



Dirty Filthy Billionaire: Part 1

Author: *Paige North*

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Description: "I don't know anything," I say, "about...sex." "It's okay," he says roughly. "I can teach you. Would you like that, Mia?"

When I scored the interview at Blush magazine, I assumed I'd be interviewing with some random HR person. And then they bring me into his office. Weston Bridges, CEO. He's twenty-eight-years old, a self-made billionaire, and a totally notorious playboy who just so happens to be super sexy. I know his reputation — player, totally arrogant, richer than God, and completely full of himself. I bet he's a total a-hole — and by the way everyone is racing around the office when I show up for my interview, I'm sure I'm right. Of course, the bastard is even hotter in person than he is in his pictures. He's like some billboard model or something, his dark hair perfectly combed with the slightest bit of curl, and his suit that just fit him flawlessly. For some reason, every move he makes grabs my attention. Just seeing him sitting there behind his desk makes me feel like I want him to take me and kiss me, which is so not like me.

Then Weston drops the bombshell. The magazine I want to write for is getting makeover. A sexier makeover. No problem, I tell him confidently. I can write about sex. (Just because I've never had it doesn't mean I can't write about it, right? Of course, I keep my lack of experience a secret.) Weston offers to discuss it further. He tells me he'll pick me up that night. He tells me to wear something sexy. What he doesn't tell me is that he's taking me to a sex club. The kind with whips and chains and handcuffs and punishments. I am so screwed...

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Mia

This is my dream job.

My dream job, located in everyone's dream city: New York.

People say that kind of thing all the time, but for me it's actually true. The only problem?

I don't have the job yet and I know for a fact that there are literally hundreds of other young women, just like me in nearly every way, who would do just about anything to work for Blush Magazine.

I've been reading it since I was thirteen, obsessed with everything about it from the fashion to the great profile stories. I'd be lucky if they let me deliver the issues to the newsstand, but seeing as I have a shiny new college degree in journalism, I'm hoping I can, by some miracle, end up writing or editing.

I dab my forehead with a napkin I find buried in my bag.

It is hot. Freaking sweltering. This may sound dumb but no one told me how muggy New York City is. It's not even ten in the morning and already my shirt is sticking to my back, and there's a thin line of sweat on my forehead. Not great when I'm on my way to make a stellar first impression.

I've only been in New York a month and I have to admit that it's a bit overwhelming. I'm from a small town and went to college in a medium town, and New York is on a

whole other level.

Looking at my reflection in the dirty office window, I touch up my face with a little powder, add some lipstick, smooth down my hair and hope for the best. I hobble the last block to the building, check in with security, and take a deep breath as the elevator sucks me up to the sixty-fifth floor.

As I walk toward the glass doors of the magazine from the elevators I can see people rushing past, seemingly frantic. The quick pace of publishing, I assume.

“I’m Mia Cassidy,” I tell the pretty receptionist.

“Put him in Mark’s old office,” she calls to someone who just rounded the corner out of sight. “And ask him if he wants water or coffee! I’m sorry, who are you?” she finally says, looking at me.

“Mia Cassidy,” I say, shifting on my sore, blistered feet. “I have a ten o’clock appointment.”

“Oh, the interview girl, right,” she says, typing on her computer. “There you are. You picked a hell of a day to show up.”

I don’t know what she means, but her comment makes me feel like I’ve already screwed up just by being here at this time and day. “Is everything—“

But she has no time for my questions, she’s already onto the next task. “Go have a seat over there and someone will be out to get you.”

“Thanks,” I say, still feeling frazzled from my hot walk over.

I sit on a white leather sofa and take a deep breath. I just need a little break, a tiny bit

of kindness to help calm me down. I wonder if such a person exists in Manhattan?

I kind of hope the person who is interviewing me is behind schedule. I could use the extra minutes to cool down and literally let the sweat dry from my back. Not to mention I need to calm my mind. I don't want to go into the interview reeking of desperation. I need the money and want the job more than anything. But I shouldn't let them know that.

"Jen, do you have those printouts?" a woman about my age asks the receptionist. She practically crashes into the desk she seems like she's in such a rush.

"Yes, right here," Jen says. "They've been here for almost three minutes—he's going to flip."

"Just hand them over," she says, and Jen thrusts a stack of papers to her. She turns to scramble back to wherever when she was headed, but stumbles and all the papers fly out of her hands like a comedy sketch. Except these girls aren't laughing.

"Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god," the girl says as she crouches down to gather all the papers. "He's going to kill me. Then fire me. I'm dead."

I go to help her, picking up the papers that flew farthest from her.

"You don't have to do that," she says. "But thank you so much."

"No problem," I say. "Is it always this chaotic here?"

"Only when our jobs are at stake," she says.

"What do you mean?" I ask, wondering if this some Survivor-style office where you have to fight for your job every day.

“Are you here to interview or something?” she says, briefly looking me over as she stacks the papers in her hands.

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“Yeah,” I say. “I just graduated with a degree in journalism and—”

“Do you read the news? Because shit is going down here. Last one hired, first one fired. I’m surprised they didn’t cancel your appointment.”

I sit back on my heels as my stomach drops. “What do you mean? What’s happened?”

She takes the papers from my hand and stands up. “Our parent company has been bought out effective immediately.”

“Someone bought out Prerogative Media?” I ask, feeling like my whole world is spinning now. Blush Magazine, as well as a whole host of other companies, fall under the umbrella of Prerogative Media, but if someone bought the parent company, then everyone at Blush is at risk.

The entire magazine could be shut down, in theory.

“Not just someone,” she replies darkly. “Weston Bridges. And if you don’t know who he is I suggested you stand up and walk out the door right now. And if you still have your interview,” she says, hardly even looking at me, “then good luck. You’re going to need it.”

“Rachel, hurry!” Jen snaps. “He’s waiting!”

Rachel, who now has all the pages she came out for, clicks quickly across the shiny floors and into the back. I slowly stand up and make my way back to the couch.

I wish I'd had a second to tell that Rachel girl that of course I know who Weston Bridges is. He's a self-made billionaire who hasn't even cracked the age of thirty yet.

He's also a notorious playboy who happens to be super sexy too. I bet he's a total asshole—and by the way everyone is racing around the office, I'm sure I'm right.

I just have to hope that I impress whatever HR person I'm interviewing with, and get in before there are any layoffs. People who buy companies love to lay off a quarter of the staff to help reboot the energy and start somewhat fresh. In a company this big, I'll probably never even have to see him.

If I get the job, of course, which would be a miracle.

I feel like I've been sitting waiting to be called for hours. The sweat on my back has finally dried but my shirt is still sticky and I really hope I don't smell. I wonder if I have time to go to the bathroom and maybe dab myself with a cool paper towel when a young man calls my name.

"Yes, that's me," I say, standing up.

"He's ready for you. You can follow me."

I pick up my bag, stand on my sore feet, and put on my best, most confident face, despite the turmoil that is happening in my mind and body. I desperately need and want this job. I just hope that whoever this HR guy is, he's forgiving for my lack of real-world journalism experience.

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Weston

I haveto admit that buying a company worth more than a billion dollars is a fucking aphrodisiac. I feel like I can do anything, take on anyone right now. The view from this corner office is outstanding—Freedom Tower, Hudson River, Statue of Liberty, New Jersey, and all the small little buildings beneath us. It feels good to be on top.

First thing I did this morning was I let some poor sap named Mark Something have the day off—and every day in the foreseeable future—and then I promptly moved into his stellar office. I may be two years shy of thirty, but I know dead weight when I see it, and that guy Mark was sitting in this chair like a fat hog doing nothing but collecting his six-figure paycheck (with the six-figure annual bonus...for doing his freaking job) and leaving early every Thursday for his house in the Hamptons.

I look at my watch. It's been two hours since I told him he didn't work here anymore. I wonder if his place in Sag Harbor is on the market yet. Maybe I could buy it.

“Mr. Bridges?” I hear Cameron, my new frightened assistant, ask from the doorway.

“What is it?” I ask, slightly annoyed. The view out the window is great, but the one on the computer is even better—all the new things I own. The magazine, the television stations, the book publishing division...it's all mine now. Jesus, it's sexy.

“Your ten o'clock is here,” Cameron says. She consults her notes. “Mia Cassidy.”

“Well what is she here for?” I hope Cameron has cab fare because if she's this terrible of an assistant she might be following ol' Mark out the door.

“She came through HR with that pile of other applicants. You tossed them all but told Helen you wanted to interview this one yourself?”

“Oh, right,” I say. I don’t want to make a bunch of new hires but I kept this resume because the girl is so green I figure we could get her for cheap. Everyone else who came through HR had too much experience and would want too much money. This Mia girl just graduated from some Podunk college and is surely desperate for work, so I thought I’d bring her in, interview her myself. Not something I would normally do but hey, it’s my party and I want to have a little fun today.

“Send her in,” I tell Cameron.

I’ve got my eyes glued to the computer, watching the stock prices of Prerogative rise and picture that money going in my pocket. It’s a good day to be me.

From the corner of my eye I see a figure walk in through the door and sit in one of the sleek leather chairs in front of my desk. I pull up this person’s resume on the computer and look through her (very limited) credentials.

Without looking up I say, “Mia Cassidy?”

“Yes, hi,” I hear her say. “That’s me. It’s, um, nice to meet you.”

I grumble. She won’t think so by the time she leaves this office.

“Looks like you have very limited experience in journalism,” I say, eyes glued to the computer.

“I was the editor of my school paper,” she says. “And I was the lead reporter for the story that exposed high levels of sodium in school lunches in the county.”

“Sodium, huh?” I say, and I feel like I have to check myself—I just might laugh out loud. “Well, it is the silent killer.”

“Actually, Mr. Bridges,” she says, and I look up at her. “That’s hypertension.”

I’m staring at this woman and for a splash of a second, I forget myself—but only for a second. She—Mia is a real, live hottie. And...is that sweat on her forehead? There is something about a woman sweating that is hot as hell. Maybe it’s because I can picture her fucking when I look at that sweat beading on her forehead.

She’s got on some silk blouse that is open low on her chest, exposing her demure but beautiful cleavage. I don’t need a lot, just as long as it’s proportionate to the body, and this girl’s got it. She shifts in the chair, crossing her legs, which are smooth and tanned. Unfortunately I spot the cheap shoes on her feet. From across the desk I can see the wrinkled plastic of the shoe, meant to fool people into thinking it’s leather, and the scuffed heel. I may have grown up on a farm with a son of a bitch of a father, but he taught me one useful thing: If you’ve got a little money, spend it all on one good pair of shoes.

“Get yourself a good pair of boots,” he’d say, “and they’ll last you ten years.”

Clearly this Mia doesn’t even have little money. Or a little experience. Sodium levels? Oh, man. This is going to be so easy.

“Well, Mia,” I say, looking her right in her eyes, “we’re not here to write about hypertension. We’re here to write about sex.”

“I’m sorry, what?” she stammers.

“Blush is getting a new angle,” I tell her. “A sexier angle. Does that make you uncomfortable?”

“No,” she says, but her voice quivers on that one syllable. She tugs on her skirt, her eyes darting away from mine.

“If I were to assign you a story with a sex angle, what do you think you’d write about?”

Talk about blush—her face and chest immediately turn a deep pink, washing across her skin like ink in water. I have to casually move my hand across my mouth to keep from laughing.

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“Well, um,” she begins, looking around the office as if a clue might appear. “Maybe I could do something on the dangerous number of young—”

“Stop,” I say. “Listen to me. The only way I want to hear the word danger in a story about sex is if it’s about spicing up a sex life. Doing naughty things agreed upon by the couple. Did I not just say that Blush is getting a sexier angle?”

“Ye-yes, sir,” she says. Sir. God, I love it. She’s squirming like crazy and probably can’t wait to leave. I give her three more minutes before she runs out of here.

“So?” I say, not letting her off the hook. “What else? Pitch me something else. Something sexy.”

I sit back in my chair and wait. Mia tugs on her dress again, shifting in the chair.

“Um, in college I did a lot of human interest stories? That focused on people?”

Oh, boy. I shake my head no. My eyes bore into her, waiting for something better.

“Maybe something on different types of condoms?” she says.

“Mia,” I say, leaning forward and resting my elbows on the desk. “Think sexier. Surely you can do that, right? No disrespect, but I’m looking at you and I know it’s in you.”

She furrows her brows and asks, “What is?”

I raise my palms up like it should be obvious. “You had experiences in college I assume?”

“I’m not sure you can assume much of anything about me, Mr. Bridges,” she says, and I’m taken aback—in a good way.

I can’t help the small grin crossing my face. “Is that so?” I ask. “Well, then. I apologize. But I do still need to hear some stronger ideas.”

“Of course,” she says. “But I’d like to hear more about the angle you’re taking the magazine. Surely there’s more to it than sex.”

“In my experience,” I say, “everything always comes back to sex.”

“That’s just not even possible,” she says. She’s clearly getting more comfortable—or braver, at least. I’m happy to hear her bat it back with me. The flush on her cheeks has faded and she’s finally making clear eye contact with me. Just her eyes alone are gorgeous, the way they look into mine. She licks her lips, waiting for me hit her back and now I’m the one shifting in my seat, looking at those plump wet lips.

“One thing I never want to hear another person say, Ms. Cassidy, is that something is impossible. We could do a makeup column, and that makeup column leads back to sex. Everything the magazine prints will have a sexy angle to it, even if it’s subtle.”

“Is that what you think women care about? I mean, only care about?” she asks.

“Sex? I think they care about it a fair amount. You don’t?”

She shrugs one shoulder. “I spent my college years being more concerned about grades and getting ahead, doing a good job.”

“And that’s what I want you to do here,” I say. “Get ahead. Do a good job.”

“But with sex,” she says.

“With a sex angle,” I clarify.

She’s quiet for a moment. She looks at me as if she’s waiting for me to tell her I’m just testing her, that of course I want her to write that story on hypertension. But I like keeping silent while she squirms. If she doesn’t leave, I’ll know she’s willing to do the work needed to take Blush to the next level. Not to mention it won’t be so bad having her around the office.

“I’ll be honest, Mia,” I say, acting like I’m placating her. “As I’m sure you’re aware, the magazine industry isn’t doing so well. It’s been in decline for years. Some would say it’s a dying industry, and to compete with online media we need to go sexier.”

“I understand,” she says.

“I’m not sure you do,” I say. “Your little hypertension story would only work if someone collapsed during sex. Do you get it now?”

Finally she says, “I mean, yeah. I can do that. I can keep the angles sexy.”

“Because if you’re uncomfortable with the direction I’m taking the magazine you need to say so now. It’s not going to get any easier.”

She rolls her lips in on each other. “No. It doesn’t bother me.”

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“Great,” I say, suddenly getting an idea. And it’s a doozy. “Before I hire you I’d like to see you out in the field, see how you handle getting a story. Does that sound fair?”

“Sure,” she says.

“Wonderful,” I say. “Then I’ll see you tonight.”

“I’m sorry—what?”

“Tonight. We’re going to investigate a story. I can’t hire you based on these college stories,” I say, waving to my computer that has PDFs of her silly but well-written pieces. “I’ll pick you up at nine. And Mia? Wear something sexy.”

“Where are we going?”

“That I can’t tell you.”

“But why do I have to dress...sexy?” she says, as if the word is confusing to her.

“Because,” I tell her. “Sex sells. And I intend to make Blush the best-selling magazine on newsstands. I assume this address on your resume is current?”

“Yes,” she says. She’s got her chin defiantly up, but I can tell she’s nervous.

I stand up, and then she does as well, tugging on that damn skirt. I can finally take the whole of her in, seeing her at her full height with a full view of her curves, that skirt hugging down her hips and thighs. It’s not bad, the clothes, but I know she can do

better—especially for where we’re going tonight.

I offer my hand to shake and say, “Mia, it was a pleasure meeting you.”

“You too, Mr. Bridges.”

I take her hand in mine, small and delicate, and give it a shake. I want to hold it a moment longer than is necessary but refrain.

“And I’ll see you at nine sharp, okay?”

I watch her every step as she leaves my office, the way her hips sway and her calf muscles flex in her (cheap) heels.

When I took over the company this morning, I didn’t think things would go as well as this. As much fun as I’m having at the office, now I just can’t wait for the day to end so that I can see Mia again.

I tell myself I’m just having fun, pushing this Mia girl to see whether she can fulfill some of the potential I sense in her. Maybe she could be a top-flight writer if she loosens up a bit...

But then another part of me knows that there’s more going on than I want to admit to myself.

Something about Mia draws me in, makes me want to focus on her to the exclusion of everything else. And the last thing I need right now is a distraction, not when I just made the biggest deal of my career.

I can’t afford to lose the plot.

And yet somehow, I think maybe Mia isn't the only one about to have her life turned upside down.

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Mia

Once I'm in the elevator I lean my head against the cool steel of the wall. What the hell just happened? How in the world did I just get an interview with the Weston Bridges?

I had no idea how hot he is. It was hard to concentrate. He's like some billboard model or something, his dark hair perfectly combed with the slightest bit of curl, and his suit that just fit him flawlessly. For some reason, every move he made grabbed my attention. Just leaning on the desk made me feel like I wanted him to take me and kiss me, which is so not like me, especially in a professional setting.

The elevator dings and I walk out onto the hot streets of the city. People stream by me, not noticing me, and I just want to yell at them that I had a meeting with Weston Bridges...and we have another meeting tonight!

I know this guy's reputation. Player, totally arrogant, richer than God, and completely full of himself. I'm sure he just loved that so-called interview he did with me. And what happened to the trusty human resources person who was supposed to interview me? That's what I was prepared for—not the absolute head of the entire corporation. And worse, he seemed to be having fun with me, egging me along, telling me how naïve I am about sex.

And maybe I am, a little bit at least. But I've been more concerned about doing well in school and getting away from my mama and small hometown than worrying about dating or guys in general. None of the boys in high school interested me, and I was too focused in college to date anyone.

And just that easily I became a twenty-one year old virgin.

I imagine what would happen if Weston Bridges found out I'm a virgin and my heart starts beating rapid-fire. He would probably fire me on the spot for incompetence.

But just because I haven't had sex doesn't mean I can't write about it. Some of the best sports commentators never played ball.

As I walk up the three flights to my apartment, the air getting thicker and hotter the higher I go, I realize I have the afternoon to get myself in shape for tonight, mentally and fashion-wise.

What I want to do right now, though, is take off my shoes and stand in front of the a/c window unit for about an hour.

What Mr. Bridges doesn't seem to realize is that I do know a little about sex. Maybe not sex as in intercourse, but my mama taught me how to "gussy up" as she'd say. I know how to look like I've spent a lifetime reading sex articles—and practicing their tips.

To her, looking good was much more important than being good. So tonight, I'll have to use her tricks and tips to look the part of sexy journalist while having no idea where we're going or what we'll be doing. I'm assuming he'll take me to some fancy dinner and tell me all about his vision for the magazine.

Or maybe I'm being delusional.

Frankly, I have no idea what he wants from me, but I feel pretty great knowing he saw something in me that made him want to spend more time with me. Maybe he was giving me some flack about my resume but he clearly saw something that showed potential. Otherwise I'd be staying home alone tonight, counting out change so that I

can have some breakfast tomorrow morning.

* * *

Later in the evening I go carefully through what few clothes I have and choose a short skirt and a different, sexier pair of heels than I wore today. They're red and strappy and from my mother. "All girls should have a great pair of red heels," she'd said. "Black just won't do it."

Part of me wants to look sexy for Weston Bridges. The pictures I've seen online certainly don't do him justice. And the fact that he's so young and has already achieved so much is also pretty sexy. I wonder what he sees in me that made him want to take me out for a test tonight?

I pair the skirt and red heels with a fitted tank top since it's so damn hot out, even once the sun has set. When I check myself out in the bathroom mirror, I think it's definitely sexy—maybe too much? But I am my mother's daughter, so I adjust the tank a bit, pulling it lower to show more of my cleavage. Weston Bridges has had the best cleavage in the world, if his playboy stories are to be believed, and so showing more of mine probably won't impress him too much. But maybe.

When the sun has almost set, the apartment door shuts and my roommate enters, dropping his backpack on the floor with a thud.

"Hey, Brody," I say, peeking out from the bathroom. "You're home late."

"Hey, girl," he says. His hair is mussed and his eyes are glassy. "Listen to me closely—there is one thing you should know about life: there is a happy hour, and you should enjoy it. Preferably for more than an hour." I realize he's slurring his words slightly. I chuckle. He's clearly had a drink or three.

We've known each other almost since the moment I arrived in town. I answered his ad for a roommate not realizing he was a guy, but we hit it off so well that I realized it didn't bother me. Brody is like a brother, a protective good guy who likes to look after me.

Brody works in the mailroom at the corporate headquarters for some big financial institution. He says he'll work his way from the bottom up, old school-style. Like me he doesn't know anyone and has no inside contacts to his industry, so we're both getting in any way we can.

"God, my hands are so freaking dry from handling envelopes and boxes all day. Did you know that cardboard has a real smell to it? It's like—whoa," he says, stopping to look at me. "Where are you going?"

I tug down my skirt and say, "I had that job interview this morning."

"Dressed like that?"

"No, of course not," I say.

"Oh, good," he says, going to the refrigerator. He takes out the water pitcher and fills up a glass. "Fuck, it's still so hot out there. Monument Press, right?" he asks me, then takes a big gulp of water.

"Prerogative Media."

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“Right,” he says. Brody has a scrappy look to him. He’s from a small town like I am, so we got each other—and our sense of wonderment at the big city—right away. “How’d it go?”

“Well, it’s kind of still going on,” I say.

“Huh?”

“The guy who interviewed me wants to take me out tonight.”

Brody pauses and looks at me, one eyebrow raised in question. It makes me uncomfortable.

“It’s like, research,” I say. “Part of the interview.”

“What are you researching?”

“I’m not sure yet. He didn’t say.”

“Mia,” he says, shaking his head. He walks toward me and sets down his water glass on the scuffed coffee table. He told me he got it from the sidewalk down the street. “The guy who interviewed you is taking you out. Did you hear yourself?”

“Of course. And it’s fine,” I say, and I do believe it. Mr. Bridges is being thorough in his interview, and I appreciate that. I’m fine with being tested in my abilities as a writer and reporter. Brody is just protective, even when he really doesn’t need to be.

My phone pings a text. When I look at it, it's from an unknown number. Downstairs, is all it says.

I go to the window and look down at the street. There's a black limousine parked illegally in front of our building.

"Dang," I say.

"What is it?"

"My ride," I say. "In a limousine."

"Seriously?" He stands next to me and looks out the window. "That's pretty douchey."

"It's classy," I say, and he makes a grunting noise of disapproval. "I'll see you later, okay?" I grab my purse and keys.

"Hey, wait!" he says as I open the door.

"What?"

"Just, be careful. Okay?"

I roll my eyes. "I will. I'll see you later. Don't wait up."

When I get to the limo I can't see inside and no one steps out to let me in. I'm not a hundred percent sure this is Mr. Bridges' car, so I kind of stand there waiting for something or someone. Finally the driver, a big burly guy, steps out.

"Good evening, Ms. Cassidy," he says, nodding politely at me.

“Um, hi. Thanks,” I say as he opens the door. When I duck into the car, I see Mr. Bridges there, looking at his phone with a scowl on his face. But when he sees me shifting across the seat in my short skirt and cleavage-baring top, the scowl disappears.

“Good evening,” he says. “It’s good to see you again.”

“Hi. Um, you too,” I say. The door shuts behind me. Mr. Bridges has changed from the sleek navy suit he wore this morning into a black jacket and pants and black button-down shirt. I don’t know what this means, but he looks gorgeous nonetheless. His collar is unbuttoned enough to show his chest, a small bit of tanned skin.

“Thank you for joining me,” he says.

“Yeah, sure. Of course, my pleasure.” I really have to slow down on the random talking. He’s sitting there looking as cool as can be. He’s not nervous. And why should he be? Unless buying a billion-dollar company is something that would stress a person out. Frankly I think I’m more stressed over the fifty bucks left in my account than he could possibly be running an empire.

“So, where are we going?” I ask. This already feels oddly like a date—the limo, the clothes, the hot guy—but I have to remind myself it’s a job interview and nothing more. Beside, a guy like Weston Bridges would never go for a small-town girl like me. Just wouldn’t happen.

“You’ll find out soon enough,” he says, all coy. He shifts his body so that he’s facing me better. He makes no secret of looking at me from top to bottom, his eyes lingering for a moment on my red shoes. “You look lovely, Mia,” he says.

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I swallow hard, the intensity from his gaze pinning me to the plush seats of the limo. “Thank you. So do you.”

A small grin plays on his lips. I bite my lower lip, and when I realize I'm doing it, I stop. This is an interview, and I have to be professional—even if the guy I'm trying to impress is totally checking me out, and I totally don't mind. “Why haven't you haven't said where we're going?”

“I think I'd rather watch your reaction than tell you.”

I don't know what that means but I smile like it's all just fine. Inside I'm really nervous and want to make a great impression, but it's hard when you're desperate for money and five times as hard when the person who will (or won't) hire you looks like Weston Bridges.

When the limo stops and the driver opens the door for me, I'm standing in front of a swanky building with lots of well-dressed people coming and going.

“Are we having dinner?” I ask, assuming there's a restaurant right here, although I don't see the entrance.

“Not quite,” he says. “Follow me. It's just down here.”

There's a slim alley between two buildings that I hadn't noticed. We walk down it, the noise from the busy streets fading away behind us.

We get to a door that has a red light above it. Weston looks back at me, and swings

the door open.

“Welcome to Plaisir,” he says, guiding me inside.

“What is this place?”

“It’s a club, and the setting for your possible story.”

Inside, the lights are the same deep red as that outside light. Music plays from somewhere deep in the club, a slow thumping with drawn-out horns.

The walls are large leather panels, and a security guard standing by the door. He nods to Mr. Bridges but says nothing.

“What kind of club is this?”

“It’s a place where adults come to let loose,” he says. “Express themselves. Feel free.”

He puts his hand on my back, gently guiding me further inside. At the hostess stand is a woman with a gorgeous body, which is wrapped tightly in a black leather dress. I can’t see her face, though, because it’s covered by an elaborate eye mask, a sort of masquerade thing.

He still hasn’t answered my question.

“Yes, but what kind of club is this?”

The hostess hears me and gives me a curious look, like I’m dense or something.

Mr. Bridges leans into my ear and says, “It’s a BDSM club.”

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Weston

“I think we’ll start off at the bar,” I say to Megan, the hostess.

“Of course, sir,” she says, nodding to me.

Megan knows who I am but no one uses names at Plaisir. It’s one of the many confidentiality rules.

Mia’s eyes are wide, and just by the way she’s walking, I can tell she’s nervous or intimidated. That smart exterior she had in my office earlier has faded and her lack of experience—either in journalism or sex, I’m not sure—is already showing. Her back is rigid and she’s trying not to look anyone in the eyes. It’s sort of cute, but mostly fun to know how uncomfortable she is.

I pull out the high-backed bar stool for her to sit. There are only a few people in the bar area talking in low voices—men and women dressed as if it’s New Year’s Eve, wearing cocktail-party attire and leaning in closely to each other. The whole vibe screams sexy.

Red wallpaper with black velvet patterns line the walls, and a mirror runs the length of the bar.

Mia, despite clearly being wound tight, looks beautiful beside me. She rests her elbows on the bar and it pushes up her ample cleavage. Her skirt, already short, is hiked up high on her thigh, and I’m not sure how I’m going to keep my hands from her skin. I’ll see how the night goes, but she’s beautiful in a neophyte sort of way.

And we are at a sex club—but for work, of course.

“Good evening,” says the corseted woman behind the bar. “What can I get you to drink?”

“Whiskey neat,” I tell her. “What would you like?” I ask Mia.

“Just a wine, please” she says.

“What kind, miss?” the bartender says.

Mia looks like she’s in the middle of an oral exam she didn’t study for. “White,” she finally says.

“Chardonnay, pinot grigio? We have a nice sauvignon blanc from the Loire Valley of France...”

“Yes, that’s fine,” she quickly says, and I have to control myself from laughing.

Mia doesn’t say anything as our drinks are made; she doesn’t look around the bar either. When our drinks are finally placed in front of us, she quickly goes to take a sip.

“Wait,” I say, stopping her by placing my hand on her forearm. Her skin is warm beneath my fingers. “We have to make a toast. To your first assignment.”

“This isn’t my first assignment,” she says.

“To your trial assignment for Prerogative,” I amend. “Here’s to you impressing me with your reporting skills.” I clink her wine glass but she’s not looking at me. “Mia. It’s bad luck not to look the other person in the eye when you make a toast.”

“Really?” she says, darting her eyes at me.

“Actually, it’s bad sex if you don’t look each other in the eyes. Ten years, I believe it is.”

I’m watching her face, the beautiful lips that she keeps nervously biting. She turns her eyes to me, wide and tinged with fear—maybe anxiety is the better word. She’s nervous and way out of her element.

“Cheers,” she says, clinking my whiskey glass, eyes on mine. “To Prerogative.”

We take sips of our drinks and a moment later she seems like she’s pulling herself together.

She leans a little closer to me, giving me a better view of that cleavage. I’ve got a great view of it in the mirror behind the bar, but seeing it up close is far more incredible. I try not to stare.

I turn my body toward her, resting my hand on the back of her chair. “You do know what a BDSM club is, don’t you?”

“Yeah, of course,” she says quickly. “I mean, it’s been a while but...”

Now I can’t help but laugh. This is too much. It’s too...innocent. Too cute. Which means this will be too easy, bordering on cruel. I wanted to throw her off by bringing her here, but it seems that she really has no idea what goes on in a place like this.

“Mia,” I say. She turns her face to me, and I nod for her to move closer. I rest my hand on the exposed skin of her back and feel an immediate flash of excitement through my body. “Do you know what that stands for?” She pauses, but then slumps the slightest bit and shakes her head no as if she’s conceding defeat. “It stands for,” I

say, then lean right into her neck, smelling her hair and skin, “bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism.”

I can see her skin flush red—it starts on her ample chest and rises to her face. “Good to know,” she says.

“Are you frightened?”

“I’m not scared,” she says.

“Sure,” I say, sliding my hand across her skin before moving away from her. “Come on, get your drink. I’ll show you around.”

I guide her to the back of the bar where the club really begins. Just having my hand on her waist is enough to make my cock twitch in need; seeing her full-length in that tight skirt and top, her calves flexing with every step in those red high heels makes me want to press her up against the wall and feel every inch of her along my own body. But we have work to do—namely, showing her the ropes of this sex club.

At the start of a long, dark, narrow hallway with almost a dozen closed doors is Mick, who nods at us.

“Who is that?” Mia asks me, her eyes darting back to the man dressed in black.

“He’s the dungeon monitor,” I say, and she looks at me with wide eyes.

“Is that really what he’s called?”

“It is,” I say. “See these little windows on the doors?” I point to the first door we pass. The slit in the door is too high for us to see in, which is the point. “He keeps an eye on the guests to make sure all is good.”

“He looks?”

“Yes,” I say. “But just to make sure everyone is playing fair and no one is in danger.”

“People could be in danger here?” she asks.

I chuckle. She really doesn’t get it. “It’s possible, but unlikely.”

Just then we hear a pop, and then a cry of ecstasy—Mia probably interprets it as pain as she sucks in a breath at the sound.

“And people like this?” she asks.

“Very much,” I say.

As we walk slowly down the hall, more noises fill the air. I keep my hand on the waist of her skirt, a light touch to let her know I’m here. I wonder if she takes it as comforting or dominance. Or maybe she’s so rattled she doesn’t even feel my hand there.

A man’s cry of more, yes, give it to me comes out from one of the rooms. We hear what sounds like a whip snap, and then the man moans out.

Mia wraps her arms around her waist as if she’s cold, but the way her shoulders are practically raised to her ears, I’m pretty sure she’s just nervous. I give her back a slight rub—as much for her as for me.

“Do you enjoy this?” she asks. We’re outside a room in which we can hear the slapping of flesh on flesh, fast and hard.

“What I enjoy is beside the point,” I say. One thing this Mia Cassidy does not need to know is what I enjoy. She will certainly never have access to that part of me. I’m not even sure I have access anymore, it’s buried so deep. But this is pleasurable enough

for now. In fact, it's quite fun.

"Then what is the point?" she asks. "Why did you bring me here?"

"To see how you can handle yourself," I tell her, which is partly true. I'm surprised she hasn't run screaming out of here yet. She deserves some props for that alone. "I need someone who can write about the kinds of topics that will garner notoriety and wider readership. I want stories that get people talking, even if they're talking in secret."

Just then, the couple who is in the room we're just outside of seem to explode in total ecstasy, crying out while slapping the floor, the wall, flesh...we can't know for sure.

Mia stops suddenly. She leans back against the wall, puts her hand over her forehead and closes her eyes. For a moment, I think she's going to pass out.

"Are you okay?" I ask her. I take her wine glass and set both our glasses on a small nearby table.

She opens her eyes, looking at me. Her eyes trail down me for a brief second. She swallows hard, nodding her head yes. I place my forearm on the wall next to her, almost boxing her in. I lean close to her ear, making no secret about purposely being close to her.

"Are you sure, Mia?" I ask so close that her hair brushes my nose.

She turns her face slightly to me, and for a moment I think she's going to kiss me. My dick is beginning to strain in my pants.

"Mr. Bridges," she says softly. "Please."

“Please what?” I ask, and there’s no answer I’ve ever been more excited to hear. I just hope she’s asking for what I think she is.

Mia

He's so close I can smell him, and not just his cologne and soap—although that is making my head spin almost as much as the cries of pleasure I hear behind these doors. I can also smell him—the true scent of Weston Bridges, the smell of his skin and clothes and just him. His face is so close to mine that if I turn my head one inch to the left our lips will surely meet. I part my lips as the image races through my mind.

“Please what, Mia?” he asks again. He shifts closer to me, his arm still blocking me in on one side. Without moving my head I look down and see that his belt and that part of his body is a half-inch from me. I picture him pressing up to me, and wonder what he feels like. Is he able to control his body in a place like this?

Because I am wet.

The walls of my sex are positively alive, clenching and feeling the desire beneath my lacy panties. My body is telling me what it wants, and I can't help but be curious, especially when I hear the sound of chains in one of the rooms. The moans of pleasure and sex ring out of all of them, it suddenly seems, as if it's a strange soundtrack to the club.

Weston—I can't keep calling him Mr. Bridges, it's ridiculous now that we're in a place like this—shifts slightly closer to me. He's waiting for me to say what I was going to say, but I've lost the words. I can feel the energy coming from him, which penetrates me and he's not even touching me. But I imagine he is, or that he might. I imagine myself saying, “Please take me into one of these rooms.” I don't know what

he'd do with me in there, but I want him to show me exactly what he means when he said what he enjoys is beside the point. What would he do to me to ensure I enjoyed myself?

Weston's fingers lightly touch my arm. He slides two fingers down my skin, sending chills through me. Even in the darkened hall he can surely see the goosebumps he's given me. He'll know instantly what he's doing to me, how my body is reacting almost against my will. This is supposed to be a professional outing but I'm paralyzed against the velvety wall, my panties getting more soaked by the second. He can probably smell me.

He leans even closer to me, his chest touching my breasts the smallest bit, a whisper of a touch, so light I wonder if he's even touching me. I want to arch my back to really feel him, but I don't. My heart pounds in my ears, my breathing is shallow and hard.

"Mia, if there's something more you want," he says in my ear, his breath hot on my skin, "all you have to do is ask."

I suddenly realize how serious he is being—how I could tell him right now to take me in one of these rooms and he'd do it. And then what? What really happens behind these doors? Only Mick down the hall knows, who is still there but politely not watching. I've barely kissed a man, much less had sex, much less had all this. Being alone with a man like Weston Bridges would only show what a novice I am—in other words, a total and complete virgin. I could never handle a man like Weston; I could certainly never please him. But the want my body is urging from me is too intense. The smell of Weston is too much. His hand on my skin makes me feel like I'm falling. I have to get out of here.

"Sorry," I mutter, and I move away from him and quickly make my way down the hall, past Mick and through the bar. I don't even know if Weston is following me or

not. All I know is that I have to get out of here before I have a full-blown panic attack.

The front door is opened for me, and I step out into the narrow alley. I don't get the fresh air I was expecting. It's still so hot out, and there's no breeze in the alley.

"Mia," I hear. I don't even turn to look at Weston. I'm embarrassed and overwhelmed. I feel so naïve, but at the same time knowing Weston is coming closer to me makes me excited. I've never felt so conflicted, wanting two things that make no sense together. "Hey, are you okay?"

I turn to face him. The light from the club illuminates behind him, casting strange but somehow sexy shadows over him. He slowly walks closer to me, and I feel myself take a step back until the cool brick of the alley touches my bare skin. I'm not afraid of Weston—I'm afraid of the way my body is reacting to him, of the way I want him in ways I've never wanted, or had, a man before in my life.

"I'm fine," I tell him, a lie we both know.

"You look a little pale," he says, worry in his eyes. "I thought you might pass out back there."

There's no need to hide how I feel, since it seems clear I'm not fooling anyone.

"I can't do that," I tell him, nodding toward the club's entrance. I can hear the sounds of the city moving along without anyone noticing us even though we're just ten feet from the bustle of the night.

"It's okay," he says. "It can be a little overwhelming at first."

"You don't understand," I say, knowing I need to be frank, totally honest with him.

“Mr. Bridges—”

“And stop calling me that,” he says. “It’s really not necessary.”

I hadn’t meant to, and I feel even smaller once it’s escaped my lips.

“I’m sorry,” I say.

“Don’t be,” he says. He’s standing before me, his hands in his pockets. He’s watching me closely. “You have nothing to be sorry for, Mia.”

I press the palms of my hands against the cool brick behind me, steadying myself.

“I’m a virgin,” I say. I just blurt it out. If I felt stupid before, I feel like the city’s biggest idiot now. Oh my god. I’ve never been so close to such a gorgeous man before, and I just blurted out the very real status of my sexual history, which is nil. I can’t even look at him.

I hear him laugh softly, but I don’t think it’s a mean laugh. “Mia,” he says. “That’s nothing to be sorry for.”

“I’m not. I mean, it’s just...that was a lot to take in. You could have warned me.”

“I wanted to get an honest reaction out of you,” he says. “Sometimes in reporting, you walk into situations you aren’t prepared for. But you shouldn’t give that away. You should always at least act like you’re prepared.”

“Fine,” I say. “Lesson learned.”

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He shifts, his shoes scraping on the concrete. His voice softens when he asks, “Did you like it?”

I don’t even know how to answer. I can’t get the sounds out of my head, and my mind is in overtime picturing what might have been happening behind those closed doors...picturing what Weston might do to me if we went into one of the rooms.

“Did you like what you heard? The sounds they make? Mia, could you picture yourself in one of those rooms?” It’s like he’s reading my mind. Feeling like he knows what’s in my private thoughts makes me so uncomfortable I can’t even look at him.

I bite my lip. I can still feel that energy—that pull of Weston toward me.

“I was scared,” I say, my eyes on the ground. “But I also liked it—because you were there with me.”

I see his shoes edge closer to me. I finally look up. Weston’s eyes have turned heavy, penetrating my own with a message that seems clear: he wants me.

It seems impossible. My heart races, and I wonder if he’s going to do anything, and if I should do anything with him. As thoughts swirl in my mind, he puts one hand flat on the brick wall next to me, leans closer until I can feel his breath on my face. So slowly, his lips move toward me, and when they press into mine, all reason is blacked out of my mind.

Weston

I knew Mia's lips would be soft and damn if they're not just as I imagined—a cushion of cashmere.

She's got me transfixed.

She smells of honey and lemon, and for the longest time I keep my lips pressed to hers and do nothing more. I shouldn't do more. I shouldn't be doing this. But soon I'm making more moves, unable to resist this beautiful, delicate woman.

I touch her cheek, softer than even her lips. At first, I just brush her with the tips of my fingers but her skin is warm and soft and I need to feel more. I cup her face with my palm and pull her a little closer. I step into her, our bodies a mere inch from touching. I push past her lips with my tongue, reaching inside her to taste the sauvignon blanc on her wet tongue. She tastes as sweet as I thought, but I have to stay in control and not go too far. Not with this girl, anyway.

Her tongue moves tentatively against mine, unsure. I pull back and take her face in my both my hands. I look at her—her lips, her eyes, and I feel her breath on my face. She's nervous. Excited too, but nervous.

“It's okay,” I tell her. “Do you want me to stop?”

She shakes her head no, apparently unable to speak.

I run my fingers through her hair, around to the back of her neck. I pull her lips to

mine again, kissing her deeply. She's moving her tongue against mine, tentatively. Her hands are still pressed to the brick wall behind her, and I'm finding that once I start kissing her, I don't want to stop.

I move closer to her until my body is pressed against hers. My cock is straining, and as I press into her it only makes me want to do more. Of course, I have control but I still want a little more of her...or maybe a lot more.

I move my lips to kiss her neck. She turns her head, exposing more of herself. When her arms wrap around my neck, I almost explode. She wants me. I give her neck little bites, wanting to eat her up, and she shows her appreciation by sucking in her breath, her fingers digging into the back of my neck.

I step back to look at her—all of her. Her lips are red from our kisses, her eyes glassy but focused on me.

“Look at you,” I say, running my hands down her sides, over her hips. “Do you know how sexy you are? This skirt, this tight little top.” I let my fingers trail across the very tops of her breasts but go no further, even as she sucks in her breath, giving an almost imperceptible push toward me.

“No, I'm not,” she says, but I think she's playing coy. She might truly be a virgin but I'm still not sure if I'm buying that, considering how smart and beautiful she is. How could she never have... Jesus if I keep going I'll only make myself crazier. Touching her body through the thin fabric of her tank is hard enough.

I stroke the rounded edge of her full hips and slowly move close again, my hand going around her backside to cup the fullness of her ass. We are both breathing heavy, my dick begging for more, and I jerk Mia's body into mine, then push her up against the wall, pressing my dick harder into her. I crash my mouth to hers, our tongues slipping across one another, going deeper, taking in more. My hands explore

all parts of her ass, her hips, the fronts of her thighs. I reach down to the hem of her skirt and edge it up, testing her, seeing how far she'll let me go. She doesn't stop me.

I move her skirt just high enough so that I can rub that sensitive skin at the tops of her inner thighs, just below her need. I go higher and let my fingers brush her cunt, covered in thin lacy fabric. I can practically feel the heat coming from her.

“Weston,” she says with a tinge of urgency. “What if someone sees us?”

We look down the alley toward the street, where people are streaming by, not one of them looking our way.

“No one even knows this alley exists,” I say. “Look at them all. Not one person is looking...” I watch her face as I run middle finger across the length of her slit, pressing into her so that I can feel her hole. I know she's soaking wet.

She lets out the smallest little kitten moan and leans her head back against the wall. I take that as a sign to move forward.

What I'd like to do is take my dick out of my pants and shove it up in her wet pussy. The thought makes me even harder, makes me want her even more.

I move her panties aside with my finger and immediately feel how right I was—she is fucking soaked. How could that club not turn her on? How could our closeness not make her hot? And she is, so fucking hot.

When I slip my finger inside her hole it is practically sucked up inside her, as if her body wants mine as much as I want hers. She is so tight and her cunt absolutely hugs my finger, coating me in her juices. I pump her a few times and soon she's digging her fingers into my shoulders, holding on tight.

Her eyes dart to the sidewalk, so I move my body closer to her and wall, shielding her from anyone who might possibly look down here. I wrap my free arm around her waist, pressing my hard dick on her thigh as my finger continues to find utter delight in her core.

As I fuck her with my finger I kiss her neck and give her earlobe a little suck, my teeth scraping it slightly as I pull it out of my mouth. Mia's panting—which she is trying so desperately to restrain—is like music to my ears, making me push my finger in deeper, leave it inside her longer, exploring her from the inside before pulling it back out.

I haven't even touched her clit yet and she already sounds like she could come. I picture it, her hard little nub of pleasure, and soon I'm picturing myself on my knees, here in this alley, with my face between her legs eating her out, licking her cunt until she screams from total pleasure. My finger fucks her faster, and I'm pushing my hard dick into her thigh, needing more of her, and that's when I know I've already gone too far.

Abruptly I step away from her. Mia's face, pink with exertion, looks at me questioningly. Her expression turns to humiliation when she sees the look in my eyes.

"Mia, I shouldn't have done this," I say, as she tugs down her skirt. Fuck, if she starts crying I don't know what I'll do. I used to have it in me to hold and care for someone—but that was years ago, in my other life...

That version of me no longer exists. It's been replaced by someone darker, jaded, haunted. This girl deserves so much more than I could ever give her.

"Did I do something wrong?" she asks, a quiver in her voice.

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“No. Not at all,” I say. “I just think it’s best if we stop.”

I reach into my pocket and take out some money. I peel off a hundred dollar bill. I take Mia’s hand, still warm from holding on to me, and press it in her palm.

“Can you get yourself home?” I ask her.

She nods yes, crossing her arms over her stomach like she’s cold, or maybe feeling sick. I can’t look at her anymore. I’ll break if I do.

“Okay,” I say, turning to walk away. “Take care.”

When I step to the curb my car magically appears. I hop in the back and I make the driver wait to be sure she gets in a cab and drives safely away. Only then will I finally relax.

She had my head spinning, and not just there in the alley. Having a drink with her at the bar was an exercise in keeping focus. Hell, even this morning in my office I couldn’t help but banter with her, push her buttons and tease her.

But the last thing I need, or can handle, is some innocent girl new to the city and worse, a virgin. Someone so inexperienced—in life and in bed—could only mean trouble for me. I can’t get involved. Complicating things further, I had planned on hiring her. Sure, she was a bit freaked out by the club but someone that unfamiliar with a subject is the kind of person who is going to ask all the right questions, the ones that readers really want to know. She’ll assume nothing, which is the only way to report.

Sleeping with Mia could only lead to disaster on so many different levels.

* * *

Later that night, once I've showered and gotten in bed, the old memories from my past try to flood my mind, those memories I have spent years pushing down.

The fire, my family, and losing everything.

Losing her....

My mind drifts to that sweet girl I called my own when I was a naïve kid in high school. Losing her set me on track that I intend to stay on—one in which I don't get involved in any romantic relationship. And sure, the alley outside a BDSM club isn't exactly romantic, but I know enough about myself to know that there's something about Mia Cassidy that is pulling me toward her, and I have to fight my instinct and keep my distance. It's the only way I'll keep my sanity.

After all, I just bought a billion-dollar company. I have more important things to worry about than the new junior reporter for Blushmagazine.

Mia

I have never felt so many emotions at once in my entire life. I am confused. Totally embarrassed, of course. But also, really freaking mad. What the hell was all that? I mean, honestly—what was all that?

The whole cab ride home, and as I walk up to my apartment, I keep checking my phone even as I'm fuming. Weston. I can't stop thinking about him, and not just in an angry way. Sure, he took me to that freaky club just to rattle me, and it worked. That was a pretty mean thing to do. But the whole night—even before the alley—I couldn't help but feel this utter attraction to him. Maybe because he's so damn hot.

How stupid am I? Weston Bridges is probably the most eligible bachelor in New York—maybe in the whole country. He's rich, young, smart, and hotter than any movie star in the world. He's also known as a world-class playboy. I once read that he and some supermodel flew from New York to Paris one day just to have dessert. They ate, and an hour later got back on his private jet and came back to New York. I wonder if it's true.

“Hey,” I mutter to Brody, once I've unlocked our door.

“Hey,” he says, brightening when he sees me. He's watching TV and has a big glass of water on the coffee table—the same glass from earlier but refilled—along with a bottle of aspirin. He must have already gone from buzzed to hungover to sober. How long have I been gone?

I look at my watch and see that it's after midnight. “What are you still doing up?”

“Just wanted to make sure you got home,” he says. That’s just like Brody. I don’t have any siblings and he’s the closest person I have to that. This guy loves looking after me. It’s sweet. “So, tell me. How’d it go?”

“Let me get changed, then I’ll tell you,” I say. I have to get out of these clothes, these stupid ridiculous clothes.

I leave the tank on and change into some shorts, then go scrub my face of all makeup. I feel lighter and looser already.

I go back into the living room and Brody says, “You should have just gone out like that. You look even better without makeup.”

“Oh, please,” I say, plopping on the couch next to him.

“What happened? Where did this possible boss guy take you in his douchebaggery limo?”

I ignore the dig and say, “It’s actually a really crazy story.”

Now that I’m sitting here on our couch, preparing to retell the night’s story, I start to shiver. It was all just so—strange and different. Intimidating and even sexy. I hardly know where to begin.

“You’re shaking,” he says. “What happened?”

I take a deep breath. “It was just…”

“Just what? Start with telling me where he took you.”

“Ever heard of a place called Plaisir?”

He shakes his head no. “What is it? Some swank restaurant?”

I stutter on a laugh. “Swank, yes. Restaurant...maybe they serve food. I don’t know.”

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. “It’s a private BDSM club.”

“What the actual fuck?” Brody says, his face igniting in to flames. “Are you kidding me? What did you do?”

“I had a drink,” I say.

“This guy is way out of line,” Brody says, his jaw clenching.

“The magazine that I interviewed for, Blush? He wants to take it in an edgier, sexier direction.”

“I’ll bet he does.”

“And wanted me to be in a place that would make me uncomfortable and see how I could handle it. Because I could be writing about that place, or a place like it. Or just about BDSM in general. Did you know that it stands for—”

“Mia, I know what it stands for.” He shakes his head, his eyes down on scuffed wood floors. “This guy...what a piece of shit. He thinks just because he has money and power that he can drag you to a place like that?” Brody looks at me and asks, “Did he try anything on you? Because if he did I’ll call the cops right this second.”

“Brody, no,” I say. That is something I can’t even talk about with Brody. What Weston and I did in that alley is for me and me alone. “Slow down. Of course he didn’t try anything on me. He was a perfect gentleman.” A stretch of the truth, maybe. I remember his hardness pressed against me as his finger filled me. I get shivers again just picturing it.

“You’re shivering again, Mia,” he says. “How can you be shivering when it’s at least eighty degrees in this apartment?”

“I’m fine.”

“I am not above kicking this guy’s ass,” he says. I can’t tell if he’s serious or not, but a small giggle escapes my lips. “I mean, sure, he’s probably way stronger than I am. He likely has a personal trainer and all. And if I do get a good shot in he’ll sue the hell out of me, taking me for the tens of dollars in my account. Word will get out that pretty boy Weston Bridges’ perfect face has been scarred by a mailroom hooligan. The world will hate me, my chance of a career will be over, and I will have less than a penny to my name. But it will be worth it just to make you feel safe.”

“I feel safe, Brody,” I say. “I promise. And promise me that you will not be storming up to the sixty-fifth floor of the Prerogative building tomorrow for an old-fashioned fist fight.”

He slumps, but he also calms down. “If you’re sure you’re okay.”

“I’m sure,” I say. “But yeah, it was pretty crazy. I was like, is this normal, a big boss guy like him taking me out as a test for the job?”

“No, it’s not normal, and he’s a creep for trying.”

I murmur agreement even as thoughts of Weston kissing me against the brick wall flutter through my mind. How will I sleep tonight when I can still feel his finger inside me? I’m still wet from it all. The truth is, that kiss—and everything else that happened out there—was the hottest, sexiest thing that’s ever happened to me. I know that’s not saying a lot, considering my lack of experience, but still. It was hot.

I'm sure I'll never see Weston Bridges again in my life, but I'll admit only to myself that I'm pretty bummed about that. I'd sleep on the streets for a week for one more kiss from him. That's how epic it was.

"I'm going to make you some soup," Brody says, giving my leg a pat before standing up. "It'll make you feel better."

"You don't have to do that," I say.

"No, I do," he says. "I know it's hot in here, even with the windows opened and fan blowing, but this is my mother's secret recipe, guaranteed to turn any frown upside down."

He goes to our sparsely stacked pantry and takes out a red and white can of soup. I laugh.

"Great chef, your mom," I say.

We end up staying up a bit longer, watching the late shows together and getting in some good laughs. I feel better, but the whole time all I can think of is Weston—Weston and the job I really wanted. But both are gone now, and I guess I just have to move on. Tomorrow I begin the hunt for work yet again.

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Weston

Sleep does not come easily. I keep drifting in and out, and whether I'm awake or in a fit of sleep, I keep seeing Mia's face.

The taste of her, the softness of her cheek, the roundness of her hips—these are things I can't forget. I can still feel and taste her as if she's right here with me. God, if she were here with me in this bed...

Giving in to fantasy is the only way I'll find sleep. It's also the only way I'll let myself have her.

With what Mia wore tonight, and as much as my hands skimmed her body, I can easily imagine what she looks like naked. I picture her on top of me, naked except for lacey little panties. She's grinding down on my hard dick. I reach into my boxer briefs and take my hard cock in my hand, moving to the rhythm I picture her rocking on me. To see her looking down at me, her tits full as my hand reaches up to capture it, feel the hard nipple. In my mind she moves closer so I can suck on her nipple, letting my tongue flick over it as she moans and whimpers at my touch. I'd love to have her tits all on my face.

In my mind I flip her over on her back and take the lead, and it's not hard to remember what her wet cunt felt like on my fingers. The memory is fresh, the tightness of her, the noises she made so close to my ear. I pull on my dick harder and faster as I remember, picturing her, feeling her. If only I could have just one night with her, one full night of doing everything I can imagine with her. So many things I'd do to that body. Suck her tits raw; finger fuck her until she came; eat her pussy;

watch her suck on my cock...Jesus, when I picture that it's almost more than I can handle. She's so inexperienced and I would love to teach her, show her how to take pleasure, and how to give it. How to suck on my dick, taking me deep down her throat.

I don't last any longer than that image. I explode as a reel of images floods my mind, images of Mia coming with me, exploding in ecstasy after much fucking.

I take a moment, my breathing intense and my heart racing. Finally I get out of bed to clean myself up.

As I walk back to my bed, I stop at the little desk in the corner of my vast room. I turn on the lamp and open the left drawer, pulling it out all the way so that I can reach into the back to grasp what I'm looking for. I take out the crumpled photo that I almost never allow myself to look at. I don't even like allowing myself to remember. But tonight, after what Mia and I did and how she elicits such fantasies from me, I need to remind myself why I have to keep my distance.

I look at the picture of us, so young and innocent. Stupid is the word I think now.

We had no idea how ugly the world could be.

I wonder if Mia knows I grew up on a farm, and that at one point I thought I'd happily live my life there.

Her name was Samantha, and we were in love. She was my first love and she'll be my only love. I can't go back to those emotions. What happened to her was too horrific, too brutal, and I can't ever let myself feel that kind of hurt again.

The one and only picture I have is one we took together, the blonde fields of the farm going on forever in the background. We're both smiling, and her honey-colored hair

is blowing in the gentle breeze of that day I remember so well. Little did I know that in less than a month she'd be gone forever.

Maybe I'm just drawn to Mia because something of her reminds me of Samantha. Or maybe I'm just really fucking attracted to Mia and that's it. Maybe it's just physical, and if there is an emotional connection, I can keep it at bay.

I know the right thing to do. Ever since that day on the farm, I've known the right thing to do. I just have to keep on that path, the one that got me here, the wealthiest self-made person under thirty in whole country. I can have any woman I want, and frequently do.

I put the photo away, in the deep recesses of the desk drawer where I try to forget its existence, yet can't bring myself to throw out. Remembering her hurts too much, but it's important for me to remind myself of why I can't let myself get too close to anyone, especially women. Especially women like Mia Cassidy.

One thing is for sure—tomorrow, things will have to change.

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Mia

I wake up the next morning feeling awful. My head is a fog of memories, good, bad and truly awful.

When I went to bed, all I could see was Weston. I replayed the night over and over in my head, wanting to relive so many parts of it. I had to remind myself that being with him was a fluke, entering and exiting my life all in one day. When I'm old and gray I can tell my grandkids that I once met the tycoon Weston Bridges. Maybe I'll even mention having a drink with him, but I'll certainly leave the rest out.

"Morning," I say as I go to the kitchen to get coffee. Brody is already up and dressed, reading for another day in the mailroom. He's made a fresh pot, which I reach for eagerly.

"How're you feeling?" he asks.

"Muddy," I say. "Like my head is in a fog or something." I don't tell him I feel asleep to the memories of Weston touching me.

"I was thinking," he says. "We should do something tonight when I get off work. Happy hour or something. Or karaoke!"

"Um, I cannot sing," I say.

"Singing is hardly the point. But we can do anything you want!"

“Thanks,” I say, giving him a weary smile as I pour some much-needed coffee into a mug I’m pretty sure was stolen from the diner on the corner. “I think I’m going to take today to reassess. I have to find a job and now it’s getting crucial. My bank account is looking thinner than a straw of hay.”

Brody laughs. “I take it to mean you’re low on cash.”

“Something like that,” I say. I don’t admit just how dire it is.

“So tonight will be on me,” he says. “My treat.”

“You don’t have to do all this,” I say.

“I know I don’t,” he says. “I just want to make sure you’re okay.”

“I promise I’m okay,” I say. “At least I will be as soon as I consume this cup of coffee. I need to scour the Internet for a job—at this point I’ll take anything, but I still want to find a job in publishing. The trick now is, finding one that isn’t under the Prerogative Media umbrella.”

“Good luck with that,” Brody says. “But if you change your mind, text me.”

“I will.” Just then, a phone rings. We both look at each other.

“Not mine,” Brody says, holding up his phone in his hand.

“Mine,” I say, and race to my room to find it. There’s no name on the caller ID but it’s from a two-one-two area code so it’s here in New York. I answer quickly, before they hang up. “Hello?”

“Mia Cassidy?”

“Yes, this is she.”

“I’m calling from Prerogative Publishing,” the woman says. “You had an interview here yesterday?”

“Yes,” I say, heart pounding, wondering what this could possibly be about. Maybe it’s the HR department filing a complaint against me because I went to a sex club with the company owner.

“We’d like you to come back to the office today,” she says. “Can you be here by ten?”

“Yes,” I say, glancing at the clock. “Yeah, of course. I’ll be there.”

“Wonderful. See you then.”

The line goes dead, and I’m standing there, phone to ear, in total disbelief.

Finally I walk back into the living room.

“Who was that?” Brody asks.

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“Prerogative,” I say. “They want me to go back. Today, at ten. What do you think it means?” I can’t keep the smile from my face just thinking about walking in those halls. God, my dream is to go to work every day at a place I love, doing something that I think I might be good at. Working for Prerogative is still the ultimate dream job.

“Was that him?” Brody asks.

“No,” I say. “Some woman.” We don’t need to clarify who him is. It’s pretty clear, especially by the look on Brody’s face. He’s not pleased.

“So what are you going to do?”

“What do you mean? I’m going to get dressed and go.” What else would I do?

“Just, you know, be careful, Mia,” Brody says. “That guy is up to no good.”

I roll my eyes. “Thank you, Brody. But I’ll be fine.”

More than fine if I can actually get this job.

As Brody leaves I jump in the shower and clean myself up. I dig out another outfit (I really need to go shopping...if only I had the money). I do my hair and makeup to perfection. I want to look as good and professional as possible. My stomach is in knots wondering what’s going to happen, why they’re calling me back (it has to be good news, right?), and who I will be meeting with. Maybe the HR person I thought I was going to meet with yesterday will give me a proper interview. Maybe we won’t

even talk about Weston. Maybe everything that happened last night will just fade into some sexy little memory.

I hope not, though. As crazy as it is, I want to see Weston again more than I want the job at his company...

When I walk into the offices of Prerogative, I feel bright and hopeful.

“Hi, Jen,” I say to the receptionist, proud of myself for remembering her name. “Not as frantic in here as yesterday, is it?”

Jen looks at me, her face revealing nothing except that she is not interested in my banter. “How can I help you?”

“Um, Mia Cassidy,” I say. “I have a ten o’clock.”

Jen looks at her monitor. “Oh. Right. Mia.”

Three words. Three sentences. Zero interest.

“That’s me,” I say.

She picks up the phone. “I have Mia Cassidy for—yes, sure. Thank you.”

She hangs up the phone and finally looks at me. “You can go back. You remember the way.” It’s not a question.

“To Weston—Mr. Bridges’ office?” I ask, feeling slightly confused.

“Yes,” she says, rolling her eyes at me. “Mr. Bridges’ office.”

I can feel myself blush for calling him by his first name. Does she know we went out last night? Does she know why he wants me back here?

Even if I didn't remember the way back to his office I still wouldn't tell Jen. As it is, I think I remember and start my way back, winding through the halls and past bunches of cubicles, everyone working hard and bustling. I pass by, and picture myself sitting in one of those cubicles, surrounded by files of great stories and leads.

Weston's assistant leads me into his corner office.

"Mr. Bridges?" she says, calling his attention. He doesn't look up from his computer. "Ms. Cassidy is here for you."

"Come in, Mia," he says without looking at me. "You can close the door," he adds to the assistant, who does so without a word.

I walk slowly toward his desk, unsure of what is about to happen. Seeing him again makes the butterflies in my stomach dance. The hard lines of his jaw, his lips, so recently on my own, make my heart beat faster. As he finishes typing out something, I remember his fingers on my body, touching me like no one ever has before.

"Sit," he says, nodding to the chair I'd sat in just twenty-four hours earlier. He finishes whatever he was working on and finally looks at me. "I want to give you another chance."

I'm not sure if I heard him right. Another chance?

"Mr. Bridges, I—"

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“I told you not to call me that,” he says. “At last for now, you can call me Weston.”

I don’t know what “for now” means in this case but I proceed anyway. “Weston, I...”

“It’s okay,” he says. “Tell me. Say what you’re thinking. You can tell me.”

I pause, gathering myself, his eyes still heavy on me like a weight, like pressure. “I want to try again too,” I say, pronouncing each word carefully, still afraid that we’re somehow not talking about the same thing.

“I’m glad to hear that.”

“But,” I add, “remember: I don’t know anything about...you know.”

A smile creeps up on his face and I realize that, when he does smile, he looks more his age. More youthful.

“Is ‘you know’ a euphemism for something, Mia?” he asks, clearly teasing me.

I can’t help but nervously laugh at myself, at how prude I am. “I guess,” I say.

“So say it,” he says, challenging me. “If you’re going to do this job, write these stories, you need to say it. You don’t know anything about...what?”

I hold his gaze for a moment, my heart pounding like mad. I want this man like I’ve never even thought of wanting a man before. But it scares me, how little I know, and how much he surely does know. The task that seems impossible is me writing a story

about sex or BDSM or something, and Weston not already knowing every single detail of what I report on firsthand. There's no way I could ever inform him of anything new when it comes to sex.

"Mia," he says, prompting me.

"I don't know anything," I say, "about...sex."

"It's okay," he says softly. "I can teach you. Would you like that, Mia?"

The thought has been brewing but now I'm really wondering—are we talking about reporting on sex, or having sex? I'm sure if I touched the skin on my face, I'd get burned. That's how flushed I am.

I feel my head nodding yes to his question, because that's the answer no matter the question. "Yes," I say. "I would like that." More than I think I realize in the moment.

"And you're sure about that?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad," he says, so formal, so professional. "Then that's what we'll do. Of course, we'll need some parameters. Agreed?"

"Okay," I say, having no idea what kind of parameters are needed for such an agreement.

"We'll take everything step by step," he says. "But you must do as I say. Mia, it's important that you agree to whatever I say."

I bite on my lower lip, trying to hide the nervous smile from my face, the heat I'm feeling, the desire I'm feeling. This man knocks me off my feet even when I'm sitting

down.

“Mr. Bridges, are you hitting on me?” I ask.

“The first rule,” he says, “is that you can’t question me. This is a very important rule, Mia. Can you agree to this?”

I’d agree to serving myself up on his desk right now. I’m pretty sure I’d do whatever he asked, no matter how embarrassed or shy I felt. Weston Bridges makes me want to explore the potentials of my body...and his as well.

“I agree,” I say. “When do we start?”

“That was a question, Mia.”

“Oh. Right...but sometimes I need to ask.”

“You do as I say, always. It’s much more simple,” he says in a commanding voice.

My nipples stiffen as my belly tightens and I’m suddenly flooded with wetness between my legs.

He keeps his eyes on me, making me squirm. He looks at me like he’s assessing me, like he’s deciding what’s the first thing he wants to do with me.

He rises from his desk and walks toward the door. He reaches for the door handle, but instead of turning it to open, he clicks a latch, locking the door.

He turns and says, “We start now.”

And then he comes towards me.

END OF PART ONE