



The Billionaire & the Nanny: Vol. 3

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Description: The only woman I'm not allowed to f*ck is living in my house, taking care of my baby...

Logan

The new nanny is sexy as f*ck.

She doesn't know it, which makes her even sexier.

Paisley's lips are full, naturally pouty, decidedly innocent. Her skin is pale and soft, and she wears her blond hair pulled back in a bun. It makes me want to know what it'd look like loose over her shoulders. Over her naked body as I slide into her, making her moan.

I should fire her.

I'm a control freak, and my volatile and possessive ways would do nothing but ruin her.

But I never learn, and soon I'm going down a dark path. I'm bringing her to me at night, pushing into her, undressing her, using her body. I can't explain how good it feels to be with her, teaching her, taking her.

For the first time in my life, my connection with a woman has gone beyond the physical. Because seeing Paisley with my kids, holding her in my arms, coming home to her every night, makes me start to feel emotions I've never felt before...

Paisley

Logan Raider.

Billionaire architect and CEO of L.R. Group—the L.R. Group. He's a self-made billionaire at twenty-eight who also happens to look like every hot movie star you've ever seen rolled into one.

He could have his pick of women.

But two days ago, he looked at a line-up of headshots the nanny

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Paisley

Barfing before any big interview sucks .

Barfing on the doorstep of the ultra-fancy penthouse belonging to Logan Raider, the hot billionaire who owns this building, who'll be letting me into his home in a minute and staring at me with his famous silver eyes, would be tragic .

I suck in a deep breath. "You can do this, Paisley. Be chipper. Be pleasant. Be brilliant ."

When I moved to New York City six months ago with my bestie, Caitlyn Summers, I agreed to work for Le Nanny as an intermediary while planning domination in the world of accounting. It'd be a good way to save money for my own apartment while starting a small business. I expected my first client to be a yoga-pant wearing rich mother. I expected a cozy home, Pinterest-perfect wreath on the door .

I never expected a cold, steely door at the top of a skyscraper in the Financial District .

But two days ago, Logan Raider, billionaire architect and CEO of L.R. Group—the L.R. Group—looked at a line-up of head shots my agent sent him and chose me. Me! Why? Why not Caitlyn who always got picked? Caitlyn, with her long blonde hair and perfect physical aptitude. Caitlyn, who's never had a problem getting hired by horny dads in need of eye candy .

I'm no eye candy .

I'm as plain as it gets .

In the brains department, I'm all set. I graduated from Syracuse with top honors, plus I have a nice list of small jobs and activities on my résumé. I've never worked as a nanny before, but my babysitting references are as solid as they come .

According to my agent, however, Mr. Raider never even looked at my references. He pointed to my photo and said, "This one. Send her Wednesday ."

So, now it's Wednesday, I'm inside a swanky glass building outside Battery Park and my stomach's about to lurch. I won't ring the doorbell until I can speak without losing my breakfast .

I'll just say it—I'm terrified of Logan Raider .

I've spent the last two days researching and studying him to a large degree, and holy shit—he's swoony and scary at the same time. The man is a self-made billionaire at twenty-eight who also happens to look like every hot movie star you've ever seen rolled into one superhunk. As handsome as he is, owning the world's largest collaborative architectural design firm, you'd think he'd be a playboy surrounded by women at all times. But he stays out of the public eye. From what I've read, the man is embroiled in the middle of a nasty divorce and custody case. His ex, Miriam Dange-Raider, can be seen on TV making allegations about him in tearful interviews, and the whole thing reeks of revenge and dirty money .

Problem is, I can't tell who's the victim and who's the jerk in that breakup. And there's always a true jerk in divorce. Some people say "there's two sides to every story." Um, no. My dad's a divorce lawyer. I can tell you—there's always a victim and always an asshole. Always .

Not that his divorce matters. I'm only here for the job. If Logan Raider is the asshole,

cheater, abusive father, or any of the things his ex-wife says about him, I'll just keep my distance. All I have to do is take care of his two-year-old fraternal twins, Becca and Price, smile, and save my paycheck. Done .

I blow out another deep breath. Ring the fucking bell already. He's a person like anybody else. Fine. I ring .

My phone vibrates in my pocket. I pull it out to make sure it's not a text from Le Nanny asking me to abort mission and come back to home base, though part of me wishes it were. Instead, it's from Caitlyn: SO JEALOUS .

"Yeah? If you're so jealous, come and take my place," I mutter just as the frosty glass door opens .

An elegant, older woman with pale skin and old lady cleavage stands there watching me talk to myself. "What's that ?"

"Nothing." I smile, relieved it's not the man I came to see. I need a few more minutes to collect myself. "Hi, I'm Paisley Carrington. From Le Nanny? I'm here for the interview with Mr. Raider." I extend my hand, and it slips into the woman's .

Her hand feels soft and boneless. "Oh, I thought you weren't coming. I'll let Logan know. Just a minute ."

"I apologize for being a few minutes late," I say .

"No worries. Though you should know, he's a stickler for punctuality and details. A Virgo..." She mutters behind her hand, like Mr. Raider might be upset to know she's discussing his astrological sign. From her amazing cheekbones to match his in all the internet images I've seen of him, and the way she calls him Logan, so informally, I'm going to assume this is his mother taking care of the children while he works .

She steps aside to let me in .

My feet slide into the most amazing living space of futuristic style and beauty I have ever seen in my entire life. It's like I've stepped into the home of an ambassador on a peaceful, earth-like planet. Glossy white, silver, and pewter tones everywhere, and just beyond, a couple of housekeepers wander about cleaning and carrying things .

Yes, Mr. Raider is, in fact, is a stickler for details. And precision, perfection, and he's very—very rich. I think I'm going to be sick again .

“Have a seat. I'll go get him.” She gestures to an all-white living room with furniture I don't want to get dirty with my simple woman's clothing and hands. I'm too nervous to sit, so I opt for standing awkwardly next to a sculpture of what appears to be a smooth ebony vagina. The taller of the two housekeepers smiles at me. She wears the classic black dress with white apron. I'm grateful she's older and not a Playboy bunny .

“Welcome,” she says .

“Thank you.” My heartbeat picks up again. I suck in another calming breath but it's no use. I was wrong—this man is not like anybody else. He's in a class all by himself or else the world wouldn't be so obsessed with him like they are the British Royal Family. He's like a prince. A prince of New York .

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Suddenly, a light sound of footsteps enters the room from the opposite side. His mother (or whoever) may have thought he was down the hall, but nope. He comes in from the opposite end of the house like a ghost floating through his modest, sixty-thousand-book library .

He's towering, commanding, brusque and business-like—like a cleaned-up pirate in a suit—and I shrink when I see him. I put on a smile. He doesn't care for pleasantries. "Miss Carrington, you're late ."

Nerves lodge themselves in front of my larynx. I attempt vocals. "I'm sorry. I'm never late, sir. Only today." My God, this man is...big. My imagination fires off a short round of naughty thoughts but I successfully bat them away .

"Why today?" His voice resonates deep and rich. My stomach sinks to my feet just hearing it. The world's obsession with Logan Raider is warranted. This man is a specimen of beauty .

Can't tell him the truth, that I was a scared chicken shit just outside his door. "First, the trains were unusually crowded today. Then, I received a text when I was almost here and wanted to make sure it wasn't related to our interview—a cancelled appointment or something ."

"I never cancel appointments." Mr. Raider steps out of the shadowy hall, and I get an even better look. Whoa. He's well over six feet, maybe six-six, a thick, beautifully-built man. He wears tailored pewter pants, a white shirt with the sleeves pressed to perfection, cuffs hugging his wrists so elegantly. His face is surprisingly more rugged than in his pics, but his eyes are that famous vampire-like silver. Sparkling, sadistic,

and out for my blood. “You don’t get to where I am by crapping out on people .”

“Point taken, sir.” I nod. I can’t. Stop. Staring at him .

“Miss Carrington, if you’re going to be working for me, and I do say if, you might want to begin by telling the truth .”

“The truth?” Have I screwed up already? Did he mean to point to Caitlyn’s photo and instead got me? Instead of the diamond, he got the cubic zirconia? “I’ve told the truth .”

“No.” He places a small crumbled paper into his maid’s hand as she swings past him. “You stood outside my door for five minutes talking to yourself, not checking work-related texts.” I feel like I’m in trouble when I’ve done nothing wrong. “Next time, tell me you were waiting, catching your breath, or whatever it was you were doing standing there. But don’t tell me about traffic and texts when I know better. Understood?” He gives me a pointed look before turning back to the hallway .

I want. To die .

How did he know I was standing outside his door for five minutes? Wait. I’m an idiot. He’s a billionaire with hidden cameras everywhere .

“I do apologize, then...I was feeling sick. Like anxiety sick,” I explain, catching the amused look on the older housekeeper’s face as she comes out of the hall. I’m sure she’s seen this happen before. “That’s the truth .”

He watches me, intense gaze roving over me, stirring all sorts of heaven and hell within me. Can he see critical areas lighting up all over my body like Rockefeller Center during Christmas? Because I’m incredibly turned on by him and highly embarrassed by it. Holy shit .

“I’ve read about you,” I explain when he doesn’t reply. “I was nervous .”

“Understandably.” He spins back to the hallway. No reassurance that there’s nothing to be nervous about. Just pure cockiness. “Follow me .”

I purse my lips and let out a slow breath. This is going even worse than I was expecting. I follow him and his ass of exquisite perfection, but since I know I’ll go to hell for thinking that at such a professional moment, I force my eyes elsewhere. At the architecture, at the polished concrete floors, at anything, though the world’s most perfect backside has already been indelibly printed in my mind .

“The woman you met was my Aunt Vivian. She’s been taking care of my children during this ordeal .”

“She’s a lovely woman,” I say .

“She’s the only family I’ve got. My mother was a crack addict, my grandmother who raised me died of cervical cancer, and my father was never in the picture .”

His cool and seemingly glib recitation of personal tragedies is jarring. But I manage to sound almost as casual as him with my response. “Oh. I’m sorry to hear .”

“Don’t be. Circumstances are just that,” he mutters with an air of impatience like my every comment or reply is evidence of dull, conventional thinking .

“I know what you mean,” I say. Props to him for becoming a world-renowned architect with only Grandma to raise him .

He walks into what’s clearly a children’s play room, sparse décor, but every toy imaginable. For some reason, I expected it to be cold, like him. “Do you now?” He looks at me again. “You know what I mean ?”

This is a test, because I'm lying again. "No," I sigh. "I'm just trying to empathize. I —"

"I don't need empathy, Miss Carrington. I need truth. At all times." He counts off on his fingers. "Truth about where you are, truth about what you're doing, what my children did today, what you fed them, every thought that ran through your mind at every moment of the day. I deal with enough lies and misinformation on a daily basis. The last thing I need is for it to come from the hired help."

Wow.

Do I feel smaller than a molecule .

And every thought that runs through my mind? I don't think so, buddy. I don't care how wealthy you are, nobody's entitled to my thoughts. You know what? I don't have to stand here and listen to him. As intimidating as he is, this is still a free country, and he hasn't hired me yet. I can still leave. Do I need the money so badly ?

Uh, yes .

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I hate my brain. My dad may be a lawyer, but he's small time in a small town. My parents always told me and my brothers that they'd pay for college, but then we'd be on our own. While I might come from a middle-class family with a quaint house in upstate New York, it's not my house nor my money. I'm nobody now .

A nobody with nothing .

“Are we clear, Miss Carrington? If I hire you, you need to be up front with me on everything you do. That means anything I care to know, at any time .”

I could walk out. I could tell him I'm not cut out for these bizarre invasions of my privacy and ask the agency to send Caitlyn instead. She's more confident and better suited for this. I'd much prefer a quiet, older couple who work a lot of hours and expect the norm from their nanny .

But I need this job. It will easily pay five times more than the others. What I earn from this gig could be enough to start my small accounting firm in Brooklyn or back home. So, shut up and acquiesce to everything he says, Paisley .

I swallow slowly. “Yes, Mr. Raider. I understand .”

“Good.”

“Where are the children?” I ask .

“Excuse me ?”

Did he expect me not to ask questions? “Your twins. Where are they?” I may as well focus my energies on the real reason I’m here .

“With their mother. I wanted your first day to be just us, so I could show you around and explain the way I work before the kids take up all your time. Have you ever dealt with twins before, Miss Carrington ?”

“My brothers are twins .”

“Ah, well, that’s a plus .”

“Yeah, I helped raise them. I know how crazy they can get .”

He narrows his eyes. “Toddlers are a challenge all by themselves. Twin toddlers will test you, as your mother would be able to tell you .”

“I understand, and I’m ready .”

“Miss Carrington, I don’t think you are. Nobody can understand how important my children are to me. Not sure how much you’ve read online about my divorce case, but it’s not true what you hear. I care deeply about my children. But I also work full-time, so I’ll be spending time with them before and after work, sleeping very few hours to make sure I see them as much as possible. Every hour in between, they’ll be with you .”

“When are they with their mother ?”

Mr. Raider bristles at the question, like the mere thought of their mother brings him physical and emotional pain. “Miriam takes them every three days, then we switch. We share them equally, though she’s trying to change that now .”

I can see why. I mean, he's clearly an emotionally unavailable dick. I think I'm right, and Logan Raider is definitely the jerk in this divorce. Case closed .

He taps on his phone impatiently, ignoring me, while he continues to talk. "I will monitor everything you do, keep tabs of where you are with my children at all times. Are we clear ?"

Surely, he doesn't mean he's implanting a microchip under my skin and tracking me on his phone app, does he? I guess he has the right to know where his kids are, but what I do after hours is my business. "Tracking ?"

"Yes, tracking. You watch my children, so I watch you." He looks up from his phone, and it's almost like he's surprised to see me still standing here. "Will you be taking the position, or do I save my breath for the next applicant ?"

I can't let this paycheck go to someone else. I should be grateful that he selected me and not let his short demeanor get to me. Besides, soon, I'll be working with the kids only. He'll barely be home the rest of the time. This is probably the most I'll ever have to deal with him .

"Sure," I say with a thin smile. I don't know what I'm getting into, but no matter—it's done. "I'll take the job ."

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Logan

Here I thought choosing the most average-looking girl presented by the nanny agency would keep me safe. Not that I'm apt to bed every hot woman I see—I mean, I used to be that way up until I met Miriam—but ever since my divorce began, the last thing I want is to be attracted to any woman .

Unfortunately, I made a grave miscalculation. Because the picture did not do this girl justice, not at all .

Miss Carrington is sexy as fuck .

She doesn't even know it, which makes her sexier .

It's those lips. Full, too naturally pouty, like some French socialite from the early 1900s. Her skin is pale and soft, her straw-colored hair pulled into a bun. Sure, she looked plain in the photo, but now I see her hair is full and thick. Keeping it in that style only makes me want to know what it'd look like loose over her shoulders. Over her naked tits .

No, damn it. NO .

“Great.” I begin walking around the twins' play room, avoiding her pale green eyes. “Now that you're onboard, let me elucidate. Here's the situation, purely for informational purposes,” I say, in case she thinks I'm sharing personal information with her because I'm being nice. “I want this divorce over with. I want fifty-fifty custody of my kids. I want the court drama to end, so I can get back to work .”

Work is something I understand. Work is logical, beautiful, and makes sense to me .

Work is where I can be myself .

I chance a glance at her and see that she's standing awkwardly, hands folded in front of her, not sure what to say. Behind her, Aunt Vivian peeks into the room, nods now that she sees the girl who disappeared from the foyer entrance, and leaves again .

"Don't say anything." I raise a finger to Miss Carrington. "Not yet ."

"Yes, sir," she says then covers her mouth .

I shoot her a look. "I only tell you all of this so you'll understand the next part. I'm in the middle of designing an ambitious, costly urban center. The pressures that come with this project are unheard of, so work requires my entire focus. Between the urban center, my divorce, raising two small children, and the bad publicity, it's taking everything out of me ."

Suddenly, talking to this young woman about my life, anger I've worked hard to control the last few weeks flares up. I bite it back down. I'm sure she hears it in my voice. No wonder she looks terrified .

"Because my ex-wife is determined to rake me over the coals, I have to prove I'm a worthy father. I have to document everything my children do, in the event there's any doubt I am a fit parent. Because of this, I'll be installing several apps on your phone. These will tell me where you are when you're with the children ."

"My phone?" She clings tighter to her purse .

"Yes. It's not to violate your privacy. It's so I can ensure the safety of my children. I don't trust anyone, Miss Carrington, understand. Even now, I struggle with the

thought that you might be someone my ex has sent to spy on me .”

Her eyes widen, and her face flushes. “Mr. Raider, I’m not a spy. I — ”

Her heaving breast makes my cock stiffen, but I ignore the strong physical attraction I’m feeling and continue onward as if it’s not happening .

“It’s outrageous, I know. But I have my reasons for being overprotective. Come, I’ll show you around .”

I lead her through the play room, showing the rest of my 8,000-square foot penthouse, excluding my bedroom. “You’ll have full access to the home. Every area requires passcodes, key codes, and in some cases fingerprints. My home is outfitted with the highest quality security system, and you will be allowed to take the children anywhere except my office and my bedroom .”

She holds up a finger for permission to speak. “When you come home from work, do I stay or go? That’s when you spend time with your kids ?”

I stare at her. Maybe it’s innocence, ignorance, or that she’s deaf, but I clearly said I had a huge project on my plate right now. “As I already mentioned, I’m in the middle of a project more complicated than putting a man on the moon. It requires all my time. Most of it. Yes, I’ll spend limited time with the children before and after work, but I’ll need you to sleep here on the days the kids are with me. You can go home when they are not in my care .”

“But do I stick around when you’re spending time with them?” Those lips when she talks. Her chest heaving up and down out of anxiety. Her body is tight, wide on the hips, thick in the waist, but it suits her. Her face looks like an unpainted doll’s. I find myself checking my phone again, to appear as though she has no hold on me .

“You’ll stick around,” I say, and somehow even this thought makes my cock stiffen all the more. “I’ll never know at what moment I might be called into a meeting, hence my office here,” I gesture to the room to our right. I scan my hand over the security sensor, the door opens, and I flick on the light, flick it off again. “Your room is here.” Down the hall, I press my hand against her bedroom panel, and the guest bedroom door opens. “I hope you’ll like it .”

“Wait, so you have access to my room?” She gawks .

“It’s my home, Miss Carrington, and you’re an employee here. Are there any objections ?”

“Well, no, but — ”

“Good. Follow me.” I don’t wait to hear her complaints. I’m sure she’s worried about me coming to her room and invading her privacy, but again, I won’t be engaging in any extra-curricular activities. Not with her. Not with anybody right now. I don’t want to be involved with another woman for a very long time .

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I trusted Miriam, and look what happened. Perhaps it wasn't love at first sight, but I believed we made a good team. Thought she fell for me, thought she could be a good mother and wife. Gave her everything. But my friends and even Aunt Vivian all had that nagging feeling that Miriam was only out for my bank account, and stupidly, I brushed aside their concerns .

Joke was on me when I realized the truth six months ago—she got pregnant soon after we married, because they were right. She was never in it for love. The plan was always to entrap me for eighteen years. And now she wants alimony, full custody of my children , and full child support. I don't mind paying support, but I'll die before I let her take full custody. She can tell the press whatever lies she wants. But I'm not asking for shared custody to avoid paying support, which is her allegation. I'm asking for shared custody because I love my kids .

After showing Miss Carrington around the penthouse, I bring her back to the living room where we began. “Anyway, that's the tour. As you can see, I've done everything I can to provide a wonderful, nurturing environment for my twins. Do you have any questions or concerns ?”

Miss Carrington—Paisley, an interesting name, to be sure—looks like she wants to say something. She chews on her inner lip and makes a grimace while tugging nervously on the strap of her purse .

“Miss Carrington ?”

“I do have one question, Mr. Raider. I've listened to everything you've said, and I hope you won't find this out of line, but your divorce ...”

“What about it ?”

“You say you’re worried the court will find that you’re not an invested, capable father. Your house is certainly beautiful, super modern, and everything. But don’t you think the best way to provide a nurturing environment for the children is to just...I don’t know...” She shrugs and looks anywhere but at me .

“Spit it out, Miss Carrington .”

She looks back at me. “Spend time with your kids?” Her grimace twists into a smirk. Between that and my seething frown, she realizes maybe that wasn’t the best thing to say .

When I get upset, I don’t yell or scream. It doesn’t accomplish anything when I know that silence is far, far worse. My silence now makes Miss Carrington sink into her shoes. I know if she could blend into the walls right now, she would .

“Maybe you didn’t hear me earlier,” I say finally, sliding my phone into my pants pocket and sitting on the edge of the sofa’s backrest. I cross my ankles. “I’m working on the most important project of my life. Hence my need for a nanny .”

Where does this girl get off thinking she can stand here and accuse me of not spending enough time with my kids when she doesn’t understand anything about my life? She only knows what I’ve chosen to discuss. Besides, you’d think a nanny wouldn’t argue in favor of the parents spending more time with their kids .

“I didn’t mean that in a bad way,” she says .

“Oh? What other way could you mean it when you say I should just spend more time with my kids and that will solve everything?” I glare at her. There’s no reason to keep her if I feel she’s impertinent. I could call the agency right now and have them send

over someone else. But the truth is, she'll do just fine. She's already here, she's used to handling twins because of her brothers, and besides, she didn't say it as cheekily as it sounded to my ego. I know I could spend more time with the kids, but I just can't. I have a job to do .

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you. It was just a question, since you're worried about the divorce case ."

I sigh. It really irks me when some wet behind the ears millennial talks as if life is so simple, merely because they are fresh out of college and full of themselves. They have yet to prove themselves, but their ignorance gives them the courage to utter the most ridiculous nonsense to those of us who actually have contended with the real world and know it's complications and compromises .

"Miss Carrington, I run a multi-billion-dollar company. This means that hundreds of people's salaries depend on me. This means that high profile clients get what they want, what they've always dreamed of in architectural design because of me. This means that I have to balance my life, and sometimes that means sacrificing family time in order to get the job done ."

"I understand." She nods .

"So, perhaps you should allow me to conduct my life and business as I see fit, keep the uninformed judgments to yourself, and let me do the hard stuff while you care for my toddlers, making a lovely wage and luxuriating in the best amenities life has to offer at the same time. Clear ?"

"Yes, I'm sorry," she squeaks. "Thank you so much for hiring me." She even tries to save herself with a smile. Pretty, that upturn of her lips. I wonder where those lips have been, what they've done in her short life. She can't be more than twenty-one, twenty-two if she's just graduated from college ?

“You’re free to go home now. Be here tomorrow morning at 7 AM to prepare for the twins’ arrival at eight. Their mother will be dropping them off, and you will meet her then .”

“Yes, sir. Have a great rest of the day. Thank you for the opportunity .”

As she walks away, I can’t help but stare at her voluptuous, heart-shaped ass .

Fuck but what I would do to her under different circumstances. And then I think about the nerve she had, to tell me how to raise my kids ...

Millennials and their entitlement, I swear. At her age, I never would’ve dreamed of challenging my boss during the interview stage. Maybe later, but not during the interview. But perhaps there’s hope for Paisley Carrington yet. After all, she’s got me for a boss, so she’s bound to learn a thing or two .

Once I settle into my office with afternoon coffee, Vivian comes in and hugs the door frame. “Well? How did it go ?”

“She’ll do .”

“I’m surprised you went with someone so average in the beauty department, Logan. Dare I say you’ve lost your playboy edge ?”

I almost correct her, suddenly feeling defensive on Paisley Carrington’s behalf. But then I realize there’s no good that can come from admitting my strong attraction to the new nanny .

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“I lost my playboy edge a long time ago, Aunt Viv .”

“Well, it’s time to get it back, don’t you think? Miriam did a number on you. I swear, I liked you better when you were a happy bachelor .”

“Things change. People wake up.” People have kids. Wives leave then slap you with divorce papers. Having money has its pros and cons. Never being able to trust anyone again is definitely one of its cons .

“In any case, I liked Miss Carrington,” Vivian says. “The children will like her, too. I’ll leave now unless you need something from me ?”

“Check in with me later this week .”

“I will. Bye, love .”

Once she’s gone, I finally relax. A huge breath escapes my chest, as I sit at my office staring out the glass wall at the Freedom Tower. I think about the ten thousand ways I would’ve made that building more beautiful, not that it matters. What’s done is done, a lot like my life .

Don’t you think the best way to provide a nurturing environment for your kids is to actually spend time with them ?

Her words echo in my brain. They bother me, yes, because I know she’s right. Too bad I’m not that kind of father. Yes, I love my kids, but I’m not some hipster with enough time to strap a baby to his chest and go out for cupcakes in Chelsea Square. I

have a company to run, a fortune to make. I never expected to be caring for the kids full-time by myself. I never expected Miriam to bail on the family and try to take me for all I'm worth .

But now, because of her choices, I have a full-time nanny .

Did I really think our marriage was the happy-ever-after kind ?

Maybe not in the Hollywood movie way, but I figured we'd build a nice life together, even if Miriam didn't make me want to sing and dance and send telegrams of my love each day .

I was stupid, but now I know better. Now I know that my big mistake was thinking I could ever really count on anyone but myself .

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Paisley

That was, by far, the weirdest interview I've ever had in my life .

Mr. Raider was meaner than I ever expected him to be, and yet I can't stop thinking about him. Why, though? Because he pissed me off or because he's so damn gorgeous? That chiseled jaw, those brooding light eyes. Damn. My feminist sensibilities tell me that I shouldn't be attracted to a man like that. My mother and grandmother and every strong woman before me didn't fight years of oppression and inequality just for me to let a man talk to me that way .

It was for the money, I remind myself .

Yes. I'll only put up with it because I need the money. Secretly, I'll be rolling my eyes at him .

When I get back to Brooklyn and my apartment, finding Caitlyn in the kitchen just waking up and having coffee, she can't contain herself. You'd think she was the one who got the job. "Oh, my God!" she practically screams. "So? How was he ?"

"Tall."

"You have to tell me all about him before I leave for work. I have to get going in a few minutes ."

"There's nothing to say. I start tomorrow at seven in the morning." I throw my purse on our beaten-up sofa. Now that I've seen how the other half lives, our place looks so

dingy and cheap .

“Then, let’s go out later. Michelle and Mackie are free, and I get off work at five. Drinks at Chelle’s ? You can tell me all about him then ?”

“Sure, except I won’t drink, since I have to get up early .”

“One drink’s not going to kill you, lovely. Besides, I know if I don’t put at least two drinks in you, you won’t open up and tell me what I want to know. And I have to know the truth about Logan Raider !”

“He’s rude and controlling. There .”

She pushes her tongue into her cheek. “He’s going through a divorce, you know .”

“For good reason. I hope his ex-wife wins the case.” I smirk to myself and hope I’m never in the position of finding out my husband’s really an ass and having to leave him. Poor woman .

She gives me side eye. “I don’t know how you can stand there and be so calm. Do you know how many girls at the agency wanted that job ?”

“As many as are blinded by money and good looks ?”

“You’re so lucky !”

“You’re right. I need to be more grateful.” It’s meant as sarcasm, but Caitlyn agrees, as she refills her coffee mug and I plow into my room to throw myself in bed. It’s only noon, but I feel like I’ve already had a full day .

“I would’ve fucked him during the interview,” she calls out .

“And I’m sure he would’ve been happy to oblige .”

Truth is, I do need to be more grateful. I now have a job, and my boss is paying me way more than the other girls. All I have to do in exchange is deal with his bullshit and be “monitored at all hours of the day,” whatever that even means .

As long as it’s not on my personal time, I guess that’s fine with me .

* * *

H appy Hourat Chelle’s is a New York City meat market. Honestly, I don’t know why Caitlyn even likes coming here. Wait, I do know. Because here she gets every kind of hoot-and-holler male attention she can dream of. They’re all watching her, as we talk about my day. Her over her second glass of wine, and me over Diet Coke with lemon. That’s right, I’m a wild woman .

I’m used to her getting male attention, and normally, it makes me jealous. But tonight, I really don’t care about the multitudes of men—hot and not—gawking at her beauty. Because I can’t stop thinking about Logan Raider. I was in Logan Raider’s penthouse. His penthouse! I got a job taking care of his kids, and now I’ll be entering the lair of a man that women everywhere only dream of having .

“I really would fuck him if I had the chance,” Caitlyn slurs, finishing her wine and asking the bartender for a third. “I don’t care if he’s a jerk. It wouldn’t be for his personality, you know ?”

“It’d be for his wallet.” I roll my eyes, and Michelle and Mackie laugh. Our neighbors in the building across from us are the ones who got us to apply with Le Nanny Agency , so now the four of us get together to exchange stories about our clients .

“Nah. Money’s nice, but it wouldn’t be for that either. It’d be because it’s him—Logan Raider. He’s goddamn hot. He’s powerful. He knows what he wants. That’s why.” Caitlyn’s blue eyes bug out, and she licks her lips. Drunk and not making sense .

The girls all agree, while I sip my Diet Coke, feeling like the odd girl out, as usual .

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I don't know that I could ever sleep with a guy just because of who he is. A man has to make me laugh, care about me, make me want to sleep with him by wooing me, not just for being who he is. That's why I've only had one boyfriend in my life. Yes, I'm picky .

Logan Raider did have gorgeous yes, though. Silver with flecks of steely blue. It was hard to concentrate on the fact that he was cold and unforgiving with eyes like those staring at me .

Luckily, the topic of conversation shifts, and we finally talk about something other than me. The wolves begin to circle—men waiting for the right opportunity to cut in and introduce themselves to Caitlyn. I'm listening to Michelle tell the story of the family she's working for—the father, specifically, who's a middle-aged perv—when suddenly, I feel compelled to look off to my far right toward the bar door. What makes me look? Some sixth sense ?

Because there, weaving his way through the crowd is Logan Raider. And his gaze is glued to me. I feel like a deer in headlights or a criminal caught with her pants down. "What the ..."

"Paisley? What is it?" Caitlyn scratches my elbow to get my attention .

Our waiter appears with her third wine glass and a refill for my soda. He blocks my vision, and for a moment, I think maybe I've hallucinated seeing my new boss. I mean, the man has been on my mind all day. It's entirely possible that I've just imagined the same cheekbones, dazzling eyes, and sharp manner of dress .

But then... “That’s it. She’s done.” The same man appears at my side, takes the drink straight out of the waiter’s hand, and grabs me by the arm. “Let’s go. You’re leaving .”

Even in the darkness, I can see it’s him—it’s Mr. Raider. Nobody’s ever demanded that I get the hell out of anywhere before, much less famous NYC billionaire, Logan Raider. On one hand, I’m aghast that he would come here, seek me out, and talk to me that way. But on the other, I’m a little turned on by it. Much to my chagrin .

“Excuse me?” I yank my arm out of his grasp before I can even process what’s happening .

“You heard me. Outside .”

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” Caitlyn brushes past me, edging out of her seat to take Logan’s hand and give him that big, beaming Caitlyn smile, which I’ve always envied but right now I hate, hate, hate. “Mr. Raider, it’s so nice to meet you. Paisley’s so lucky she gets to work for you. But you’re lucky, too, to be fair.” She winks at me over her shoulder. “You didn’t tell me he was meeting us for drinks .”

“He’s not,” I mutter, wishing I could shrink into the walls .

I cannot believe this is happening .

Logan’s nostrils flare. “I’m not here to socialize. I need to speak with Miss Carrington.” He reaches around her back, as Caitlyn’s arms break into goosebumps at his touch, and tugs on my sleeve. “Outside, Now,” he tells me .

Then he disappears into the crowd, while half the bar stares at me, my heart pounds in my throat, and Caitlyn’s jaw hangs by her knees. “What was that all about? Oh, my God, Paisley. Are you in trouble already? You little viper!” She looks at me like she’s

never seen me before, like she's impressed with my imaginary criminal record .

"I haven't done anything. Be right back." I grab my purse in case I won't be back. I try to think about anything I might've done wrong since I left his penthouse this morning. Everything I've done in life wrong, for that matter. Once I copied Jacob Sadler's spelling test in fourth grade, only because I'd been sick all week and couldn't study the words .

But why would Logan be upset with me ?

I push through the double doors into the cold, clear night. I find him standing by a lamp post, glaring .

"That was incredibly disrespectful what you did in there," I tell him, pointing at the bar. Again, I don't care who he is or how much money he's got—nobody treats me that way .

"It was disrespectful of you to go out partying and drinking the night before you're to report at my home at seven AM, the night before you meet my children ."

"What?" I gasp. "Are you kidding me right now?" I consider the possibility that I'm on some prank reality show. He's way off base, I don't care how hot he looks when he's angry. "I wasn't drinking. I was having a Diet Coke ."

I've heard of companies stalking Facebook pages to find out if their employees are behaving, but I've never heard of an employer following you out to a bar .

"If you'll remember, I installed an app on your phone this morning, Miss Carrington. I would've thought you'd have been wise enough to guess I'd monitor your activities this evening ."

“This is my private time, Mr. Raider. You told me you wouldn’t invade my privacy. It was only for the protection of your children...who I’ve never even met .”

“This is for the protection of my children. I can’t have the new nanny getting smashed with her friends the night before she’s due to begin working with my children .”

“Well, that’s just a risk you’re going to have to take, isn’t it?” I cross my arms to stand my ground. I’m shaking. “I’m sorry, but you can’t follow me around during my time off to make sure I do everything you tell me to do. That’s not how it works .”

“That is how it works.” His eyes darken .

“Do you treat your housekeepers this way, too ?”

“My housekeepers only come twice a week and only because my aunt insists on it. Otherwise, I couldn’t care less to have them around. You’re different. You’ll be watching my kids. I have a right to know what you’re doing. If you don’t like it, you can quit .”

My mouth opens to argue again .

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I don't want to quit. Besides losing out on great money, there's something else ...

I'd be disappointed not to see him again .

Although my brain wants to fight this fight, my body hasn't gotten the memo. Maybe it's because no man has ever sought me out that way before, just barged right into an establishment and ordered me to come outside. Or because it's because I haven't so much as kissed a man in over a year, and this one is so authoritative that it's sent my mind into a tizzy. But my body feels alive. Every square inch of me feels like it's on liquid fire. Adrenaline times ten .

What is wrong with me ?

I should be livid but somehow, I'm not. It's as if I actually like him watching over me, as if I simply want his attention at any cost .

He watches me carefully, his chest heaving slightly, giving away his stone, controlled exterior as being not quite the whole story. Wait. Is this really about his children? He taps on his phone, and cheep-cheep , the super-fancy black sports car next to us comes to life. "Get in. I'll drive you home," he says .

Whoa. That car is worth more than my parents' house .

"I already told you, I'm not drunk. I was having a Diet Coke. That's what responsible people do the night before they report to work for the first time ."

He opens the side door and scoffing, I huff and climb inside, sliding into cold, black

leather. I can't believe I'm doing this. I can't believe this guy is my boss. What have I gotten myself into ?

After he comes around and climbs in, he checks the mirrors and the road before taking off down the street going in the right direction. I guess he knows where I live, too. Of course he does—he's got all my info and a GPS right on my phone .

“Your friend was drinking. She was intoxicated, and there were plenty of drunk men staring at you. Doesn't give off a good impression of the person I hired, does it ?”

I gawk at him. Seriously? “Maybe they were staring at Caitlyn, but not me .”

“Of course, it was at you. Anyone with eyes can see that you...” He pauses .

Knuckles grip the steering wheel tightly .

“See what ?”

My heartbeat speeds up again like it's at the Indianapolis 500. Does he think I was flirting with those men? Could this possibly be because he likes me ?

There's just no way. Logan Raider is the hottest commodity on the planet. He could have any woman he wants. Quite literally ...

Even so, it's not right, but I can't bring myself to be mad. I've never had this kind of attention before—the hot-billionaire-ordering-me-into-his-car-because-he's-raving-jealous kind. Holy shit .

Checking the time on his watch, he silently decides something, then makes a left, taking me further away from Brooklyn and closer to downtown Manhattan. “Where are we going?” I ask .

“My place. You can sleep there and be ready bright and early for when Becca and Price arrive .”

“But I don’t have anything on me. I need my clothes, my bag, all my stuff ...”

“I’ve taken care of everything. You’ll have the clothes I’ve bought for you, all the items you need. Stocked bedroom, stocked bathroom. Whatever you need, just ask for it.” He looks straight ahead, as he shifts through the gears. I watch his right fist commanding the manual transmission, as the engine revs. I’ve never seen anyone drive stick before .

It’s sexy as hell .

I guess I don’t need anything from home, and it would be better to arrive now than brave subway traffic in the morning. This would seem more of a blessing if I weren’t so perplexed about everything going on. I stare out the window and cluck my tongue. This is crazy. So crazy .

“Has anyone ever told you you’re a control freak?” I ask, finally .

He takes a moment before answering. Those eyes slide over to me, illuminated by the city lights, and I catch tension in them. He wants to be angry at me. He wants to tell me I’m wrong, but clearly, I’m 100% correct. “You have no idea, Miss Carrington .”

It’s the first time I ever see him smile .

Logan

I 'm doing it again.

I'm going down a dark path I know is wrong. I told myself a hundred times before showing up at Chelle's Brooklyn to leave her alone. Let Miss Carrington have one fun night before starting work. Stay out of it, Logan .

But I never listen. I never learn. I smell trouble on the horizon, and I'm speeding straight for it .

She's right—I'm a control freak. Which has its advantages. Bringing Miss Carrington home when I'm feeling volatile and possessive, however, isn't one of them. I only meant to spy on her, make sure she wasn't a total drunk or pothead or whatever. I honestly wouldn't have cared if she'd had one drink, as long as she left the bar on time to get a decent night's sleep. But the moment I saw those dudes circling her—and yes, their sights were set on her, not her friend—I couldn't help it .

When we pull into the building, I open her side door and offer my hand .

She stares at it a moment before looking up at me, one leg hanging out the side of my Lamborghini. In that little black dress with the peek-a-boo swath of sheer fabric across the chest, she's driving me insane, even when it was from the hidden corner of the bar. Now, giving me those unsure, sexy eyes, I'm instantly hard and fighting to control my breath .

Paisley steps out, and I close the car door, showing her the way to the private

elevator. “I would imagine it gives you trouble,” she says .

“What does?” I catch every detail of her strong legs, her pedicured toes inside her strappy heels, and her guarded, stiff walk .

“Being in control of everything .”

I see she’s still stuck on that. “How so?” Reaching the elevator, I press the call button and watch the arrow turn downward .

“Well, any woman you’re with must hate it.” She gives me a look from the corner of her eye. I study her face to determine if she’s teasing or completely serious .

I decide it’s both. She bites her lip which tells me she’s holding back a smile. My cock stiffens even more. This girl has a lick of attitude. She doesn’t mind pushing my buttons, even if it means putting her job at risk. But she does it so calmly, I can’t bring myself to be mad at her. You can’t blame someone for telling the truth .

“I don’t get any complaints in that department,” I say, watching the elevator numbers finally reach the thirties, then the twenties ...

Her bottom lip quivers. She’s thinking hard about her next words, weighing the consequences. She wants to cross into flirting territory but she’s afraid. Still, she will. Because she wants me. I see it in her body language. Trembling. Restrained. Fighting to stay professional. Her desire is a side effect of my having controlled her back at the bar. Works every time .

“I think you like being controlled.” I shouldn’t go there. But it’s too late. It’s out there, and I’ve crossed the line. I can’t help it. As much as I love control, I love it because I’m really weak at heart. And Paisley Carrington has done what no other woman has been able to do in a very, very long time if ever—weaken me .

Her head shakes quickly side to side. The elevator dings. “No. I don’t.”

The door opens .

“Are you sure?” I ask, stepping in and watching her full, womanly form step in and stand next to me. She looks straight ahead. Scared to look at me. I feel the heat radiating off her body without even touching her .

One little sigh .

The closing of her eyes that tell me she’s fighting. Fighting hard .

Take it. Take her kiss and don’t ask permission. I’m not this new breed of simpering man who wants to talk about feelings and asks before he does every little thing he wants to do .

Paisley doesn’t need that kind of man. She needs me .

Before I can argue with myself that I have no room in my life for giving Paisley Carrington what she doesn’t know she wants, that I’m still in the middle of a divorce and should probably close one door before I open another, I’m pulling her into my arms and landing hard with my back against the elevator wall. Blindly, I press the PH for my floor .

I hear a gasp and see the shocked look in her pale eyes before my lips press against hers. Now, they’re blue—her eyes. I love the way they change depending on her mood. Must remember—blue = horny as fuck. I taste the sweetness of her breath and the tartness of the lemon. Clean, pure taste. She really was keeping it clean at the bar .

Her heartbeat pounds against my chest. My hands hold onto her neck and lower back, as I draw her into me. I have to feel her body. Have to push my straining cock against

the warmth radiating between her legs. The heat doesn't lie. Neither does her gravitation toward me. "Mr. Raider, I ..."

"Stop anytime you want." I stroke her hair, push it behind her ears, grip her chin and make her look at me. "But I know what you want, Paisley. I knew it the moment you stepped into my car ."

"But you told me to." She breathes against my mouth, eyes scanning mine .

"And you listened." I kiss her again. The elevator races higher. Paisley feels weak in my hold. My tongue explores the inside of her mouth, the hotness of her lips and tongue. Her gasps for breath and the raw openness of her parted mouth drive me to higher levels of insanity. I imagine her dropping to her knees and taking my rock-solid dick into her mouth. I want to fuck that lovely throat. I want to spin her around and fuck her against the elevator glass .

But we've reached the penthouse level, and the door opens .

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We continue to kiss as we stumble out and I slam her against the front door, the one she stood in front of this very morning, trying to talk herself into being confident. I watched her through the security camera and secretly wished she'd go away. Once I saw how gorgeous she actually was, how different from her picture, I wanted nothing to do with her .

Because I knew it'd lead to this .

I may not trust women in my life anymore, but I trust myself least of all .

The door opens, and we slip inside the warm interior of my house. The door closes and now we're kissing our way to the couch in my living room. The fire is on, filling the room with scents of toasted cedar wood. I could stop kissing her. I could leave her wet and reeling, tell her this was a momentary lapse of judgment, and I'll see her in the morning .

But my body wins out over my brain, and besides, now she's the one pulling me into her, grabbing me by the jacket lapel and insisting I drop down on top of her. Are we on the floor or couch? I can't think. But I do know this—she can't control me. Not in life, not on this couch .

“Logan...”

“I'm sorry, what did you call me?” I ask, standing and pulling her up with me. If we're going to do this, we're going to do it my way. I turn her around facing toward the fire, and hold her wrists behind her back .

“Mr. Raider, I’m...I’m so confused.” Her back arches, as I hold her wrists firmly with one hand and pull the zipper of her dress down with the other .

“Are you ?”

“I don’t know .”

“Because your body seems to know you better than you do. If you’re not turned on, then I’ll stop this instant. But if you’re as hot and wet as I know you are, then I get to control you. All the way to the end.” I wait for a protest, but there is none. My fingers travel down her back, slide underneath her ass, as I grab the firmness there. She lets out a little gasp. I slip my hand between her legs .

Knew it. She’s wet. Soaking wet. So fucking sexy .

“Shit,” she mumbles .

“Damn straight, sweetness.” I smile to myself. “Let the dress drop, Miss Carrington.” I step away and wait while she slides out of her dress, letting it hit the floor. White panties and bra, which only makes my cock so stiff, it hurts like fucking hell .

I undo her bra and let it fall away. Her silhouette from behind is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. How I ever looked at her photo and thought she looked unremarkable is crazy. I have to see the whole thing. Spinning her around, my eyes fall on her medium, but round, tits, her rosy nipples hard and aching for me to touch them .

“Slide out of your panties,” I tell her, keeping control of my voice. She can’t possibly know how much she’s affecting me. She does as I command and pushes the white lacy panties down, revealing her slick mound, which makes me want to throw her on the couch and lick it all up .

Paisley's open mouth fights for breath. Her shut eyes tell me she's never done this or maybe never to this level. Clearly, no one has ever made her feel this way before. "Remove my belt. Then my pants," I instruct. She needs to undress me. She needs to own her desire, understand that she wants this just as much as I do .

Giving a little nod, she reaches for me. With trembling fingers, she begins to undo my belt, tripping up a bit, then biting her lip as she opens the buckle and searches for the zipper. Finding it, she slides it down, pushes on the pants, and they fall .

"Good. Now, see how hard you've made me?" I ask, reaching down and cupping her one tit, playing with its nipple. She gasps, closing her eyes again, and nods in silence. I've rendered her speechless. This is right where I want her. "Pull off my shorts and look at what you've done ."

She fumbles with the shorts then hooks her fingers around the waistband and slides the whole thing down. My cock springs forth, curving toward her mouth like it belongs in her face, fucking her throat until I come in it. I know it's my brain just going insane, and I have to take it slowly. Not ready for that yet. I want to make her come first .

"Lie down, Paisley. Open your legs and show me your pussy ."

She tries to say something, but it comes out a hoarse whisper. Doing as I command, she lies back against the cushions and timidly parts her legs. Seeing her pussy glistening wet and bright pink and wanting release so desperately, I kneel between her legs, drop down to kiss her again, then blaze a hot tongue trail down her neck and chest. These tits—I have to taste them, push them into my mouth, one then the other .

Paisley gasps, fingers sliding into my hair. I would nuzzle and suckle on her tits all night if I could. She has no idea how much that would mean to me if I was in a different kind of mood. But I don't want to give her the satisfaction yet. Of knowing I

adore her body. That I imagine these breasts doing their job, nourishing a baby we might make together in another lifetime. I'm intelligent enough to know these are just hormones talking, testosterone and pheromones wanting to possess her, fill her with my seed, and make her mine .

And for tonight, she will be mine .

Just once .

Because this can't happen again .

Part of me wishes I could just plow my cock into her, ram her hard and make this possession a reality, but I can tell she's inexperienced and needs my hands more than anything. I can't stop touching her. Her skin is smooth and soft all over, and she smells delicious. My mouth travels further down. I need to feel her slick pussy on my tongue. I need to make her come and feel those waves of pleasure rolling off my face .

"I'm going to lick you now, Paisley. But you can't come until I tell you to, understood ?"

My ear pressed against her body feels the vibration of her agreement. Her fingers curl into my hair and grasp, pulling me closer to her. She's ready and won't take long at all before she explodes .

I slide one finger down through her cleft, feeling it dip into her slippery folds. That soaked slit of hers compels me to stop and breathe it in, inhale the essence of her skin, bury my nose into it, searching out her clit like a kitten searching for mother's milk, while my finger finds the opening of her pussy. Then, as it dips in and feels the tightness of her cunt, I gently lick that juicy cunt. Her clit is just behind it, but I want to tease her first and make her beg for it .

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“Beg me to lick you, Miss Carrington .”

“Please...” She sighs. “I’m so close. I just want to come .”

“I know you do, but you can’t yet. Not until I tell you.” My tongue delves deeper until I find that hot kernel, that aching, pulsing button of flesh twitching at the top of her beautiful pussy. Pressing my tongue against it, I hear her gasp and then I slide another finger into her .

Two thick fingers now press deep into her, filling her up a little more. My cock twitches, wanting to bury itself into her body. I’m amazed by how well it’s behaving, but that’s how much I want to please Paisley first .

“Oh...” She groans and moves underneath me .

“No. Not yet.” I breathe against her hot skin then give her a strong lick upwards. I feel the beginnings of an orgasm tightening my face, coming from her thighs, but I pull my tongue away and look up at her. “I said not yet. Only when I tell you .”

“I can’t help it,” she whispers .

“Yes, you can. You must not disobey me, Miss Carrington, or you won’t get this again. If you do, I won’t be this nice again.” I press my tongue against her and circle it, flicking her clit to either side, kissing it, making love to it. Suddenly, my willpower takes a hit, and I want her whole pussy against my face .

“But I can’t, Mr. Raider. I can’t hold it in anymore.” Her hips buck up against me, her

soft flesh smashes up against my mouth. I open my lips big and wide to receive her. I know she can't take it. I know she has to come. And regardless of what I've said, I want her to. I'm compelled with the need to taste her completely .

She comes hard, her pussy rising up, flushing with heat. Moans fill the living room, and I swear, it's the most beautiful sound I've ever heard. Wetness gushes over my fingers. I pull them out and taste it, sliding up her body to bring them to her as an offering. With her mouth open, I push my fingers onto her tongue. "This is you. Delicious ."

She tastes herself and sucks on my fingers. The action makes me want her completely. My own willpower begins to wane. "But I told you that you couldn't come yet, Miss Carrington. You've disobeyed me ."

"I'm sorry," she says, sitting up onto her elbows, blinking as though she's just awoken from a dream. "I tried, but I'm not used to this. I've only been with one other person ."

Ah. That explains it. And suddenly, I'm wanting her even more knowing I'm the first man to really show her how sex is done. It's all a mind fuck, and the sooner she learns that, the sooner she'll be begging for it every night. Her future husband can thank me later .

Standing between her legs now off the edge of the sofa, I hold my cock at eye level. "As punishment, you're going to beg for my cock in your mouth ."

She's at that point where she could stop, having been satiated by me, or she could continue and go for another. I don't know if she's ever had two orgasms in one night before, but she's going to now whether she likes it or not .

"What do you mean ?"

Her question. So innocent and amusing. I have to smile wickedly. “I mean exactly what I say, Miss Carrington. Remember how I told you not to lie to me? To tell me honestly what you’re feeling ?”

“Yes?”

“Take my cock in your hand,” I instruct. Small, shy fingers wrap around my shaft, and I wrap my hand around hers to show her how to hold it. “Firmly. It’s not delicate, hon. It’s a fucking battering ram. Treat it like one .”

“Like this?” She places her other hand over hers, so that she’s double fisting me. And holy fucking shit, I love this. I love seeing a woman’s hands so small, she has to use both to get me off .

“Yes, just like that. Now tell me what you’re thinking,” I say .

Her light green eyes look up at me underneath curved brows. So sexy. So in need of instruction. If I’m not careful, I’m going to want to teach her every night .

“I’m scared of what we’re doing .”

“Why?”

“Because of the implications. I’m scared I won’t be able to do my job right tomorrow .”

“Because you’ll regret this night or because you’ll want to do it again?” I ask. She better give me the right answer .

“Because I’ll want it again .”

“Good girl. That’s the truth. Beg for my cock, Miss Carrington. It’s what you want .”

She doesn’t argue. She doesn’t argue because it’s true. She wants my cock. In her mouth, in her pussy, maybe even in her ass once she realizes it. And from the way her knees naturally spread further apart as she glances up and says, “Please give me your cock, Mr. Raider. In my mouth. Please ...”

I know her desire is beginning to build up again .

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I shudder just hearing her ask for it .

“Open your mouth and slide it in then,” I tell her. She acquiesces, her plump mouth, that mouth I’ve been studying so carefully from the moment she arrived this morning, opening and allowing my thickness to push its way in. “That’s it .”

My eyes close. I groan. Holy fuck. Her mouth is warm and tight, and she doesn’t need any help knowing what she wants anymore. She begins to suck, eyes closed, as nature takes over and she lets her inhibitions go. She sucks and slowly jerks my cock into her mouth at the same time, wrapping her lips around the fat head then popping those eyes open to look up at me .

“Good girl...” I have to say something to keep from spewing in her mouth. It seems like I’m still controlling her, but the truth is—she’s got me. She had me from the beginning, from the moment she arrived. I was pissed during her interview. I was pissed because I knew we’d end up like this, I knew I’d unwittingly invited this woman into my home and my life, to break me down and screw up the works .

I’m weak and it’s because of this woman. This face. These lips .

As she works me harder, longer, faster, spit and sloppiness hanging off her chin, the beauty of her perfect cock sucking sends me higher and closer to my climax, but I don’t want to come in her mouth. I want to come inside her pussy, buried deep .

“Do you want to be fucked, Miss Carrington?” I hold onto her head and fuck her mouth, pretending it’s her wet, slippery cunt for a moment more .

She pulls away, gasps for air, and says in the breathiest tone ever, “Yes .”

“Yes, what, Miss Carrington ?”

“Yes, please fuck me. Please make me come again .”

She doesn't have to twist my arm, that's for fucking sure. I lift her to her feet, fold her over the armrest of the couch, and position her ass right where I want her, as she grips the couch in anticipation. At this point, I've lost all sense of propriety. I don't care if this is right or wrong or that I just employed her this morning. I'm about to fuck my nanny, and it's gone way past the “just one blowjob” phase. It's now in “I need to claim this pussy” territory .

I've no idea why. But I want her to know that I own her. That no sweet boyfriend will ever fuck her as solid and good and long as I will because no man out there is like me. Why it matters that I impress this upon her is a fucking mystery to me .

“Beg me again to fuck you. Push your ass up high and look at me when you say it .”

Her seafoam colored eyes bend my way, just as that plump, perfect ass parts, exposing her aching pussy. It's swollen and pink all over again. She's prime for another orgasm. “Fuck me, Mr. Carrington. I beg you, please...” Slowly, to ensure madness on both our parts, I slide into her a little bit at a time. Paisley moans low and long, as her hips push back against me, pleading for more. “More cock, please ...”

“More cock? Like this?” Gripping her ass, I pull out for a momentary respite then plow hard and deep into her. Her back arches, as she cries out and asks for it again. I push in one more time, filling her up, burying myself inside of her. I can't say how good it feels to be one with her, teaching her, taking from her .

I can only fuck her. Faster, little bit at a time, allowing myself to build slowly. Going

from a man exercising control over her to some kind of animal outside under a full moon, giving into his primal instincts. She beats back against me, matching me thrust for thrust, moaning and crying and reaching between her legs to give herself a boost, while I continue to fuck her .

To pound her .

To claim her .

She's mine, she's mine ...

And she knows it. Holding onto the armrest, she gives up trying to safeguard against my strong pummeling and just takes it. Crying out, she lets me hammer her hard, slapping her clit over and over until she's screaming out loud. Ah, yes, there it is—those gorgeous screams I imagined all day long .

“Do you like it? Is this what you wanted?” I ask, driving harder and harder into her, feeling her delicious shockwaves engulf my cock .

“I love it. I fucking love it, Mr. Carrington. Thank you .”

“For what?” Whatever she says next is going to do me in. She's talking dirty and has reached that level of pure openness that kills me every time. There's nothing sexier than a woman losing complete control, both physical and emotional .

“For taking control from me. For fucking me hard and making me come. Thank you, thank you...” Over and over, she thanks me, and it hits me. This gorgeous young woman, who I don't even deserve, has just shown me her gratitude for making her come undone. For making her abandon all inhibitions and bring out the animalistic side of her .

But it's what she does next that sends me over the edge .

She reaches back, and using both hands, spreads her pussy for me as I drive into it. Full access. Full permission. Full setting aside of any and all pretenses and showing me what she really wants—for me to finish off and claim her. “Come all over me, Mr. Raider .”

I can't anymore .

The heat rises up through my balls into my cock and then it comes...the warm flush, radiating all through my body. I groan out loud, gripping her hips, and continue to fuck her hard even as I'm aching with beautiful need, filling her as deeply as I can. But then, I withdraw because I don't know if she's on the pill or not and cannot, must not, make another baby, and shoot hot ropes of cum all over her pussy and ass . -

My mind explodes. Amazing. Exquisite .

I ride it out as long as it will go .

Turning her around, I pull her into my arms and kiss her long and deep, because that was indescribable. How could a woman with little experience know what I wanted at the end like that? It's like she read my mind, like we've known each other much longer than one night. I know I should pat her off to bed now and retreat to my own bedroom all alone, but I can't .

I don't want to .

Even for just one night, I want her close to me. I made this mess, I brought her here, I acted like a jerk at that bar. And now I want her to know there was reason behind my madness. If she was going to get into trouble tonight, I wanted it to be with me. She'll sleep with me tonight. God knows we've earned a full night of rest .

In the morning, however, it must end .

One thing is pure attraction and professionalism is another. We cannot, must not, do this again. I lead her to my bedroom, knowing full well that she'll be the first woman to enter it in months. But I don't really care anymore. At least not tonight. Because I need her a few more hours .

Paisley

I could live a thousand lifetimes, and I'll never be able to explain the way I feel right now. Terrified. In awe. In total shock. What the hell was that all about? What did we just do? Will we talk about this in the morning? Will he pretend like it never happened? I can't believe I just slept with my boss! A million questions run through my mind, but they all lead to the same thing—fear of the unknown .

In his bedroom, which is bigger than half the apartments on my floor, I lie in his arms, still coming down from the high of our unspeakable acts. We don't speak. He just holds me, his strong chest with the smattering of hair solid and strong and warm against my face. His fingers caress my hair gently. Something is happening deep inside me, and it's not Logan's cock anymore .

Does he feel it, too ?

Has he been repressing feelings for me all day? Have I been on his mind the way he's been on mine? I've heard of this kind of volatile chemistry before where it explodes out of nowhere leaving both parties panting and grasping at explanations. I just never thought it would happen to me .

The exhaustion is so real, so tangible, we fall asleep instantly in his bed. I've never slept so comfortably, so giddily, pressed up against this man's body. I awaken every so often wondering where I am then fall away drowsily and easily when I sense his heartbeat against my back. Did he have every intention of seducing me when he ordered me into his car tonight, or did this just "happen ?"

I won't worry about it anymore tonight. I'll worry about it tomorrow .

I have a job to do at seven in the morning, and the job is here .

* * *

Wedding bells ring.Or maybe they're church bells. Actually, now that I listen more closely, it sounds like ...

Holy shit, someone is ringing at the front door .

My eyes fly open. Where the hell am I? One scan across the spacious silver bedroom brings my memories crashing back against my brain. I'm in Logan's room and it's morning .

Logan is gone, presumably off to work .

That means the person at the door has to be...Miriam, bringing the kids .

I'm naked. I'm naked, and my clothes from last night are nowhere to be found. The doorbell continues to ring incessantly. "I'll be right there!" I call out, frantically searching for something to wear. In my desperate search for shorts, a T-shirt, anything, I'm aware of the sound of kids talking and the click-clack of heels on a slick floor. The sound of children comes closer, and I realize what's happening—the twins are coming to look for their daddy...in his bedroom .

I run for the door to shut it when I spot them. Everyone stops in the hallway—a beautiful, older brunette with a better body than mine, even post-twin-birth, and two lovely blond children with big gray eyes. Everyone stops chattering. Everyone stops moving. The little ones giggle .

“Who are you?” she demands, her jaw dropping and her eyebrows drawing together to form one, giant angry one .

“Hi. I’m Paisley Carrington, the new nanny.” I do my best to shield my body with the door. “My alarm didn’t go off, I overslept, and I, uh...I am so sorry. This isn’t what it looks like .”

“So you’re not a naked girl coming out of my husband’s bedroom?” She scoffs and reaches for her phone. I worry that I have only seconds before she begins taking photos as evidence .

Behind the door is a silk robe hanging off a hook. Oh, praise baby Jesus for small miracles. Thank you! I slip it on and tie the sash around my waist, slipping out of the room and closing the door .

“No, I am. I mean, I thought I was alone in the house, and I went looking for...” I realize how stupid I sound trying to make up excuses, so I decide to quit while I’m ahead and just shut up .

“Looking for what? Your sense of decency?” She smirks like she’s got me right where she wants me. The children stare at me, still dumbfounded, and the effect is much like the twins in that horror movie, *The Shining* .

“Miss Carrington, is it? The courts will no doubt be interested to hear how Logan is putting his children’s wellbeing first and foremost by banging the childcare provider. I’ve seen everything I need to see here. Let’s go, kiddos .”

She ushers them downstairs, while I stand there fuming .

“Stop.” I pad down the hallway in my bare feet and pause in front of the trio. “This entire conversation is inappropriate,” I tell her, my hands shaking. “I already told you

my alarm didn't go off. I apologized, but I won't be spoken to this way. Just give me a minute and I'll be ready to take the kids off your hands .”

“I'm sure you can do lots of things with your hands,” Miriam scoffs, texting someone furiously. I have no doubt in my mind that it's Logan to give him an earful for what's transpired here this morning .

I rush down the hall, almost forgetting which bedroom is mine. I'm nearly in tears, feeling so humiliated, but I have to hold it together. Shit like this happens all the time. It's fine. Just be mature about it, ignore Logan's bitchy ex, go do my job .

When I leave my room, the house is quiet again until I walk around, feeling a lot like Dorothy in Oz, searching for signs of life in Emerald City. Hearing sounds coming from the play room, I enter there to find the kids sitting on their little couch, watching TV .

Miriam click-clacks her heels over to me, looking down at her phone. “Give me your phone number, please, Miss Paisley.” I don't bother correcting her. I just want her out of my hair so badly so I can get on with doing my job. Why would she have access to Logan's house anyway? Even if she used to live here, I'd imagine that she no longer has a key .

I give her my number and try to smooth things over by offering a handshake. “I'm sorry we started out on the wrong foot. I'm really committed to do my job and can't wait to spend quality time with your children.” I even throw in a pleasant smile .

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She shakes lightly but the dark lipstick smirk is still there. “Quality time,” she sneers. “Yes, I’m sure. It was lovely meeting Logan’s new mistress.” With that, she turns and leaves the room, click-clacks down the hall, and slams the front door. Yikes .

Okay, then! Aren’t we having fun, yet !

The moment—and I mean the moment their mother leaves—Becca and Price are out of their seats, running around, screaming, climbing the sofa, and jumping off the toy chests. “Hey, Becca and Price, you’re not supposed to do that,” I admonish, grabbing them off the ledge before they hurt themselves and positioning them back on the couch .

But the TV show has no pull on their short attention spans, so I do what I’ve always done myself when I need to calm down and think. I plot an escape. “Let’s go to the park!” I exclaim, adding my happiest face to assuage their unsure looks .

“NO!” they scream in unison .

Fuck. So much for that. Between the stressful interview yesterday, the weirdest, most wonderful and terrifying night of my life with the sexiest man I’ve ever known, a man who took me to heights I didn’t even know existed, spending the night in his warm embrace, and awaking to a full-on existential crisis with the ex-wife and now this ...

I want to cry. And so I do. While the kids run around, expending their energy, I plan the rest of the day. I’ll calm them down with a snack soon, a big snack that will fill their tummies and render them without much energy. Then, we’ll introduce ourselves,

I'll sing a couple songs, and by then, hopefully, they'll be tired enough for a nap. If all goes well .

In the meantime, I'm just going to sit here, watch them wreak terror all around me, and sob my eyes out .

Logan

When I arrive home after a hard day, I'm in the foulest mood. The urban architectural project has proven more difficult than I could've imagined and we're going to have to troubleshoot some problems tomorrow .

But that's the least of my concerns ...

I find the house mostly dark, except for the electric glow of the TV coming from the play room down the hall. From the flickers and flashes, I take it the kids are watching a movie. They better not be up this late, or I'll have to reprimand Miss Carrington. I specifically told her yesterday that they needed to be in bed by 9 PM. It's almost 11 .

I creep down the hallway. Pausing at the door, I find Paisley sitting on the couch, wearing sweatpants and a T-shirt, my two nuggets asleep by her side. She's a sight for sore eyes. Clearly, she doesn't know how gorgeous she is, mostly when she's not trying. She's asleep as well, long brown hair draped across the back of the sofa. Quietly, I walk in and turn on the TV .

Paisley snaps awake, notices me there and looks up. "Logan. I mean...Mr. Raider ."

"Why are you all here? They should be in their beds," I say without even a hello. I feel like even the slightest pleasantries could be taken the wrong way after what we did last night, and I can't afford that .

Sitting up straight, she pulls herself off little Price's clutches. I reach out to tousle my son's hair. "It's been a long first day," she says, sighing. "They took a while to get

used to me, and kept asking for their mom. But eventually, they settled down. I was afraid to move them in case they woke up .”

“Did Miriam drop them off on time ?”

“Yes.” At this question, her whole demeanor changes. Guilt and mortification slide across her face like the eclipse of the moon. “There was an issue when she arrived .”

“What kind of issue?” I’m sure she had something to say about me hiring a nanny. She probably hated the fact that Paisley is young and pretty, too .

Paisley takes a deep breath, stands, and moves to the other side of the room to not wake the twins. She faces me. “Well, first of all, I didn’t know she had access to the house .”

“She does. This home used to be hers, and the children live here part of the time .”

“I...I didn’t know that. And second, I didn’t hear you when you left. You didn’t say goodbye or tell me it was time to get up .”

My chest constricts. “Am I supposed to tell you that, Miss Carrington? Are you not a responsible woman who knows how to set an alarm on her phone ?”

“I understand that, but I never got the chance to set the alarm or even go through my night-before-a-big-day routine, Mr. Raider, because we just fell asleep. I mean, everything I’d planned for last night was blown off course, because of what happened. So, finally, the doorbell rang just as I was getting up, and she came into the house .”

“And so she saw you. Coming from my room,” I venture to guess .

Her cheeks flush crimson. “Yeah. Not only that, but she saw...the state I was in .”

Naked.

Miriam, my ex-wife, saw Paisley naked, emerging from my room. Fucking great. “Did the kids see you naked, too ?”

“Yes.”

I turn around and slide a hand through my hair, huffing to control my breath. I can't lose my shit. I won't worry about the kids, because seeing a naked woman is a natural part of life. Plus, there's nothing about Paisley Carrington's body that's damaging to the eyes. It's Miriam and what she'll do next that I'm worried about .

Facing her again, I point a finger at her. “You knew you were supposed to be up early and ready for the handoff. How could you let that happen ?”

“Me? I...we disrupted everything last night. I expected to sleep at my house, I expected to bring my clothes, and I expected to be awake and ready long before the kids got here. The one thing I never expected was what happened. Between us,” she adds to clarify, as if I need any clarification. Bright eyes examine mine .

I can see she's hoping for some kind of validation from me, some sense that I experienced the same feelings she did last night. Maybe I did, maybe I didn't. Regardless, we can't let it happen again .

“Yes, I know what happened between us.” My blood simmers. It was entirely my fault for venturing so close to the line, knowing I wouldn't be able to resist her. I let it happen. I failed myself and my kids. “It can't happen again. It'll only give Miriam more fodder for the tabloids, and I can't give her ammunition .”

She says nothing. But I know she's hurt. I see it in her eyes. The price of sleeping with young women is that they always allow themselves to feel too much. They get attached. Then, I end up the bad guy for breaking their heart, for telling them that nothing will develop between you. It's just truth .

All of that and more is reflected in her eyes .

"She'll make me look like a fucking monster," I add to soften the blow a bit. So she won't take it personally .

"I understand." But the fire in her eyes says it all. She's hurt and disappointed. Bad guy. Tired of always being the bad guy .

"Now take the kids and put them in bed. Don't let them fall asleep in front of the TV anymore." I glare at her, unloading anger the origin of which I can't even pinpoint. "It's not good for their brains or their eyesight. Or their routine ."

"I got desperate. First day and all." She heads off and begins picking up Becca first .

I kiss the child's forehead, as Miss Carrington carries her off .

I understand. I do. She had to do what she had to do to get through the day. "Just don't let it happen again ."

And I have to do what I have to do as well. Which is keep my distance as best as I can, see my kids early in the mornings, then go back to business as usual. No crossing the lines. No sex. No conversations unless I absolutely have to. I'm her employer, she's the nanny. Nothing more, nothing less. As it should've been from the beginning .

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Paisley

A week goes by. Logan might say he doesn't want anything between us, but each time we pass each other in the halls, he pauses as though deliberating whether or not to grab me, throw me in a room, and fuck me .

Our only safeguard are the kids. Because I'm only here when the twins are here, he's unlikely to touch me when they're around. And because the little suckers take up ALL my time when I'm with them, I'm highly distracted. Which is a good thing .

Because I can't stop thinking about him .

His hands, his hard body against mine, his perfect ass and washboard abs. But more than his physical qualities are the way he talked to me during sex, how he made me beg for his cock. Never would I ever have dreamed of being with a man who talked to me that way. Yet he's the first thing I think about when I wake up, the last person I think about when I fall asleep alone in bed, and every moment in between .

Talk about obsession .

Is he as obsessed with me as I am with him? I can't imagine that he would be. He's forgotten me already, I'm sure. When his stare does linger, I'm sure it's purely physical, because there's nothing about me that would interest a man like him. Billionaires with billion-dollar projects don't just fall for girls who take care of children .

* * *

Back at my apartment, it's 6 AM. I'm getting ready to leave for work when Caitlyn drags her skinny, half-naked body into the kitchen to make coffee. "Ah, a Paisley ghost sighting," she says when she sees me. "Well, hello, stranger." She smiles.

I grab my bag and keys. "Hey. What are you doing up early? I thought you didn't do mornings." All week, I've been hoping not to run into her, so I wouldn't have to explain the complex situation that is my work and personal life.

"I have another callback. The interview's at nine. If I get it, this will become a full-time gig."

"Great news! Well, I'll see you later."

"Wait, Paisley..." She props a fist into her hip and gives me a curious look. "How's it going with Logan Raider's kids? You leave super early, get home super late, and the days you're off, I barely see you."

"Oh. It's good," I say, hovering on the edge of truth. Should I tell her? She is my best friend in NYC, has been ever since Lucia ditched me in high school all because I wasn't an alcoholic like her. But I know how much she obsesses over Logan. I'm not sure telling her would be the best idea. The inquisition would be endless. "The twins are a lot of work, but it's getting easier every day."

"I don't mean the twins. I mean with him. Do you see Logan a lot? Does he walk around in his underwear? Does he ever bring anyone over for sex?"

"Caitlyn." I suck in a breath. "I see him very little. He leaves early and arrives super late. Like me." I tap the couch. "Well, gotta go. See you in a couple days."

"Bye, lucky little slut." I hear the sneaky smile in her voice.

At the door, I bristle. If you only knew, honey ...

Another day without the twins tying me to a chair and setting me on fire goes by. Not that two-year-olds would, but you never know with these kids. Once they mercifully fall asleep, I carry them to their toddler beds before he arrives home. Kissing them on the foreheads, I think about my mother and all she went through with my brothers, and the nightly guilt sets in. I should've been an easier teenager for her .

I close the door, making the monitor app is running on my phone. Then, I go about cleaning up the play room, getting it ready for tomorrow. When I close the door, I notice the handprint identity panel isn't working. Note to self: tell Logan so he can have it fixed .

Next order of business is to make myself a cup of sweet orange tea. After a hard day's work, it's a small pleasure to help me relax. I must fall asleep hard on the den's comfy chair where I'm hiding out, because I wake up to rock music playing somewhere in the distance. Did Logan get home while I was asleep? I check the time. It's past midnight. Most likely it's him. According to him, he spends a little time with the twins before work and after work, but I've yet to see if he actually does, because I'm usually in my room plotting to open an accounting firm or I'm asleep like I was now .

I need to tell him about the handprint panel being broken. I could text him, but something compels me to seek him out. First, I want to confirm it's actually him I'm hearing from somewhere in the house, and second...I just want an excuse to see him .

Taking off in search of the music, I walk through the lonely, state-of-the-art home. As beautiful as it is, as much as it still amazes me, there's little life to it. There's more love in my parents' middle-income home in upstate New York than there is in this sleek penthouse. The music grows stronger as I reach the stairs at the end of the hall. It's coming from down below, the floor underneath us where I never go .

A set of spiral steps leads me into the belly of the house. Down here, it's darker with wooden floors and wooden ceiling beams. For looks, I imagine, because the whole skyscraper is made of steel. The rock music grows stronger. It's classic 80s. I follow it all the way to a room on my left. The door is ajar. I stand outside of it, heart pounding. Assuming Logan is here, should I be lurking in the dark? Though he said I have full access to the house, I think he meant upstairs. For some reason, this whole basement level feels restricted .

Peeking into the room, quarter eyeball at a time, the mystery comes into view. It's a home gym, replete with every type of machine and free weights you can imagine. In the middle is Logan Raider in long shorts, sneakers, and no shirt, massive hard body glistening with sweat. He's finished a set of chest presses and takes a breather before doing another .

I watch him with complete fascination .

He's a large man. I can't believe I had sex with him just a week ago. It's hard to believe, and I often find myself pretending it was only a dream in order to forget him. But there's no forgetting this specimen of flawlessness. His movements with the weights are rough, his breathing coarse, his body gloriously shiny. He's working off some serious stress. I'm not sure this is a good time to approach him, but I figure he'd want to know about a broken security panel .

I venture a light knock at the door. "Mr. Raider ?"

Sweet Child O' Mine blares from invisible speakers. Logan sets down his weights and cocks an ear. My heartbeat bangs against my ribcage like crazy, my stomach filling with a mixture of dread and lust. When he stands, he's an ancient god sculpted from clay. Utter perfection. I want him so badly, and my core, slickening with wetness, knows it .

It was a mistake to come here .

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Still, I step halfway inside .

He sees me. Suddenly, I feel borderline frightened. It's like I've entered an animal's lair. I could step out and run back upstairs, but I can't move .

“What are you doing here?” His voice is a deep growl .

“I...just thought you'd want to know ...”

I never get to finish my sentence. Not that I remember what I came here for. Because suddenly, he's aiming in my direction, a man on a mission, pulling me away from the door so brusquely, I think some kind of danger is behind me. Then, his mouth is hard on mine, tasting, urging, exploring, salty sweat mixed with man skin filling my senses. The danger is him—it's Logan .

And I have no desire to run .

So, it's real. So, I didn't imagine it last week. Logan Raider really does want me the way I want him. I don't understand why, unless I'm caught in the crossfire of his life. Is he so stressed he just needs a fuck? If so, why am I not offended that it's me? Why is it that I don't mind when he throws me against the mirror, strips me naked and begins assaulting my body with his mouth and tongue? When his sweaty chest smashes against me, and I feel his cock, massive and aching, pressing into my stomach? His hands elevate, inundate, and titillate my soul .

I want him inside me right now .

Nothing else, nothing first, no formalities, not even any kissing .

Flipping me around so my breasts press up against the mirror, he pulls down his shorts, his wide leg stance stretching the waistband. “Your eyes are blue .”

“Which means ?”

“It means don’t move,” he mutters against my ear, his hot breath sending a string of electric impulses down my spine into my pussy. And then, less than thirty seconds after I made my presence known at the door, he’s already entering me .

I cry out and grasp at the mirror, but my fingers only slip. There’s nothing to hold onto as his cock buries deep into my body, banging at the centermost parts of my core, as his fingers grip into the flesh of my ass cheeks. Watching our reflection, we are not man and woman. We’re female cat pinned down by a lion, a beast whose balls slap against my ass with every stroke. We’re animals in heat, a bitch and a giant wolf dog .

It’s raw. Raw as fuck, and I love it .

“So good...” I mutter, the mirror fogging up with my breath and disappearing with each word. “Fuck me harder...please ...”

Suddenly, his hand curls around my mouth, covering it so I won’t speak, as he presses his chest against my shoulders. I get the hint and he slides it down and grasps my throat instead, not hard enough to hurt. Just holding me in place, as he fucks me harder, his cock plowing and driving into me. He pounds me so roughly, I begin dripping, my own pussy’s juices sliding down my inner leg .

It’s hard not to step out of myself right now. To internalize that it’s New York’s hottest billionaire fucking me, making me his own in the deep belly of his own home,

taking an interest in a simple girl like me. It's that thought that brings my desire to a fever pitch. Caitlyn is right—I am lucky. This man is not only paying me well, but he's fucking me so good, too. What did I do to deserve this ?

Forgetting him after this will be futile .

His grunts match mine and his thrusts bring me closer to the edge. It's been a week since I came, since he pulled two of them out of me last week, and I've had no desire to touch myself since then. It's almost as though he really did leave his mark on me. As though I belong to him, and only he can bring me to ecstasy. I have no problem with that if that's what he wants .

Because I'm his. I can't imagine I'll ever want anyone else after this .

I come easily without even touching myself. The waves radiate throughout my body, as I mewl out loud and he leans close to hear it. I see a momentary smile flash across his mouth as he bites and pulls my ear with his lips, grips my hips with both hands, and drives it home. “That's it, baby. Let that pussy squeeze me ...”

Baby. That word alone is enough to wheedle another orgasm out of me, and the waves rip through me again and again. Somewhere in my loss of consciousness, he groans aloud and I feel him slowing down, enjoying each pump of his seed into me. He's completely used me and I don't even fucking care. Because I used him, too. Because we both needed it, so it's fine. The two halves of my brain argue with each other—the appalled side that cannot believe what I've let this man do to me, and the satisfied side that could kiss his feet for it .

I'm so spent from the aftermath that I barely even notice him carrying me the entire time he's kissing me. Yes, the kissing comes afterwards, deep, exploratory sweeps of his tongue and lips around mine. It isn't until he's laid me down on a soft bed that I realize we're in his bedroom again .

This mammoth of a man has just carried my chunky ass upstairs all the way to his room. To say I'm amazed is not enough .

“Thank you,” he says when he kisses me again. The demon has been exorcised. He's a man once again. There's even a soft smile to him, as those luminous eyes rove over me in bed .

“For?”

“For letting me. I shouldn't have taken you that way without warning,” he says. “You obviously didn't go down there to get attacked. Though I don't think you minded .”

“I didn't. This is weird, to say the least. I mean, it should feel weird, but it doesn't, for some reason. It feels normal.” I want to ask what's going on with us, where we're taking this “thing” we've created. But I fear it would be too much too soon, though I know I have a right to know. I'm afraid of jinxing it. Because I want it again. And I hate myself for needing him so badly .

He sighs and lies back, his hands clasped behind his head. His arms are solid muscle with veins roping around them, setting off a small fire in my core again. “This new project we're working on is killing me,” he mutters. His voice feels intimate, soft and deep next to me. “Millions of dollars are on the line, my ass is on the line, and there's no room for error. To make it all worse, there's my ex playing with fire, and I'm scared I'm going to lose my kids.” He side-eyes me. “You were right, you know .”

“About what ?”

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“I need to spend more time with them. Kissing them when I come home and they’re already asleep isn’t enough, but I just don’t know how to make the time when literally every second between now and project delivery counts .”

So he does kiss them when he comes home. I feel sad for the children that they rarely get to see their father, though. Does work matter that much ?

“Add to all this now a new distraction,” he says, glancing at me. “That’s you, by the way .”

“Me? How am I a distraction, Logan?” Woops, I just called him Logan instead of Mr. Raider, but he doesn’t seem to mind. He moves right along like nothing’s happened. I can’t believe I could ever be a distraction to a man like him .

“Paisley, I don’t think you realize just how beautiful and sexy you are,” his deep voice soothes me in the darkness. “When I saw you standing at the gym door in your sweats and thin shirt, I saw you weren’t wearing a bra, I saw how tired you were—if not more tired than I am—and in your eyes. I saw that you wanted me, too .”

Wow. Well, I appreciate him saying I work hard. Glad that hasn’t gone unnoticed .

“The truth is, I can’t stop thinking about you.” His fingers reach across the pillow to caress my hair .

I sigh because I can’t believe this is happening. My boss, the most sought-after businessman in the entire city who’s designed famous modern buildings around the world, can’t stop thinking about me? ME , Paisley Carrington? What is this world

coming to ?

“You don’t believe me, do you?” he asks .

“It’s hard to. You don’t understand. I’ve never been the girl that gets the attention. Not in school, not at college, not anywhere, really .”

“Those guys were stupid, then,” he says. “I know I said we couldn’t do this anymore, but I couldn’t help myself. I’ve been keeping myself at bay since that last time. But tonight, I was too weak to resist. Come here.” He reels me into his body and again, we doze in the darkness. This time I make sure to set my alarm, as Logan drifts off .

Within minutes, he’s asleep, but I can’t get there. Though our connection just got deeper, he’s still a man on the edge. He may insist I’m sexy, but I still think I’m only his stress-release plaything. I refuse to believe I have anything to offer him, though I know the back of my brain is screaming that it’s not true. I’m smart, I’m diligent, and I take damn good care of his children. Maybe that’s enough, but I still can’t help but feel that this is wrong on a deeper level .

Whether that’s my consciousness trying to warn me or my professionalism getting the best of me, I’m not sure. All I know is I’ve just joined Logan Raider on this cliff of emotions, and I don’t know whether I should leap down the ravine with him...or run the other way .

Logan

The urban center design doesn't just take everything out of me. It taunts me, provokes me, torments me .

It's no wonder I come home as late as I do .

But tonight, I decide to kick out and head home early. Paisley was right—I need to spend more time with the kids. I know I said it was nearly impossible to spend more time at home but it's not. I can put people to work for me in my absence, and a little time off would be good for me. At least that's the plan .

First order of business, setting my phone to silent .

When I walk through the door, I hang my coat and head to the play room, expecting the kids to be there watching TV or something. Except they're not. I hear giggling on the other side of the house and follow the sounds all the way to the atrium where my kids, guided by Paisley, are digging a hole in the ground. Their hands and faces are covered in dirt. Paisley looks up, her jaw dropping in shock. "Logan ?"

The kids look up, too. "Da-yee!" Thing 1 and Thing 2 drop their mini spades and come running toward me. Part of me puts an instant guard up—don't want to get dirty in my suit. But the other...ah, fuck it. Each of my arms scoops up a little one, and I plant a kiss on each of their cheeks .

"You're home early." Paisley is all smiles from ear to ear. Damn, she's absolutely gorgeous when she's relaxed and not scared to talk to me. I should catch her off-

guard more often .

Putting the twins down, I sit on the cobblestone walkway into the atrium. “Decided I needed a break .”

She cocks her head. “But won’t everything fall apart without you there?” Her question is laced with cheekiness, and it comes accompanied with a wink, but I won’t reprimand her now. I’ll smack that ass later and make her apologize .

“Yes, it will, but the kids leave tonight, and I wanted to see them before they go.” I reach for one of the mini spades and start digging in the earth. “What are you guys doing ?”

“Making treeeeeeees!” Price throws his hands up, showing me how big his imaginary tree is .

“We had apples for snack, Daddy. They just planted the seeds .”

“Wow, are they going to grow big?” I ask, catching a tackle from Becca on my left side .

“Ya! Very big! We’re gonna make APPLES!” she screams into my ear, nearly bursting an eardrum, and I just don’t care. Their giggles and shouts, hugs, kisses and dirty hands are the best thing that ever happened to me .

Paisley watches the whole thing with awe .

“What? What’s wrong?” I ask .

“Nothing. I just had no idea ...”

“No idea I actually loved my kids? Did you think I didn’t care about them?” I catch Becca as she runs circles around me, and she shrieks with pure happiness .

“Well, not exactly, but ...”

She did. She thought I didn’t care, that I was some uninvolved father. I can’t blame her. Since the ten days I hired her, five of those here with the kids, I haven’t actually sat down to chill with them even once. But now I’m home, and it’d be good for her to see that I’m actually a great dad. If only I had less responsibilities .

Paisley digs another hole, and Price drops a tiny seed from his hand into it. “Grow big, apple!” he shouts into the hole. Paisley and I both crack up at my crazy son’s antics .

“You tell it, son. Show that seed who’s boss .”

“Like you do to me?” Her comment casually slips out, but it sends shivers through my body. Her tongue pushes into her cheek, and she can’t help that smile. Great, now I want her while the kids are awake, when it can’t happen .

“Exactly.”

We hang out in the atrium until all the seeds have been planted. Of course, none of them are going to grow in this climate-controlled setting not conducive to apple tree growth, but we’ve had fun and that’s what matters. While Paisley gets the kids washed up, “I’ll be in the living room,” I say and move off to pick a movie for us to sit and watch. I know hands-on activities are supposed to be better for little kids, but I’m exhausted and just want to chill with my babies. On the couch. With them in my arms. There’s no better stress-reducer .

I sit and stretch my legs out. Seconds later, the patter of little feet come running.

“Yay! Da-yee!” They climb onto the couch, one on either side and settle in against my stomach and chest. Headrests for everyone .

“Daddy,” I correct. “I know you guys are only two, but it’s the most important word you’ll ever say .”

Paisley giggles from the kitchen behind me. I like making her smile. I wish I was witty enough to make her laugh all day long. “Actually, the most important word they’ll ever know is ...”

“Don’t do it. I swear, if you say, Mommy...” I warn her .

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“Paisley. Daddy’s alright, but Paisley is the best.” Rounding the sofa, she offers them sippy cups of juice and a carrot sticks in two, plastic bowls. I want to tell her I don’t like food on my living room couch, especially toddler food, but decide against it. Don’t want to ruin this perfectly good evening .

As the movie begins, and the kids snuggle closer, I realize Paisley is hanging back. “Hey,” I say. “You don’t have to leave us. Come, sit here with us .”

On the same couch where I fucked your brains out almost two weeks ago .

Wherever she went, she can’t hear me. I take it as a sign that this allotted time should be just me and the kids, so I don’t insist. I take the hint. Just me and the kids. I feel my stress melting away and know I have to do this more often .

* * *

M iriam arrivesto pick the kids up while we’re still watching the movie. She walks in and leans against the wall. The kids are too entranced with the colorful cartoon movie to move or even acknowledge her. I do a mini victory dance in my head. “Why aren’t they ready with their shoes on ?”

I give her a lazy glance. “I didn’t see what time it was .”

“Didn’t see or didn’t want to see ?”

I wish for once she would stop playing games with me. “Leave it alone, Miriam. I’ll get them ready in a second.” I get up and look for their shoes. I don’t even know

where Paisley keeps them, but I refuse to show Miriam that .

“I’m shocked to see you with them. What happened, your nanny had an afterschool dance and your aunt was too drunk to substitute ?”

At that, I give her a full-on glare. “Watch it .”

“Like I’m scared of you, Logan. Let’s go, Becca. Price, let’s go.” The kids don’t move. They stand there, affixed to the TV screen. “See why I don’t let them watch movies for longer than a few minutes? This is what you get. TV zombies .”

“Don’t crap on my time with them, Miriam. You do what you want with them, and I’ll do what I want.” On my way to look for shoes, Paisley comes out of the play room wearing glasses, book tucked under her arm, two sets of shoes in her hands. She treads carefully, knowing she’s entering what could easily become a battlefield .

“Hi, Miriam,” she says, giving my ex a curt nod, then quickly disappearing .

Miriam scoffs, takes the shoes from my hands, and calls the kids over to her. As if she’s the only person capable of dressing them correctly. In her mind, everything I do is wrong, I’m a terrible father, and any little thing I do becomes grounds for taking custody away from me .

Which is why the kids cling to my legs when it’s time to go .

I almost laugh in Miriam’s face, but that would make me a sore winner. “Look at me. Such a terrible dad that they don’t want to leave me .”

She rips them away amid tearful protests. “Don’t flatter yourself, Logan. They only do that because you finally spent time with them...for once.” And then she’s gone and I’m left wanting to rip the head off a rhino with my bare hands .

Paisley emerges from behind a corner and sidles up to the kitchen counter with today's mail. "This came today. Sorry about Miriam."

I ignore the mail. I don't want to cope with bills, ads, or bad news of any kind right now. I just want to pull Paisley into my arms and kiss her. Kiss away the shit feelings, bring some normalcy back into my life. She doesn't resist when I reach out for her, and she tastes delicious. I wish I could throw her onto the counter, spread her legs, and lick her to orgasm, but she's got her keys in her hand.

"Do you have to go?" I kiss her earlobes and her neck. Even after a full day at work, dealing with my twin terrors, she still smells good to me.

"I have a hair appointment in my neighborhood in an hour."

"But your hair is perfect the way it is." It really is. I pull it out of its hold and spread it over her shoulders in soft waves. "I just need you, baby. Stay with me?"

"You do?" she asks. There's that thing again where she doesn't believe me. Believe in herself.

"Yes. I need your smile, your body, your everything." Kissing her deeply, I realize I've never quite said things like these to anyone before, not even Miriam when we were married. "Your sweetness, your snippy sarcasm at just the right moments. Everything about you, Paisley. You sure you can't stay?" My hands are all over her, squeezing and feeling this woman who works so hard for me and puts up with all my shit.

"But I'm icky, Logan. I need a shower."

"We'll shower together. I don't care." I love when she's in her natural state, and it scares the shit out of me that nothing will stop me from making it happen.

Because besides my kids, she's the other reason I came home early .

I wanted to see her. Those eyes, that ass, that perfect smile. I wanted to see her all lit up in her element, working with kids, seeing how the twins interact with her—which was wonderful. She's a good woman and yeah, she may end up being untrustworthy down the line like Miriam was, but that's not here nor there, because I don't plan on having a future with her .

I just want to spend time with her while she's here .

“Please...” I cup her breasts underneath my palms, feel the small of her back arching into me, taste the sweetness of her mouth when her lips part under mine. “Stay .”

Paisley

Things have changed so fast.

It's been three weeks since I've been working for Logan Raider. Three weeks since he stood in the play room insisting I follow his every command, showing off his control freak side. But ever since he started coming home earlier, spending time with me and the kids, he's changed. I don't know if he's testing out a softer side, or if he's secretly sweet and was only pretending to be a dick before ...

...but I love it .

The best is seeing the change in the kids. Whereas they were pains in the butt before, now they're better at listening and following directions. I think it has to do with Daddy paying them more attention. Kids act out when they feel neglected. But Becca and Price have just blossomed. I love hearing them yell, "Daddy!" every time he gets home and watching them run into his arms .

Good job, Logan. There's hope for him yet .

As for us, I stay a while after the kids leave or go to sleep. The sex happens almost every day when I'm at Logan's. Sometimes it's nothing but fucking, hard and lusty and raw—and I love it. Sometimes it's slow and sweet and I love that in an entirely different way. Every time I think he might consider me more than a stress-release toy, he either turns inward or goes back to work .

I love being with him so much—it's more sex than I've had my whole life put

together in a few weeks. But...most nights, I lay awake wondering what's going on. We haven't done anything together other than fuck—we haven't shared a meal, we haven't talked about the future, and we never go out together .

Am I nothing to him but a dirty little secret ?

Or is he afraid of more ?

* * *

One evening, Becca and Price have just left to go to Miriam's house without seeing their father before they go. Logan's texted to say he's running late, should be home soon. Of course, I stay and wait. I have no further obligation to him other than to clean up after the kids and prepare the play room for the next day they come, but I want to see him. It's beyond a desire—it's a need .

I freshen up, fix my hair, and change into a clean shirt without juice stains. I wait in the living room, reading my iPad until I hear the familiar footsteps coming to the door. Then comes the beep-beep-beep of the security panel recognizing Logan's handprint. I smile, feeling a bit like a trophy wife awaiting her husband home from work .

Logan busts through the door, and right away I sense that something is wrong .

He sees me, charges right at me, and slams an opened manila envelope right on the coffee table. His eyes are on fire, his shoulders flared, jaw tense like it's made of stone. "What is this ?"

I have no idea what he's talking about. I take the envelope and pull out a stack of papers. Court documents? "I don't know," I say shakily. Though I've done nothing wrong, I can't help but feel like I have. Then, I see a familiar name smack at the top

of the first page ...

Arnold Carrington, Esq—Law Offices of Post, Newton, & St. James

That's my father and the law office he works for. What the hell is going on here? Why does Logan have an envelope with my father's name on it ?

“Who do you work for?” he demands, hands on his hips .

“What?” I stammer. “I have no idea what this is about. I swear, Logan!” My heart pounds. My head begins to hurt from the sudden adrenaline rush. Scanning over the pages, I see another name—Miriam Dange-Raider .

As in, Logan's soon-to-be ex-wife, who appears to be working with my father on this divorce proceeding .

All blood drains from my face. I have to sit down or I'm going to faint .

How could my father be working with Miriam? He's a small-time lawyer, and she would never condescend to work with a firm so small. And yet, it seems she is ...

“Are you working here just to inform about what goes on in this house? Are you spying for your father's law firm?” he yells .

“What? No!” Sitting to catch my breath, I try to make sense of this. “Logan, you're the one who picked me out from a lineup, remember? I swear, I had no idea my dad was her lawyer. I mean, what are the chances ?”

“I don't know, Paisley. You tell me. It's a hell of a coincidence, don't you think?” His tone is accusing, angry, and part of me feels like I'm responsible, even though that's crazy. Still, that's my last name there paired with Ms. Dange-Raider's. Why is

my father representing her ?

And then reality comes crashing in and I realize it is no coincidence. Of course not .

The pieces are falling into place. The only thing that makes sense is that Miriam found out my father is a divorce attorney and then went and hired him simply to screw with Logan. And perhaps, me as well .

“It’s because of that day,” I say, staring at the papers .

“What day ?”

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“The day she came here and saw me coming out of your room,” I explain. “My first day. She must’ve done some investigative work to find out who I was and saw that my father was a divorce lawyer .”

Logan sucks in a deep breath and tries to calm down. He sits on the edge of the couch running a hand through his hair. “That crazy bitch .”

Crazy bitch is right. If Miriam hiring my dad is a revenge tactic, then that’s pretty sinister stuff. I mean, what business does she have hiring an attorney who doesn’t work out of the city, has never worked a high-profile case in his life, and lives all the fuck way upstate? It has to be because of me .

Anger courses through me. Suddenly, the voices of everyone I’ve ever heard warning women not to get involved with married or divorced men attack my brain. You’ll always be dealing with his ex, you’ll always be caught in the middle... But seriously, why should Miriam care if her ex is seeing someone new? She’s the one who filed for divorce !

I have to get up and move around. I can’t sit still thinking about this .

“There’s only thing to do,” Logan says, picking up the packet and sliding it back into the envelope. “You need to call your father and talk some sense into him. Explain what’s happening and tell him not to take her as a client. Either he quits or you do .”

I’m aghast at his words. Is that how it is? I guess he has no choice. If I stay and my dad continues to work for his ex, it’s a conflict of interest. “I’ll call him as soon as I get home.” My voice quavers on the brink of tears. This is so unfair. It’s what I get

for getting involved with a man embroiled in a court battle .

“Let me know your decision in the morning.” He storms off, leaving me in a swirling dust of indecision, pain, and regret .

* * *

Outside my apartment, the one I rarely see anymore except to sleep a couple nights a week, I pace the sidewalk, phone in hand. I’m about to call my dad, but I go over the words carefully in my head first. My father’s not a big-time lawyer. It’s always a sore spot between him and my mom, that he doesn’t earn what other partners at the firm earn. He’s small potatoes compared to other attorneys in his field. I know he secretly feels like a failure .

I know because I hear the disappointment in my mother’s voice when they talk about work. I hear her sighs, like she should’ve married the other guy, the more confident one, the bulldog attorney, the one who can sell himself better than my dad. My dad hears the sighs, too. I can imagine how important he must’ve felt when he got Miriam’s call .

If I weren’t working for Logan, I would be over the moon for him .

But I am working for Logan. And more than that, I have feelings for him. Confusing feelings, but feelings nonetheless .

Here goes nothing ...

I press “Dad” and wait. Just as I think the call will go to voicemail, he picks up. “How’s my little girl?” His voice is entirely too cheery. Almost like he just got himself a big case this week .

“Dad, I need to talk to you .”

“Of course. What’s up ?”

“You’re representing Miriam Raider .”

“How did you know that ?”

“Dad. I work for Logan Raider. I’m pretty sure you know that, because I called Mom the day I got the job to tell her .”

“You work for Logan Raider.” It’s a statement, not a question, one of disbelief. Did he really not know? Will he drop her as a client then, once I tell him ?

I sigh. “Yes, Dad. It’s the biggest gig of my life. He’s paying me thousands of dollars a week, and it’s money I’m saving to open up a small accounting firm first chance I get. Dad, you know this. You won’t take the case now, right ?”

“There’s no way I can drop it, honey. This is a windfall for the firm. Big publicity. If we win this, it’s huge for me, huge for the partners. I’ll most likely get my due share. I’m stoked about it, and your mom is thrilled, and — ”

A dreadful feeling fills my stomach. “Dad...” I pace on the sidewalk at a furious clip. “You can’t represent her. I’m telling you. Don’t you realize that the only reason that woman hired you is because you’re my father? Because I work for Logan? She just wants to stir the pot, create havoc .”

“Why would she do that, Paisley? Does she have something against you ?”

Silence.

I can't tell my dad I'm involved with Logan, that such a detail has complicated matters beyond belief, but it seems I don't have to. He figures it out anyway. My father may not be the most successful lawyer in the world, but he's smart. "You're involved with him, aren't you?"

"Dad..."

"Is that why you're working there, Paisley? To provide services that extend beyond the responsibilities of child care?" There's a vicious tone in his voice .

"No, Dad, and I don't appreciate the accusation either." Tears sting my eyelids. I want to punch this light post or at the very least the yoga mom walking by who looks like Miriam .

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“There’s no other explanation. Why would my client purposely drop James L. Dewitt, a well-known divorce attorney in the city to hire me? I was wondering why fate had finally smiled on me, and now I think I understand .”

“Dad, it doesn’t matter if it’s true or not. She only wants to cause trouble. But it doesn’t matter, because the fact is...I can’t lose my job. I just can’t .”

“And I can’t drop this case,” he says, “As it is, my place at the firm was becoming tenuous and now because of this, things have improved tremendously. I’m finally getting the respect I’ve long deserved. Don’t you want that for me ?”

Ah, parental guilt. “In another other situation, sure. But not in this one. Things may be looking up for you , but now they’re worse for me .”

“Paisley, it’s just a nanny job. Mine is a high-profile case. There’s no contest .”

“No contest?” I whine, fighting to rein my voice in. “In just three weeks, I’ve saved five times as much as my friends have working other jobs in the city. I can’t lose this job .”

The panic settling into my chest is real .

But is it because I might lose my job, or because I might lose Logan ?

The worst part isn’t even that my father has taken this case or seems hell-bent on keeping it after knowing the situation. It’s that he doesn’t care how this is affecting me .

When he doesn't say anything, I know I've offended him. He's prideful and resentful about his lack of high-level success all these years, but that's not my fault and he shouldn't punish me for it. "Dad, Logan Raider is furious that you're representing his ex. He feels betrayed, as if I had something to do with this .

"I can't drop Miriam as a client, honey. I'm sorry," Dad says, and I know my efforts are futile .

He doesn't care. Mine is just a nanny job. His is more important .

Even though he's right—my job is and always was just temporary, whereas his could spell an ascent on the corporate ladder—I hate him right now .

It's always been this way since I was little. Though I've always loved my dad, he's always had the bitter resentments of a man who feels left behind. A man who thinks he has to prove himself big-time worthy before he checks out of this life. He's never been content with what he has and has oftentimes set me and my brothers aside to put his own needs first .

He's never cared about how it's affected me or my siblings .

In the end, it doesn't matter. Father knows best. Every single time .

Logan

Just when I thought things were getting better, the shit had to go and hit the fan. When I saw the paperwork from Miriam's new lawyer, I couldn't believe my fucking eyes. Paisley had to be in on it—she had to. I mean, what are the chances that her own father would suddenly become Miriam's new lawyer? It's been an inside job from the beginning .

At least, it appears that way .

But Paisley has a point—if it was an inside job, what explains me picking her resume out of a lineup? If the agent had recommended her to me, then maybe I'd fully subscribe to the theory. But it was my own intuition that picked her out. Paisley's certainly right. Switching to Arnold Carrington was one of Miriam's manipulative tactics .

Unfortunately, the bottom line is...if he insists on taking the case, I can't have Paisley here anymore .

I wait to speak to her about it again until the next night she sleeps at my home .

I make sure to approach her room after the kids are asleep just in case it gets ugly. I knock once just to let her know I'm coming in, and then I press my hand to her security panel and let myself in .

“Logan.” She comes out of the bathroom in her bath towel, another towel wrapped around her hair. She seems surprised to see me, even though I've been coming to her

room for a month now. Is she hiding something ?

“Did you speak to your father?” I stand firmly, crossing my arms .

“Yes.”

“And? Is he going to drop the case ?”

“He refuses,” she says. “He says it’s too high-profile a case, and he needs it for status at his firm .”

“Fuck!” I grab the first thing I see, a fat candle sitting in a dish on her dresser, and chuck it across the room. It hits a small pile of clothes on top of her hamper and tumbles away. I can’t let my rage get the best of me. I’ve always controlled myself well, but every man has his limits. “What are you going to do about it?” I turn to Paisley .

She sits on the edge of her bed, the towel now off her head. Her long brown hair clings to her still-wet skin. Damn her for looking so sexy. I can’t employ her if her father won’t drop the case, and I can’t continue to see her either .

I’ll never truly be able to trust her if I know that her family will benefit from me losing custody of my children .

Fuck her for doing this to me .

And not just because I’ll miss the sex. It has become a lot more than that—and I should’ve known better. I liked coming home early, letting my team deal with less important aspects of the urban center project while I chilled with the kids and her in the evenings. I was starting to feel normal, less like a work machine and more like a father. Dare I say I? Like a husband, too. Even though Paisley’s not even my

girlfriend, much less my wife .

But I think perhaps I wanted her to be. I think I'm pissed about that than anything else right now, and that in itself is a huge part of my anger .

"I can't do anything, Logan," she says, breaking into my thoughts. "He's my father. He thinks this case is more important than me working for you ."

"Did you insist? Seems like you gave up too easily." Now I'm back to thinking that was her plan all along .

"I begged him," she says, standing, wringing her hands. "He just said no ."

I can't throw another candle. I want to storm around the house fucking breaking shit. I've never felt rage like this before. "What kind of man is your father than he won't listen to his daughter ?"

Now, she's the one crossing her arms, as though she has any reason to be mad .

"He's just trying to make a living! You can't blame him!" She fires back. Normally, I hate it when women scream. It brings out the ugly in them, but in this case...is it possible for any woman to look so fucking beautiful while angry as Paisley Carrington? Damn her .

"Oh, I can blame him. And I do ."

"He's not rich. He couldn't turn down the opportunity ."

I shake my head. "Goddamn it ."

"And he guessed about you and me, too ."

Great. My day only gets worse. “You told him about us ?”

“No, but he suspects .”

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I pinch the bridge of my nose before I lose my shit .

“Logan? Are you okay?” she asks timidly, clutching her towel close to her. “How do you think I feel with all this going on? I’ll probably lose my job .”

I look up at her. “Your job? You think your job is the worst thing at stake here, Paisley? You’re not the one who stands to lose your children. You’re not the one who’ll have to pay full-time alimony and child support. You’re not the one who’ll be turned into a monster in a tabloid frenzy for people to pick apart on social media .”

Her eyes burn holes through my face from how hard she’s glaring at me. “This is hurting me, too, Logan. So, I wish you wouldn’t minimize it .”

“Why?” I demand, taking a couple steps toward her .

“Why, what?” Her pale eyes soften, glance around for a place to run, as I approach. I’m not going to hurt her. On the contrary, I’ve never been able to stay away from her because of how much she affects me. I believe I need her around more than I’d like to admit .

“Why does this hurt you? Tell me the truth .”

“You know .”

“No, I don’t. Tell me.” I want to hear her say it. I want the words to come from her mouth, and I don’t want her to dilute the truth. I want the truth .

Her bottom lip trembles so much, I want to kiss it, rub my thumb across it, then make her pain, and my own, go away. If only sex could solve everything, we wouldn't be in this quandary right now. "Because I don't want to leave," she says. "But I may have to."

Eyes never lie. I can tell this is how her heart feels. She's falling for me. Has been all this time. Which only angers me even more .

How did I let this happen? How ?

I can't stand to see her standing there, tears in her eyes. I hate that my irresponsibility has caused this. I've always been rational, level-headed, hardworking, analytical. Yes, we're both adults and therefore both responsible, but I'm older, more experienced in life, in sex, in everything. I should've stopped it from happening .

And I still can't stay away from her .

Even now .

If there's no way out of this situation, I want her. One last time .

We kiss, our lips colliding, our tongues angry, seeking revenge and relief. Since day one, I've loved kissing her, breathing in her essence. I pull away the towel, letting it fall to the floor. So perfect. My hands knead her back, full chunks of ass in them. I love her body, and I love that she's as angry and frustrated as me. Still, I can't let her leave. I have to do what it takes to make her stay. I have to love her like I haven't yet .

My finger traces over her ass. She's already soaked, so I dip a finger into the wetness, hot and eager for me, pressing a finger into her ass. She pushes back against my hand, wanting more, and groans that beautiful sound I love. Her hand rubs against my

crotch, which fights back with restrained desire. Seems like restrained desire has always been my demon with Paisley. Somehow I have to set it free .

“You want it?” she asks, pushing her ass against me even more .

“Yes,” I murmur .

“Then, take it .”

In one swift movement, I flip her around so her hands splay against the bedroom wall. Then, I lower myself down onto my knees, tugging on her hips to arch her ass out more. She smells of shower gel and dampness and her own, personal elixir all rolled into one. Intoxicating .

“What are you going to do, Mr. Raider ?”

She’s fucking with me. How could she remind me that I’m her boss right now? Because it never should’ve moved into personal territory? Well, it did. And now we have to deal with it .

Sliding my hands up her warm thighs, I slap her ass hard, leaving a red mark on her right cheek. She cries out and arches her back even more. “I’m going to lick your pussy, Paisley . And you’re going to enjoy it. Don’t make a sound until I tell you .”

“Yes, sir .”

Why does she have to do that? Call me sir? Why drive it home? She really wants to piss me off, doesn’t she ?

“Don’t move either, or I’ll have to do it over and over again .”

She moves purposefully, and I detect the birth of a smile on her cheek before she bites her lip and turns away .

“You moved,” I say. “Now, bring it down .”

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She lowers her ass until her warm cheeks make contact with my unshaven face, the roughness scratching against her just slightly. I think she's going to complain, but she just pushes down harder, as though she likes it. Paisley closes her eyes but doesn't moan .

With my hands, I grip and separate her cheeks, and then slowly run my tongue up and down her wet slit from behind, focusing on her body's movements. She rocks against my tongue slowly, rubbing herself in circles, then stopping to let me lap her up. I sigh, close my eyes, and get lost in the moment. How many nights I've laid in bed wishing I could do this to her, take it up a new level, and now that I can, I'm going to have to fire her .

Her daddy may think he got the last laugh, but guess what? I'm licking his daughter's sopping wet cunt .

And fucking loving it .

I lick harder and slip two fingers underneath her, along her slick entrance, to massage her clit. Still, no sound from her. She's being a good girl. "You can moan now ."

The groan comes suddenly and long, as if being released from the center of an aching wound. I love this woman's body, the way it responds, and the way I make her feel. I love how she gets me worked up into an amalgam of emotions. Nobody has ever done that to me before. I don't know if to pound her or make love to her .

Thinking about entering her, I flip her around and kiss her deeply .

“I want to taste you,” she tells me, working her stealth fingers around buttons. But when the shirt and pants don’t come off as quickly as she’s trying to get them, she rips the last two buttons and throws the damn shirt off my body. Her arms snake around me, her face pressing against my chest .

I hold her close, breathing in her hair, harder than I’ve ever been in my life. What kind of magic has this woman cast on me that I need her so badly? That I cringe every time I think of her leaving this house? I can’t stand the thought of not knowing where she’ll be every day if I let her go .

She drops kisses all over my chest, my nipples, even sucks on one while unbuttoning my pants. Drunk on desire, she drops to her knees and takes in my steel hard cock, letting it rest on her tongue to drive me insane. Then, she crosses into bad girl territory and spreads her knees apart, touching her clit while she begins to suck on me. Every time she looks up at me with those arched eyebrows and green eyes, I want to spill into her mouth .

Then, it’s me who groans, but the sound filling my airspace is that of her sucking, gasping, and gagging as she begins pushing my cock deep into her mouth, to the back of her throat. When I look down at her again, there’s a string of spit hanging from her mouth and off her chin, wobbling back and forth. And holy fucking shit, that’s beautiful right there .

I fuck her mouth. I want to feel lost inside of her, I want to push myself all the way in and have her completely, and that’s when I realize I want to be fucking her more than anything right now. But her grip on my cock is strong, and she’s determined, as she flicks herself faster and faster, her fingers in a flurry, and I have to wonder if this is more for her than it is for me, not that I mind .

If her own orgasm is what she wants from this, I’ll be more than happy to help .

I push all the way to the back. “Open your throat. Breathe through your nose.” She does as I say and I’m able to push in a couple more inches. My balls nearly touch her face, as Paisley’s fingers fly like crazy. “You love when I do this?” I feel a hum against my cock. “Good. Come for me, baby. Come hard .”

She pulls away from my cock and sings that climax loud and clear. Grabbing her arms, I pull her to her feet, and I don’t care that she’s still coming, I need to fuck her now. Fuck her hard and feel those contractions all around me, feeling the influx of her juices coating me and drawing me in further .

“Turn around,” I order her .

She does, pushing her ass up against me and sliding her soaking wet pussy up and down my cock. But it’s not her pussy I want to drive into tonight. With the stress I’m feeling, I’m going to need a little more. Grabbing her hair, I lean down and whisper, “Have you done this ?”

Paisley gasps, understanding the question. “No .”

Coating my fingers full of her juices, I slather it onto her ass and get it nice and wet. I need this to feel good for her. I need to become her whole world, her end all, be all, and I need her to love what I’m about to do, too .

I hate myself for testing her, but as with everything else, I can’t help it. “Relax .”

I push only the tip against her tight asshole, hearing her cry softly. I hold two fingers against her ass to keep her from pushing back when she seems too eager for her own good, but then, I grab both her hips firmly with wide hands and draw her toward me. The slickness gives way, and I begin to slide in. Exquisite tightness all around me .

When I feel her fingers between her legs, working up her clit again, I know this is

going to work. She's doing the right thing, keeping her hands and her mind occupied, while I make way through her ass. To make things easier, she spreads her legs a little more, giving me access to an amazing view of my massive cock halfway into her small body .

I could come just then .

“Fuck me harder, Mr. Raider,” she whispers over her shoulder. “I’m not afraid of you .”

“You will be, Paisley. You don’t know what you’re asking for.” And then I push in harder, opening her up, filling her, so she can see the implications of her brazen actions. But she’s not dissuaded .

When I feel her ass push against me one more time, I’m done being Mr. Nice Guy .

I plow into her ass unapologetically, expecting her to cry out or complain, but she doesn’t. She spreads her ass cheeks apart for me again like she loves doing to me, and I have to close my eyes or spill too early. Because I want to feel this. I want to enjoy it. And only when I have for a while will I let go. I pull out halfway then drill into her again. She cries out when I shake her body over and over, and after a minute of pounding her hard, her one hand goes flat up against the wall while the other still massages her clit .

“Go ahead and come,” she says. She won’t be finishing herself off, and I’m not in the business of making her miserable if she’s not comfortable anymore .

“You sure ?”

“Yes.”

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I reach around and touch her myself. This way, I'm already fully inside of her and there's less drilling, less in and out. Focusing on her clit, I rub her the way she likes it and watch her head fall back toward me, exposing her neck. Biting her softly, over and over, her breathing quickens and I feel her legs tightening around my hand. As if I would finish without letting her come. Complete nonsense .

She comes and this time, it's hard as fuck. And that's when I resume fucking her over and over, right through her climax, and it's perfect. Because I can't stand it anymore. There's no way I can hear that sound of her doing herself in while I pound her ass and not lose it .

"Come inside of me," she says .

And that is all the invitation I'll ever need. Gripping her ass cheeks hard, I let it all go, grunting loudly as the cum shoots up through my balls and out my body. I have to press two palms against the wall to keep from falling over. I have never come so hard in my life .

Paisley spins around, rings her arms around me and kisses me .

"Thank you, Mr. Raider," she says softly. "For everything ."

I'm in a brain fog and can't believe this woman is thanking me when I should be thanking her, adoring her for the rest of my life just for that one experience .

It's not until we've fallen onto the bed, arms splayed out, completely spent, catching our breaths, kissing and falling into the exhausted land of dreams do I realize what

she meant. But by then, she's fallen asleep and I can't question her. Can't analyze, can't pick apart her brain to ask why that sounded so much like an ending, and I spend half the night thinking about it, unable to fall asleep. I can only cover her with the comforter and make sure she's taken care of with towel and water by her side .

Only after a full Ambien to calm my brain and a decent night's sleep are my fears confirmed. I did my best but it wasn't enough. In the morning, I understand what she meant by "thank you." Because she's nowhere to be found. Not in the bathroom, not in her room, not in the kids' room. Nowhere. No clothes. No bags. Nothing. Just me and me alone to take care of the kids when they wake up .

I hold my Becca and Price close to me. So closely, because I can't mess this up. She left so I could have them, to help me win my fight with Miriam. She stepped out of the way, despite my secret wish that she'd stay. It was the only thing to do. I squeeze them tightly and hold them a long time. Because I already lost Paisley. I can't lose them, too .

Paisley

The last thing I did before leaving was lean over their little sleeping bundles and kiss them. Becca and Price have become more than just my charges. They've become extensions of a man I'm falling for. A man I can no longer be around. If my presence is going to spell ruin for him, then I have to go .

This is all my father's fault .

No, wait, it's Miriam's fault .

No, wait, it's my own fucking fault for getting into his car the night he stormed into the bar looking for me. Demanding I follow. Seducing me. I didn't have to fall for him but I did .

I've been a stupid girl long enough .

At some point, I had to grow up, and that's why I left .

I walk into Battery Park and stand at the site of the planned library overlooking the harbor. If I squint hard enough, I can envision Logan's idea rising into the sky, walls of windows infused with sculpted, colored glass designs. The man is a genius at what he does. He's also conflicted with the way he begs me to stay then tells me he can't be around me anymore. I don't want to be the source of his torment anymore .

Toting my bags to the curb, I take an Uber all the way to the subway station and take the train back to my neighborhood. I haven't seen Caitlyn or the other girls in days,

and coming back will feel like more than just walking through the door—it'll feel like defeat .

Had I been stronger, had I resisted Logan's advances, I might still have my job. Miriam and Logan would still be working things out without me and my father in the middle. My father wouldn't think of me as a slut, which I'm sure crossed his mind. How did this happen? Was I so desperate for a connection, for recognition, that I gave it to my boss the minute he stepped over bounds? Why did I do nothing to stop it ?

Now I'm riding home on a train, fighting tears, checking my phone every two seconds to see if Logan has texted. I know the kids are awake by now, and surely, he's heard them. But no texts. His Aunt Vivian should be arriving soon. I called her as I was leaving the building to let her know I'd be needing her to stop by. When she asked why I was leaving, I couldn't utter a word. I only shook my head and said that Logan knew why .

An hour after leaving Logan's home, I arrive at my apartment and amble in, throwing my purse and bags on the sofa. Without an ounce of energy, I smash my face into the couch and wait for Caitlyn to wake up. My mind spins at 5,000 RPM with thoughts of Logan, the children, my father, stupid Miriam, Logan and what we did last night, why I let him. Was it a parting gift? Or an attempt to make him change his mind? To make him love me and keep me around .

Regardless, it was dysfunctional of us to have sex again when we knew damn well I wouldn't be staying. The situation was doomed from the beginning. Next time—if there ever is a next time—I'll date a guy with no history, no ex-wife, no children, nothing. Just me and a blank slate going to a restaurant and having a great time .

Sounds terrible .

I'd rather have Logan. But I can't and this needs to stop .

Finally, I hear stirrings from inside the apartment, as Caitlyn comes out of her room, giggling and running around the kitchen being chased by...no surprise here...a guy. He's cute but looks way too old for her, not that I can talk. When he catches her (in her underwear, no less), they start kissing up against the counter, but I wait until they get really deep into heavily touching each other before clearing my throat and waving hello .

Caitlyn screeches. "Paisley! Holy shit, you scared me ."

"I'm home ."

"I see that. I thought you were going to be at work today?" She socks her blonde head like a dog to secretly say that I'm interrupting her morning plans .

I get up and grab my bag again. "I'll go hang at Starbucks. Be back later ."

"No, wait!" She runs up behind me and pulls me back, turning me around to gaze into my eyes. Tears are on the brink. My life is pretty much over, and now I can't even rest in my own god damned apartment. "Don't leave," she says and she means it. "Leo? I'll call you ."

Leo, the cute dude, nods slowly at first like the message is having trouble reaching his brain because of his dick, then finally says "okay" and returns to their room to fetch his things and get dressed, I guess .

"I didn't mean to ruin your date ."

"No, it's fine. He slept over. He was just leaving, actually." I know it's a lie. Leo was hoping to get more frosting at the cupcake shop, but Caitlyn has slammed the

“Closed” sign in his face, and I love her for it .

“You don’t have to...” I insist .

“It’s fine. Come on.” She tugs me by the hand all the way to my room. I hear the front door open and close quietly, as poor Leo vacates the premises, and then it’s just me and Caitlyn. “What happened ?”

“I fucked up .”

“I seriously doubt that, Paisley. What happened, the pressure was too much? I knew that caring for twin toddlers could be a problem .”

“It wasn’t the kids. It was Logan .”

She stares at me a long time. Since the beginning, when we first found out that this nanny position was open, Caitlyn had been hoping to get it. Besides her unhealthy obsession for Logan without ever meeting him, she was just used to getting the best jobs. It was the first time since knowing her that I pulled ahead and swiped a position out from under her nose. Even then, she was happy for me, though still jealous .

But now, I’m not sure what’s going on from the look on her face. “What about Logan?” Her tone says that her jealousy will transcend into full-blown envy, maybe even outrage, if she were to find out that I entered the private inner circle of Logan Raider’s personal life .

This is where I should stop and say, oh nothing happened. Forget it, I’m just tired .

But a funny thing happens when you leave the man you were falling for, in order to let him have a peaceful life while he sorts shit out...you want to crawl into a hole and die. And you finally just need to talk about it. To anyone who will listen, maybe .

I sigh. This is a big mistake. Tell my mom? Sure. Call my friends back home, Heather and Maya, and dish the details? But maybe, in some strange way, this is the one person who will understand what I've been through .

“Caitlyn,” I say. “I have a lot to tell you .”

Logan

Today is a walking day. Some NYC days, you drive. Some, like today when it's overcast and windy, you walk to work. The Financial District picks up all those humid breezes near the harbor, but there's something else in the air besides the wind. While waiting to cross the street, people talk. Twisting my neck, I catch three older women gathered around a newspaper, shaking their heads .

"Can you believe it? At least she won't have to deal with that deadbeat anymore," one woman says. When they catch onto the fact that I'm glancing at them, they stop talking immediately and elbow each other .

I cross the street and turn right, waiting until the women cross and continue on before sliding around the next corner and leaning in to see the papers for sale. Miriam is on the front page, walking with Andy Kincaid, the actor, a mutual friend of ours, laughing with their arms touching, pinkies linked. Pinkies linked ?

The headline reads: Happiness for Miriam ?

Pfft. Like I fucking care. Good riddance .

Entering my building, I get into the elevator and don't even bother to fake a smile at the people who greet me. I'm in no mood to talk. Between our deadline today, plus a presentation with investors, this has to go well or the next few months could be murder for me. They're already bad enough now that Miriam plans to present what she calls "evidence" that I've been fucking the nanny to her lawyer, not that it matters, since New York is a no-fault state. Whatever it is, it won't affect the divorce

but it could have some impact on her wanting full custody .

The worst thing about my life right now is that Paisley's gone. A week now. I understand why she left—I was threatening to fire her and she couldn't continue to live this way—but we could've talked about it. I could've stayed calm, been less of an asshole. We could've figured out. Then again, I feel like fate is telling me this is how it was meant to be .

Anyway, I try not to think about it, but it's damn near impossible. She's the first thing I think about when I wake up. She's the last thing I think about at night. Even now in my office, looking out at downtown, I see her in my mind's eye. Her curves, her flowing hair, that smile, but best of all...those seafoam eyes .

My secretary buzzes me, but I don't want to hear her voice. I want to pull out paper and sketch. Sketching is how I brainstorm, get the ideas out of my head and begin bringing them to life. It's the first step to creation, but the most organic. I rely on computers so much, it's stress-relieving to press pencil to paper every so often .

But people keep coming into my office and reminding me of the time. The time, the time, the fucking time. “Yes, I know what fucking time it is, Randolph. What the fuck do you want from me ?”

“Just reminding you about our meeting, sir .”

“And I'm just reminding you that this is my building, and I'll show up to the meeting when I damn well feel like it. Have you ever seen me miss a meeting ?”

“No, sir .”

“Now you can leave my office .”

“Yes, sir.” I hear the door close quietly and a hubbub of voices outside, asking what went wrong. Randolph explains in hushed tones .

I continue to sketch a new building. I don’t know what it’s for but it’s curvy and it’s sexy and its glass reflects in a myriad of seafoam green tones. Someone has the balls to text me at this very moment, and that’s it—now I’m pissed. I throw the sketchbook into my drawer, grab my things for the meeting, and storm out .

The first thing I see is a group of people glancing at the same tabloid I saw on my walk here. I snatch it out of one of the secretaries’ hands, fold it, and shove it in the outer pocket of my bag. In a cubicle on just the other side, one of the guys whose worked in drafting for me for a year now is talking to Randolph who slowly backs up down the hallway and tries telling him I’m standing right here with widened eyes .

“Cleary, he needs to get laid,” the fucker says. “He’s been acting like a bitch for a week now.” He laughs, shaking his head. “Maybe his new building will be called The Cuckold Center .”

The idiot giggles even though the group around him has now fallen deadly silent .

“I’m sorry, what’s your name again?” I say in a calm, quiet tone .

Dude freezes and turns slowly like a cornered mouse. His skin goes ghostly pale and he seriously looks as though he might pass out. “Victor...uh...sir .”

“Victor, no wonder your name isn’t memorable. Victor, feel free to log off your computer and go home. I no longer need your services. I’ll see to it that you get your paycheck by the end of the week. Betty, please inform HR that we need a new drafter .”

“Yes, sir .”

“And we have a meeting to get to.” I breeze past her. “So move it .”

“Yes, sir,” Betty says, collecting her things while Victor stands there, mouth agape, wishing he could turn back time about ten seconds .

I almost feel sorry for the douche, but he was dumb enough to insult me and mock me in my own building a few feet from my office. If I let him get away with talking like that, I’d have lost the respect of everyone who works for me .

And right now, I need to show everyone that I am still firmly in charge. And it’s not about to change .

I don’t have time for people I can’t trust and now that basically means everyone .

* * *

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At least tentimes throughout the day, I want to call Paisley. During the meeting, during the presentation, during dim sum with the guys from the bank. I don't care about anything going on in the world of L.R. Group. I don't even care about the Battery Park Library plans anymore. I just want to hear her voice and pretend that nothing got ruined between us. I want to watch her offering her body to me, and I want to forget that I'm in the middle of a huge emotional mess .

She may be gone, but reminders of her are everywhere .

Especially the alarm that goes off on my phone every week at 5:45 PM. It reminds me to escape work and go spend time with Becca and Price. If the short-lived "thing" with Paisley taught me anything, it was to spend more time with my kids. I'll never forget the sassy comment she made on the first day of work—Isn't the best way to provide a nurturing environment for your kids to actually spend time with them ?

I'll always be grateful to her for that .

When I get home, Aunt Vivian is pulling her hair out by the chunkfuls. "These kids want nothing to do with me, Logan," she says, taking a scouring pad to her jeans and scrubbing off something beige and crusty .

"Da-yee!" Thing 1 and Thing 2 come barreling toward me and jump on my shoulders and back .

"They don't even want their mother," she murmurs. "They want 'Miss Paisy .'"

"Yes, I know. Don't remind me." I lumber into the kitchen and throw my shit onto

the counter, setting the kids onto the floor before grabbing a beer from the fridge. I skulk off, the kids following me close behind, and as usual, they settle into the crook of my arms as I sit to watch mindless TV .

I don't care how many times Miriam tells me this is an awful way to engage the kids, I love it. I love coming home after a stressful day at work, sinking into the sofa, and having my happy children snuggle up to me. This is Paisley's doing and the fact that she isn't here anymore suddenly hits me hard .

Aunt Vivian talks to me for the next thirty minutes, but I feign being sleepy, and eventually she lets herself out, telling me I ought to call back that nanny girl, because at least she knew how to run a tight ship. Yes, Aunt Vivian, indeed she did .

I'm not looking forward to seeing their mother today after what I saw at the newsstand, so imagine my joy when Miriam walks through the door and tells me, "I just saw your aunt in the elevator and realized your nanny's not here anymore, is she ?"

"Not only are you manipulative, you're observant as well." I hug the kids who hold me tighter when they see their mother is here to get them .

"Let's not debate who is more manipulative," Miriam replies. "If I am, it's because I learned from the best ."

"Your mother ?"

"No," she says, her mouth tightening. "You. Asshole ."

I get up, prying the kids' arms off me and breeze over to the foyer .

"From now on, when you arrive here, you'll have to ring the doorbell like everybody

else,” I tell her .

“Nice way to treat your family. Becca? Price? Get away from the TV. We’re leaving now.” Miriam fumes, as she scrolls through her phone, ignoring me .

“They’re my family.” I point to the kids and bring their shoes over to them. If I don’t put them on them, they’ll never leave. “How about I cut you a check right now and you leave the kids with me ?”

She doesn’t answer, only walks out in to the hallway to wait for the kids. I’m ushering them out amid protests, kneeling to hug and kiss them as loudly and annoyingly as I can for Miriam when the elevator door opens and a young woman steps out. She’s blonde, walks with a catlike gait, and I swear I’ve seen her somewhere before. What is she doing here? I didn’t clear anyone downstairs .

“Oh, look,” Miriam says, giving the young woman the glance-over. “Another one .”

“Maybe you can hire her father, too,” I tell her as she climbs into the elevator and the doors begin to close. She flicks me the middle finger, just as the doors shut her out of my life. Well, for three days, at least .

Now it’s me and Blondie. I give her a long look as she raises an eyebrow at me. “May I help you?” I say. “Who do I have to fire downstairs for allowing you to be here .”

She smiles and laughs airily, extending her hand. She’s a fucking knockout on a different level from Paisley altogether. Whereas Paisley is all natural beauty, this girl is a pinup queen with big round tits and a tight miniskirt. And tanned legs for days and days. Painted eyes and sculpted eyebrows .

“It’s okay, Mr. Raider. I was cleared by your aunt who answered the phone earlier when I called. My name is Caitlyn Summers. I was sent here by Le Nanny? I believe

you have a position available?” Quite the kitten voice, too. Once upon a time, I would’ve jumped on a woman like this. I wouldn’t have thought twice about it .

But that was before .

Before I found out how much more there was to life than a woman who could pretend to be a nympho at the drop of a hat .

Before I met Paisley .

“I do? I don’t believe I let the agency know that I needed anybody else.” Though I do need someone else, unfortunately. The project is about to get busier than ever at work, and Vivian won’t agree to watching the kids several times a week. I need a nanny and wish it was Paisley, but wishing hasn’t changed a damn thing in my life, and it won’t now either .

“Oh? Maybe it was a mistake. But you do need someone, don’t you?” She snakes up to me, and I catch the scent of her body spray. Something vanilla .

I’m about to send the Playboy nanny away and call up Paisley to come fix my life when I stop myself. Paisley doesn’t want anything to do with me. She left because it was all too complicated and convoluted for her. And I get it. Nobody wants to be in the middle of the shit I have going on, and I can’t blame her at all .

Maybe in the future when things settle down, we can start over. When the divorce is nothing but a memory, and I have a better idea of what I can offer her, if anything. In the meantime, I could use an extra hand with the babies, and hey, I’m too exhausted to go through the hiring process again .

Let Le Nanny handle it .

Going back inside, I hold the door open for Caitlyn. “Let’s go over the rules then, Miss Summers .”

She smiles, wide, toothy, and victorious. “Yes.” She walks through the door. “Let’s .”

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Paisley

It's been over a week since I left .

Nine days to be exact since I saw his face, and deep winter has come .

Most days, thinking about Logan hurts, but I try not to focus on him. Whatever "we" were, it wasn't meant to be. Logan came into my life like a hurricane and I managed to get out unscathed .

Except, I'm not really. My heart and body ache for him and the world is duller now without him and the twins in my life .

I should also be grateful that the time I spent working for him afforded me days like this, sitting at Starbucks, working on my business plan to open my accounting firm. If it weren't for him, I'd be scrambling to find another job. I'd be neck-deep in interviews and planning out my meager finances for the next several months. Still, another part of me (the stupid part) would trade away the small nest egg I've saved just to be with him one more night .

Why?

Because no one has ever made me feel the way he did before. And probably never will again. There can never be another man like him. Logan, older, more experienced man that he is, knew my body better than I did. He did things with it I never would've dared do. He pushed my sexual limits and made me feel cared for, loved, feminine...and yes, owned. But not in a bad way. It can be a good feeling knowing

your man takes care of you, makes decisions for you that you know you'll never have the balls to make by yourself .

Not only that, but he was coming out of his shell. Seeing him with his kids the way I did the last couple weeks really changed the way I viewed him .

He wasn't a monster .

He wasn't a bad guy .

He was a great dad. He just needed to learn to control his temper when he didn't get his way. Would not accusing me of being a spy for his ex-wife during his divorce been such a terrible thing? If only he'd trusted me the same way I trusted him .

Doesn't matter. Time to move on. Maybe I'm never meant to find love .

Sighing, I sip my mocha latte then start a new spreadsheet on my laptop. I chose the Starbucks in the Financial District hoping Wall Street and the world of numbers might rub off on my business planning. Fine, I also wanted a view of Logan's building, but nobody has to know that but me .

The door chimes, and I hear people bustling and chattering. Looking up, I see why. It's Miriam, plucking off her gloves, shaking off the cold, and ignoring the people in line who are taking candid phone pics of her. What day is it? Tuesday. She must've just dropped off the kids who I miss so much. Becca with those big blue eyes of hers and Pierce with those big bear hugs he'd give me right before night-night time .

I sink lower into the table hoping she won't see me, but her gaze is like a heat-seeking missile. After she orders, gets her drink, and takes a couple of photos with fans, she stops at my table. "Well, look who's here." She smiles that deep red smile like she's just chewed off someone's face .

I look up and force an easygoing smile, if anything, just so she won't think she got the best of me. I'm fine. Totally fine. She didn't break me. "Hi. How are the kids?"

"They're alright, could be better. I hate dropping them off at their father's." She shrugs like she's forgotten who she's talking to. I'm not one of her girlfriends. "I hate knowing a nanny is spending time with them that I could be spending."

"So why do you leave them there then?" I ask.

It's a legitimate question. As the daughter of a divorce attorney, I know nothing is set in stone during a divorce until the marital settlement agreement. She could very well spend all her time with her children if she wanted to during this lawless period when everything's up in the air. But she doesn't. And I've seen the tabloids, so I know why.

When she glances at me, she remembers who she's talking to and gives the standard interview answer. "Because it's important for my children to spend time with their father."

Because you want to spend time away from the kids and get in bed with Andy what's-his-face? I want so badly for her to vacate my personal space, but a burning question aches inside my chest. I have to ask while I have her here in front of me, as much as I hate confrontation.

"Why did you do it?"

"Do what?" She glances at someone outside who's waiting for her. It's not Andy. Or maybe it is him in a baseball hat covering his sharp facial features.

"Hire my father. You could've hired any lawyer in the whole state of New York. So, why him? He doesn't even live in Manhattan."

Our eyes lock on each other. Hers are deep brown and full of malice. I can't believe I ever took her side on this matter, before I ever knew anything about her .

“Because he's a wonderful man and a great attorney. A gem, actually .”

“But you'd never even heard of him before you met me, so doesn't that seem a little odd ?”

She flicks her hand, brushing off my suspicion. “Look, I admit, I called him up hoping to learn more about you than is explained in your nanny bio. I wanted to know who was taking care of my children. Then, I discovered there was more to him.” She smiles as though imagining my father in the center of her mind. “I liked the things he stood for .”

“He didn't stand for his daughter,” I say .

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“That’s right,” she agrees. “He stood for his client, his law firm. I don’t want a lawyer who’s a nice dad. I want a lawyer who will do anything to help me win .”

“Unfortunately for you, he’s really not that good. He’s okay at best,” I tell her. Part of me regrets saying it, but given that my father hasn’t even called or tried to talk to me since everything came apart, I don’t really care .

And it feels nice to stick it to Miriam .

Miriam stares, and if she could slap me, she would. But her disdain right now melts into a casual shrug. “I suppose like father, like daughter,” she says finally .

“What’s that supposed to mean ?”

She begins backing toward the exit. “You were just okay as a nanny. Just like your father is okay as an attorney .”

“I was better than okay.” I feel my eyes burning, and I don’t know why I’m letting this witch get inside my head. But I can’t seem to stop .

“I don’t know,” Miriam smirks. “The other girl from Le Nanny seems to be doing much better than you, and the kids don’t cry when it’s time to go. I like her a lot better .”

Other girl from Le Nanny ?

Who??

Miriam slaps sunglasses over her eyes and presses against the door .

“Which girl?” I ask, my chest trembling. Like I know, deep in my heart, before she even says it .

“Caitlyn something? Blonde, beautiful...a threat, to be sure.” She smiles evilly and pushes out into the busy sidewalk of the Financial District where she falls in step with the man waiting for her outside .

Caitlyn? Caitlyn Summers, my roommate and friend who told me she got a new assignment working for “some loser midtown?” Sure. A loser she’s been dying to fuck. Suddenly, all my brain can envision is her and Logan having hot monkey sex all night, every morning, and all the times in between. I see him groping her perfect breasts, and I see him pushing his cock into her tight body. Her tight ass .

A wave of jealousy rises up through me like lava about to spew .

If I call her, I’m only going to end up yelling in the middle of this Starbucks. I decide to text her instead. More controlled that way. Plus, with texts, I’ll have verbal evidence I can analyze over and over again .

You’re working for Logan ??

???

??

I was going to tell you .

Sure you were. Thought you were working

for some “loser .”

Paisley I was going to tell

you today. It wasn't my idea .

The agency sent me and I knew

you'd react like this so I kept

putting it off .

You always wanted

my job because of Logan .

And now you are probably fucking him too .

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That's not true and no we're not .

You never were a good liar, Caitlyn, for someone who does so much of it .

I toss my phone into my bag and don't bother reading her reply. Am I being immature? Fuck, yeah. Do I give a rat's ass? NO. She's my fucking roommate, and my friend, for fuck's sake. All she had to do was come clean and tell me the truth instead of making me find out in the worst way possible—hearing it from Miriam Dange-Raider's mouth .

There's no way Caitlyn has been working there for a week without getting the same “treatment” he gave me. Now, I feel so foolish. And unbelievably hurt. Maybe it was naïve of me, but I actually thought there might've been more between me and Logan. I thought it might've been special. I thought maybe I was the woman to finally bring out the best in him .

I thought a lot of things I'll never think again .

Because I'll never be this stupid ever again .

Shoving my laptop in my bag, I barrel out of the coffee shop and flick my middle finger at Logan's penthouse in case Caitlyn can see me. Then, I head for the nearest train back to Brooklyn, my pride in my throat and fists in my pockets. Caitlyn better hope I don't run into her tomorrow night when she gets home, because I can't be responsible for what I'll do next .

Logan

In the past, when a staff member of mine has left, that's it. I don't invite them back. I don't beg and plead. None of that. I let them go. Free will is a beautiful thing. But I'll say this—it's only happened twice. One's departure was caused by a jealous boyfriend, the other because my maid got pregnant (not by me, smartasses). Both things I couldn't do anything about .

But Paisley left because of me .

I feel like shit about that and I haven't stopped thinking about it. I could've spoken to her differently. I could've shown her she was appreciated. Lots of "I could haves." But instead, I drove her away. And now I'm driving back to her—literally .

My Lamborghini flies down the highway, crosses the bridge and corners throughout Brooklyn. When my car tells me I've arrived at Paisley's apartment, I step out and note the faces in windows all over the buildings looking out at me down on the street. Maybe I should've gone with the Bentley or any one of my more understated vehicles .

It's a shitty part of town. I don't know why that bothers me, because I love New York. All parts of it. But something inside me wants to take Paisley Carrington away from this grimy area and put her where she deserves to be—in an apartment in the City, something newer, something more special. Somewhere closer to me .

I run up the steps of the brownstone in need of updating and press the call button for Paisley's apartment. The sky looms low overhead, pregnant with snow. Her voice

comes over the intercom. “Hello ?”

“Paisley, it’s me, Logan .”

There’s a pause. I know I’ve shown up by surprise after two weeks, but I needed to see her .

“Why are you here? You could’ve called or texted .”

“It’s not the same. I wanted to talk to you. Let me up.” At that moment, I realize how bossy I sound even when I’m not on my territory. “Please,” I add .

The door buzzes. I pull on the handle and come inside from the cold. The elevator takes forever, so I use the stairs all the way to the fifth floor. Luckily, I’m in great shape from all the extra stress workouts lately. When I arrive at Apt. 5B, it takes a moment for her to come to the door. It occurs to me that maybe she’s not alone. Jealousy flurries through me that reminds me of the night I pulled her out of the bar when I saw her surrounded by all those men and couldn’t figure out what I was feeling .

I know now what that feeling was .

She opens and peers out through a three-inch space like I’m a stranger. Finally, I get to see those eyes again. It’s her and she looks amazing, but tired. “Can I come in?” I ask .

She relents. “Sorry about the mess.” It’s clear she doesn’t want to see me, is still angry. I don’t blame her at all. The door opens fully, and I step inside. I don’t see a mess. I just see a normal apartment, like the one I grew up in before I had a full staff to clean up after me. Paisley walks off, leaving me to close the door and show myself in. She stands in the kitchen, resuming food prep at the counter. “I was making egg

salad for lunch. Do you want some ?”

“No, thanks. I just ate.” I haven’t eaten lunch at all, but I’m not hungry. “Paisley, I want you to come back. The kids miss you .”

“Only the kids ?”

“I miss you, too. And the kids...it’s not going well with the new girl .”

“You mean Caitlyn?” An eyebrow arches at me .

“How did you know her name ?”

“Logan, really? We’re all from Le Nanny.” She chops eggs. More chopping. I’m scared to come near her with that knife in her hand .

“Doesn’t mean you all know each other .”

“Well, we do. In fact, she lives here. She’s my roommate. I thought you knew that. She’s the blonde I was sitting with that night at the bar when you so forcefully made me leave? Remember ?”

I knew I knew Caitlyn from somewhere. She looked so familiar, but I couldn’t figure out why. “To be honest, I wasn’t looking at anyone but you that night, Paisley.” At this, she silently mixes all the ingredients in the bowl. I use it as my clue to go on. “I don’t think of anyone but you. You’ve been on my mind, and it’s driving me insane. The kids don’t want Caitlyn. They want you. I want you, too .”

She shrugs as tears well up in her eyes. “Well, I can’t .”

“Why not ?”

“Logan, I’m not made of stone. I can’t just live at your place, take care of your kids, be intimate with you, then pretend it doesn’t hurt when you threaten to fire me or hire my roommate as my replacement. I know how you welcome new nannies, and since Caitlyn is only the hottest girl I know, I can only imagine how well you initiated her .”

“Initiated? You think I sleep with everyone I hire? You think I slept with Caitlyn ?”

“If the shoe fits .”

“The shoe doesn’t fit. I’ve never slept with my staff before, Paisley. I mean, yes, I did with you, but that was different. I never slept with Caitlyn. In fact, I’m going to fire her regardless of whether or not you come back .”

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“Why?”

“Because all she’s done since starting work is flirt with me. Honestly, I’m sick of it .”

“Why was it different ?”

“What do you mean ?”

“You said sleeping with me was different. Why was it different ?”

Did I say that? One of these days, I’m going to invent a device that lets you rewind conversations to prove that you did or didn’t say something and make a killing off it. I throw my arms up and let them fall at my sides. “I don’t know, Paisley. It just was. I felt drawn to you. I can’t explain it, I just know that I miss you. Plain and simple .”

She watches me carefully, analyzing my face and tone. Paisley’s eyes are like a human lie detector test. “What about Miriam and my father ?”

“Look, I accept that it wasn’t your fault your dad took the job. I shouldn’t have made you feel like it was. As long as you give your word that you won’t share any details of your job with your father, I’ll trust you .”

“I don’t know, Logan. I’m not used the way you talk to me sometimes, like you own me or like I’ve done something wrong when I haven’t. I need respect. I need kindness .”

“And I will treat you with both. I promise.” I know I can be an asshole sometimes. I

still don't completely understand why, but Paisley doesn't deserve it. It has to do with the doubt I feel with everyone around me .

Her smirk tells me she's on the fence. She's mad at me, mad at Caitlyn, mad at her father, and I can totally see why she's having the same trust issues as me. But I can't afford to live without her. Not only because of the kids, but also because...well, because of me. There's only one thing to do .

"Please," I add, coming around the counter and slipping the knife out of her hand. I take her wrist and press it against my lips. The scent of her skin fills my nose and sends me back to that place. The place I'd lose myself whenever she was with me. The place she helped me forget. "I need you, Paisley ."

* * *

Getting rid of Caitlyn is easy. It's almost like she knew she'd be fired but is happy to have made it this far. However, when I tell her why, her whole demeanor changes. "You're bringing Paisley back?" she asks, blue eyes wide and shocked .

"Yes, the kids have grown accustomed to her, she knows them better than you do, and she's willing to come back ."

"Oh, she's willing? I wonder why." Her entire tone changes .

At this point in my life, it's better to get the real person up front than go on months or years dealing with a pretender .

"Look, I know you're her roommate," I tell her. That's a little detail she left out of her first meeting with me. "And I know she told you everything about us. But this is about my kids, and all my decisions are in the best interest of my kids ."

It's not true. Some decisions are made because of me, because I need Paisley in my life, but Caitlyn doesn't need to know that. This is purely professional .

"Sure." Her smile is carefree but deep down, I can see she's hurt. It's a shitty testament to my reputation that she expected to seduce me all because I slept with her friend and roommate, but I need to end that. I didn't sleep with Paisley out of habit .

I slept with her because I was falling for her .

"It was a pleasure having you, Caitlyn," I tell her, a harmless white lie. In actuality, she was a real pain in the ass and not very good with the twins. I stick out my hand. Time to move on and figure out my life. "I'll be adding five thousand for your trouble and efforts and wish you the best of luck ."

The handshake is weak, and she leaves without a word after that .

* * *

The next day, my driver delivers Paisley back to my building. I ask him to escort her all the way up to the penthouse just in case Miriam or Caitlyn are nearby. Angry women can be brutally dangerous with each other, and I want nothing to happen to her. Overprotective of me, maybe, but I can't take any risks with the last months of the divorce still looming .

When I step out of the hall and see her standing in the middle of my living room, bags slung over her shoulders, eyes red with tears, I know I should've made my offer before sending Caitlyn back to the same apartment. I can see they've had a fight, and now I feel like I should've acted sooner. My woman, the words slunk into my brain, seeing her standing there .

"I want you to stay here. Whether or not the kids are here." I stare at her gorgeous

face, cheeks stained with tears. Her light green eyes fuel my soul. She's home .

"I can't live here, Logan. I'll find another place to go, don't worry ."

"You'll live here," I told her, rushing up to her and taking her face into my hands, kissing each cheek softly. "With me ."

She doesn't argue. Just falls apart in my arms defeated by stress and life, like a warrior finally arrived at a safe haven. I need to make sure she understands this is a safe place for her. I know I haven't been the most dependable man...I have to make that up to her .

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I kiss her gently, and damn it, it's like coming home .

Why does Paisley make me so crazy ?

There's a worried look in her eyes like she's already gotten too involved with me, like she's not sure if she should let this happen, but love wins out. Or maybe a tired brain wanting, needing refurbishment. I kiss her again, not because I want to, but because I have to. Her tears run down the contours of her face, slipping between our lips and tongue. We're a salty mess, but I could kiss her all day, and I see her beginning not to care if we did .

Some things are beyond our control in life, and the person you're drawn to is one of them. She's right, I had a beautiful woman here for almost two weeks—her friend Caitlyn. But the woman did nothing for me. Why? Because I was already sold. Sold on Paisley Carrington .

We begin tugging and pulling in that insistent way I love, and somehow, we end up in her room through minutes of kissing and walking. I've lost my shirt and she's lost her jacket, and I throw her bags down to lead her into the greenhouse balcony where it's warm and there's a great view of the harbor .

“What do you want, Paisley?” I ask. I've been the control freak all this time. Now I want to know what she wants of me. I take her face in my hands, admiring her parted lips. “Just tell me, and I'll do it .”

“I don't know, Logan. I've been so lost .”

“What about right now? Do you feel lost now ?”

“No. Right now, I want you.” She wipes at her eyes and looks into mine, as if to solidify her intent. Words I love. Words that fuel me higher .

“Then we’ll take it one day at a time.” I sweep her face into my hands again and kiss her. We’re spiraling down that dark ravine, the one that’s hard to escape from once you’re in it. It’s almost as if something larger than us is controlling us. Do I hear the voices of a million people warning me not to get involved yet? To finish my divorce and then take time for myself ?

Yes, I do, but they’re not in my shoes. They don’t need something good in their life so desperately like I do. Her breasts push against me, her nipples hard and aching against my skin. I pull aside her bra cups to expose them then squeeze and feel their soft roundness. Lowering myself, I suck and flick her nipples with my tongue, eliciting moans with each movement .

I love those moans and hear them all day long inside my head .

I strain against my pants, which means it’s time to lose them. Before long, we’re completely naked, her hips moving against me, her hot core searching for my fingers to quench it. “I don’t know what you’re doing to me, Logan. I don’t know why I can’t stop you .”

“I can’t stay away from you either, babe. It’s like I can’t get enough of you .”

“Did you want me back for the kids? Tell me the truth .”

“I wanted you back for myself...and the kids. I’m not going to lie, Paisley.” I suck and nibble at her hard pink nipples, moving from one to the other, pushing them together so I can suck on both at once. Her tits are so fucking great, the way they fill

my hands with her warmth .

Her hips push against me, and her eyes filled close, face tilted to one side. Her deft fingers reach for my cock, and I want her to. I want her to decide what we do here today. This morning, because I already know I'm going to want her again tonight, and in the morning, and ten more times tomorrow. I can't get enough of this woman and think I never will .

Paisley moves her hand from my cock to her slick pussy and dips her fingers in, bringing them up to my lips for a taste. I suck on her fingers. Love the taste of her wet cunt so much, I drop to my knees, resting her ass up against the cushion of the wooden bench. Pressing my cheek against her lower stomach, I take in the scent of her skin as my arms wrap around her hips. Anyone looking at us will think I adore her, and I can't say they'd be wrong. I don't normally let my guard down this way, but this is what Paisley does to me .

I want to meld into her body. I want to look up and see that pretty face of hers, those lips parted and moaning, her body twisting in pleasure. I want to taste everything she has to offer and I want to be the one to give her pleasure. Slipping my fingers into her wetness, I rub her clit in circles as she arches into me, searching for more hot touch and begging for my tongue .

Which I gladly give her. Because I want it as much as she does. Pressing my tongue flat against her, I watch her facial expressions change like colors in a winter sunset. God, she's so fucking hot. She begins by taking it slowly and rubbing herself against my open mouth in circles, which makes me crazy because all I want is for her to let go, grind her whole pussy against me, and coat my face with her juices. I lick her from different angles to get the right one that makes her legs squeeze against my face .

“Come for me,” I mutter against her hot skin. “Do it .”

The more I lick, the more I drive two fingers into her pussy, bringing her closer and closer to climax. Her body responds by moving faster, her small fingers in my hair, urging me on. If I wanted to escape now, there'd be no way. Not that I'd ever want to. I could be stuck in this position all day, every day, for the rest of my life, and be perfect happy .

Paisley

I can't deny him. Logan is sexy as fuck, naughty, and a good man who wants me to stay and live with him. How can I say no? Will things get sticky at times? Probably. But I need him as much as he seems to need me, and I can't be the rational girl when it comes to him .

Right now, this is what I need in my life .

Seeing his face between my legs, looking up at me with those silver eyes is all it takes to send me tumbling over the cliff. I come hard against his face, just like he wants me to. I don't even care that someone in another building could totally be watching us through their telescope. Ask me if I care. I cry out, my moans filling the space of the greenhouse. My fingers curl into his hair, and I writhe, pushing myself against him, stretching out the orgasm as far as it'll go .

I love him, I love this, I love our lovemaking, and I love being back here again .

I know it will bite me in the ass later, but as long as it's Logan doing the biting, I just don't care. When the waves die away, Logan stands to his feet, takes my head in his giant hand, and kisses me, pushing his Paisley-coated tongue into my mouth. I taste the sweetness and rev up for another round, because now comes his turn even though I'm spent .

His hands rove over my back and down to my ass, squeezing my cheeks hard and slapping them a bit. His fingers slide up and down my soaked pussy, then he returns to fucking me slowly with his massive digits. I know it's just two fingers, but two of

Logan's fingers feels bigger and thicker than my own. I grow wet again and revel in another kiss, inhaling his scent plus my essence in a delightful mixture .

Just as I'm enjoying this kiss, he takes my wrists in one link of his thumb and forefinger and spins me around over the back of the little greenhouse bench. My hands are pinned behind my back, and I'm facing the outside world .

Part of me even wishes that Caitlyn and Miriam could see this. A big fuck-you to two women who've delighted in fucking up my life as of late. Logan's grip on my shoulders pushes me down, and my head comes to rest on the bench. I slip my arms around the backrest and hold on for dear life. He's fucked me hard before, so I can handle it again if need be .

"I'm sorry for being difficult," I say, though I know part of me is just roleplaying. I've always loved the idea of being punished for being a bad girl, but that's a whole chapter in sexual psychology just waiting to be written right there .

"Oh?" Logan purrs. "You think this is punishment?" He slaps my ass cheek hard until it stings, and I cry out. Then he rubs it down, soothing the redness and kissing my stinging skin with his warm lips. The length of his hard cock pushes up against my pussy. I tremble with every second he makes me wait. "This is reward, babe. For coming back to me. For forgiving me ."

I feel the fat, thick head of his massive cock pushing against my pussy, and he slides in just a bit. I moan, because I want so much more, he's killing me over here. I moan, because he's big and he knows it, and I secretly love it though I know it inflates his ego. Holding onto my hips, I bite my lip and know I'm about to get it .

And then he plows in all the way. I cry out loud again, as he pulls out slowly, waiting...for my moans to soften, for my body to loosen up before driving into me again. He pulls on my hair, dragging my face back so he can breathe by my ear,

reminding me how very primal this act can be. With each thrust into me, his balls slap against me, which only makes me wetter .

When I feel his warm, big hands curl over my shoulder, I know I'm about to get it good. His other hand wraps around my hip and two fingers flatten up against my clit. He's creating pressure in this position, prolonging the fullness inside of me. "I love this, Paisley. I love how you feel around me, and I love being inside you ."

Before I can reply, he drives hard into me, plowing his cock deep. Yes. I need this. Need it so badly. For two weeks, I haven't stopped thinking about him. For two weeks, I haven't touched myself because nobody can touch me like he can, and I didn't want to remind myself of what I didn't have anymore .

"I love it," I think I say. I'm not sure, because my brain doesn't work right at the moment. At least not for things like words, but I'm sure the next thing that comes out of my mouth involves telling him I love him. Is it true? What else could explain why I would come back to him? Why I even care about him ?

All this, plus he brings out the pure lust and need in me, and that's so important, because for so long, I thought I wasn't a full woman. I went so long without sex all through high school (because I was a good girl) to college (because sex was so pathetic). I thought that's how it was meant to be. Logan has shown me what trust can do, what two people can achieve together .

The more he drives into me, dare I say makes love to me, he grunts, knifing hard into me, my brain shattering into a million pieces. I want to come again, and I want to come all over him, and have him spill his seed deep into me. With each thrust, our bodies move in unison, a perfect rhythm rising toward that crescendo .

Right when I reach back to grab his ass and push him deeper into me, he moans loudly, filling my ear, filling this beautiful green space, filling my life, holding

himself still as he does. Words tumble from his lips, but I can't make them out, because we're in this fog together, and the words don't matter, but they're something about love and being his woman and never letting go. Hearing this man who's always been so much a control freak letting go and telling me beautiful things, worshiping my body in such a way, and feeling the hardness of his body in contrast to mine makes me come again .

His fingers slide in and pat my clit to coax it out further, to elongate the pure joy of this lust until we can't stand any more. Logan lowers himself, lifts me and carries my tired ass back to my bed where he plops me down and lands next to me. The whole bed bounces and I laugh out loud. When he looks over at me, he has this great big smile on his face. Which is so amazing. I've never seen him this happy. I've never seen that smile quite so big. I mean, I've seen his public smile in social media, but I've never seen this relaxed happiness pouring from his soul .

Is that because of me ?

Seriously?

"You're amazing," he says, fingertip brushing my cheek .

"No, you are." I smile .

"No, you are." He laughs, bear-hugs the crap out of me, and reels me in. My God, it's like being hugged by the Hulk. And guess what? I can live with that. "Why are you smiling so much, Miss Carrington? Because I just fucked you in plain view of New York City ?"

"Because you haven't stopped smiling since I came back ."

"Ah, well, that's true. That's what you do to me. Not something I'm used to ."

“You never smiled when you were married?” I ask, hoping the question isn’t a downer. I’ve never asked him personal questions about his marriage, but if I’m going to be living here and he’s begged me to come back, there’s nothing wrong with this type of closeness .

The glow in his face dies down a bit but he still smiles, only sadly now. He takes my hand and traces the lines all over it. “Babe, my ex used me like a two-bit whore .”

“Don’t say that, Logan .”

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“It’s true. She used me like a butter knife during Sunday morning breakfast .”

I laugh. Where is this side of him coming from? The jokes, the smiles. I love it. “Everyone thinks she’s a saint and you’re the bad guy,” I say .

“I won’t say I’m perfect, because I’m not.” He slaps his chest, and his fingers drum along making a hollow, tapping sound. “But she’s no angel. It was clear to me soon after we married that she’d only done it to get pregnant, divorce me, and get money .”

“That’s incredibly sad .”

“It is .”

I think about those poor children. Did they really not come into this world out of love? Because that makes me so sad for them. Suddenly, I wish they were here so I could run up to them and give them big hugs. “That must’ve really hurt,” I tell him .

“Not just that. It made me jaded, distrustful, and I’m sure you could tell. So when you came here and started working, it was hard for me to process my attraction for you. I equated chemistry of any kind as a bad situation to be in, because look where it led me .”

“Right. I get it.” And I do. When he started to like me, it worried him that he’d be hurt again. “But I’m not Miriam,” I tell him. Not that I plan on marrying him and having his babies, but I want him to know that he can trust me. “With me, what you see is what you get .”

“You think,” he says, turning to me. “And I appreciate that. But Paisley, something I really like about you is that you don’t know how much more you are than what you’re showing. Damn, woman, you’re hardworking, you’re awesome with the kids, you’re gorgeous and you’re ambitious. On top of everything, you’re sexy as fuck. I had no idea about all of that when I hired you .”

“So you didn’t accidentally point to my picture when you meant to point to Caitlyn’s?” I laugh .

He pulls me in and takes my chin in his fingers. “Look at me. Miss Summers is attractive, I’m not going to lie, but she’s also conventional and desperate. Whereas you are the genuine article. She’s just a cheapo knockoff. You demand that I take you seriously. That’s what’s beautiful to me about you, babe. Got it ?”

“Got it.” I smile and he kisses me gently. It’s the first time we’ve ever had a conversation this long in bed where he’s not falling asleep and I’m not staring at the ceiling wondering what the hell is going on with my life. “I’m sorry if I haven’t recognized the good things about me,” I say, staring at his full lips and the dark shadow of stubble growing across his jawline. “It’s just that I’ve felt so betrayed by so many people in my life—my best friend, my roommate, even my dad ...”

“I know. That one really pissed me off. That’s why I asked what kind of a man was he. Maybe I shouldn’t have said that, but I would never do that to my daughter. I know where my loyalties lie .”

And that’s just it. Logan has never given me any reason to believe he’s not loyal. On the contrary, he keeps his eyes to himself, doesn’t ogle women (from what I’ve seen), was faithful to Miriam until she declared she wanted a divorce, and even these last few weeks...even Caitlyn’s physical charms weren’t enough to sway him .

“You’re a good man, Logan.” I mean it. I feel terrible that I judged him on the first

day and called him the evil one in the relationship. “I’m so glad I met you. And, just so we’re clear, I don’t just mean for my job.” I giggle and shake my head .

“Yeah, yeah, you’re just sleeping with me to keep yourself employed .”

“Sir, I could leave here anytime I want and be fine with my bank account.” I turn to him and look him in the eyes. “I came back because of you. Because you asked me to. Because I missed us. And I missed Thing 1 and Thing 2 also .”

“Yeah,” he says. “They’re pretty stinkin’ cute .”

“They are. Just like their daddy.” I kiss him and smile when he pulls away and snuggles into my neck, breathing softly and falling into a quiet doze. How did we get here? Just yesterday I thought my love life was over, and then came Logan all the way to my front door to bring me back. Because he missed me, he claimed. Because he needed me. I’m not in the habit of not giving people the benefit of the doubt, but I just find it so hard to believe that he would need me for anything .

But maybe it’s time I start believing. Just because he has money doesn’t mean he has it all. And I can see how women might have acted stupid and desperate around him in the past. Money makes people show their true colors, makes those with money mistrust others’ motives. But I never cared about money beyond what I need to survive and grow a business. It’s Logan’s heart I’m interested in .

Whoa. Where did that thought come from? And why don’t I care one bit ?

Yeah, I think I’ll admit it now. What hurt more than anything about leaving two weeks ago was thinking I’d never have the chance to change his heart .

Logan

A mazingthe difference a couple of weeks makes .

Since she returned, Paisley has been staying in my room with me, waking up earlier than the kids do on the days they're here and making sure they don't see her sleeping with me. When I tell her it's okay, they're too young and won't understand anyway, she insists it's what's right .

I love that she wants to do the right thing. I only wish I could go back to a completely normal life as quickly as possible, and having her with me every night and every morning, having the kids run into the room and pile on top of us would be a dream. Miriam used to get up out of bed as soon as they'd come in. At first I wasn't sure why, but as time goes on, I realize it's because she didn't want them to see us together in an intimate way. In retrospect, she was always preparing for the separation .

But I try not to focus on the past or the things Miriam did .

Paisley's back now, and she not only takes care of the kids, she cooks, she works on her business, she works out, and she basically kicks ass. The girl's only twenty-two. I shudder to think what kind of world domination she'll be working when she's my age .

Today, we're out of the house all together, because...we need it. The library project is kicking my ass, and we're getting down to the wire. The blueprints go to the county in two weeks and then comes the waiting game. But for two weeks, I get to stress,

yell at my team for not moving fast enough, all while balancing life and a girlfriend. A girlfriend...who knew ?

So, at my insistence, we ride up to Central Park with the kids. It's a beautiful snowy day, a great day to be a kid. As soon as we hit a slope and clear area, we release the kids from their double stroller and let them wreak havoc on nature. Becca runs one way, and Pierce runs another, but they both shriek and fall over in the snow. I take pics, because even though half my brain is at the office, one day this will be nothing but a memory, and I'm going to wish the twins could be this little again .

"Daddy, look at me!" Becca picks up a giant ball of snow too big for her tiny hands and throws it at Paisley. It falls about three feet short, but she's proud of herself and I am, too .

I pump my fist in the air, run up to her and scoop her in my arms. "Aw, you almost got her. You almost got the Paisley Monster ."

"Ya," Becca laughs. "The Paisley Monster ."

I help her pack a nice wad of snow, show her how to aim at our smirky-smiling target, then launch the precipitation missile at Paisley. Even though the snowball is clearly headed wide right, Paisley feigns disorientation, runs in the direction of the snowball and takes the hit .

Becca laughs that giggly laugh I love .

"Oh! She's down!" I cry out. "Repeat, the Paisley Monster is down!" Then, I wink at my gorgeous woman for taking the fall for the benefit of my daughter .

Clad in a purple parka, Paisley gets up and brushes snow off her jacket. "You got me, Becca. You got the Paisley Monster ."

“Yay!” Becca cheers for herself .

Paisley looks around. “Where’s Price ?”

“He’s over there, making a snow ferret,” I say, pointing to my son laying in two feet of snow .

“A snow ferret ?”

“Yeah, he’s moving one arm and one leg while sliding along the ground. See him?” Scooping Becca up into my arms, I stomp over the snow to where Price lies and take pics of him creating snake-like pathways in the fluffy white stuff .

Paisley sees Price and lets out a great belly laugh while holding her stomach. I love seeing her laughing so hard, those crinkle lines around her eyes that disappear when she smiles. I could easily envision her in a spring or summertime dress, flouncing around in the sun while I take pics of her, too .

I think of the sketch I keep in my drawer at the office. Need to add summery touches, something to reflect the sun ...

“Should we get a snack?” Paisley asks after we’ve played in the snow for a good hour. “We could grab something nearby then they’ll be completely tuckered out and ready for a nap afterwards .”

“Sounds good to me .”

“How long can you stay?” Paisley asks, linking her arm through mine as we set off pushing the stroller through the park .

For a moment, I’ve forgotten her question. I’ve pulled out of myself and can’t help

but see ourselves as an outsider would—a great-looking, happy couple with two kids who are equally happy, all of us spending time together the way a family would. How did this happen ?

I don't know if to bask in how awesome that is or run away hard and fast .

Should I be thinking the f-word so easily like that? It's one thing to hang out with Paisley and the kids so I can spend time with them as a respite from work, but it's another when I start fantasizing that we're a family. I just lost my own family, and here I am contemplating starting another ?

“Logan?” It's Paisley, staring at me. Apparently, I've slowed down walking and she's been talking to me about the new routine she's implemented for the kids' daily schedule. She's asking my thoughts on the matter .

I have no thoughts. Because I was too busy imagining her as my wife and the stepmother of my kids, all of us together and content. Goosebumps run up my arms. Wife and stepmother? Where did that come from? I need Paisley, for the kids, for myself, and because I want to give her a good life away from that shoddy apartment. Saying I needed her was hard enough to admit, but could there really be a future for us beyond the average shelf-life of most relationships ?

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We enter a bakery where the warm air and smells bring instant smiles to everyone's faces. Becca points to a pink cupcake with sprinkles, and Price points to a bagel that's bigger than his head. We order some drinks to go along while I find a seat. Reserving four chairs, I sit and check my messages while Paisley pays for the snacks. Across the table at another, nearby table, a couple of women give me dirty looks .

Let me guess. They read the latest interview with Miriam where she claims I'm a deadbeat father. I glance away from the ladies and repress the urge to give them the middle finger, because after all, here I am with my kids and it's not for show either. I'm with them because I want to be .

When Miriam became pregnant with twins, we kept hearing people say, "Oh, poor you. Wait 'til you see what you're getting." Like it was a bad thing. Like they'd be too much work .

Hell, yeah, they're twice the work. Mostly for Paisley, I'll admit. But they're also twice the love. When Paisley pulls up with the kids in the stroller and begins doling out snacks and drinks, I get a message saying I have to return to the office. It's urgent. One of the buildings isn't ready for approval, and the engineer involved with it just quit .

"Shit, I have to go. I'll get a car to take you home so you don't have to deal with the trains by yourself ."

"You have to?" Paisley's eyes flash across the room. "Because those two wenches over there apparently know which side they're on in your divorce, and newsflash...it's not yours. I would love for you to prove them wrong ."

“I know. I was thinking the same thing. But I have to go.” I kiss the Things and pause right over Paisley. I would kiss her, too, but there’s people watching. “You’ll get yours later,” I say, as she watches me with a combination of hesitation and hurt .

“Okay.” Not a flirty look to give me something to look forward to .

Did she really think I’d kiss her on the lips in public? I haven’t gone there yet and can’t, as long as the divorce is still pending. I can see our photo in the tabloids now .

Our lawyers are gearing up for a big fight, and the last thing I need is photographic evidence of me involved with the nanny, for fuck’s sake. Miriam might’ve done it, but her current beau isn’t someone who works for her, as in my case .

I spin out of the bakery, call a car to come pick up Paisley and the kids in fifteen minutes, then catch a ride-share downtown. Doubt begins to consume me. It’s been happening a lot. I’ll be having a great time with Paisley and the kids then something will creep in and mess it all up. Right now, it’s the nagging feeling that I’m not good enough for her. I’ll always be running off to work, leaving her behind in order to put out fires at work, a lot like a doctor who’s always on call .

That’s a fucking sad existence. But I have to do it. L.R. Group depends on me, and nobody can come up with the designs I do. I may be a billionaire businessman, but I’m an artist at heart, so I’ll always be stuck at work. Can’t just spend time with family while letting my employees run things. They don’t have the artistic vision I do, they simply don’t care about it the same way that I care .

That’s not me patting myself on the back, that’s just truth .

Paisley’s eyes, as I left her back at the bakery, haunt me in the car ride back .

They reflected hurt. I didn’t treat her with the respect she wanted and deserved after I

said I would. At some point, she's going to get tired of me treating her like the nanny again. If I decide and accept that she's my girlfriend, then I'm going to have to stop employing her. She can't be both. But I'm not sure I can move in that direction .

As much as I want to, something is stopping me. Warning flags, mistrust, all the things one would expect to feel after getting fucked over by my ex. But I'm not Miriam, Paisley said to me once. So true. But she could be. I already dealt with one woman who married me for money. Once upon a time, Miriam also put on an enthusiastic face when dealing with my problems. She pretended to be in love with me, and who's to say that Paisley couldn't pretend to be in love with me and my kids, too .

Then, when the honeymoon wears off, they take you to the cleaners .

Will Paisley turn out to be the same way ?

I love her, but do I trust her after all that's happened to me ?

I love spending time with her, and I'm glad she came back to work, but I'm beginning to feel like letting her into my bedroom a mistake. Maybe I should've fired Caitlyn, then hired someone entirely new instead of Paisley. The kids love her, yeah, but I might've used that as an excuse to get her to come back. I simply couldn't stand the thought that she'd left me. I wanted her back to make my life whole again .

You're a control freak, Logan. You just wanted to have your cake and to eat it, too .

Not going to deny that. I've always wanted my cake .

But now I've brought the daughter of my ex's lawyer back into the house, in a more intimate role than ever before when the final hearing is only two weeks away. At the same time the project is due. As a perfect storm begins to brew, and I've put Paisley

Carrington smack in the middle of it .

Fuck.

Paisley

L oveme some Jake and the Neverland Pirates . I've seen this episode like three times, but I could watch it again. This is what happens when you hang around two-year-olds for too long. You start looking forward to kiddie shows the same way you would Game of Thrones . Normally, we'd be making Play-Doh or baking cookies or making drawings for Daddy, but this morning, Things 1 and 2 are out of sorts .

They're not quite feverish, but they're cranky and listless. It might've been the frolicking in the snow we did earlier this week. If so, then I feel bad for taking them out on such a cold February day even though they had so much fun. We all did .

I smile .

It was a great day, and I'm still thrilled that Logan got to come with us. But ever since he got that call from work, he's worked overtime every day, rarely coming home early like he was starting to do. I guess that's how it is in his line of work. If a project is due soon at L. R. Group, then the world gets put on hold .

"Noooo!" Becca pushes away my offer of water and snuggles closer to the pillow. Her thumb is in her mouth, which she only does when she's sleepy. Weird, because she just slept for two hours straight .

I feel her forehead. She's definitely warmer now than she was half an hour ago. Reaching across the couch, I feel Price's arm. Also warm, and there's a slight flush to his cheeks. Their eyes are also glazed as they watch Jake on TV and outside, the snow falls in swirling drafts of confetti. Covering them both with a big chenille

blanket, I head for the kitchen to prepare some soup. Maybe I can feed them while they're hypnotized with Jake and the pirates .

I really hate to bother Logan at work, but I think he'd want to know that the kids are coming down with something. Especially since they're scheduled to go home with Miriam this evening. He might not want them to go outside while they're sick. I don't know how Miriam would take to them staying an extra, unscheduled night at Logan's place. Though it would be the best course of action for them, Miriam's not exactly about best course of action for the kids .

I decide I'll text him a photo of the twins just to inform him that they're feeling a little under the weather. He doesn't need to call or go out of his way to worry. I got this. When I come back with soup, the kids are asleep again less than an hour after they've awoken from their naps .

I take a pic of the sleeping angels and text them to Logan with the words: The babies are feeling poopy . No less than a minute after describing them as poopy, Becca twists and turns in her sleep, winces in pain, then finally wakes up in tears. From the sour change in the air, I realize she's gotten sick in her pull-ups .

Ugh, must be a stomach virus. This could be bad. Especially if they've both got it .

"Shh, little one, it's okay. Let's get you cleaned up." I lay her flat on her back while she cries, waking up her brother, and get her changed. She still refuses the cup of water and clings to my shoulder when she's dressed again .

Unfortunately, Price begins having the same issue and I have to change him as well .

"Wow, you guys really are twins," I mutter, changing him into a fresh, clean pull-up. I think of my mother dealing with my brothers when they were little, how she could've used a hand though she handled it herself. I could very well have twins as

well. The fraternal kind, like Becca and Price, like my brothers, are a side effect of hyper-ovulation, when the ovaries release more than one egg per cycle, and it's hereditary .

I think about a possible future. What if Logan and I continue this way? What if we become serious and stay together? What if I get pregnant with twins and then Becca and Price will have another set for siblings ?

I can't let my brain go there. I don't know what this is with Logan yet. I would like to think it's love, but I'm not sure. It's hard when he works so often and I'm mostly here just to do a nannying job. Logan's text reply reads: Shit, what's wrong? On my way .

I didn't mean for him to leave work in the middle of a pivotal point of the project. I begin formulating a reply but suddenly, Becca needs changing again. I think I'm about to lose my mind. If I'm not changing, comforting, or leading one sick child to the bathroom, then I'm changing, comforting, or leading another. They both cling to me, crying, and my arms feel like they're going to break off .

But I sit on the couch and hold them both. "It's the Mickey Mouse Clubhouse..." I start to sing one of their favorite songs. "Come inside, it's fun inside. It's the Mickey Mouse Clubhouse..." Their cries turn to whimpers, but every time one twin begins to cry again, the other joins in .

It feels endless, but soon they're falling away into a sleepy state again. Though my arms are killing me, I won't lay them down. If I try, I know they'll only wake up again and start crying. So I stick it out and keep singing. Once the show has ended, I press the remote button OFF with my toe and use my feet to close one of the light-colored curtains so the sunlight doesn't bother them .

"I came over right when you texted." Logan appears in the doorway. I didn't even hear him come in. He always looks so incredibly handsome coming home from work.

Every time I see him dressed in nice pants and buttoned shirt, his expensive, stylish watch, and his hair all perfectly in place, I get a knot in my stomach .

Immediately, I give him the universal sign for “Shhh...” with pursed lips and wide “don’t you dare” eyes .

He plucks Becca off my shoulder and flips her around to settle onto her father’s massive, tree-trunk torso. Something inside of me thaws. There’s nothing sexier than seeing a man taking care of his children, and the fact that he left work just to be with them has propelled him to superstar fatherdom .

“They definitely have a stomach virus,” I tell him, settling next to him, sighing. Just having him here is a relief, even though I could’ve handled it on my own. “Do you want me to take them to the doctor ?”

“Let’s wait a bit. If they’re still sick tomorrow morning, then we’ll take them .”

I appreciate his easygoing manner. So many parents are quick to take their kids to the doctor, especially rich parents with nannies. It’s like they’ve never heard of fevers being a normal part of the immune system before .

As we sit in silence, our hands nearest each other creep across the seat and link. His fingers feel strong and secure. I give him an appreciative smile. The kids sleep on our shoulders for over an hour, and my skin burns just having them stuck to me, sweating it out. I’m touched by his dedication. He should be working on the final leg of the project, not helping me at home .

The next day, he’s home again to help, telecommuting, fielding phone calls and joining into Skype meetings, all the while holding his kids and making sure they stay hydrated. He accompanies me to the doctor late in the day, and sure enough, a stomach virus is the diagnosis. Lots of fluids and keep them cool .

Check and check .

We work as a team to battle the Virus Monster. By the third day, little smiles begin to appear again, but this time, I'm the one not feeling well. When I can barely get out of bed the next day, Logan sits on the edge of my bed and tells me to stay there. He will take care of everything. Soon, hot soup is coming to my room, cold drinks, and warm blankets for my feet. Movies come on to keep me company, since I insist he stay away from me or else he'll end up with it, too .

He doesn't have to be here .

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He could be at work, and I could be dealing with this alone. He could also hire backup to help me, but I'm grateful that he's the one helping. Anyone outside of this, familiar with the divorce case, might say he's doing it to be Super Dad. He's only doing it for custody of the kids, but I know it's not true. I know he loves them and loves taking care of me as well .

Upon waking from one of my feverish dozes, I find Logan sitting at the edge of my bed, painting my toenails pink with Becca. "Hi, Paisy," he says, imitating Becca's name for me, except it's way cuter hearing it coming from a deep voice .

"Hi, Paisy," Becca follows her father's lead .

"Hi, guys ."

"Pink?" He holds up a bottle of nail polish. "Or purple?" Then another .

"Black," I reply .

"Blaaaack?" Becca giggles. "Da-yee, Paisy wants black ."

"If Paisy wants black, then we'll get her black. Because we love Paisy. Don't we, love bug?" Silver eyes smile at me. I look away and blush, then glance back at him. Did he just say he loves me? Butterflies flit through my belly, the good kind, not the ones that have been making me sick lately .

"Yes," Becca replies with utmost assurance. "We love Paisy ."

* * *

If I was going to get sick anywhere, I'm glad it was here with Logan. Though there's been nothing glamorous about running to the bathroom every hour, I feel like I'm at home. I feel like Logan's my husband and these children are my own. I know I shouldn't think that way, because he's not and they're not, but I can't help it .

Home is where your heart is, and mine now feels like it's in Logan Raider's penthouse .

Which is still so hard to believe .

After a week, Logan finally returns to work but only because I insisted I would be alright without him. He needs to catch up and burn the candle at both ends now to get the final project ready in time for city approval, and I won't get in his way. I'll be a fly on the wall, a bug on a rug, a ghost for a host. I'll just work on my business stuff while he comes home late every night .

Whatever it takes to make sure he's happy with his project .

The kids are going back to Miriam for a week to make up for their being sick here at their father's, and I think she's going to have a coronary when she finds out I was sick, too .

"So, this whole time, they could've been with me but they've been with their sick nanny instead. Nice." She huffs at the door, keeping the kids at bay so they don't run back into the penthouse. Miriam has definitely caught on their preference of me over her and it's become a silent, seething rivalry .

"Logan was here, too. It wasn't just me. They needed him." I probably shouldn't have said that. I'm not supposed to talk about anything Logan does or doesn't do. But it

doesn't hurt to mention that he was home caring for his children, I suppose .

It's like a fire has been lit under her butt. The thought of the four of us, home together, behaving like a family during a health crisis, brings out the envious bitterness in Miriam. "They needed their mother is what they needed," she spits. "One day you'll understand, Miss Carrington. Hopefully not too soon ."

She leaves and I'm left wondering what she means. She's afraid I'll get further involved with Logan, isn't she? She's afraid I'll one day get pregnant with his baby and she'll have to face the fact that he moved on with his life without her. What an attention whore .

As I'm closing the door, the doorman steps out of the elevator holding an envelope. He hands it to me and tips his hat. I don't have any money for him, but he waves me away. "Don't worry about it, darlin'. Mr. Raider does enough for me, as is." He smiles, tips his hat again, and leaves .

The envelope is made out to me, even though it's been couriered, not mailed. Miss Paisley Carrington. What's so important that it's been sent here by hand instead of mailed to my apartment? Even though I technically still live there, because I still pay my rent, I haven't seen my place nor Caitlyn in almost two weeks. Someone knows I'm not living there anymore. Someone knows I'm here full-time .

Inside is a subpoena from none other than my father's law firm. They want me to come and testify at the hearing next week about the things I've seen as Logan's live-in nanny. I can't believe this. I can't believe my own father would allow for me to be put on the stand when he knows I don't want any part of this .

Logan apparently has received notice at work, because he calls me. Enraged, he hisses through the phone, a sound that still reminds me of those first days of working here when he was curbing his anger any way possible. "This is insane," he yells. "I

don't know what they're trying to pull, but you can't do this .”

“What choice do I have, Logan?” My heart pounds against my ribcage. I don't want to upset him, but a subpoena is a subpoena .

“Paisley, they're going to ask how often I'm there, how much of the kids' time you spent with them versus me spending with them ...”

“And I'll tell them the truth, that you're a wonderful father who doesn't hesitate to run home when his kids are sick, who feeds them and holds them when they're crying. It's the truth, Logan .”

“But it's not always like that. I do spend lots of time away. They're going to use that to make me look like a bad parent.” I hear him pound his desk as he grunts. “This is fucking ludicrous that your own father would put you in the middle .”

Logan put me in the middle, too, by inviting me back .

I did, too. I could've said no and refused, but I couldn't help myself either .

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“This is all of our doing,” I say. “Not just my father’s .”

Logan sounds like he’s counting to ten in an effort to control his rage. He did promise he would speak nicer to me, but I know this is infuriating. “Please call your father and try to talk some sense into him .”

“Logan, I’ve tried .”

“Try again,” he snaps then hangs up .

So that’s how you hang up with someone you love ?

Got it .

I know exactly how this is going to go. My father is going to say that it’s the nature of his business, that he’s just doing his job. He’s going to say I have an obligation to my family before I have one to my employer, and he’s going to say that the truth will set everyone free. Fuck that. The truth will only serve Miriam’s purpose and pit Logan against me, and I don’t want any part of that .

Unfortunately, I may not have a choice .

Logan

I book it home, driving erratically and nearly clipping the rolling suitcase of a man crossing the street. He offers me a few choice expletives then the light turns green .

I charge ahead toward my building, my head swirling with a million different thoughts. Something tells me Paisley will take the stand and whatever comes out of her mouth will end up helping Arnold Carrington and Miriam win the case .

They wouldn't make her testify unless they felt sure she will have to admit to something that helps their cause ...

Once again, I feel like I'm being played and manipulated and I can't let this happen .

Screeching into the parking garage, I park haphazardly right next to the elevators, because I just don't give a fuck. On the way up, I think about what I'm going to say to Paisley. I can't have her here anymore. Though I've done my best to spend time with my children, the fact remains that I work 80% of the time .

Knowing Miriam, her new attorney will ask Paisley all sorts of personal questions involving me, and since she happens to be his daughter, he'll be ruthless. He'll fight extra hard to elicit the responses he wants, the kind that will make me look like a cradle-robbing pervert asshole, but he won't do it for Miriam, he'll do it because of Paisley. Because I'll be the bad guy, no matter what .

This case moving to a personal level for Arnold Carrington makes it a recipe for disaster .

I burst through the door, throwing my shit on top of the kitchen counter after barreling through the house. Paisley comes out of her room when she hears me and pauses at my bedroom door while I tear through the room, slamming doors, ripping off my tie, and throwing my shoes. Judging from her fear of coming in, I know I'm scary to watch .

“Did you call your father?” I ask calmly .

“Yes.” She bows her head. “I have to appear, Logan. It's a subpoena .”

“I can't have you here,” I say softly .

Her eyes overflow instantly. “Of course not,” she whispers .

“It's too risky. And we should've known better .”

There's a moment before she calmly replies, “Yes, sir. Thank you for the opportunity.” A few moments later, the door to her room closes .

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Paisley

The front door of the apartment opens, closes, then the locks click. Caitlyn is home .

And so am I .

Except this doesn't feel like my home any longer, and the pain of being back here is so awful that I want to curl up and sob. But I have no tears left, I'm all cried out .

Since I've come back, I've avoided her. I haven't so much as glanced her way, so good thing we're rarely ever here at the same time. I couldn't care less if she fell into the river with nothing but her breast implants to help her float .

There's a knock on my door .

You're kidding me. I don't want to talk to you. Go away .

I keep watching the show and pull the blanket closer to my chin. If I ignore her hard enough, maybe she'll buy a clue and leave. But she knocks again. Ugh. "Who is it?" I mumble, knowing fully well who it is and knowing that she knows that I know .

"Paisley, can I talk to you ?"

"There's nothing to talk about. Go away ."

She opens my door anyway. Because Caitlyn, the girl who thinks she can do whatever the fuck she wants. "I wanted to apologize. Just give me a second of your

time, please?” Then, she actually sniffs the air like there’s something rotten in the apartment. We both know it’s me. I hope she’s completely offended .

“A second’s over,” I say .

“Paisley, I was a shitty friend. I know it, and I’m sorry .”

“You were a shitty roommate. Friends don’t do what you did .”

Her sigh is almost loud enough to drown out the television, which I turn up in order to drown her out. “I don’t know why I did it, okay ?”

“Because you need therapy for your attention-seeking issues?” I say, knowing how cruel I’m being but not quite able to stop myself .

She nods a little. “I know I have some kind of body image disorder, and I guess I overcompensate for it sometimes .”

“All the time,” I mutter. They go to commercial. There’s a new chicken taco fiesta at Taco Bell. Food—meh .

“I don’t know about all the time, but — ”

“All the time,” I interrupt, shooting her a glance. Staring at the taco is making me hungry and I’m determined to go as many days as possible without eating or drinking. I hope they find me dead in a few days. Then, maybe, Logan will be sorry. “You do it all the time. Wherever we go. You have to be the center of attention, you have to get all the guys to notice you, flirt with you. You, you, you ...”

“I can’t help the way I look, Paisley, if that’s what you’re saying .”

“No, but you can help taking advantage of my departure by trying to get a job with my former boss who also happens to be the guy I was seeing .”

“I wouldn’t exactly call it seeing , Paisley. You never even went out on one date .”

Ouch. This is why she’s a bitch and I hate her .

“According to you,” she adds like that makes any difference. Another sigh droops her shoulders, and she’s definitely not herself. More like a Caitlyn who actually has been mad at herself for a while now. “Look, it doesn’t matter. The fact is, you guys were seeing each other, and I shouldn’t have interfered. I’ve just...I’ve liked Logan Raider for so long. And when I first found out you’d gotten the interview with him, I was super jealous. I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe you weren’t all that crazy about him either .”

“You thought you could do a better job than me .”

“I had an opportunity, so I took it. At your expense. I’m sorry.” Her lips press together in regret. “I have a lot of insecurities, you know .”

“How is that even possible? Have you ever looked at yourself in a mirror ?”

“Yes. And I don’t like who I am, Paisley. My face, my body, it’s all guys ever see, so I learned to focus on what works for me. I don’t actually know how to do anything. If I was disfigured in a terrible house fire right now, I’d have no skills. None. Zilch. Nothing going for me .”

“That’s not true. You went to college .”

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“And partied, Paisley. And drank my weight in alcohol. I wish I would’ve worked harder like you. I wish I would’ve gotten the grades or actually be good at what we do, like you. Instead I have to rely on the only god damned thing that works for me and that’s this.” Her hand draws a circle around her face and tits. “I’ve been jealous of your accomplishments .”

What accomplishments? I lost my job and the best man I’ve ever met, even if he’s full of faults. Doesn’t matter, because I’m full of faults, too. Clearly, I suck at life .

“I know I have to get over it.” Caitlyn blows out a breath and looks around the room like the answers for life are somewhere there .

“You do .”

“Got it.” Her face darkens a bit, as tears rise into her blue eyes and suddenly, I feel bad for her. Okay, she means all this. I should give her the benefit of the doubt for apologizing. “Anyway, I don’t know what’s going on with you and Logan this time, but I just wanted to tell you that I value our friendship. I’ll do whatever it takes for you to forgive me. I’ve been jealous of you and him but now I see that you’re perfect for each other .”

“We’re not perfect for each other. He keeps sending me away .”

“Yea, but then he comes back for you. He knows what he had in you, Paisley. Logan Raider may be the richest man in the city, but he’s also smart, because he loves you. He does. I saw it in his eyes whenever he mentioned you .”

I look at her. “He mentioned me ?”

“Yes. I never told you, because I didn’t want to give you the satisfaction of knowing. I’m going to work on this, I swear. I already have my first appointment with a therapist next week. Please forgive me ?”

Does she really have an appointment? That’s actually impressive. Anyone who realizes their behavior is shitty enough to try and do something about it deserves another chance in my book. I smile a tiny smile, but hey, it’s something, and besides, This Old House is back on. “It’s fine, Caitlyn. Time will pass and maybe...maybe eventually we can get back to how we used to be .”

“Only I’ll be better,” she chokes out. “I’m sorry I hurt you,” she says then disappears. I’m relieved she didn’t walk in and try and go for a hug, because I just can’t touch anyone right now, not even my former-back-to-possibly best friend .

I only wish that ending the bad blood between Caitlyn and I was enough to make me feel better. The truth is that I feel nothing, just numb. And the one person who could make me feel again is never coming back .

* * *

The subway ride from Brooklyn uptown to the City feels like the longest trip I’ve ever taken. I can’t stop thinking about what they’re going to ask me. I also can’t stop imagining how my father might act when he sees me. Like a witness on the stand or like his daughter? Will Logan speak to me or give me the evil eye ?

I hate being in this position but I’m going to do my best. Answer questions. Tell the truth .

Am I angry at Logan for firing me ?

Yes. I haven't done anything wrong. I said I would defend him. Yet, he's put my emotions through the ringer so many times, I could bring him down if I wanted to. I could let my anger get the best of me, make him look like some kind of predatory psycho .

But something has been nagging at me—the look in his eyes when he sent me away this last time .

He looked haunted, almost in more pain than me. And that's saying something, because I feel like I've been tortured .

When I enter the courtroom, both Logan and Miriam are there with their respective lawyers. And of course Miriam's attorney also happens to be my father, which is awkward as fuck .

Then there's the honorable Judge Someone Harris, a sour-faced woman who makes my stomach hurt. I avoid Logan's eyes. I have a job to do .

Nothing more, nothing less .

When I finally take the stand and the oath, I'm so nervous I can barely breathe. I suck in a few deep breaths and let them out slowly to will my heart rate back into place. My father looks more handsome than usual in his gray suit. It's been several months since I've seen him. Taking this case has done something for his confidence. It saddens me to know that Miriam is using him, too, though. I want to shake him and say, Daddy, wake up. She didn't hire you because you're a good lawyer any more than she got with Logan because she loved him .

But none of that is my business .

I have one goal today and that's to tell it like it is .

My father steps up to the podium and smiles that handsome smile of his. The child in me wants to hug him. The woman in me remembers that he put his own needs and desires before mine yet again. “Miss Carrington, could you please tell us the nature of your relationship with Mr. Raider ?”

“He’s my employer. I’m his children’s nanny .”

“Is that the only relationship the two of you have ?”

I look at Judge Harris, an older woman who will probably have no mercy on Logan’s soul. “I don’t see what this has to do with my job, Your Honor .”

“Please answer the question,” Judge Harris says coldly. There goes that. Just like Logan knew would happen. Oh, well, it was worth a shot .

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“Off-hours we had a friendship, but that has nothing to do with whether or not he’s a wonderful father. Which he is .”

“A friendship you say,” my father intones, his voice dripping with sarcasm .

“That’s right .”

My father seethes and rolls his bottom jaw around, like he’s not comfortable nor happy with my reply. “We’ll return to that later, your Honor.” And then he moves forward in a new direction with his questions. “Were you released from your job three weeks ago, Miss Carrington ?”

“Yes.”

“And why was that ?”

“Because you took over his ex-wife’s divorce case,” I say, looking directly at him. “And he felt that my duties would be compromised by my relationship with you. Since you’re my father and all .”

My father doesn’t take the bait. “And did he invite you back ?”

“Yes,” I say, leaving out the part about how he begged me to come back because he needed me. How our relationship blossomed after that .

“How did he respond when he learned that you would be here today to give testimony ?”

“He wasn’t happy, but I told him that the truth was all that mattered. I told him I’d tell this courtroom everything they want to know about the real man that he is .”

Miriam appears intrigued, as is the Judge and my father, as though I have juicy bits about the man they’re trying to fry. And I do .

“Please describe the parental capabilities you observed while working in Mr. Raider’s home, Miss Carrington. If any .”

Nice, Dad.I fight the urge to roll my eyes. Taking a deep breath and letting it out slow, I begin. “I was expecting a cold, heartless man, to be honest. I’d read the reports about him just like everyone else and was nervous when I first arrived. But he turned out to be quite the opposite .”

“Please elaborate,” my father says. “Opposite, how ?”

“Well...” I pause. I could go either way with this. Hurt or help him. “He’s an amazing father. Does he work long hours? Sure. But he works just as hard as any other loving father you’ve ever seen. He wakes up early to spend time with his children, Becca and Price, and he cuddles with them when he comes home. If they’re sick, he leaves work to be with them, and he even fired another caretaker he felt wasn’t good enough for his kids .”

“You say you had a personal friendship with Mr. Raider, so isn’t it possible that he invited you back simply because he wanted to continue that friendship, not because his decision necessarily held the children’s best interests at heart ?”

“I believe he did have their best interests in mind. The other nanny wasn’t effective. Becca and Price wanted me. They asked for me by name every day. So he invited me back. He’s a great dad who truly loves his kids,” I insist. “Every day, I see them hug their father. I see them fly into his arms when he comes home. I see them cling to him

when their mother comes to pick them up.” I glance briefly at Miriam and holy hell, that was a mistake. She looks like she wants to eat me for breakfast .

Dad shrugs dismissively. “It’s normal for children to be attached to the parent with whom they have less contact, Miss Carrington,” my father has the balls to say. Right now, I want to punch him in the balls, because he knows I’m telling the truth about Logan. He knows .

“They cling to him, because he’s close with them,” I assert. “He sings to them, reads to them, treats them with respect...he even cooks for them when he doesn’t have to. There are plenty of people to cook for them, but he likes spending time with them. He’s very actively involved .”

My father looks at his notes to see what else he’s got. The best thing Logan has got going for him is that my dad’s not a bulldog. Right now, Miriam is looking at him like she wishes he would go for the throat. But guess what, lady? That’s one thing I’m fairly sure my dad won’t and can’t do. It’s just not in his personality .

“Have you ever seen anyone in the house who doesn’t know the children? Any unsupervised guests?” My father looks up at me .

“No. In fact, he has a sophisticated security system. No one can get in without an approved handprint. He’s even had a panel replaced when he it wasn’t working right.” I remember after I told him that panel wasn’t working, someone came to replace it the next day. “Everything he does, he does for the twins. Everything.” I look at Logan .

“Tell us, Miss Carrington...” Spite edges into my father’s voice, and I know he’s about to pull out the big guns. “Are or were you in a romantic relationship with Mr. Raider between the time you began working for him and now ?”

And there it is. If he loved me, he wouldn't be asking this question. Though I'm not surprised .

"Yes," I reply .

There's chatter in the room, as he holds up a hand and Logan's attorney whispers in his ear. The Judge furiously jots something down in her notes. She does not look happy. Miriam smiles as though her point has been proven, and my dad goes on, "No further questions, Your Honor ."

"I just want to say..." I begin, but my father repeats .

"No further questions," Dad repeats .

But the Judge wants to hear what I have to say. "Go ahead, Miss Carrington ..."

My fingers shake as I push my hair back behind my ears. "I was going to say...that it's over now. Things between me and Logan have ended romantically and professionally. But even though it's over, I won't lie just to hurt him or even to help my own father's case. Everything I've said about him is true. He's an amazing father, and that's all there is to it ."

The judge sits back and nods at both me and my father. "Thank you, counsel, Miss Carrington...you may step down ."

Logan

Miriam settled for a sum of money—a big sum, but nothing I can't handle—and I'm awarded shared custody of the babies. When the gavel comes down, and the case is closed, I should be elated. Instead, I feel like the biggest asshole on the planet .

Paisley was right—telling the truth was the best medicine. She was never a threat to me .

Never.

When the judge heard her, plus when records showed that the kids have spent more time with me while Miriam's been off gallivanting with her new boyfriend, my ex was the one in danger of losing shared custody. That's when her tune changed, and she decided to settle instead. If Paisley hadn't testified I would've likely lost this case .

I shake my attorney's hand, then run off to catch up with Paisley. She exits the courtroom, me working my way in front of her before she can escape. "Paisley," I say, but she doesn't stop. Her face is stoic, as she keeps her eyes riveted in front of her instead of me. "Paisley, thank you for everything you said in there. I really owe you ."

She refuses to speak to me. It stings .

I've never been one to worry much if a woman decides she has better things to do than speak to me. Women usually come around when they're ready, and most of the

time it has nothing to do with me. But this time, being ignored burns like Paisley's shackled me against the walls of Hell .

"Paisley..."

"Leave me alone, Logan." She walks on ahead of me .

I stop to watch her go. In the dark blue wrap dress she's wearing, her curves are accentuated and her hair appears lighter against the dark background. Everything about her form and aura saddens me, because I fucked things up. I did exactly what I swore up and down I wouldn't do .

I treated her badly yet again .

She saved my ass and asked nothing in return .

She did it because she loved me. In return, I hurt her like the colossal dick that I am .

Clearly, I don't deserve her .

Outside the courtroom, it's raining. Someone appears by my side with an umbrella to shield me. I don't even know who it is, because reporters and cameras are in my face. "Mr. Raider, you've just been awarded shared custody of your children in a long, exhausting battle. What are you going to do now ?"

"I'm going to Disney World. Get the fuck out of my face." I push the reporter to the side so I can reach my car .

"Mr. Raider, your former nanny and girlfriend testified in court, but you still emerged victorious. Will you be getting back together with her now? Why did she leave alone ?"

I look directly into the camera. “Miss Carrington is a woman of substance and integrity. She’s too good for the likes of me, and she deserves the very best in life going forward. Meanwhile, I’ll spend the rest of my life regretting the moment she left me. Good day.” I yank myself free from the crowd, slip a hundred into the valet’s hand, and step into the quietude of my closed car to catch my breath .

You’re single again. No women to nag you or force you to be a better person. You’re in control of your life again. Just the way you always wanted it, asshole .

* * *

Wealth, fame, a luminous career—none of it matters without someone to share it with. Without Paisley, I should say. No other woman I’d even come close to wanting to share it with. But I can’t call her. As much as I should beg her to take me back, I won’t. Because... What’ll end up happening is I’ll only disappoint her again. My temper will always get the best of me. It’s only a matter of time before I’m saying dick things to her, and she doesn’t need that disrespect .

When the kids aren’t here, I get my work done and then I say goodbye to the real world. At home, an endless string of drinks keeps me company .

The morning when the kids come back, Vivian is here early to welcome them. So much for not having any women around to nag me. Get out of bed, Logan. Get your shit together, Logan. Come and kiss your babies, Logan .

Good thing she’s here, though, because I’m hungover and don’t want to get out of bed. I could hire another nanny, but Vivian insists the kids need at least one family member spending time with them. She’s right. If Paisley can’t be with them, then I don’t want anyone else. The kids wouldn’t want anyone else either, and I can always create a schedule where I work from home part of the time. I mean, they don’t need me at the office every moment of every day .

“Where’s Daddy?” I hear them around the house giving Aunt Viv a hard time. She keeps trying to usher them away from my room so they won’t be subjected to seeing me unshaven and two shades away from alcohol poisoning .

“Daddy is sleeping. He’ll come down soon unless he wants to lose the custody he was just awarded!” she shouts loud enough for my benefit. Of course, the kids have no clue what the fuck she’s talking about, but that’s my cue to get up and be a man. Get out of bed, regardless of how pathetic and self-loathing I feel, and rise up to the occasion .

If anyone can cheer me up, it’s the Terribles .

“Okay, okay...” I roll out of bed, shower, and venture out of the cave, ready to face the day. Somehow. But not really. If I have to lie on the couch all day while the kids bounce around and dig their heels into my ribcage, then that’s how I’ll spend time with them. “You can go, Aunt Viv. Thanks for watching them.” I walk into the kitchen to pour myself coffee and take three headache pills .

“I don’t feel confident leaving you here with them,” she says, turning and heading back to the play room with a snack for the kids .

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That triggers me. Not sure if it's because she doesn't trust me with my own children or because it's true that I'm untrustworthy right now. "I'd never hurt them, if that's what you're suggesting. Go ahead and go."

"Logan, the way I see it, you all need watching over right now." And then, she disappears down the hall .

I guess it's true, I could be considered a sick person right now. Can't sleep, drinking too much, depressed as fuck...I wouldn't want someone like me caring for the kids either. Somehow, I have to get my ass back in gear. I can't go on like this, hating myself for losing Paisley. I need a plan. Part of that plan must be therapy of some kind. If I ever have the chance to talk to Paisley again, I'm going to want her to know that I'm serious about doing better .

She deserves that. She deserves more than that, really, but therapy is a start .

I spend the day hanging with the kids part of the time and doing video calls with work the rest of the time. "Daddy!" The Terribles attack me, a wonderful feeling to have little arms and baby's breath surrounding me, reminding me of what matters, but at times, I'm irked and need a moment to regroup or talk with my team .

I don't know how working moms do it .

To make matters worse, the kids keep asking for Paisley. "Where Paisy go, Da-yee?" A question I hear no less than fifty times a day. The answer is always the same. "She went home, guys. But she loves you." It's all I can bring myself to say .

It's hard to feel whole. For all intents and purposes, my children should be enough for me. Nothing should feel like it's missing when I'm with them. But it's a tough day, one where it's hard to pinpoint exactly what's bothering me .

When the kids sit at their little table to color some pages, I sit with them. Their chairs are like tiny stools for my butt, and I feel like the Jolly Green Giant sitting at their table, but I pull out paper, too, and start coloring. Only my drawings are about buildings—lines and cityscapes and trees. The kids color and watch me work with fascination. Whereas they're filling in Mickey's shorts, I'm designing something .

Something curvy, something colorful, something beautiful. Something that reminds me of the woman who saved my ass and almost saved my soul. If I can't be with her, then I'll pay homage to her. I work and color and draw until I've created an addendum to the urban center project, and it's the missing ingredient .

Another video call comes in, and my engineers and architects are all thrilled with the end result. The final approval is tomorrow, and they feel they're ready, but I'm not. There was and has been something missing from the design this whole time. Now I know what it is .

“So, we're ready, boss?” my head engineer and project manager wants to know. His eyebrows appear hopeful, but their work is not done yet, unfortunately .

I have to see this come to fruition. I have to see this as part of the New York skyline. She's my muse and she was right in front of me all along. “We'll ask for an extension,” I inform him, and six members of the team all standing behind him drag their faces .

“Excuse me, sir ?”

“Ask for an extension. We're not done with the design. I've just emailed you all a

new building I want built next to the library to complement it .”

“But, sir...we can’t...we’re all exhausted. Perhaps we should talk about it, and — ”

“Make it happen,” I say and hang up the video conference .

Paisley

Winter gives way to spring, and spring gives way to summer. It's been the longest six months of my life. Lots of thinking. Lots. And moving. Last month, I used some of my nanny savings to rent out my own apartment in Chelsea right in the City. I have Logan to thank for that, though some might say I did that myself.

Either way, today I have my first interview since Logan's.

It's hard. I'm not going to lie. The memories come strong today, what I wore that morning, standing outside his penthouse worried about the interview, the way I felt when I first saw him. A mixture of terror and pure lust. It was a mistake. Inherently, I know it was. So why does it still hurt so damn much? If it wasn't truly love, I would've forgotten about him by now.

Anyway, it doesn't matter. I haven't seen nor spoken to him since the courthouse when I cried and questioned my existence the whole train ride home. But today's interview takes place near Battery Park, the site of the urban center Logan is building. Imagine my shock when I come up from the subway station to find that the buildings are nearing completion.

At four in the afternoon, the sun slants and glints off a gorgeous edifice of glass. I have to stop and soak it in—it's breathtaking. About forty stories tall, the building's exterior reflects the moody harbor so at times it appears light green and at others, like blue iridescent metal. Slightly different from the plans Logan showed me, but beautiful just the same.

Next to it, another building is nearly finished. I'm not sure what it is, but it wasn't part of the blueprints and renderings he showed me. Must be something new. Then, I notice it—the teardrop pattern etched into the glass. As I walk toward the complex, the pattern appears and disappears depending on the angle .

Paisleys.

Logan worked paisleys into his buildings .

I can't stop staring, as tears alarmingly rise into my eyes .

But why ?

I don't want to admit it, because I know whose mind it came from, I know who designed it, but it's hard to turn away. It's the most beautiful building I've ever seen. And it's been created with one person in mind .

Me.

An old woman sitting on a park bench next to me speaks. I didn't even realize she was there, I'm standing here shaking so much. "Isn't it gorgeous ?"

"It is," I stammer .

"You should see it when it's all lit up ."

"They're already lighting it up? I thought it wouldn't be done for another few months." I keep my face turned away, in case the woman knows who I am from seeing my face in connection with Logan in the news .

"Oh, no, the library is finished. Just not open yet. The building next to it will take

another month or two, but they're going to do the ribbon-cutting both at once at the end of this month." She nods her head, takes out her iPhone and snaps a few photos of it for her Snapchat story .

I almost laugh, because...well, she's an old woman posting to her Snapchat story. But she clearly needs someone to talk to, and I'm rooted to my spot, staring at the masterpiece. It's the most beautiful thing this park has seen in years. I could stare at it all day. Problem is, I have to get going. Besides, staring at a manifestation of Logan's imagination right before my interview might not be the best thing to do .

I start off down the sidewalk again .

"Between the colors and the curves," the woman continues. I slow down and turn to look at her. She's smiling faintly. "You'd think the architect was inspired by that lady out there." Following her gaze, I see she's staring across the harbor at the Statue of Liberty. "Or maybe some other muse." She looks straight into my eyes, into my soul, as some might say. "A living Mona Lisa for the architect. Wouldn't that be something ?"

"Yes," I reply, averting my face again. She knows who I am. She's made the connection. "Yes, it would be ."

"A living work of art. Feminine, strong, evocative. Anyway, what do I know?" She laughs and goes back to Snapchatting. "Have a nice day ."

"You, too." I take off faster than a pregnant woman in need of a bathroom .

Why would he add those paisleys, and what's with the sea foam glass that changes when the light hits it just the right way? He can't possibly still think of me. He hasn't called me in six months. Wouldn't he have called by now if he still thought of me ?

Maybe he wants to but he's too proud ?

Tears well up in my eyes. I wipe them. Can't think about Logan now when I'm three streets from my interview. All I know is if he hasn't asked for forgiveness, then it wasn't meant to be. A gentleman would've come back to me by now .

* * *

Getting the job was easy. The first thing they did was see that I'd taken care of twins for four months and handed it to me on a silver platter. It's an old couple caring for their granddaughter, so luckily, they don't know about Logan Raider, except that he's a billionaire. The Housens haven't followed the case or put two-and-two together, so they don't know I'm the nanny with whom my former employer had "special relations ."

I've been working there a month and like it fine, but I miss Becca and Price. Caring for a baby is lovely, but I really miss sitting with the Things and coloring or singing with them or building whole cities out of wooden blocks. I miss their hugs and their "Paisy! Paisy !"

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 7:02 am

The midsummer rain comes down hard one July afternoon as I'm returning home from work. I don't ever need to sleep over the Housens', which works for me, since I've been fixing up my apartment to look nice anyway. It's not until I'm all the way to my door do I notice the Lamborghini parked outside my building and why it's there—sitting at the end of the hall holding a big bouquet of pink and white roses is Logan Raider .

“Jesus, you scared me!” I press my palm to my exploding chest .

“I would've waited downstairs, but it's pouring outside.” That smile, that torturous look he somehow pulls off as charming every time. “As you well know .”

My heartbeat races inside my body, pounding my ribcage so hard I feel like I'm going to pass out. I hold onto the door frame in the open doorway. Five thousand thoughts pummel my mind at the same time. “What...what are you doing here, Logan ?”

“I wanted to see you .”

“Just because you want something doesn't mean you can get it without permission.” I cross my arms. Hold tight, Paisley. You've suffered enough .

“I should've called first, but I was in the neighborhood. I figured I'd drop by .”

I stare at him so dumbfounded, so unbelievably shocked, I can't speak. It's really him right here in front of me. I've thought of him every single day for months—every morning, every night, and every moment in between. I was only now starting to get

over him. Why is he here ?

“Fine, I wasn’t in the neighborhood.” He climbs to his feet and walks over to me slowly. “I’ve been meaning to call you for a while now but knew I had to see you in person first .”

“How did you know I lived here ?”

He chuckles lightly. “Come on, Paisley .”

Stupid question. He’s a billionaire. His money opens doors everywhere. If anyone should have first-hand experience with that, it’s me. He hands me the roses, and all I can do is stare at them. They’re, without a doubt, the most spectacular roses that money can buy. They smell amazing, too. “Thank you, but I can’t accept them.” I enter the apartment to breathe in clean, un-stifling air .

“Paisley, I know I hurt you. I haven’t stopped thinking about it for seven months.” Logan lingers in the doorway without coming in. At least he’s waiting to be invited instead of taking whatever he wants. Has he changed ?

“Why didn’t you call me, then? Why now, Logan?” I fling my hand aimlessly. I’m reeling from the sight of him after all this time. “Come in. Close the door, please .”

He does and walks in, setting the roses down on my little kitchen counter .

“Beautiful apartment. It suits you.” He towers over me, still as tall and handsome as ever, though his eyes are sadder .

“Why now, Logan? Why wait so long to come see me ?”

“I thought we needed the time. You were right—we never should’ve gotten together

when we did, but I'm grateful that we did. Or else, I might never have fallen in love with you .”

Fallen in love. With me .

I face him, balancing my ass on the edge of the sofa. Much like the way I feel right now. “Logan, this is crazy. You have no idea how hard it’s been for me. I had to pick up so many pieces. I had to deal with the media, something I never asked for, I haven’t spoken to my father since that day, I’ve had to get angry at you in order to forget you. I had to take part in an ethics class at work, because of what we did.” It all comes out of my mouth like a torrent of rain. “You’ll never understand .”

“And yet, you still work with Le Nanny. Because they know how wonderful you are. Because they know it was mostly my fault...Fine, all my fault. But Paisley, I can’t stop thinking about you. I can’t get you off my mind, as hard as I’ve tried. I did what I always do—I immerse myself in work to forget about life, and guess what? Even that failed. On the contrary, work became you .”

I think about the building that finally finished going up this week sitting down there along the banks of the Hudson, in the harbor, a building that many think is an homage to Lady Liberty but he and I and that old lady in the park all know that it’s me .

“I’m obsessed, Paisley.” He comes up to me and holds out his hands. I look down at them. Big hands. Thick fingers. I’ve missed them. I’ve missed those fingers and the way they’d take mine like I was a little girl to be cared for. “The kids miss you, too. I couldn’t hire anyone after you .”

He couldn’t ?

So he’s been taking care of the kids himself? “Who’s watching them?” I ask .

“My aunt and I take turns. They don’t want anyone but you, Paisy.” He says my nickname, and I nearly break into tears. God, I hate this. I hate falling apart when I most need to hold it together .

“You hurt me.” The words escape my lips. It’s fine. He needs to know it .

“I know.” His hands slip into mine. “I’ve been in therapy. It’s one reason why I’ve waited this long to see you. I wanted distance between the whole divorce debacle and now. I wanted to start clean without tons of overbearing stress on top of us. I wanted to make sure I could truly be different than who I was before. You deserve better than that .”

“I did,” I mutter, amazed that he’s taken these steps and thought this through. “I still do .”

He nods, brushes away my tears with one thumb. “I wanted to be that man for you, because I knew that’s what you’d want. The time apart was critical. Forgive me ?”

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I shrug and look away, fighting back more tears. So, he wants me back? But what if this doesn't work out? What if he thinks he can control me again, order me around or have a tantrum when it doesn't go his way? This is the nature of who he is. I'm not sure that will ever change .

"I love you, Paisley." He cups my face in both his hands. I always feel so delicate around him. "There's also another reason why I came in person ."

"What?" I sniff and wipe my eyes with the back of my hand. I must look so terrible right now with my nose all red, my hair all messy. "You wanted to make sure no guys were hitting on me, so you could go raving mad and stuff me in your car ?"

He drops his chin out of shame then looks up like he's already over it. "Come on, now ."

"Tell me what's going on, Logan ."

He takes my hands together in one of his. "Our buildings open tomorrow. I wanted to invite you to the ribbon-cutting ceremony. It's at six o'clock, and I'll come get you myself ."

"Why should I be there?" And what does he mean by "our buildings ?"

"Because. That project has your name written all over it, Paisley. You made it happen. You inspired its concept, and I'm dedicating it to you. Please come. I want the whole world to know the woman behind the Battery Park Children's Library and Paisley Arts Center." He kisses me in the middle of my forehead .

Paisley Arts Center? My hands shake. Is he serious ?

“I want the whole world to know that I love you .”

Logan

I can't remember the last time I was this nervous .

I don't do nervous. Not my style. But there's so much riding on tonight. I so want to impress Paisley. It's sad to think that we never even went on a date, and when we finally do, it's to dedicate a whole building to her. I kept her in a closet like a dirty secret .

But my therapist has said I can't think of it that way. I must think of it like this: Paisley showed me the kind of man I want to be. Living with her was only the beginning of that process. Now, I'm ready—literally and figuratively .

My tux fits nicely, a tiny bit loose since I've lost weight, but no time to tailor it. The kids are mostly ready, and Aunt Viv has agreed to take them down to Battery Park while I go pick up Paisley. Aunt Viv's heels click-clack along the floor toward me. "My, my. You've always looked so handsome in a suit, Logan. Back to breaking-hearts status?" She winks. "Love it ."

Not exactly. My head and heart both know who I belong to. I'm only sorry it took me so long to figure it out .

"Thanks, Aunt Viv. See you there ?"

She nods and kisses my cheek. "Good luck, darling. Come on, kiddos !"

"Bye, Daddy!" Becca and Price look back at me and wave, each of them taking one

of Viv's hands, and skipping out of the house. I can't wait to see the looks on their faces when they see who I've brought to the event .

Not long after that, I've made the drive to her apartment .

I knock on the door and wait nervously .

Feet shuffle across the floor on the other side of the door, and I hear the locks open. The apartment door cracks wide... Paisley stands there in a soft yellow dress, her hair loose down her shoulders, like sand molded by waves. "Holy shit." Not the most gentlemanly thing to say, but... "Holy shit. You look stunning, babe ."

She's wearing makeup, which is a first. Not heavy makeup, just glowing gold and brown touches that highlight her eyes and make her look like a summery living painting. Paisley has always seemed this way to me—a moving, breathing work of art—only this time, she's elevated to goddess level .

I can't believe she's coming out with me when she has every right to hate me .

"Come in while I finish getting ready?" She kisses me on the cheek, smelling so delectable, the fires inside of me ignite, and points to the roses I got her, now in a glass vase on the kitchen counter. Whew. Thought she might toss them in the garbage, which I totally would've deserved .

I close the door and hold back my urges to take her before the event. Not that she'll let me. Winning her back will be a slow process and there's no guarantee. But I'm determined, as I've always been .

I watch as she puts things inside her small purse—lipstick, a compact, keys. "Do you think I'll need cash for food and drinks? Since you're driving, can I pay your parking ?"

“Um, no.” She’s so adorable. How do I tell her I practically own this part of the city without sounding like an egomaniac? “I think I’ve got it covered.” Sadly, I muse how we’ve never been in this position, never gone out together in a couple sort of way. That’s my fault, but it’s also a new beginning .

“Alright, then I guess I’m ready.” Between the dress, the heels, the purse, and the smile she gives me, I have to say this evening will go down in my hall of fame as most memorable. Even if she denies me at the end of this night, even if she never wants to see me again, I can say I got to see her one last time. I got to take her out, show her my love by dedicating the building to her, and die a heartbroken but happy man .

In the car, she nervously wrings her purse with her fingers. “Who’s going to be there ?”

“Everyone.” I laugh, reaching for her hand. She lets me take it a moment before I have to change gears on the transmission .

“What if people recognize me? What if they talk about us ?”

“Of course they will, babe. They know about us, but things are different now. Aren’t they ?”

Light eyes reflecting the setting sun glance at me. “I hope so .”

My head practically spins. Does this mean she’s forgiven me? Has she thought about what I said and agrees to start anew? Because that would be a dream come true for me, the first of many she doesn’t know about yet .

When we arrive, the paparazzi begin with their questions and their cameras and their invasive trickery to get you to look and answer questions. “Don’t talk to anybody,” I

mutter in Paisley's ear. "Just smile and wave. Tonight's not about them ."

"Mr. Raider, what can you tell us about the building's design? Is this the woman you had an affair with during the trials ?"

"This is the woman I love," I give them that and that only, then show Paisley to her seat right as Aunt Viv and the kids are coming down the aisle, looking for their seats next to Paisley .

"Daddy!" Becca runs up to me, and Price follows suit, and they both jump into my arms. I lift them like the 30-pound barbells that they are and kiss them each .

"Hey, guys, look who I brought to see you." I lower them right in front of Paisley who stands and covers her mouth like she's about to cry .

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“Oh, my God, look at you two! How much you’ve grown!” Her arms open, and the things run right into them, a little fluffy dress and a tiny tuxedo man filling Paisley’s personal bubble .

“PAISY!” They attack her with hugs, while guests and reporters all take photos of them. I stand idly by, holding down a ball in my throat, watching my children reclaim the love they’d thought they’d lost. This is the greatest day of my life and hopefully will get even better during the dedication .

I crouch down to wrap an arm around each Thing. “You guys be good? Daddy has to go onstage and get ready .”

“For the show?” Price asks. Aunt Viv has taken them to so many children’s performances lately, Price thinks the whole world is Kiddie Broadway. Speaking of which, Aunt Viv looks on at the children hugging Paisley with a satisfied look on her face, like she’ll talk to me later. Like she always knew something was going on in my heart .

“Yeah, buddy. For the show.” I kiss the top of his head and wink at Aunt Viv. Then, I take Paisley’s hand and kiss the top of it. “See you later ?”

“Sure.” Her smile could light up the world brighter than that lady standing out in the harbor facing the end of another day .

The stage stands in front of the completed library and arts center. Ribbon-cutting ceremonies are always satisfying, but tonight’s particularly because those edifices are so personal to me. All my blood, sweat, tears, and hopes went into that .

The Mayor of NYC arrives to cheers, wild applause, and more paparazzi. She steps across the stage, shakes my hand, the hands of all my team members, then takes her position behind the glass podium. The crowd hushes, and the ceremony begins .

“My dear ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to stand up here tonight to honor those who’ve toiled to make this dream a reality...” As she welcomes everyone and thanks each team member personally, introducing them to the crowd, my gaze wanders off to the crowd below where everyone who’s important to me awaits in the first row .

That is the love of my life, I think, watching Paisley interact with the kids, keeping them actively listening and behaved like the perfect nanny she is. But what’s more, she looks like their stepmother, expertly reigning them in, enacting all the tricks that parents and stepparents of toddlers know—the doling out of animal crackers, the pointing out of things to look at. She knows my kids better than anybody, better than their own mother, I’m willing to bet .

“And now, I’d like to introduce the tour de force behind this masterpiece. You know him as a visionary, a modern Michaelangelo...” The Mayor goes on and on. I haven’t prepared anything to say like I usually do, but there’s no need for formal words tonight. Everything I want to say is closely guarded in my heart. “Mr. Logan Raider !”

Thousands of invited folks filling Battery Park cheer wildly, as I take the podium. This is it. I look at Paisley, clapping happily, her cheeks filled with renewed hope but also worry. If it’s because I might mention her by name to the thousands of people here, plus the millions around the world who will watch this dedication remotely, she’s right .

But they need to know her by name, because no man is an island, and she made all of this possible as much as my team did. “Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Tonight is

truly a special night. The blood of these new buildings runs through my veins more than any other project I've ever worked on. I'll be honest—they're my favorite—but shh, don't tell my other buildings .”

The audience laughs, as the flashbulbs go off. Behind everyone, the sun is beginning to set, creating the perfect background sky against which these babies will be illuminated .

I go about the usual protocol of thanking my entire team, one by one, making them stand and be recognized for their hard work and unwavering dedication. Even when I throw last-minute surprises at them, like I did for this project, they take those changes and run with them like the professionals they are .

“I know there's been moments where they've wanted to kill me, but I'm grateful to them for not doing that.” I chuckle and listen to my engineers jeer back jokingly, “That's because you pay us !”

“I'm truly lucky to have them. They are what makes L. R. Group so unique. We're a family, and families stick together. Families don't let each other down. Families see through the difficulties and come out the other side no matter what.” I look at Paisley and the kids when I say this. “And that's why I want to introduce you all to a woman who's not only inspired me but believed in me at a time when I didn't believe in myself. She saw the good in me and told the world her truth. You'll see her in the aesthetic of the design—in the colors reflecting the water, in the beautiful curves of her frame, and in the repeated patterns of frosted glass .”

I look at her and hold out my hand. The guards look at the woman I'm talking about and work quickly to escort her out of her seat and up the stage .

“Paisleys. Hundreds of them. Because Paisley Carrington was on my mind every single day during the planning and development of this arts center. If you'll look

closely, there's one for every day since the day we met. Some muses come and go, but it's my hope tonight, as we celebrate and bring this compound to life, that this muse...will stay forever."

When Paisley arrives on stage to oohs and aah and more photo-taking from the paparazzi and various news stations, she looks mortified. I take her hand, and she mumbles, "What are you doing, Logan? Oh my God, what are you doing ..."

"This." I get down on one knee beside the podium to surprised gasps all around us, echoing their way down the length of the park. The whole of the crowd is abuzz with whispers and excited whistles. "Paisley Carrington, you've made me a changed man. I've only known you for a year, but it's felt like a lifetime. Everything about this building, I did for you. I couldn't get you out of my mind, and it's because I love you. And I want you to be my wife."

Her manicured fingertips press against her mouth, and her beautiful eyes fill up with tears. I know she'll kill me later for ruining her makeup, but I just don't care. She could have dirt and seaweed all over her face, and she'll always be beautiful to me .

"I can't believe this..." She keeps repeating .

Taking out the jewelry box stashed safely inside my jacket pocket, I present it to her, open the box, and watch her face carefully .

I know this is sudden. I know I deeply hurt her in the past, but I hope this makes up for everything. I put the microphone under my arm for this part, since it's just none of anyone's business .

"I know you're still mad at me, Paisley, but please marry me...and I'll spend the rest of my life making it up to you." Taking out the ten-carat diamond solitaire now surrounded by the tinier diamonds my mother used to wear on her wedding

ring—another design just for Paisley—I hold her ring finger and look up at her, still debating .

It may have taken me a while. I may have been stupid at times. But I knew what I had to do, and when that clicked, there was no stopping me. Finally, thankfully, she nods and whispers, “Yes. I’ll marry you, Logan .”

The park fills with cheers and joyous applause, as I slide the ring onto her slender finger, rise to my feet, and kiss my fiancée gently. And just like that, my life is complete. The Mayor appears by our side, holding out a pair of huge scissors, indicating it’s time to cut the ribbon, as I slide my hand underneath Paisley’s chin and look into her eyes. “I’ll never let you down again, babe. I promise .”

“You won’t,” she says, reaching for the Mayor’s offering .

“Shit, a woman holding scissors. I’m in trouble, aren’t I?” I smile .

“You have no idea.” She wipes tears from her eyes, makes a snip-snip motion that sets everybody off laughing, and hands them to me .

“No, ma’am,” I say, walking us over to the bright yellow ribbon across the stage wrapping around the entire perimeter of the complex. “You do the honors .”

Paisley takes a deep breath, uses both hands to slice down the middle of the ribbon, and the coils fall away. The lights of the building go on, and the park erupts in applause at the spectacle. The paisleys glow in multiple colors. In the distance, the Statue of Liberty’s lights go on in matching colors in celebration, and I’m the happiest man in the world. For months, only the first building had its basic flood lights on, but no one has seen it with its accent outline lighting to match the arts center, and together they make a beautiful collaboration. Just like me and Paisley, just like Becca and Price .

Just like the amazing family we're going to make soon .

Very soon .

Epilogue - Paisley

Summer in the City is colorful, vibrant, and exciting. Then again, the whole year since Logan got down on one knee and proposed to me has been that way, starting with our wedding in April. It rained the entire time on the yacht down the Hudson River, and we have fabulous shots of him carrying me in my dress, both of us soaked to the bone, but I wouldn't change it for anything in the world .

It was perfect—absolutely perfect in every way .

Now it's three months after our wedding, a year since that surprise proposal, and we've moved into the Paisley Center of the Arts. You'd think it's just a cultural center for the arts, but you'd be wrong! Right up top is the penthouse suite, our together home with the children full-time and a view of Lady Liberty out in the harbor .

Yes, we have Becca and Pierce full time. Turns out that Miriam fell for an older man during her Happy Divorce trip she took to Paris last year and has given up her shared custody of the children. At first, she kept in contact with them, brought them fancy gifts from the heart of Paris, things they never played with or cared about. Talk about clueless. Eventually, she stopped video calling them and now barely sees them .

At first I was sad for them. I mean, their own mom didn't want them. But little by little, she made it clear what kind of person she is, and now I have a full and complete picture. She only got pregnant for the money. She got what she wanted out of Logan, and it's actually better this way. It's better that they be with us full-time, caring for them, giving them a stable, happy home than going back and forth with Miriam

picking them up every other day like Cruella De Vil picking up puppies to be made into coats .

Becca and Price don't even seem to care. They rather seem to love their new life .

At the moment, I prepare their afternoon snack right before we head outside for a walk in the park. It's 2 o'clock, so Logan is due home soon. Early afternoon is the time he comes home now every day to be with me and the kids. Even though he still works his ass off, because I mean, how can he not? He's a creative person and creative people's minds never turn off, at least he gets some work done at home while he's hanging around with us .

When Daddy comes home, we go for walks or subway rides or we visit museums. Becca's favorite is the MoMA and Price's favorite is the Natural Museum, because of the dinosaurs. That kid has more dinosaurs in his room than the museum itself. Becca loves art. She loves it so much, we've enrolled her in painting classes, and so far, she's created three works of art that can best be described as Jackson Pollack meets Nickelodeon .

One that resembles a mango inside a taco hangs in the kitchen. "That Daddy's favorite?" Becca asks, pointing at her painting .

"Yep, Daddy and Paisy's favorite." I pack up the apple slices for our picnic in the park and check my texts. Logan's almost here .

"No, Paisy. Daddy and Mommy ."

I pause in mid-motion and cock my head at her. "You mean Paisy, Becca." I don't want to encroach on Miriam's territory, not that I have. I've always done a good job of knowing where I stand and that's neither as the twins' mother nor their nanny anymore—just a happy-to-be-included stepmom .

“Not Paisy. Mommy! Mommy, Mommy, Mommy...” She bounces around, taking enormous leaps like stepping over invisible puddles, and I have to hold my enthusiasm down before I cry from sheer joy. This child who I love so very much has just called me her mother. I’m honored beyond belief. Logan always said if the kids felt like calling me “Mommy,” we shouldn’t interfere. He maintains that if Miriam were to ever complain, we’ll take it up with her then .

But really, why would she complain? She’s never around to see her children and has moved permanently to Paris. It’s safe to say that I just became their official mother. Wiping tears, I put down the paring knife and go over to Becca, sitting her on my knee. “Thank you for calling me Mommy, baby. I love you so very much .”

“I love you more!” Her arms ring around my neck, then she points to my belly. “Baby in there ?”

I freeze and stare at this wide-eyed innocent child. How did she know? I only just found out this morning and was planning on telling Logan and the children as soon as we got our picnic started. I’ve heard that kids can sometimes have a sixth sense about these things, but I’m floored, happy, and ecstatic all at the same time .

“Yes, Becca. But shh ...” I place my finger to my lips. “Don’t tell him, okay? It’s a surprise. In fact, let’s pack a few extra things and let Daddy figure it out. Like a puzzle, okay ?”

“Okay, Mommy. Puzzle, puzzle, puzzle ...”

Pierce comes zooming into the room carrying his big stuffed dinosaur, Herbert, as I take a sheet of paper from their stash, a few crayons and quickly draw a rendering Logan would be proud of .

When he comes home, he’s got that exhausted, ready-to-be-revived look on his face. Kissing us all and sweeping us into big hugs, he says, “Let’s go for our stroll,

Terribles. I get to pull the wagon .”

“No, I get to pull the wagon,” I fake-fight him, giggling .

“No, I get to pull the wagon. Becca and Pierce are mine, mine, mine .”

“No, they’re mine,” I counter, and the kids laugh so hard, I break into a ginormous smile. This is our little routine. Each day, we pretend to fight over who loves the kids more. I wish my parents did this sort of them with me and my brothers, but alas, my dad never bothered. Only recently did I reach out to him for the first time since that awful day last year when I last saw him at the trial .

I believe in love and I believe in forgiveness, so maybe soon, I’ll let him back into my life completely. Especially since he’s going to be a grandfather soon .

At the park, it’s hot but the water dazzles under the afternoon light, and the park is filled with joggers, families, and tourists. We stroll to our tree, the one we’ve dubbed “the Family Tree” because it has four big branches that extend into the sky exploding with white flowers, one for each of us, and Logan says, “Look at that. There’s a small branch coming out of the side there. Hmm, wonder what that means...” He gives me a sneaky look like he’d be willing to try for an addition later tonight after the kids are asleep .

But Becca beats him to it. After all, she’s almost four and can’t contain herself, much less a secret of this magnitude. “That’s the baby’s branch, Daddy .”

“The baby’s branch?” Logan tilts his head to me .

I capture this moment, the lowering orange sun illuminating his silver eyes, our little ones happily munching on apple slices and goldfish crackers, a light summer breeze flowing over us. There will never be another day quite like this one, when Logan Raider looked into my eyes inquisitively imploring what his daughter might possibly

mean, when I had the honor and full joy in my heart to say the words I'd never thought I'd say to him .

Life is ever-flowing, like that river over there, the one bending and twisting its way up the state of New York. A year ago, our life changed for the better when he asked me to marry him. A few months ago, it changed again when we made our love official, and now it's about to change one more time .

I pull out the crude but awesome drawing I made just before he got home. "Babe, can you give this to your team and see that it comes to fruition by December ?"

He looks at it, completely befuddled. "What's in December?" His eyes rove over the lines and shadings and rustic renderings of a crib, furniture, and a beautiful tree painted on the wall .

It's time to add another branch to the Family Tree—literally—and I want this depicted on the nursery wall. "Probably my due date. It's the baby's room." I watch his face change from confused to shocked to the biggest silliest grin I've ever seen on my husband's face .

And then that grin transforms into a look of love like I've never seen before, and as he leans in for a long kiss, I tell myself to freeze this moment, to remember its perfection forever and ever ...

THE END