



In Bed with the Ice Queen

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Lesbian Romance

Description: One Bed, Two Rivals, and a Battle of Wills...

CEO Helena Wolfe is the ultimate corporate predator—cold, ruthless, and untouchable. She thrives on competition and control, ruling the boardroom with an iron will and icy precision. But when she's forced to team up with Sloane Callahan—a sharp-tongued, equally ambitious corporate lawyer—sparks fly. And not the friendly kind. Their rivalry is legendary. Their banter? Scorching. And when a business trip mix-up leaves them stuck sharing a hotel bed, their professional tension ignites into something far more dangerous: undeniable chemistry.

Helena is determined to keep her walls intact, but Sloane's wit, charm, and refusal to back down make resistance impossible. As their passionate clash deepens into unexpected intimacy, both women must confront the emotional barriers holding them back. Can Helena let her icy armor crack for the one person who sees through it? And will Sloane take the risk of falling for the woman who's perfected the art of staying distant?

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HELENA

Helena Wolfe stood in front of the large window in her office high above downtown Los Angeles. The sun was setting, casting a golden glow over the city, and she watched cars moving like ants on the streets below. Today, she wore a crisp black suit that hugged her figure perfectly, and her dark red bob gleamed under the bright lights of the office.

In the large conference room, her colleagues gathered around a long glass table. Papers were spread out, and everyone looked tense but excited. The team was finally starting to feel more like one she wanted around her and not one her dad built. She looked around, noting the faces of those she still did not trust. Some of them seemed tired and unmotivated, slouching, staring off. She took mental notes as usual.

“Is everyone here?” she called over her shoulder, her voice cool and clear. Helena, as CEO of Wolfe Enterprises, was known for being direct. She liked to think it was because of her sharp mind and even sharper strategies.

“Yes, Helena,” replied Mark, her right-hand man, as he pushed his glasses up his nose. He was eager, always ready for the next challenge. “We’re just waiting for Sarah to connect the calls with the other team.”

Helena nodded and turned back to look at the city. She liked to watch the sun dip below the horizon. It reminded her of how quickly opportunities could disappear. She had her eye on a big prize: a rival company that had been struggling financially.

Helena could see the chance to buy them and grow the family empire.

Just then, the door swung open, and Sarah rushed in, holding a tablet. “Sorry I’m late! I was making sure we had all the numbers right.”

“Numbers are everything in this game, Sarah,” Helena said, her tone icy. “Let’s get started.”

All eyes were glued on Helena as she took her seat at the head of the conference table. She scanned the faces of her team and felt a mix of nervousness and determination.

“Here’s the plan,” she began, her brown eyes glinting with focus. “We’re going to offer them an acquisition deal they can’t refuse. This is about more than just numbers. It’s about taking control. Yes, it would be a merger, but with our leverage, we will reap all the benefits and erase their brand from people’s thoughts. Unless they don’t want it to be gone, then we act like they’re a part of us, which they will be.”

Mark leaned forward, folding his hands. “What’s our first offer? We need to strike hard and fast.”

Helena flicked through her papers, revealing charts filled with numbers and arrows pointing to growth. “I want to start with a bid that’s three million below their asking price. They need to know we mean business.”

“Should we mention our competitors?” Sarah asked, glancing down at her notes.

Helena smirked slightly. “Oh, of course. Let them think they have other options, but show them how much better we are. Confidence is key.”

The group nodded in agreement, and Helena continued, “They might try to play

hardball with us. Be prepared. They'll probably throw in a few ridiculous demands."

Mark chuckled softly. "Like a golden parachute for their CEO?"

"Yes," Helena replied, smiling for the first time during the meeting.

Mark was often the only person she had a soft spot for to allow moments of silliness, and it helped her maintain her image of being collaborative. The corners of her mouth lifted, but there was still a spark of seriousness in her eyes. "But remember, we are not just buying their problems. We're buying their potential."

The phone on the table buzzed loudly, interrupting the moment. Sarah quickly grabbed it. "Sarah from Wolfe Enterprises." She paused as the person on the other end of the line spoke to her. "Yes, we're ready to discuss the acquisition."

Helena leaned back, crossing her arms, and watched closely as the call unfolded. She could tell by Sarah's eyes that the other team was on edge. After a few tense moments, Sarah nodded and said, "Yes, we're prepared to make an offer, but first, let's talk numbers."

The conversation went back and forth, and Helena could see how nerve-racking it was for Sarah. Helena had been in those shoes before. She knew the tension of trying to negotiate with another company while knowing at any moment the deal could fall through.

"Are they taking this seriously?" Helena whispered to Mark, who was watching intently.

"I think so," he replied. "But they might want to squeeze us for more money. They know they're in a weak position, but they'll still try their chances."

Helena tapped a pen against the table, her mind racing. She could almost taste the acquisition. It would give Wolfe Enterprises access to new technology and markets. They needed this. She needed it.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Sarah turned to Helena, her face brightening. “They’re willing to consider our offer! They just want a few days to consult with their board before giving us a final answer.”

Helena’s eyes sparkled. “Good. We’ll make them an irresistible offer, and while they think, we’ll prepare our counteroffer. This is just the first step.”

The team erupted with cheers and smiles, but Helena’s demeanor remained cool. She liked to encourage her team, but she couldn’t let them forget the reality of their situation.

“We’ll celebrate later,” she reminded them. “Right now, we need to work harder. We have a lot to prepare, and nothing is final until the papers are signed.”

As the meeting wrapped up, Helena couldn’t shake the feelings of hope and possibility. She stepped back toward the window, looking out at the city that stretched endlessly before her. In her world, every success was just a stepping stone to the next challenge.

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But for Helena Wolfe, a corporate raider as she was known by those in the business, the thrill was in the hunt, and she was just getting started.

“Sarah, Mark, please come with me,” she said, her voice sharp yet inviting.

Helena walked out of the conference room, her dark-red hair bobbed slightly as she walked, her heels clicking against the polished floor. Sarah and Mark exchanged glances before following her.

Once inside her office, Helena turned to face them. “I really believe this acquisition could be a game-changer for us. It’s not just about expanding our portfolio. This time, we’re bringing in real talent from the inside. We’ve been considering businesses for years, but this one feels right.”

Mark nodded, but his brow furrowed. “But what makes this one so different?” He leaned forward slightly in his chair.

Helena smiled at him. She had always loved his curiosity. “Because this isn’t just about numbers and profits. We’re gaining people who can contribute their skills to our company. We won’t just get new assets; we’ll get new ideas and new teams that can rejuvenate our efforts.”

Sarah bit her lip, clearly mulling over the details. “That sounds promising. But have you thought about the legal side? Their corporate lawyer, Sloane Callahan, will need to be on board with this.” Helena felt a familiar mix of annoyance and admiration at the mention of Sloane’s name. The two had clashed before in the courtroom, each woman strong-willed and determined in her own right. “Sloane Callahan is fierce,

and I respect her for that,” Helena replied, her voice steady. “But we’ve had our disagreements. She can be a real challenge.”

Mark chuckled softly. “I remember the last meeting with her. You two were like fire and ice!”

“That’s one way to put it,” Helena said, rolling her eyes. “She has an impressive track record. I wouldn’t want to mess with her in a way that would jeopardize the deal, that’s for sure.”

Sarah crossed her arms and leaned back in her chair. “We also have to consider that she’ll do everything she can to protect their interests. It’s her job. Maybe this time, you can find a way to work together instead of butting heads.”

“I know.” Helena sighed. “Sloane is strong and smart. I can’t help but admire her, even when we disagree. But if we can convince her to see the potential in this acquisition, it’ll be worth it.”

Mark tapped his fingers on the table. “We should prepare for that meeting then. Let’s gather all the data to back up our ideas. If we walk in fully prepared, we can show her it’s not just about risk. There’s real opportunity and money here.”

“Exactly,” Helena said, feeling energized again. “We present it as a unique chance to grow together. If we can get Sloane on board, I know we can make this work.”

Helena stood up, her excitement bubbling over. She walked to the large window, looking out at the city skyline as the last rays of sunlight disappeared. “I can almost see the potential right there,” she said, pointing into the distance. “This is about building something great together.”

Sarah chimed in, “I know that we want her on board, but I think we should prepare

for all possibilities. What if Sloane has some hidden agenda? She's not just some corporate lawyer. She's smart and understands the game."

Sloane was not just any lawyer. She had built her career on guiding companies through tough negotiations and had a reputation for being fierce in the boardroom. The thought of her joining the opposing side of this deal sent a shiver down Helena's spine. Would they be able to hold their ground?

"Let's focus on our advantages," Helena said, shaking off her uncertainty. "We have experience and a strong position in the market. Sloane might be good at representing them, but we have our strengths too."

Mark leaned back in his chair, crossing his arms. "You're right, but we also have to acknowledge what she brings to the table. She'll challenge us."

Helena nodded, her lips tight in a thin line. She felt the walls of her inherited identity closing in like a vise. Raised by business-savvy parents who seemed to breathe success, she had always been the one in charge. As the oldest of four children, the pressure to be the best had weighed heavily on her shoulders. "You know," she started, her voice steely, "I didn't get here by taking things lightly. I know what's at stake."

Sarah grinned. "Then let's use that to our advantage. We know our strengths, so let's play them. You're a brilliant strategist, Helena. You can outmaneuver anyone."

Helena smiled briefly, then her expression turned serious. "We're going to walk into that meeting prepared. We'll anticipate Sloane's moves and make sure we stay one step ahead."

"Sounds like a plan," Mark said reluctantly, pulling out a few documents. "But let's also think about how we'll manage the dynamics in the room. We need to present a

united front.”

Helena’s mind raced, calculating not just the facts but the feelings. She knew being unaware of feelings was how people lost control in the heat of things. “We need them to see us as the leaders in this negotiation, not just competitors.”

“Right,” Sarah added, typing notes on her tablet. “And if we can catch Sloane off guard, then we might just have the upper hand.”

At the mention of catching Sloane off guard, Helena felt conflicted. She had a sense of appreciation for the woman’s talent and poise, knowing how hard she had worked to earn her place in the corporate world, but admiration wouldn’t distract her from her mission. And admiration for the way Sloane’s great ass looked in her smart pants and the way her full lips curled enticingly when they argued would not close this deal help her make her dad happy. She needed to push those thoughts away, firmly reminding herself that this was business, and certainly not anything more.

Admiring the opposition was reckless, especially as the new CEO. She had inherited the company, and her father was always there, watching her like a hawk, expecting nothing less than perfection. Being the eldest daughter meant she had always carried that weight on her shoulders.

Helena leaned forward, her brown eyes narrowing. “Remember, we’re here to make a deal. There can be no room for weakness. We show strength and resolve.”

Mark nodded, now more energized. “Got it. We’ll keep our eyes on the prize.”

“Let’s gather the final notes and sharpen our pitch,” Helena instructed. “When Sloane Callahan walks in, I want her to know we mean business.”

Mark nodded, crossing his arms. “Exactly. I can’t shake the feeling that she’s going to

throw something unexpected at us. She always does.”

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Sarah jotted something down on her tablet, glancing between them. “We’ve done our fair share of homework over the years, though, right? She can’t catch us off guard if we know her tactics.”

Helena leaned against the table, gripping its edge. “That’s the thing. I’ve studied her tactics like they’re some kind of secret manual. I can’t stand giving in on some things.” Her voice dropped lower, and she added, “I’ve been CEO for five years, but I still have to prove myself every single day.”

Mark leaned back in his chair, folding his arms. “Helena, nobody thinks that but you. You’ve built this company up from the ground. Your dad might have started it, but you’ve turned it into something else entirely.”

Helena shook her head forcefully, her expression icy. “That’s just it, Mark. I don’t want anyone thinking my success is just because of my dad. If this merger goes south, everyone’s going to ask if I deserve to be here.” Her heart raced as she spoke. The fear of being anything less than the best was a constant in her life.

“Come on, think about it,” Mark pressed. “You’ve worked here since you were sixteen. You know this company better than anyone. You’ve fought for it and earned your spot. You’re not just riding on your dad’s coattails.”

“You’re right, but...” She hesitated. “If things go downhill, all those years of hard work will be questioned. My whole career will be reduced to ‘Oh, she’s just the founder’s daughter.’” She pushed her chair back with a soft scraping sound and stood, pacing a few steps.

“This is your shot, and you’ve prepared for it,” Sarah said. “Callahan might be intimidating, but you’re not some rookie in this game. You’re Helena-freaking-Wolfe.”

Helena came to a stop, her breath catching in her throat. Each word felt like it struck a chord deep inside her, the reminder of who she was pushing against her worries. “I appreciate that. But she knows how to rattle people. I’ve seen her do it. In the courtrooms, she’s like a shark. She’s fast and unyielding. Two sharks in a tank is a recipe for...a fight.”

Mark chuckled lightly. “True. But remember, you’re a Wolfe. You know how to navigate these waters too.”

The team sprang into action, flipping through papers and organizing their materials. The atmosphere was electric with anticipation, but beneath it all, Helena felt that familiar sense of pressure squeeze her chest. As she contemplated their strategy, she couldn't shake the uneasy feeling that no matter how well they prepared, the weight of her inheritance and her father's expectations would always be there. If she ever had a chance to succeed, it would have to be on her own terms.

“Let’s get to work,then,” Sarah said.

Mark grinned. “Yeah! Let’s show Sloane what we can do!”

Helena nodded, filled with a newfound sense of purpose. “Alright, team. Let’s make this happen. We have a lot of preparation to do, but I believe we can turn this into something incredible.”

As she felt the weight of responsibility resting on her shoulders, Helena knew that despite any challenges with Sloane, the promise of a new horizon was more than worth the effort. Together, they were ready to take Wolfe Enterprises to the next

level.

She continued barking orders for the rest of the day, feeling an eerie sense of anticipation for the meeting with Sloane. Just as she was about to dive into the latest merger documents, her phone buzzed insistently on the desk. Glancing at the caller ID, she sighed. It was her father: Malcolm Wolfe. As the largest stakeholder, he still held immense power over the company.

"Great," she muttered under her breath, straightening her posture before picking up the phone. "Hello, Dad."

"Helena! Why hasn't the merger with Thompson Industries been finalized yet?" He sounded more shocked than concerned, but that was typical for him.

Helena's fingers drummed against the polished wood of her desk. She could hear the impatience crackling in his voice, even through the phone. "It's in the final stages, Dad. Mergers take time." "Time? Time? When I was running the company, I would have had that signed and sealed before you could blink!" Malcolm's voice boomed through the receiver like thunder.

Helena rolled her eyes, feeling a familiar bubble of annoyance rising inside her. "Things are different now, Dad. There's a lot more to consider with regulations and technology."

"Technology? Please! That is your greatest advantage! Back in my day, success came from hard work and determination. Now you have fancy computers and monitors to assist you in reading every bullet point. No wonder everyone is so unsure about making business decisions. It's all done through screens and acting like robots." His tone was dismissive, as if he was still the king of a kingdom that required no modern rules.

A small vein throbbed in Helena's temple. "You make it sound like I'm just sitting around texting, Dad. I'm working hard here. You chose me to take over the company for a reason, remember?"

"Of course I remember! You are the eldest, and I trained you the hardest for this," he snapped back. Helena could picture him pacing in his home office, his hands gesturing dramatically. "I expect results, Helena. Don't make me regret my decision," he continued with the chilling calmness of a looming storm.

A heavy silence hung between them. Helena glanced at the photos on her desk, many of them of her and her siblings smiling at family gatherings, her father wearing a proud look. "You should have more faith in me." She tried to keep her voice steady.

"Faith? I'm looking for results! Do you have any idea what your brother Kaleb is doing over in San Diego? He's making waves. I won't have any slackers in my family." His words cut like a knife, leaving her feeling smaller than she liked to admit, and Helena took a deep breath. The news about Kaleb thriving as a strategic assistant made her teeth clench. "I get it, Dad. I do. But you can't compare what I'm doing with Kaleb. He's in tech, and this is corporate. They're two different worlds."

"Different worlds? Maybe. He is still a strategic assistant. At the end of the day, it's business, Helena." He paused, as if weighing his next words. "If your numbers don't continue to climb like they did when he left Wolfe Enterprises, I might need to call in better help."

"Help? You mean someone to take my place?" Helena felt the air grow thick, her heart racing. "You can't be serious."

"I wouldn't say it if I wasn't." The finality in his voice pierced through the phone. "I need to see progress, and I need to see it soon."

Helena's fists clenched tightly. She wanted to unleash a storm of replies, to defend herself, to tell him how hard she was working. But she knew that would only make him more irate. Instead, she forced herself to take a deep breath and exhale slowly.

"I'll make it happen, Dad. Just give me some time."

"Time. Here we go again. You're surrounded by this new-fangled technology, and yet you still need time. How quaint." His sarcasm hit her like ice water, but she held her ground.

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"It's not quaint, Dad. It's smart planning. When it's ready, I'll have more than just numbers on a piece of paper for you."

"You better, or I'll have to rethink who runs this company."

Without another word, he hung up, leaving Helena staring at the screen, the weight of his words sinking deep.

The sunlight now felt too bright, and the reports on her desk seemed to taunt her. She wasn't just battling spreadsheets and mergers. She was battling her father's expectations and the pressure of being the one chosen to lead Wolfe Enterprises.

2

SLOANE

Sloane Callahan sat in her modern office in Callahan Legal. The sun poured through the tall windows, casting an elegant glow on her desk. Her loose, curly brown hair bounced around her shoulders as she moved, and her light blue eyes sparkled. Today was a big day. She was preparing to negotiate a crucial merger for her client Thompson Industries.

She picked up her pen and tapped it against the desk as she scrolled through the proposal documents. She knew this merger was important—not just for Thompson Industries, but for the workers and community they served. Each line of the contract weighed heavily on her mind. She took a deep breath and looked around her office at the framed awards and photos of past successful negotiations. This wasn't just any

case, though. It was a chance to make a real difference in preventing a monopoly.

“Is everyone ready?” she called out, glancing over to her lead negotiator, Jake, who was laid back in his chair, poring over the numbers.

Jake looked up, his brow furrowed. “Sloane, we have to be careful. You know who we’re up against?”

Sloane nodded. The name "Helena Wolfe" sent chills down the spines of many in the corporate world. The new CEO of Wolfe Enterprises had built her reputation through fierce negotiation tactics and a cold, calculating style that made even the toughest players nervous. With her dark red bob and icy demeanor, Helena was a tough opponent.

“I know,” Sloane said with confidence. “But we can’t let her intimidate us. We need to come out strong. What if we high-ball them first? We’d show them we mean business.”

But before Jake could respond, his face paled. He leaned forward, his eyes wide. “It’s too late, Sloane. They already low-balled us by three million.”

Sloane’s heart raced for a moment, feeling the urgency of the situation. “What? How could they do that?” She paused, agitation rising in her chest. “We can’t let that stand. We can’t let them push us around.”

Jake shifted uncomfortably in his chair. “I know, but the numbers are set. It’s not easy to recover from a low-ball offer like this. They’ll think we’re desperate.”

Sloane straightened her spine and fixed her gaze on Jake. “Listen, we need to counter it. I’m not about to let them walk all over us.”

Jake blinked, surprised at her fire. “How do you want to counter?”

“Simple. We go six million over what they asked. We show them we know our worth and we’re not afraid to fight for it. If they think they can lowball us and win, they’re mistaken.”

Jake nodded slowly. “But that’s a huge jump, especially after their initial offer.”

“Exactly!” Sloane exclaimed, her confidence shining through. “They need to know we mean business and that we’re here to protect our client’s interests—economically and ethically. We’re not going to sit back and take their scraps. It’s about setting the tone.”

Just then, Melissa, the office manager, peeked in. “Ms. Callahan, the car is ready for you to head to the meeting. Are you all set?”

Sloane turned to Melissa with a smile. “Thanks, Melissa.” She turned her focus back on Jake. “We’re going to make them rethink their strategy. Are you with me?”

Jake took a deep breath, a flicker of excitement igniting in his eyes. “Absolutely. Let’s do it.”

Sloane grabbed her briefcase, making sure all her documents were securely inside. She felt a rush of adrenaline as she marched toward the door, and she knew stifling any fears of Helena Wolfe was crucial. She had faced the icy CEO before, and she knew exactly how to deal with someone like her.

As they walked to the elevator, Jake whispered, “What if Helena flips out? She’s known for being ruthless.”

Sloane chuckled softly, her eyes glinting with mischief. “Then we’ll show her we can

be ruthless too. After all, this is business; it's not personal. We just need to make sure Thompson Industries comes out on top."

The elevator door opened, and they stepped inside. Sloane's heart raced not with fear but with excitement. She could already imagine the intense back-and-forth negotiations ahead. She would be a force to reckon with, and nothing could stand in the way of delivering the best outcome for her client.

As they descended, Sloane practiced the words she would say. She mentally rehearsed her pitch, ready to confront Helena with confidence. The thought of facing her old rival only fueled her determination. Today would be a turning point, and she would not back down.

"Okay, be ready," she whispered to herself. She couldn't help but feel a rush of excitement mixed with nerves. There was a lot riding on this deal, and she wanted to ensure they came out on top without her client losing their ethical stance.

Sloane recalled the last time she had faced Helena Wolfe, the CEO of Wolfe Enterprises. Helena was a force to be reckoned with; she was sharp, stern, and always in control. Everyone in the industry knew her for being a hothead.

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Sloane could still picture their last meeting: Helena had sat there, arms crossed, a fiery glare in her eyes, cutting through Sloane's arguments like a knife. "This is a waste of time," Helena had said, her voice strong and clipped. "If you want to discuss merger terms, I suggest you come prepared."

She shivered at the memory. Helena had a commanding presence that could easily unsettle anyone. But Sloane didn't back down easily. She had learned to stand her ground, to push back, and she was determined not to let Helena intimidate her this time.

With this new merger hanging in the balance, Sloane felt a surge of determination. She could get under Helena's skin; she was sure of it, especially since she was the only one who knew they were both drawn to women—not that they ever spoke about it. She could use it to her advantage, perhaps even rattle Helena enough to catch her off guard in their negotiations.

Sloane stood up and paced the room. "What would I say if I wanted to make her flustered? Maybe something about how much fun it is to be bold in business...or how important it is to break free from old-fashioned thinking."

Just then, her assistant, Mia, popped her head into the office. "Hey, Sloane, you ready for this?"

"Ready as I can be," Sloane replied, straightening her blazer. She turned to Mia, a mischievous glint in her eye. "I think I'm going to play a little game with Helena."

Mia raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "A game? What kind of game?"

“I’m going to challenge her,” she explained, folding her arms. “I want to see if I can rattle her a bit. You know how she is—always so high and mighty.”

Mia chuckled. “Good luck. She’s not going to let you rattle her easily. You know that, right?”

“Oh, I know,” Sloane said with a wave of her hand. “But that’s what makes it fun. I have a few tricks up my sleeve. Just you wait.”

As she spoke, her mind was already racing with strategies. She pictured herself sitting across from Helena, their eyes locked in an intense stare. She considered throwing in a casual mention about what a nice surprise it is to bump into old friends. The impact might be enough to make Helena’s composure shatter, even if just for a moment.

“By the way,” Mia said, interrupting her thoughts, “do you need anything else before the meeting? I can get you coffee or...a stress ball?”

Sloane chuckled and shook her head. “No stress balls today, but I could use a little pep talk before I walk in there. Remind me not to let her steamroll me again.”

“You’ve got this,” Mia encouraged, giving her a thumbs-up. “Just show her who’s boss.”

“Exactly,” Sloane said, her voice rising with confidence. “I’m the one representing Thompson Industries, and I’ll do what it takes to protect their interests.”

Mia smiled. “Alright, then. Go get ‘em, tiger!”

As Mia closed the door, Sloane took a moment to gather her thoughts. She felt the familiar thrill of competition bubbling within her. “Helena Wolfe is about to realize that she’s not the only force to be reckoned with,” she said, pumping herself up.

She could already envision the boardroom: the polished table, the tension in the air, and most importantly, Helena across from her. Just remember, she thought, this isn't just business; it's personal too.

And with that thought grounding her, she felt ready. Ready for whatever the meeting would bring, ready to navigate the intense waters of corporate law, and ready to make sure that Thompson Industries wouldn't just survive the merger but thrive.

Sloane Callahan was a force in the industry, and she wouldn't back down without a fight.

3

HELENA

Helena Wolfe sat in the conference room, her sharp gaze focused on her laptop. The office was filled with tension, and a wooden table separated her and her team from Sloane Callahan and the representatives of Thompson Industries. Despite being the CEO of Wolfe Enterprises, Helena felt the pressure of the merger looming over her like a dark cloud. Sloane Callahan looked immaculate in a dark blue pant suit. The cut of it accentuated her long legs and fantastic ass- Helena hadn't failed to notice that when they walked into the room. Her wavy brown hair was pinned back off her face and her blue eyes were focussed. Helena couldn't help but admire the way the light picked up the lines of her face and the curve of her lips.

Come on, Helena! Now certainly isn't the time to be checking out the opposition.

The walls of the room were a deep shade of navy blue, and large windows let in bright sunlight. The room was filled with modern furniture and abstract art that seemed to say, "We mean business." Helena straightened her posture in her chair. She wanted everyone to know she was serious. She brushed a loose strand of hair behind

her ear and crossed her arms, waiting for the meeting to start.

Sloane Callahan looked at everyone around the table, scanning the room with confidence. “Alright, everyone. Let’s get started,” she said, her voice steady and commanding. Her presence had a calming effect, even in this tense situation.

“Thanks, Ms. Callahan,” Helena replied, her tone cool and clipped. “Let’s cut to the chase. Thompson Industries needs this merger more than we do, so we’re not going to offer more than we have to.” She leaned forward, a small smirk crossing her face. She knew Wolfe Enterprises was in a strong position, and she didn’t mind showing it.

One of the representatives from Thompson Industries, a man with thinning hair and glasses, cleared his throat. “We understand that, Ms. Wolfe. However, our employees have worked very hard for this company. We need to ensure that their contracts and long-term security are respected during this transition.”

Helena rolled her eyes but quickly caught herself. “We’re open to taking on your employees, but we can’t promise long-term contracts for everyone. We need to keep the company profitable.” Her voice remained steady, making it clear that she meant every word.

Sloane shot a quick glance at Helena, sensing the growing tension in the room. “Perhaps we can find a middle ground,” she suggested. “Thompson Industries provides essential services, and retaining their skilled workforce is crucial for a smooth transition in this merger.”

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“Middle ground?” Helena scoffed, leaning back in her chair. “You’re talking about incorporating all sorts of benefits that will weigh us down. We have to look at the bigger picture.” She emphasized her words, hoping to intimidate them into silence.

Another Thompson Industries representative, a woman with dark hair pulled into a tight bun, frowned. “But we have employees who have been with us for years. They deserve some assurance that their hard work and dedication will be recognized.” “Look,” Helena replied, her tone now a bit sharper. “I understand loyalty, but this is business. If we start throwing around guarantees, the numbers just don’t add up. We all want what’s best, but we also have to be realistic.” Her eyes darted from one person to another, anticipating their reactions.

Sloane raised her hand slightly. “Let’s refocus on the proposal. What does Thompson Industries need to stay afloat during this time?” She looked directly at the representatives.

The thinning-haired man spoke again. “If we could negotiate a transitional phase where most employees are kept on for at least a year without losing their current contracts, that could work. We believe that would help our employees trust the new structure.”

Helena pursed her lips, considering their request. “A year?” she echoed, her voice dripping with skepticism. “That’s a long time. You must think we’re made of money. We can give you six months. That’s reasonable.”

The room fell silent, and everyone exchanged glances. Sloane’s brow furrowed.

“Ms. Wolfe,” Sloane interjected gently, “what if we thought about this from a different angle? Building good faith now could pay off later, don’t you think?” Helena waved her hand dismissively. She wouldn’t be swayed by Sloane’s calm voice. “This isn’t about feelings. It’s about facts. We need to protect our company. If Thompson Industries can’t accept what we’re offering, then maybe this merger isn’t as beneficial as we thought.” She stood up, as if preparing to leave. The others exchanged nervous glances, unsure of their next move.

“Please, let’s not act hastily,” Sloane urged. “We can work together to find a solution that makes sense for both sides.”

As the debate unfolded, representatives from both companies began raising their voices, presenting their cases like it was a game of tug-of-war. Helena’s dismissive attitude only heightened the fervor in the room, and tensions reached a boiling point.

After what felt like hours, Sloane stood up suddenly and Helena felt her gaze sweep over the length of Sloane Callahan’s body in her lovely dark blue pantsuit.

“Enough!” Sloane exclaimed, startling everyone. “We’re all here because we want a successful outcome. I suggest we take a break, gather our thoughts, and come back with fresh eyes.”

Helena crossed her arms, frowning but remaining silent, feeling a mix of frustration and admiration for Sloane’s boldness.

As the representatives filed out of the room, Helena exhaled sharply. The negotiation was far from over, but it was clear they needed to refocus. She hoped it would end in a way that favored Wolfe Enterprises. She glanced at Sloane, knowing they had more work to do.

“Do you think we should go over the merger numbers again?” Mark asked. He was

always the peacemaker, but Helena just felt irritated.

“For a third time?” Helena snapped, sitting up straighter. “What’s wrong with you two? Haven’t we gone through this already?” She realized her tone was harsher than she intended, but the pressure felt overwhelming.

“Whoa, easy there,” Mark said, raising his hands as if backing away from a wild animal. “We’re just trying to help, Helena.”

Sarah looked down at the documents she held, her face tightening. “Yeah, we just want to make sure everything’s perfect.”

Helena took a deep breath, the reality of her sharp words hitting her. She could feel the heat creeping up her cheeks. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to come off like that.” She ran her fingers through her hair, nervously tapping her nails on the wooden conference table. “Sarah, Mark, you guys are everything to me at this company, and I treat you guys the worst sometimes. I’m sorry. I just had a tough call with my dad. He’s...he’s really putting the pressure on me.”

Mark’s voice softened. “Your dad can be intense. You’re doing a great job, Helena. He doesn’t see everything you’ve accomplished.”

Sarah nodded, adding, “And we’re here with you, every step of the way. You know that, right?”

Helena looked at her two colleagues, the warmth of their support washing over her like a gentle breeze. “I know, I know. I appreciate you both.”

“Just don’t forget to take care of yourself too,” Sarah said. “You can’t pour from an empty cup.”

“I’ll try to remember that.” Helena forced a smile.

Sloane cleared her throat, startling them. They hadn’t realized that she had been standing in the doorframe listening to their conversation. “Ms. Wolfe, I think we all want this merger to go smoothly, and we’re lucky to know what everyone needs for this to work.”

Helena chuckled softly. “You’re right. Teamwork makes the dream work, as they say.”

As the tension began to fade, Helena felt a flicker of pride in her chest. This was her company, her team. They were a family, even if it was a dysfunctional one at times.

Sloane walked across the room, her eyes sparkling as she took her seat across from Helena. Though Sloane was only a few years younger than her, she had a command that made her seem years older. Helena felt frustrated by Sloane Callahan, even though she felt a little calmer for the break, Sloane was beginning to have a bit of an affect on her and she couldn’t afford to be distracted during this.

Once everyone was seated again, Sloane said, “Alright, let’s get back to it. We need to discuss the asking price for Thompson Industries. There’s still a large discrepancy, and we need to bridge that gap.”

Helena leaned forward, her eyebrows furrowing slightly. “I understand that, but we need to consider the long-term benefits here. Wolfe Enterprises can’t just meet the asking price without reviewing the potential growth that Thompson brings to the table.”

Sloane nodded, her expression unyielding. “I agree, but I think it’s important to recognize the value of their existing team. You’re planning to take on all their employees, right?”

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“Yes, but each employee's contract will need to be negotiated separately,” Helena insisted. “We want to make sure everyone feels valued based on their skills and experience. It’s fair, and it also protects Wolfe Enterprises.”

Sloane crossed her arms and met her with an icy blue glare. “I can see your point, but how would that work for a business that’s trying to merge? It could lead to confusion and distrust among the team.”

Helena felt a flutter of something strange in her stomach. Was it tension or attraction? It was tough to tell when they were locked in this intense negotiation, their voices becoming more animated.

“I don’t want to create confusion,” Helena replied, keeping her voice steady. “I want each team member to feel appreciated. It’s part of building a cohesive unit after a merger.”

“You’re right about that,” Sloane conceded, but there was a glimmer of defiance in her gaze. “But time is of the essence. If you take too long deciding on each contract, we may lose key players. Those employees might look for opportunities elsewhere.”

Helena sighed, running a hand through her dark red hair. “Then let’s prioritize the key players now. We can draw up a list and tackle the top ten first, while also providing a framework for the rest.”

Sloane leaned back in her chair, a flicker of interest flashing across her eyes. “That’s a good compromise. It shows you want their team to feel secure, but it accelerates our timeline for the merger.”

“Exactly,” Helena confirmed with a small smile.

There was a spark between them, ignited by the energy of their negotiation. It made Helena’s pulse quicken slightly. Was it excitement from the deal or something more?

“Okay, here’s the plan,” Sloane said, pulling out a notepad and flipping it open. “Let’s start with the essentials: salary ranges, benefits, and any special considerations for each of those key players.”

As they negotiated, the conversation ebbed and flowed. They went back and forth, deciding on how the merger could benefit both companies. Even when they seemed at odds, Helena sensed a rhythm in their debate, a dance of ideas. Sloane was formidable, and Helena found herself wanting to rise to the challenge.

“Why don’t we focus on the benefits of the merger for the employees?” Sloane suggested, her voice calm. “If we can show them that with the two companies combined, they’ll have more opportunities and growth, it will make the transition smoother.”

Helena nodded, appreciating this approach. “That’s smart,” she said. “By emphasizing growth, we can ease some fears about job security. We want to present this merger as an opportunity for everyone.”

Sloane’s eyes lit up, dual shades of blue reflecting her passion. “Exactly. If we position it right, everyone will see it as a step up rather than a threat.”

They both paused, the air thick with energy. For a moment, it seemed that the world outside the large office room faded away, leaving only the two of them and their agreement. Helena felt a spark, something she couldn’t quite put her finger on. She shifted in her chair, feeling the warmth of their growing connection, even amid the professional contention.

“Okay, let's draft an outline,” Helena suggested, her voice a little more confident. “Once we have that, we can approach the employees and explain the vision for the companies together.”

“Deal. Jake, Mia, bring over the papers please,” Sloane replied, her expression softening. “I think we’re finally getting somewhere. Let's aim to have this all settled as soon as possible.”

Helena couldn’t help but smile wider. The negotiations were tough, but there was something electric in the air with Sloane around. Maybe, just maybe, this merger was easier than she initially thought. It was more than just business that had her so flustered. It felt like the start of something new, a partnership not just in the conference room but perhaps something deeper too. The two teams clarified expectations and wrapped up for the day.

As they shook hands, an unspoken understanding passed between them. Everybody filed out of the room, but Helena took her time.

She knew she had to meet with her lawyer again, and she felt a little anxious about the contracts and payment negotiations. The meeting had gone well, but she knew the business world was full of surprises. She needed everything checked, just to be safe.

Sloane stood up, her tall figure casting a long shadow. She pushed stray strands of hair behind her ears. “Ms. Wolfe, can we have a quick word?” Her voice was smooth, almost playful.

Helena raised an eyebrow, a little wary but curious. “Sure, what’s on your mind?”

Sloane took a step closer, her eyes sparkling with mischief. “I just wanted to say that I hope both parties can hold true to the negotiations we discussed today.” She paused, leaning just a bit closer and added, “You know, it’s important for women like us in

this tough business world to stick together.”

Helena blinked, caught off guard by Sloane’s tone. There was something more in her words, something that made the air crackle with tension. And Sloane’s gaze travelled down to Helena’s breasts, pausing for a second, before she looked back to Helena’s eyes and then ran her tongue casually over her upper lip.

What the hell?!

“Um, yes, I agree. Of course it’s important to uphold our agreements,” Helena responded,, a slight frown furrowing her brow. Her mind raced as she processed what Sloane had implied.

Sloane smirked and rested her hands on the edge of the desk, looking confident. “You know, it’s hard being a woman in this field,” she continued, her voice softer now. “Sometimes I think we could do more if we...collaborated in different ways.” Sloane’s eyes dipped over her body once again.

Helena could feel her heart racing, a mix of surprise and irritation washing over her. “Collaborated? In different ways?”she echoed, trying to hide her confusion. “Are you suggesting something?”

Sloane’s smile widened. “Just that we could be more than just business partners, Helena. Don’t you find it refreshing to connect with someone who understands the challenges we face?”

Helena flicked her gaze to the window, trying to catch her breath. She hadn’t expected this kind of conversation. She thought about how confident she was in her boardroom and how she’d built the company from the ground up. But here was Sloane, throwing a curveball into the mix.

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“Look, I appreciate the compliment,” Helena said slowly, measuring her words carefully. “But I’m here for one thing: business. I have a lot on my plate, and I prefer to keep my personal life separate.” Her tone was more firm now, a hint of her usual arrogance creeping in.

Sloane tilted her head, unfazed. “Oh, I get it. Business first,” she said, her eyebrows raised playfully. “But what if we could help each other in more ways than just numbers and contracts?”

Helena felt her cheeks warming slightly. “This is a serious deal we’re working on,” she replied, trying to maintain her composure. “Let’s focus on what matters, not...whatever you’re hinting at.”

Sloane stepped back slightly, her expression shifting to one of mock innocence. “Just trying to lighten the mood, Helena. All work and no play...”

“Can make anyone a dull girl,” Helena cut in sharply, folding her arms over her chest. She felt a rush of frustration but also a spark of intrigue at Sloane’s audacity.

Sloane laughed lightly, the sound filling the space between them. “You really are something else, aren’t you? So serious all the time.”

Helena relaxed her shoulders, aware that Sloane was just teasing her. “It’s how I get things done. Besides, we both know this is a cutthroat environment. I don’t have room for distractions. Neither do you.”

“Fair enough,” Sloane said, nodding. “But don’t forget that some connections can

lead to amazing partnerships...and results.”

“Are you an expert in amazing results?” Helena asked, raising an eyebrow again, half-smirking at the playful challenge.

Sloane shrugged, a glimmer of determination in her eyes. “I like to think so. Just remember, I’m always here if you need more than just a lawyer.”

With that, Helena rolled her eyes but couldn’t hide the smile forming on her lips. “Alright, let’s keep our eyes on the prize then.”

4

SLOANE

Sloane Callahan took a deep breath as she walked around her office, her heels clicking on the polished wooden floor. The meeting with Helena Wolfe was finally over, and Sloane wanted to settle her thoughts like the last pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

“That went surprisingly well,” Jake said, grabbing his briefcase. “I have to go pick up my kids from the afterschool program.”

Sloane nodded, her mind still foggy from the way her conversation with Helena took a turn. “I’ll see you soon. Have a good night. Mia, you can take off as well. Thank you.”

She looked at the view of the city skyline, what always felt like a line of giants standing watch over their domain. But today, her mind was on Helena, who had just impressed everyone in the boardroom with her confident presence. Sloane remembered how Helena’s sharp voice had commanded attention, her eyes sparkling with ambition and ideas. So passionate, so fierce.

“Goodbye, everyone. Safe travels!” Sloane called out to the members of Thompson Industries as they gathered their things and began to leave. Most of them nodded, some a littledazed from the intensity of the meeting. Sloane could still hear Helena’s voice echoing in her mind, like a drumbeat that wouldn’t fade.

As she walked toward the door, she spotted Charles Thompson, the elderly CEO of Thompson Industries, lingering at the back of the room. He had a weathered face, deep lines etched by years of experience, but his bright blue eyes had a light in them that made him seem younger.

“Ms. Callahan, mind if I have a word?” he asked, his voice gravelly yet kind.

“Of course, Mr. Thompson. What’s on your mind?” “Oh, please call me Charles. That young lady, Helena Wolfe,” he started, shaking his head slightly. “She’s a hellcat, isn’t she?”

Sloane chuckled. “You can say that again! She really knows how to hold her ground.”

Charles leaned against the table, his hands resting on his cane. “She reminds me of someone I used to know. Driven. Smart. Brave.” He sighed, looking a little wistful. “If only I had children like her who could take over.”

Sloane raised an eyebrow, curiosity piqued. “What do you mean?”

“It’s just that I see so much potential in her,” Charles continued. “But I can’t help but wonder if she’s lucky too. You know, being the daughter of the man who built Wolfe Enterprises.”

Sloane paused, letting that thought sink in. Helena was undeniably brilliant, and her ability to steer conversations and ideas was impressive. Yet she couldn’t escape the fact that she had a famous name behind her. “It’s true. She has some advantages that

others don't," she admitted. "But she works harder than anyone I know."

Charles nodded, considering her words. "Yes, hard work is necessary," he said slowly. "But does it balance out the luck? Doesn't it always come back to who you know?"

Sloane felt a knot of unease tighten in her stomach. She had seen many talented people get overlooked for promotions because they didn't have the right connections. "True. But I believe she's also creating her own path. It's not all about who you know. Sometimes, you have to prove that you belong."

"That's a fine way to see it, Sloane," Charles said with a small smile. "Maybe someday, she'll prove it to everyone."

Sloane watched Charles carefully. The old CEO had seen so much change in business—the rise and fall of leaders, the evolution of companies. "And what do you think she'll do?" Sloane asked.

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Charles stroked his chin, studying the floor as if it held his answers. “I think she’ll rise or she’ll fall. Time will tell,” he replied. “But it will be interesting to see.”

She nodded back, thinking of how exhilarating and terrifying it must be for Helena, standing where she did, making decisions that could change lives. “I guess we’re all just doing our best with what we’ve got, right?”

“Indeed,” Charles said, his voice warm. “And remember, it’s good to have someone like Helena out there shaking things up a bit.”

As she watched him carefully, Sloane couldn’t help but admire Charles. Years of experience had given him wisdom, and Sloane felt grateful to learn from him. “Do you think she’ll take us further?”

“We can only hope,” Charles said. “Because if not her, then who?”

Sloane smiled gently at him. “I believe that given the chance, Helena will.”

“Good. I appreciate your confidence in her,” he said, leaning back and letting out a deep sigh. “And in yourself as well. Don’t forget that.”

“Thanks, Charles,” Sloane said softly, feeling grateful. “But I can only do my best.”

As she watched him walk away, she turned back toward her desk. The meeting may have ended, but the reflections in her mind were just beginning. She thought about power and how sometimes it could be inherited, but also earned. Perhaps Helena was both skillful and lucky.

And hot. Helena was certainly hot. Sloane had always had a thing for fierce women. It never ended well.

"Why did I let myself get carried away?" Sloane muttered to herself as she gathered her things. Her desk was cluttered with papers and files that had been pushed aside during the meeting. She hurriedly shoved a few documents into her leather bag, the soft leather cool against her fingers. The memory of Helena's piercing gaze struck her again. She had hit on Helena and Helena had shut her down.

But, she had caught the way Helena looked at her when she thought she wasn't watching. There was something there, she was sure of it.

Outside, she entered the small parking garage reserved for employees. It felt like a maze of concrete, but Sloane effortlessly navigated to her special parking spot. It was hers, a small victory among many in her career. She smiled at the thought; at least one thing had gone right today. As she got into her SUV, the familiar scent of leather filled the air.

Driving through the city, she spotted a few homeless people huddled near a street corner. They wrapped themselves in tattered blankets, staring blankly as cars rushed by. She felt a tightness in her chest. It was a sharp contrast to the glass towers and rich contracts she had just left behind.

Her thoughts drifted back to the meeting. Helena looked as hot as hell in her tailored red suit, her sharp brown eyes slicing through any pretense. The merger was supposed to be straightforward, yet when they had adjourned, Sloane found herself alone with her thoughts, replaying her own words: "But what if we could help each other in more ways than just numbers and contracts?"

Sloane cringed. "Ugh, I came on way too strong." The embarrassment washed over her like cold water. Had she really just suggested that they could be more than just

business partners? A voice in her head whispered that she had gotten carried away. Maybe it was Helena's beauty or the way she commanded the room. As she merged onto the main road, Sloane recalled her conversation with Charles. He had said something snide about Helena's position and how she only had it because of nepotism. At first, Sloane had defended Helena's capability as a new CEO, but now she felt a mix of annoyance and frustration building inside her.

It was hard to ignore Charles's words. He had a point about the competitive world of business, but why did she care what he thought? The more she reflected on her unprofessional attempts to connect with Helena, the angrier she felt. The city lights began to twinkle as she drove closer to home. The towering skyscrapers loomed over her, reminding her of how small she felt at that moment. Here I am, trying to bridge gaps while she just sits in her ivory tower acting like she owns the place, Sloane thought.

Helena's icy demeanor mixed with her striking beauty made Sloane feel a mix of admiration and irritation. Why did she let it get to her? It was unprofessional to have acted like that in front of a colleague, especially someone who she was at odds with.

Just then, her phone buzzed loudly on the passenger seat, breaking her thoughts. It was a message from her friend Amelia: . "How did the meeting go?"

Sloane rolled her eyes. What could she say? She could opt for: "It was fine! Just fine." But really, it had been a mess of conflicting feelings.

"What was I thinking?!" she grumbled aloud. "I was just doing my job, representing my client," she said, her voice rising. She felt annoyed with herself for trying to be more than just a negotiator. Why did she have to blur the line? And why did she even want to connect with someone as arrogant as Helena?

Wild sex does solve a multitude of tensions. And Helena would be wild in bed.

Absolutely.

Pulling into her driveway, Sloane took a moment to breathe before she sent a text back to Amelia: “It was...complicated.” She turned off the engine and sat in silence. “Tomorrow,” she promised herself, “I’ll focus on the merger and nothing else.” With that thought guiding her, she unbuckled her seatbelt and stepped out, ready to leave the chaos of the day behind her.

When she got indoors and locked the door behind her, she wanted to shake off the day’s frustrations. But the image of Helena, with her icy demeanor cloaked in waves of beauty, lingered like a stubborn guest. She was filled with a mixture of admiration and irritation, something Sloane couldn’t quite wrap her head around.

“Maybe I just need to focus on my clients,” she whispered to herself, as she set her bag down on the kitchen counter. “No more personal connections. Just business.”

With that thought anchoring her, she made a cup of tea, hoping it would help drown her uncertainties.

A little later, she cradled her empty cup of chamomile tea, savoring the last remnants of warmth. Sloane loved her quiet evenings at home after long hours at the law firm, yet tonight felt different. She sighed deeply, the noise echoing in the small, cozy room.

“Another day, another set of problems,” she murmured to herself, shaking her head as she set her cup down in the sink. She pushed away the thoughts of her day at work. Clients demanding results, endless paperwork—it was enough to make anyone feel drained.

She peeled off her crisp white blouse and slacks, tossing them onto a nearby chair. She padded into the bathroom, her bare feet feeling the cool tiles beneath her. As she

turned on the shower, steam swirled around her like an embracing fog.

Under the warm spray, Sloane took a deep breath. She felt the tension in her shoulders slowly begin to melt away. She sighed with contentment as she lathered soap into her hands. The scent of lavender filled the air, helping to ground her thoughts. But soon, her mind wandered, and it drifted to a topic she often tried to avoid: her dating life.

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She scrubbing her hands over her body, trying to scrub the thoughts from her mind. She rolled her eyes at the thought of online dating, feeling a sting of frustration.

This was why she was hitting on Helena. It had been far too long since she had been with anyone.

The world felt so different now. When she was younger, dating had been simple. Just meet someone, grab coffee, and see where things went. But now, everyone was behind screens, swiping left or right on profiles. I can't even remember the last time I had a decent date, she thought.

Her thoughts drifted again to the hot redhead in the red business suit.

"Helena Wolfe," Sloane said to herself with a half-smirk. She wondered how someone so privileged could seem so complicated. Helena always walked into a room like she owned it and turned the air as icy as her personality. Sloane closed her eyes for a moment, luxuriating in the warmth of the water on her skin. She thought about her own upbringing—smaller, middle-class, but filled with love and encouragement—a stark contrast from Helena's. Her parents had worked hard, always pushing Sloane to do better for herself. "You can achieve anything," they'd say, and she believed them. She reminded herself that she had come from a really great place, but it wasn't easy feeling inferior to someone like Helena.

Sloane rubbed the soap into her skin, creating a gentle lather. It's Helena's privilege that shapes her, and it doesn't have to make me feel small, she thought, scrubbing a little harder. But deep down, there was a nagging doubt. Maybe she was being presumptuous. Maybe Helena's controlling attitude didn't come from privilege but

from the pressures of living up to lofty expectations.

“Ugh, I’m thinking about this way too much,” she said aloud. She shook her head as she rinsed away the soap and let the water cascade down her body. She couldn’t control how others acted, but she could choose how she reacted. Stepping out of the shower, Sloane wrapped herself in a soft, fluffy towel. Leaving her worries behind, she took a deep breath, ready to embrace whatever came next.

“Tomorrow’s a new day,” she declared to herself, a hint of determination creeping into her voice. With a small smile, she stepped into her room, leaving behind the thoughts of a too-complicated world and settled into the comfort of her favorite book and an evening of peace.

5

HELENA

Helena Wolfe sat at her large desk in her office high above the bustling streets of the city. The sun poured through the floor-to-ceiling windows as she flipped through a stack of reports, her brow furrowed in concentration. The soft hum of her computer filled the quiet space, mixing with the distant sounds of the city below.

But today, Helena could feel her thoughts drifting away from the numbers and graphs before her. She would frequently glance at the clock, noting how the hours slipped by. She longed for a break from the busy work, but it seemed that every time she put down one report, another would come in.

Just then, the door to her office creaked open, and Mark walked in. Helena noticed he had a slight frown on his face, his brow furrowed in worry. He was usually calm and collected, so this expression caught her attention immediately.

“Helena,” Mark started, his voice a little shaky. “Can we talk?”

Helena leaned back in her chair, a sense of unease creeping in. “Sure, Mark. What’s on your mind?”

He stepped closer, the air between them thick with tension. “It’s about the Thompson Industries deal.” He paused, fiddling with a pen that sat on her desk. “They’ve mentioned something kind of last minute.”

Her curiosity was piqued. “Last minute? What’s going on?”

Mark glanced down at the floor, hesitating. “They want you to attend a business trip in Hawaii this weekend.”

Helena’s jaw dropped. “What? Hawaii? This weekend? Do they think I’m made of free time?” She rubbed her temples, feeling a headache brew. “This is so sudden. We’re already so close to dotting the Xs and crossing the Ts with the merger!”

Mark nodded. “I know, but they want to ensure you’re going to represent the company culture they’re losing.. They’re also inviting their best employees as a going-away party, and they think it’s important for you to be there.”

Helena let out a frustrated sigh. “And what, pray tell, does Hawaii have to do with any of this? It sounds like a vacation, not a business meeting.”

“Yeah,” Mark agreed, “but there’s more. I overheard that a competitor is going, too, and you know how their CEO Charles Thompson is.” He looked back at Helena, trying to gauge her reaction. “He’s traditional and a bit outdated. He likes to shmooze folks and to be shmoozed back, especially when it comes to big deals like this.”

“I can’t believe this,” Helena muttered under her breath. She tapped her fingers

against her desk, considering her options. “Why do they want a lavish trip now when we’re so close to the finish line? It feels unnecessary.”

“He probably wants to impress everyone, show that he can still play the game,” Mark explained, crossing his arms. “But you being there could really seal the deal.”

Helena took a deep breath, trying to calm the storm brewing inside her. She liked to be organized and efficient, and this last-minute trip threw a wrench in her carefully laid plans. “So, what do you think? Should I go?”

“Honestly, I think it’s a good idea to show your face,” Mark replied, his voice firm. “You might even like it. It’s a chance to show your leadership skills and adaptability. Plus, some fresh ocean air wouldn’t hurt, right?”

Helena imagined the gentle waves lapping against the shore. Maybe a little bit of sun wouldn’t be the worst thing. The thought of the ocean sounded refreshing, even if it was wrapped in layers of business obligations.

“Alright,” Helena said finally, determination growing inside her. “I’ll go. But I’ll make sure they know I’m not just there for the beach. This is business, after all.”

Mark smiled, relief washing over his face. “Great! I’ll handle the travel arrangements and make sure everything is smooth.”

As he walked toward the door, Helena called out, “Mark, wait.” He turned back, looking at her expectantly. “Let’s make sure we have a solid action plan before I go. I’m not just stepping into this situation unprepared.”

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“Absolutely,” Mark replied. “We’ll brainstorm some strategies to handle the meetings and strengthen our connection with their team.”

Helena returned to her desk, feeling a spark of energy woven through her earlier frustration as she jotted down notes. Maybe this trip could bring something good after all. It could be the opportunity to solidify their partnership and set a strong foundation for the future.

As the door clicked shut after Mark left, Helena leaned back in her chair, sighing heavily. She fiddled with a pen, twirling it between her fingers. The idea of meeting her new employees wasn’t terrifying... Well, maybe a little. She had always been more comfortable closing deals in glass towers than mingling in a room full of strangers, much less on a beach.

Yet somewhere buried beneath her annoyance, there was a small spark of interest. Helena took a sip of her coffee, savoring the rich flavor. She could feel the tension in her shoulders slowly easing. Perhaps this trip could turn into something meaningful. She could be a leader who connects with her team, not just a name on a door plaque.

Shifting in her leather chair, she recalled the meeting with Thompson Industries last week. The room had been filled with sharp suits and bright ideas, but it was Sloane Callahan who had captured her attention. Helena couldn’t shake off the memory of Sloane leaning in closer after the meeting, her voice low and teasing. "We could be more than just business partners, Helena."

Helena’s cheeks flushed at the thought. Why would Sloane say that? Did she somehow know Helena was into women? It certainly wasn’t public information. The

question looped in Helena's mind like an unwelcome song stuck on repeat. Her heart fluttered at the memory of strands of Sloane's golden-brown hair falling gracefully around her face, the way her eyes sparkled with mischief, and the subtle hint of flirtation in her tone.

And the way her gaze had dropped to Helena's breasts and then she had licked her lip.

Helena had felt a bolt of desire between her legs at that point and it hadn't entirely gone away since.

She had kept her personal life tightly wrapped and separate from her business life. Not that there had ever been much of a personal life. Sure, a bit of dating, some friends with benefits on occasion, but women often seemed to want more than Helena was prepared to give. She realized early on that she wasn't cut out for a relationship. She clearly made a terrible girlfriend.

With a huff, Helena tried to focus on her work. But then her curiosity got the better of her. She opened her laptop and typed in Sloane's name, hoping to find out more. A quick search turned up empty on Facebook. No profile, no clues—nothing. Frustrated, she leaned back in her chair, her head spinning with thoughts about the merger and Sloane's mysterious invitation.

“Ugh, fine.” She opened Instagram instead. It was a treasure trove of visuals, and soon enough, she discovered Sloane's profile. She waded through a few images, intrigued by what she saw. There were photos of Sloane doing yoga, her toned body showing off years of hard work and dedication. Her ass in tights was a pleasure to see, indeed. Helena felt a flutter in her stomach as she marveled Sloane's fit body. She frowned, glancing at the date on the photo, realizing it was two years old. Maybe she's not as in shape now, Helena hoped to herself.

She navigated to the tagged photos and felt a jolt of surprise. Sloane was at a pride parade dressed in a vibrant outfit, and her face radiated joy.

“Is she that out that she would attend a pride?” Helena pondered, biting her lower lip.

Clearly Sloane Callahan is gay. Helena hadn’t necessarily thought it before, but why would she have hit on Helena if she wasn’t into women. But, going to a pride and allowing yourself to be photographed... in Helena’s mind, that wassupergay. Gay-er than she had ever imagined.

Helena herself had always made sure to be out of town when gay pride was in town. Sure, she might date women, but it was all behind closed doors.

She quickly rationalized that tons of allies attend those pride events. It wasn’t a big deal that Sloane was there. Maybe she was just attending with a friend.

Helena felt annoyed at her growing obsession with this woman she barely knew.

She exhaled and came back to the present, feeling the pressure of the merger looming over her like a heavy blanket once more. Her father's expectations weighed heavily on her shoulders. He had entrusted her with the company, and now she had to show up, play nice, and seal the deal with Thompson Industries and Sloane.

Despite trying to stay focused on her task,, Helena’s mind drifted again to Sloane.

Just then, the office door creaked open, pulling Helena from her thoughts. Sarah clutched a stack of papers. “Helena, that meeting is starting in ten minutes,” she announced, her tone brisk but friendly.

“Right!” Helena replied, pushing aside her thoughts of Sloane. She took a deep breath, straightening her jacket as she gathered her papers. “Thanks, Sarah. You

always know when I need a reminder.”

“Of course. And remember,” Sarah added with a playful smirk, “try not to think about Hawaii too much until you get there. Focus on the task at hand.”

Helena chuckled lightly, shaking her head. “Easier said than done.”

As Helena walked out of her office, she felt a mix of excitement and nerves swirling inside her. Would Sloane Callahan be in Hawaii? Would she smile coyly again, or would it all come crashing down when business turned back to business?

6

SLOANE

Sloane adjusted her seat belt in the cozy first-class chair as the airplane rumbled down the runway at Los Angeles International Airport. She knew the business trip in Hawaii would mean long hours, but it also promised sun, sand, and maybe just a bit of relaxation in between meetings. With a sigh, she leaned back, taking in the luxurious space around her.

After she felt satisfied she caught her breath, she pulled out her tablet to review the merger documents one last time, but she was distracted by the plane taking off..

Just as Sloane was about to go back to her work, she caught a glimpse of vibrant red hair out of the corner of her eye. It wasn't just any red hair; it was that unmistakable bob cut belonging to Helena. Sloane froze for a moment, her heart doing a little flip. She had known that Helena would be attending the trip, but she hadn't expected to see her on the same flight.

Trying to keep her cool, Sloane ducked behind the seat in front of her, hoping to hide.

The last time they chatted, Sloane had attempted a silly forward advance, and Helena's polite but clear rejection had stung a little more than Sloane had anticipated.

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She peered over the seat, taking a quick look at Helena. The red-haired woman was settling in her seat, fiddling with her tray table. She saw Helena glance around, her gaze sweeping over the first-class passengers. Sloane ducked down even lower, her heart racing. She felt like a creep for staring, but her eyes just wouldn't leave Helena.

The flight attendant leaned close to Helena, and Sloane could hear Helena chirp back, "Ooh, I'll take a glass of the Chardonnay, please. And can I get the chicken salad with a side of fruit?"

Even her drink choices sounded elegant and composed. Sloane took a sip of water, trying to calm her nerves.

Sloane's mind drifted to their last encounter, flashing back to Helena's surprised expression the moment Sloane had stepped out of her comfort zone. Flirting had always been awkward for Sloane, and she remembered how Helena had glared at her.

"Do you need anything else?" the flight attendant asked as she delivered Helena's order.

"No, thank you!" Helena replied cheerily and began scrolling through the in-flight entertainment options, her fingers moving nimbly over the screen.

Sloane found herself captivated, stolen moments slipping by as she watched Helena make selections, giggling softly at a comedy and shaking her head at a romance film. She felt like a voyeur, caught between delight and embarrassment. Just then, Helena stretched her arms high above her head.

Sloane's heart sank when Helena turned slightly and caught sight of her. "Callahan!" she shrieked, her eyes wide.

Sloane stumbled into the open space, rising up quickly as if she had been caught stealing cookies from a jar. "Oh hi, Ms. Wolfe! I didn't realize we would be on the same flight." Her cheeks flushed crimson.

"What a coincidence!" Helena replied. "If I'm honest, I'm a bit annoyed that this whole trip was thrown on me."

"Yeah, that's Mr. Thompson for you," Sloane agreed, feeling slightly more relaxed now that they were speaking. "I just wish I were there for vacation instead of business, but you take what you can get."

"Indeed," Helena said. "I was thinking, maybe while we are on this trip we should drop some of the formalities outside of the boardroom. You can call me Helena."

Sloane smiled to herself. Maybe she was getting somewhere. "OK, Helena. Nice to meet you. You should call me Sloane."

"Nice to meet you, Sloane."

Helena chuckled softly before turning her attention back to her screen. Sloane tried to stay busy reviewing merger documents but gave up and watched a movie instead.

Six hours after takeoff, the plane landed in Honolulu, and Sloane waited for her turn to disembark. After being given the all-clear from the flight attendant, she stepped into the aisle and reached up to grab her carry-on luggage. Every step she took toward the exit, she felt lighter.

Hawaii, here I come, she thought as excitement flickered in her heart when a flight

attendant placed a lei around her neck in greeting.

The warm Hawaiian breeze greeted her like an old friend, the salty air tangling in her hair as it lifted her spirits. She didn't take long to grab her check-in bag before heading toward the car rental desk. She needed to get to the hotel and prepare for the business meetings that would consume her mind and schedule for the next few days.

Just as she was sliding into a bright red convertible with the top down, Sloane caught sight of Helena across the parking lot loading her bags into a black luxury SUV.. "Of course," Sloane murmured, rolling her eyes.

With a light tap of her fingers, Sloane pulled out of the parking lot, her heart racing with anticipation as she followed the winding roads toward the resort. Palm trees danced in the wind, and the scent of salt and flowers filled the air. "I could get used to this."

By the time she reached the resort, her mood was dramatically better. She parked, took a deep breath, and stepped out, ready to absorb every ounce of Hawaiian beauty surrounding her. But just as she walked up to the grand entrance, Sloane spotted a familiar figure. Helena was already there, standing at the check-in desk, her arms crossed tightly around herself. Sloane noticed she wasn't wearing a fresh-flower lei.

Sloane blinked, half-amused and half-exasperated. "Well, look who finally made it," she called, a teasing lilt to her voice that floated over the warm air.

Helena looked over her shoulder, her expression as hard as the stone walls of the resort. "Oh, it's you again," she snapped, straightening up as if she was trying to regain her authority in this laid-back atmosphere.

Sloane chuckled, shrugging her shoulders. "Maybe we should've carpooled, huh? One less car on the road."

Helena's lips twisted into a tight frown. "That's unrealistic, Sloane. We both have our own agendas."

Sloane raised an eyebrow, the edges of her smile turning downward slightly. "Right, because sharing a ride would have messed up your strict schedule." She tried to keep her tone light, but something inside her tightened. The relentless determination in Helena was tiring.

"I'm just being practical," Helena replied, tapping her fingers against the counter. "There's no time for jokes when there's so much at stake."

Sloane nodded, trying to push down her irritation. "Sure, I understand. But, hey, we're in Hawaii, right? Lighten up a bit. Maybe try a pineapple drink. You know, relax?"

Helena simply turned her gaze back to the front desk attendant, her jaw set as her irritation thickened the air between them. "Business is business, Sloane."

Feeling thwarted, Sloane moved to the side, rolling her eyes as she took out her phone. "Business is better when you're not a square," she muttered softly, not caring if Helena overheard.

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The moment passed as they both waited for their keys. "Just remember," Sloane finally said, forcing a smile. "You're here to showcase how adaptable to our company culture you can be."

Helena didn't even look at her, adjusting her blazer as she straightened. "We'll see," she replied flatly.

Sloane stood by the check-in desk of the resort, feeling a mix of excitement and anxiety. This was supposed to be a relaxing trip, a welcome break from her busy life as a corporate lawyer. But standing next to her was Helena, and from the moment they saw each other, Sloane could feel the familiar icy aura that surrounded her.

"Welcome to Paradise Resort! How can I help you today?" The attendant smiled brightly, his shirt crisp and clean, standing out against the backdrop of tropical flowers surrounding the desk.

Sloane smiled back. "Hi, we're here to check in."

"Great! Can I have your names, please?" the attendant asked, typing on the keyboard.

"Sloane Callahan," Sloane said, her voice steady.

"Helena Wolfe," Helena added impatiently, her tone flat as if she were reading from a script. She glanced annoyingly at Sloane.

The attendant nodded as he typed their names. "All set! Room 301." He handed Sloane a key, the metal warm in her palm.

"Wait, what about me?" Helena's voice shot through the air, sharp and piercing.

"301. That's what I said," the attendant replied, glancing at the screen again.

"No, no. That can't be right. I want to see the computer," Helena demanded, her eyes narrowing.

Sloane's heart raced as she looked between Helena and the man.

The attendant blinked, surprised. "Uh, let me check again," he said, his fingers dancing over the keys. "Yes, here it is. Both of you are listed for room 301."

"This won't do. I cannot share a room with her. We don't even know each other!" Helena snapped, pointing at Sloane as if she were a piece of garbage.

"I'll book another room."

The attendant frowned, shaking his head. "I'm sorry, ma'am. The hotel is fully booked."

"This is ridiculous!" Helena huffed, crossing her arms.

Sloane furrowed her brow, bewildered. "Helena, it's just for a couple of nights. I'm not justifying this in any way; I thought I'd have my own accommodations as well. But we've been working together, so don't act like we've never met.

Sloane felt a mix of anxiety and frustration bubbling inside her. She had been trying hard to keep her cool with Helena, but it wasn't easy with her icy demeanor pressing down on her, making everything tense and awkward.

"I'll go to a different hotel." Helena's voice was cold as ice.

“There won’t be any other accommodation on the island, Ms. Wolfe,” the attendant said, a concerned look on his face. “Not this weekend, not with our annual beach event on. To be honest, the Thompson Industries event was a challenge to get all the guests booked in for a start.”

After it was clear there were no other options, Helena huffed. “Fine, I guess I have no choice,” she said, marching away towards the elevator, her heels clicking on the tiled floor. Sloane hesitated for a moment before trailing behind her.

As they walked to room 301, Sloane looked around. The resort was beautiful. Colorful flowers bloomed everywhere, and a gentle breeze floated by, smelling of salt and sunshine.

Helena led the way, not speaking a word, just guiding them through the flower-laden path and up an elevator. They reached room 301, and Sloane opened the door. The room was spacious and bright, decorated with vibrant patterns and soft lighting. Her eyes widened as she took in the view of the glistening ocean from their large window. But her excitement faded when she noticed there was only one queen-sized bed.

“Great,” Helena said, her voice dripping with sarcasm. “Just great. Look at this place. One bed for two people.” She rolled her eyes, her irritation palpable.

“And a couch. I mean, it’s nice,” Sloane said cautiously, trying to soothe the situation. “It’s just a couple of days...”

“Stop trying to sugarcoat this!” Helena snapped, already reaching for her phone. “I’m going to call someone who can fix this.”

Sloane watched as Helena started dialing, the phone ringing loudly in the room. The tension hung heavy in the air, and Sloane felt her stomach twist with anxiety. She wished they had gotten separate rooms, wished Helena would just relax, but none of

that seemed likely at the moment. How did this happen?

As the phone rang on the other end, Sloane took a deep breath, wondering what was going to happen next.

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But all she could think was how much she dreaded sharing a room with someone who felt like an ice queen in paradise.

7

HELENA

Helena sat on the edge of the crisp hotel bed, her mind racing as she held her phone tightly. The tropical air wafted through the open window, and she could hear the ocean waves crashing in the distance, but all she could focus on was the conversation unfolding on the phone.

“Sarah, why did my room get mixed up with Sloane Callahan’s?” Helena's voice was sharp, her eyebrows knitting together in frustration.

“Helena, I told you. We had to leave a lot of the bookings to that package Thompson Industries reserved,” Sarah replied from the other end. Helena could hear the papers rustling and the occasional sigh in the background. “I thought you would get your own room, and I can contact them if you want. I’ll sort this out.”

“No,” Helena snapped, clenching her jaw. “The desk attendant said the whole hotel is booked. He said the whole fucking island is booked. It’s not going to work. I’ll just see what I can do.” She ended the call.

From her perch in the armchair, Sloane straightened up and glanced over at Helena, her expression mildly amused. Helena could feel Sloane’s eyes on her, but she tried to ignore the distraction. She rose from the bed and paced near the window, trying to

calm her racing heart. The Hawaiian sun cast a warm glow through the glass, but it did little to soothe her.

The last thing she needed was to be trapped in a room with her rival who she had been thinking about just about non stop.

“Just think about it, Helena,” Sloane interjected gently, her tone smooth and collected. “It may have been a mix-up, but causing a fuss right now might bite you in the butt later.”

“What do you mean?” Helena shot back. She felt a tug of irritation wash over her.

Sloane leaned back, folding her arms. “Look, I’m representing Thompson Industries. They’re concerned about this merger, and they need us all to get along. This could really start this business trip on bad footing.”

Helena’s frustrations boiled inside her, but Sloane’s point hung in the air like an uninvited guest. Helena thought about the pressure her father had put on her to close the deal and how he mentioned bringing her brother into the discussions—and possibly replacing her as CEO—if she couldn’t manage it. She didn’t want to fail. Not now, not at this critical moment.

“But, it’s ridiculous, I bet the men aren’t having to share rooms,” Helena said, feeling her heart race. She didn’t like being pushed into a corner. Sloane stood up and walked toward Helena, her movements fluid and sure. “I understand, but let’s be smart about this. You’re right to be annoyed, but how you handle it will define this trip. I get that it’s not ideal, but showing adaptability will reflect well on all of us.”

“Fine. I guess I’ll hold off on kicking off further for now,” Helena said, her voice softer. “I just wanted to start things off right.”

“Me too,” Sloane replied, a hint of a smile on her lips. “But first, let’s enjoy this beautiful hotel. We only have to sleep in this room. You’ll have time to see if you can address this tomorrow.”

She looked out the window at the sun glowing on the ocean, the waves rolling in and out. For a moment, she could almost forget about the stressful trip ahead of her.

“You know,” Sloane said, breaking Helena from her thoughts as she settled back into the armchair, “Hawaii isn’t so bad. Even if our rooms got mixed up.”

“Easy for you to say. You’re not the one stuck in a room with only one bed with a sharky corporate lawyer,” Helena replied.

Sloane chuckled. “True, but think of it as an adventure. We can fill our mornings with meetings and power lunches, but the evenings are ours. This place has so much to offer.”

The flicker of excitement in Sloane’s eyes was contagious, and Helena felt a spark of annoyance again as they exchanged glances. “Your positivity isn’t helping.”

Helena sat on the edge of the hotel bed, running her fingers through her hair, frustrated. The room was simple yet elegant, with light-colored walls and a big window that overlooked the water. It should have felt cozy, but instead, Helena felt trapped. Sharing a room with Sloane Callahan was not part of her plans, especially when the only bed was a queen.

Being fiercely attracted to Sloane made this all the harder.

Sloane unpacked her bags, and she seemed completely unbothered by the fact that they were forced to share such close quarters. She studied the room as she carefully placed her clothes in a neat pile on a chair. Helena couldn’t understand how Sloane

could maintain that level of composure.

Frustration bubbled up inside of her again, and she couldn't stay silent anymore.

“This is so inappropriate. How are we going to get rest with one person on this tiny couch? Really?”

Sloane paused, turning to face Helena. “I don't think it's that big of a deal, Helena,” she replied smoothly, as if she was used to handling awkward situations.

Helena threw her hands up in exasperation. “Seriously? You don't think this is weird?”

Sloane shrugged, a flicker of uncertainty crossing her face. “I think it's okay. I mean, you know we're both adults, and?—”

“Wait a minute,” Helena interrupted sharply, her voice rising. “How do you know it's okay for me? You don't know anything about me. You hit on me the other day! Entirely inappropriately I might add.”

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“Oh, come on, Helena, lighten up. I hit on you. You shut me down. End of story. No big deal.”

“I’m not even...”

Sloane raised an eyebrow.

“Not even what, Helena?” said Sloane with a look that suggested that she knew damn well that Helena was. She fixed her gaze on Helena’s big brown eyes.

“Not even...” Helena’s voice was quiet and then petered out. “OK, well maybe I am a bit. But, nobody knows. How on earth would you presume to know?”

“I’ve seen you look at me,” Sloane countered, clearly not backing down from the challenge.

Helena flared up instantly, “I certainly have NOT looked at you. This is beyond a joke now. You need to back off.”

Sloane put her hands up, “Ok, ok. Calm down. I’m not doing anything. You can be gay or straight or bi or in the closet or whatever, nothing to do with me.”

Helena knew she had issues with her sexuality, and it seemed that Sloane was regretting bringing it up now.

Helena crossed her arms, her brows furrowing. “This whole thing is just ridiculous, Sloane. Why would you even say that?”

“I didn’t mean to upset you.” Sloane’s voice was softer now, more sincere. “I just mean that sexuality can be fluid. You get to choose whatever you want to be. And you also have no obligation to share it. If it makes you feel any more comfortable, I’m also...” She trailed off, her eyes darting to the floor.

“Also what?” Helena asked, her temper still simmering, but curiosity piquing through her annoyance.

“Also a lesbian,” Sloane admitted, running a hand through her wavy hair, appearing increasingly awkward.

“I am certainly NOT a lesbian,” Helena flared again, her eyes blazing in defence.

Helena didn’t know what she was calling her sexuality, she wasn’t into men, never had been. But she had still never been comfortable with branding herself as a lesbian. So her defence had come out faster than she wanted to. But she wasn’t about to explain any of that to Sloane.

“I just thought we were on the same level, you know? So it wouldn’t be weird for either of us. But clearly, I misjudged.” She sighed, shaking her head. “I shouldn’t have brought it up. I’m sorry.”

As Sloane went back to unpacking with a slight flush on her cheeks, Helena felt a bit of her anger melt away. She sighed, rubbing her temples. “Can I just...have a moment in the bathroom to change and get ready for bed? It’s been a long day.”

“Of course,” Sloane replied quickly, relief washing over her face. “Take your time.”

Helena stood up, grabbing her clothes. “Thanks.” As she headed toward the bathroom, she couldn’t shake the feeling of unease.

She stood in the small, dimly lit bathroom as she waited for the water to heat up for her shower.. As steam filled the room, she looked at her reflection in the mirror, taking a deep breath. Her brow furrowed as she thought everything that led her to this moment.

“What a day,” she muttered to herself, brushing a loose strand of hair behind her ear. It had been a long flight, and Sloane had been seated right near her. They’d exchanged awkward glances and made small talk. Just when Helena thought she would have a peaceful escape from the world, they’d both ended up checking into the same hotel—and the most baffling part, the same room.

“I can’t believe my life right now.” She sighed, her irritation bubbling beneath the surface.

Sloane was nice enough, but the whole situation felt so inappropriately intimate.

Which it probably wouldn’t have done had Helena not found Sloane so painfully attractive.

And now, Helena was wrestling with a whole new layer of frustration after the unexpected revelation that they both were attracted to women.

It shouldn’t have been unexpected, Helena rationalized. But, somehow, it still was, for her at least. Not, as it seemed, for Sloane.

Her mind wandered to the navy jumpsuit that Sloane had worn. It looked comfortable and form-fitting, yet classy. Helena shook her head, trying to push the thoughts away. “Focus, Helena. Just take a shower.”

She stepped in, closing the curtain behind her, and felt the hot water wash over her, cleansing not just her skin but her swirling thoughts. As the steam enveloped her, she

could still feel Sloane's soft presence from the other room, and it made Helena's heart race.

Why does she have to be so...everywhere? What if all this is some kind of master plan? A trap? Helena thought. Her heart began to pound at the thought. Sloane was charming. She could easily lure someone in. What if this was part of a master scheme to control the outcome of the merger? "Calm down, Hel," she whispered to herself, shaking her head as she rinsed off the soap. "You're being ridiculous."

But for a moment, she imagined what it would be like to face Sloane with no makeup on, her skin bare and vulnerable. Sloane was so naturally beautiful. The paranoia started to melt away, replaced by an odd sense of relief. If Sloane was also a woman who loved women, maybe this situation wasn't as inappropriate as she thought.

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With the water hitting her back, she found herself smiling just a little as a thought crossed her mind. Maybe she could be friends with Sloane, but would Sloane want to be friends with someone like her? And is it really ok to crush on a friend the way that Helena was beginning to crush on Sloane? The speck of confidence she had slowly began to dampen.

“Okay, okay,” Helena said, stepping out of the shower and grabbing a towel. “Pull it together.”

She glanced at her makeup bag on the counter, a splurge of colors tumbling out like a vibrant jumble of candy. After a moment of hesitation, she opened it and decided just to apply a splash of blush to her cheeks and some chapstick. Just enough to look fresh, but not too much. Peering into the mirror, she questioned Sloane’s motives again before she dismissed them, reasoning it didn’t matter what Sloane thought. With her heart racing, she took a deep breath and opened the bathroom door. The moment she stepped out of the warm solitude, she was met with Sloane stretched out on the bed, flipping through channels on the TV.

“Hey, there you are!” Sloane said, her tone light and friendly, her smile easy. “I thought you were hiding from me.”

Helena felt her nervousness wash away slightly as she braced herself against the bathroom door frame, her voice steadier than it felt. “I didn’t want to come out looking like a mess.”

“I doubt you could ever look like a mess,” Sloane replied playfully, her eyes twinkling. “But it’s nice to finally see you. You’ve got the whole ‘fresh face’ look

going on. Very chic. I like the loungewear. Is that Versace?"

Helena looked down at her night attire, feeling exposed, but she was glad to see Sloane had also gotten into pajamas. Maybe this wouldn't be so bad after all. They were just two women in a hotel room—nothing more, nothing less. Or perhaps, just maybe, there was the spark of friendship kindling underneath.

"Yes, thanks," Helena said, a genuine smile breaking across her face. "I mean, it feels a little vulnerable to be without make up post 40."

"Oh, trust me. I'm nearing forty too, I understand," Sloane replied. "Now, want to order some room service and watch something terrible on TV?"

"I guess," Helena said, feeling more at ease. As they sat together, Helena couldn't shake off the feeling that maybe this whole situation was bizarre.

Sloane laughed as she flicked through the TV channels. "Want to watch *The Office* instead? It's kind of late to start a movie. You like that show, right?"

Helena raised an eyebrow, momentarily distracted. "Of course I love it! Who doesn't love Michael Scott's clueless antics?"

Soon, their room service arrived, carrying the rich smell of pizza, fresh salad, and golden chicken tenders that filled the room. As they dug into their food, sharing laughs over the quirky humor of the show, something shifted in the air. Sloane sat across from her on the couch, and Helena couldn't help but notice the little things, like how Sloane nibbled on a chicken tender and how her eyes lit up during a funny scene.

"See? This is way better than sulking alone," Sloane said, her laughter infectious.

“Maybe,” Helena mumbled, but her heart wasn’t fully in it. She quickly shoved a piece of pizza in her mouth to distract herself so she didn’t have to think too hard about what she was feeling.

After the episode ended, the room fell silent. Helena felt the awkwardness creeping back in. She had to get up. Standing wasn’t a problem; it was the unsettling sensation in her chest that made her feel nervous. She didn’t want to analyze her feelings, especially about Sloane. They were just colleagues, after all.

"Mind if I brush my teeth first?" Sloane asked.

“Sure, go ahead,” Helena replied, trying not to trip over her words.

After Sloane was done, Helena walked to the bathroom, and she couldn’t shake the undercurrent of nervousness. There was something about Sloane that made her pulse quicken, something unnervingly intriguing. Maybe it was those blue eyes. Or perhaps it was simply her confidence. Helena quickly washed her hands and splashed her face with cold water, hoping to reset her mind.

Sloane had such confidence in her sexuality and although that was terrifying, it was also so attractive. Helena realized suddenly how little experience she had with women and she felt very exposed.

When she returned, Sloane was trying to adjust on the couch, her long legs sticking out awkwardly. Helena disliked how her heart thudded at the sight. Sloane looked just a little uncomfortable, her usual poise tinged with unease.

“This couch is not made for sleeping. I feel like a pretzel,” Sloane joked, a light blush creeping up her cheeks.

Helena felt a twinge of guilt. "You know, you can join me in the bed if you want. It

would be less...cramped," she offered hesitantly.

"Really?" She sat up perched on one arm, looking over.

"As long as you promise you didn't orchestrate this whole thing just to get me into bed," Helena joked, but she secretly was curious.

"What? Why would you think I'd want to?" Sloane asked.

Helena glanced away, swallowing hard. "I don't know. You were hitting on me after our meeting."

"Ugh, not this again," Sloane said, rolling her eyes. "Maybe lawyers are hard to trust, but I promise you I wouldn't pull a stunt like this. I have no idea how all this happened. It must have been a mix-up with the reservation."

Helena shrugged, her thoughts spinning. They were colleagues, but there was something more right now. Something that made her cheeks warm. Maybe it was just the pizza talking, but she didn't entirely believe that. Sloane's laughter lingered in her mind, intoxicating yet confusing.

Sloane's pyjamas consisted of striped PJ bottoms and a tight tank top that showed off the outline of her breasts. And her nipples. Helena couldn't help her eyes sweeping over them.

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Sloane definitely noticed, but pretended not to.

With a resigned sigh, Sloane climbed into bed next to Helena. “Just know that if you snore, I’m out of here.”

“Deal,” Helena replied, trying to sound confident but feeling slightly breathless.

As they settled in, the room wrapped them in a comfortable darkness. The only sound was the gentle hum from the TV, and the warmth from Sloane’s presence sent a whole new set of alarms buzzing in Helena’s head. They stayed that way for nearly an hour, and Helena barely heard Sloane’s soft voice pierce the silence that, to Helena, seemed so loud.

“Hey, Helena? I just wanted to say you’re not as uptight as I thought.”

Helena smiled, a mix of emotions washing over her. “Thanks, I guess. You’re not so bad either.”

They both fell silent again, but this time it felt different. The world outside their hotel room faded, and Helena felt a buzz between them.

8

SLOANE

Sloane lay in bed, the soft glow of the Hawaiian sunset spilling through the hotel room window. The warm breeze brushed the curtains, a gentle reminder that she was

far from home. But it wasn't just the beauty of Hawaii that had her mind whirling. It was the woman beside her.

Helena Wolfe, a woman she barely knew, was turned away from her in the bed. In the dim light, Helena's red hair shone. Sloane tried to keep her distance and give Helena her space, and she kept her body stiff as she laid flat on her back. The sheets felt cool against her skin, but her thoughts were anything but calm. She mentally replayed everything that led them up to sharing a bed together: the flight, the hotel mix-up, the shared night of watching TV. Helena wore a soft satin matching pajama set that looked luxurious. Sloane's old PJ pants and tank top felt even more tired beside it. She risked a glance at Helena's profile, the way her bare shoulder peeked out from under the covers. Sloane felt a blush rise to her cheeks. Why was she entertaining these thoughts?

Sloane's eyes darted to Helena's back, and she wondered if she were asleep. It was quiet, but Sloane couldn't shake the feeling of a charged tension lingering between them. The air felt thick, almost electric. Just a few hours ago, Helena had asked if Sloane had orchestrated this whole hotel room mix-up. Sloane understood the jab, but it struck a chord. Was she still feeling the sting of that accusation?

Sloane shook her head, trying to free herself from those thoughts. She stared at the ceiling, counting the little patterns in the tiles. It was easy to get lost in her head, but that didn't help the situation. The more she thought about Helena, the more she felt crazy. "Get a grip, Sloane," she whispered softly to herself.

But it was hard to ignore the wild thoughts fluttering around in her mind. What if they got intimate? She bit her lip, a mix of irritation and temptation swirled inside her. The idea made her stomach flip. Why did she even find Helena attractive? Maybe it was the confidence she projected or the fire in her eyes. Or the intense vulnerability to her when she avoided talking about her sexuality. Whatever it was, Sloane couldn't deny it anymore.

“Hey,” Sloane finally said, breaking the silence that hung between them like a thick fog. Her voice was softer than she intended, and she felt the heat of embarrassment creeping up her neck.

“Hmm,” came Helena’s quiet reply, but she didn’t turn to face Sloane.

“Are you mad at me?” Sloane asked, a hint of nervousness creeping in. It seemed absurd to think that sharing a room could cause such tension, but here they were.

“No, just tired,” Helena said, her voice still distant. Sloane wished she could see Helena's expression, wished she could read what was happening in her mind, but the way Helena’s back was turned left everything feeling uncertain.

Sloane took a deep breath, feeling overwhelmed by so many emotions. “I really didn’t plan for us to end up here together,” she said, her voice more steady this time. “It was just a mix-up. I promise.”

Helena sighed softly, and for a moment, Sloane thought she heard a hint of laughter in it. “I’m trying to believe you.” Helena’s voice was teasing now, but there was also something serious in her tone.

Sloane frowned, irritation sparking within her. “You think I wanted to be in the same room as you? I mean, I don’t mean it like that, just that I didn’t plan it, Helena. It just happened.”

“Right.” Helena shifted slightly, and Sloane felt her heart race. “But you didn’t mind, though, did you? You were excited to share the room.”

“No, I wasn’t!” Sloane exclaimed a little too quickly. “It was just...unexpected, that’s all.” The truth hit her like a wave. Deep down, the idea of sharing the space with Helena felt thrilling and scary all at once.

“Sure.” Helena’s voice held a knowing tone that made Sloane’s cheeks heat up again.

Sloane scoffed playfully, trying to fight back a grin. “Maybe you just don’t trust anybody, not just lawyers.”

They both fell silent again, the air filled with unspoken words. Sloane stared at the ceiling once more, feeling turmoil inside. She wanted to know if Helena felt the same strange pull she did. “What are you thinking?” she finally asked, breaking the silence again.

Helena turned slightly, giving Sloane a glimpse of her profile. “How maybe I have a little bit of a hard time trusting people. I’m supposed to always be on top in my family. It’s a lonely place to be, wondering who is pining for your downfall. You did call me out on my trust issues pretty quickly.”

Sloane chuckled nervously. “I just said that...thinking how you probably think I’m some sort of manipulative lawyer. I promise I’m not. It says a lot about you to even admit you struggle trusting people.”

Helena’s mouth curved into a small smirk, and Sloane felt a smile creep across her own face. “Believe me, I have my reasons.”

“I bet,” Sloane said, her heart pounding. Maybe, just maybe, this surreal night wouldn’t lead to anything bad. The unexpected was often where the best stories began, and for Sloane, the night was just getting started.

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“So...you’re used to being on top?” Sloane asked playfully after a long moment, her voice teasing as she raised an eyebrow. “Does that pertain to, like, all areas of life?” Helena’s eyes widened in surprise, her cheeks flushing a soft pink. It was clear that Sloane had struck a nerve. “I, um, I don’t actually know,” Helena stammered, her voice barely above a whisper.

“What do you mean you don’t know?” Sloane pressed, a playful smile tugging at her lips as she adjusted her position to face Helena more directly.

Helena took a deep breath, her gaze drifting to the ceiling as if she would find the answer up there “Are you really so decisive that you only pick one side—dominant or submissive?”

Sloane smirked, clearly enjoying the conversation. “I guess I’ve always leaned a little more toward one side. But I’m curious about you now. You said things have changed a lot for you lately. Are you saying you’ve been in control?”

“Yeah, it feels that way,” Helena admitted slowly, looking deep into Sloane’s eyes. “But I honestly would love to find something more balanced again, like how it used to be.”

Helena pretended to yawn, curling up into a ball beneath the covers. “I don’t know why we’re talking about this personal stuff,” she mumbled, trying to deflect the conversation.

Sloane laughed softly, amusement dancing in her eyes. “Come on, it’s sleepover talk! Don’t you remember those giggly nights as a kid, staying up late talking about

everything?”

Helena rolled her eyes playfully. “Yeah, but it feels childish now.”

“Childish? Maybe that’s exactly what you need. You just said you wish you could find that kind of spontaneity again. Maybe being forced to have someone so close to you will make you face something more innocent and less intentional,” Sloane suggested, her voice softening.

Helena raised an eyebrow, a mixture of curiosity and skepticism on her face. “So you mean this childish spontaneity is what I need? What do you want me to do about it?”

Sloane tilted her head, a smile creeping onto her face as a playful thought crossed her mind. “I don’t know. Let’s test it. Let’s see what happens.” With that, she started inching closer, her heart racing with excitement.

Sloane carefully reached out and brushed her fingers along Helena’s arm, tracing the soft fabric of her satin outfit. She felt the warmth of Helena’s skin beneath her touch and noticed the way Helena’s breathing began to quicken. It was as if a spark had ignited between them, crackling with energy.

“Hey,” Sloane whispered, her fingers now gently brushing the strands of red hair away from Helena’s face. “Relax. Just feel it.” Her voice was both soothing and daring.

“Or, just say if you want me to stop.”

Helena’s eyes flickered with hesitation, but there was also a hunger there.

She might have been adamant she wasn’t gay, but that certainly wasn’t what her big brown eyes were saying right now.

Sloane took it as a sign to keep going, her hand trailing down to Helena's waist. She could feel her own heart racing as she explored the curves of Helena's body gently, moving her fingers over Helena's hips and to the soft curves of her thighs. Gooseflesh appeared on all the exposed areas of Helena's skin.

As Sloane's palm pressed against Helena's backside, she felt a rush of heat. Helena gasped softly, and Sloane could see the desire sparkling in her eyes. It was intoxicating, and Sloane couldn't help but lean in closer, their lips almost touching.

"I'm not..." Helena started.

"Not a lesbian?" Sloane queried, "Don't worry, I don't mind what you are."

Helena bit her lip nervously. "It's not that," she said. "Maybe I am a lesbian, but I've never said that to anyone before. And the truth is, I'm not very experienced in the lesbian department. I just thought you should know."

Helena's eyes glanced down and her voice was unsteady.

"Well," Sloane said, pulling her closer again. "I am very experienced in the lesbian department. So, I can help you, if you like?"

Helena nodded, her breath quickening further, "Maybe," she whispered back, allowing a hint of a smile to grace her lips.

In that moment, Sloane leaned in, closing the tiny gap between them. Their lips met in a whirlwind of urgency and warmth, both feeling the desperation and connection that had been bubbling just beneath the surface for too long. The kiss deepened as Sloane felt Helena surrender to the feeling, letting go of constraints and expectations, exploring her curiosity in the most intimate way possible. Sloane pushed her tongue into Helena's mouth and Helena gasped. Sloane explored Helena's mouth with her

tongue while her hands roved over Helena's delicious satin clad ass.

Sloane pulled away for a second, taking a deep breath and carefully slid her fingers along Helena's waist. "I think it's time for a change, don't you?" With that, she lifted Helena's top, revealing her soft skin underneath.

She hadn't expected this nervousness from Helena- wide eyed- like a deer caught in the headlights and she had to admit that it was a massive turn on. She felt her own desire flooding beneath her pyjamas. She was soaking wet already and she knew it.

"Are you sure?" Helena asked, her voice a little shaky. She looked surprised but didn't pull away.

"Yeah," Sloane said softly, her heart thumping. "I want to see you. All of you."

With gentle movements, Sloane pulled the satin away, revealing Helena's full breasts. Now they were something spectacular as they fell free. Full round breasts with big rosy pink nipples that stood out against Helena's pale skin. Sloane's eyes widened as she took in Helena's body—the way her waist curved in beautifully, the way her stomach was tight and smooth. The way her breasts spilled out so beautifully.

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Oh, fuck. I've got it bad for her. Worse than I thought.

Helena's cheeks blushed deeper, and Sloane couldn't help but admire her more. "You're so gorgeous," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. "I wish there was more light. Can I put this lamp on so I can see you?"

Helena's eyes flickered nervously. "I... um... I suppose yes that would be ok."

Sloane reached over and flicked the lamp on casting a soft golden glow over Helena's breasts.

She ran her hand slowly from Helena's face, down over her breasts, pausing over her nipple and feeling it harden in her hand.

This was going to be a lot of fun. Sloane was sure of it.

Sloane smiled and reached for the hem of her own tank top, pulling it over her head. She then slipped out of her pants. In contrast to Helena, she felt very comfortable in her own nakedbody, she always had. She wasn't as curvy as Helena, but Sloane was happy with her own body.

Helena's breathing quickened, her eyes widening. "You look amazing."

They locked eyes, both feeling the heat of the moment. The kisses they shared were tentative at first, soft and sweet, their lips brushing against one another. Sloane wanted to give Helena time to adjust to what was happening. She didn't want to come on so strong, but as she felt the press of Helena's big breasts against her own, she

didn't know how long she could hold out for.

"I want to kiss every inch of your body," Sloane whispered in Helena's ear.

Helena gasped and Sloane kissed her neck, running her tongue over Helena's earlobe and then sucking it into her mouth.

"I want to feel you come in my mouth," Sloane whispered again, feeling Helena's whole body begin to melt next to her.

She rolled until she was on top of Helena, enjoying the feeling of their bodies pressed so tightly together. She pushed her right thigh between Helena's legs pressing it tightly against Helena's pussy through the satin pyjamas.

Helena instinctively began to grind herself against Sloane's thigh.

Mmmmm, this is going perfectly, Sloane thought to herself.

Sloane strayed into deeper kisses of Helena's neck, before moving down to take a delicious looking big puffy pink nipple into her mouth, sucking it in deeply, massaging it with her tongue. Meanwhile her fingers found their way to Helena's waist, feeling the softness beneath her touch.

She toyed with the waistband of Helena's pants and felt Helena tense up beneath her.

"Helena, it's okay," Sloane breathed, reading the expressions on her face. "You don't have to hold back."

Helena exhaled slowly, as if weighing her options. "I just—I've never thought I'd be this open..." she trailed off, biting her lip.

“Neither did I,” Sloane confessed, her heart fluttering. “But it feels right. Doesn’t it?”

“Yes,” Helena said, her voice strong now. “It really does.”

“Is this ok?” Sloane asked, pressing her hand against Helena’s pussy through the satin, not wanting to push Helena too far, as desperate as she was to taste her.

Helena felt damp through the satin.

“Yes,” Helena said, her eyes screwed shut. “It... it feels good.”

As she leaned down again, Sloane felt a rush of anticipation. Her lips traced again along Helena’s magnificent breasts, suckling each nipple in turn and enjoying feeling them harden in her mouth. Sloane closed her eyes, savoring every gentle touch and kiss.

Sloane’s hand slipped beneath the waistband of Helena’s pants once again, and this time she gasped softly.

“Is this ok?” Sloane asked again.

Helena nodded, looking at Sloane again with that familiar lust in her eyes.

“Ok if I take off your pants?” Sloane asked quietly and Helena nodded once more raising her hips to allow Sloane to remove them.

Helena was now bare before her and between her legs was a riot of red pubic hair.

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Sloane looked at it and smiled.

“You are so fucking beautiful, you know. I can’t wait to taste you.”

Helena looked once again frozen to the spot wide eyed. As though she wanted it so badly, but didn’t know how to take it.

“Just relax,” Sloane murmured again, her eyes sparkling. “Let me take care of you.”

She ran her hands over Helena’s legs, teasing them open as she went. She knelt between them moving her kisses from Helena’s breasts, to her abdomen, down over her red pubic curls, teasing her inner thighs.

Sloane swallowed hard, feeling heat rise within her. She could smell Helena’s desire and it was driving her crazy. Her kisses moved lower, and she felt Helena responding to each gentle lick. It was like electric waves coursing through her body. “Oh, that feels amazing,” Helena moaned, clutching the sheets tightly as Sloane’s tongue met her clitoris.

Sloane’s laughter was soft, playful. “I’m glad you like it.”

Sloane dipped her head further, losing herself in the musky taste and smell of Helena. She was so wet, it was pleasure itself to get to lick her clean. Long slow licks from bottom to top, pressing the flat of her tongue against Helena’s clitoris. She felt Helena relaxing into it and her legs parting further.

Sloane moved her right hand to join her tongue at Helena’s pussy, her fingers teasing

at Helena's entrance.

"Is this ok?" Sloane asked, once again.

"Yes... please..." Helena's voice was shaky.

Sloane pushed two fingers into Helena's wetness, feeling her body tighten around them deliciously. She curled them upwards to press against Helena's G spot, hearing Helena's deep moan as she found it.

"Oh, god.... that feels... so... good.."

She began to move her fingers slowly in and out of Helena, hitting her G spot every time. She took Helena's clitoris back into her mouth and began to suck on it.

"I'm going to... oh... god... I'm...." Sloane could feel Helena tightening around her fingers. She could feel her whole body tensing. She knew any minute now Helena's orgasm would overcome her and the thought of it excited her like nothing else.

Suddenly Helena cried out as her body clenched tight around Sloane's fingers and Sloane felt her clitoris quivering in her mouth.

She let Helena ride out her orgasm, her whole body shaking, before she withdrew her fingers slowly and released Helena's throbbing clitoris from her mouth.

Helena took a minute to breathe, her expression a glaze of post orgasmic lust.

"That was... well.. just incredible." Helena took a deep breath and Sloane looked all across her beautiful body, big breasts and puffy pink nipples heaving. Her pussy looking so beautiful and open with all those luscious red curls atop of it.

“You are so fucking beautiful,” Sloane said and Helena blushed and glanced away in response.

Sloane smiled and moved to lie next to her, trailing her hand casually up over Helena’s body.

Helena turned to face her, “I want to... you know... make you as happy as you just made me...”

“You don’t have to,” Sloane said quickly, not wanting to pressure her even though she could feel her clitoris pulsing wildly between her legs desperate for Helena’s touch.

Suddenly, with a surprising strength, Helena flipped Sloane onto her back, her eyes shining with passion.

“Your turn,” Helena said softly, her voice a husky whisper as she loomed over Sloane.

Sloane felt her heartbeat quicken, her breath hitching in her throat. Helena gently tugged at her hair, bringing her closer. “I love your beautiful hair,” she murmured. “And I can’t say I wasn’t curious about your body.”

Helena’s hands wandered, exploring Sloane’s curves. “You’re stunning, you know that?”

Sloane felt warmer than before, a blush blossoming her cheeks. “You’re amazing too,” she replied, her voice barely above a whisper.

With a playful glimmer in her eye, Helena then pushed Sloane down onto her belly. Excitement bubbled inside Sloane as she felt Helena's warm breath behind her.

“I think it’s time for some more fun,” Helena teased, her tongue tantalizingly close to Sloane’s ear, her hand pulling her head back with a handful of her long hair.

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Sloane surrendered to the sensation, overwhelmed as Helena began to paw at her body again. She gasped, the feeling every nerve come alive. Helena made her way down Sloane's body, not leaving an inch untouched as she traced the curve of her ass and down the back of her legs, then back up again until she reached Sloane's hot, wet pussy.

She hesitated, and Sloane wanted to peek her head around to make sure Helena was okay, but before she could lift up her torso, Helena glided her fingers between her thighs, separating them just slightly before she pushed two inside.

Sloane couldn't bite back her pleasure as she moaned deeply, feeling the pressure of Helena inside her. Helena's fingers explored Sloane's inside as she brought them in and out rhythmically. Sloane tried to sit up, but Helena pushed her back down on the bed.

"Not yet," she growled. "I'm not done with you."

And with that, she increased her speed, roughly pushing her fingers in and out, curling them slightly and finding her clit with her thumb to rub it in circles.

Sloane started panting as she tried to hold on, wanting it to last as long as possible, and just when she thought she would burst, Helena flipped her over on her back and buried her face in between her legs, running her tongue between Sloane's folds.

Clutching the sheets, Sloane felt every wave swell higher. Each gentle lick sent shivers down her spine. "I can't... I'm so close!" she gasped, her voice thick with desire.

Helena continued, her rhythm steady and skilled. “Just let go, Sloane. I’ve got you,” she encouraged.

With one final wave of pleasure, Sloane clung to the sheets as everything exploded into a brilliant light. Breathless, she let out a soft cry.

As Sloane came back down from her orgasm, she felt Helena’s comforting presence beside her, and Sloane turned to smile at her.

“That was incredible,” Sloane said, grinning.

Helena chuckled softly, brushing a strand of hair from Sloane's face. “That was... I think I missed that.”

9

HELENA

Helena woke up early. Her eyes fluttered open to the soft, golden light streaming through the window. She rubbed her eyes and blinked a few times, trying to shake off the heaviness of a night's sleep in a strange place. The tropical air filled the room with a faint scent of flowers, and she took a moment to enjoy the warmth of the Hawaiian morning. But then she turned her head and saw Sloane.

Helena groaned quietly, her heart sinking a little. There, sprawled comfortably nude next to her with wavy brown hair splayed across the pillow, was Sloane. Helena quickly sat up, feeling a twinge of panic. They were never supposed to end up in the same bed like this, and certainly wasn’t supposed to....

She shook her head to clear the memories of last night’s intimacy.

“Sloane, wake up,” Helena whispered, shaking Sloane gently. “We’re late for the meeting.”

Sloane stirred, her eyes blinking open slowly. “Huh? What time is it?”

Helena quickly glanced at the clock on the nightstand. The numbers blurred together for a moment, but it read 8:15. The meeting was supposed to start at 9. “It’s after eight! We’re supposed to be at the conference center for breakfast by now.” She felt a rush of frustration mixed with embarrassment flooding her cheeks.

“Seriously? Oh no,” Sloane said, sitting up and rubbing her temples. “I forgot to set the alarm. I thought I could just sleep in a little.” She threw back the covers, revealing that they were both completely undressed.

Helena gulped and averted her eyes, feeling an awkward heat rise to her face at the sight of Sloane’s beautiful toned body and small pert breasts.

“Well, we can’t just sit here. We need to get moving!” Helena said, her voice sharper than she intended. She stood up, trying to take charge, but inside, she felt a whirlwind of conflicting emotions. The night had been unexpected but...exciting. No one had ever made her feel that way so quickly before, and she didn’t know how to handle it.

Sloane stretched her arms up overhead, exposing herself fully, yawning. “Right. Business first, fun later?” A playful smile broke through her sleepy expression.

“Sure,” Helena retorted, not quite able to mask the annoyance in her tone as her eyes roved over Sloane’s body. “But maybe let’s skip the ‘fun’ part after last night, huh?”

A moment of silence fell between them as they both remembered how they had ended up so close. Helena felt her heart race again with the memory of the laughter they shared, the way Sloane had looked at her, and how it had all turned into something

she had never planned on.

“Okay, CEO Wolfe,” Sloane said calmly, tossing her hair back as she stood up. “I’ll get dressed. You, uh, might want to find some clothes too.”

Helena turned to face the closet, trying to focus on being professional, but her mind kept wandering. As Sloanerummaged through her suitcase, she glanced back at Helena. “You know, this trip isn’t just business for you. It’s an opportunity for both our companies. Plus, who doesn’t want a little Hawaiian adventure?”

Helena shot her a sideways glance. “Adventure? I’d call it a headache. It’s all so forced, like this crazy trip was thrown together by the universe just to mess with me.”

“Maybe the universe was trying to give you a break,” Sloane said lightly, pulling on a dark blue blouse. “You usually seem so serious, Helena. How about we just take it step by step today?”

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Helena sighed, pulling on a carefully pressed blouse from the closet. “Fine, step by step. But I still think this whole luau thing is silly. Who needs to hula dance to make a deal happen?”

“I do!” Sloane laughed, her eyes twinkling as she tucked her blouse into her pants. “And I think you secretly want to too.”

“Not a chance,” Helena replied, a hint of a smile creeping onto her face despite her efforts to stay annoyed.

“Right, and I’m sure you’ll wear that serious face all day,” Sloane teased, putting on a necklace.

“Don’t push your luck, Callahan,” Helena said with a frown, shaking her head. “We’re supposed to be professional.”

“But everyone has fun at these events!” Sloane insisted, reaching for her heels. “You never know what kind of memories you could make.”

Helena rolled her eyes. “All I want is to not mess up this merger. It’s important. And now I’m stuck sharing a bed with my biggest rival,” she said, trying to keep a straight face.

“I see your little competitive side is still alive and well,” Sloane said with a grin. “Don’t worry, Helena. I won’t let you mess up. I’m here to help, remember?”

Helena sighed again, still feeling a mix of embarrassment and confusion. Maybe

Sloane was right. She was taking this all too seriously. Maybe there could be a little fun hidden somewhere in the chaos.

“I really can’t tell if this is all a manipulation tactic,” Helena said, pushing back her hair. “Let’s just hurry the hell up because we’re late and you keep bringing me out of my element.”

“What’s your element? Steel?” Sloane tried, getting her things.

“Tungsten is the hardest metal element. If you’re going to make jokes, at least be scientifically accurate.”

As they reached the floor with the conference room, Helena pushed through the door and entered the conference area, Sloane following behind her.

The room was bright and filled with chatter. A long table was covered with plates of food. Toast, eggs, and fruit filled the space, and a crowd of executives swirled around.

“Hey, you made it!” shouted Mark, one of Helena’s teammates. He waved his hand to get her attention.

“Just in time, I hope!” Helena forced a smile, feeling the tension of the day ahead of her. She glanced around, catching sight of Sloane.

Sloane was talking to someone, her hair catching the light and her eyes shining with confidence. Helena felt a flutter in her stomach. They were rivals now, but part of her remembered how amazing their connection had felt last night. No! She pushed the thought down. Focus on the merger, not the feelings, she reminded herself again.

Just as Helena turned to grab a plate, she overheard Sloane’s conversation. “This

merger is going to be great. We've prepared too hard to back down now." Sloane's tone was strong, and Helena couldn't help but admire her confidence.

Helena picked up a muffin, her hands shaking slightly. She had to remember why they were here. It wasn't about whatever happened last night. It was about completing the merger. But part of her just couldn't let go of that other side of it all. The side that found Sloane so incredibly attractive.

Mark nudged her. "What's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost."

Helena forced a laugh. "I'm fine! Just a little out of breath." But the truth was, she was still thinking about last night. She quickly sat down, trying to push the memories aside.

"Hey, Helena!" Sloane's voice called out across the room, snapping her out of her thoughts. Helena looked up, caught in Sloane's gaze for a moment.

"Hey," Helena replied, trying to keep it casual, but her heart raced again. "Ready for the luau?"

Sloane grinned, her smile brightening her face. "Absolutely! May the best team have the most fun." There was a confidence in her tone, sharp and clever.

"Right," Helena said, forcing a smile as she took a sip from her coffee. It was hot and strong, almost like the electricity between them. She had to stay focused.

As breakfast went on, Helena listened to the chatter around her, stealing glances at Sloane every few moments. They were professionals, after all. Two strong women in a field where the stakes were high and competition was fierce.

Helena leaned in closer to Mark. "What do you think of Sloane? She's really good at

what she does, isn't she? She's less lawyer-like than most in her profession."

Mark laughed. "Oh, don't let her charm fool you."

Helena nodded, but doubt crept into her mind. It wasn't just Sloane's professional skills troubling her; it was the lingering aftertaste of their night together. "I just... She's a good lawyer," Helena replied, masking her true feelings.

Despite the surrounding breakfast crowd, it felt like just the two of them were locked in their own little bubble, captivated by each other, even as they plotted to finish the job their own ways.

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As breakfast began to wind down, Helena realized she couldn't avoid her feelings forever. She resolved to just get through the day intact, but as she stood up to leave the table, she caught Sloane's gaze one last time.

Within that shared look, Helena knew this battle was just beginning, and so were her encounters with the woman sitting across the table.

Helena stepped outside of the hotel, the warm sunlight washing over her like a soft hug. The scent of saltwater from the ocean mixed with the smell of blooming flowers in the air. Next to her, Mark walked with a bounce in his step, and she looked over at him. He doesn't have a clue.

"So, how was your room?" Mark asked, glancing at her.

Hesitant, Helena felt her heart race a little. She didn't want to think about how her night had been. Instead, she looked at the palm trees swaying gently in the breeze.

"Oh, um, you know," she deflected, pulling at the hem of her form-fitted sundress. "It was fine. Really nice ocean view." She forced a smile, hoping it seemed natural. A group of tourists strolled by, laughing and taking pictures. Helena envied them.

Mark's brow furrowed slightly, catching the change in her tone. "That's great. I mean, who wouldn't love a view like that?" He paused, then asked, "So, are you excited about the luau tonight?"

The luau. Helena felt a pang of anxiety in her stomach. This was important. Her company, Wolfe Enterprises, needed to show Thompson Industries that they were fun

and inviting, not just serious all the time. But wouldn't it be hard to enjoy it with all the thoughts swirling in her head about last night? She hadn't planned for this kind of distraction, especially not with the opposing team's corporate lawyer.

She tried to shake it off. "Absolutely! I can't wait to see the hula dancers and try the roast pig. That sounds delicious, right?" Helena smiled, but it felt as if the smile was stuck on her face.

Mark nodded, a little too enthusiastically. "Totally! It's a good opportunity for us to mingle. They need to see that we know how to do business and have a good time."

Helena's gaze drifted off again, thinking about how out of place she felt. What made her forget everything she knew? Sharing a room with Sloane made her feel unprofessional and uneasy.

After a brief silence, she turned to Mark, her voice laced with skepticism. "Hey, do you still have those flashcards with people's names and faces on them?"

Mark's face broke into a grin that lit up his features. "Of course! I brought them just in case. You know how important it is to recognize the other employees. We can't be fumbling around trying to remember names." He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a neatly organized stack of cards, each with a name and a corresponding picture.

"Wow, thank you for being so prepared. I know I kind of shut down the idea at first," Helena said. She could focus on something else for a while, something that felt more in her control.

"Okay, let's practice," Mark prompted, waving the cards like they were a magic tool. "Here's the first one." He flipped one over, revealing a picture of a middle-aged man with silver hair and a friendly smile. "Who is this?"

“Um...” Helena squinted at the card, forcing her mind to work. She took a deep breath. “That’s...oh! That’s Mr. Thompson, right? I know that one, of course.”

“Bingo!” Mark clapped, and Helena felt a tiny spark of pride. Maybe she could snap herself back into professional mode after all.

Mark continued flipping through the cards. One by one, they quizzed each other, laughing as they scrambled to remember names. “Okay, this one might stump you.” He held up a card featuring a woman with striking green eyes and an easy smile.

Helena bit her lip, her mind racing. “She’s...um, Amanda? She’s the one in marketing, right?”

“Close! It’s Allison, but you were halfway there.” He chuckled lightly, and, despite her earlier worries, Helena felt her cheeks heat up with a mixture of embarrassment and laughter. They kept going, with Mark cheering over every success.

Even though she felt a little silly, she knew he was right. Knowing names made a difference during meetings. If she walked into the luau tonight with these names fresh in her mind, it would be easier to relax and be the professional she needed to be, minus any distractions still lingering.

As they strolled around the hotel property, the sun climbed higher in the sky, casting playful shadows on the ground. Helena took a deep breath, grounding herself in the moment. No more distractions. It was time to embrace the fun, to show everyone at Thompson Industries that Wolfe Enterprises could indeed let loose.

“Ready for another round?” Mark asked, his eyes twinkling with mischief.

“Let’s do it!” Helena replied, her confidence growing as they continued their practice. A little competition and laughter was just what she needed to shake off the

uneasiness. The luau was coming fast, and she was determined to enjoy it.

10

SLOANE

The sun was already climbing high in the sky, painting the landscape with blues and golden rays. Sloane ran a hand through her wavy brown hair as she finished off the last bite of her tropical fruit salad. The sweet taste of pineapple lingered on her tongue. She glanced across the conference room table, catching a glimpse of the stunning view of the beach outside. Today was important for Thompson Industries. They were trying to merge with Wolfe Enterprises, and Sloane was here to make sure everything went smoothly.

As she stood up from the table, she couldn't help but remember the night before. It had been a mix-up that led her to share a bed with Helena Wolfe, the powerful CEO of Wolfe Enterprises. They were just acquaintances, but now it was way more complicated. Sloane shook her head to dismiss the thought.

The memory of the taste of Helena, of her body opening up to Sloane like a flower, was overpowering her at every turn.

Every time she saw a flash of Helena's red hair, she couldn't stop thinking about the vibrant damp red curls between her legs.

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She grabbed her notes to try to distract herself.

Sloane stepped out into the bright sunshine and headed toward the beach where the luau was being set up. Bright flowers hung between the tiki torches, and the sounds of laughter mixed with the bubbling of a nearby bonfire. People from both companies were mingling, and she could see the excitement building.

“Hey, everyone!” Sloane called out, trying to keep her own spirits high. “The luau is going to be amazing. Just look at those dancers!” She pointed to a group of performers practicing hula. The bright patterns of their skirts swayed, bringing vibrant color to the event.

“Still feeling like this is a good idea?” asked Jake. He rubbed the back of his neck, looking unsure. “Wolfe Enterprises has a strong reputation. What if they try to take over?”

Sloane leaned in closer, lowering her voice. “Listen, Jake, I understand your concerns. But Helena is not just some icy CEO. We had a chance to talk last night, and she cares about this merger. It’s about collaboration, not competition.”

“Yeah, but what if she gets the upper hand?” another team member asked after overhearing their conversation. “What if she wants to make all the decisions?”

“I promise you everything is going to be okay,” Sloane reassured them both, hoping her confidence would ease their anxieties. “Let’s see how things go today. Enjoy the luau, and trust in the process.”

They all nodded, though some still looked skeptical. Sloane couldn't blame them. The stakes were high, and changes like this could be scary. She spotted Helena on the other side, chatting with some of the people on the Thompson Industries team. Helena was radiant, her short red hair floating in the breeze, her brown eyes lighter under the sun. Despite her usually icy demeanor, Sloane saw a warmth radiating from her today.

As the performers began to dance, the excitement grew, and soon Sloane found herself moving closer to the crowd. She could hear the beating drums and the soft sound of ukuleles. When the dancers began to perform, Sloane felt the energy around her shift. Laughter echoed as people clapped and cheered.

"Wow, look at that!" Sloane exclaimed to the group around her, pointing to a group of hula dancers swirling gracefully. The bright flowers in their hair swayed as they moved. "They make it look so easy."

"Yeah, I could never do that," Jake replied, chuckling nervously.

Just then, she felt a familiar presence beside her. It was Helena, standing tall and confident, watching the dancers.

"I hope you don't mind me joining," Helena said, her voice wavering just the slightest as she put on an act. "I'm sure enjoying the festivities."

Sloane turned, feeling her heart skip a beat. "Of course not! I was just telling them how amazing the dancers are."

Helena smiled, and for a moment, all the worries about the merger faded. "Perhaps you should get your own dance lesson?" Helena teased, raising an eyebrow playfully.

Sloane laughed, trying not to let her nerves show. "I think I'll stick to legal contracts

rather than hula. But your leadership will make a big difference during this merger.”

“I appreciate that. I believe in what we’re building together,” Helena replied with a sincere smile.

As the ceremony continued, Sloane found herself watching Helena more than the performance. She admired how Helena engaged with the Thompson team, her cold exterior melting under the sun. People laughed around her, and they looked at her with respect.

“I’ll be back in just a moment,” Helena said, breaking Sloane from her thoughts. “I want to speak with a few of the executives.”

Sloane nodded and watched her go, feeling a mix of admiration and nerves in her stomach. What if the hotel had a cancellation and Helena found a reason to get her own room tonight? The thought tugged at her mind. Would it change anything between them? Sloane shook her head again, focusing on the present.

“Here’s to new beginnings!” Sloane raised her glass of pineapple juice high, and her colleagues joined her.

They engaged in food and luau rituals until the sun dipped low on the horizon, painting the sky in shades of pink and orange. Despite her best efforts, the memories of last night were impossible to forget. The memory of Helena’s body, soft and vulnerable, clung to her thoughts. Sloane recalled the way Helena gasped and moaned as Sloane kissed her, making her feel wild and free. It felt like a dream, but it was real, and the warmth of the sun couldn’t shake off the heat that lingered in her heart.

“Hey, Sloane!” Jake called, snapping her back to the present. “Are you ready for the meeting tomorrow?”

Sloane smiled, nodding, but all she could think about was Helena. “Yes, of course,” she replied, trying to push her feelings away.

They reconvened with the rest of the team, reviewing tomorrow’s agenda. Yet in the back of her mind was the burning question of how tonight would unfold.

As the sun set, Sloane found herself away from the group, drawn to the sound of crackling firewood. There was Helena, seated on a log, gazing at the waves that softly kissed the shore. Her hair danced in the wind, a dark halo around her face. Sloane walked closer and felt a rush of excitement.

“Mind if I join you?” Sloane asked, her voice steady despite the fluttering in her stomach.

“I guess,” Helena replied, her voice holding a hint of playfulness. “Just enjoying the view.”

“You mean the ocean or the person sitting next to you?” Sloane teased with a smirk.

Helena shot her a quick glance, a flicker of something electric passing between them. “Maybe a bit of both. But I think you’re getting ahead of yourself.” They both sat in silence, watching the waves crash against the rocks. The fire crackled beside them, filling the quiet with warmth. Sloane couldn’t help but remember the way Helena had looked last night, naked and beautiful, hair sprawling across the sheets, eyes shining with pleasure. She shook her head slightly, trying to focus.

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“Were you able to get your own room tonight?” Sloane asked, trying to keep her tone light.

Helena raised an eyebrow, a smirk touching her lips. “I did,” she said, not offering more.

“Oh. Good,” Sloane replied, feeling a pinch of disappointment. “I’m glad you have your space.”

“Why? You wanted to share again?” Helena’s voice was teasing, but Sloane sensed an edge beneath her words.

“I mean, it’s just...comfortable,” Sloane stammered, unsure of how to navigate this conversation. “Being together, I mean.”

Helena looked at her, the firelight dancing in her deep eyes, making it hard for Sloane to breathe. “It’s a business trip, Sloane,” she said, her tone slightly firmer. “We need to keep things professional.” There was something in her voice—an invitation, a challenge—but it felt just out of reach.

“Right, of course,” Sloane said quickly, pulling her gaze away, stifling her disappointment. “Let’s just focus on the merger.” She tried to meet Helena’s gaze again, but it felt heavy and loaded.

Just then, Jake called out from the group. “Hey, you two! Are you coming? We’re taking a picture for the merger!”

“Coming!” Sloane shouted back, standing up and brushing sand off her outfit. She turned to Helena, who was already rising with a sly smile. “Let’s act like the business professionals we are.”

As they approached the group, Sloane felt Helena’s eyes on her. It was as if Helena could see through the carefully erected walls around Sloane’s heart. They joined the circle where everyone was laughing and talking about their plans for the next day.

“Tomorrow, we’re going out on a yacht!” Jake announced, pouring liquor into shot glasses. “It’ll be fun!”

Sloane nodded, her excitement dampened by the absence of Helena next to her in their shared room. She could feel that ache again, the longing to be close to Helena, to see that smile up close and personal.

Helena raised her glass, and Sloane held hers up, too, but the connection felt strained, as if they were on different pages of the same story.

“To the merger!” everyone cheered, and the shots went down, hot and strong.

As laughter erupted around her, Sloane tried to smile and join in on the cheerfulness, but her thoughts drifted back to the fire on the beach, the way Helena had looked at her, and the space that suddenly felt too wide between them.

After the night’s celebration was over, Sloane watched as Helena walked confidently inside the resort.

“I should head up to my room,” Sloane murmured more to herself than anyone else. Even as she turned away, her curiosity lingered. Where was Helena’s new room?

As Sloane made her way back to room 301, she replayed their earlier conversation in

her mind. Sloane opened the door to her room, ready to unwind after a long day. To her utter surprise, there was Helena, lounging comfortably in a silk nightgown that shimmered like moonlight. The sight was mesmerizing.

“I thought you found another room,” Sloane exclaimed, her heart racing.

Helena looked up, a sly grin spreading across her face. “Not only lawyers can lie,” she teased, her voice soft yet playful.

Sloane's brow furrowed. “What do you mean by that?”

Helena sat up, her eyes sparkling with mischief. “I knew changing rooms would cause a stir, especially with all the corporate people around. I didn't want to admit that we shared a room.” She paused, her expression turning more serious. “I worry what people might think and don't want to become gossip.”

Sloane felt a rush of warmth on her face. “I understand. It's a bit tricky in our world, isn't it?”

Helena stood up gracefully, the silk clinging to her body in an alluring way. “It was kind of fun, wasn't it?” she said, her voice dropping to a whisper. “Seeing the clear disappointment on your face when I told you I changed rooms. It made me think you actually wanted me here.”

Sloane's heart raced at the implication. “Maybe I do,” she admitted, taking a step closer, the space between them crackling with tension.

“Well...” Sloane moved forward, her lips curling into a teasing smirk. “So, what do we do about that?”

Helena swallowed hard, every muscle in her body on edge. The air felt thick with

anticipation. “Maybe we can...talk about it?” she suggested, her voice barely above a whisper.

Sloane realized that Helena needed a moment. Sloane casually organized her things and turned away, giving her space.

"Hey, did you have a good day socializing at the luau?" Sloane asked, her voice a gentle nudge to reconnect as Helena crawled in bed.

Helena sighed and leaned back against the headboard. “It was fun, but it was also a lot of pressure,” she admitted, her tone revealing the weight she carried on her shoulders. “But it’s not like I’m not used to it.”

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Sloane smiled softly and reached for her pajamas, the fabric smooth against her fingers. “You wore your best smile, though. You looked amazing.” She pulled on her pajama top and slipped into matching pants.

“Thanks,” Helena replied, a small blush coloring her cheeks. “My parents expect the best from me, especially since I’m the eldest. They’ve trained me to take over the company since I was a kid. It’s been so much pressure these last five years, especially from my dad.”

Sloane’s heart ached for Helena as she listened. She sat close to her on the bed, the space between them reducing. “What do they want you to do exactly? Be perfect?”

“Something like that,” Helena said, twisting a lock of her hair around her finger. “I sometimes feel like I’m just a trophy to them, showcasing success. Everyone always looks at me and expects great things. But I... Sometimes I never feel like people want me around for anything other than my family’s money or for what I can do for them.”

Sloane frowned, her brow furrowing. “That’s not true. I’ve enjoyed you for you, Helena. For who you are, not what your family has.”

Helena turned to Sloane, her eyes narrowing slightly, searching for honesty. “But how do I know? It’s not like I’m exactly nice to you. I mean, if the merger details change, you stand to benefit more from Wolfe Enterprises. What if that’s the only reason you’re being like this?”

Sloane shook her head, feeling her pulse quicken. “This isn’t just about business for me. It’s...it’s about us too right now.” The air between them thickened, filled with

something electric and warm.

Helena shifted closer, her body brushing against Sloane's. "You make it hard to keep my guard up. I'm supposed to be cautious." She took a long, deep breath, her expression softening. "But honestly, it's hard to be suspicious when you treat me like a person, not a CEO."

"Because you are a person," Sloane said. "And I care about people."

Helena hesitated, her gaze shifting dramatically from Sloane's eyes to her lips, lingering for just a moment too long. "It's just...things are complicated."

The uncertainty hung in the air like a heavy curtain, making it hard to breathe, yet Sloane felt a rush of boldness ignite inside her. "Then let's simplify things," she said, her voice steadier now. "Let's be honest with each other. Away from the merger, away from the stress. Just you and me."

Helena swallowed hard and brushed her fingers against Sloane's arm, sending shivers down her spine. "What if I lose the deal?"

Sloane met her gaze, unwavering. "You won't lose it. I promise. No matter what happens with the merger, I won't jeopardize your reputation."

They stayed in a charged silence, both women feeling the undeniable pull toward each other, like magnets drawn close. Sloane's heart raced, her mind spinning with possibilities.

Then, with a sudden burst of courage, Helena leaned in just a tiny bit, her lips almost touching Sloane's, their breath mingling. "Sloane..." she started, but the rest of her words evaporated in the space between their lips.

“Helena,” Sloane replied, her voice low. “Sometimes you have to stop worrying about what lies ahead and just...” She slowly leaned in, tasting the warmth of affection and fearlessness wrapped in a kiss that was sweet and tender. It was somewhat hesitant, but still charged with longing.

In the glow of the lamp, wrapped in the warmth of their small world, the complicated business world outside faded away, leaving behind just two women. They were both strong and fierce, yet vulnerable.

11

HELENA

The sun peeked through the curtains of the hotel room, casting light across the bed. Helena blinked sleepily at the ceiling and turned her head to see Sloane. Her mouth was slightly open, and she snored lightly, oblivious to Helena's jitters.

For a brief moment, Helena felt a wave of warmth. Was it the morning sun? Or was it the unexpected intimacy of sleeping so close to an opponent? A sudden wave of alarm washed over her. What if this this moment could endanger the merger? What if they got caught? She couldn't let that happen. Not now.

As if Sloane could hear her thoughts, she peeked an eye open and groggily said, “Good morning, sunshine.”

Still wracked with anxiety, Helena couldn't engage. Instead, she stood up and rifled through her wardrobe, trying to pick out the perfect outfit for the day's meetings. When she felt content with her choice, she tugged on her clothes without a backward glance to Sloane.

“It's a busy day with meetings about the merger, and I have to prepare. I'll see you at

breakfast,” Helena replied curtly, exiting the room with purpose as she left Sloane to her thoughts.

As she walked down the hallway toward the conference room, Helena's mind was buzzing, a whirlwind of anxiety and urgency. She needed to be the strong leader everyone expected her to be. But deep down, a small voice whispered that perhaps she was missing something important. Something that might lead not just to a successful merger, but to understanding herself and the complexities of her team. In that moment, she felt the struggle between duty and connection.

Helena made her way to the conference room where breakfast awaited. The room buzzed with the chatter of Thompson Industries’ higher-ups, all seated at a large, polished table. She took a deep breath and joined them, her pulse still quickened from anxiety.

“Morning, Helena!” called Mark, his friendly smile beaming at her. He pushed a plate of fresh fruit toward her. “How’s the sunshine treating you?”

“Good, I guess,” she replied, forcing a smile as she settled into her chair. The distant chatter and clinking of dishes felt overwhelming, but she focused on the task ahead.

“Are we ready to discuss the yacht excursion?” Mark asked, pulling out a notebook.

“Sure, we should have fun out there,” Helena said, nodding. But fun was the last thing on her mind. She didn’t want to be stuck on a boat with Sloane and the people from Thompson Industries. What if things got awkward?

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As they discussed the plans, Sloane arrived, looking stunning in a flowing Hawaiian shirt and pants adorned with vibrant flowers. Helena did her best to ignore how good Sloane looked, focusing instead on the details of the excursion.

“Morning,” Sloane said, her voice warm but casual. She avoided Helena’s gaze, meeting it only for a flicker of a second. “Ready for the boat ride?”

“Yup,” Helena replied, trying to keep her tone light.

They finished breakfast filled with light chatter and polite smiles. Helena could feel the eyes of everyone with Thompson Industries on her, scrutinizing every word she spoke. She clenched her jaw, determined not to let the situation weigh her down.

Once they finished, the group made their way to the dock where the yacht awaited. Helena climbed aboard, taking a moment to soak in the gorgeous scenery. The ocean sparkled under the sun, and the gentle lapping of the waves soothed some of her worries.

As the boat started moving, Helena glanced around at her team and the Thompson delegation. Everyone was laughing, chatting, and seemingly enjoying their time. Yet slightly apart from the group stood Sloane, looking out at the horizon. The wind played with her hair, adding an ethereal quality to the moment.

Helena found herself watching Sloane, unable to pull her gaze away. There was something captivating about the way she looked, but that only reminded her of the night before. She shook her head. This is a mistake.

“Hey, Helena,” Mark called from across the deck, holding a drink. “Come join us! We were just talking about snorkeling.”

“Sure,” she replied, forcing a smile. She tried to immerse herself in the discussions, but part of her wanted to steal another glance at Sloane.

Later, when the boat anchored, people hurried to put on their fins and masks, excited to dive into the underwater world. Helena found herself lingering at the edge of the boat, watching Sloane as she laughed with some colleagues.

Helena sighed, pondering the situation. “Just keep it professional,” she whispered to herself. “Business first.”

Taking a deep breath, she stripped down to her swimwear and dove into the water alongside her team. The cool ocean enveloped her, washing away her worries for a moment. Yet even as she swam and explored the colorful fish and coral, her mind drifted back to Sloane and her ever-growing attraction to her. Her gaze was drawn to Sloane looking striking all long and lean and muscled in a sporty two piece. The water on her skin looked so beautiful in the light.

Later, as they all climbed back aboard, the sun dipped lower in the sky, casting a golden hue across the water. Helena caught Sloane’s eye, and for just a heartbeat, there was understanding between them—both aware of the unspoken tension.

“Great snorkeling, huh?” Sloane said, coming closer.

“Yeah, it was,” Helena said, and she tried to steady her voice. “I needed the change of pace today.”

“Yeah, I understand that,” Sloane said, and Helena could tell she meant it..

The sun shone brightly over the blue waves, and the hum of the yacht's engine blended with the soft sound of water. Helena stood on the deck, the wind tousling her shoulder-length red hair. She glanced down at the ocean, wondering how everything had turned into such an unexpected adventure. Just a couple days ago, she had been preparing for an important merger meeting, but now she was sailing with the people from Thompson Industries, the very company they were negotiating with.

"Mmm, this is beautiful!" someone exclaimed, leaning against the railing.

Helena smiled tightly, trying to ignore the slight tension that filled the air, and her eyes drifted to Sloane instead.

Sloane stood a few feet away, arms crossed, her wavy brown hair bouncing slightly in the breeze. Her piercing blue eyes were focused on something far off in the distance, but Helena could feel the weight of her gaze. There was something striking about Sloane. Her presence filled the space, but it was more than just her looks. It was the way she carried herself, seemingly closed off from the rest of the group.

Helena tried to shake off the feeling that Sloane was quietly judging her, but every time she looked in her direction, Sloane's expression remained unreadable. It made Helena uneasy. She took a deep breath, choosing to focus on Charles Thompson, the CEO of Thompson Industries. He was inside the yacht with several other higher-up executives, and Helena hoped that the discussions were going well.

Suddenly, the door slid open. Charles stepped out, a broad smile on his face. "Everything is going great! We're just about ready to finalize the terms," he called out, his joyous laugh ringing through the air.

"That's great to hear!" a Thompson Industries employee shouted, raising his glass in a cheer. Helena joined in, a sense of relief washing over her. She could feel the tension dissipate a bit, at least among her own team.

Charles motioned for Helena to join him on the deck. “Helena, come here for a second,” he said with an inviting wave.

As she stepped closer, Helena could hear the conversation from inside. The smell of cheese fondue wafted through the air, making her stomach growl. She smiled at Charles.

“You’ve done an incredible job adapting to this sudden trip,” he said. “It means a lot to me seeing how invested you are in the future of Thompson Industries.”

“Thank you, Charles. I wanted to make sure we showed good faith,” Helena replied, feeling a warmth spread in her chest. This was what she craved: recognition for her hard work.

“Your dedication is what makes you an excellent candidate for taking the lead,” Charles said, nodding. “I’m not going to lie; it brings me comfort knowing I’ve got someone like you who can carry the torch when the time comes for me to step back.”

“Thank you,” she said, her voice firm, feeling more confident. Sloane stood back from them and unfolded her arms with a sigh. Helena noticed and raised an eyebrow, curious about her perspective on the merger. Was she also proud? Or was she here simply doing her job?

“Is everything okay, Sloane?” Charles asked.

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Sloane shifted her weight from one foot to the other, glancing at the boat's railing. "It's just...a lot of moving parts," she replied finally, her voice measured. "But I'm confident we'll reach an agreement."

Helena felt her curiosity piqued. "What do you think we need to focus on for this merger to succeed?" Sloane looked up, her eyes locking with Helena's. "Communication is key," she stated, her tone steady. "If we want this merger to be successful, we must ensure both sides feel heard and valued."

"Exactly," Charles chimed in, clearly impressed. "That's exactly the mindset we need."

Helena nodded, but she noticed Sloane's face soften just for a moment, a tiny crack in her stoic demeanor. "You have a good point, Sloane. I hope we can work closely together to make this transition smooth."

"Absolutely," Sloane said simply, lowering her gaze.

The conversation continued, but Helena couldn't help stealing glances at Sloane. She couldn't figure this woman out. Who was she really? Determined not to let her unease show, Helena laughed at jokes she barely heard as the group lightened the mood around them.

"Alright, everyone!" Charles said, drawing everyone's attention back to him. "Let's head inside, enjoy some fondue, and wrap this up with a toast to our future."

Helena felt a swirl of excitement and apprehension. As they all began to move inside,

she took a last look at the ocean and then at Sloane. For once, she saw a glimmer of understanding in Sloane's eyes as they made brief contact.

12

SLOANE

Sloane sat at a long wooden table below deck, feeling the sway of the boat as it bobbed on the waves. The air smelled of melted cheese mixed with spices. The glow from the candles flickering around the table added a cozy charm to the room, and a big pot of fondue was melted in the center.

Around her, higher-ups from Thompson Industries mingled with the team from Wolfe Enterprises. Sloane's eyes darted from one person to another, absorbing the atmosphere. She twirled a strand of hair, something she did when she was nervous. Her iPad rested in front of her, open and ready for notes, marking her as the diligent corporate lawyer she was trained to be.

"Okay, team," Charles said, leaning back in his chair, "let's talk timelines. Helena, any updates from your end?" His voice was steady, controlling as he directed the conversation.

Helena sat nearly at the head of the table. Her hair was pulled back tightly, and a sharp, businesslike demeanor surrounded her today more than ever. It was an interesting contrast from the intimacy they had shared. This was a woman of power. But behind her cool exterior, Sloane sensed something deeper. A loneliness that seemed to be masked.

Sloane couldn't shake off the memories of the previous nights, where the two of them—Helena and herself—had ended up sharing a bed and an intense passion, that was incomparable to anything Sloane could remember sharing with anyone else. The

warmth of their closeness had felt comforting, but now it felt tangled and confusing. She tried to remember the last time she was in a situation of hiding a romance. High school, maybe? Sloane knew Helena's fear of coming out and desperation to remain professional was always going to stifle them and it bothered her.

"Right, so we're aiming for closing the deal in six weeks," Helena replied, her tone clipped yet professional as she expertly dipped a piece of bread into the cheese. "With the current financials, I believe we can make that happen."

The group nodded, but Sloane noticed the way some of the Thompson Industries executives exchanged glances, uncertainty flashing in their eyes. Sloane felt her heart tighten at the sight. Could anyone really trust Helena Wolfe? They'd discussed this merger so much, but had they really taken the time to understand who they were working with?

"Helena," Sloane ventured softly, her voice breaking through the tension that hung in the air. "Do you ever feel like you're carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders?" She searched Helena's eyes for a glimpse of vulnerability.

For a second, the room held its breath. Charles raised an eyebrow, obviously surprised by Sloane's directness. Some of the team from Thompson Industries glanced at each other, curiosity creeping into their expressions. Did they really think that Helena was just a hard-nosed businesswoman?

But before Helena could respond, Charles cleared his throat and smiled. "Now, now, Sloane. Helena is doing an excellent job running Wolfe Enterprises. This isn't the time for doubts when we're so close to finalizing everything." He took a quick sip of his drink, dismissing the moment with a wave of his hand.

Sloane felt a flicker of disappointment. It was as if Charles had put up a wall between her and Helena, blocking the chance for real conversation. She glanced back at

Helena, who was now staring into the fondue pot as if the swirling cheese held the answers to life's questions.

"It's not about doubts, Charles," Sloane countered carefully, her heart racing. "I just believe that opening up can help us navigate challenges better. Particularly in a merger like this."

Helena looked up, a hint of surprise crossing her face. "And open up to who, exactly?"

Her voice was cold, but Sloane detected a flicker of something. Perhaps it was defiance or fear.

"Us," Sloane urged, her heart pounding with emotion. "What we're doing here, it's going to impact so many lives. I know you're under a lot of pressure. Everyone sees it. Maybe sharing some concerns could bring us closer together."

The table was silent, and everyone's curiosity was piqued. Sloane noticed a few raised eyebrows, and she held her breath, hoping Helena would respond. She could only hear the ship's gentle swaying.

Then, to Sloane's relief, Helena sighed and leaned back into her chair. "You're right, Sloane. It's just..." She paused, her gaze drifting to where the waves lapped against the boat. "I sometimes feel like I can't afford to be vulnerable. Not with my father's expectations looming over me."

A shift occurred in the room. Sloane could feel it. The load of expectations were laid out and bare finally. Even Charles seemed taken aback, understanding now what Sloane had been trying to express about Helena.

"I can understand that," Sloane said gently. "We all have someone watching us,

someone whose opinion we value. You don't have to carry that alone, though."

The other members of Wolfe Enterprises exchanged quieter looks, glimmers of empathy shining in their eyes now. For the first time, it felt like they were really listening.

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Helena's face softened, albeit only slightly. "Thank you. I don't know if I can change overnight, but..." she trailed off, and Sloane caught a hint of something else in her expression.

A wave of relief washed over Sloane. Maybe all of them could become a team after all. Not just two companies merging, but a group of people willing to understand one another.

The fondue pot bubbled in the center of the table, breaking the tension of the moment.

"Let's eat!" Charles cheered, grabbing a piece of broccoli and thrusting it into the fondue.

The lightness of his words, along with the bubbling cheese, eased the atmosphere just a bit. Conversation resumed with laughter and chatter, but Sloane made a note on her iPad. She wanted to draft something that would guide them toward better communication as they moved deeper into the merger process.

The sun dipped low on the horizon as the luxury yacht glided back to the dock. Sloane stood by the rail, her hair dancing in the soft evening breeze. The day had been long, filled with meetings and negotiations, and dinner with the team had been a mix of tension and excitement. Now, as they finished their last round of drinks, the atmosphere felt lighter.

"Cheers to the merger!" shouted one of the executives from Thompson Industries, raising his Champagne glass high. The others quickly followed suit, their glasses

clinking.

Sloane raised her glass. “To new beginnings!” she echoed, trying to maintain her enthusiasm despite the worry gnawing at her insides. She glanced at Helena. She was the kind of woman who could control the room with a single glance, but tonight, her hidden expression sent a chill through Sloane.

Once they docked, the group began to go their separate ways, and Sloane’s heart quickened. She had a sinking feeling that Helena was upset with her. During the final negotiation meeting, Sloane couldn’t help but call out Helena’s defensiveness, pointing out how it might affect the merging process. It had been a gamble, and now, Sloane felt the reaction and resolution of such an expressive meeting would be beneficial for the two companies, just maybe not for her.

“Uh-oh,” Sloane muttered to herself, her stomach twisting as she followed Helena off the yacht. “Here comes trouble.”

The walk back to the hotel was short, and the air was thick. Once inside the building, Sloane fumbled with her keycard before letting herself in.

“Helena!” Sloane called, stepping inside. The room was dim, overwhelming her with the scent of whatever scents the hotel maids must have sprayed. Helena stood by the window, staring out into the night. Her silhouette was stoic, but Sloane could see the tension in her shoulders.

“Why did you bring that up earlier?” Helena’s voice sliced through the silence, sharp and unforgiving. She turned around, betrayal clouding her eyes.

Sloane hesitated, glancing down at her hands. “I thought it was important to address it.”

“Important?” Helena interjected, her tone icy. “It was reckless and totally distracting from the task at hand. You backed me in a corner.”

Sloane felt her heart sink. “I didn’t mean to. I just thought?—”

“Thought what?” Helena snapped, taking a step closer, and her eyes narrowed.

“That you should be honest with who you are to the team. It makes you seem more real. I also thought we had a connection, but the way you ran off this morning, well, I guess I was wrong.”

The room felt smaller, and the air was heavy with vulnerability. Sloane could see the hurt and anger swirling in Helena’s expression.

“We’re what? Having fun?” Helena said, her anger simmering just below the surface. “I’m not afraid to be open, but I need to protect myself from the wrong people.”

Sloane's heart raced, but she couldn’t let Helena see the turmoil within her. "I thought we had something a little more real than just business," she said softly, taking a small step back, as if trying to create distance between them.

Helena crossed her arms, her jaw tightening. “You need to let this go. This is just a distraction from everything we need to accomplish. Clear your head, Sloane. This merger is complicated enough without...without whatever this is.” She waved her hand between them, dismissing the idea of their connection.

Sloane swallowed hard. “I understand,” she said softly, gathering her things. The pain in her chest felt unbearable. She had no right to fight, not on a business trip where their reputations were more developed than whatever this was. “I’ll leave you alone then.”

“Good,” Helena replied, her voice a mere whisper. “It’s for the best.”

With that final, stinging remark, Sloane hastily collected her things from the room, and Helena turned away, her back to Sloane, leaving a cavernous silence between them. Sloane felt every ounce of connection slip away like sand through her fingers.

“Fine,” Sloane said, biting back her emotions. “If that’s how it is, I’ll just... I’ll just find another hotel.” Her voice was steady, but inside, she felt broken.

As she stepped out, Helena didn’t stop her. Sloane paused for a moment before walking away. The hallway felt long and unwelcoming, and it felt like she was leaving a part of herself behind, one she had hoped to share with Helena. Her heart was heavy as she walked down the hallway. The hotel felt vast and echoing around her, and she felt so small. She looked at the door one last time, then turned away, her mind racing. She needed a place to escape, to think.

When she reached the lobby of the neighboring hotel, Sloane slumped into a chair, burying her head in her hands. She couldn’t help but cry softly, the weight of disappointment bearing down on her.

Tears streaked down her face and sadness twisted in her heart, and she made the hardest decision yet. If Helena didn’t want to connect, then Sloane would disengage to protect her own heart too.

Whatever they had, whatever it could have been, it was a lie. If Helena wanted to keep things strictly business, then that’s how it would be. Sloane had to steel herself.

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As she took a deep breath and sat up straight, wiping her tears away, she knew it was time to retreat emotionally. She had to guard her heart, even if it meant closing a door she wished could have opened wider.

After finding a desk attendant and with some crazy luck managing to get a cancellation- the only room available, she found her way to her new room. Settling into her new accommodation, she stood in the middle of her hotel room, hands on her hips. She took a deep breath, inhaling the salty air, hoping it would calm her racing thoughts. Her hair fell softly over her shoulders as she turned to survey her surroundings.

“Why does it have to be so complicated?” she murmured. A small tear slipped down her cheek, and she quickly wiped it away.

Just then, her phone buzzed on the bedside table. She picked it up, heart racing, hoping it was a message from Helena. But it was just a reminder about the meeting the next morning.

Sloane huffed, tossing the phone back down. She gazed out at the waves crashing relentlessly against the shore; they seemed carefree while she felt like she was sinking.

Just as she was about to get up and grab a glass of water, her phone buzzed again. This time, it was a message from Helena.

“Can we talk? I’m at the café near the hotel.”

Sloane's heart skipped. The mix of hope and anxiety made her feel dizzy. Taking a deep breath, she typed back, "I'll be there in five minutes."

After slipping into a light shirt, shorts and sandals, Sloane gave herself one last look in the mirror. "You can do this," she whispered, trying to boost her confidence. She grabbed her purse and made her way to the door, the cool ocean breeze brushing against her cheeks.

When she entered the small café, her eyes scanned the room until they landed on Helena sitting at a corner table, her head bowed. Sloane's heart sank again. Helena seemed so small, yet she was always so strong. She braced herself, feeling like it would likely be a conversation full of boundaries and regrets.

13

HELENA

Helena stood in her hotel room, staring out the window at the twinkling lights of the resort next door. It was late, but her mind was racing with thoughts of Sloane. She could still see Sloane's long, wavy brown hair flowing gently behind her as she walked away. She watched silently as Sloane walked down the street, suitcase rolling along the path. Helena's chest tightened as she observed her walking into the entrance of the nearby neighboring resort.

"What is wrong with me?" she muttered to herself, sinking into the oversized armchair by the window. She replayed their earlier conversation in her mind, her voice still echoing from the way she had dismissed Sloane.

And then she watched Sloane go, her eyes glimmering with something Helena could not put into words. It was a mixture of sadness and strength. It had made Helena's heart ache, but she had pushed it aside, convincing herself it was for the best.

“It’s always about business,” she whispered, shaking her head. “You can’t let feelings get in the way.” But deep down, she knew that it wasn’t just about business. There was something much deeper, something she was afraid to acknowledge.

Helena remembered the moments they shared. The intimacy they shared. The way their bodies inched closer together. Sloane’s tight body, full of energy, matched with Helena’s own perfectionism. But every time their connection threatened to deepen beyond the professional, Helena shut it down.

“Why can’t I just let someone in? Why is it so hard?” she sighed, her voice barely above a whisper. It was an endless cycle. One she didn’t know how to break. She thought about how she had built walls so high and thick they felt like steel. And it was lonely up there.

Just then, she stared at the reflection in the window. The way she calculated every move, every friendship, every relationship through the eyes of a strategist.

She considered reaching out to clear the air, but doubt washed over her.

What would she say? “Hey, Sloane, forget everything I just said. I don’t want to lose you.” Helena couldn’t justify that kind of vulnerability; after all, what if Sloane didn’t feel the same way?

Helena’s phone buzzed on the table, breaking the silence. She glanced at it, her heart skipping when she saw Sloane’s name at the top of the screen. “No, don’t,” she whispered, shaking her head. But the urge to grab the phone was overwhelming.

“Just one message. Just one,” she said, fingers hovering over the screen.

But she hesitated. What if...? The thought of Sloane’s hurt expression lingered in her mind, and the weight of regret pressed down on her shoulders.

“Maybe I messed up too much,” Helena finally admitted silently to herself as she put the phone back down. “Maybe if I had let us connect, this wouldn’t feel so empty.”

She walked over to the window, peering out again. The resort seemed so close, yet so far. In her heart, she knew what she wanted—someone to escape with, not just to fight against in the corporate world but to share the emotions of her hectic life—but fear kept her lonely and isolated.

Helena picked up a pillow and hugged it tightly, her emotions swirling. As the city hummed outside, she knew she had to make a choice. It felt like she had to make it right now, and the pressure was suffocating.

Without thinking too much, she grabbed her phone and dialed her sister's number.

“Hey, Helena!” her sister, Rachel, answered cheerfully. “What’s up?”

Helena hesitated for a moment. She almost said “nothing,” but that felt wrong. “Um, Rachel...I’m having a rough time.”

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“Rough time? You? Seriously?” Rachel sounded shocked. “What’s going on?”

Helena leaned against the bedpost, feeling her heart race. “I’m in Hawaii for a business trip, but it got complicated. I ended up sharing a room with the opposing team’s lawyer, and we kinda...got intimate.”

There was a silence on the other end. Helena could almost hear Rachel’s brain working. “Wait, what? This is huge! You have to explain everything.”

“It’s embarrassing,” Helena admitted, sitting back down on the bed and running her fingers through her hair. “I usually don’t let myself get emotional like this. But I’m feeling so much pressure after Dad said he might have Kaleb take over the company.”

Rachel let out a loud laugh. “That’s ridiculous! Dad is just trying to push Kaleb because he thinks it’s tough love. He believes in that nonsense.”

Helena felt a little lighter with Rachel’s laughter. “But Kaleb just had a baby. His wife is angry all the time, and I’ve never seen him so anxious. I hate thinking of him like that.”

“Yeah, well, I mean, having a baby is a big deal. And he’s a genius, but he’s also human, Helena. He’s going to feel the pressure too.” Rachel paused. “But you know what? It sounds like you’re comparing your life to theirs again.”

“I know, I know.” Helena sighed. “I shouldn’t do that. I should just focus on what I need to do.” She looked out the window and watched the waves crashing against the shore. “I’ve spent so long just holding money as my only goal. I should check on

Kaleb more.”

“You should,” Rachel agreed. “And speaking of checking in, what about this lawyer girl?”

Helena rolled her eyes. “How did you know she was a woman?”

“Oh, Helena! Are you kidding? I know you. Whatever else you might say or not say, it’s always been women for you.”

Helena screwed her face up, unable to admit that her sister was right.

“Are you really worried about this being a conflict of interest?”

“I am, but if anything, the opposing team might actually like that she’s with me. It could help both sides negotiate better.”

Rachel snickered through the phone. “Exactly! They’ll think you’re team players, and no one will likely even find out unless it progresses. And let’s be real, you’ve clearly done an amazing job negotiating. It’ll all work out just fine.”

“Thanks, Rachel,” Helena said softly, feeling encouraged. “I just feel so scared sometimes. I’m so used to control. And, well, I’ve never really had a girlfriend. I never thought I’d be able to be that for someone.”

“Hey,” Rachel said, her tone turning serious but warm. “ You can do this. Don’t wait to tell her how you feel. Never go to bed angry. You have to communicate how you feel. Don’t let yourself push her away. Because, you do that, you know. Push women away. And about the coming out thing- it really won’t be the big deal you think it will, you know.”

“Right.” Helena nodded, even though Rachel couldn’t see her. “That makes sense. I really appreciate your advice.”

“Always,” Rachel replied, sounding happy. “Just remember to check on Kaleb too. He doesn’t want to inherit Dad’s problems; he’s fine with just being on a will. You’re not alone in this, Helena. You’ve got this.”

“Thanks, Rachel. Love you,” Helena said, smiling for the first time that evening.

“Love you too. Call me soon, okay?” Rachel said before hanging up.

Helena set her phone down and took a deep breath. She felt a little bit better. She had the ocean's calmness outside her window and her sister’s words in her heart, and now, the next step was to figure out what came next for her and Sloane.

She took a deep breath and made a decision. She needed to talk to Sloane, to clear the air, to admit how much she cared. The tension surrounding the merger with Thompson Industries hung over her head. Both women had high stakes in this deal, and their friendship made things more complicated in her mind.

The business merger was heating up now, and Helena knew that mistakes could cost them everything. Still, beneath all the suit-and-tie discussions was a messy connection between them. They formed a bond that only seemed to entangle them more and more with every passing day.

Without thinking too much, Helena grabbed her jacket and left the hotel. As she walked toward the neighboring resort's café, she felt like she was on auto-pilot. Her heart raced not just from nerves but also from the feelings she had kept buried. “Just go talk to her,” she whispered under her breath, trying to calm herself.

With her heart racing, she stood up and straightened her dress. The walk to the

neighboring resort felt tough. It was still early in the evening, but the island around her seemed so quiet, as if everything had paused. As she walked, she tried to turn off her logical brain, pushing aside thoughts about business and deals. Right now, there was something much deeper at stake.

Why do you care so much? Helena asked herself. The answer came quickly. She cared because there was something real between her and Sloane, something pure despite the complications. The merger talks with Thompson Industries were flowing smoothly, and Helena felt confident about their position. Yet hiding her feelings was making it more complicated than it already would have been.

When Helena arrived at the café, she noticed it was empty, but she didn't mind. The quietness felt comforting. She pulled out her phone and hesitated for a moment before texting Sloane. "Can we talk? I'm at the café near your hotel."

Helena sat at one of the tables, her thoughts swirling. She kept glancing at her phone, waiting for a reply, her fingers tapping nervously on the table. What if Sloane didn't want to talk? What if she was done?

Minutes felt like hours, and she thought about the situation they were in. Her phone pinged, and she practically threw it in the air trying to glance if it was Sloane. She would be way too disappointed if it wasn't, and it had her so shaky.

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“I’ll be there in five minutes.” Sloane had texted.

Relief flooded her, and she had a small smile. She remembered the way Sloane had looked at her, warm and kind. But Helena had pushed her away, acting cold and bitchy. She couldn’t help but worry. What if tonight was the last time they would ever see each other in a personal context?

As the minutes went by, Helena’s heart raced faster. She pulled out her phone, checking the time again. “Come on, Sloane. Where are you?” She bit her lip, fighting back the rising tide of panic. She needed to talk to Sloane, to make things right. But how could she explain her feelings? They were all tangled up inside her, confusing and messy.

An image of Sloane’s frown flashed in her mind, and the thought made her heart ache. She could feel tears biting at the edges of her eyes. Her palms grew sweaty against the cool table.

Just then, the bell above the café door jingled. Helena’s head whipped around, every muscle in her body tensing. There stood Sloane, her tall frame silhouetted against the bright light from the hallway.

14

SLOANE

Sloane adjusted her sunglasses as she walked down the path from the hotel. The warm Hawaiian sun was gone, but a breeze carried the scent of ocean salt. Sloane

wasn't overly girly, but she was growing an affinity for the tropical flowers. Despite the beauty around her, she felt uneasy. Not long ago, she had received a text from Helena. She wanted to meet up, but Sloane was still processing their last conversation, the fight that had pushed them apart.

"Why does she want to see me?" Sloane mumbled to herself. Her heart raced as she thought about how their last encounter had gone. As Sloane walked, her mind kept racing. What if she's just worried about our business partnership? Is she afraid I might tell everyone what happened? Sloane shook her head, trying to clear her thoughts.

She stepped into the dimly lit café. The air felt cool, and the sound of soft music played in the background. She took a deep breath and glanced around, her eyes landing on a familiar figure.

Helena sat at a small table in the corner. Her short red bob gleamed under the low lights, and her eyes were focused on her phone. Sloane's stomach flipped. It was strange to see the usually confident CEO looking so...vulnerable... outside of the bedroom anyway. Sloane's heart softened a little, despite the anger and disappointment still swirling inside her.

Helena looked up as Sloane walked in. The moment their eyes met, time seemed to pause. Sloane took a step closer, feeling a mix of determination and uncertainty. She could see lines of stress around Helena's eyes, and for a second, Sloane felt a pang of sympathy.

"Hey," Helena said, her voice hesitant. She set her phone down and sat back in her chair, crossing her arms. "Thanks for coming."

"I didn't think you wanted to talk after...you know." Sloane tried to keep her tone steady, but she could hear the slight tremor in her own voice.

Helena sighed and ran a hand through her hair. “I didn’t either. But I can’t stop thinking about what happened. We need to address it.”

Sloane crossed her arms, matching Helena’s posture. “Address it? As in what?”

Helena looked down, taking a deep breath. “I didn’t mean to push you away. I just—” She paused, searching for the right words. “I have a lot of responsibility. Wolfe Enterprises needs me to stay focused.”

“Is that all I am to you? Just a distraction?” Sloane asked, trying to keep her anger in check.

Helena’s face flushed slightly. “It’s not like that. You know it’s complicated. We’re on opposite sides of a merger. I can’t lose sight of that.”

Sloane felt her heart sink. “So this was just a fling? Just something you can forget?”

Helena shook her head, frustration flaring in her eyes. “It wasn’t just a fling. But I can’t let it mess up what we’ve built.”

Sloane took a step closer, searching Helena’s face for hints of sincerity. “Then what do you want? Why call me here if you’re just going to push me away again?”

Helena uncrossed her arms, leaning forward. “Because I miss you, Sloane. I miss what we had. But this—”—she waved her hand between them—“this is dangerous.”

Sloane felt a rush of emotions: hope, hurt, anger. “Dangerous or not, it’s real. Or at least it was real for me.”

Silence hung between them. The soft music played on, but it felt far away.

“I just am so afraid,” Helena finally admitted, her voice softer now.

Sloane considered her words. “And I don’t want to get hurt or be a secret,” she confessed.

They stared at each other for a moment. The air shifted around them, charged with unspoken feelings.

“I don’t know how to do this,” Helena said slowly, looking away.

“Maybe we can figure it out together?” Sloane suggested, her chest tightening with hope.

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Helena looked back at Sloane, and Sloane could see the conflict still brewing within her.

They both knew what they had to do next. Either they would take a step forward or a step back. Sloane held her breath, waiting for Helena's answer.

“I’ve messed up,” Helena said, her voice barely above a whisper. “I have been a total bitch to everyone, including you.” She took a deep breath, and Sloane noticed tears welling up in Helena’s eyes. “I can’t keep doing this, Sloane. I am so tired of pretending I have it all together.”

Sloane’s heart broke a little at the sight of Helena, usually so commanding and confident, now vulnerable and emotional. “What do you mean?” she asked, her voice softening.

“I feel like I don’t have any real support. Everyone around me just wants something from me or wants to make their own lives better,” Helena explained. “It’s hard being in charge. All these people clock out at 5 p.m., but I’m still here, alone.”

“Helena, you’re the CEO. It’s your job to lead,” Sloane said, trying to understand.

“I know,” Helena said, wiping a tear from her cheek. “But it doesn’t feel good. I haven’t had anyone to really lean on for years. And, honestly, I’ve never had a girlfriend. I just push women away. And then, when you...when we...happened, I got scared.”

Sloane felt her breath hitch. “Scared of what?”

“Scared of what it could mean. Scared of getting hurt. Scared of technicalities and motivations. Scared of coming out. Scared of losing you,” Helena admitted, looking straight into Sloane's eyes. “I felt like I had to push you away because I couldn’t admit that I actually have feelings for you. I hate how I reacted, and I’m honestly in more pain than I’m used to handling.”

Sloane looked at Helena, seeing the seriousness in her eyes. “You want me to believe that?” she asked, her heart fluttering with a mix of hope and hesitation.

“I do,” Helena said, her voice thick with emotion. “I could not let you go to bed not knowing how I felt. I’m sorry for everything. I feel awful about how I pushed you away.”

Sloane nodded slowly, taking in Helena's honest pain. “You hurt me, Helena. I thought we had something real.”

“We do,” Helena insisted, leaning forward. “I know I’ve been difficult. I’ve been like this for so long. But you...you make me feel different. You make me feel like I’m not just a CEO or a warrior in a suit. When I’m with you, I feel...more.”

Sloane felt the warmth of Helena’s words wrap around her, making her hesitate just a little less.

“What do you want, Helena?” Sloane finally asked.

“I want to start over. I want to be honest with you. I want to try,” Helena said, wiping her tears and meeting Sloane's gaze with sincerity. “I need you in my life, Sloane. I don’t want to lose you. I think I’m falling in love with you.”

“I can’t believe you apologized,” Sloane said, her voice steady but soft. She had always found it hard to get through to Helena. “I didn't expect that.”

Helena took a deep breath. “I’m really sorry, Sloane. I know I’ve been closed off. With the merger and everything, I got so wrapped up in work. It has felt easier to push everyone away.”

Sloane set her cup down and leaned in closer. “Do you really think you needed to do that with me? I mean, with us?”

Helena looked down at her coffee again. “Maybe I thought I had to be strong. But now I realize I don’t want to be strong all the time, especially not around you. Hiding how I feel clearly just makes me less relatable and doesn’t help in the long-run. My admission on the yacht was the first time I’ve felt like I could be myself in a professional setting in so long. It took me off guard.”

A flutter of excitement raced through Sloane. “So, you’re saying you want me to be part of your life even with everything else going on?”

“Yes,” Helena replied, meeting Sloane’s gaze. “I was afraid you wouldn’t understand. But I do care about you. More than I thought I would.”

Sloane could feel a warmth spreading through her. “You don’t need me, Helena. Maybe you just want me. And that’s okay.”

Helena’s eyes widened slightly. “You’re okay with that?”

Sloane smiled a little. “Yeah, I think I am.” She paused for a moment, feeling a mix of emotions. “But now...? What do we do next? We each have our own rooms.”

“I don’t want to confuse you. I know I’ve been distant. But I really want to be close to you.”

Sloane took a breath, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear. “I want to be close to

you too. It's just I've been guarding myself after seeing how harsh you've been to people close to you. So I'm really surprised you said all this. It must have been hard for you, with the merger and everything on the line."

Helena nodded, her fingers tapping lightly on the table. "Honestly, it is. I was scared to mess everything up at work. But I think I messed up more by pushing you away."

Sloane watched her, feeling a softening in her chest. "I accept your apology, Helena." She hesitated, wondering if now was the right moment to confess her own feelings. "And I'm willing to forgive you for being closed off. Just know that I want to move forward, but I also want to be careful and not risk any exposure that would make people question the legitimacy of the merger."

"I understand," Helena replied, her expression earnest. "I promise to be open with you from now on."

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Sloane felt a rush of relief. “That sounds perfect.” She noticed how her cheeks felt warm.

“You’ll tell me if I’m ever pushing you away again, right?” Helena asked, her voice low and serious.

“Definitely. But I think we’re in a good place now,” Sloane said, feeling her defenses start to crumble. “We just need time for this deal to be completed, and I think a lot of the conflict you are feeling will resolve itself.”

“Time is what we have,” Helena said with a reassuring smile. “Let’s take it slow. The last thing I want is to lose you.”

Sloane nodded, feeling a mix of hope and apprehension. “Okay. Slow sounds good. I also really want to be with you, Helena.”

And as they sat there, sharing glances and smiles, Sloane knew they were on the brink of something new. The waves continued to crash outside, and inside the café, a real connection was crashing over them too. She reached across the table, her palm out and open as an offer. Helena slowly reached and clasped her fingers with hers.

The dim light from a nearby lamp made the shadows dance on the walls, but Sloane felt a warmth between them now. She could see relief in Helena’s eyes, and a small smile crept onto Sloane’s face.

“I’m really sorry about earlier,” Helena said, biting her lip. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

Sloane shook her head. "It's okay, Helena. We both said some things we didn't mean. I'm just glad we could talk it out."

Helena looked down at her drink. "Do you think... Can I see your hotel room?"

Sloane raised her eyebrows and nodded. "Sure! It's not far. Let's go!"

They stood up and walked out of the café and through the colorful lobby. The hotel was quiet as they took the stairs to Sloane's hotel room. She felt excited to show Helena her new space. Sloane opened the door, and they stepped inside.

"Wow!" Helena exclaimed, looking around. "It really is nice!"

Sloane grinned. The room had two big beds instead of one. "Yeah, this was the only room available when I checked in. It's pretty cool."

Helena wandered over to one of the beds and bounced lightly on it. "Can we sleep in here together? I'm so used to being alone before you... but now..."

Sloane nodded again. "You don't have to explain anymore. Of course you can stay. It's way more comfortable than the other bed."

They both climbed onto the larger bed, sitting close to each other. Sloane looked at Helena's shy expression. "You know, I'm glad we made up."

Helena smiled softly. "Me too, Sloane. I don't like being a bitch all the time anymore."

They shared a quiet moment looking into each other's eyes. Then, without thinking, Sloane leaned in and kissed Helena gently. The kiss felt sweet and warm, as if they were wrapping each other in a cozy blanket.

“Can I kiss you again?” Sloane whispered, her voice barely above a breath.

“Yes,” Helena replied, closing her eyes.

Sloane kissed her again, this time deeper. The world outside faded away, and all that mattered was the two of them in the soft glow of the hotel room. They leaned back onto the bed, and Sloane felt the sheets cool against her skin as they continued to kiss.

As they cuddled, Sloane took Helena’s hand, intertwining their fingers. “I want to do this every time I see you,” Sloane said softly.

“Me too,” Helena said, biting her lip again, her cheeks turning a light shade of pink.

Slowly, they began to remove their clothes, helping each other until they were both naked. Sloane felt giddy and free, her heart racing with excitement. She pressed her body against Helena’s, their skin touching, making her feel even more alive.

Helena’s breath hitched as Sloane trailed her fingers down Helena’s body, bringing a rush of warmth. “You feel amazing,” Sloane said, looking deeply into Helena’s eyes.

Helena smiled back, then her hands explored Sloane’s body, sending shivers down Sloane’s spine. They were lost in their own world, forgetting everything but each other. The air was filled with soft giggles and whispers.

“I think we should be a little more adventurous,” Helena said, her eyes sparkling with mischief.

“What do you mean?” Sloane asked.

“I want to be inside you.” She moved closer, her hands lingering over Sloane's hips.

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Sloane felt herself swoon at the words.

Helena paused and looked up at Sloane, waiting. Sloane nodded, and Helena smiled as she moved her hand from Sloane's hips down her legs then back up, hovering over Sloane's aching pussy.

Sloane's breath hitched as Helena slid a finger inside then a second. As Helena pumped her fingers, Sloane arched her back so Helena's fingers hit the perfect spot that made her moan. With expert precision, Helena slid her other hand down and pressed on Sloane's clit in circles as she curled her fingers inside Sloane. Minutes went by as the pleasure built up until Sloane couldn't take it anymore, and she cried out in ecstasy. She squeezed her eyes shut, sparks still shooting behind her eyelids as she lost control.

When she finally regained her breath, Sloane opened her eyes to see Helena still sitting in the same spot, a satisfied grin on her face.

"That was a much better apology," Sloane said, laughing.

"Then maybe you should show me how much you appreciate my apology."

Sloane leaned up and tucked her legs under her, sitting on her knees in front of Helena at eye level.

Wordlessly, she leaned in and kissed Helena deeply, then guided her to where she had just been lying down. With a gentle push, she pushed Helena down, then traced her kisses from her lips down her neck, down her chest, lavishing each nipple as she

sucked and nipped.

Sloane felt Helena's body tighten underneath her as she nipped on her nipple and moved her hand down to her waist.

Helena leaned back and moaned, "More."

Sloane brought both hands up to cup her breasts as she squeezed them harder than she normally would have.

"That's for letting me walk out," she said playfully as she flicked Helena's nipple with her tongue.

"If that's my punishment, then I need to walk out more often."

Sloane's silent response was to nip down a little harder while squeezing Helena's breast with one hand as she snaked her other hand down to trace her curves, eliciting a sound that was between a yelp and a moan from Helena.

"Fine, fine. No more walking out," Helena acquiesced.

"Better," Sloane purred as she cupped Helena's soaking pussy, then moved her thumb up to rest on top of her clit. "Much better."

She started moving her thumb in tight circles, and Helena's body slackened and her breathing became more ragged in response. She dropped her thumb and ran her fingers down her pussy. Helena was wet and ready. Good.

Sloane leaned all the way down til she was on her stomach in between Helena's legs and teased Helena with her tongue, little movements that made Helena's body twitch at first but then long strokes that elicited deeper moans.

“You’re amazing,” Helena panted in between strokes, and Sloane moved her hand up to brace against her stomach, silencing her.

Sloane kept swirling her tongue then moved up to the clit to suck on it, pulling it into her mouth and massaging it with her tongue which made Helena cry out in pleasure.

“Keep going. I’m so close,” Helena said as she tangled her fingers in Sloane’s curly hair.

Sloane kept the pace with her tongue, and she inserted two fingers inside Helena and pushed into her. She alternated licking and sucking while pumping her curled fingers, and Sloane could feel Helena’s body completely tighten before her orgasm crashed through her body and she screamed Sloane’s name while arching her back and neck.

Sloane slipped her fingers out and curled up next to Helena, facing her. “Liked that?”

“Let’s just say I won’t be walking out again. Ever.”

15

HELENA

Helena Wolfe sat at her large desk in her office overlooking the bustling streets of Los Angeles. It was good to be back and settled into what somehow felt like an upgraded life. The sun poured through the floor-to-ceiling windows, casting natural light across the room. Papers were neatly stacked, and the faint scent of fresh coffee filled the air. Helena smiled as she thought about the merger with Thompson Industries. It had been a tough process, and now, everything felt right.

Just then, Sloane walked in, and Helena’s heart skipped a beat. Sloane had been the opposing lawyer during the merger, but now she was more than that. They had started

dating a couple of months ago and were enjoying every moment together, even if they kept their relationship quiet at first, she had now come out to everyone and had no regrets at all

Although she had been originally consumed by what people might think, she had quickly realized that all of that fade into nothingness compared to the power of their love.

She loved Sloane and that was all that mattered.

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Her father still pressured her in many ways, but Sloane had opened her eyes enough to realize she did an incredible job and he was wrong to doubt her.

He had been pretty unfazed by her coming out. Her family had been much less shocked than she had imagined as if they already suspected.

“Hey, Helena,” Sloane said, her eyes sparkling. “I brought the revised contract for the new marketing team.”

“Great! Come sit down,” Helena replied, her voice bright with enthusiasm.

Sloane took a seat across from Helena, placing the documents on the desk. “I think these are going to help the team understand their roles better.”

Helena glanced at the paperwork. “This looks perfect. You always manage to keep everything so clear and organized.”

Sloane smiled. “I’ve learned from the best,” she said playfully, leaning forward. “You’re doing an amazing job with the transition.”

“Thank you. It’s made a huge difference having you involved. The new team members really feel supported with you on our side,” Helena replied, her eyes warm with appreciation.

It felt easy to talk to Sloane, as if they had known each other for years. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. It was Mark.

“Sorry to interrupt,” he said, stepping in. “I wanted to share some exciting news. The launch of our new campaign exceeded all expectations! We’ve gained more clients than we ever imagined.”

“That’s fantastic!” Helena exclaimed, her heart swelling with pride. “Tell me everything.”

Mark chuckled. “Our engagement on social media has gone up by fifty percent, and people are actually talking about us. It feels like we’re really making our mark.”

Sloane leaned back in her chair, enjoying the enthusiasm. “That’s great work, Mark. The whole team deserves a round of applause.”

Mark nodded, a big smile on his face. “I’ll make sure they know you’re proud of them, Helena. They’ve worked hard to adjust to the changes, and having Sloane on your side has made everything smoother.”

Helena threw a glance at Sloane, nodding in agreement. “It really has. I think the employees appreciate that someone is watching their back and advocating for them.”

“Absolutely,” Sloane said. “When they see a lawyer who's invested in their success, it makes a big difference.”

Mark beamed. “I’ll let the team know. They’re going to love to hear this!”

As Mark left the office, Helena turned to Sloane, feeling even more excited about their partnership. “We really did it, didn’t we?”

“We did,” Sloane replied softly. “You trusted me, and I wanted to prove that I was worth it.”

Helena leaned in closer. “You didn’t just prove that, Sloane. You’re an essential part of this team.”

Sloane smiled, her cheeks slightly pink. “I love being here, working with you, all of it.”

Just then, the phone on Helena’s desk rang, breaking the moment. “Excuse me,” she said, answering it. “Wolfe Enterprises, Helena speaking.”

As Helena listened, she nodded and quickly took notes. “Yes, I understand. I’ll follow up with you by the end of the day. Thank you.” She hung up and turned back to Sloane. “That was a client wanting updates on the new contract. We need to put a plan together.”

“Let’s do it,” Sloane replied, ready for action. “I’ll help draft a response to make sure they have all their questions answered.”

Helena’s eyes sparkled with gratitude. “I really appreciate everything you do. I couldn’t have gotten through this without your support.”

Sloane leaned over the desk, her voice low. “You’d have done great without me, but I’m glad I got to be part of it.”

The two women started discussing the details, their easy banter flowing between business and laughter. Time flew as they collaborated, and before they knew it, the sun had begun to set, casting a golden hue over the office.

“I can’t believe how late it is,” Helena said, glancing at the clock. “Where did the time go?”

“Must be all that chemistry between us,” Sloane joked, her eyes dancing with

mischievous.

Helena laughed heartily. “Maybe we should take a break and celebrate tonight.”

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“Sounds perfect! How about dinner at that new Italian place down the street?” Sloane suggested.

“Let’s do it!” Helena agreed, feeling a rush of happiness.

As they packed up their things, Helena couldn’t help but feel thankful for both her growing business and her blossoming relationship with Sloane. She had built a solid foundation for Wolfe Enterprises, and now, with Sloane by her side, the future looked brighter than ever.

Together, they left the office, ready to take on whatever challenges awaited them, both in business and in their personal lives.

Helena adjusted her sunglasses as she stepped out of the car, ready for her next business trip. This one felt drastically different from the Hawaii trip. The sun was shining in FortLauderdale, Florida, and warm breezes swept through the palm trees. She felt excited to be here, even though it was a business trip. She glanced at Sloane, who was getting out her luggage.

Once they reached the front desk, Helena argued a little with the receptionist. After a moment of chatter, Sloane turned to Helena, her arms crossed with a teasing smile.

“They upgraded us to a suite!” Helena announced proudly.

“Wow, that’s great!” Sloane cheered while she tried to suppress her laugh. “Do you think it has two beds this time?”

“We’ll see about that!” Helena replied as they walked towards the elevator.

When they reached their floor, Helena could feel her heart race with anticipation. They stepped inside their suite, and Helena gasped. The room was much larger than she had expected. Elegant decor surrounded them, and a big window overlooked the lush greenery outside.

“Look at this place!” Helena exclaimed, her eyes shining. “This is amazing!”

Sloane grinned and twirled around. “I know! But...” She paused, her smile widening as she pointed. “Look at the bed.”

Helena’s eyes followed, and she burst out laughing. “No way! There’s only one bed!”

Sloane chuckled, shaking her head. “This is just too funny! We’ve upgraded our room, but they still gave us one bed.”

Helena leaned against the wall, remembering their first trip together to Hawaii. “Oh to be stuck in that room with just one bed again.”

Sloane laughed harder now. “You were so frustrated back then. I thought you were going to throw your shoes at me!”

“I was just stressed out!” Helena replied, trying to catch her breath from laughing. “I felt so lonely and bitter back then. Having you thrust into my personal space was annoyingly great, okay?”

“And look at us now,” Sloane said, her tone gentle. “We’ve both changed so much since then.”

Helena felt her heart swell at Sloane’s words. They had come a long way, and it made

her feel warm inside. “You’re right. I’m glad we’re here together.”

Sloane stepped closer, her eyes searching Helena’s. “Me too.” She reached up and brushed a strand of hair behind Helena’s ear. At that moment, the air felt charged with emotion.

Helena’s breath caught in her throat as Sloane’s fingers lingered against her skin. Without thinking, Helena leaned in closer, and their lips met softly. A spark ignited between them.

Sloane pulled back, her eyes twinkling. “Do you want to relive that night in Hawaii?” she teased with a playful smirk.

Helena’s cheeks flushed. “Only if it involves me being much nicer to you this time.”

Sloane nodded, a laugh escaping her lips. “Won’t argue with that.”

They began to take off each other’s clothes, slowly and tenderly, feeling both the warmth of the air and their hearts. They kissed again, deeper this time, their hands exploring softly as they moved to the bed. This time, there was no fight or internal conflict, only love and deep respect. As they settled onto the soft mattress, laughter faded into whispering words and gentle touches. Helena felt her heart race again, not from anxiety but from love and connection. “I’m glad we’re together like this,” she murmured, resting her head on Sloane’s shoulder.

“It’s the best part of these trips,” Sloane said softly, brushing her fingers along Helena’s arm. “Being together, building something new.”

Helena smiled, feeling the warmth of Sloane’s affection. “Yes, together. Always.”

They kissed again, feeling grateful for each other. And though they only had one bed,

Helena knew that it was going to be a good night. The thrilling part was not hiding herself the way she thought she always had to.

In a playful mood, she gently pushed Sloane down onto the fluffy white bedspread.

“Whoa! What was that for?” Sloane laughed, her eyes sparkling with surprise.

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“I just wanted to remind you who’s the boss here,” Helena joked, winking as she stood at the foot of the bed.

Sloane giggled, brushing her hair off her face. “Yeah? You think you can handle this, big boss?” She sat up, pretending to make an aggressive face.

Helena couldn’t help but chuckle. "I guess we’ll find out!"

As Helena rummaged through her bag, she unearthed a double-sided strap-on that she had brought along for a little fun. It was shiny and colorful, with silver straps that sparkled in the light. She held it up, grinning mischievously.

“You brought that?” Sloane asked, her eyebrows raised in curiosity.

“Oh, just something to make our little getaway more...spicy,” Helena teased. “Want to give it a try?”

Sloane laughed, her face lighting up with excitement. “Oh gosh, yes,” She said hesitantly. “I’ve really been wanting to,” Helena replied, laughing as she sat down beside Sloane on the bed. “Just think of it as a kind of...relaxation.”

They undressed slowly, teasingly. “Here, get on your hands and knees on the bed.” She leaned closer.

Sloane’s eyes widened. “This is making me wet already!”

“I can tell.”

Helena bent down and traced her tongue along Sloane's folds, savoring her taste. She teased the tip of Sloane's clit with her tongue before she slipped in two fingers and curled them. She could feel Sloane's body shake with pleasure, and she kept her rhythm as she steadied herself by placing her other hand on Sloane's hips, moving in time with her.

Helena took out her fingers and strapped the dildo into place by inserting one side into herself, gasping as she felt it fill her, and guided the other side until it was flush against Sloane's wet pussy and paused for a beat. "Ready?"

Sloane looked over her shoulder. "Ready."

Helena pushed the toy inside Sloane until her hips were against Sloane's body, and she could feel Sloane loosen to let it in. Once fully inside, Helena paused to let Sloane adjust, then pulled it out and slid it back in, the other side inside her rubbing against her walls, making her moan.

Sloane's right hand was at her clitoris and Helena knew it wouldn't be long before she tipped right over the edge.

With each thrust inside, Helena could feel Sloane get wetter, which riled her up even more. She gathered Sloane's long, curly hair in one hand as she braced her other hand against Sloane's hips, then gently pulled her hair back as she continued thrusting inside. She could feel the pressure of the dildo against her own clitoris as she thrust.

As Helena had gained in confidence sexually, she relished opportunities like this to have Sloane submit entirely to her.

Sloane almost all but lost control as she scratched at the bed sheets and crumpled them in her hands.

“Scream my name,” Helena purred, her own excitement building.

Sloane moaned deeply as she buried her face in the pillow.

“I didn’t hear you,” Helena teased.

“Oh my god, Helena! I’m about to come. Keep going, just like that.”

Helena reveled in hearing her name on Sloane’s lips and kept her pace consistent, knowing she was on the verge of ecstasy too. Three more pumps, and Helena felt her own body squeeze around the dildo as Sloane’s body tightened, both women screaming their pleasure in harmony.

Sloane dropped from her knees onto her stomach, and Helena collapsed on the bed next to her, fighting to catch her breath. Sloane’s forehead was slick with sweat, and her hair was a tangled mess. Helena pushed aside stray strands that were stuck to her forehead as they looked into each other’s eyes.

“That was…” Sloane started.

“Incredible,” Helena finished.

Sloane silently smiled as she closed her eyes, and Helena couldn’t take her eyes off her. In that moment, she knew she had found her forever person.

After their little nap, they decided to put on bathing suits and check out the resort. Helena watched in admiration as Sloane slipped on a sporty bikini. She knew twenty year olds who were in worse shape than this beautiful woman she was lucky to call her girlfriend.

“Can you believe we are finally here?” Helena asked, smiling.

Sloane grinned back. “I know! It’s about time we had a little fun before the big meetings. We should relax and enjoy our time.”

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Helena nodded, feeling her heart race with both excitement and affection. Their relationship kept growing deeper, and she loved it.

As they walked toward the outside of the Hard Rock Café Resort, Helena admired the building's unique shape, which looked like an oversized electric guitar. It was beautiful and modern.

“Look at that!” she said, pointing at the guitar-shaped structure. “Isn’t it wild?”

“It’s awesome,” Sloane agreed, her voice full of enthusiasm. “I can’t believe we get to stay here.”

Once they entered the resort, it felt like stepping into another world. Music played softly in the background, and the air was filled with the smell of food. They headed to the pool areas.

The large collection of pools were surrounded by lounge chairs with bright umbrellas. They picked two chairs near the water and settled in. Sloane poured sunscreen into her hands and rubbed it on her arms and shoulders.

“You need some help with your back?” Sloane said, looking at Helena.

“Oh, definitely!” Helena replied, turning her back toward Sloane. She felt Sloane’s hands gently spreading the sunscreen on her back, and she relaxed. “Thanks, you’re the best.”

“Just looking out for you,” Sloane said, her voice playful.

Helena turned around after Sloane finished, her skin now glistening in the sun. “Your turn,” she said, grabbing the bottle of sunscreen.

Once they were ready, they jumped into the cool water.

The sun was bright, and the water felt refreshing. They splashed each other playfully, laughter echoing around the pool area. After swimming, they floated on their backs, staring up at the bright blue sky.

“I love this,” Helena said, glancing over at Sloane.

“Me too,” Sloane replied softly, turning her head to look into Helena’s eyes. “This is perfect.”

After a while, they swam over to the edge of the pool and rested on the side, their feet dangling in the water. Helena admired Sloane’s shoulders and the way the sunlight danced on her skin. Sloane caught her gaze and smiled widely.

“What?” Sloane asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Just thinking how lucky I am,” Helena said, feeling warmth spread through her.

Sloane’s smile softened. “I feel the same. We make a great team, both in business and in life.”

Helena felt a flutter in her stomach and leaned closer. “I love how you always know what to say.”

They shared a moment of silence, looking into each other’s eyes as the water lapped gently against their bodies.

EPILOGUE

SLOANE 5 YEARS LATER

Sloane lay in bed, the soft sheets tangled around her legs as she smiled down at her wife, Helena Wolfe-Callahan. Helena's warm hands gently explored her body, and Sloane felt the electric thrill of her touch. They had been together for years now, yet every moment still felt new.

“Helena,” Sloane breathed, her voice soft and excited. “That feels amazing.”

Helena looked up, her eyes gleaming with mischief. “I aim to please,” she said playfully, her tongue dancing teasingly. Just as Sloane felt herself rising to the edge of pleasure, a loud cry filled the room.

“Waaaah!”

Sloane and Helena both paused, laughter bubbling up between them.

“Looks like Maui needs us,” Helena said with a grin, sitting up and brushing her hair off her face.

Sloane chuckled and said, “I guess our moment is over.”

Helena leaned over to give her a quick kiss. “Don’t worry, we can continue this later.”

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“Promise?” Sloane asked, a playful glint in her eyes.

“Promise,” Helena replied with a wink before hopping out of bed. Sloane watched as Helena rushed to the other room, her heart full of love and admiration.

While Helena attended to their toddler, Sloane quickly pulled on a comfortable t-shirt and shorts. She couldn’t wait to cuddle with Maui, their two--year-old son. He was the joy of their lives, a bundle of energy with big brown eyes and messy brown hair.

Helena returned carrying Maui, who had tears glistening in his eyes. “What happened, buddy?” Helena asked with a soothing voice.

Maui reached for Sloane, and she opened her arms wide. “Come here, sweetheart.”

As soon as Maui was in her embrace, she felt the familiar tightness in her heart. It was a mix of happiness and protectiveness. “What’s wrong, baby?” she asked gently.

Maui sniffled, burying his face in her neck. “I want mommies!” he cried, his voice muffled but clear.

“Oh, sweet boy, we’re right here,” Sloane said, hugging him tightly. “You don’t have to cry.”

Helena climbed back into bed beside them, wrapping her arms around both Sloane and Maui. “See? We’re all together now.”

“Bouncy, Mommy! Bouncy!” Maui squealed, his little feet hitting the mattress with

soft thuds. Sloane couldn't help but smile at his enthusiasm, even if it was past midnight.

"Maui, sweetheart, it's time to sleep," she said, trying to sound firm but unable to hide her amusement.

The toddler paused for a moment, considering her words. Then, with a loud laugh, he jumped higher, his chubby arms waving like he was flying. "Bouncy!"

Sloane chuckled, shaking her head. "You're like a little kangaroo! We cannot bounce at this hour. The moon is sleeping too."

"But, Mommy! No sleeping!" Maui protested dramatically, throwing himself onto the bed with an exaggerated sigh. His round cheeks were flushed with energy, and he giggled again, rolling onto his back. "More bouncy!"

Sloane propped herself up on one elbow, her golden hair falling messily around her face. "What if you bounce just a little bit longer? But then we have to snuggle, okay?"

"Snuggle! Yay!" Maui clapped his hands, his excitement bubbling over. He jumped once more, then plopped down beside her, curling up into a little ball. His warmth radiated against her side.

Sloane smiled at her son, feeling a wave of love wash over her. "Alright, little kangaroo. Just five more jumps."

"Okay! One! Two!" Maui counted as he bounced again, each number punctuated with a gleeful shout. His laughter filled the room like music, and Sloane found herself swept away by the joy of the moment.

“Three! Four! Five!” He counted faster now, his feet moving as he bounced. “Six! Seven! Eight! Nine! Ten!”

“Okay, that’s ten. Let’s lay down now,” Sloane said, reaching over to scoop him up in her arms. She held him close, the warmth and softness of his small body bringing comfort to her.

“No sleep!” Maui protested, but the defiance was fading, and he yawned widely, his eyes fluttering.

Sloane brushed her fingers through his hair. “You need some sleep, buddy. You’re so bouncy because you’re tired. Remember how we read your favorite book about the sleepy bear? He always sleeps.”

Maui looked up at them, his big eyes filled with wonder. “Book!” he said, as if realizing they hadn’t read him a bedtime story yet.

“Yes, sweetheart,” Sloane replied, her heart swelling as she looked into his eyes. “We’re all cozy now.”

“Maui, do you want us to tell you a story?” Helena asked, nudging him playfully.

“Yeah!” Maui said excitedly. “Book!”

Maui’s eyes sparkled again with recognition. “Bear! Sleepy bear!” he echoed, snuggling deeper into her side.

“Yes, just like that. The sleepy bear,” she continued, her voice softening. “And what happens when he gets a good night’s sleep?”

“Wakes up!” he replied, his voice still a bit slurred from his fatigue.

“Exactly! He wakes up all ready for adventures,” Sloane said, leaning back against the mountain of pillows. “Like jumping on beds/”

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Maui giggled, the corners of his mouth curling into a sleepy smile. “More jump ‘morrow?”

“More jumping tomorrow,” Sloane promised, having already made a mental note to allow her son a bit of extra playtime in the morning. Maui shifted in her arms and snuggled deeper against her, relaxing into her warmth.

As the little boy settled, his breathing slowed. The wild energy that had filled the room moments ago began to fade, replaced by the quiet rhythm of sleep. Sloane smiled, her heart full as she watched him drift off, his small face peaceful and content.

“Goodnight, my little kangaroo,” she whispered, pressing a gentle kiss to his forehead. “Sweet dreams.”

His little face looked peaceful as he drifted off to sleep.

Sloane smiled at Helena. “He really loves jumping, doesn’t he?” she whispered. We’re going to need a trampoline in a few years, she thought.

Helena smiled back, brushing her fingers through Maui’s curls. “He does.”

They shared a soft laugh, the kind that resonated with years of shared dreams and challenges. Sloane’s heart swelled with happiness. Just five years ago, their lives had looked so different.

Gently, Sloane slipped out of bed, careful not to wake Maui. She tiptoed over to the

door, carrying her son to bed. He seemed so small in the big room filled with bright colors and toys. She paused for a moment to admire his room, filled with dinosaurs and space rockets. Posters of superheroes hung on the walls, and his bookshelf was stacked high with all kinds of stories.

As Sloane quietly left the room, she felt a wave of gratitude wash over her. Every bit of this is ours, she thought. It was her family, her life, and it was everything she had ever wanted.

She padded down the hallway to where the baby monitor sat. Sloane turned it so it faced Maui's bed. "Just in case," she whispered under her breath. She knew that sometimes he woke up in the middle of the night. The last thing she wanted was for him to feel scared or alone.

"Everything is perfect," she said to Helena when she returned to their room. Helena was perched on the edge of the bed, looking at her with a knowing expression, as if she could read Sloane's mind.

"Thinking about the past again?" Helena asked, her voice soft and warm.

Sloane sat down beside her. "Yeah. It's wild to think about how far we've come."

"Remember when we first met?" Helena chuckled, shaking her head. "I know I was a bit— What did you call it? Bitter?"

"You were definitely a bit standoffish," Sloane agreed, laughing. "I thought you were just some gorgeous, entitled person who had everything handed to her."

Helena raised an eyebrow playfully. "And now?"

"And now you're my wife, and we have Maui," Sloane said, her heart full of love for

Helena. “You’re not at all what I thought back then. You’re so supportive. You’ve worked so hard, and we’ve built a life together.”

Helena nodded, “What did I tell you back then? I just needed time to show you who I really was.”

Sloane reached for Helena's hand, squeezing it gently. “I’m happy I learned to see beyond first impressions. I love you, and I love our life together.”

“We make a good team,” Helena said, smiling brightly. “And I think Maui is our best collaboration yet.”

Sloane agreed, feeling a rush of happiness. “I never thought I would be a mom at thirty-eight, but look at us now.”

They both glanced at the baby monitor, which had a small light blinking. It made Sloane feel reassured to see Maui’s sleeping figure on the screen.

“I wouldn’t change a thing,” Helena whispered. “We’ve grown together, and I think we’re stronger because of everything we’ve been through.”

“Absolutely,” Sloane replied. “We’re a family, and I feel energized being this close.”

The two women shared a quiet moment, just enjoying the peace of their home and the love they had created. Outside, the moon shone brightly, and inside, their hearts were even brighter.

“Maui’s going to wake up, isn’t he?” Helena said, stifling a yawn.

“Probably,” Sloane said, smiling. “But that’s okay. I wouldn’t trade these moments for anything.”

Sloane sighed, thinking back to how their life together had begun. It had only been a few years ago, but it felt like a lifetime. They had gotten engaged so fast, almost like a whirlwind. Sloane remembered the night when Helena had proposed to her. "Sloane," Helena had said nervously, her voice shaking a little. "I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

Sloane's heart had raced as she watched Helena pull out the ring. It sparkled in the candlelight of their favorite restaurant, and all Sloane could do was nod and say, "Yes! Yes, a million times, yes!" They had both laughed and cried, the excitement overwhelming.

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Their wedding had been beautiful. They hired wedding planners to help them with everything. Sloane could picture it now—the flowers, the music, the laughter of their families. "Can you believe we did it?" Sloane remembered shouting joyfully as they walked down the aisle. Helena had smiled back at her, eyes glistening with happiness.

But after the wedding, Sloane had opened up about something that worried her. Laying in bed that night, she could see it clearly in her mind. "Helena," Sloane had said, her voice tinged with uncertainty. "I really want to be a mom, but what if my time is running out?"

Helena had taken her hand and squeezed it gently. "We'll figure it out together," she said with confidence. "We have time, and we'll do whatever it takes."

It was that support that pushed Sloane forward. Together, they attended all the IVF meetings. Sloane remembered sitting in those sterile rooms, feeling anxious but hopeful. Helena was always by her side, holding her hand tightly. "You're doing amazing, Sloane," she would whisper. "We are going to have a baby. Just keep believing."

Finally, after what felt like a long journey, Sloane had become pregnant with their son, Maui. The moment she found out was one she would never forget. "I can't believe it, Helena! We're going to be parents!" Sloane had shouted through joyful tears. Helena had hugged her tightly, swaying them both side to side. "I knew it. I just knew it!"

Helena had been such a loving partner while Sloane was pregnant. She doted on her every need, cooking healthy meals and rubbing Sloane's feet after long days. "You

deserve to be pampered,” she would say with a smile.

Now, two and a half years later, their little boy, Maui, was sleeping soundly in his room down the hall. Sloane chuckled softly, remembering how he had learned to call for them. “Mommy! Mama!” he would shout with his little voice, running to them with open arms. It filled Sloane’s heart with joy.

“Life is different now,” she whispered to herself, glancing at Helena’s peaceful face. They had two thriving businesses, balancing work and home life together. It was a lot, but they managed.

“I couldn't have done it without you,” Sloane remembered telling Helena one night after a long day at work. Helena had just smiled and replied, “We’re a team, Sloane. We always will be.”

Sloane felt content just lying there, the memories wrapping around her like a warm blanket. She thought about the challenges they had faced and how they had come out stronger together. She leaned closer to Helena, planting a soft kiss on her forehead.

“Thank you for being my everything,” Sloane murmured softly. As she closed her eyes, she was grateful for the life they had built. She felt hopeful for the future, and she knew that no matter what came next, they would face it hand in hand.