mouth. All the way down your throat.”

He wraps a hand around my neck and forces me onto his sex like I’m some whore he’s using. My pussy clenches in reaction, dripping more.

Ward doesn’t wait for me to agree. I draw in a breath, then he’s deep down my throat, fucking my mouth.

Page 18

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

I swear I'm going to orgasm without his touch.

Gaining some control, I reach and stroke him as I work his manhood with my mouth and tongue.

"Good girl." He purrs.

Holy hell.

My entire body bursts into a thousand nerve endings on fire.

I like hearing those words way too much. I must make a sound because he pulls me off his cock and before I know it, I'm on my back and Ward's enormous body is over me.

"Ward," I cry, gripping his shoulders.

"I've waited long enough." He growls as his cock presses at my entrance.

My entire body shudders in anticipation.

"You ready to be fucked, Penelope?" he asks and I think I must nod because he enters me with so much force that I scream.

WARD

YES! GODDAMN, WHY HAVE I waited so long to be back inside this woman?

She's everything I remembered and more.

I'm sure the second time is even better. I know Penelope's body a little more and what makes her scream.

And scream she most definitely has.

I'm not completely unaware that this is the home I built with my wife, but apparently being an animal and fucking like one helps to push it to the back of my mind.

Plus, Penelope is wrapped around my hard cock like a glove, and I think I might pass out from utter fucking pleasure.

"Feel that?" I ask her, slamming in once more after slowly pulling out. Like I deserve to be tortured for destroying at least one room of memories from my past.

Stop thinking about it.

"Yes. More. Faster," she pleads.

"Tell me this feels amazing. That you can feel me in your pussy. Every inch. Ever fucking little bit of hot inch," I demand.

I lift her hips, going deeper, and she cries out, digging her nails into my arms. That's going to hurt tomorrow, but I don't care.

I slap her ass, then flip her over.

"Ward, more. I need to come." Penelope begs as I fill her again.

"You'll come when I give you permission." I slap her ass again and grin like a

madman at the sight of my hand marking her precious skin.

As if she could be mine to keep.

Mine to fuck every day and night. To have her suck my cock like she just did, those lips wrapped around my shaft like a good little whore.

But I promised myself.

Just one more night.

That's all.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

I've even been willing to fuck her in my wife's house; I wanted Penelope so much. That speaks volumes.

My hips slap against her as I grip her cheeks, widening them to press my thumb against the nerves of her ass.

"Oh, Jesus fuck," Penelope cries.

I'd love to fill this spot too, but there's no time to find out if she could take me. So, I opt for a finger instead.

She falls right over the edge, her pussy strangling my cock, and I slam into her wildly, letting myself go.

Fire rushes down my spine, hitting my balls and sliding along my cock, exploding inside her.

"Ward."

Thrust after thrust, I jerk out every last drop.

We both shudder from the erotic pleasure as I pull her up against my chest, twist her face, and claim her mouth.

"That's number one." I rumble.

CHAPTER SIX

WARD

I DON'T KNOW HOW I feel.

Sated.

Exhausted.

Confused.

Penelope is lying on my chest, completely out cold, as I stare at the ceiling of my guest room.

One of them anyway.

I've never slept in here before. I have no idea who has. Not the kids. They all have their rooms. Possibly one of the grandkids, but I don't want to think about that as my sticky cock lays semihard against my stomach.

Or as a woman—not my wife—has my come dripping from her pussy.

This should feel much worse, but it doesn't.

What the fuck does that say about me? A man who swore his life to a woman forever. I thought it was my forever, not hers.

Some days, I hate Tina for leaving me. Like it was her choice.

I knew one day, one of us would go before the other, but not this early. I was forty-fucking-seven. The young don't really understand, but life is only just getting underway at that age.

The kids had left home, and we had plans. We had fucking plans. None of which included me bringing a beautiful woman home into our guest bedroom and wondering if I could fuck her in the ass.

Jesus.

I gently move Penelope off me and head to the ensuite bathroom to clean up. Staring in the mirror, I wonder once again who I am.

Leaning on the sink, I stare down into the basin as the water swirls down the hole and zone out.

Now what?

Now I'm supposed to say goodbye, thank Penelope for another great night, and tell her that I wish her well in life. That I don't want to fuck her again—which is a lie—and she won't be the image I think of when next jerking off.

Page 20

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

She will be.

God this is a mess.

Maybe I should speak to a shrink, but I know what they'll say. You should start dating. It's normal to move on when you're ready. Tina wouldn't expect you to stay alone forever...blah, blah, blah.

No, she wouldn't.

As I wouldn't want her to if our situation were reversed, but it's not just about me or her. It's the kids I think I'm most concerned about. Seeing me replace their mother...it's not right.

Something snaps me out of my thoughts, and I finish up and return to the bedroom.

Penelope is wriggling, tucking her hands under the pillow. She blinks at me when I climb back into bed.

A ping in my heart surprises me.

She's so beautiful, lying here sated from the way I pleased her body. The way we seem to fit and move together with more ease than two almost strangers should.

Not that I'm an expert.

"Hey." I tug her hip closer, and her tummy presses into my cock. Penelope places a

hand on my chest. “Need anything. Glass of water?”

“Sleep.” She smiles, and her eyes gently close once more.

So trusting.

I decide to do the same and work things out in the morning. I drift off to sleep, forgetting everything except the warmth of her body against mine.

WHEN I WAKE THE NEXTtime, I open my eyes and find Penelope lying there staring at me. She looks beautiful despite her dark hair being a fuzzy mess and her mascara smudging under her eyes.

“Morning,” I say and roll onto my back, rubbing a hand through my hair.

I have all of it still, thank goodness. My boys have my genes too—all of them with thick dark hair.

I suddenly wonder why Penelope has never had kids, and if she wants them. She may be in her early forties, but it’s still possible.

Something about that makes me uncomfortable.

I can’t quite put my finger on it, but when I turn back to face her, I can see that her own mind is whirling.

“Morning.” She smiles and glances past me. The drapes are drawn, but the sunlight is sneaking through the gaps.

“Coffee?” I ask, starting to move.

“Ward.” Penelope puts a hand on my arm and I still. Then let out a sigh and roll over facing her.

“I’m not sorry.” I assure her. “Not the first time, and not last night. You are a beautiful, sexy woman, Penelope.”

She nods, swallowing, but her eyes cloud over.

“And that’s all.” It’s not a question, but we both know it is.

I nod.

“Just sex. Nothing more,” she clarifies.

Fuck.

“I...” I try to choose my words carefully but I’m hungover, sleep deprived, and not sure if my dick is still in charge. It hardened the moment I opened my eyes and took in the swell of her breasts. “I lost my wife a few years ago.”

Page 21

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

God, saying those words still makes my tongue bitter.

“I’m sorry,” Penelope says with compassion.

This conversation, while naked, feels wrong, but I take responsibility for not having it at any other time, so carry on.

“I don’t intend to marry again.”

Her smile completely vanishes.

“Or date.” I rake my hand through my hair. “Fuck, Penelope, I sh—”

“Wow. Okay, which is why you brought me to your guest room. Like I’m just some whore.” She falls on her back and shakes her head at the ceiling.

“No, that’s not—”

Yeah. It is.

I don’t see her in that way—not at all. I can’t change what I did or why I did it. I’m trying to protect my wife’s memory, and would it really have made a difference if we woke up in my bedroom?

The one with Tina’s things still in a few places?

Wouldn’t that have been a whole lot worse?

For both of us.

“You’re not a whore,” I say firmly, sitting up on my arm. “I thought this was consensual.”

Her head spins back to me. “It was. It is. But... I...you’re right. I knew this wasn’t your bedroom last night and had the opportunity then to say no.”

I swallow.

Of course she knew.

Neither of us could have stopped what took place. It would’ve taken a strong person to say no to that level of attraction. Someone stronger than me.

I let out a sigh.

This is why I didn’t want a woman in my home. I don’t want the guilt, shame, or to hurt anyone. Especially not my kids who come and go as they please.

As they should.

This is their family home.

“I should go.” Penelope flicks back the covers and bends over to pick up her dress.

Desire blasts through my body.

Goddamn it. I was supposed to fuck that right out of my system.

I failed.

I think I want Penelope more this morning than I did last night. I leap out of bed and take the dress out of her hands, cupping the back of her neck. Big vulnerable green eyes lift to mine.

“Wait. Don’t go. Let me make you breakfast.” I kiss her lips gently.

“Why?”

“Stop asking me why, woman. I don’t fucking know. I just know I don’t want you to leave.” I grunt.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

Her eyes fall to my chest and I let them linger there for a moment, then lift her chin with my fingers.

“Please.”

“Okay. Coffee and eggs.” She nods. “And I’ll need to borrow some clothes.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

PENELOPE

THERE WAS NO WAY I was wearing vintage Chanel and doing a walk of shame in Ward Montgomery’s mansion while he makes me breakfast. Which is how I find myself sitting in his kitchen wearing a pair of his rolled-up black sweatpants and a white t-shirt that’s enormous on me.

Ward, for context, is six foot four and around two hundred and thirty pounds. Way bigger than my five foot five and...way less pounds.

As I lift the glass of orange juice, an arm snakes around me under the knotted t-shirt, then cups my breast.

“Stop doing that.” I slap his arm.

“I can’t help it. I know you have no bra on underneath and can see your hard nipples.”

He's like a teenage boy, I swear it.

And much more playful than I expected.

Do not fall for him.

"They're hard because you keep grabbing my breasts! I'm not doing anything."

"Breathing, Penelope. You're breathing." Ward turns me around and tugs me against his hard frame. I force myself not to wrap my arms around his neck.

I want to.

I want a lot of things with this man, but he drew a line in the sand this morning and I am not going to ignore it.

I don't date.

"Are you fourteen?" I shake my head, laughing.

He takes my hand and places it on his cock, over his gray sweatpants. "All men are fourteen when it comes to their dicks."

The pan sizzles behind him and with a groan Ward releases me and returns to the eggs he's frying.

"Sunny side up," I tell him and climb up on one of the stools.

In minutes, my plate is loaded with eggs, bacon, and pan-tossed tomatoes. A steaming mug of coffee beside it. We eat in relative silence, his large masculine body just inches away.

I can't help but admire the way, even out of a suit, Ward is still able to own a room with his alpha dominance.

Am I still upset after our conversation in bed?

Yes.

But I take full responsibility. The Alanis Morissette lyrics fool me once: shame on you. Fool me twice: shame on me. I'm playing on repeat in my head.

It wasn't like he hadn't already showed me who he was. Unavailable. I should have waited for my car and gone home.

And miss out on last night?

Hell no.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

Now I have my answer. The one I've been seeking.

Ward Montgomery doesn't date. He's not over the death of his wife, and that makes him an emotionally unavailable man who will only hurt me if I don't walk away.

The danger with men like him is they want their cake and to eat it too.

He eats my pussy well; I'll give him that.

But it's up to me to draw my own line in the sand so he can't just keep taking.

I wipe my mouth on a napkin, then turn to face him as he sits there like a GQ model on the cover of their Silver Fox edition looking sexy as fuck.

My poor ovaries.

He makes the butterflies in my tummy do the tango every time I look at him.

"I'm going to get dressed and then head home," I say softly, meeting his gaze head-on. "I enjoyed both our nights together...and"—I smile—"you make a great breakfast."

"Penelope." Ward places his mug on the marble countertop, frowning.

"No." I hold my hand up. "Losing your wife must've been devastating. I can't even imagine the pain."

“Yes.” His palm flattens on the cold marble, and I notice the indent from the wedding ring he once wore.

Even the physical scars are still there.

“If I was the kind of woman who could do casual sex, you’d be the man I choose, Ward.” I let him take my hand and push back the stupid emotions tightening my chest.

“I wouldn’t want you if you were,” he says roughly and lifts me onto his lap. His strength and dominance wrap me with this delicious feeling of protection, which I know isn’t real.

I want it to be, but it’s not.

I push back the tears threatening at the loss of what could be between us. Something amazing, I sense. But we will never know.

Ward wants a fuck buddy.

I want to fall in love and have a baby. Maybe not even in that order. There’s still a chance I could have a baby.

A tiny one.

Ward is in a different place in life, even without the grief he’s clearly still suffering from.

I dip my face into his neck and breathe in his musky and masculine scent to remember him always.

Cupping the back of my neck, he tugs me back up and kisses me like we've been lovers for years. Like two people with regrets who are saying goodbye. Who aren't ready for it to end, and the fire begins to roar.

"Hey Dad, did you k—oh...fuck." A voice much younger asks.

We rip apart.

I slide down off Ward's lap and my bare feet slap on the tiles. Then I come face-to-face with a younger version of the man I just spent the night with.

"Atlas," Ward exclaims, stepping in front of me.

I lean around him and catch the smirk on his son's face.

Crap.

Crap, damn, shit.

Page 24

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:08 am

“I’m... I’m going to get my things.” I dart around Ward and give Atlas an awkward wave as I run up the stairs.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WARD

“GIVE ME FIVE MINUTES.” I say to Atlas as I glance around the kitchen and rub the back of my head.

Penelope has her purse in one hand and a garment bag in the other when I glance up.

No doubt she found it in one of the closets and has tucked her vintage Chanel dress inside. I can’t help but respect that under the circumstances.

A woman who appreciates the importance of protecting couture in the face of being caught with her pants down...well, that’s admirable.

And the kind of grace I expect from her.

“Take your time. I think it’s pretty clear what happened, so you don’t need to hurry back and explain.” Atlas sips his coffee, and I want to slap the smirk from his face.

But I’m also slightly relieved.

Of all my kids, he’s the one I’m the least concerned about. Atlas is my optimist. The one who takes life in his stride and seems comfortable in his own skin. They all are,

in their own way, but perhaps it's because he's a creative.

Or...who knows why our kids are like they are?

If it had been Knox. Jesus. A whole other story.

Bella would likely be trying to make friends with Penelope and have her babysitting.

Levi. Shit. I just don't know. I need him focused on his football career. These years are so important to him. As the baby of the family, losing his mom so young was harder on him.

I think.

Men. We just don't talk enough.

Even though I think I talk to my boys more openly than most dads. At a guess. Like all parents, I'm fucking winging it.

"Message your brothers and I'll kick your ass." I growl under my breath as I pass my son.

He spits out his coffee, coughing and laughing, while I go and say goodbye to Penelope.

I gather her coat from the closet and steer her outside, hoping another one of my offspring doesn't show up.

"I'm sorry." I smile down at her.

"Don't be." She shakes her head but barely meets my eyes. "We were saying

goodbye, anyway.”

It felt to me like my cock was waking up again, having her on my lap. Feeling her tongue sweep over mine. Her soft breasts pressing against my chest.

So much for fucking her out of my system.

A second night with her has made me desire her more...and not just physically. Making her breakfast and teasing her as she padded around my kitchen was...nice.

Her giggles had me smiling like an idiot, feeling all macho and shit. I...liked it.

I could've easily tucked her under my arm and curled up on the sofa watching movies for the day. Or, in better weather, dragged her out to the tennis court and tested her skills.

Made her a cocktail and watched her swim lengths—naked—in my heated lap pool.

Adopted a fucking dog and gone walking in the park together.

Page 25

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

I don't want her to leave.

Damn you, Atlas. I love you, but couldn't you have visited tomorrow instead?

I have an open-door policy in my home, but I guess, if I want to have a relationship one day, that rule will need to change. A woman who is not their mother wouldn't appreciate them just walking into her home.

My chest tightens.

I'm not sure I could ever be ready for that.

Or if they will be.

I glance around and then tuck a stray dark lock over Penelope's ear. She's put the rest up in a ponytail, making her look younger than her forty-one years.

It's time for that goodbye.

"Once again you were absolutely divine," I rumble.

She nods, dropping her eyes. I lift her chin with my finger, stepping closer, as the Uber she ordered pulls up.

"I want to see you again."

Shit.

It falls out.

I don't know what I'm asking, but the words just tumble out before I can stop them.

"No," she replies, immediately meeting me head-on. "I can't."

I nod.

"Okay."

No, it's not.

Fuck that.

"Why?" I ask, not accepting her answer.

The driver gets out and rounds the car, opening the door for her.

Fuck off.

"Because I could fall in love with a man like you. And you will never love me. Goodbye, Ward," Penelope says, kissing my cheek, then rips out of my arms.

She's in the back of the car before I can catch my breath after the shock of her words. I stand there watching the driver pull away and take her with him.

I could fall in love with a man like you.

I don't know how long I stand there. The Uber has left the property, and I've swallowed loudly at least twice.

“Dad?” Atlas says behind me.

“Yes.” I shake myself out of it, turning.

“Who is she?”

Turns out my memory is going because an hour later my house is filled with my kids and grandkids for lunch.

Page 26

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

I spend most of the day watching Atlas to see if he's whispering in his siblings' ears, and the others to see if they are looking at me differently.

It's torture.

The other part of my brain is distracted by thoughts of Penelope.

I could fall in love with a man like you. And you will never love me.

Is she right?

I don't know how other men deal with a declaration like that, but I'm taking it very fucking seriously. I mean, my cock was inside that beautiful woman for hours last night.

She's not just...I've thought about her for weeks. Since that first time.

I wasn't expecting this and don't know how to deal with it.

"Grandpa," Bella says to me, dipping her eyes at the toy I'm supposed to be playing with.

"Wampa," Jamie, my granddaughter, repeats, clapping her hands excitedly.

"Oh, did you hear that? Blake! Your daughter just said Grandpa."

"She said Wam-pa," Bella's husband replies deadpan. "And she still hasn't said

daddy.”

I ignore them. I’m struck by how much Jamie looks like her grandma, and it pulls me back to the reality of my life.

Fuck, this is hard. I don’t know how to be a man who lost his wife and desires another one without feeling guilt and like I’m lying to everyone I love.

Including Penelope.

She deserves better than this.

“Momma!” Jamie claps some more.

“You’re not mine.” Blake shakes his head, but winks at his daughter.

“Stop saying that.” Bella throws a toy at him.

I climb to my feet and slap Blake on the back. “Give it time. Knox said every word under the sun before he said daddy. But he also followed me around like a bad smell.”

“I was after your money.” Knox sips his beer.

I snort.

He’s not lying.

“Jamie,” Blake leans forward. “Daddy is rich. Say daddy.”

“Momma!” Jamie dances on her bottom and we all laugh.

“At least I’ve got a one in two chance of having my babies say daddy early.” Atlas grins, glancing over at Molly, who is pregnant with twins.

“Two disappointments.” Blake shrugs and then laughs when Atlas gives him the bird.

“Get over it, Blake.” Bella lifts Jamie into her arms.

“Bwakee!” Jamie declares.

“Are you fucking kidding me!” Blake throws his hands up and the entire room breaks into laughter.

Page 27

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Leaning on the edge of the mantelpiece, I stare out at my family. I'm blessed to have every single one of them. I never take for granted what life and Tina gave me.

Could Penelope take on me and my family? Would she want to? Perhaps seeing Atlas was a reality check for her.

I could fall in love with a man like you.

God, I'm going insane trying to get inside her head. Mine is enough to work out.

When I head into the kitchen, Atlas follows me.

"You going to tell me who that woman was?"

"As you said, it's pretty obvious, son." I pour myself a glass of water from the jug on the counter and watch him as I take a long drink.

I drop it on the counter.

"But I am sorry you had to walk in on that."

"Please. I'm a grown man." He scoffs. "Glad you weren't naked—that would have taken some therapy."

I cringe inwardly.

He means seeing his father being sexual—he's seen me buck naked over the years. If

it had been his mother, I'd hate it enough, but that it was another woman is exactly the thing I'm trying to protect my children from.

"It won't happen again," I say firmly.

Knox walks in.

"What won't happen again?"

I cross my arms and press my hip into the counter, waiting to see what Atlas does. He stares back at me in question.

Fucking hell.

Why did I breed smart kids, not dumb ones?

I can't lie.

I'd also like to keep this to myself. It is my private life, after all. But the reality is, my sons are close, and they'll talk.

"I had a friend over for breakfast," I reply, and Knox begins to tune out. Until I say, "A woman."

His brows shoot up.

"And that's all you need to know. It's nothing serious," I add.

I could fall in love with a man like you.

"Is it the woman you were talking to on the phone at the Super Bowl party?" Levi

asks from the doorway.

I glance over Knox's head.

Shit.

I am not ready for this conversation. But Tina and I always promised we wouldn't lie to our children. Unless it was for a damn good reason to protect them.

"Yes."

"She seems nice." Atlas slides his hands into his pockets as my heart pounds.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

She is. I just never thought I'd be standing in our family home talking to my kids about a woman other than their mother. I thought I'd be telling them to treat their wives—and soon to be wives—with respect. To be loyal their whole lives.

Not discussing my fucking dating life.

Not confessing that I brought a woman home and fucked her until my cock nearly fell off.

Or tried to.

Also, I am not mentioning that part.

“You met her?” Knox frowns as Levi steps farther into the room.

I hold up my hands before Atlas can launch into a description of Penelope on my lap wearing my clothes.

“He arrived before she left. Boys, it was just breakfast.”

“Ah, yeah, I don't think it was just breakfast.” Atlas narrows his eyes at my downright lie, and I want to kick myself. “Unless she goes around wearing men's trackpants.”

Fuck.

Knox crosses his arms.

Levi does the same thing.

Then Bella walks in. “What am I missing?”

“Dad is dating,” Knox declares.

When my little girl's face drops, I feel my heart break and everything I've been trying to protect them from comes crashing down.

CHAPTER NINE

PENELOPE

I HUG MY MOTHER AS she greets me at the door.

“Why has it been almost two weeks since I saw you?” She rubs my back in the way only a mom can.

I melt into her embrace and close my eyes.

I've regretted saying those words to Ward for two long weeks now.

I could fall in love with a man like you.

Pride is kicking my ass.

Not that I didn't mean it, but I didn't have to spit it out. The fact he didn't stop me, call, message... I'm glad. I'm also not glad.

I guess it's true that women are complicated and impossible to please. I can't even figure myself out.

All I've done is go to work and then head home to nurse what I guess is a bit of a broken heart.

Which is silly. I slept with Ward twice.

Two nights.

One breakfast.

And one emotionally unavailable man.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Instead of beating myself up, I've accepted that I was powerless to his charm and whole—I mentally circle my hand in front of me—sex appeal.

Ward is unlike anyone I've ever met. Sure, he's a self-made billionaire who carries himself with a confidence, power, and grace few men have.

His potency tugs me toward him like a magnet.

Not to mention his strong jawline, bright blue knowing eyes, and broad shoulders, which make me weak at the knees.

Younger men don't even compare.

But it's the way he gazes into my eyes and how I shiver under his touch that make me completely powerless.

He knows exactly what my body wants, and his natural dominance tells me each time he's taking it with or without my consent. It's so wrong, but it just makes me want him more.

That and watching his stern gaze which dares any other man to come near me. A woman knows these things. Ward has claimed me. I sense it with every cell in my body.

The problem?

Ward doesn't know it and I don't think he wants to acknowledge it because he's

grieving over his wife still.

I can't compete with that.

Which leaves me with a broken heart, a craving so powerful it hurts, and a ticking clock that says I need to move on and do it fast.

"Come, let's eat." Mom leads me through to the luxurious dining room where a huge crystal chandelier hangs over the antique oak table.

As kids, Eric and I were rarely allowed to dine here. Now we're treated like royalty when we come to visit. They get out the silver and make a fuss about serving us.

"Hey sugar." Dad walks in and kisses me on the cheek. "How's the lobbying going?"

I love my father.

He's been a solid presence in my life since the day I was born. Always believing in me and encouraging me to follow my dreams.

"Good." I smile, and we ease into a comfortable dinner conversation. "I've got some PR lined up, so you might see me on TV this week."

"You know I could just pay someone and make this happen, right? If you really wanted me to." Dad smirks before biting into his fish.

I grin and shake my head.

"That's cheating. And no. Thank you, Dad."

Although it is very tempting.

Every time I visit farms and see the atrocious way animals are living in cages, I get so riled up. If there was more transparency, things would change rapidly. The media can do that faster than anything.

“What we’re doing is working. With more publicity, we’ll get a tipping point of change very soon.”

“I’m proud of you, sweetheart.” Mom smiles at me. “Now. Tell me. Are you seeing anyone?”

Crap.

“I heard you were seen speaking with Montgomery recently. He’s a bit old for you.” Dad lowers his brows. “I take it, it was a business conversation.”

“Mmm hmm.” I nod, laser-like focus on the broccoli I’m pushing around my plate.

With precision surgery.

“Shame that all his sons are now spoken for,” Mom says, and I suddenly feel sick to my stomach.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

“Mom, they are young enough to be my sons!”

I gulp my wine.

“Oh, are they?” She shrugs.

Yes. Yes, they are.

And it’s their father who takes my breath away.

“How’s James?” Dad asks.

This.

This is why I stayed away for two weeks. I want to escape these questions, make an excuse, and head home to hide under my duvet.

Being forty, single, and childless is not fun. While my parents love and support me, they want grandkids. Neither Eric nor I have given them any yet. Though Eric is five years younger than me, so he has a greater chance.

The familiar tightness in my chest returns.

It’s a reminder that I need to make smart decisions from this point in my life. Sleeping with Ward might’ve been incredible in the moment, but it wasn’t taking me in the direction I want to go.

Being a mother.

Finding a life partner.

He is going to take time to get over her—time I don't have—if he ever truly will.

So, I've decided, I need to take matters into my own hands. I've booked appointments at an IVF clinic and a top dating agency.

It's doing things upside down, I realize, but at forty-one, I am not waiting for anyone anymore.

I suppose it's like buying two lottery tickets and seeing which one I win.

Or perhaps I won't win either.

What I do know is that Ward Montgomery is unavailable and is on a different path in life than I am.

You will never love me.

Goodbye, Ward.

CHAPTER TEN

WARD

I STAND IN MY OFFICE—WHICH I still maintain at Montgomery Enterprises—with one hand nestled in the pocket of my Tom Ford pants and the other holding a coffee mug to my lips as I stare at the gorgeous woman on TV.

Penelope.

My Penelope.

She's not yours.

“This morning on the breakfast show we have Penelope Goldsmith here from Paws Welfare. Good morning.”

“Good morning, Kelly.” Penelope smiles, and the sound of her smooth, sexy voice slides through my body like a lightning bolt.

I can't look away. I'm mesmerized.

Page 31

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

And I miss her like fucking crazy.

She's wearing an apple green pant suit which looks stunning with her long straight dark hair and same-colored eyes.

I'm almost breathless watching her.

It's been two-and-a-half weeks since she walked away from me and my children found out I was dating.

Which is a lie.

We never dated.

But I wasn't going to say I fucked her twice. She told me she could love me, then I never called her again.

That doesn't mean I haven't thought about her every damn day. Because I have. I crave her being in my arms again, and the thought of her out with other men makes me restless.

And a little unhinged.

She belongs to me.

I curse, remembering the moment I said my wedding vows to Tina, and try to work out how another woman could so quickly mean something to me.

Because she does.

“The work you’re doing to help improve the lives of farm animals is highly commendable. Tell us how it works.”

“Well, we’re asking consumers to vote with their wallets at the checkout. When you see products with the little blue heart logo”—an image appears on the screen behind her—“you know our auditors have been on their farms.”

“How does this help the animals?” Kelly asks.

“Farmers must meet our standards. If they don’t, they can’t use the logo. A logo which consumers know to mean the animals were living their best lives. The more consumers that choose blue heart products, the more farmers will be encouraged to join.”

“And more happy animals.” Kelly nods, smiling.

“Exactly.”

“But you pay a little more.”

“You pay the true price of farming. Animal cruelty occurs from cutting corners. It’s as simple as that. But consumers are driving this, so they get to choose.”

“I know what I’m choosing.” Kelly nods emphatically.

“Me too.”

Penelope’s pride hits me straight in the chest. Suddenly, I want to be in that studio with her, waiting to pull her into my arms and congratulate her on getting in front of

the nation this morning.

It's not easy.

And not with a highly sensitive topic like animal welfare.

My finger itches to reach for my phone.

"Is that her?" A voice asks behind me.

I turn to face Knox.

He's the marketing director at Montgomery Enterprises and when I'm in the office, which is at least once a week, we always meet.

"Yes." When I glance back, she's gone, and an advertisement is on the screen. I reach for the remote and turn it off.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

“She’s beautiful.” My eldest son says, leaning against the doorjamb.

“She is.” I smile, shaking my head at how I reacted to seeing her.

I need to get control.

When I glance back at Knox, his usual broody expression is there but he’s studying me.

“You like her.”

If there’s one child I cannot hide from, it’s Knox. Or maybe Bella. But she’s sensitive rather than intuitive, like her brother.

“I do, but like I told you on the weekend, I’m not dating. It’s too soon. I love your mother and miss her like crazy.”

“Loved.” He responds and I lift my brows, unimpressed.

“Love.Love doesn’t die when a person does.” I snap angrily.

Just because Tina, his mother, isn’t here doesn’t mean my feelings were buried with her. I hate that he might think that. This is exactly the sort of thing I want to avoid.

I still love her very much.

I still wish she was here.

I still wish she was my wife...and yet I can't ignore my feelings for Penelope, either.

Even though I'm fucking trying.

"Hey. Sorry. I get it. Well, maybe I don't. If Payton died, I think I'd die along with her. A part of me, anyway," Knox says.

He would.

That boy loves his wife the way I loved his mother. Which is part of the reason I didn't give him the CEO role. I considered it, but because I have all the years of experience I have, I knew this was the right thing for them.

The position is rightfully his. By birth. It will be there once he and Payton have had time together and created their family.

I nod, calming down.

Knox doesn't deserve my wrath. I'm angry with myself. Not him.

"But Mom wouldn't want you to be alone."

I should have known he wouldn't drop it. This kid—this grown man—is too much like me.

"Knox, I've heard it a million times from others. Please. Don't." I sigh and walk around my desk.

He's silent as I sit and open my laptop. It won't last. I know my son; he's simply choosing his words. When I lift my head, begging him silently to let this go, he walks in and closes the door.

“Knox,” I warn.

“Dad.” He slides his hands into his pants pockets and glances down at the floor.

If he’s praying, he’s looking in the wrong direction.

I think.

Then he lifts his face, emotion rich in his eyes, and I curse silently.

“You know I’m not one to talk about feelings and shit,” he starts.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

No kidding.

Which is why I'm a little floored right now.

"I miss Mom just as much as anyone. Seeing you with someone else is going to be weird as fuck," Knox says while my heart slowly cracks.

"But what I just saw on your face while you were watching her...and I'm your son, so this is awkward."

"Yeah, so maybe—"

"I think you love that woman."

What?

I avert my eyes, unable to look at him.

Of all the kids to say this to me, I would never have bet on it being him. Never in a million years.

"No. Son. Knox listen," I start, but my words fade away to nothing as our eyes meet once more.

I stare at my son while he stands there holding space for me to catch up. Instead, I slump back into my black executive leather seat and curse.

When did my kids get smarter than me?

“It took me ages to figure it out,” Knox says, referring to his wife. “Dad, I watch people date and break up around me and consider myself lucky to have met Payton. Luckier that I didn’t fuck it up and lose her.”

He is.

I watched from the sidelines.

“So perhaps, and fuck, I don’t know, but if you’re lucky enough to be loved by two women in this life, then don’t let her get away.”

All the oxygen leaves my body.

“Jesus, when did you become Oprah?”

“Fuck knows. Probably some osmosis stuff from Payton rubbing off.” Knox rubs his jaw and shoots me a sly grin.

I let out a small laugh.

“Bella will be okay,” Knox adds. “We’ll make sure of it.”

I know they will. She might be their older sister, but the boys love her so intensely I still don’t know how Blake was able to marry her.

I’ve never worried about my little girl—even though she doesn’t have my DNA, only her mother’s—because Atlas, Knox, and Levi have protected her even when they weren’t big enough.

And drove her crazy the entire time.

Now, she has an even more protective husband... which is exactly why they allowed her to marry him.

And when I say “allowed,” I mean it.

I glance at the black screen of the TV and wonder if she is still at the studio.

If you are lucky enough to love two women in this life, then don't let her get away.

I push back my chair.

My heart rate picks up as an idea begins to percolate.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PENELOPE

I DID IT! AT LEAST ten million people will watch the show that just aired and will replay over the days and weeks to follow.

That kind of brand exposure is impossible to pay for when you're a charity, and it's far more powerful than advertising.

It's influential.

That's the magic.

I'm so giddy I don't even stop to remove all the makeup they layered me with before I go to my next meeting.

Or rather, my appointment.

I also don't have time. I knew it was close, but both were important, so after chatting to all the crew behind the cameras and thanking them for the opportunity, I hightailed it out of there.

As I walk across the large lobby of the studio building, I wonder if showing up with all the bright makeup will give the wrong impression. If it even matters.

I remind myself to explain.

My heels tap on the floor as I hitch my large tote bag onto my shoulder, then stop dead.

My heart skips a beat.

What is he doing here?

Dressed in a navy suit—jacket unbuttoned—a crisp white shirt, and hands casually slid into the pockets, Ward Montgomery stands several feet in front of me.

Owning the space around him.

And staring at me.

His ocean blue eyes swirl with unsaid things. I'm unsure if I want to run into his arms, cry, or slap him.

I'm an emotional mess.

I can't move.

But he does.

Step by step, as I shake, Ward closes the distance, and I tell myself he's just some guy I slept with and means nothing.

Liar.

“You were incredible.” He stops a foot away. Close enough for me to breathe in his expensive cologne and read the time on his Rolex watch.

“Thank you,” I whisper.

“Breathe,” he says, running a finger down my arm.

Christ.

Then he takes my hand and my eyes snap down to them.

“What is happening?”

“Can we talk?” Those blue globes are so intense, and it reminds me of when he’s inside me.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Do not think about that right now.

It throws me.

“Okay.” Then I shake my head. “No. I. Ward, I have a meeting.”

He releases my fingers, and the loss is palpable.

“Of course.” Ward glances around and takes my arm, steering me outside. “Then have dinner with me tonight.”

What is going on?

The chilly air hits me and I realize I haven’t messaged my driver to meet me. I was so excited about the segment that I just raced downstairs.

Shit, fuck.

This appointment is expensive and important. Time of the essence. I had a friend pull strings to get this time slot. Usually, you have to wait months to get in to see this expert in the field.

“I’m sorry, I can’t,” I reply. “I really do need to go.” I pull out my phone and fumble so much it falls onto the snowy sidewalk.

Ward crouches, picking it up as it beeps and the screen flashes with the appointment reminder.

No!

He hands it to me as his eyes scan the message and I die on the spot.

IVF first appointment with Dr. Qwann.

Our eyes meet, and his face turns ruddy red.

No, no, no.

I want the ground to swallow me up. Having the man I was sleeping with learn I'm going to get artificially inseminated was not on my task list. Today or any day.

I feel ashamed and as if I've lied to him. God, what if he thinks I was just trying to get knocked up by him?

I wasn't.

I wouldn't do that to a man. Or my yet-to-be-born child.

"I have to go," I whisper.

Then curse, because I still haven't messaged my driver and now, I could very likely miss the appointment.

"Pen—"

I spot a cab, shoot Ward an apologetic glance, then dart around him, waving out my arm.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WARD

A BABY. PENELOPE WANTS to have a baby?

A fucking baby.

How did I not realize? She's a woman in her early forties, single, and childless. Of course she does. Not that every woman in her position would, I just hadn't taken considered what her life goals were.

Probably because there was never meant to be anything else between us except a night of passion.

Page 36

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Which turned into two.

And now I'm here with the grand plan of asking her to dinner. To date me.

While she's off heading out to get artificially inseminated.

Fucking hell.

There are a million miles between our plans.

If you are lucky enough to love two women in this life, then don't let her get away.

This changes everything.

Damn it.

I watch the cab whizz past Penelope, and snow flies up into the air, covering her. The crestfallen look on her face as she lifts the phone to her ear almost breaks me.

This is important to her.

I've known couples who have suffered through infertility and the pain is real.

I don't know her story, but there will be one that has led her to this point, and I want to hear it.

She brushes at her cheek, and without another thought, I nod to Luke, who is waiting

for me right out front with the Bentley. Then stride toward Penelope.

“I’ll take you,” I say firmly, taking her arm.

I don’t wait for permission. I help her into the backseat and join her, adjusting the heat while she shares the address.

Wet eyes meet mine when she lifts her face to say thank you.

Fuck.

Fuck!

It’s like the rug has been completely pulled out from under me. A million reasons to drop her off and walk briskly away hit me. Then it takes me another minute to connect a few more dots.

I turn to her and demand, “Who is the donor?”

“What?” she blinks.

“Who have you chosen to be the father?” I growl, imagining her swollen with a child, being filled with another man’s sperm.

My fists clench and I almost tell Luke to drive us home so I can fuck a child into her myself.

PENELOPE

WHEN WE STOP OUTSIDE the building and Ward climbs out with me, I place my hand on his arm.

“Thank you.” I walk toward the building and do a double take when he follows.
“What are you doing?”

“I don’t know. Just keep walking.” He growls.

I don’t have time for this.

I need to know what he thinks he is doing. Plus, demanding to know who my sperm donor is—or will be—is completely unacceptable.

“Ward. Go home,” I say as I push open the doors and rush across the lobby.

“Keep walking,” he repeats.

After shooting him an irritated look, I glance at my phone. I have two-and-a-half minutes to get upstairs. Pressing the elevator button, I wrap my coat around me. I’m not cold. I’m...confused.

Who have you chosen to be the father?

“It’s just a first meeting,” I told him. “There’s no man.”

He barked out a maddening laugh. “You do know how babies are made, don’t you? There will be a man.”

That’s when the car stopped and that stupid conversation ended.

Of course, I know how babies are made.

Idiot.

It’s like he is trying to upset me further. I hate that he saw me in tears. I hate that he is here.

This is something I need to do alone.

But the stupid alpha man will not leave no matter what I say, so I just have to keep moving.

The fact he's telling me to do that just makes me not want to.

But I don't have time for games.

The elevator is empty, so we both step in. I ignore him, push the floor button, and stare at the doors once they close. Then say, "You can't come with me."

"Apparently I am."

I glance quickly and find Ward facing the front, his wide shoulders firm and unmoving.

Ugh.

This isn't his boardroom. He can't push me around. He doesn't get to make the rules here.

"This is a medical appointment. You can't just force your way in." I huff, then turn to him and put my hands on my hips. "Ward. Why are you here?"

He ignores me.

"Ward!"

More ignoring.

Oh, my god. He cannot be here. This is not how I saw this going. My nerves are a wreck. I'm still half on a high after the TV segment, and now Ward—my ex-lover—is trailing along to my first fertility appointment.

This is not normal.

Not after I've spent weeks telling myself he doesn't want me, and I shouldn't/can't/don't want him.

I was just starting to move forward.

Ish.

How dare he?

I shove his arm. "Ward, talk to me."

His eyes drop angrily down to me, then next minute he leans forward, pushes the emergency button and the elevator lurches to a stop.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Has he lost his mind?

“I think I fucking love you!” He barks in my face.

I blink.

My mouth falls open as he closes the small space between us and grips my face with such dominance I can't breathe.

“If you want a baby, I will give you one.”

Oh, my god.

What?

I tremble as the low timbre of his voice rolls through me while trying to make sense of what he just said.

My heart is thumping, my panties are wet, and I'm fairly sure this is not the right way to start a conversation with a fertility doctor.

I'm also certain Ward has lost his mind.

“You don't mean that,” I whimper, tears welling.

“Yes, I fucking do. I'm not standing by while some other man, test tube or otherwise, impregnates the woman I love.” Ward's thumb rubs over my cheekbone, and I start to

melt into him while his deep voice rumbles through me. “Your body belongs to me. Your heart belongs to me.”

“Ward.”

I’m scared to believe him.

How has he suddenly shifted from seeing me as someone he just fucks to being in love with me?

He doesn’t even know me. He doesn’t know my hopes and dreams, or what I want.

But I do.

And I know how vastly different they are from where he is on his life path.

“You’ve had your family, Ward.” I shake my head. “When you’ve thought about this, you’ll change your mind.”

His hand tightens on my face.

I want to believe him, but I can’t.

I cannot go through the rejection and pain again. When he’s had some time to come to his senses and talk to his kids, this won’t be what he wants.

I have to be the strong one here.

For me.

“Please. Let me go. I have to go or I’ll miss my appointment.”

Waiting three or six months for another appointment is an eternity when it comes to fertility. It could mean the difference between having a child or not.

Despite my feelings for this man, I have given him multiple opportunities, and each time he has backed away and not shown me he is committed to being the man I want.

The man I need.

Ward's hand drops from my face, and he pushes the button so the elevator begins moving again.

Despite my insistence, my heart splinters at how easy it was for him to give up. Then he surprises me by sliding his hand through my hair and dropping his mouth to mine.

Page 39

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

His kiss is long and demanding, taking my breath away.

Goddamn him.

“Have your meeting, sweetheart. Then we talk.”

Sweetheart.

The doors ping open, and I walk out robotically and into the doctor’s office, glancing over my shoulder as Ward lowers his huge body into a chair.

His eyes never leave mine as the door closes between us.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WARD

CHRIST.

I went to the studio to tell Penelope I was proud of her, that I wanted to date, and ended up telling her I loved her and promising to give her a child.

When you’ve thought about this, you’ll change your mind.

Jesus Christ.

She might be right.

But as I sit here, knowing she's in there talking about how many eggs she has and choosing the type of sperm doner she wants, I grind about ten years of enamel off my teeth.

I stand and begin to pace.

"Excuse me. Can you please take a seat?" the receptionist asks.

No.

No, I can't.

But with one glance at the other patients in the waiting room, I notice the anxiety they're already under and how my pacing is stressing them out further. I'm a large intimidating man, I get it.

Running a hand through my hair, I exit the waiting room and continue my pacing in front of the elevators.

Another child?

A baby? Again? I have grandchildren for fuck's sakes.

I don't even know Penelope very well. We have had sex twice. Technically, seven or eight times if you count orgasms.

I know her body.

I know...I know I want to know her more.

I know that I don't want her having another man's baby!

Fuck, I've lost my damn mind.

This must be a midlife crisis. Maybe I need to buy a convertible Maserati and go cruising the California coastline.

Stoned.

Fuck, I don't know.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

I thought I'd be playing a stupid amount of golf and hanging out in some gentleman's club talking smack about all the billions we've made over the years. Comparing the success of our children.

Clearly, I'd win—Levi is an NFL quarterback.

But wanking off into a plastic cup and giving this woman a baby? No, I did not see that coming.

I pace the full length of the area in front of the elevators about fifty times, then stop and stare at the floor.

My children all reacted differently when my dating status was announced. Thank you, Atlas. And aside from Bella, who cried and then told me she was happy for me, which we all knew was a lie, they said it was inevitable and didn't expect me to stay alone forever.

"I did," I replied.

"You can't. Mom loved you. She wouldn't expect you to stay alone for the next thirty or forty years," Atlas said. "If it was her—"

My eyes stopped him from finishing that sentence.

That's when it hit me. While the thought of another man with my wife made me turn all kinds of murderous, if it had been me taking my last breath and leaving Tina behind, I know what I'd tell her.

Love.

Grieve.

But when you're healed, go out there and love again. Life is short, and if you're blessed to live a long full life, then do not spend it alone feeling obligated to me.

Let someone else into your heart and live it to your absolute fullest.

The words sat in my chest for weeks before I saw Penelope on the TV this morning. Then Knox's wisdom just cemented it.

To ask her on a date.

Not offer to be her baby daddy.

Christ.

I lift my head and stare at the ceiling, rubbing my hand over my forehead. Then I glance at the door to the medical clinic and stride back in.

I don't want Penelope to walk out and find me gone. So I ignore the glower from the receptionist and squeeze my body back into the stupid small chairs.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PENELOPE

I CAN BARELY FOCUS on what Dr. Qwinn is telling me. She's throwing numbers and data at me while I nod, but all I can think about is the Ward waiting outside the room.

“You will need to get these tests done to determine the quality of your eggs and if you have enough. Then we will talk through the best way to move forward,” she tells me.

What she hasn’t done is give me false hope. In fact, if anything, she’s been rather pessimistic. If I wasn’t so agitated by the six-foot-four distraction sitting outside, I might have felt quite crestfallen.

If you want a baby, I will give you one.

I am not going to let myself believe his words. It was said in the heat of the moment and without thought.

I think I fucking love you!

It’s taken him two weeks to respond to what I said and for some reason he needs to tell me as I take this enormous step in life.

Sure, I might not be successful in getting pregnant via IVF, but just coming to this appointment has been emotional. Walking through the building having Ward in tow only added to that pressure.

“Penelope?”

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

“Yes, sorry.” I nod, annoyed with myself for not paying attention.

I write down a few things, trying to stay focused so I can remember everything. I’m handed dozens of pamphlets and the form to get the tests done.

Should I choose to proceed.

I don’t have a choice.

My suspicion is that Ward and I have a connection that is hard to walk away from. The chemistry between us is like a blistering heat and highly addictive. He wants me as much as I want him, but that doesn’t mean it will work out.

I have this last chance—hopefully—to have a child, and so I am going to choose to proceed. If I didn’t, and I waited for him, then never had a baby, I’d end up bitter.

I’m already angry at myself for not doing this sooner.

You can’t turn back time, but you can make decisions now that create what you want.

“You should stop taking the contraceptive pill immediately,” Dr. Qwann says, scribbling on a notepad.

“Oh, I stopped it last y—”

She looks up. “Have you had a test?”

I shake my head.

“Are you regular?”

I nod.

“When was your last period?”

I must go pale, because she smiles, pushes her chair back and pulls open her drawer, while my heart beats loudly in my ears.

I don't hear another thing she says.

There's no way...

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WARD

I STAND THE MOMENT Penelope walks back into the room and I notice her gray, ashen face.

Shit.

It didn't go well.

They must have told her she is infertile. I can't even imagine how devastating it must be. My heart breaks for her.

I lift the corner of my lips into some type of dorky compassionate smile, unsure it hits the spot. She swallows and hugs her purse to her chest.

Fuck.

I hate seeing her in pain like this.

I cross the room and wrap my arm around her waist as she turns to the receptionist.

Tossing my American Express Black Card on the counter, I say, “Please use that.”

“Ward.” Penelope shakes her head, but her voice is a whisper.

“Let me.” I rub her back.

She’s stiff and in shock.

I’m not going to tell her I understand, I don’t. I was blessed with three beautiful children and Bella. Not to mention Jamie and Daxon.

“That’s gone through.” The woman slides my card across the counter as if surprised the man in front of her wearing a Rolex Daytona watch and Armani suit can afford a simple medical appointment.

“Thank goodness.” I smirk, unable to help myself despite the situation, and steer Penelope out the door.

“Do you want to go somewhere?” I ask when the elevators open, keeping my hand on the small of her back.

“No.”

“Hey.” I turn, pulling her against my chest. “You’re in shock. It’s okay.”

It’s like hugging a lamppost.

“Penelope, sweetheart.” I pull back and she looks up at me. “It’s going to be okay; I promise.”

She’s not even crying. I thought she’d at least be crying. Shock does crazy things to

people and, clearly, she goes numb.

I will do whatever she needs.

“I’ll take you home. Can I ring your office?” I lead her across the lobby and outside onto the sidewalk. “What about your parents? Do you want me to take you to see your mom?”

That snaps her out of it.

“No. Shit no. I can’t tell her about this!”

I guide her into the back of the Bentley. “Shh, she doesn’t need to know. You don’t need to be ashamed. I think it’s great you met with the doctor. I’m sorry it’s not the answer y—”

“I’m pregnant.”

Luke has just shut the door, and it’s just us in the car. Her eyes meet mine and I smile at her. I clearly misjudged her shock. That’s great news. Perhaps she is fertile after all.

Clearly, she’s just overwhelmed.

How and with whose sperm, I will deal with another day. Today I am just going to support her.

I brush her hair from her forehead. “One day, sweetheart. It doesn’t happen quite that quickly.”

Luke climbs in as I smile into her eyes, and he pulls out into traffic.

Penelope bites her bottom lip.

I am happy for her.

Once we have a minute to gather our thoughts and take a breath, we can discuss this in more detail. First, I'm going to take her out for dinner somewhere special.

A date. Like I planned.

We can go on romantic walks through the park in the spring once this snow has gone, and I might even surprise her with a trip to Paris.

I know she'd love France.

I wonder if she skis and has been to Switzerland.

"Ward," Penelope says, interrupting my thoughts, and I glance down. "I'm. Pregnant."

Page 43

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

I blink as she places her hand on my arm.

What?

Time. Slows. Right. Down.

My smile fades as I roam her beautiful face looking to understand what is happening as my own shock settles heavily inside my chest.

I'm pregnant.

"Now?" I rasp.

Penelope nods and then swallows noisily.

She's pregnant.

In her belly now?

Today?

My eyes drop to her tummy, then lift once more, stunned into silence.

I don't disrespect her by asking who the father is. I already know it's mine because there is no other answer I will accept.

The world around me becomes a dull blur as I count the weeks since she was in my

bed.

Two.

And the number of orgasms.

At least five.

Number of condoms: zero

“Please say something,” Penelope pleads and takes my hand.

Holy fucking shit is on the tip of my tongue, but I draw in a breath, squeeze her fingers, and stare at the woman I just created a life with.

A baby.

For the fourth time in my life.

I wouldn’t call myself a religious man. I don’t not believe either.

But what I do believe is that when you’re being a fucking idiot and not seeing what’s in front of you, life, the universe, or God—whatever—will shove you back on track.

Or into her arms.

I pull Penelope against me, gripping her face, and my voice comes out husky. “What do you want to hear first? That you better fucking marry me or that I’m scared as fucking hell to become a father again?”

She lets out a cry. Tears finally start falling, and I slam my mouth down on hers.

“Where are we going, boss?” Luke asks, and I hear the smile in his voice.

He’s happy for us.

“To Penelope’s.”

The moment we step inside her apartment, I take her in my arms and kiss her the way I’ve been wanting to for weeks. She melts into me as my hands thread through her long, dark hair. Her own claw at my jacket and the next minute clothing is flying around us.

Page 44

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

“Pregnancy hormones?” I ask, smirking.

I remember this part, and it’s not horrible.

“Yes. No. I don’t know. I only found out five seconds ago. Just fuck me. I need you to fuck me, Ward,” Penelope pleads, emotionally overwhelmed and needy.

I get it.

I feel the same.

The need to get inside her is desperate.

When we’re both naked, I lift her up and she wraps her legs around my body. My cock presses an inch inside her warm sex.

Christ.

I swear it’s not just women who are affected. Knowing she’s carrying my child has me feeling like I need to slam inside her and stake my claim.

Plant a damn flag.

“Please. Now.” She grips my hair painfully.

I place her down on the bed and my dick slips out. Not for long. I lie over Penelope and slide my eager swollen head through her pink folds.

“You’re soaked,” I growl.

“Now. I need you deep.” She begs.

I cup her breast and pinch the nipple with my thumb and finger, taking a moment to enjoy this.

I glance at her stomach, knowing the beginning of life is in there, and my cock lurches. My head presses in, and we both groan loudly.

Yes.

“Fuck me.” Placing my hands on the bed linen, on either side of her head, I thrust.

Once.

Hard.

Deep.

“Yes.” Penelope arches off the bed, taking me in deeper, her nails scraping down my back.

I do it again.

And again.

Until we both lose control, and my body is slapping against hers as my come rushes out of me into her hot tight pussy.

I collapse down on top of her, gasping, as my brain catches up with what has just

happened.

“Holy hell,” she says under me.

Lifting my head, I wipe Penelope’s soaking forehead and stare right into her soul. “I don’t know how this has happened so fast, but I do love you. I think I loved you the moment I first saw you.”

“You don’t have to say that, Ward.” She smiles lovingly at me.

I nudge my cock inside her. “Feel that?”

Page 45

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

She lifts a brow as if it's a stupid question.

“That’s my cock. I’m the only man you will ever feel inside you again. You are marrying me.”

The raw need to possess this woman has taken away the charming gentleman who would be doing this differently.

I don’t care.

I need to know she is mine, and that Penelope knows I will protect her and our child.

“You’re not proposing to me while your cock is inside me, Ward Montgomery,” Penelope says as my lips press to hers, silencing her complaint.

“Who said I’m asking?” I shift us both farther up the bed and lay beside her, letting our juices pour from both our bodies.

I don’t care.

This is what marriage is.

Messy and real.

Lucky me, I’m about to do it all over again with the blessing of another child.

Tina and I raised Bella, Knox, Atlas, and Levi to be strong people and know they’re

loved. They will accept Penelope and this new baby into their lives.

It will take some adjusting, for all of us, but families come in all different shapes and sizes these days.

“I really hope we have a girl.” Penelope gives me a cheesy grin and my heart opens even more.

“Don’t count on it, sweetheart.” I laugh and kiss her forehead

EPILOGUE

PENELOPE

Thanksgiving

WARD TAKES MAX FROM my arms and hands him to my mother. I glance at them, both confused. I have just fed him and was about to put him down to sleep.

He’s only six weeks old and the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.

Yes, another cheeky Montgomery boy in the world. I couldn’t be happier.

Hosting Thanksgiving didn’t seem like something I could do after recently giving birth, but Ward had it all catered.

“Oh, look at those blue eyes,” Mom gushes. “Just like your daddy and brothers.”

My father leans over her shoulder and the look of love in his eyes almost has me in tears.

Again.

I had no idea a child could make me so happy. I'll never be sorry that Ward knocked me up. As Atlas likes to say.

The boys have all accepted me into their father's world without issue. One thing I admire about the Montgomery's is that they're such a loving and open family. They talk about things. Emotions.

Sure, sometimes the passion is over the top, but they respect their father and challenge one another on things. Robust conversation over the dinner table is a common thing.

Bella was a little more challenging.

She misses her mom and found it hard to see Ward with another woman. He explained that she's always felt slightly insecure because he's not her birth father. To which he emphatically said was irrelevant.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

I took Bella out for a coffee several weeks after being formally introduced and we talked. I told her I wished I'd met her mother, that Tina sounded like she was a brave and loving woman.

"Thank you. I miss her so damn much." Bella shared, then told me some of her life journey.

I asked if we could be friends and told her I didn't want to and could never replace her mom.

A few tears later, I rubbed my belly and said, "Actually, I could do with advice on becoming a mother."

"The hardest bit of being pregnant for me was having lost mom. Blake and Dad were great, but I was surrounded by men until Payton and Molly met my brothers."

I chuckled.

"Thanks for doing this. It must be hard stepping into our family. We are all so close."

I nodded, not telling her about some of the tears I'd shared with Ward.

"Hang in there," he'd said, solid as a rock.

We both knew we couldn't force Bella to accept me. In the end, I had to put my big girl panties on and speak to her one-on-one.

“I didn’t like Dad being alone but then seeing him with you instead of Mom made me sad. Which is selfish.”

“It’s not,” I said. “It’s natural.”

“Well, I’m glad it’s you,” Bella said and as she hugged me, I cried.

“Sorry. Pregnant.” I pointed at my belly.

Ward walked in, having planned to pick me up, and stood watching us—not that Bella could see—and the emotion on his face stole my heart.

Like he hadn’t already.

Many months on, now both our families sit full of turkey and laughter while the fire roars in the vast living room. I reach for Max, needing to put him down so I can put my feet up.

Mom smiles at Ward and steps away.

What is going on?

“Um, can I have my baby, please.” I laugh awkwardly, staring between the two of them, confused.

Then Ward disappears.

I glance down and find him kneeling on the white rug in front of the fireplace.

I gasp, my hand flying to my mouth.

Everyone goes silent. Well, except Molly, who does a little squeal.

My eyes, however, are locked on my big, powerful, and loving man.

“Penelope, my sweetheart. My greatest surprise in life. Where did you come from?”
Ward begins.

“I think you know,” my father says, and everyone laughs.

Ward smirks but doesn’t look away.

Oh my god, is this happening?

I wipe my hands down the front of my red woolen dress and feel them get clammy all over again.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

I moved in with Ward almost immediately after we learned I was pregnant. He was such a fusspot making sure I took my vitamins and watching what I ate. It ended up being easier and felt like the most natural thing to do.

We hated being apart.

After telling me he was going to marry me, we never spoke about it again. Bringing Max into the world was our focus.

Now he's here. This amazing man has surprised me again.

"You've given me another son and extended our already growing family." This time he does glance at my parents and around the room. "In the words of a wise man"—he smiles at Knox—"if I get so lucky to love twice in this life, do not mess it up."

"That's not quite what I said," Knox mutters.

"Close enough." Ward smirks.

"Penelope Goldsmith, will you do me the honor of being my wife, raising our son together, and spending the rest of your life with me?"

I pretend to think about it for a second while a couple of people chuckle.

Who am I kidding?

There has never been a second since I met this man that I didn't want him.

“Yes, yes! I will marry you.” I cry.

Ward leaps to his feet and slides a ring on my finger, then pulls me into his arms and kisses me.

“I love you,” I whisper into his ear.

WARD

THE ROOM AROUND US explodes into cheers, and Max starts crying. I know my fiancé will forgive me. I’ll probably have to put him down tonight to make up for it.

Totally worth it.

I grin as I release Penelope’s mouth.

“You even got a ring?” She holds her hand up and gasps at the ten-carat yellow diamond. “Ward, it’s stunning.”

“Like my bride,” I whisper against her mouth.

Her dirty smile makes my cock twitch inappropriately in my pants as our family surrounds us.

Champagne pops and Levi starts pouring.

“Congratulations you two.” Molly claps. “I’m so bad at keeping secrets.”

“Did everyone know?” Penelope asks.

Everyone, and I mean everyone, nods.

“Even Max,” I tell her.

“Traitorous child.” She mocks taking the baby from her mom.

“Photo!” Payton shouts, using her hands to guide us into her shot.

Click.

For the next ten minutes, we take about seven hundred photos with everyone in them, and I can’t help but feel my chest swell with pride.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Knox slaps me on the back. “Good to see you happy, Dad.”

I smile and pull him into a hug. He’s not the cuddliest of my children but today is a special day.

“Thanks for calling me on my bullshit. I may have lost her if it wasn’t for you.”

“Not true. As Atlas says, you knocked her up.”

I chuckle, even though I do not approve of them saying it.

“Penelope loves you,” Knox states.

“She does. It doesn’t take anything from your mother and me, and in fact I feel at peace about it now.”

“Mom would have liked Penelope.”

I glance at my eldest son and smile. He’s matured so much in the past year.

“Daxton Phillips, our CEO, has accepted another position in London. One he couldn’t refuse,” I tell Knox, and he twists his head around in surprise.

I found out a few weeks ago but wanted to mull over my decision before saying anything to anyone. Daxton has given me three months’ notice—the norm in any senior position—so I had time to sit and think.

As the majority shareholder in Montgomery Enterprises, I still have the voting power over who leads my company.

“And resigned,” I clarify. “Talk it over with Payton. If you’re ready, the job is yours.” I slap my son on the shoulder.

“Fuck.” Knox runs a hand over his mouth.

He’s waited for this all his life. Correction, he’s worked his whole life for this. If he wants to wait and spend more time with his family, that’s his call. He’s proven himself to be an amazing husband and father.

And businessman.

The decision isn’t mine.

It’s his.

“She’ll support my decision. I’m ready,” Knox says, emotion rich in his eyes.

“Then, congratulations Knox. You are the new CEO of Montgomery Enterprises.”

“Dad. Thank you.”

For the second time today, we hug and pride roars through me.

Penelope turns back to me after kissing everyone in the room and showing off her ring to the girls. I tuck her under my arm.

“Looks like we’re having another family wedding in the spring,” I say, kissing her forehead. “What do you say, sweetheart? April wedding?”

“In the Hamptons?” Penelope asks hopefully.

“I’m ringing Jacob right now.” Blake waves up his arm, meaning his brother, who owns a stunning beachfront mansion.

“Whatever you want.” I turn her into my arms as everyone breaks away.

“I love you,” she whispers softly.

“Forever.” I kiss her.

This one, I know, will be for the rest of my life. Both of my wives have a place in my heart, and I truly do feel blessed to have loved once and now love again.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

“Now let’s get our little boy to sleep and the rest of our family out of here so I can make sweet love to you.” I growl in Penelope’s ear.

“There is nothing sweet about your lovemaking, Ward Montgomery.” She pokes me in the ribs.

“You enjoy every minute of it.”

“I do.” Her dirty smile has me thinking very naughty thoughts.

“Drink up!” I say to everyone after kissing my fiancé firmly on the mouth. “My bride and I have wedding plans to make.”

“Is that what the kids are calling it these days?” Atlas asks.

“You want me to go into better detail?” I quirk a brow as Penelope loops her hands around one of my biceps, and all my offspring and their better halves block their ears with their hands and start packing up.

“No. Please don’t.” Penelope’s father moans. But he laughs and reaches out his hand. “Welcome to the family, Ward.”

I shake it.

“Thank you, sir.”

When the door closes behind everyone, I follow Penelope into Max’s room.

Miraculously, he's become drowsy in her arms as she rocked him.

She lays him down in his crib, covering him with his cream blanket and tucking a toy giraffe beside him. Then leans in and kisses him.

"Goodnight, my beautiful boy."

My hand rests on her hip as we both watch him drift deeply into sleep. The soft shadows in the room wash over me and I'm filled with an enormous amount of peace.

I know I'm a lucky man.

From my success, to my children, and to the two women I love. I count my blessings every day and take none of it for granted.

Perhaps that's the secret to success.

Penelope turns, places her hands on my chest, and I lean down, kissing her gently.

"Let's go make another one. Or at least practice." I smile slowly.

"How about a girl this time?" she asks cheekily.

"I doubt it." I wink.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I've wanted to write Ward Montgomery's book for so long. So I did during my summer holiday in 2024. (Otherwise, it would have taken me a year to publish.) Technically it's a novella, falling just short of a novel (the price reflects that) but I am thrilled with their love story.

Just a note about Penelope's career in this book. It was based on one I held in real life. The facts about farming may not be accurate for the USA or any other countries, so please remember this is a work of fiction. It was fun to relive a role of which I am enormously proud to have helped hundreds of millions of farm animals live cage-free.

Thank you for loving the Montgomery's as much as the Dufort Dynasty! This is the last book in their world. If you've discovered this series first, start FREE with SINFUL DUTY, and meet Daniel and Harper, one of my favorite couples.

BIG NEWS: I've created a NEW series with hot billionaires and new characters.

The Obsidian Club is a group of wealthy men who have pledged not to marry unless it's true love, after one of their best friends was murdered by his new wife. This sets the scene for five standalone spicy romances for Sebastian, Zander, Mason, Drew and Colt. Preorder *Seducing Mr. Remington* today!

Join my Newsletter to hear about other freebies, sales and promotions I'm running first. I have over 50 books! Find them all here: www.juliettebanks.com

Page 50

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Hang out every day with me and other readers in my Private Facebook Group, and tell me which characters you loved. I do listen and reply!

Love military romances? THE SEAL is free!

Is dark mafia more your thing? Then Connor Barrett in The Darkest King has Daniel Dufort vibes but much darker. MUCH darker. Also FREE!

Thank you so much for loving my books. I appreciate each and every one of you. I'll keep writing if you keep reading.

Juliette x

PS: By the way, my Private Facebook Group is R18 and loads of FUN, but I already know you're cool with that if you've read my books.

NEW BILLIONAIRE ROMANCE

SEDUCING MR REMINGTON LAUNCHES IN JULY

SEBASTIAN

Marry for love... not to lose our fortunes. That's the pledge we made ten years ago after our Harvard graduate brother suspiciously died three months into his marriage.

I've never wavered. The last thing I need is a woman distracting me from my billion-dollar NYC business. Taking it... or killing me.

So, when my private jet has an issue and I'm forced to fly first class, I take one look at Emily as she clambers over me and roll my eyes. She's clearly been upgraded, a sexy mess and totally out of her depth.

Four hours later, thirty thousand feet in the air, I get the best blow job of my life. Might have to rethink the private jet.

EMILY

That was no how I thought my new life in America would start.

I'm sure it's just a coincidence that his name is Sebastian, and so is my new boss.

Two days later, I find out I'm wrong.

Seducing Mr. Remington is Book One in The Obsidian Club series- a Dark Billionaire series with a Romantic Suspense twist. If you love forbidden workplace romances with a grumpy-sunshine trope, bantering wealthy men, and scorching hot happy ever after's tropes, then you'll love Sebastian and Emily's spicy love story.

GET SEDUCING MR REMINGTON

NEW DARK ROMANCE SERIES!

ASHES OF SIN

I was his toy to do with as he pleased. And he did, while my mother watched.

My saving grace was the day he sent me to boarding school. Years later, my mother died leaving me with family money my controlling father couldn't touch.

It bought me my freedom.

I did the rest, becoming powerful in my own right, hungry for revenge.

Now he's remarrying a woman half his age and I'm going to take her from him.

Just as he took my innocence.

It was a sound f*cking plan until I get her locked away and she refuses to obey me. The moment Kyra lifts her chin defiantly, and I stare down into her icy blue eyes, lust plows through me.

Sadly for her, no one can break down my walls.

But I will break her.

Page 51

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Then toss her back.

The Dark Alliance is a dark enemies to lovers, dark romance series by international bestselling author Juliette N. Banks. If you love broken heroes seeking revenge, dark tropes, kidnapping and spicy page-turning romances with a happy ever after, then you'll love this group of powerful and wealthy men.

GET ASHES OF SIN!

FREE DARK MAFIA ROMANCE!

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1 -CONNOR

HERE WE FUCKING GOagain.

Another gala event. Another speech. Another night spent with strangers who schmooze me for my money and power.

It's all part of the charade I'm playing, I remind myself, tugging on the sleeve of my Armani jacket and adjusting my cufflinks before leaning back into the soft leather seats of my limousine. Nothing to prepare. My finance manager arranged the transfer of funds this afternoon, and my scriptwriter emailed me the same cut-and-paste version of the speech I've already given at least five times this year.

Only the name changes, with a modified reason why the cause is so important to

Barrett Enterprises.

Except this one is important to me...personally.

The We Are Family Foundation is committed to the care of orphans in the U.S. and around the world—a cause I deem important. No one should be alone because they don't have parents or a family.

There are eight fucking billion people on the planet. Few of them with the sort of money I have to contribute, to make a difference. Still, I'd rather have sent a check and sat at home, sipping on my Macallan Gold, watching porn, and jacking off.

Or rather, ordering in.

I don't mean Chinese food.

Truth is, I don't watch porn. I have no need for it. If I want a woman spread before me, I can have one at any time.

I'm Connor Barrett, one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in New York City.

Yet, I'm not who I say I am.

I'm both a ghost and, ironically, one of the most visible men in America. Why hide in the shadows when you can hide out in the open? The opposite of what they trained me to do in the marines.

Even more ironic—I have skilled security protecting me, which even they know is unnecessary. I'm six foot four, broad and muscular. And I've been trained to kill.

I have killed.

Still, I can't look over my shoulder while running a billion-dollar empire, doing deals with politicians and untrustworthy businessmen who would love nothing more than to see me fail.

That happens when people owe you favors. They know I'll come knocking, and when I do, they won't say no.

No one says no.

I'm the founder and CEO of Barrett Enterprises. Entrepreneur, philanthropist, investor, and prolific businessman.

Men want to destroy me.

Women want to fuck me.

I reach for the crystal cut glass filled with whisky in the console beside me and bring it to my lips, remembering the last woman who slid down my black silk sheets and wrapped her red-stained mouth around my cock.

God, I could do with round two.

It's been weeks since I've had a good release without using my fist. I should've booked someone for this evening, but I didn't think ahead.

Page 52

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Booked? Yes. They're not prostitutes—I'm paying for their discretion. I'm paying for control.

Something I never give away.

But I'm careful about the women I fuck. By the time they enter my penthouse, they've accepted payment and signed a confidentiality agreement—one no lawyer would ever let their client sign—which demands their silence and agreement to the terms of our time together.

One, should they break, that would destroy their lives.

So, not prostitutes, but they are escorts.

They're instructed to undress and blindfold themselves in my private elevator. I'm not fucking Batman—everyone in NYC knows my address—but it just sets the scene. One which makes it clear why they are here, and that intimacy is not welcome.

I'm not looking for a wife.

I need to stay a ghost.

If my enemies knew I was alive, I would be hunted.

The last words my father said to me...Never tell anyone who you are, son. Run!

The familiar grinding of my teeth, the pain slicing up the back of my neck from my

fury, brings me back to the present, and I blink. I stretch one of my legs and check that the knife strapped just above my sock remains invisible. Just as all the other weapons on my body are.

I don't leave home without them.

"We're going to be a few minutes late, sir," Benson, my driver, says. I pulled him out of the military a few years ago. He knows how to scan for bombs, drive if we're attacked, and protect both of us if shit goes down. "The traffic was built up near Madison Square Gardens."

I'm silent, my body tensing, and my eyes slide over to Mack.

As if on cue, Mack Turner, my head of security, turns from the passenger seat and gives me a reassuring look. "It's an accident, Mr. Barrett. Turn up here, Benson. Then take 27th Street."

My body relaxes.

Mack is one of three men I trust with my life. He's by my side ninety percent of the time.

Not when I fuck.

That's not my kink.

While the We Are Family Foundation is important to me, I don't give a damn about being on time—I'm the VIP guest, and they'll wait for me. However, when you're hiding in broad daylight from the mafia—that's correct, all the mobsters and cartels—and are as powerful as I am, it would only take two minutes to go from being the hunter to the hunted.

Because I am hunting them.

They just don't fucking know it.

Glancing at my Rolex, I note I'm ten minutes late. I run my hand over my solid jaw, rubbing my dark scruff. I need to fuck. I've been agitated and impatient recently. As a dominant and controlling lover, the act helps me release built-up energy.

I nearly snort at the word love. There's no love in my life.

"Keep the car close when we arrive, Benson," I say darkly. "I'm only staying an hour."

"Yes, sir."

When the limo pulls up outside the Convention Center, I wait for Mack to open the door, then I climb out and stand, running my hands over my Armani tux and glancing around.

The red carpet is empty. Everyone inside is waiting for me.

In and out. That's the plan.

"Give Billy the night off tomorrow," I say to Mack without looking his way. When I take a few steps and he hasn't responded, I turn.

Page 53

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

My dark eyes connect with his.

“You need a new location. It’s not safe, Connor,” Mack replies.

I nod.

He’s not disagreeing with me. No one would. He’ll have his reasons, and I trust him.

“Arrange it,” I say, then step into the hotel lobby. The sign for the event points to the large conference rooms in the back.

To be honest, I’m surprised someone from the company organizing the event is not greeting me. I was told they would. But it’s one less annoying person on this planet to deal with, so I couldn’t care less.

I make my way through the space and find the room and the main door. As I reach for it, it flings open.

Ommph.

“Oh, shit!” the small body who just slammed into me whisper-yells, and the door closes behind her with a click.

Then I feel it...

Wet, cold, and seeping through the front of my tuxedo.

As I grip the petite brunette's arms and remove her from my chest, her eyes fly open wide, and I can't ignore the magnetic pull from the crystal greeb globes.

Jesus, she's fucking gorgeous.

My cock wakes up and begins to swell. I imagine gripping all that long dark hair and wrapping it around my fist. Then, as panic fills her eyes, I'm tempted to smirk. But I never smile, and my hands, which have released her, want to touch her again, and that bothers me.

Who is this young woman?

"Connor Barrett," she gasps quietly, knowing who I am. Her eyes drift down over the dark liquid on my shirt, and she bites her lip, letting out a soft curse. Then those lids dip further down my body.

Don't look any lower, sweetheart, or...

Too late.

Her eyes shoot back to mine, and I say in a dark, thick voice, "You shouldn't have done that."

As she swallows, my lips curl up at the corners.

Tonight just got a whole lot more interesting.

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LOVE STEAMY MILITARY ROMANCES?

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CHAPTER ONE - JOSH

“Josh, I’ve got Blaze Cartwright on the phone,” my office manager/receptionist/ruler of the universe, Penny, says.

I drop the weight bar with a clang and sit up before reaching for my towel. I notice a few of the team, who are also working out in the Black Hawke gym, glance my way.

“As in the rockstar?” I ask Penny.

“Yup.” She nods.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

“Isn’t he retired?” I frown, walking to where my water bottle is and chugging down half of it.

I’m pretty sure people think Navy SEALs are magically chiseled, but that’s so fucking far from the truth I don’t even know where to start. We get our reputation because of the hard work and almost superhuman lengths we had to go through to earn our stripes.

That day was a long time ago, but staying in shape is just as essential since starting Black Hawke Security with Aidan Black, a US Marine.

Hence having a good quality gym in our building in Los Angeles.

“Turn on a radio sometime, Josh.” Ryder laughs as he climbs off the rowing machine and walks over.

I grunt.

I do that a lot. Apparently.

“I have Spotify,” I mutter then drag my eyes back to Penny. “Get a number. Tell him I’ll call him back.”

“I tried that,” she replies, crossing her arms in annoyance.

I swear she’s the only person in the universe who questions me and gives me sass.

The only person I let get away with it.

Maybe because she's in her seventies and mothers us in a pick your shit up boys or I'll put it through the shredder kind of way.

It was that or hire someone in her twenties or thirties who would distract my men or be distracted by them.

I'm not stupid. All of them would want to fuck her.

Or just would.

What a disaster that would be.

I'm not interested in female drama of any kind. I fuck them and thank them. Which I think is fair. I don't want to know about their exes, their family issues, or even how their dog or cat did some cute shit.

Not fucking interested.

I run my towel over my still sweating forehead and ruffle my hair. It's a little longer than when I was an active SEAL but not long enough so that the dark strands curl.

Annoys the hell out of me when it does that.

"Give him to radio boy here." I tip my head to Ryder.

"He asked for you. Josh, are you going to take this call or keep Blaze waiting?"

Blaze?

I smirk. “A fan, were you?”

She drops her arms and huffs. “Of course I was. Everyone was. He sold one hundred million records while you were still in diapers.”

Ryder snorts and I shoot him a glare. He holds up his hands, but the smile is still there.

Jesus.

What could a retired—I thought—rock star want me for?

Black Hawke Security, or BHS, is a group of paramilitary experts. We provide services mostly to governments (yes plural) and the rich and famous.

But usually that means a huge name that’s all over TikTok, not some eighties rockstar.

Page 55

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Letting out a sigh, I toss my towel, miss the basket, and follow a muttering Penny out to my office.

“Put him through,” I say, continuing past her to the big office down the end of the hall.

“Put a shirt on!” she calls out.

I shake my head as I shut the door and reach for a black BSE t-shirt and tug it on, covering my offensive looking eight pack and tribal tattoos.

I grab a bottle of electrolytes out of my mini fridge then flop in the big chair behind my desk as the phone rings.

“Josh Hawke,” I answer.

“Mr. Hawke. Blaze Cartwright. I need your help,” he says.

Interesting.

I tap the keyboard to wake up my computer and Google his name.

I know who he is.

I know his music. Everyone does.

Penny wasn't lying about the one hundred million album sales. Blaze also has one

Grammy, and his band Sonic Rebel has three. In fact, I'd argue nearly everyone on the planet knows who Blaze Cartwright, lead singer of Sonic Rebel, is.

The Beatles, Led Zeplin, Aerosmith, Sonic Rebel.

He lost his wife, the love of his life, tragically to cancer two years ago. I knew that, but as I type in his name, I see that he's come out of retirement after a decade and released a new album.

I read the news.

I don't need to listen to the radio.

Thanks Ryder, you dick.

Still, I'm confused why he'd be asking for me in person. If he's wanting to use our bodyguard services, Penny would've handed him to Ryder.

Aidan heads up the government contracts. Ryder manages the bodyguard services teams, and me? I look after our corporate clientele—you'd be surprised the interesting needs they have—and the black ops stuff.

Which doesn't exist.

Off books stuff.

Working with some of the most powerful people in the world. Many of whom also don't exist.

It's complicated and better if I don't explain.

And that you don't know.

Blaze Cartright is likely one of those precious celebrities who wants to talk to the person whose name is on the door. Or in our case, the website.

Black Hawke Security.

I'm Josh Hawke. A Navy SEAL and dangerous asshole if my former colleagues are to be believed—and they should—and arrogant, if the women I reject at the end of the night are to be believed.

Again, they should.

Frankly, I don't care what people think of me.

My priorities are my elite team of former special ops and fulfilling the contracts which bring in millions (and millions!) of dollars into my company every year. Money aside, we protect the vulnerable and rid the world of evil.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

I knew at a certain point in my SEAL career that I could do more out of uniform, but I respect the navy and thank the universe for the opportunity to serve.

Expecting this to be a short conversation and to hand him over to Ryder, I take a sip of my drink and then wipe my mouth. “How can I help you, Mr. Cartwright?”

“Blaze, please.”

“Blaze.”

Jesus, get to the fucking point.

I have a satellite call with the Middle East in twenty minutes and wanted to get in a full workout. That isn't happening now, so I'll have to fit in some more reps later tonight.

I might not be in the service anymore, but some days my job can be just as dangerous. Even more so without the backing of the government.

There are pros and cons.

Staying in shape and keeping my fitness at optimal levels keep me alive.

“My daughter's life is in danger, and I need you to protect her,” he answers.

Fuck no. I'm not a trust fund baby bodyguard.

Jesus fucking Christ, I'm offended.

Did he read my bio? I'm a goddamn Navy SEAL. Not a mall cop. No offense to mall cops. Someone has to do that shit.

Not me.

And I don't look after spoiled rich kids.

I'm about to launch into my well-practiced spiel and transfer him to Ryder's voicemail when he adds, "I'll pay you triple. It's just until they get this guy put back in prison."

I lift my brows slowly.

He's got my attention. Not because of the money—although the potential for referrals from Cartwright is huge—but I'm curious about who the escaped convict is. Usually, he would be on the BHS radar, and I've not heard a thing.

That's both a concern—because why the fuck don't we know—and I wonder who and why it's been covered up.

And why.

"Keep talking," I say as I change my Google search to find Blaze's daughter.

"Eleven years ago, when Sonic Rebel was at the height of its success, my daughter Cassy was eighteen. The media took an interest in her and so did Isaac Miller."

I stare at my screen as Blaze continues talking.

Christ.

I can see why she turned heads.

A young Cassy Cartright stares at me through my laptop screen, and she's fucking gorgeous. Not just your usual Hollywood gorgeous. She's naturally beautiful and lean, with long dark wavy hair and startling green eyes surrounded by thick long lashes.

I'm no stranger to beautiful women. Being six four and built like a brick shithouse I draw them to me like magnets. But beauty aside, there's something about her stopping me from looking away.

Like the Mona fucking Lisa, I can't put my finger on it.

Is she smirking? Cheeky?

No.

Page 57

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Is she a dirty little girl, hiding behind an innocent charade? I lean in and study her eyes.

No.

But it's something and it has my cock twitching.

And my mood darkening.

I click my messenger and send Penny an abrupt message asking why we don't have information about escaped convict Isaac Miller.

Penny replies. Say please.

Fucking hell.

Please GET me the information.

"So," Blaze says, after wrapping up. "Isaac Miller was convicted and imprisoned for twenty-five years. Three days ago he escaped, and Cassy refuses to listen to me."

She's stubborn.

And stupid.

"Listen, how?" I ask.

“She’s going to work and won’t hire a bodyguard,” Blaze said. “I sent a couple of my team over there and she called the police. Had them removed from the premises for trespassing.”

My lips stretch into a smile.

I shouldn’t. It was irresponsible of her, but it still makes me smile.

“He will kill her, Mr. Hawke. I need someone who will not let Cassy run roughshod over them and can keep her alive. You come highly recommended.”

I’m not surprised.

Much of our work comes from repeat business with governments and personal recommendations. Hollywood is a small industry, and because our head office is in Los Angeles and they can afford us, we are their first call.

Given we didn’t exist when Sonic Rebel was one of the biggest bands in the world, it’s no surprise we don’t have their long-term business.

I see this as a potential opportunity to grab it.

And the woman staring back at me looks like a challenge.

I also don’t like men who harm women. I might not have been listening intently to Blaze as he explained what Isaac did, but I heard enough.

“We’ll make sure she’s protected and connect in with law enforcement to see if we can help track him down,” I say.

I won’t guard her myself, but I’ll meet with them and make sure I keep my word that

BHS will keep Cassy Cartwright alive.

“Thank you.”

Get your FREE copy of THE SEAL now and start this steamy military romance jam packed with spicy and suspense! And hot military guys!

LOVE SPICY BILLIONAIRE ROMANCES?

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CHAPTER ONE

Daniel Dufort lifted his whisky to his lips and nodded at the blonde who was regaling him with an apparently hilarious story of her father at their recent New Year's party.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Daniel knew who the man was. The fact he'd actually spent time with his wife and family was a small Christmas miracle. He'd heard rumors—and his source was pretty reliable—that her father, Senator Johnson, had two girlfriends. Neither of which knew about the other. With Valentine's Day approaching, it would be an expensive one for the politician.

Three women. Ugh.

Daniel shivered at the thought. He preferred his women in and out in an evening, not sticking around for breakfast or a ring on their fingers.

He glanced around Bar Hugo, one of Manhattan's most exclusive bars, and saw most of his key connections had now left. The only reason he was still nursing his Macallan was, to put it bluntly, his cock. The blonde, who wouldn't stop talking, was going to have her mouth around it within the next hour.

Beep, beep.

Daniel, we need to speak. Meet me in your office in an hour.

After reading his father's message, he mentally rearranged his plans. Dropping his crystal glass onto the polished wooden bar, he replied to confirm he'd see him there, and then took the petite blonde's arm. "Shall we go?"

Her face lit up.

"Your place or mine?" she purred.

“I have a meeting in my office tonight, so let’s head there,” he replied, leading her to the private exit. The last thing he wanted was to be photographed with her and more gossip spread about his relationship status.

When would the media give up? He was never getting married.

She hesitated slightly as his offer sank in. There would be no breakfast in bed. Daniel held her gaze. The decision was hers—she could take it or leave it.

He knew she’d take it.

They all did.

A billionaire in a suit was an aphrodisiac to these types of women.

Like his brothers, he had inherited their father’s good looks. At six foot three with a muscular frame—which he worked hard to maintain in his gym—and a square jaw, Daniel was confident and powerful.

Some of it learned. Some of it was natural.

In the United States, and other places around the world, Daniel Dufort was frequently quoted in business and economic media, and unfortunately in less respected publications for the women he took to events. Rarely, if ever, was it the same women, and yet they insisted on discussing his marital status.

The gossip columns had a few cringeworthy nicknames for him. Try as he may, Daniel struggled to keep his sex life private. He only had a few rules.

No promises.

Nothing overnight.

No, do overs.

Okay, fine—he occasionally slept with the same woman twice, but not in the same quarter or it gave the wrong impression.

Daniel Dufort wasn't interested in a relationship. Of any kind. He didn't believe in true love, nor was he going to settle for something vanilla. However, he did enjoy female company, and the activities at the end of the evening, so he took dates to the events he had to attend, or to meet some social obligation.

And he wasn't lacking in options.

But a relationship was not for him.

Settling down with a best friend and having missionary-style sex three times a week? No thanks.

As predicted, she'd walked through the door, so they head to Dufort Towers. Daniel hung his dark gray Tom Ford jacket on the hanger and turned.

Miss Johnson—fuck, he'd forgotten her name—lingered, taking in the valuable 57th Avenue view that overlooked Central Park. It was one of the best along Billionaire Row.

“Stunning,” she said, stepping up to the full-length glass.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Daniel removed his cufflinks, and they pinged as he dropped them on his custom-made oak wood desk. He rolled his shirt sleeves to his elbows and checked the time on his Piguet watch.

They had thirty-five minutes.

Daniel moved to stand beside Miss Johnson and dug his hands in his pockets. “I’m going to assume you give head.”

She turned, her mouth opening.

A good start.

Daniel leaned in and ran his finger through her hair. “Or I can bend you over my desk and fuck you. You decide.”

Her mouth closed and acceptance settled over her features. She was too proud to storm out, and he knew she was wet for him.

She reached for his fly and slid to her knees. “Both.” Her eyes lifted to his as she gripped his cock.

Daniel didn’t answer. He simply watched her tongue swirl around his swollen head and take him deeper, inch by inch.

Daniel let out a low moan. He gripped her hair and pressed in further while she moved skillfully over and around him. It wasn’t long before he was fucking her throat

as she milked him dry. He groaned out his orgasm while she swallowed.

That was a bonus—he thought she'd be a spitter.

She sat back on her Manolo Blahnik heels and licked her lips. She was a beautiful woman, more natural than many in this town, but like all those before her, Daniel suddenly lost interest.

Most of them were here for his last name. They often had trust funds or money of their own, but he had power and they falsely believed by marrying him, they would also have power.

They were wrong. Power was something one either had or didn't have. It came from within, as much as a bank balance.

Dufort Hotels, which made up most of the Dufort Dynasty, had properties all over the world. It had been built by his father and went public two years ago. Two years ago, his father had stepped away—though remained the majority shareholder—and Daniel had taken on the position he'd been groomed for all his life.

CEO of Dufort Hotels.

“Thank you for being my date tonight,” he said, zipping his pants. God, why could he not remember her name?

Megan. Shit.

“Give your father my regards, Megan.”

She stood and smiled at him, all sultry. “I think you've forgotten about part two.”

No. He hadn't.

Fortunately, his father was always early and at any moment he'd be interrupted if things got tense. Occasionally, claws came out when they felt rejected.

"Looks like we are out of time. I need to prepare for my meeting," he replied with no pretense of disappointment, then stepped away. "Please make use of the facilities before you leave if you need to."

Daniel stepped behind his large desk and lifted his laptop open.

Megan cleared her throat and picked up her purse. "No, thank you. I will gargle the sperm from my throat with a glass of Cristal champagne when I get home," she replied, then spun and walked out of the office with her head held high.

Despite himself, Daniel smiled.

Good for her.

A moment later, his father stepped into his office, thumbing his finger over his shoulder. "Was that Senator Johnson's daughter I saw leaving?"

"Yes. She accompanied me to the Glass Towers rebrand launch this evening," Daniel said.

Glass Towers were a friendly competitor in New York City, but a competitor, nevertheless. He'd chosen the senator's daughter as a political statement because of some government lobbying he was doing regarding the water system in Manhattan. The CEO, David Glass, disagreed with Dufort, which could cost Glass Towers a small fortune if it went ahead. But it was the right thing to do, and they both knew it.

Daniel smiled.

He loved the game, and he was good at it.

Johnathan Dufort walked over to the same spot Megan had performed in and rocked on his feet. It wasn't unusual for them to meet in the evenings, but Daniel knew what this was about. It had been a hot topic for weeks and was his least favorite subject right now.

"I don't have good news, son," he said. "The agreement is still missing and now Senator Mackenzie is trying to extort us."

He looked up.

"With what?" Daniel asked loudly. "He's already doing that by claiming we owe him more interest on the initial loan than was originally agreed to."

Nearly two decades ago his father had entered an agreement with his then friend, Bill Mackenzie. The amount had been substantial—in the high six figures—and was paramount in Dufort Hotels growing into what it was today. The loan was to be repaid in twenty years with three percent interest.

It was no secret. Their finance team had been putting the money aside over the years and were preparing to pay it out in this financial year.

A few weeks ago, they'd received a letter from the now senator requesting payment for a much larger sum. Attached was a copy of the agreement.

Except it wasn't the original—it had been doctored.

The three percent interest had ballooned to fifteen percent. A rate no one in their right mind would agree to.

Very few people were aware of the situation, outside his father, his brothers Fletcher and Hunter, their financial advisor and lawyer. The latter had advised they hunt down a copy of the agreement before going to the authorities.

Johnathan Dufort had thought he had a copy at home in his own files, along with the one kept in the vault at Dufort Dynasty.

Apparently not.

His father ran a hand over his face.

Shit.

“Father. Tell me.”

Johnathan slammed his fist down onto the arm of the sofa next to him. “He has said we have thirty days to pay, or he wants his daughter married into the Dufort family. The prenup cannot exclude her from the Dynasty shares.”

“You have got to be fucking kidding me,” Daniel growled.

He knew what was coming next.

“She has asked for you.”

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BOOK ONE IN THE MONTGOMERY BILLIONAIRES

CHAPTER ONE - KNOX

I hear the bathroom door open and drop my phone, glancing at the naked woman walking back into my bedroom.

Stacey Rodgers.

She's one of the lawyers at Luxingtons, the high-end department store here in the United States, who stock our products. Our being Montgomery Enterprises.

Or more to the point, our brand Verity & Co., a fashion label which shares the same runways as all the big names in the industry. From men's and women's clothing to leather goods and perfume, we have luxury goods across the entire spectrum.

For those who can afford them.

My father, Ward, started the billion-dollar organization, and since I was a little boy, I have known that I would step into his shoes.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

One day.

At twenty-four I've got many years ahead of me and I'm satisfied with my role as head of marketing. There is still much to learn, although I'd argue that my business and marketing degrees from Brown and shadowing my father from an early age has set me much further ahead than many my age.

My two younger brothers, Atlas and Levi and older sister, Bella, were much less interested in what Dad was doing. I remember Mom buying me a little briefcase when I was about five. I carried it everywhere. Inside I kept my GI Joe and a couple of toy dump trucks.

Serious business.

These days I spend the majority of my life in a suit—no briefcase or GI Joe—and the occasional sweats. A necessity when you're six foot three and over two hundred pounds.

I'm not going to attract women like Stacey by letting all that muscle turn into a pouch. She and I have been flirting for months. When she flew in for the half-yearly review, I invited her back to my penthouse for a debrief.

I mean, she's a beautiful woman and the tan from her recent tropical vacation made her tall, toned curves even more appealing. Plus, she's a dynamite in the boardroom.

My favorite type.

To break.

The corner of my lip twitches as I recall how she lost complete and utter fucking control just twenty minutes ago. I've been looking forward to the day she screamed my name.

She did.

Loudly.

"I'm surprised you didn't get us a hotel room, Knox," Stacey says, pulling her panties on.

I toss back the sheet covering my now soft member and climb out of bed. "No need. I know you'll be professional about this," I say, reaching for my briefs.

Most women I fuck are clear this is just sex. Raw, rough, and passionate sex. Nothing more.

Once or twice, I've got it wrong and had to have the talk. The one that goes something like;this isn't going to happen. I don't date. I fuck. I thought we were on the same page.

It always works.

Their pride kicks in and they give me a shrug muttering that,yeah, I just thought it was an enjoyable night and we could do it again.

Nope.

I don't like leftovers.

Stacey, though, is highly focused on her career and climbing the ladder within Luxingtons. She has a reputation for being tough, and today that determination was focused on me.

It was sexy as hell.

Hence my hour-long erection and deciding to do something about it.

Now?

Now I want to open my emails and sip on a Macallan once she's gone back to her hotel.

More than most, I've got a clear path for my future. In another ten years, or so, I'll take over my father's role as CEO and lead Montgomery Enterprises.

Already I've made an impression with the board and our partners. When I was appointed the director of marketing sales had been low. I know why. My mother had died a few years earlier, and we'd all struggled to come to grips with the loss. My father included.

That had reflected on the numbers.

Now, a few years on, we're back in a strong phase and soon we'll be launching our next Verity & Co. collection. It's an essential season for the company to gain more ground on competitors who benefited from our earlier weak performance period.

That time is over.

Page 62

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

We have a couple of months to get everything ready and I'm excited to really show what I can do.

“What if I want to do this again?” Stacey asks, doing up her bra.

My eyes drop to the lace, momentarily disappointed to lose sight of her deep pink nipples which had been pressed firmly into my sheets while I thrust into her from behind.

I'll admit, I'm a breast guy. Which is why I'd moved her up the bed, then had her sit up and face the wall while I took a handful and continued to pound her ass. Palming the wall, I told her what a dirty slut she was and she fucking loved it.

I've yet to meet a woman who doesn't.

I'm sure it's because you need some excellent upper body strength to sustain it. That and you can lower your hand and stroke the clit, which is always a winning move if you're ready for some clamping around your cock.

I'm always ready.

But do I think Stacey wants seconds? No, she's testing me. We both got what we wanted. No heart eyes needed.

I'm not looking to fall in love.

Or commit in any way.

In fact, I don't date. I don't take women out to dinner. Or go to the movies. Or walk hand in hand on the beach and watch sunsets.

I fuck.

When I hit my thirties, I might feel differently about settling down, but that's a few years away yet.

Right now, my priority is growing Ward Montgomery Enterprises—or WME as we call it—to double the size by the time I take the lead.

A bold target given it's already a multi-billion-dollar company.

“You won't,” I finally answer, sliding my gold Rolex back on and then walk into my wardrobe. I select a pair of Prada jeans and a black cashmere sweater then return to the bedroom to find Stacey dressed. “I'll walk you down. My driver is only a few minutes away.”

I stop a foot away and study her reaction to the fact I organized the car while she was tossing the used condom in the toilet.

Yeah, I'm an asshole.

“I'm glad we did this.” She smiles.

I smirk. “It's been in the cards for a while.”

Now leave.

Stacey reaches for her purse, and I guide her through my multimillion-dollar Philadelphia penthouse apartment. She turns and places a hand on my lower

abdomen, and I feel like she's breached my personal boundaries despite having her lips around my cock an hour ago.

Or it might've been two hours. She had good stamina; I'll give her that.

"Stay up here, Knox. I can ride in the elevator on my own. I'm a big girl."

"Then I'll see you at the next review in six months."

We politely smile at one another for a final moment as I hold the door open. Then Stacey is gone.

Click.

Jesus, I hope she doesn't share bedtime stories with Selena, her senior manager. I fucked Selena six months ago when she was in Philly for the last review.

I'm a private man. Who I sleep with is no one else's business, but being part of a wealthy family means people think they have a right to know. Especially the media.

Then there's my father.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Ward had seen Selena and I chatting after our meeting six months ago, and apparently picked up on our chemistry.

“Good night last night?” he’d asked me the next day.

“Yup.” I sat opposite his huge oak desk, sipping my coffee while Ward swirled his ink pen around his fingers.

Deceptively casual, as I’d quickly learned.

“So did you fuck Selena Warner?”

Jesus.

“What?” I choked on my coffee, coughing as I wiped my shirt and blazer. Fortunately, I have a closet in my office with several spare shirts, suits, ties, and shoes.

“Answer the question,” Ward pressed.

“Christ, Dad. Yes. I used a rubber. What’s the problem?” I had asked, irritated.

Does he think I’m fucking fifteen?

Shaking his head, he leaned back in his chair. “If you don’t know the answer to that, I’m even more disappointed. Lexington’s are an important retailer for us.”

His comment had fucked me off even more. I mean, welcome to the twenty-first century, Dad. How did he think people met? At damn work. Among other places.

People fucked, they dated, and one day got married and made little humans together.

“Is it on the news? No. Does anyone here know? No.” I widened my arms. “Selena left happy, so I don’t know what the issue is.”

He’d sat staring at me with those disappointed eyes, but I’d made it clear to him that he had no right to dictate what I did with my cock.

He was my father.

He was my boss.

But what I did in my personal life, as long as there was mutual consent and it didn’t interfere with business, was none of his business.

However, I’ve been a lot more discrete with Stacey, and the dozen other women since then. I’m confident he hasn’t noticed.

Would he feel the same if I started dating one of them? No. Well, sorry Dad, but wining and dining women and all that charming stuff is for other men.

I fuck.

I fuck rough and hard.

CHAPTER TWO

PAYTON

WHERE ARE MY DAMN SHOES?

I spy them under the chair in my bedroom and dive for them. Then hop on one foot as I pull on the black pumps, and race across the other side of my bedroom, reaching for my purse.

I slept in.

To make things worse, today is the first day of a new job. And I need this job. Or rather, I need to keep this job.

I fell asleep without setting my alarm last night, so was blissfully dreaming about lying on the beach in the Bahamas when I suddenly bolted upright.

I don't know what woke me, but I'm grateful.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

Now I have exactly ten minutes to get to my workplace. The good news is I live in an apartment building about seven blocks from the StoryCraft offices. The bad news is my hair is still a little damp and I haven't had any coffee yet.

I tug on my black blazer and yank my shoulder bag over my head. Then grab my tinted lip gloss off the dressing table and race out of my bedroom.

The first thing I did when I woke was push the button on my De'Longhi coffee machine, so the delicious aroma has filled my apartment. One day I'll own a Keurig, but not until after I've paid my student loan.

So approximately seventy-five lifetimes.

Or so it feels.

It could be worse, I remind myself. Much worse, and it still could be. If I lose this job, my father will make me pay back half of my marketing degree (he paid the other half) and the first year of law school.

Yale Law School - I'll let you do the math.

That was the deal.

A renegotiated deal.

I changed degrees, and he was highly disappointed in me. Let me backtrack a little. Both my parents are lawyers and we all thought I would be too. Now Dad is a judge

and when I told him I didn't want to continue, I think it broke his heart a little.

But my father is not a soft man, so his reaction was a surprise. Oh, I knew he'd be unhappy, which was why I spent months keeping my thoughts to myself and then when I finally decided and told my then boyfriend, Asher; I was extremely nervous.

More on him later.

When I confessed, they were shocked and asked a lot of questions. Including what I wanted to do next. When I said marketing, Dad didn't look impressed.

"Hey, I could have said I wanted to be a stripper," I said with a cheesy smile.

"Well, at least you don't want to be a comedian," Dad deadpanned.

"Are you sure about this?" Mom asked.

I nodded.

"I've been miserable all year," I told them. "My grades are suffering, and I can't see myself being a lawyer."

"There are a lot of things you can do with a law degree," my father tried.

"Dad. I... It's not who I am. A marketing degree is a great foundation if I want to work for a good company or start my own business one day."

"And do what?"

I threw up my hands. "I don't know. I'm twenty!" I cried. "Just because you knew what you wanted to do. Most people don't."

“She’s right, Jerry,” Mom said in support.

His frowning face watched me for a long time before the ultimatum arrived.

“Fine. But here are my terms,” he said.

Did I mention my father was a judge? He wasn’t about to agree and let me walk away lightly. I had known this, but I was still surprised by what came next.

“Do your Bachelor of Marketing, but you must remain at Yale. Your mother and I will pay for it, but if you don’t complete it, you will pay back the entire amount and the first year of law school.”

My mouth fell open.

I’d always believed my parents were paying for college. They told me they would, and I worked hard to get into Yale.

“Plus,” Dad said. “When you graduate, I want to see you stay in a job for two years. You need to stick to something.”

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

“Oh, come on,” I cried, looking at my mom.

“That’s the deal,” my father had continued.

“This isn’t encouraging her, Jerry,” Mom had finally piped up in support.

He grumbled, then started on his fingers. “Guitar, hip-hop dancing, photography – and do you know how much cameras flipping cost? – and what happened to becoming a fitness trainer? Then you finally agreed to study law.”

In my defense, no one had told me how early trainers started in the morning. I don’t rise before the sun. Not for anything.

Not even coffee.

“I don’t have the flexibility for dance. You should really take some responsibility for that. After all, I’m half your DNA.”

“Again, thank goodness you aren’t looking at stand-up comedy. Yet.” His brows lifted.

I flopped back on the sofa.

“Great. So finish my degree and I have to stay in my first job for two years,” I clarified. “If not, I have to pay it all back, including the first year of law school.

“With interest,” Dad said, standing.

“What?”

Mom patted my leg. “We are not charging our daughter interest. Darling, you need to think carefully before you make this decision.”

“You know, this is part of me figuring out who I am as a person. It’s normal.”

“Christ, next she’ll tell us she wants to be a shrink.” Dad walked out of the room shaking his head while Mom and I began to giggle.

“Laugh away, but I’m not funding any more of this finding yourself rubbish. That’s on your dime now,” he called from the hall.

Then his head popped back around.

“Finish your marketing degree, Payton. Do at least two years in a job, then I’ll wipe your debt. Until then, you’re liable. Can I assume you learned what that means while you were studying law at damn Yale?”

More giggles.

“I hear you, Daddy,” I replied. “I promise.”

“I just want you to stick to something.” He shook his head. “You’ll be surprised what you learn about yourself when you are forced to commit.”

I hated that he saw me as some flake, when I really was just trying to figure out what I loved. Mom and I had talked for an hour after and she said she believed in me.

So I’ve been on a mission to prove to my father I could do this.

I graduated and then found a great job in Philadelphia. A year into the job, when I was nearly free of the financial burden hanging over my head, the PR agency sold and most of us were made redundant.

I freaked out.

The first thing I did was head home to speak to him in person.

“Dad, I didn’t resign, so this doesn’t qualify as me quitting,” I’d argued. After all, I’d been raised by two lawyers so I knew how to defend myself.

In my family's kitchen at least.

“I accept that,” Jerry Mills had said. “Find another job in thirty days and I will overlook this small blip.”

“I will,” I said. “So, one more year.”

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:09 am

“No. The clock starts again at day one,” Dad said, and even my mom looked shocked.

“What? No, that’s unfair,” I cried.

“Life is unfair. Stay in this new job for two years. That’s the deal.” Dad shrugged.

I had started to think repaying him was the easier option. Then I remembered how many hundreds of thousands of dollars it was and zipped my lips.

In any case, I had needed a new job so it was a moot point. Finding one that I loved and wanted to stay at for two years was the challenge.

Last week I had finally found something.

It was almost fateful. My bank balance was getting extremely low, and the idea of having to move home was getting worrisome. One of the account managers at StoryCraft had suddenly left because she’d won seventeen million dollars in the lottery.

Lucky for some.

When they asked if I could start straight away, I said yes and was offered the job.

“You don’t have as much experience as we would like for this client,” Alexandra, the owner, had told me. “But I’ll shadow you to make sure everything runs smoothly. This is one of our biggest and most important clients. They have an important launch happening in September, but you starting immediately gives us time to train you.”

I was excited.

StoryCraft is a well-known and reputable marketing agency. It felt like the opportunity had just fallen in my lap. And now I am running late on my first day.

Ugh.

I am so angry at myself for not setting my alarm.

I fill my coffee mug and run out the door. Downstairs I hit the pavement and walk/jog the seven blocks.

When I step inside the doors of the StoryCraft offices, my armpits are sweaty, and I know my hair is frizzy because I didn't dry it enough.

Great.

"Hi Payton, please follow me," a woman a few years older than me in a tight black pencil skirt and fitted matching blazer, says. Her smile is tight as she tucks a laptop under her arm.

"You're a few minutes late," she says loudly as we pass through an open plan environment. Faces lift and watch me, and I wonder if anyone is going to introduce me.

I send a few smiles out, but none are returned.

Oh, god, I hate it here.

"Is there somewhere I can put my bag down?" I ask as we turn a corner and head toward the meeting rooms.

She glances over her shoulder as we stop by a door, then suddenly stops and opens it, reaches into the cupboard and grabs a notebook and two pens.

One greeb.

One red.

Then thrusts the stationery and laptop into my arms. I nearly drop it all as I juggle them, along with my sticky coffee tumbler.

“They’re waiting for you in room four,” she says and walks away.

My mouth parts in surprise as I watch her leave.

“Wait,” I call out. When she turns, I ask, “What is your name?”

“Karen.”

Of course it is.

I glance down at the items in my arms and catch a glimpse of myself in the reflection of one of the glass walls.

Crouching, I drop everything onto the floor and pull my bag over my shoulder.

Shit.

The front of my shirt has a huge coffee stain.

Then the door to the meeting room opens.