



The Executive Assistant

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Billionaire Romance, Adult

Description: "I'm your personal assistant," he said. "It's my job to deal with all your needs."

Alison Firth has everything she wants: a successful career as the CEO of a marketing firm, a high salary, and fantastic friends.

The only problem is her executive assistant, Cameron Holmes. He's great at his job, but everything about him is a distraction, from his imposing height to his gorgeous eyes to his knowing smile. It's infuriating, especially because Alison can't have him: he's her employee.

Then, one night at a charity event, Alison drops her defences and does the one thing she promised herself she'd never do: she gets intimate with Cameron. It's so wrong, but to her surprise, she loves letting someone else be in charge for once.

Sleeping with each other is a bad idea, but neither of them can stop. But when feelings and work complicate things, Alison will have to confront the fact that there are more important things than her job. Otherwise, she'll risk losing the man who's perfect for her.

The Executive Assistant is a steamy workplace romance between a female CEO and her handsome personal assistant. It features a career-focused heroine, a confident hero, and a guaranteed HEA

Total Pages (Source): 66

CHAPTER ONE

If Cameron Holmes wasn't so good at his job, I would've fired him months ago.

I still remember the day I interviewed him. Julia, the head of HR, had passed me his résumé before the interview and told me he was the most impressive candidate by far. She had already vetted several applications for the role of my executive assistant and had created a shortlist of the top five.

Cameron was number one on her list. He was also the only male.

I read through his résumé, which, as Julia said, was outstanding, with lots of internship experience, skills, and fantastic references. He'd earned a master's in marketing from a prestigious university and had recently graduated, so I estimated he'd be about twenty-two or twenty-three. I imagined someone nerdy, scrawny, and shy.

The man who walked into the interview was none of those things. He walked in like he was the CEO, like he was the one interviewing me. He was tall—six foot three, I'd guess—with broad shoulders and dark blond hair. His light blue tie matched his eyes.

He was so unlike what I imagined that when he offered his hand for a handshake, I stared at it for a few seconds, my mind blank. After I quickly gathered myself and shook his hand, a jolt of electricity surged through me. I told myself this was a good thing. I didn't want an assistant who was shy, scared of me, or got flustered easily. My assistant would represent me and Firth Marketing. I needed someone polite but assertive. Kind but strong.

The first thing I asked him was his age. He wasn't twenty-two or twenty-three, but rather twenty-six, two years younger than me. There was a three-year gap between his undergrad and master's, which he explained by saying he'd been overseas. When I asked what he'd been doing, he blinked once at me, calmly, and said he'd been looking after a relative.

It was a perfectly reasonable question for me to ask about the gap, but his answer, the way he answered it, made me feel like I'd stumbled. I felt unsteady for the rest of the interview. Maybe it was his eyes. Maybe it was the size of him.

After the interview finished, I fought the urge to write him off immediately. Sure, his résumé was impressive, and he answered every question with ease, pitching a smile here and there that was effortlessly charming. But it was hard to breathe around him, and I knew it would be dangerous to work with someone who made me feel so... tense.

Unfortunately, no other candidate measured up to him, and so the answer was clear. He had to be my executive assistant. Julia offered him the job that week.

I wished I could say that things had changed now that two years had passed since the interview, but I was still too weak. Even now, the sight of him still made my stomach flip.

Today, Cameron was waiting for me outside of the bank building, leaning casually against the car. He was dressed, as always, in a simple navy blue suit, white shirt, and light blue tie. His hair was slightly windswept, but he still looked handsome. I let myself stare at him for a moment, then stepped through the revolving door. Gray clouds rolled overhead, and a wave of city noise washed over me. Car honks. People talking. My name being spoken.

"Alison," he said, straightening up. "How was the meeting?"

“Fine,” I said, as he opened the car door for me. As I moved past him to get into the car, I could’ve sworn I felt a ghost of a touch on my back, but maybe that was just my imagination. I crawled inside and patted the chauffeur’s arm in greeting before taking a seat. “Back to the office, please, Mr. Anderson.”

“Yes, Ms. Firth,” he said, shooting me a smile in the rearview mirror. He looked like a kind grandfather, with deep smile lines and neatly combed white hair. He’d called me Ms. Firth since I first hired him, despite my protestations that it made me sound about a hundred years old, and calling me Alison was perfectly fine.

As the car zoomed off, Cameron fixed me with a look. “Now, how was the meeting? Don’t tell me it was just ‘fine.’”

A sly smile broke across my lips. “I might’ve convinced them to purchase our largest commercial package.”

Cameron grinned and nodded, not looking the least bit surprised. “If anyone is going to make bank commercials interesting, it’ll be you.”

Luckily, the commercials had to be more informative than fascinating, but I always gave every single project my own little flair.

“Don’t flatter me,” I told him, suppressing a smile.

Cameron chuckled, tilting his head back a little and showing off his defined jaw. “I’m not flattering you. I’m telling the truth. Besides, it’s my job to support you. Don’t you feel supported?”

I met his gaze. Over the past two years, he’d learned almost everything about me. My schedule, my habits, my behavior. The fact that he spent so much time with me made it extra difficult for me to conceal how much he... affected me.

“Sure,” I said. “Any updates for me?”

“Mr. Richards wants to reschedule tomorrow’s meeting, and Vantage Tech wants to talk about extending their contract with us,” Cameron said.

“How many times has Mr. Richards pushed back this meeting?” I asked as my jaw tensed a little.

I had been in the business world for a long time now. I was used to dealing with a whole array of issues and plenty of difficult people, but one thing that dug under my skin was having my time wasted.

“I believe this is the third time,” Cameron replied. “I could mention to him that this will be the last attempt at scheduling a meeting before we move on.”

“Good thinking. Light a fire under him, please,” I said.

Cameron took out his phone and summarized a few emails that had been sent to me during my meeting. As he spoke, he adjusted his legs. He was a tall man, and while the company car was modern, it wasn't the largest. Once, I suggested he sit in the front, because he'd have more space and would be more comfortable. He declined, stating it'd be better for us to talk if we were both in the back seat.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

Even so, every time Cameron rearranged his legs, I became increasingly aware of the mass of him. I wished he was shorter. I wished he was smaller. I wished he had a different face and a different voice. I wished he had eyes that didn't pierce so deeply.

"The Lloyds would like dinner with you," Cameron finished. "Would tomorrow night suit?"

I blinked my thoughts away. "No, I can't do tomorrow night."

He frowned, glancing at his phone, and I knew he was checking my calendar.

"It's not a work thing," I explained. "I have a personal commitment."

Cameron's eyes met mine, blue and as clear as ice. I felt a chill and jerked my eyes away, already rearranging my face into something blank because I knew what he would say before he said it.

"Is it a date?" he asked.

"It's none of your business," I said. "As I mentioned, it's a personal commitment."

"Ah, yes." I could hear the smile in his voice. "Well, good for you. It's been a while since you had a personal commitment. I was starting to worry about you."

"Cameron," I said, shooting him a sharp look.

Most of my employees would have cowered at the sight—not that I glared at my

workers that often. No, Cameron was the one who received the majority of my glares, and somehow he was never, ever affected by it.

Now, all he did was raise his hands in surrender, his lips twitching. “I only meant that I was worried for your work-life balance,” he said pleasantly. “This will be good for you. We can’t have a CEO who’s working all the time. That’s a fast track to burnout.”

“Very true, Ms. Firth,” Anderson said from the front. “Besides, it makes sense for a pretty young woman to start a family.”

“Anderson,” I said patiently. I couldn’t get mad at him. He was only saying it because he thought he was being kind, the way my parents thought they were being kind when they asked whether I’d ever get married.

Cameron got in before me. “I doubt Alison has time to deal with men, not when she’s so busy running a company.” He smiled at me. “I, for one, hope you remain single.”

My heart stopped.

“If you found a husband, I’d be out of a job,” he continued.

I took a second to compose myself. Of course, that’s what he meant. He wasn’t implying...

I pushed the thought away. “Why?” I asked him. “Because marrying someone would automatically mean I’d become a housewife?”

He blinked. “Right, of course not. I spoke without thinking.”

“God,” I muttered, “you’re no better than Anderson.”

Cameron smiled at me, but this time it was slightly uncertain, which took me aback. It was very, very rare that Cameron ever looked unsettled, especially around me.

“I’m not bad,” Anderson piped up, as he turned down a street. Thunder rumbled in the distance. “I only bring it up because I care about you, Ms. Firth. Your work is impressive, but there’s nothing more important than love.”

“Well, it’s a good thing I love my company,” I replied in a light tone. I knew I spent a lot of time working, but Firth Marketing was my baby, my dream turned reality. Of course, I was going to put my all into it. I didn’t know anything else.

I didn’t want to argue because I knew Anderson had good intentions, but I got this sort of comment all the time, especially now that I’d turned thirty. I had been single for several years now, and I wouldn’t change that. Relationships were distracting and complicated, and where in the world could I fit that in my already hectic life?

Sure, it had been so long since I’d had sex that I practically had cobwebs between my legs, but I spent so many late nights at the office that it didn’t really matter that my bed at home was cold and empty.

“Alison’s got plenty of time to make some guy out there feel very lucky,” Cameron piped up. “The company’s in its prime. It wouldn’t be smart for her to slow down the momentum.”

I couldn’t help the surprised raise of my eyebrows. Cameron always had my back, but this was a little unexpected. I thought that maybe deep down, he agreed with Anderson like everyone else.

Before I could reply, rain poured from the sky, rattling as it hit the roof of the car. “We don’t have an umbrella, do we?” I asked, looking around the backseat.

“Sorry,” Anderson said, sounding genuinely distressed as he parked in front of the Firth Marketing building. “I can go in and fetch an umbrella.”

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“No, I’ll go,” Cameron said. He dashed out of the car without giving Anderson the opportunity to protest.

Through the window, I watched Cameron move through the shower, raindrops turning his shirt dark.

“He’s too kind, isn’t he?” Anderson said. “He must know that I have to keep healthy for my upcoming vacation.”

This was his last week at work before taking his annual leave. He was going to the beach with his grandchildren. I could tell he was excited because he told me about the holiday approximately twenty-seven times. Usually, it made me smile because it reminded me of my own great uncle, who, when I was a kid, would tell me about his childhood exploits over and over until I knew each story by heart. But today, as Anderson told me once again about his upcoming holiday, I let my mind wander as I stared through the car window. The rain was thicker now, crashing violently against the concrete pavement.

The worst thing about Cameron was that he was a genuinely good guy. He made nervous interns laugh, remembered the names of his coworkers’ children, and always had a smile for everyone. At first, I wondered whether he was trying to charm everyone as part of some office politics tactic, but I soon realized he was thoughtful, even when no one was watching.

An imposing physique and a kind heart. That was another reason why I felt so guilty when I fantasized about firing him: because he didn't deserve it. He didn't deserve the way I resented him, just because of how he looked.

The automatic glass doors of the building slid open, and Cameron dashed through. He was already soaked from the rain, which had gotten worse since then. He spread out a black umbrella above him, clasping a second umbrella in his other hand. As he approached, I saw with stomach-twisting clarity that his light shirt had turned almost translucent and clung to the musculature of his body.

He opened the door and passed the unopened umbrella to Anderson, then extended his hand to me. I let him help me out of the car, completely shielded by the umbrella he held over us.

Gently, he led me to the office building. He was so close, but carefully made sure his damp clothes didn't touch mine. My skin was humiliatingly hot. Why was I reacting this way? I didn't even get this flustered for important meetings.

When we reached the building, Cameron let me go inside first. My heels clicked against the sleek tile flooring as I rushed inside, coldness settling on my skin from the chill of the rain outside. I turned just as Cameron stepped inside, closing the umbrella and giving his head a light shake to dry off his hair. My eyes darted right back down to his visible chest.

Was my heart really pounding over the sight of a sculpted torso? Had it really been that long?

When I lifted my eyes, I saw Cameron peering at me, almost looking curious. Or was it amusement?

I couldn't read his expression, but guilt was heavy in my gut. I tore my eyes away from him and smoothed down my blouse and skirt, my face burning. While I couldn't control my feelings, I could control my actions. I reminded myself that as much as I wanted him, I couldn't have him. He was my employee, nothing more.

CHAPTER TWO

“Alison! Hello?”

I blinked. The sounds of glass clinking and people talking to each other flooded back to my ears as my eyes shifted around, taking in the golden hue of the upscale bar’s lights and dark wood accents. My best friends, Brooke Collins and Emilia Park, were staring at me.

“Sorry. I have work on my mind,” I said before taking a sip of my martini, reminding myself that I was here to relax, not overthink. This was the personal commitment I’d spoken about with Cameron. I hadn’t been lying — it wasn’t a date, just a catch-up with my two friends I hadn’t seen in a while because of our busy work schedules.

Emilia brushed the straight, black strands of her hair behind her shoulders, a sly smile crossing her dark red-tinted lips. “Work? Really?”

“What part of work? Your next project? Or your hotassistant?” Brooke asked, wiggling her eyebrows as Emilia laughed.

Brooke and Emilia had been my friends since college. We’d bonded quickly because we were all career-focused, and we’d achieved our goals. I had my firm, Brooke was a successful lawyer, and Emilia was a consultant at a huge finance company.

We knew each other’s secrets, so of course they knew how I felt about Cameron, and they teased me about my crush constantly.

“No,” I protested, but the lie sounded flimsy, even to me.

“Your expression was a dead giveaway,” Brooke said. “I’d describe it as a mix of annoyance and dreaminess.”

“With a generous sprinkle of carnal desire,” Emilia added.

Annoyance, dreaminess, and carnal desire. How would that even show on a face?

“But don’t worry,” Emilia said. “The perfect solution will present itself tomorrow night.”

“The perfect solution?” I echoed.

Emilia took a long sip of her cocktail, keeping me in suspense. “Don’t tell me you’ve already forgotten about your date. You’ve already rescheduled once. Do it again, and the poor man will think you’re not into him.”

It took me a second to understand, then I straightened up, incredulous. “What do you mean the solution to Cameron Holmes is Russell MacArthur?”

Several weeks ago, Emilia had set up a blind date with an investment banker who worked in the same office building as her. If it was up to me, I’d cancel the date altogether — I had no interest in spending time with a literal stranger — but I didn’t want to be ungrateful.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“Cameron clearly bothers you. Russell will be a distraction,” Emilia explained.

“Cameron doesn’t bother me,” I replied. “He’s just...irksome.”

“Irksome, and six foot three,” Brooke teased.

"And as strong as an ox," Emilia added.

They exchanged smiles.

I rolled my eyes. “I’m not talking about this again,” I said, picking up my drink and taking a long sip, relishing the hit of alcohol.

“I don't know why you're so embarrassed about this kind of stuff,” Brooke said. “Granted, he's not my type.” That was an understatement—her type tended to be red flags, often twice her age.

“He's not my type either,” Emilia added, “but if I knew for certain that you wouldn't start a catfight, I'd ask him out. He’s cute.”

“I wouldn't start a catfight,” I said indignantly. “You can have him.”

The two of them exchanged a look, which irritated me even more. “Actually, no one can have him,” I amended, “because he’s not available to have. He's my employee, and I won't have him complain about his boss’s friends harassing him. Or his boss, for that matter.”

“Come on, he's a man. I'm sure there's nothing more he'd want to do than unbutton those white blouses you always wear,” Brooke said.

“Brooke,” I groaned, and this time I didn’t feel just irritated, but pained too. There was nothing I hated more than wanting something I couldn’t have.

Her expression softened. “Sorry, babe. We’ll drop it.”

“Thank you,” I said. For a moment, I felt embarrassed for exposing my emotions so clearly to my friends, but at the same time, I knew I could trust them with anything.

“Be honest with us,” Brooke said. “Are you excited to see Russell tomorrow? Because if you really don't want to go, then you can call it off. There's no point wasting your time.”

I considered it. “No, I’ll go. I know you two were half joking before, but it would be a good distraction. Besides, I should probably fix my work-life balance,” I said, thinking of Cameron’s words.

Brooke smiled. “I think it’ll be good for you.”

“Good stress relief too,” Emilia added, raising both of her brows playfully.

I couldn’t suppress the laugh that escaped me. Emilia was right — I was high-strung all the time, and maybe Russell would be a good way to work out all of my frustrations.

The following night, I regretted everything.

I sighed as I stared at myself in my bathroom mirror, seeing a woman all dressed up in a gorgeous blue cocktail dress, her long brown hair perfectly curled. She should be

excited about her date tonight.

But she wasn't. I wasn't.

I indulged in a daydream of ditching my dress and makeup for a hot bath and an early night, but then I thought of my friends' disappointed faces. They wanted me to go out and have fun because they knew it was good for me. I wouldn't be able to work twenty-four seven forever.

What would life be like, five, ten, fifteen years from now? Would Firth Marketing still be successful? Would I still be working late hours? Would Cameron still be my assistant?

No, of course not. He was clever, charming, and hard-working. Someday, he'd leave my side to be a high-powered executive at a different company. He'd have a beautiful wife and children, probably three daughters with the same light blue eyes.

I shook my head. I needed to stop thinking about Cameron. Who knew? Maybe Russell McArthur would be the most alluring person I'd ever met in my entire life. I wasn't particularly optimistic about the fact, but the least I could do was try.

I glanced at my phone and realized I was running late. I was never late. Being on time was late in the business world. I quickly spritzed on some Dior perfume that Emilia had bought me as a birthday gift, grabbed my handbag, and dashed out the door.

I arrived at the restaurant five minutes late.

The Cavallino had only opened two months ago and its cuisine had been lavished with praise in all the local publications. Russell had chosen it for our date. To be honest, I was impressed he'd been able to get a reservation.

My heels lightly clicked against the sleek, wooden floor as I strode through the restaurant, my eyes sweeping left to right over the faces of other patrons. Couples. Business partners. Friends.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

Finally, I spotted a single man sitting at a white-clothed table toward the back of the restaurant. He was tall, with short brown hair, just as Emilia had described. He stood up as I approached.

“I hope I didn’t keep you waiting too long,” I said.

“Not at all, Alison,” he replied, kissing me on the cheek. He leaned back to look at me, his gaze sweeping slowly over my body. “You’re a very beautiful woman.”

I smiled and sat down, noticing two glasses of red wine on the table. It was a kind gesture, even though I much preferred white wine.

Emilia had mentioned he worked in investment banking, and he looked like it, from the confident way he sat to his expensive haircut, to the silver watch that glittered on his wrist.

Cameron wore a modest watch with a worn leather band. I’d always wondered about it and considered buying him a new one for Christmas — purely as a thank you for all his hard work — but then I’d overheard him telling a coworker that it had been a gift from his uncle.

I pushed thoughts of Cameron away. “Emilia mentioned you’re in investment banking,” I said. “That must be interesting.”

“Interesting doesn’t even cover it,” Russell chuckled as he sat up straighter, his hands moving animatedly as he spoke. “I work with all sorts of clients. More than you can even imagine. Every day, I work and get them hundreds of thousands of dollars. It’s

the most rewarding job in the world.”

He was certainly passionate. I couldn’t judge his enthusiasm because I felt the same about my own work.

He told me about the prestige of his firm, the competition among his colleagues, and that work was becoming hectic because it was approaching the end of the quarter.

I nodded, trying very hard to look as if the existence of financial quarters were new to me.

He wrapped up his recount of his latest client, then gestured at the menus. “Have you been here before?”

“I haven’t,” I said, taking the opportunity to look around. Warm lighting emitted from abstract lamps, the waiters were smartly dressed, and behind the bar was a wall of liquor bottles, glittering like magical potions.

“The food’s fantastic,” Russell said. “I’ve been here quite a few times. Can I make a few recommendations?”

“Of course,” I said. He pointed out some items on the menu. “I’d say the lamb is the best,” he finished. “Did you want anything else to drink?”

He must have noticed I’d only taken a few sips of my wine. “Tap water would be fine.”

He caught the attention of a passing waiter, and ordered, finishing with “the lamb and a glass of sparkling water for the lady.” He smiled at me.

I stared, then forced a smile. I knew perfectly well how to be charming in business

situations, but tonight I felt off. Maybe it was because I wasn't negotiating a business deal. I wasn't trying to get anything out of this man.

Well. There was...stress relief. I heard the words in my friends' laughing voices. I looked at the man sitting across from me, but before I could even start to imagine him in that sort of way, he started talking about the time he had dinner with a local politician. Then, before I could get a word in edgeways, he talked about his regular gym routine and his recent holiday to Taipei.

Why was he bragging so much? Cameron never boasted like this.

Right. Russell was bragging because he was trying to impress me. This was a date. Impressing each other was what you were supposed to do.

Cameron never tried to impress me. But, then again, I suppose he didn't need to.

To my relief, a waiter interrupted Russell's monologue by bringing the meals. I had to admit that my lamb did look good — it was seasoned with salt and pepper, with pale sauce spread artfully across the plate and roasted vegetables on the side.

I took a bite and savory goodness burst across my taste buds. "Wow, that's really good."

"I told you," Russell said smugly as he cut his steak. "Do you fine dine often?"

"Sometimes. I usually go to Vintello's for business dinners."

Russell lifted an eyebrow at me. "Business dinners. What do you do for work?"

"I have a marketing firm," I explained. I would've expected Emilia to tell Russell what I did — maybe she had, and Russell had simply forgotten.

“You have a firm?” he asked, frowning.

“I’m the founder and the CEO,” I explained.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“Ah.” A pause. “Who is your business partner? A family member?”

“I don’t have a partner,” I said, careful to keep my voice pleasant. “I founded the firm myself.”

He took a moment to digest that. “Impressive,” he said after a long moment. “Small businesses are part of the backbone of the economy. Sure, it’s hard work just starting out, but if you put your mind to it, you’ll be making the big money in a few years.”

I opened my mouth to correct him because Firth Marketing was hardly a small business, but then I stopped myself, because frankly, I couldn’t be bothered. If Russell made assumptions about me and my career just because of how I looked, or the fact I was a woman, that was his problem, not mine.

I picked up my glass of water, deciding to lay off the wine. As soon as I took a sip, I was reminded that it was sparkling, not still, and it bubbled unpleasantly on my tongue. For a moment, I tried to deal with it because I didn’t want to seem picky, especially about something as trivial as water. But I hadn’t asked for sparkling.

“Is there anything else I can get you before bringing the check?” a waitress asked as she picked up our empty plates.

“Some tap water please,” I told her.

“Bottled,” Russell said.

“No, tap is perfectly fine.” My voice remained polite but firm, and I didn’t miss the

twitch of Russell's mouth.

"It must offer you a lot of freedom, being your own boss," Russell said after the waiter had whisked away. "I'd love to be able to have full control over my timetable. You must be able to take several vacations."

I gave him a tight smile. "Not as many as you'd think."

The night was going as brilliantly as I thought it would, and my only consolation was keeping track of every awful detail, so I could report them back to Brooke and Emilia later.

The silence between us stretched out. Russell sipped his red wine while I studied him. While he didn't take my breath away the way Cameron did, he was objectively handsome, with his thick brown hair and square jaw.

I considered taking him home. It had been forever since I'd had sex, and occasionally I theorized that was why Cameron irritated me so much. If I could just work out my sexual frustration — get some stress relief — then maybe the next time I laid eyes on my executive assistant, he'd be just a man to me. Not an object of desire. Just another, ordinary man.

If I did ask Russell to come home with me, I was certain he'd say yes. Sure, he might think I was loose or "low-value" or whatever people were calling it these days, but I couldn't care less about the opinions of a random investment banker.

The more I thought about it, the more it seemed like a good idea. Besides, if I did sleep with Russell, it wasn't like I'd have to hear him talk. He could just pin me down and —

My eyes caught on some movement past Russell's head.

Across the restaurant, a couple was sitting down at the table in the corner. The man was tall and blond, and the woman wore a stunning sky-blue dress, her black hair falling over her shoulders like a waterfall of ink.

It was Cameron, here, on a date, with the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen.

CHAPTER THREE

Was she a supermodel? Probably. Of course, Cameron was dating a supermodel.

Perhaps they were friends, a desperate part of me wondered, but there was no way that he was bringing a friend who looked like that to a fancy restaurant like this. They couldn't be family either, since they looked nothing alike. Cameron was Caucasian, and the beautiful woman was Asian.

The woman shared a warm smile with Cameron. They were in their own little world.

I tore my eyes away, and despite trying to keep calm, my skin started to warm, which was ridiculous. He hadn't even made eye contact with me. He didn't know I was there, but I felt sick at the thought of him noticing me, greeting with a smile. Then he would falter, because with one look, he would be able to read everything on my face. He would see that for the longest time, I had a foolish infatuation with him.

"Are you okay?" Russell's voice was far away.

I blinked and met his eyes. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"You look flushed," he said, gesturing at his own cheeks.

I pressed a hand to a burning cheek. "Would you excuse me? I need to use the ladies'."

I rose from my chair and walked in the opposite direction of Cameron and his date, weaving around other patrons and tables until I finally entered the hallway that led to the restrooms.

“This can’t be happening,” I said after I’d hurried into the women’s bathroom. Sure, I’d harboured a crush on Cameron, but I always thought it was silly and small. I hadn’t expected my stomach to twist and churn when seeing him with another woman. It appeared that I cared about him more than I thought.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

I walked over to the sink, checking my reflection in the gilded bathroom mirror. Thankfully, my cheeks were no longer red. I counted down to ten in my head, taking deep breaths, then straightened up, chin high.

You're his boss, Alison. Why are you hiding in the bathroom? You're allowed to be here. You're on a date, just like he is.

I walked out of the room with a confident stride, only to run straight into a firm body. My hands flew up and grabbed hold of strong biceps as I met a pair of familiar blue eyes.

My jaw fell open, but I quickly clamped it shut.

"Hello, Alison," Cameron said calmly, like he wasn't surprised to see me. Had he been waiting for me?

"Hello. What are you doing here?"

"Having a meal," he said, with a small smile, like the answer was obvious. "I wasn't expecting to run into you tonight."

"Me neither," I said. "Well, I better get back to my meeting with my...friend."

Before I could slip past him, Cameron reached out and gently wrapped his long fingers around my upper arm, stopping me from running off again. The amusement faded away from his handsome face as he peered at me with concern. "Are you alright?"

“Why is everyone asking me that?” I snapped, then took a breath to calm myself. “I’m fine. I’m just having dinner with a friend. Everything is fine. Besides, it’s after hours. You don’t need to check up on me.”

Cameron frowned. “I’m not asking as an employee. I’m asking as a friend.”

My heart skipped when I felt his thumb brush against my upper arm in the softest stroke. Even the tiniest touch lit up my senses up like wildfire. It didn’t help that his eyes were pools of warmth, inviting me in and soothing me.

I almost succumbed until he spoke again.

“You could do better than him,” Cameron told me as he gestured in the direction of the dining area.

I blinked in surprise. “W-what?”

The corner of his mouth turned up. He was still touching my arm, and a shiver threatened to tremble up my spine in response. “You would have a better time with someone else. You deserve the best.”

I stared. “I’m not on a date,” I lied. “I told you. He’s a friend.”

“He wasn’t looking at you like he wants to be friends with you,” he said.

I scowled. “Even if I was on a date, that’s none of your business.” I pulled my arm from his grip and he let go. “I’ll see you at work tomorrow,” I told him, before returning to my table.

What was that all about? You could do better. You deserve the best.

I shook the words from my head as I sat back down with Russell.

“Everything alright?” he asked.

“Yes, fine,” I said.

“I already took care of the check while you were gone. I figured we could change the scenery a little.”

Let me guess, he wanted to take me back to his place. Maybe mindless sex with him would take my mind off Cameron. It wasn't like Russell was ugly, but he was a bit too obsessed with himself for me to believe that he was a giving lover.

“Actually, I think I'm going to go home for the night. Thank you for dinner,” I told him, forcing a smile.

Russell blinked at me. “You want the night to end already? Are you sure?”

“I'm tired,” I said. “I had a big day today, but...maybe another time?” I wasn't sure if there would be another time, but I wanted to be polite.

He still looked disappointed but he mustered up a smile. We walked out of the restaurant together, and I kept my eyes forward, so they wouldn't stray to stare at Cameron and his runway model date.

“You deserve the best,” Cameron whispered, dragging his hands up my calves, his fingertips left me shivering as they crept up over my knees and up my thighs, sliding underneath my pencil skirt.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

He knelt on the carpet, but he was so tall that if he leaned forward, his face would press against my chest. I sat at my desk, and tried to maintain a dignified posture, but my legs were spread, revealing me for what I was: a wanton slut.

A shaky exhale escaped from me as Cameron kissed my inner thigh, lips impossibly warm against my skin. “You’re so beautiful,” he whispered. “So perfect. Legs spread just for me.”

I swallowed hard when he pulled my undergarments down, leaving my most vulnerable places completely exposed. I couldn’t breathe as he slid his hands up, and when he pressed the pad of his thumb against my clit, I gasped.

“That feels good, doesn’t it?” he whispered. “You needed this.”

As he rubbed slow circles around that sensitive nub, coaxing soft moans from me, another finger slid down my slit.

“Wet already?” He looked up at me with an expression I knew far too well, amusement glinting in his eyes. He dragged his fingertip up and down, and if I strained my ears, I could hear the humiliating, slick noise.

“You’ve wanted me for so long, haven’t you?” he whispered. “You’ve tried to hide it. You try to pretend I’m nothing more than a slightly irritating employee. But I know there’s nothing you want more than my big hands on you.”

With that, he thrust a single digit inside me. That, paired with his thumb, still gently massaging my clit, made me tremble in pleasure. No. I couldn’t lose control. I

couldn't surrender to Cameron. Not now, not ever.

But...it felt so good...

"You're squeezing my finger so tight, Alison," he said, almost playfully. Like he was teasing me. Like it was funny the way my body reacted to him.

He watched me, eyes dark — almost sinister — as he sank another finger inside. Once again, I gasped, but then let out an involuntary noise. My stomach was tightening like a coil, and I could feel myself grow wetter by the second. "Oh..." I moaned. "C-Cameron —"

"Be quiet," he warned. "Unless you want everyone to see you."

Everyone?

I blinked, then looked around. I was in my office, boxed in by glass walls that put this entire erotic show on display for the whole company. My heart stopped at the sight of my employees whispering to themselves as they watched me. Disappointed and disgusted expressions filled their faces, and panic surged within me. No, no, no —

My eyes snapped open with a start. My bedroom was pitch black and silent except for my heavy breathing. I was sweaty, my hair sticking to the nape of my neck, my sheets tangled in my legs. It took me a few minutes to compose myself after the nightmare — because that's what it was, a nightmare. Definitely not a wet dream.

After a few minutes, I reached for my phone, which was charging on the nightstand. It was four in the morning — too early to get out of bed, but I didn't want to risk returning to that dream with those blue eyes looking up at me. He'd been wearing a suit, kneeling on the floor with his fingers —

I shifted my legs uncomfortably, and that's when I noticed it. To make sure, I reached down and touched the fabric of my underwear. Wet.

Fuck. I grabbed a pillow and covered my face with it, muffling a groan.

CHAPTER FOUR

My day was thrown off because of that stupid dream. At work, I stormed down the hallway, passing by the offices of some of my employees until I reached one of my marketing specialist's office. I rapped my knuckles against the door and stepped inside.

Austin quickly straightened up in his office chair, abandoning his phone on the desk. He cleared his throat and offered me a sheepish smile. "Alison, can I help you?"

"You can help me by meeting your deadlines and staying off your phone. The website was supposed to be updated yesterday."

Austin's eyes widened, looking like a deer in headlights. He was young, but he had been working here for a few years already. He knew what my expectations were, and missed deadlines slowed the whole system down.

"I'm sorry. I ran into some issues and had to reach out to IT," Austin explained as he gestured to his computer.

I breathed in sharply through my nose. He couldn't help IT issues, but I doubted he was texting the IT guy on his phone. "I need the website updated ASAP."

Austin immediately nodded and turned to his computer. "Yes, of course."

I strode out of his office. Everything felt like it was slipping through my fingers,

which was awful, because this was the one place I was supposed to have control.

On my way to my own office, I rounded the corner and nearly ran straight into Stacy, a content manager. I jerked to a stop, as my right heel wobbled. I grabbed at the nearby wall to steady myself, and it was like fuel had been thrown on a live fire.

“Oh! Sorry, Alison,” Stacy apologized, reaching out like she was going to straighten me up. The aggravated look on my face must have made her think twice. “I didn’t see you coming.”

“Neither did I,” I replied, ice seeping into my voice. “I was meaning to talk to you anyway. Where is next month’s content calendar?”

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

Stacy blinked in surprise. “Oh, I told you a few days ago that I would turn it in next Monday.”

I furrowed my brow, my mind working to remember this conversation that I seemed to have forgotten. “Not this Friday?”

Stacy nodded, her body tensing like she was bracing herself for an explosion. “I needed an exception this time because I have a doctor’s appointment.”

That rang a bell. Why was I forgetting these things? Probably because I was distracted.

“I’ll need it by end of day Monday,” I said before walking past her, making a beeline for my office before something else drove me crazy.

I shut my door behind me and sighed deeply, relieved to be away from everyone else. After gathering myself, I sat down at my desk and logged onto my computer, my fingers flying over the keys. I pulled up my email, my latest documents, my calendar, and anything else that shifted my focus to work and work only.

I wouldn’t think about the dream. I wouldn’t think about last night’s disastrous date. I wouldn’t think about the conversation I had with Cameron and his warm hand on my arm.

Eventually, all the overwhelming noise quieted down, and I lost myself in what I knew best. There was nothing more comforting than getting the job done and knowing that all this hard work was going to pay off.

Suddenly, Cameron slipped into my office, shattering my concentration. He was wearing his usual suit and tie, and looked good, the way he always did.

I tore my eyes away from him, focusing on the email I was drafting. “Yes?”

Cameron approached my desk. “You’re scaring everyone.”

“Telling people to do their jobs and stick to their deadlines is me scaring people?” I asked without looking away from my screen.

Cameron rested his palms on my desk and leaned forward, making me look at him. His presence easily filled the room, dominating the space with his height and breadth. He gave me a pointed look like he could see past my cold words.

It drove me crazy. He was my assistant. The employee who kept me up to date on things I needed to do and grabbed me coffee when my momentum was running out. He wasn’t supposed to look at me like...like he could see past my defenses. Like he was concerned about me.

“Did something happen last night after we spoke? Did that man upset you?” he asked.

My brows jumped up. “No, last night was... fine. Why are you bringing it up?”

“You didn’t leave with him.”

“Oh, so you were watching me?” I snapped. Despite my tone, the thought of him keeping an eye on my last night sent a thrill through me. “Shouldn’t you have been paying attention to your own date?”

“Did you see I was with someone?”

“Of course, I did,” I said. “It’s not like the restaurant was very large.”

“Her name is —”

“I don’t care,” I interrupted.

That hung in the air, tense silence stretching out. I fought the urge to cringe. I shouldn’t have been so rude, but I would have rather stick my hand in a beehive than listen to Cameron tell me all about his perfect girlfriend.

“I’m not here to antagonise you, Alison,” he said eventually. “I just wanted to make sure you were okay. You seemed upset.”

“I’m not upset,” I said, then sighed. “I’m just stressed about work.”

He nodded with understanding. “Is there anything I can do to help you relax?”

The memory of my heated dream immediately filled my head, reminding me of how good he looked between my legs. Heat formed low in my stomach.

“W-what?” I asked, my voice coming out unsteady as my heart skipped.

Cameron smiled, and I half expected dirty words to spill from his mouth like they did in my dream. “I could book you a spa appointment. That’s one of your favorite ways to wind down, isn’t it?”

Of course. This wasn’t my dream, and thank god for that.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“No, I’m fine,” I said.

“Well, let me know if you change your mind. You know that I’m happy to help.”

Because it was his job. Nothing more.

“I’m fine,” I repeated.

There was a moment of silence after that. Tension hung in the air like we were waiting for something to happen, for someone to say something.

I couldn’t stand it anymore. “Was there anything else?” I asked.

He blinked, then straightened up. “Vantage Tech wants to negotiate some terms in the contract, Mr. Richards has agreed to meet you next Tuesday at 11 A.M, and Anderson has left for his annual leave. Oh, I almost forgot.” He pulled an envelope out of his back pocket. “The tickets for the charity auction tomorrow came in.” He handed the envelope to me, an electric surge traveling between our fingers as they brushed.

“Charity auction?” I asked.

“You ordered them months ago for you and a friend,” Cameron replied.

I opened the envelope and took a look at the tickets. 20th Annual Business Association Auction.

Right, of course. Months ago, Emilia and I had decided to go. These types of events were mostly for networking and showing off how much money someone had, but it was for a good cause and an excuse to dress to the nines. This year, the auction was donating money to cancer research.

I tucked the tickets back into the envelope and set it on my desk. “Is that all?” I asked, turning my attention back to Cameron.

“What are you going to wear?”

My brow furrowed. “To the auction?”

Cameron smiled and nodded. “Yes. I’ll run whatever you’re thinking of wearing to the dry cleaners.”

Right. He was simply being thoughtful, like always.

“I’m not sure yet,” I admitted. There were quite a few options in my closet that I used for other events, and I didn’t feel like shopping for something new in the limited time that I had.

“Wear the red dress,” Cameron told me.

The off-the-shoulder red dress with a fitted bodice that cascaded down to my ankles where I typically wore my best pair of heels. My favorite part was the thigh high slit at the front.

“It’s my favorite,” Cameron added.

My breath hitched as our eyes locked, warmth stirring low in my stomach as my thoughts took off. What ran through his mind when he saw me in that dress? Was it

the thigh slit that he liked the most? Or the way the dress hugged my curves in all the right places?

Stop it, Alison.

I almost felt taunted, which made me that much more frustrated.

“I’ll think about it.” I told him dryly before turning back to my computer.

Cameron lingered. I thought he was going to break the silence, but eventually he left the office and shut the door behind him.

The following day, I was determined to make the most of it. Not only was it the weekend, but I would get to dress up with one of my best friends and donate to charity.

As my coffee maker rumbled and hummed, I grabbed a white mug from one of my kitchen cupboards, breathing in the bold, smooth smell of freshly brewed coffee. My head subtly nodded to an upbeat tune stuck in my mind, sunlight washing over my open kitchen.

My phone rang, and I picked it up off the marble kitchen island, seeing Emilia’s name on the screen. I tapped the answer button and pressed my phone against my ear. “Excited for tonight?”

Emilia let out a weak laugh, her voice hoarse.

I frowned. “What’s wrong?”

“I have the flu,” she sighed.

My eyes widened. “The flu?”

“I’m sorry. I — ” she was interrupted by a burst of coughing. “I have to bail.”

“Don’t apologise. Get lots of rest, okay?” I tried to sound positive despite my disappointment. I’d been looking forward to today, and I could admit that I could stand to spend more time with my friends outside of work. There was definitely an imbalance when it came to dividing up my time. “Do you need me to bring over soup or medicine?”

“No, no. I have everything I need, and you need to get ready for tonight,” she said. “See if Brooke will go with you to the auction. She loves a good party,” Emilia suggested.

She was right. Brooke might’ve been a lawyer, but she wasn’t overly serious or stiff. Her law school days were full of wild nights.

“I’ll call her now. Get better soon,” I said, bidding her goodbye before I hung up and immediately called Brooke. The phone rang a few times before there was a familiar crackle as Brooke picked up.

“Hello?” There were faint voices in the background.

“Hey, are you busy?” I asked as I leaned my back against the island, toying with the tie of my white robe.

“I’m about to go into my Pilates class. What’s up?” Brooke asked.

“Are you busy tonight? Emilia was going to attend this charity auction with me, but she has the flu,” I explained. “Do you want to go with me?”

“I wish I could, but I have a family dinner tonight. You know how my mom is. If I don’t show up, I’ll be hearing about it for weeks.”

“That’s okay. I’ll figure something out.” Today was already starting to fall apart, and I hadn’t even gotten to enjoy my coffee yet.

“You should ask Russell to go with you!” Brooke suggested.

I wrinkled my nose. I could already picture Russell boasting all night about how much money he made.

I still hadn’t told Emilia and Brooke about the disastrous date that I had with him. They had been so excited to throw me back into the dating game, so I didn’t want them to disappoint them.

“I doubt he’ll want to go. It’s too last minute anyway,” I said, grasping for any excuse that I could think of to shoot down her idea.

“How about Cameron, then?”

My heart stopped. “Cameron? No... I couldn't...”

“Why not? It’s kind of a work event, right?” Brooke pointed out. “You know that he would be good company.”

I parted my lips to argue, but I couldn’t think of anything to say.

“Are you going to ask him? I think you should,” Brooke added, already sounding victorious.

What other choice did I have? I didn’t want to go alone, Cameron knew about the event, and I had to admit, he was great company. He was kind and charming and confident and...

And deep down, I did want to go with him. I wanted him to compliment my dress, I wanted us to drink champagne together, I wanted us to exchange glances when the other guests were being ridiculous.

“I guess I could ask him,” I replied, trying to hide the flicker of excitement in my chest.

“That’s what I’m talking about! Alright, I gotta go — my class is starting soon. Have a good time!” Brooke said, before hanging up.

I lowered my phone, preparing for the third phone call of the day. My thumb hovered over the call button on Cameron’s contact, a nervous sensation filling my stomach. I felt like a teenager asking a crush out on a date.

I sucked in a deep breath before hitting the call button. Only two rings passed before Cameron picked up the phone, which was his typical response time whenever I reached out to him.

“Alison,” he answered. “How can I help?”

“Cameron,” I said, willing my voice to steady itself as the pressure of my question rose in my chest like a bubble. “Sorry to call you on a Saturday. Are you busy?”

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“You never have to apologize for contacting me. I’m available 24/7,” Cameron replied.

“I need you to go with me to the charity auction tonight.”

“I’ll pick you up at six,” Cameron said after a moment.

My eyes widened in surprise. I knew that he was flexible, but he was good to go just like that? “It’s black tie.”

“I have a suit,” Cameron replied. “Don’t worry. I’m not going to embarrass you.”

I shook my head. “You couldn’t ever do that.”

Oops. I hadn’t meant to let that slip.

“Then, I’ll see you tonight,” Cameron told me, letting his smile shine through his warm voice.

“See you then,” I said, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible.

We ended the call, but his words echoed in my ears. I pushed them away. It was time to be productive.

I took my cup of coffee to my home office, where I worked on my desktop computer. I tried not to think too much about what my friends would say if they saw me. It’s Saturday, I imagined Emilia saying. You’ve worked hard all week — give yourself a

break. You should be at a spa, getting ready for tonight, not working, Brooke would say. How much more money and success do you possibly need?

The truth was, there wasn't a limit. I didn't have a magical number I wanted to hit in my bank account balance, or a certain accolade I wanted Firth Marketing to achieve. All I knew was that I had to work. It was a habit, a compulsion. If I worked enough, maybe I wouldn't notice how quiet my apartment was.

Suddenly, Anderson's voice came to me. Your work is impressive, but there's nothing more important than love.

With a groan, I shoved that sentimental nonsense out of my mind and put all of my attention on the campaign documents before me.

When evening approached, I finally got up from my desk and started to get ready. As I curled my hair, I wished Emilia was with me. It was always more fun to get ready with a friend, and we would consult each other on makeup looks or which accessories to wear.

After what felt like an eternity, I'd finished my hair and completed my makeup: cat eyeliner to accentuate my brown eyes, blush and bronzer on my cheekbones, my lips painted a bold red that would match my dress.

A quick check of my phone showed I only had ten minutes until Cameron was due to arrive. My lounge clothes formed a pile on the floor as I pulled them off, my stomach flip flopping as I grabbed my dress from my closet — the red dress. Secretly, it was also my favorite.

I zipped up the dress and slipped on a pair of heels. When I looked in the mirror, I looked...well, nice, but also...nervous. My mouth was twisted and there was a worry line between my brows.

Calm down. I went to more business events than I could count, but this felt like it bordered on... a date. It wasn't by any means, but it had the pressure of one because Cameron was going with me.

We were dressing up. Attending as a pair. Spending hours together over expensive drinks and tasty hors d'oeuvres. How would I be able to bear tonight?

Suddenly, there was a knock on my front door.

The air left my lungs, leaving me breathless as I quickly took one more look into the mirror to make sure everything was perfect. I could've added a little more volume to the back of my hair, but I had no time for that. I had to go.

I took a deep breath and strode to the front door. When I opened it, Cameron stood on my doorstep, wearing a tuxedo with a matching black bow tie. His hair was combed, his jaw impeccably shaved, and he wore cologne that was bold with a hint of something sweet, taking over my senses and momentarily rendering me speechless.

He looked amazing.

Cameron flashed me a half-smile and gestured to me. "You look incredible."

An uncontrollable blush rose to my cheeks.

"So do you," I said as a small smile formed on my lips. "Thank you for coming with me on such short notice."

"It's my pleasure." When he extended his arm out to me, I wrapped my fingers around his bicep, swallowing hard at the firmness of his muscles. I stepped out of my apartment, my side bumping against his as I moved too fast.

His free hand rested on top of mine, helping steady me as our eyes locked. “Ready?”

For a second, I forgot what he was asking that I was ready for. Heated electricity charged the air between us, making my heart race when I realized just how close we were. Mere inches separated our faces. Centimeters lingered between our bodies.

“Ready,” I said softly.

CHAPTER FIVE

The charity auction was hosted at the main ballroom in The Kingston, a five-star hotel. The ballroom showcased paintings, sculptures, haute couture, and antiques that would later be auctioned off for eye-watering prices. Waiters milled around the crowd, offering champagne and wine. There was a bar on either end of the room for guests to order more specific drinks. Above us, the crystal chandeliers glittered and glimmered.

“Fancy,” Cameron commented, tilting his head back to look at a life-sized marble statue that would be auctioned off later that evening.

“Tell me about it,” I replied as we weaved through groups of people talking. A waiter passed by, and I picked up two flutes of champagne from the tray, passing one to Cameron.

“To tonight,” I said. It was the first thing I could think of.

“To tonight,” he echoed. We clinked glasses and took a sip. Around me, I could already hear chatter about so-and-so. This person had won this business deal. That person had married an heiress. This person was getting divorced. That person had been charged with embezzlement.

“Are you going to bid on anything?” Cameron asked me, pulling me from the haze of gossip.

We looked around. Some of the art was nice, and the antiques were cool. It was all very niche, though.

I shook my head and motioned to a table next to the stage where someone was taking donations by cash or check. “I’m just going to write a check. I don’t need anything in return.”

“You don’t need a Parisian corset or a breakfast bookcase from the 1700s?” Cameron replied with a teasing smile on his face.

An uncontrollable smirk crossed my lips. “I don’t think any of that will match my vibe.”

Cameron chuckled. “I don’t think so either. You need...”

“The best?” I asked, the words slipping from my mouth before I could even process them. Was I already getting loose lips?

He gave me a wry smile. “Of course.”

I couldn’t take my eyes off his, captivated by his smooth words and alluring grin. I wished that I could —

“Alison! Is that you?”

I whipped around, my eyes widening at the sight of Russell McArthur. What the hell was he doing here? “Russell,” I said, forcing a polite smile. “I didn’t expect to see you here.”

Russell gestured around us. “I’m surprised to see you here too. You should have told me you were coming.” He gestured at the blonde woman on his right, who wore an

emerald dress and diamond earrings. “This is Lindsey Harmond, one of the chief executives at Capital Tech, and this is Arthur Wilson, CEO of Crowne Consults,” he said, motioning at the short, bald man on his left.

I politely shook their hands. “I’m Alison Firth of Firth Marketing. This is Cameron Holmes.”

Cameron jumped in and shook their hands. “I’m the executive assistant.”

“Oh, an assistant. She got you fetching drinks and holding her chequebook tonight?” Arthur asked with a teasing laugh.

While I wrinkled my nose, everyone else chuckled, even Cameron. Of course — he was always easy going.

“Actually,” I said, “I invited him as a friend.”

There was a short silence before Lindsey swept her hair behind her shoulders and smiled at Cameron. “Well, it’s lovely to meet you.”

Was I imagining it, or was Lindsey looking at Cameron the way a carnivore looks at a fresh cut of meat? I tried to stamp down my irritation, and finished the rest of my champagne.

“Yes, yes,” Arthur was saying now. “It’s always good to see new faces at these types of events; it gets boring otherwise.”

I picked up another flute of champagne from a passing waiter, then found that Russell had moved to stand beside me. “I enjoyed the other night with you. Shame it came to an end so early,” he murmured.

“Yes, it was nice,” I lied, taking a long sip of my drink, letting the warm, bubbly sensation fill me. I needed this to take off the edge a little.

“We should do it again soon,” Russell told me. “Maybe in a more private setting.”

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

I started to scoff but hastily turned it into a cough. Involuntarily, my eyes shifted over to Cameron, who was lightly laughing as Lindsey told him a story that I was only halfway listening to.

I took another sip. And another. A sip for every time that Russell tried to flirt with me. Another sip every time Lindsey touched Cameron's arm. It wasn't long before my face felt warm from all the alcohol I'd had.

"Next item up for auction. Confinement by Nicolo Ranallo. Acrylic on canvas," the auctioneer announced from the stage as he gestured to a large canvas that I couldn't quite make sense of. The background was green, and there was a red shape in the center that looked like a misshapen rectangle. Inside of that red shape was a smaller black shape that could've resembled a potato for all I knew. Tiny white dots littered the entire canvas like it had chicken pox.

"Wow. That's fascinating," Russell said as his hand rested on his jaw out of awe. "Look at the texture of that."

Lindsey nodded in agreement. "That's really nice."

I couldn't stop the laugh that burst from me and shook my entire body, the rest of my champagne nearly sloshing over the rim of the glass. This was my third flute. Or was it my fourth? Fifth? "Are we looking at the same thing? It looks like a preschooler made it with crayons."

Cameron shot me a shocked look.

I glanced around, seeing that other people were looking in my direction. Oops. I might've said that a little too loud.

"Art is subjective, but you should really take the time to try and understand what artists are trying to portray in their works," Russell told me.

"Let's start the bidding at \$1,000," the auctioneer called out.

Russell lifted his bidding card.

"Got \$1,000 right here," the auctioneer said as he motioned in Russell's direction.

More laughter bubbled from my lips that I tried to muffle with my hand. He was really spending \$1,000 on a painting that he could do himself? Not that I knew anything about his artistic talents but come on.

"Okay," I said to him. "What is this painting about?"

Russell blinked at me. "Pardon?"

"What is this painting about?" I repeated. "To me, it looks like a whole bunch of blobs and colors. They're not even pretty colors."

Cameron shifted closer to me. "Alison, what are you doing?"

I ignored him, keeping my attention on Russell.

"Well," he said, eyes flicking around at the people who were looking at us. "It's about confinement." He tore his attention away to bid \$2000.

"Confinement," I repeated. "Wow, how insightful."

Russell went red. “Look at the shapes, the way they are inside of each other. They’re confined by each other. It’s a metaphor.”

“A metaphor?” I echoed, trying not to laugh.

“Alison,” Cameron warned in a low voice.

“Yes, a metaphor for the prison industrial complex,” Russell said, then waved a hand. “I wouldn’t expect you to understand. Most people don’t get art — it’s nothing to feel insecure about.”

“Going once,” the auctioneer called out. “Going twice...sold! To Mr. MacArthur for \$2000.”

Everyone turned around to applaud Russell for his win.

“I,” I began, waving a finger at Russell, “think you” — my voice was slightly wobbly, a bit slurred. I hadn’t had that much to drink, had I? — “are full of shit.”

“Excuse us,” Cameron spoke up as he placed his hand on my back firmly, ushering me away from everyone and out of the ballroom.

“What are you doing? I need to see Russell write that check,” I told him as I started to draw away from him.

Cameron wrapped his arm around my waist, anchoring me to his side as he brought me out into the hallway, and then into an empty conference room. He shut the door behind us, blocking me from leaving. The noise and voices from the ballroom were completely muffled from here.

Page 15

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“Don’t move,” Cameron told me sternly. He walked over to a water cooler in the corner of the room and pour me a small cup. “Drink. You need to sober up.” He placed the paper cup in my hand.

I frowned. Talk about killing a good buzz.

With an annoyed sigh, I downed the whole cup of water, but he wasn’t done yet. He made me drink several more cups, and we remained in that room for what felt like an eternity.

“You’re sabotaging your reputation,” he said.

“Yeah, yeah,” I said, waving a floppy hand. I wasn’t in the mood to talk about this stuff.

“Have another,” he said, passing me another cup of water. I drank it, even though what I really wanted was more champagne. That, and to return to the ballroom to laugh at Russell.

“You can’t be sloppy and drunk like that. Not where people can see you,” he continued.

I rolled my eyes and made a talking hand with my mouth, signalling that I thought he was yapping nonsense.

He sighed. “You’re clearly still tipsy. Stay here. I’ll get you some food to sober you up.”

After he left, I considered ignoring him and returning to the ballroom. Who was he to boss me around? But suddenly, I couldn't be bothered. I wasn't as energized as I had been before, when I'd had a lot more champagne in my blood stream.

Finally, he returned, with a plate piled with canapés. "Here," he said, pushing me into one of the seats at the conference table, and placing the plate in front of me. "Eat."

I obeyed, not because I wanted to listen to him, but because the food did look really good. I hadn't realized how hungry I was. I quickly helped myself to the tower of bite-sized savory snacks, and as my stomach filled, I sobered up more and more, until I realized exactly what I had done, back in the ballroom. Embarrassment burned in my throat.

Oh god. I'd acted like a bitch. An immature, unprofessional bitch. No, I didn't care if I offended Russell and his stupid painting, but I'd behaved badly in front of Lindsey and Arthur and who knew who else.

"You can't act like that again," Cameron said, taking the seat across the table from me.

"I know," I snapped, because he didn't need to rub my face in it.

He didn't seem to notice my irritation. "I'll make excuses," he continued. "I'll say that you've had a rough day. That you've been exhausted from work."

"You will not," I said. "That makes me sound weak. Out of control."

"I think you're forgetting," Cameron said calmly, "that you were out of control and it was weak of you to get drunk within the first half an hour of arriving."

I stood up, my chair pushed back with an ugly screech. "Excuse me?" I demanded,

my palms flat on the table. “You can’t speak to me like that.”

He didn’t blink, just looked at me with that same unfazed expression, which infuriated me even more. He was supposed to apologize. Even if there was some truth to his words, I was still his boss. There were standards about how you were supposed to speak to employers.

“Never boss me around again or chastise me like a child,” I told him, ice in my voice.

“Then don’t act like a child.”

I walked around the table, so I was standing right by him. “I think you need to remember, Cameron, that I can fire you whenever I want.”

His jaw tensed for just a second, before the side of his mouth turned up. Was he...smiling? “You can’t fire me. You need me.”

No, I don’t. I don’t need you at all. In fact, most days I can barely stand you.

He was close enough that I could see the different shades of blue in his eyes, so vivid and clear like sapphires.

“There are hundreds, even thousands, of people out there with your same qualifications. Some with even better.”

He stood up, and I stumbled a step backwards. When he’d been sitting down, I’d almost forgotten how tall he was. Now he was at his full height, towering and looking down at me. “You don’t need someone with the best qualifications. You need someone who is brutally honest with you,” he said. “You need someone to look after you. I help you. I want to help you.”

I couldn't say anything. I felt frozen, staring up at him, as each of his words hit me deep in my chest like a bullet.

"I care about you," he said, more quietly.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

Then, as if in slow motion, he reached for my face, thumb tipping my chin up. My heart pounded, loud like a drum, my eyes widening in shock. This was the sort of thing that happened in dreams.

The logical part of me wanted to say no, to pull away, to remind him I was his boss. But the rest of me was overwhelmed with yes, with heat and wanting, and it felt like heaven when he finally lowered his head and kissed my lips.

CHAPTER SIX

Desire spread through me like wildfire, lighting up my senses and I kissed him back, hard and desperate. His hands roamed as our kiss deepened, his fingertips gliding down my back and along my sides. Just that simple touch made heat seep low in my stomach, and I leaned into him. He was intoxicating.

I wrapped my arms around his neck as his tongue pushed between my lips, making me moan. This felt ten times better than any fantasy that ever graced my mind. We were only kissing, but it was better than all the sex I'd ever had.

His hands slid upward, caressing the curves of my breasts through my dress. The action took me aback for a second, but I liked his forwardness. I liked him touching me like I was his, like he couldn't help himself. His thumb brushed my nipple through the thin fabric, feeling it stiffen, and he groaned, a deep erotic noise.

I could feel myself getting wet. I wanted to touch him more. I wanted to have him. I wanted it so much that it hurt, and I let out a pained whimper.

Suddenly, Cameron pulled away, the absence of his body heat leaving me cold.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

I blinked a few times, still dazed. “Nothing.”

“You sounded —”

“No, I...” I swallowed. I liked it.

Silence stretched out beneath us. Had I ruined the moment? I wanted to go back to the way things were.

“I’m sorry,” Cameron said, taking a step backwards.

I stared at him. “Sorry for what?”

“I don’t know what I was thinking,” he continued, not hearing me. “I — shit. I understand if you want me to resign —”

“Cameron,” I said, unable to keep the impatience out of my voice. His fearful eyes met mine. I didn’t want him to be afraid of me. I sighed. “You were right. I was a mess tonight. The truth is —” I pushed past all the voices in my brain shouting at me not to expose myself, not to look weak, not to tell him something he could use against me — “sometimes I’m just sick of this.”

“Of what?” he asked quietly.

I gestured at myself, then noticed that my dress was dishevelled, revealing far more of my cleavage than it was supposed to. I fixed it up, using my hand to smooth out some of the wrinkles. “Sick of being me. Sick of being a boss. Sick of being

responsible, and sick of being in control all the fucking time.” As soon as the words left me, I froze. I hadn’t meant to say it like that, hadn’t meant to curse. “I guess I reached my boiling point tonight and...slipped,” I admitted, staring at the floor because I didn’t want to look at him. “Sometimes I wish...someone else would take charge.” The words tumbled out before I could stop them.

It was true though. Sometimes I wanted to be lazy or selfish or reckless, but I never let myself, and even if I did, I wouldn’t be able to handle the guilt. I was supposed to know better than that. Besides, I was Alison Firth, businesswoman. I had to hold myself to certain standards.

I sensed Cameron step closer, but I kept my eyes lowered, embarrassed after blurting all that out. It wasn’t until he raised my chin that I was forced to look at him. He had a look in his eyes I’d never seen before. There was warmth, but also something darker there too. Determination, perhaps? Resolve?

Then he kissed me for the second time that night, and all my thoughts melted away. If I thought our first kiss had been desperate, this one was dirty. He kissed me hard enough I thought my lips might bruise. One hand played with one of my breasts, making me gasp against his lips, and his other hand grabbed my ass and squeezed.

I couldn’t do anything but hold onto him, grabbing onto his biceps as he kissed me ferociously. His hand on my backside moved to the front, pushing past the slit in my dress. I sucked my stomach in anticipation and felt his fingertips brush against the fabric of my thong. He pushed it aside, swiping a finger across my sex. I knew I was drenched, and now Cameron knew it too.

“Fuck,” he said. “You really love this, don’t you?”

I wasn’t sure what ‘this’ was supposed to mean, but I didn’t have time to think about it, because Cameron spoke.

“Get on your knees.”

I stared at him. “What?” I rasped.

“Get on your knees,” he repeated, placing both hands on my shoulders. I must’ve temporarily lost my mind, because when he began to gently push me down, I obeyed, my knees thudding as they hit the marble floor.

“Cam—” I began, looking up at him, but my attention was caught by the sight in front of me. The front of his pants were a mere inch from my face and he was hard. The bulge wasn’t small either. I shouldn’t have been surprised, since the rest of him was so big...

When I finally managed to look at his face, he didn’t look like he had lost his mind. In fact, he looked as calm and collected as usual, except for his eyes, which were slightly hooded.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

Without saying a word, he unzipped the front of his pants. I watched, frozen, as he pulled out his erection.

Oh,fuck.

His cock was thick and flushed a deep, angry pink. I'd never seen any like it before, and realized with horror that my mouth was watering. He smelled clean, like soap, but also masculine.

It was getting warmer and wetter between my legs with every second.

“What are you waiting for?” Cameron asked. “Suck it.”

I blinked up at him. “Suck it?” I repeated.

“Yeah.” His voice was lower than usual.

“Cameron, I...” I unconsciously wet my lips. God, his cock was huge, and it was right in front of me, almost touching my lips. If I stuck my tongue out, I would be able to taste him. “I don't understand,” I finished.

“What, you've never sucked a cock before?” he asked.

I shook my head. I had, but never like this.

“Come on, you know you want to,” he continued.

I whipped my head to look up at him, my brows drawn together. “What are you...what...I don’t...” God, I’d literally lost the ability to talk.

He reached down, pushing a hand gently through my hair. “You got so wet for me,” he said. “And now, you’re looking at me like you’re starving. You want someone to take charge. You don’t just want it — you need it.”

I parted my lips, but was unable to say something.

“When was the last time you got laid?” he continued. “Is it even possible to enjoy yourself, when you’re wound up so tight?” He smiled. “Just do what I say. Let me make all the decisions. Be a good girl for me.”

I wanted to, I really wanted to. But there was still a fragment of rationality left. “I can’t,” I whispered. “You’re my employee.”

His expression didn’t change — the reminder that he was my subordinate clearly didn’t bother him. “I’ve seen the way you look at me. You look at me like you’d crawl over burning coals to suck my cock.”

My stomach swooped at his filthy words.

“You want this,” he said.

Part of me wanted to get angry at his arrogance, but he was telling the truth. I did want this — in fact, I’d never felt so turned on in my life. It was as if every one of my bones was on fire.

I could stand up right now, walk out, and call for security to throw him out. I could fire him for sexual harassment. I could slap him and tell him he was out of his mind.

I could, but I didn't. I just kneeled there, barely noticing the uncomfortable marble underneath me, staring at his hard cock.

"Come on, Alison," Cameron said. "Make me feel good." A pause. "Or...are you waiting for guidance?"

Something in my expression must've answered him, because the next thing I knew, one of his hands was on the back of my head. He slowly pushed me forward, until my lips pressed against his erection, sending a shockthrough my body. I hesitated only for a second before giving in, opening my mouth and letting him slide in.

If he looked big, he felt twice as large between my lips. I widened my mouth as much as I could, but could only take half of him inside. For a moment, I adjusted to the size of him, then pushed back, letting saliva coat the length of him. As I pulled away, a string of spit connected my lips to the tip of his dick and I heard him groan above me.

Without wasting any time, I used both of my hands to spread the wetness all over his length. I was worried about losing balance but he kept me steady, hand gentle but firm on my head.

Once his entire cock was sufficiently slick, I took him in my mouth again, letting my tongue flatten against the heaviness of him while my hands moved up and down the base, rotating from side to side.

"Fuck," Cameron breathed. "Who knew you were so good at giving head?"

I looked up at him, and I probably looked ridiculous, lips stretched out, but his grip on my head tightened and I felt him pulse in my mouth.

"I shouldn't be surprised. I always knew that underneath it all, you were a slut."

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

His words made me shiver. If someone asked me yesterday whether I'd like it if a guy called me a slut, the answer would be hell no. But something about the way Cameron said it...

I bobbed my head up and down and he moaned, long and low.

“Such a good cocksucker, aren't you?”

I should have been offended. I should have felt humiliated. But his words, dirty as they were, were wrapped in pleasure and praise and I liked it. I was so, so wet.

I wish I had something to rub against, some friction, but there was nothing, nothing but flat, cold marble. Both of my hands were occupied. I desperately wanted something inside me, or something pressed against my clit, but I had nothing.

Well. If sucking cock was the only thing I could do, I'd do it well. I amped up the speed, letting the hardness between my lips get wetter and wetter until it was soaking with spit. Nasty, naughty noises filled the room — the sound of wetness and Cameron's groans.

If I couldn't touch myself, I'd chase those moans. Every noise he made went straight to my clit.

“Fuck, you're good,” he said. “Shit, Alison...”

Even though my mouth was full as it was, I tried hollowing my cheeks anyway, creating a suction.

He hissed, tipping his head back so I could see the column of his throat, the underside of his jaw. When he looked down at me, his Adam's apple bobbed.

“You look so hot like that. Do you know how long I've wanted to do this? Push you to your knees and force mycock into your pretty mouth? See those perfect lips stretch around me. You're so good. You're so fucking good. And you love it, don't you? Getting on your knees for your assistant. You're always bossing me around, pretending you don't like me, but look at you now. Look at you now,” he repeated, voice rough.

I whimpered. I could feel him throbbing, could taste salty pre-come on my tongue.

He gritted his teeth. Tightened his grip on my head, until he was almost tugging my hair. “I'm gonna cum,” he said, and the next moment, he shot down my throat.

I swallowed as quickly as I could, not wanting to gag. His hand loosened on my hair and he stood there, catching his breath.

I remained on my knees, breathing in deeply. My jaw hurt. My pussy pulsed.

Cameron tucked himself back into his pants and helped me up to my feet. I felt boneless, dazed.

“You did such a good job,” he told me, and kissed my forehead. “Come on. Let's go home.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Muffled voices echoed in the background. I was sure that my CFO was saying something fairly important about the company's finances, but I couldn't get my brain to focus on his words. All I could think about was Saturday night.

My fingers tightened around the arms of my chair as I sat at the head of the conference table, but I still wasn't able to pay attention to the meeting. The memory of myself on my knees in front of Cameron as he pushed his cock past my lips played on a loop in my mind over and over. When he took me home that night, I thought that he was going to come inside and take things further. Instead, he walked me to my door, kissed my forehead again, and left.

I spent all of Sunday in a confused daze, unsure if I made the whole thing up in my head or not. Part of me wished he'd stayed the night. I still wanted him. I still wanted more.

Maybe I needed to fire him, before things got messy. But deep down, I knew that I wouldn't.

I shifted a little in my seat, the air heating and growing heavier around me. I kept being brought back to that room when I felt his hands on my body, his lips on mine.

"Alison?"

I snapped out of my thoughts and straightened up in my seat. "Yes?"

Wyatt, my CFO, cleared his throat and glanced around at the others. "Did you have any thoughts to share about us going into this next quarter?"

Oh, damn it. I hadn't listened to a word they'd said. I released the arms of my chair and flexed my fingers, my mind working to come up with something on the spot. "Let's see... we did really well this past quarter, so we need to keep up the momentum for this next one."

Everyone around the table nodded, but I could tell they were expecting a different answer. Typically, I was prepared to give a motivating speech that encouraged

everyone to give every day their all because hard work always paid off in the end, but I wasn't in the game today.

Wyatt nodded and clasped his hands together. "Why don't we call it early, folks?"

I frowned a little, unable to help but feel disappointed in myself. I needed to be present and not distracted. How could I expect the best from my employees when I wasn't giving my work a hundred percent effort too?

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“Sure. We’ll pick up again next week,” I said as everyone nodded and grabbed their things.

It was too late to make up for my lack of participation and attention. Everyone filtered out of the conference room, and I was at the back of the line, mentally shaking my head at myself. This was why I couldn’t get involved with Cameron, or any other man. I couldn’t have personal matters distracting me from the most important thing in my life: my company.

“Want me to have the meeting notes sent to you?” Wyatt asked as he lingered by the doorway.

Embarrassment shot through me, but I kept my composure. “Yes, I’ll review everything later today.”

Wyatt nodded. He paused for a second like he wanted to say something else or ask me something, but changed his mind and left the room.

Everything was fine. I was just having one off day, but I’d be back on the ball tomorrow.

I headed toward my office, passing by one of the break rooms. That’s when I heard a familiar voice, and my stomach flipped. Inside, Cameron was standing by the coffee machine, making one of our graphic designers laugh. Our eyes immediately locked, and my cheeks went hot.

I hadn’t seen Cameron all morning, since I’d been in a meeting. This was the first

time I'd seen him since Saturday night.

Since we'd kissed.

Since I'd gotten on my knees for him.

Cameron didn't smile at me, the way he usually did at work. Instead, he gave me a long, knowing look. It reminded me of the way he'd looked down at me on Saturday. Not quite smug, but sure of himself. Above me. In control. Like he was my boss.

Not for the first time, I replayed what had happened that night. Why hadn't he stayed the night with me? Was it because he suddenly realized what a terrible idea it was? If so, why had it only occurred to him then, and not an hour before when he had his hand between my legs?

Or maybe...

Maybe I hadn't done a good enough job. I'd never had a reason to doubt my... skills, but it had been years. I could be out of practice. Embarrassment flushed through me at the thought.

But no. He'd praised me. You're so good. You're so fucking good. And afterwards, he kissed me on the forehead. "You did such a good job," he'd said.

I shook the memory of his voice from my head, and marched onwards. When I arrived at my office, I closed the door behind me a bit too hard, making one of the interns jump. Then, I closed all the blinds, so none of my employees would be able to see me through the glass walls. I wanted to hide away from the rest of the world — Cameron, especially.

What I needed to do was work. First, I read over Wyatt's meeting notes, which he

had emailed to me. Afterwards, I finalised a few contracts and electronically signed documents. Despite the familiarity of work, my shoulders remained tense, my jaw tight.

When I heard a knock on my door, my eyes snapped up as Cameron stepped inside, my body stiffening up. Obviously, I knew that I was going to have to come face to face with him at some point given his position, but I wasn't ready yet.

He set a cup of coffee in front of me before taking a step back from my desk, his expression blank. "The graphic design team will be sending you some mock-ups for Opportune Media's campaign to approve, and Matt Brandon from Paradise City Realty wants to arrange a meeting with you next week to start a new campaign."

All I could do was stare at him because he sounded completely normal. When he lifted an eyebrow at me, I rebooted my brain and nodded, setting myself back into business mode. We would pretend Saturday never happened. Good. That was what I wanted too.

Because Saturday was a mistake, and it could never happen again.

"I'll review the mock-ups. Set up a meeting with Mr. Brandon on whatever day you think works best," I told him.

"Done and done," he said. "What would you like for lunch? Cobb salad from Green Market or grilled chicken sandwich from Dally's?"

"I'll skip lunch, I've got too much work to do. I'll help myself to the snacks in the break room if I get hungry."

He frowned. "You can't skip lunch, Alison. You need the energy to get through the rest of the day."

“Cameron, I’ll be fine.”

“Coffee and a granola bar aren’t going to be enough. Don’t you want to perform your best?”

Why did he have to know me well enough to pitch my own motivations against me?

“Fine,” I gritted out. “A grilled chicken sandwich. But I’m eating at my desk.”

“I’ll pick it up for you,” he said, with a victorious smile.

I huffed and turned my attention back to my computer screen. In my periphery, Cameron remained standing.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“Was there anything else?” I asked.

He took a moment to reply, and my eyes briefly swept over his body, remembering how firm and strong he felt under my hands.

“You look stressed,” he said finally.

“Thank you. That’s exactly what a lady wants to hear.”

“No, I—” he cut himself off, shaking his head. For a second he looked...almost uncertain. “You seem more stressed than usual. Rochelle asked me if you were mad at her.”

“Who the fuck is Rochelle?”

“An intern,” Cameron explained. “She said youslammed the door, and I think she’s afraid she did something to upset you. She wondered if she was about to be fired.”

Right, Rochelle Fitzgerald, the college student majoring in advertising. Today wasn’t my day, because I usually remembered the names of all my interns.

“I didn’t slam the door, it was just an accident. I’m not going to fire Rochelle. Where would she even get that idea?”

He shrugged. “All the interns are a little bit afraid of you.”

“Afraid of me?” I repeated, incredulously. Yes, I could tell they were nervous during

interviews, but I always tried to be as friendly as possible to everyone.

Well, except for that day last week when I'd lost my temper a bit.

"You're their boss," Cameron said. "They look up to you. They don't want to disappoint you."

"What about you?" I asked.

"What about me?"

"Are you afraid of me?"

A corner of his mouth quirked up. "No."

That didn't surprise me. While other workers would sugar coat things, Cameron was always brutally honest with me.

"Do you look up to me?" I asked, half-joking.

"Of course, I do," he replied.

I stared.

He gave a self-deprecating laugh. "Why do you look so surprised? You're successful, smart, and hardworking. Of course I admire you."

My cheeks warmed. I was used to praise from coworkers and clients, but from Cameron it felt different. Maybe it's because he was always so relaxed and laid-back around me.

“Thank you,” I said, a little brusquely. I cleared my throat and forced my attention on my computer. “I should get back to work. I need to look at those mock-ups.”

Cameron didn’t go. “You didn’t give me a real answer, when I said you looked stressed.”

I met his gaze. “Of course I’m stressed. I’m stressed all the time, it’s a fact of life. Don’t worry about it.” My voice was sharp, but I was frustrated. He had walked into my office, acted like nothing had ever happened, then blurted out that he admired me. I felt confused, on edge, and yes, stressed, because I had a pile of work to get through and he was wasting my time, standing here talking to me.

“You should relax,” he said.

I barked a laugh. Telling someone to just relax was like telling a sick person to just get better.

“I’m fine,” I snapped.

To prove my point, I returned to my work, my fingers flying across the keyboard. He was still in the office but I ignored him, and eventually, I saw him start to walk away in the corner of my eye. But when he arrived at my door, instead of leaving, he locked it, and the sound of it echoed in the silent room.

Page 21

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

I swallowed hard. “What are you doing?” My voice was more wobbly than demanding.

Sure, my office door had a lock, but I almost never used it. Now, my heart started to race as possibilities bloomed in my mind.

He turned around and approached my desk. He looked completely blank, except for the glint in his eyes. It was the same look he’d had Saturday night. It was dangerous.

“Cameron?” I asked, as he moved around my desk. He whirled my chair around so I faced him, and stood so close that his legs almost brushed mine.

“I can help you,” he said quietly, lowering his head so we were eye level.

“Help me with what?” I replied, breathing shallowly.

He leaned forward, so his lips grazed my ear lobe. “I can help you relax.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

I held my breath as Cameron closed the distance between us, lust burning like fire through my body. I tried to fight against it, to remember what was at stake, what I could lose.

If word got out that I was having intimate relations with my assistant, no one would look at me the same again. They would say I took advantage of Cameron because I was his boss. I wouldn’t be ruining only my reputation, but my career as well. Firth

Marketing would be destroyed.

My breath hitched as Cameron slid a hand up my leg, his skin warm. I watched, speechless, as his fingertips disappeared under the hem of my skirt. I'd never thought of my thighs as particularly sensitive, but right then they were nothing but nerve endings.

"We can't," I managed. "Especially not here."

Slowly, he knelt down in front of me, the sight a mirror of my wet dream from all those nights ago. "No one will know," he said.

How could he sound so certain?

"The blinds are down," he continued, hand inching higher and higher. "The door's locked. The walls are soundproofed."

He rubbed one fingertip against the cotton of my underwear, and I sucked in a breath. I knew, just from the satisfied look on his face, that my underwear damp.

I swallowed, trying to pull myself together. "What about when you walk out of here? What if everyone just sees it on your face?"

He shook his head. "They won't. I'm good at pretending. I've pretended for years I don't want you with your legs spread for me." With that, he pulled my legs apart, gentle but firm. My skirt was still covering everything, but sitting like this made me feel exposed. Too exposed.

Perhaps Cameron saw it on my face because he paused. "Alison?" he said, letting go of me. Immediately, I missed his touch.

For a moment, I considered taking the opportunity and putting an end to this. I could tell him to leave. The rest of the day would go as planned. I would work, he'd leave my lunch on my desk, and I'd never have his hands on my thighs again.

I squeezed my eyes shut. "Just — hurry up," I gritted out.

He grinned, eyes glittering, and he immediately slid that hand back up between my legs, rubbing a finger up and down my slit through thin fabric. "I knew it," he whispered, looking up at me with satisfaction. I couldn't get annoyed at his smug expression, though, because there was happiness and relief in his eyes too.

"You're so tightly wound," he continued, and pressed his thumb on my clit. Even through my underwear, the touch made me jolt. "There's nothing I want more than to see you let loose."

He rubbed slow circles around my clit, and it wastorturous. I clutched the arms of my desk chair, my fingernails digging into the leather.

"Look at you. Relaxing already."

I did not feel relaxed. I wasn't sitting up straight in my chair like usual, but slumping against it, legs spread wantonly, wantingmore, but not letting myself beg for it. Every movement of his fingers made pleasure shoot through my body.

Finally, he pulled my panties down. They were black and looked tiny in his hand. For a moment, I wished I'd worn something nicer today, but I'd worn my usual plain underwear, the same kind I always wore to work.

Cameron though...he was staring at them like they were the sexiest lingerie he'd ever seen. After a moment, he returned his attention back to me.

“Want me to touch you, skin on skin?”

My stomach felt tight with anticipation, but I didn’t let myself nod.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

Cameron smiled anyway, like he could read my mind. “You don’t have to say anything. I’ll do what you want.”

He pushed my skirt up, so he had a better view of what he was looking at. I had a moment to feel embarrassed about being so utterly exposed, the air cool against my hot pussy, before he rubbed my clit, making my vision white out.

He was good at this, his fingers deft but gentle. I had to grit my teeth so I wouldn’t moan, but whimpering noises escaped me anyway. I’d missed this. I’d missed a man touching me this way.

“Good?” Cameron asked, grinning wickedly at me.

I made a muffled noise that was supposed to mean don’t stop.

His smile widened. “I’ve thought about doing this for a long time. Did you know that?” The rhythm of his fingers slowed, like he wanted me to pay attention. I blinked rapidly, trying to get control of myself.

“I remember the first time we met. It was for my interview, remember? You had your hair back in a tight ponytail. You were beautiful, of course, but even then I could tell you were uptight. Even back then, I wondered what you would look like when you lost control.”

Then, before I could respond, he pushed my thighs even more apart and pressed his hot mouth flush against my center. I gasped, pleasure rolling through my entire body as his tongue caressed me, adding to the wetness that was already there.

I couldn't help myself — I moaned helplessly, and had to slap a hand over my mouth when he licked my clit. Sensation crackled through me, leaving behind tingly warmth.

His mouth moved down, teasing my entrance with the tip of his tongue. Oh god. He — he wasn't going to, was he?

“C-Cameron.” My voice was shaky.

He pulled away and looked up at me. “Yes?”

I tried not to notice how shiny his mouth was.

“I can't believe you're doing this.”

“I'm your personal assistant,” he said. “It's my job to deal with all your needs.” He lowered his head and thrust his tongue inside me, and one of my hands flew to his hair, gripping the soft strands as he tongue-fucked me with enthusiasm, eating me out like he was starved.

He hummed in pleasure as I tugged on his hair, the vibration rumbling against my sensitive clit.

“Oh...” I lightly gasped as I tilted my head back, my legs beginning to shake. With every lick and tease, more and more heat generated within my body, spreading to every single inch of me.

He dragged his tongue over me before sucking my clit, applying just the right amount of pressure to make me buck my hips against him. He tightened his hold on my thighs, anchoring me in place.

A faint whine sounded in the back of my throat, my back arching as much as it could while I sat in the chair. My fingers curled in his hair, lightly pulling when my pleasure peaked higher and higher. He pushed a finger inside of me, and I gasped. The pressure intensified as he added another finger, thrusting them deep as his tongue continued to roll against my clit.

Something tightened in my stomach. I was about to shatter.

Cameron curled his fingers just right, and bliss ravaged my entire shaking body, my toes curling as I came. Cameron dragged my orgasm out for an additional moment, pressing a lingering kiss against my clit and slowly sliding his glistening wet fingers out of me. His eyes locked on mine as he placed the fingers in his mouth, licking them clean.

God. He was trying to kill me.

After a minute, I became aware that I was a panting puddle of a person. How long had it been since I came that hard?

Cameron smiled up at me. He was still kneeling on the carpet. “Was that good for you?”

“Fuck,” I said.

“I’ll take that as a yes.” He looked so pleased, so proud of himself. He stood up, visibly hard through his pants.

I couldn’t move, my legs still like jelly. But slowly, the warm aftermath of my orgasm faded away, and all the stress I had earlier came rushing back.

We just broke several company rules in the workplace. It was one thing getting

involved with each other outside of work, but this was a whole other level of policy violation.

I pushed myself to my feet, stumbling a little as my legs threatened to give out. I grabbed the edge of my desk for stability, only for Cameron to place his hand over mine. My eyes shot up to his. “This can’t happen again,” I said.

He frowned. “I thought you enjoyed it.”

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

I pulled my panties off the floor and pulled them up. My skirt was wrinkled, and I smoothed the fabric out with my hands. “I did,” I said, not looking at him, “but this is inappropriate.”

“Why?” He sounded hurt. “We’re two consenting adults.”

I shot him a frustrated look. Was he being dense on purpose? “Because I’m your boss!” I said. “You could sue me for sexual harassment, for god’s sake.”

“I came onto you,” he said.

“Yeah, like a judge will care about the technicalities,” I said sarcastically. “It’ll look like I’m abusing my power as your employer.”

“I’d never sue you,” he said quietly.

“If people found out, I’d be ruined,” I said. “It’d be a scandal.”

“Men fuck their secretaries all the time, and no one blinks an eye,” he said.

“That doesn’t make it ethical.”

Cameron looked at me for a long time. I thought he might argue, but in the end, he just nodded. The air between us flattened and died. I felt like a cruel bitch, putting an end to this when he’d just made me feel so good. When he’d looked so proud of himself. But I had to make things clear, because this couldn’t become a habit.

“I’ll let you get back to work, then,” he said. With that, he left the office, closing the door behind him.

I remained in the silent room, shielded away from the rest of my company. For a moment, I felt unbearably lonely, but I pushed the emotion down. I’d made the right decision.

CHAPTER NINE

I woke up in a sweat again for what felt like the hundredth time this week. My legs were tangled in my white sheets, making my bed look like I actually experienced the sex I couldn’t stop dreaming about.

I groaned as I covered my flushed face with my hands. It was bad enough that I had to deal with being around Cameron during the day at the office. Ever since that day in my office, it had been incredibly awkward between us. I couldn’t bear to stand too close to him. Even sitting together in the back of the company car made me feel flustered, because I’d guiltily remember all the things we’d done together.

Now, I couldn’t even find peace in my sleep. I’d just dreamed that we were in this very bed. He was stretched over me, strong and muscly, and he’d been fucking me so good.

My heart fluttered at the thought, the sensation trailing down into the depths of my stomach and between my thighs. I shook my head at myself and sat up. Stop it. What’s wrong with you?

Why was I so desperate to feel his touch in the first place? Sure, he was hot as hell, but there were plenty of good-looking guys in the world.

Maybe I just needed to get laid.

I had basically zero social life. I worked a lot and barely took vacations. It was only natural that I'd ache for the man who I spent most of my time with.

All I had to do was burn off my pent-up desire with someone else.

So, what were my other options? I needed someone who would be down for some fooling around. Someone who was good looking enough, but definitely not someone who I'd catch feelings for.

Russell's face floated in my mind, and I sighed. Sure, he was good-looking, but his personality was not my favorite.

Then again, I supposed I wouldn't have to hear him talk much if we were having sex.

Eventually, I managed to fall back asleep. Once I woke up, I called Russell before I could lose my nerve.

"Hello?" Russell answered, some noise in the background.

"Hey, Russell. It's Alison," I said, my voice more energetic than I felt. "How are you?"

"Ah, hello, Alison," Russell replied, his tone humming with interest. After I spoke to him at the auction, I was surprised that he was even entertaining me. "I'm good, just at the gym. I always get a workout done in the morning. It does wonders for my productivity for the rest of the day."

"That's wonderful," I said. "What are you doing tonight?"

"Why do you ask?" He sounded sly. "Do you have something in mind?"

Page 24

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

I took a deep breath. I was going to look desperate, but it didn't matter, not when I had to fix my sexual frustration. "Would you like to meet up for drinks later? Say, seven o'clock?"

"Well, well," he said, a smile in his voice.

I was glad I couldn't see his smug expression. "Yes or no?" I said.

"Count me in. Let's meet at Vine and Nectar," Russell told me.

Of course. One of the fanciest bars in the city. There was no harm in trying something new, though, right? I could stand to enjoy an overpriced drink in a beautiful, bright venue if it took my mind off my troubles.

"Perfect," I said. "See you there."

I hung up and dropped my phone back onto my bed, hoping that I made the right choice.

For the rest of the day, I worked in my home office, exercised in my building's gym, and tried to keep myself busy until it was time to get ready. After I showered, I opened up my drawer where I kept my panties, bras, and other pieces of lingerie, my eyes skimming over my options. I wanted to dress to impress tonight. I picked out a black, lace set with a thong. It would do nicely, especially paired with the black bodycon dress I had in mind.

I got dressed and did a few turns in front of my full length mirror, smiling a little at

the deep V-neckline that was covered just enough to entice Russell to want to see more. The bottom of my dress stopped a little past mid-thigh, certain to have his eyes roaming.

Sure, I was wrapping myself up and presenting myself like a present, but this was what I wanted. This was what I needed to stop my steamy dreams.

Maybe I was sort of using Russell, which made me feel a flicker of guilt, but even if I was honest about using him to get another guy off my mind, he would probably still be game to fuck me. I had seen the way he looked at me.

When I arrived at Vine and Nectar, I found it looked exactly like it had sounded: expensive wooden furniture and golden hanging lights. Round tables and booths of people filled most of the space, but the bar was circular and huge. Jazzy, sophisticated music floated in the slightly warm air as I walked toward the bar.

I spotted Russell and took the seat beside him. “Hey,” I said, flashing him a small smile.

His eyes swept over me. “Wow. Look at you.”

I felt a stir of confidence inside of me, prompting my smile to bolden. Tonight could be fun if I allowed it to be. “Thank you. You look nice too.”

He wore a light tan suit with a silk, olive green pocket square, and his hair was neat and slicked back from his face. The smell of his aftershave was nice too.

This could work, I told myself.

Russell grinned and flagged down the bartender. “Old fashioned for me. Manhattan for her.”

I wasn't the biggest Manhattan fan, and it bothered me that he ordered me, but I'd let it go for now. I was here for one thing only.

"Thanks for meeting me here on such short notice," I told him as I angled my body more toward him and crossed my legs.

"Of course. I couldn't say no."

"Why's that?" I asked, tilting my head.

Russell gestured to me. "You don't say no to a woman who looks like you."

"Something tells me you don't get told no a lot either."

Russell chuckled and shrugged. He nodded to the bartender when he set our drinks down in front of us. After taking a sip of his whiskey, Russell turned back to me, his hand brushing the back of my arm. "I have a lot to offer a woman."

"Like?" I asked before sipping on my Manhattan, forcing myself not to grimace at the taste of whiskey.

"I can buy them whatever they want. Get them connections with whoever they want," Russell replied with a satisfied smirk. "I've helped out quite a few people. I could help you out too."

I thought he was going to talk about what he could offer physically, not what he could offer in the realm of business or money.

If I really gave it some thought about what he would be like in bed, it probably wouldn't be too different from how he acted outside of the bedroom: selfish. And not selfish in a hot, assertive manner like Cameron when he ordered me down on my

knees to please him. The type of selfish where he would focus on getting himself off before even thinking about trying to please me.

I took a deep breath. I'd got dressed up and came all the way out here. I was going to give him a chance. Who knew? Maybe he'd surprise me.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“I’m not looking for that type of help,” I assured him as I rested my hand on my bare knee, drawing his eyes to the few inches of exposed thigh that my dress didn’t cover.

“I could help you scale your business more. People let pride get to their heads. They refuse to ask for help and seek counsel. Don’t be naive like them.”

I took another sip to cover up my irritation. I was trying to throw hints left and right, but he was so blinded by his reputation and his money.

Wait. Was I just like him? When people looked at me, did they see a woman who also only cared about business, success, and cash? The thought stunned me into silence for a moment.

Eventually, I found my voice. “I’d rather not talk about business,” I said, forcing a light smile onto my face.

Russell raised an eyebrow at me. “Too stressful?”

“No. I just don’t like to mix business and pleasure.”

He gave me a sly smile.

“Besides, it’s important to have a life outside of work,” I continued, which was laughable. I was the least qualified person to say that.

He nodded. “I agree. I often golf with my buddies or go out to restaurants.” He started talking about all the exclusive places he’d dined at.

I nodded as I listened to him, waiting for him to ask me a question, but he never did. After his review of every restaurant in the city, he spoke about his luxury watch collection and then the sports car he wanted to buy.

As minutes turned into an hour, I lost my patience. I'd forgotten how self-absorbed he was. This was a terrible idea. Why had I chosen him?

I finished up my drink, not even feeling a buzz.

"Want another drink?" Russell asked as I set down my empty glass.

I shook my head. "I'm done for the night."

Russell checked the time on his watch. "The night is still young." He shot me a suggestive look. "Come home with me."

The opportunity that I prepared for was right in front of me. All I had to do was accept and let him whisk me away to his penthouse or wherever he stayed. He'd probably give me an hour long tour, pointing out all the expensive furniture, before leading me to his bedroom.

Did I really want to listen to him talk even more just to get laid?

The answer was clear: no.

"I'm sorry, Russell," I said, feeling guilty since I'd totally wasted his time. "I need to head home."

His face screwed up. "What do you mean? You dress up for me like this and flirt with me, but you don't want to come home with me. Are you playing some sort of game?"

“I’m more tired than I thought I’d be. I had a big day.”

We both knew it was a lie.

Russell scoffed and tossed some money on the bar. “Goodnight, Alison,” he said, and walked out without sparing me a second glance.

I watched him leave feeling genuinely guilty — I hated having my time wasted too — but also relieved. I must’ve temporarily lost my mind to think having anything to do with Russell would be a good idea.

Once I stepped out of the bar, I looked up and down the street as the dark night sky loomed overhead, pleased to see that the sidewalks were well-lit. A walk to clear my head wasn’t a bad idea.

I started down the street, passing by closed shops and busy restaurants and bars. I ventured west, the buildings becoming older. That’s when I noticed the street sign on the corner. Clermont Street.

This was Cameron’s street.

I hadn’t ever been to his place before, but I recognized the street name from his employee file. Unable to help my curiosity, I wandered on, checking the specific addresses of the apartment buildings before heading to the left where a four-story building was wedged between a laundromat and a sandwich shop. This was it. This was his building.

I lingered outside, staring at the intercom box next to the front door. What was he doing right now? Watching TV? Reading a book? Cooking?

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

Or maybe he wasn't even in. Maybe he was out at a bar, flirting with a beautiful woman.

Before I could stop myself, I hit the call button on the intercom.

CHAPTER TEN

"Hello?"

I froze at the sound of Cameron's voice leaving the small speaker. What was I doing?

"Hi, Cameron. It's Alison," I said, my stomach flip-flopping. "I was in the neighborhood and just... wanted to talk."

"Oh," Cameron replied, sounding surprised. "Of course. I'll buzz you in. I'm up on the third floor."

When I heard the door unlock, I headed inside and ventured up the stairs until I reached the third floor. The hallway smelled like cleaning supplies, and the wooden floor creaked under my feet as I headed down the hall.

I didn't know what to say to him. Where would I even start?

When I reached his unit, I knocked. The door opened a few seconds later, and Cameron appeared in the doorway with a warm smile on his face. This was the first time that I had seen him in casual clothes, specifically a white t-shirt and gray sweatpants, and he still looked strikingly handsome.

“Sorry I just showed up out of nowhere,” I apologized. “Are you busy?”

Cameron shook his head before motioning for me to come inside. “No, not at all.”

I followed him through the foyer where it split into an open space. It looked like a typical one-bedroom apartment, but it was clean and tidy from what I could see. “Nice place.”

Cameron glanced over his shoulder at me, his smile weaker than normal. “Oh, thanks. It’s nothing much.”

It seemed pretty homey to me. It smelled nice too, like he’d just cooked something.

As I trailed him out of the foyer, I started conjuring up all the courage I had. It was time to say something. After taking a breath, I parted my lips to speak—

But the words never came because a noise from the kitchen caught my attention. Someone else was here: a woman, cooking dinner. She was the supermodel from the restaurant.

I froze in place, my stomach dropping.

He wasn’t sad or hung up on me. Not when he had her.

I looked between him and her, rethinking everything that happened between us. My stomach twisted, and I started to step back, especially when the woman turned and smiled at me over her shoulder. How was she not fazed by me? Did she even know who I was?

Before I could flee the apartment and try to preserve what was left of my dignity, Cameron took my hand and led me down a short hallway to his bedroom. He turned

on a floor lamp and shut the door behind him, stopping me from leaving.

I spun around to face him, my heart briefly stopping when I realized how close we were.

“What’s going on, Alison?” Cameron asked me, stepping closer. “Is it a work emergency?”

I shook my head. “There’s no emergency. Is that woman out there your girlfriend?”

Cameron looked so surprised that it caught me off guard. “What? Riko?” He shook his head quickly. “She’s my cousin. Well, technically my step-cousin. She comes over and makes me food every once in a while. I don’t ask her to — she insists.”

“I remember seeing her with you at The Cavallino.”

“I took her there for her birthday.”

My skin went hot with embarrassment. “I’m sorry. I jumped to conclusions.”

A slow grin spread across his face. He took a step closer, raising a brow at me. “Were you... jealous?”

My cheeks must’ve been bright red. I didn’t say anything, but I didn’t have to.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

There was a knowing look on Cameron's face, and he wasn't afraid to let his eyes stray, allowing them to roam over my figure and sultry attire.

The silence lingering between us deepened and intensified, my chest tensing with each nervous breath.

"I'm heading out! Food is in the fridge!" Riko called from the kitchen, breaking the silence.

"Thank you, Riko," Cameron called back, before turning back to me. When the front door opened and shut a few seconds later, he smiled and reached out for me, his hands resting on my hips. "You look incredible. Where were you going dressed like this?" he asked in a low voice.

I couldn't lie.

"I went out to get a drink with someone. Russell McArthur, if you remember him."

Cameron frowned. "From the charity auction."

"I was trying to get you off my mind," I admitted.

Cameron lifted his eyebrows in surprise. "But you're here now."

I couldn't meet his eyes. "Again, I'm sorry for showing up out of the blue. This is so unprofessional — "

Cameron pressed a finger to my lips, cutting me off. “Don’t apologise. And Alison? Let’s make a promise not to talk about work or professionalism right now.”

“Okay,” I whispered.

Cameron slid his hands around to the small of my back, coaxing me closer until there were mere centimeters between our bodies. “I’m glad you came,” he whispered.

My hands glided up his strong arms, my fingertips tracing the grooves of his biceps. “Yeah?”

Cameron leaned closer, his lips brushing my jaw. That single touch stole the breath out of my lungs, and my eyes fluttered shut. He closed the distance between us, his lips capturing mine in a heated kiss.

My breath hitched, but I didn’t even care about oxygen right now. All I cared about was how good it felt to kiss him.

Cameron grabbed the back of my thighs, easily picking me up and carrying me over to his bed to drop me down onto the sheets, which smelled like they’d been freshly laundered. He pulled his shirt off in one swift motion, and I stared, open-mouthed. This was the first time I’d seen him shirtless. Sure, there’d been that moment in the rain several weeks back, when his soaked shirt hinted at his muscles. But now, seeing all that skin, all those hard ridges...

My mouth felt like it was literally salivating.

He crawled over me, pushing me down on my back. “You look so sexy in this dress,” he said in a low voice, dragging a possessive hand down the length of me. He buried his face in my neck, leaving open-mouthed kisses against every sensitive spot that he found until I was squirming beneath him.

“Cameron,” I whimpered.

He slipped a hand under me and unzipped my dress, slowly peeling it off my body to reveal the lacy lingerie I had on underneath.

Suddenly, he paused, ripping me out of the moment.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, panic spiking.

He slipped a finger in the hem of my thong. “You put this on for Russell McArthur, didn’t you?”

I nodded. “I don’t know what I was thinking,” I said honestly. “It should’ve been for you.”

“Promise me you won’t even think of going to him again,” he said. “If you ever need to get fucked, come to me. I’ll take care of you.”

“Okay,” I said, feeling slightly breathless. “I promise.”

“Good girl,” he said.

Warm pride spread throughout my body as I leaned up to press a gentle kiss against his chest, my fingers roaming over his firm abs. I had thought about doing this more times than I could count.

Cameron breathed in deeply as I kissed my way lower, his fingers sifting into my hair. He tightened his grip and coaxed me to lift up before I could reach the waist of his pants. “Take off your bra and lay back.”

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

Obediently, I unclasped my bra and tossed it to the side before laying down, lifting my hips so he could slide my thong off. Goosebumps covered my skin as the cool air washed over me.

Cameron leaned down and took one of my already hardnipples into his mouth, sucking firmly as his hand caressed my other breast.

My eyes slid shut as I focused on how good his mouth felt. The softness of his tongue. The warmth of his lips. Arousal pulsed between my thighs as he flicked his tongue against my nipple, heightening my sensitivity even more.

Cameron lightly dragged his teeth along my other nipple, coaxing a gasp from my lips. A coy grin crossed his face as he squeezed my breasts, caressing every inch of my soft flesh. “Enjoying yourself?”

I attempted to roll my eyes, but was immediately distracted by his fingertips lightly pinching my nipples.

“Cameron,” I moaned.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” he said. “I’ll make it good for you. I’ll make this so good there’s no way you’ll regret it. I’ll make it good, as good as you deserve.” He took my hand and kissed the inside of my wrist.

Despite the fact I was completely turned on, the action pulled me out of the haze of sex and lust, and made my heart flutter. His words...his lips on my wrist...

It felt romantic. Sure, I'd spent the past few years lusting after him, but in that moment, I felt more.

Cameron pressed a lingering kiss against my lips, and my thoughts dissolved. "I've been dying to taste you again."

I made a noise that was a mix of a moan and whimper as my gaze shifted down to his insanely talented mouth. "Please."

In one smooth motion, Cameron lay down on the bed and pulled me on top of him, so I was sitting on his face, my hot pussy pressing against his chin. I felt my cheeks go hot and pink. "A-are you sure?" I asked.

I tried hovering, so I wasn't crushing him with my weight, but he grabbed the top of my thighs and anchored me down. "Don't hold back," he murmured, before pressing his mouth flush against my center. His tongue dragged through my folds and over my clit, licking me from top to bottom like he didn't want to miss a single inch of me.

I nearly doubled over at the wave of pleasure. "Oh, fuck," I breathed, reaching down and gripping his hair as my body heated up more and more as he sucked and licked.

Cameron pushed his tongue inside of me before lapping at my clit, my wetness covering his lips and chin. He didn't seem to mind in the slightest, putting all of his concentration into getting me closer to orgasm.

Soon, I was mindlessly grinding against his face as the bliss ramped up. His tongue was so damn talented.

Why had I put an end to this back in my office? We could've been doing this all week.

No, why hadn't I shown up at his place sooner? I could've come months ago, years ago, and asked him to make me come. Now, I knew that he would have obliged me.

I rocked against him frantically, and Cameron groaned.

I stilled. "I'm not too heavy, am I?" I asked, worried for a second that his groan was from pain rather than pleasure.

In response, he dug his hands into my thighs, forcing me even closer to him. I let out a squeal of surprise, then glanced over my shoulder. There, clear as day through the fabric of his sweatpants, was his erection. He was hard as hell.

The sight worked me up that much more, injecting me with confidence and arousal. I tightened my grip on his hair and angled my hips, my clit grazing his tongue with every rock.

He gave me everything that I needed and soon I was moaning uncontrollably. "Cameron... oh..."

A blissful gasp tore from me as I came, shuddering against him as the pleasure took control of my body.

Cameron grabbed my ass, holding me still as he ran his tongue over me one more time to savor my taste. Afterwards, he dropped his head back against the bed, grinning with my wetness glimmering on his face. "I could do that for hours."

I lay down beside him, exhaling heavily. After a minute when my heart rate had slowed down, he leaned over to kiss me. I gently bit his bottom lip in a teasing bite, drawing a faint moan from him. I slid my hand past the waistband of his pants and to curl my fingers around his thick base. He was hot and heavy against my skin.

“Fuck,” Cameron hissed out as I started stroking his hard cock. “Every night I’ve been thinking of you doing this.”

“Yeah?” I rubbed my thumb around the sensitive tip of his cock.

He gritted his teeth. “Yeah. I’ve been dreaming of burrowing my cock inside you.”

I rubbed circles around his tip, soon feeling pre-cum leak. “I’ve been dreaming of that too. Of you, pounding into me —”

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

The next thing I knew, he was on top of me. He shoved his sweatpants and briefs down, freeing his gorgeous cock, before reaching over to grab a condom out of the drawer of his nightstand.

I released a shaky exhale, my anticipation rising as he rolled the condom on before pulling my thighs around his hips. The moment his cock glided through my folds and over my clit, I moaned needily. He was hot and thick and hard, and I was going to explode if he didn't fuck me in the next ten seconds.

Cameron grabbed the base of his cock and pressed the head of it against my entrance. As he slowly pushed inside of me, his face was overtaken by pleasure as I took him inch by inch.

My breathing faltered as I adjusted to the size of him, but bliss quickly overtook the slight discomfort of the stretch. Once he was fully sheathed inside of me, I felt my body pulse around him. "I can't believe this is finally happening," I blurted out.

Cameron smiled as he ran his hands up and down my thighs, caressing my bare skin to help me relax. "Finally? I would've fucked you any time you asked."

I shook my head instinctively, because that was ridiculous.

"I would've," he insisted. "From the very first moment I saw you, at that interview."

I stared, speechless.

"I would've bent you over the table and railed you. Your hair was in a ponytail,

remember? I would've gripped it while I made your legs shake."

I opened my mouth to respond, but before I could, he started thrusting in and out of me, making me lose my breath.

"You're so wet for me," he groaned, watching his cock disappear inside of me over and over. He began to thrust even deeper and harder.

I couldn't help my moaning as I tilted my head back, enjoying every second. There was no way that I was going to last long. I was still sensitive from my first orgasm, so it wouldn't take much for him to throw me over the edge again.

Cameron's eyes darkened, pure desire filling them. He leaned over me, planting one hand next to my head and pushing my legs back toward me.

It was a good thing I was flexible because he folded me, pressing my thighs against my chest as he pounded into me. I didn't even care about my muscles slightly burning, not when the pleasure was so intense.

Cameron pushed his free hand into my hair, curling his fingers around the long strands and pulling me into a deep kiss. He didn't slow his pace, fucking me into his mattress without hesitation, and I let him. I surrendered to him, trusting him to take control. Every move that he made was the right one, nudging me closer and closer to my second orgasm.

"So good," I whimpered into our kiss.

Cameron kissed along my jaw and into the crevice between my neck and shoulder. "You feel incredible. Do you want to come again?"

I nodded fervently, already feeling that familiar tension low in my stomach.

Cameron grinned, but there was deviousness in his smile. “I asked you a question. I want you to tell me your answer. Use your pretty voice.”

If anyone else bossed me around like he did in the bedroom, I would’ve slapped them across the face. But when it was Cameron, I could’ve listened to him talk forever. “I want to come again. Please, make me come again.”

Cameron released my hair, his hand gliding down my body. His fingertips trailed down my throat and collarbone before squeezing my breast, making my back arch. “That’s exactly what I want you to do. I want you to come all over my cock.”

My stomach flipped and tensed. I was going to lose control.

Cameron reached between my thighs and rubbed his fingertips against my clit, making me toss my head back with a moan. “There you go. Come on, baby.”

I barely had a chance to register the pet name before my body was convulsing, and I cried out, giving into him. After the initial big wave of ecstasy, I was reduced to trembles and shaky breaths. My nails pressed into his back as he leaned down, crashing his lips against mine just as he finished with a groan.

I whimpered in tired bliss as his cock pulsed inside of me, a blanket of warmth settling over me as our kiss became more tender.

Cameron pressed his forehead against mine, only pulling away from our kiss so that he could catch his breath. “I really can’t get enough of you,” he whispered.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

As Cameron discarded the condom and cleaned up, I remained lying in his bed, too tired to even sit up. When he returned and pulled me against his chest with his arms

wrapped around me, it was even more difficult to convince myself to leave.

Comfortable silence settled in the room as my eyes swept around, taking in a few details that I liked. A framed picture of Cameron and his family. Several business and fiction books on his bookshelf. His work outfit for Monday already hanging up on his wardrobe door.

I knew a little bit about him from the small talk we'd exchanged over the years, but there were still so many details I didn't know. So much could be found out about someone from what was in their home, and this was the first time that I had ever been here.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

But I knew I shouldn't get comfortable here. In his bedroom. In his arms.

Cameron rubbed my upper arm like he could tell that my mood had shifted. "What is it?"

I turned my head to look at him. "This was a bad idea." My voice was weak.

Cameron frowned. "Do you regret it?"

"No," I said quickly. "Rationally, I should, but..." I trailed off. Emotionally, I'd wanted this. I'd needed it. "It's just a lot," I finished.

The corner of his mouth curled up as he gazed into my eyes, looking at me like I was the only person in the world who mattered. "Talk to me. I can't read your mind."

I raised an eyebrow at him. "Are you sure? I'm pretty sure it's in your job description."

He smiled. "If we were in the office, that'd be one thing, but this is different."

He was right. This was way different.

"I never expected you to want me like this," I admitted.

"I told you. I've wanted you from the day we met."

I blushed. "I remember that day too. I thought you were very handsome."

Cameron chuckled and gave me a playful squeeze, pulling my bare body even closer to his. “I know. You weren’t good at hiding that.”

My mouth parted. “What?”

Cameron’s laugh deepened, the sound making my stomach flutter. His laugh was lovely — deep and rich, and I was weirdly proud to make him laugh. “You tried to hide it by being all curt with me, but I always caught you staring at me for a little bit too long.”

My face burned. “If I stared, it’s because I found you irritating. Not because...”

His laugh deepened. “Alright, Alison.”

He clearly wasn’t buying it. Oh my god. Had I really been that obvious? I covered my face with my hands. “Oh, God.”

“It was cute!” Cameron locked his arms around me, nudging my hands away from my face so that he could cover it with kisses.

His lips tickled, making me giggle as I tried to wiggle away. My stomach ached. I couldn’t remember the last time that I laughed this hard.

When Cameron finally took mercy on me and released me, I caught my breath and slumped back against his strong chest, enjoying how warm and firm he felt. I could’ve laid there with him forever.

Cameron kissed my temple as we settled, a moment of silence passing before he spoke again. “You’re not just beautiful and incredibly sexy, though. You’re hardworking and determined and clever.”

My heart skipped a beat. I hadn't expected his compliments to mean so much. When Russell had complimented me, it was like rain rolling off glass — no impact, no lingering. But when Cameron did it, his words seeped deep where I could truly feel them.

"I admire a lot about you," he continued. "Even if I wasn't crazy about you, I would be grateful for my job just because I got to work next to someone like you."

His words stole my breath, leaving me speechless for a few seconds. I pulled away from him so that I could turn and face him better. "I don't know what to do," I murmured.

Cameron frowned and took my hand, his thumb grazing over my knuckles. "What do you mean?"

"What is this?" I gestured between us. "A casual thing? A one-night —"

"No," he interrupted, then gave me a small, shy smile. "I mean, it's up to you. But I don't want this to be some random hookup."

"Then what?" I asked, breathless.

"I want..." for a second, he looked uncertain. Even scared. "I want to give this a real try. Us. Dating."

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“I...”

His brow furrowed. “It’s okay if you don’t want to —”

“No,” I said firmly. “No, I...I want to try this too.” My heart was pounding with fear, but excitement too.

In all my fantasies, Cameron had only fucked me. But now he wanted to give an actual relationship a try?

Cameron smiled, and the sight of it made my heart squeeze. “I know things aren’t that simple. I know work me complicates things.”

Suddenly, my excitement faded. When I thought about us being together romantically, a whole line of roadblocks appeared.

“I worked hard to build Firth Marketing from the ground up. I put everything into it,” I murmured.

He nodded. “I know. I would never jeopardize your career. It’s part of who you are.”

It felt like almost all of me. It consumed my life, and I let it because I worked so damn hard for it. How could I put it on the back burner when I gave up so much for it?

“But this could jeopardize your career too,” I said, not wanting him to ignore the possible repercussions on his side too. He could go far, but it would be difficult if he

had the reputation of sleeping with his boss.

“I don’t want to quit,” Cameron said. “I like working for you.”

I squeezed his hand. “Withme,” I corrected.

His expression softened. “With you.”

“I don’t want things to be ruined for us professionally,” I explained, trying my best to find a middle ground. “But I do really like you.”

Cameron sighed and leaned forward, pressing his forehead against mine for a few seconds. “Why don’t we just give things a try? Let’s just not tell anyone.”

“Keep this a secret? Wouldn’t that be difficult?” I asked.

Cameron shrugged. “Maybe, but it’s worth it to me. Just think about it. We date in secret and see how things go.”

It was a gamble. If we were caught, we might as well throw our careers in the dumpster because the reputation of the boss sleeping with the assistant would follow us forever.

But if we weren’t caught... we could give a relationship a real try. Just the thought of actually dating someone, even in secret, made my stomach flip.

I didn’t really plan on dating anyone any time soon. I let my friends send me on blind dates and entertained the thought of possibly dating, but it didn’t seem like an actual possibility, especially since the one man I wanted was off-limits.

Until now.

“You’re willing to take this risk?” I asked him.

Cameron nodded as he brushed his fingers along my cheek. “For you? Yes. I trust you.”

“I trust you too,” I told him without even having to think. Despite the risks, I knew Cameron would never use our relationship against me. He had grounds to report me, even sue me, but I knew, deep in my heart, he’d never do that.

“Let’s do it,” I said.

His smile brightened as he cupped my face. “Really?”

I couldn’t help but return his smile, happiness swelling in my chest. My hands moved to rest on his wrists as I leaned into him, letting my worries roll off my shoulders. “Really.”

He pressed his lips against mine, his eyes shutting as our kiss deepened.

When I kissed him, it was like the rest of the world fell away.

“You should stay tonight,” he murmured, his lips lightly brushing mine as he spoke.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“I wish I could,” I said, “but I have to get up early tomorrow. I’m having brunch with some friends.” And I knew that if I stayed the night, then I’d be...distracted tomorrow morning. As much as I wanted to indulge in morning sex with Cameron, I knew I should restrain myself.

“Alright,” Cameron said. “I’ll call you an Uber.”

I watched him use his phone, something warm and light stirring in my chest. I couldn’t believe this had happened. I couldn’t believe I was in this man’s bed right now.

“Five minutes away. I’ll walk you down,” Cameron told me as he shut off his phone. He got off his bed and held his hand out to me, helping me off the bed so that we could get dressed.

After I put my clothes on, a heavy sensation started to grow in my chest. I didn’t want to leave him, but a lot happened tonight. It wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world to have a moment alone to think.

Cameron walked up to me from behind, zipping up my dress before placing his hands on my hips. He kissed the back of my head, his chest pressing against my back. “You’re welcome to come by anytime.”

I turned around and pecked him on the lips, before taking his hand and letting him lead me out of his apartment.

We stood outside on the sidewalk together, streetlights combatting the darkness of

night. He put his arm around me as we waited for my Uber to show up, holding me like he didn't want to let me go.

"I'll see you on Monday," Cameron said.

Right. We had to go back to work soon, which meant we had to act like all of this had never happened. It would be difficult to pretend like nothing had changed over the weekend, but I was already used to hiding my feelings.

"Come over to my place after work," I said, the idea suddenly sparking in my mind.

He nodded and smiled. "Alright," he said.

I smiled too, but it faded when a white sedan rolled to a stop in front of us. We parted ways, shooting each other a bittersweet look. I wanted to kiss him goodbye, but what if someone saw? What if the Uber driver somehow knew us?

Stop it, Alison. You're being paranoid.

As I stepped into the Uber and put on my seatbelt, I told myself that I'd have to learn to manage my stress about our arrangement. It would either make or break us in the end. We would either fight hard to have something that worked, or it could end in disaster, burning us both.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I had to drag myself to brunch the next morning. I was excited to see my friends and catch up, but I hadn't gotten much sleep. I thought I'd fall asleep as soon as I crawled into bed, exhausted and sated by everything that had happened, but instead my mind stayed awake, racing with hopes and worries.

“Whoa, you okay?” Emilia asked as I dropped down into my chair at the round, wrought iron table outside of Sunny Side Eatery.

I pulled off my sunglasses, grimacing as the late morning sunlight burned my sensitive eyes. “Yeah, sorry. I didn’t get much sleep last night.”

“Work?” Brooke asked, shooting me a sympathetic look.

I shook my head. “No, not work for once.”

Emilia raised an eyebrow at me. “What is it then?”

Before I could answer, the waitress came over to take our orders. I ordered a mimosa and a spinach and mushroom omelet for myself, then Emilia and Brooke ordered.

After the waitress left, they gave me confused looks.

“If I tell you,” I began, “you have to promise to keep it a secret.”

“Of course,” Brooke said. “When have we ever spilled?”

That was true. We’d been friends for years, sharing all kinds of secrets, and none of us had ever betrayed each other by sharing secrets. I took a deep breath, knowing I could trust them.

“I slept with Cameron last night.”

Whatever they were expecting, it wasn’t that, because their jaws dropped.

“What?” Emilia gasped.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“I need a full story,” Brooke demanded, tapping the table with her forefinger.

The waitress appeared, dropping off our mimosas. Once she left, I took a long sip, hoping the sweetness would work some magic on me and wake me up. “You know that charity auction I called you guys about the other day?”

They both nodded.

“Well, I took your advice and invited Cameron,” I told Brooke before looking at both of them. “I, uh...I had a bit too much to drink. Cameron had to sober me up.”

“And then what?” Emilia asked, leaning forward.

“We kissed,” I said, deciding to skip the part where he got me on my knees to suck him off. There were some details that didn’t need to be shared. “And he dropped me off at home.”

“That’s it?” Brooke asked, looking surprised.

“We kissed again at work,” I said, half-lying again. “I was having a bad day, and he... calmed me down.”

“Hang on,” Emilia interrupted, pointing at me. “Why do you look so flustered about a kiss?”

“Huh?” I pressed a hand to my cheek, and sure enough, it was warm. “Well, you know how long I had a thing for him.”

Brooke and Emilia shared a look.

“No,” Brooke began slowly. “You look way too embarrassed about just an innocent kiss.” Her eyes went big. “You didn’t do anything naughty, did you?”

“Keep your voice down!” I hissed, glancing around to make sure no one had overheard. “Listen —”

“Oh my god, you two totally fucked in your office, didn’t you?” Brooke said.

Emilia gasped. “In your office? At work? No way.”

“No,” I said loudly. “No, we didn’t,” I said in a quieter voice. “We just...he just...ate me out,” I finished in a whisper.

Both of them gaped at me. But instead of looking judgemental, it was more a mix of shock and amusement.

“Alison!” Brooke said. “I would have thought you were way too uptight to do something like that at work!”

“Well, afterwards I told him we had to stop,” I said, then took a sip of my drink. “And we did, for a while. But I...needed to blow off some steam. So, I decided to catch up with Russell for drinks, but instead I ended up at Cameron’s apartment.”

“So this was last night?”

I nodded. “We decided to keep seeing each other, but in secret.” I covered my face with my hands. “Logically, I know it’s a terrible idea, but...I can’t bring myself to stop it. This is what I’ve wanted for so long.”

Brooke and Emilia were silent for a few moments as they processed everything that I told them. I shifted in my seat impatiently, not knowing what to expect. They always teased me about my crush on Cameron, but they knew as well as I did how risky it was getting involved with him.

They were career women themselves. Would they put their careers at jeopardy for a man?

“You’re happy with him?” Emilia asked me.

I thought of last night. The sex had been amazing, but it had also been so nice and peaceful just laying in bed together, talking.

“It’s early days. I have no idea what we’re doing, but...yes,” I admitted.

Brooke smiled and reached out to squeeze my wrist. “We’re happy for you. We know you’ve liked him for a while, even if you kept trying to deny it.”

I shrugged. “It’s just new,” I said. “It scares the hell out of me, but I like feeling happy like this.”

“You’ll have to be careful,” Brooke said. “One wrong move, and both of your reputations will be ruined. Your business too, Alison.”

I nodded slowly, my stomach twisting. My mind had already conjured up the worst things that people could say. Manipulation. Abuse. Corruption. It could all turn into a soul-sucking fiasco that ripped apart everything that I worked for.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

Yet, I still agreed, despite the risk.

Was I stupid? Or brave?

“I’m sure everything will be fine, as long as you’re both careful,” Emilia said.

I relaxed a little. “We will be,” I said.

Our meals were brought out, and we all went quiet as we ate the delicious food. Afterwards, they started teasing me and pushing me for steamy details. I laughed and played coy, and soon my stress melted away.

The rest of brunch was lighthearted as Brooke and Emilia talked about the latest things going on in their lives. Brooke was busy with a huge corporate case, and Emilia complained about a male coworker she despised. Even though I was engaged in the conversation, Cameron still lingered in the back of my mind. I would see him tomorrow, and despite my excitement, I also knew we had to be careful.

No mistakes. No stumbling. No miscommunication.

We had to pretend we didn’t mean anything to each other outside of work. I just hoped we could actually pull it off.

Monday felt like the longest day ever.

I checked the tiny clock on the bottom right corner of my computer screen for what felt like the hundredth time, my impatience turning into frustration. How could a day

feel so long? It felt like I had been at work for nine days instead of nine hours.

Cameron walked into my office. I parted my lips to greet him, but I steadied myself, not even allowing myself to smile at him. The blinds weren't shut, so people could see us.

"Yes?" I said, keeping my usual straight expression.

Cameron offered me a faint smile. "I wanted to see if there were any last-minute things you needed me to do. It's almost five o'clock."

"Right. Let me think." As excited as I was for our plans after work, I was still at the office and needed to focus. My professional life couldn't suffer because of my personal life. "I have a meeting tomorrow with a few members of LearnQuest. Can you make sure the conference room is prepared for it?"

"Already did it," Cameron replied.

"I can't think of anything else," I told him as I smoothed my hands over my lap where my dark blue pencil skirt covered my thighs.

Cameron's eyes shifted downward, his jaw tensing for a second. "If you think of anything that I can do for you, just let me know."

"I definitely will," I assured him, holding his darkening gaze as the seconds went by torturously slowly.

Cameron took another glance at my skirt and swallowed hard. "I think I'm going to double check the conference room. Just in case."

The side of my mouth turned up. I nodded and turned back to my computer, regaining

my composure once he left my office. I decided to over-prepare for my meeting tomorrow and research LearnQuest again, reading through their mission statement.

At 4:59, I shut off my computer and started gathering my things. Typically, I was the last to leave the building, but I didn't want to be late for my plans tonight. I lingered in my office for an extra few minutes to make sure that Cameron left before I did, though.

We couldn't be seen together in any capacity besides our typical interactions during the workday.

Once I left the building, I headed home like normal, but the big difference was that someone was going to be waiting for me when I got there. By the time I reached my apartment door, Cameron was lingering in the hallway with a smile on his face.

"Look at you being punctual," I said as I unlocked my front door.

"Have I ever not been on time?" he asked.

Before I could even switch on the light, Cameron pushed me up against the door, his lips crashing against mine. I wound my arms around his neck, pulling him closer as he pinned me against the door. He deepened our kiss, his tongue sliding against mine, his hands roaming over my body, squeezing my waist and ass.

"Today was torture," I breathed out as he kissed the side of my neck. "Is every day going to feel like this?"

"We just have to stay busy," Cameron whispered.

I shuddered a little, the light chill of my apartment clashing with the aroused fire burning within me. When Cameron released me, I switched on the foyer light, and led

Cameron into the main area of my apartment. His eyes swept around the large, combined living room, rec room, and dining room. The kitchen was through a door to the left, and the two bedrooms, two bathrooms, and my home office were down a hallway straight ahead on either side. The master bedroom also had a balcony view, which was my favorite part of my luxury apartment.

“This place is huge,” Cameron murmured as he glanced around, his eyes sweeping over my leather sectional and mounted flatscreen television.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:30 am

“Are you hungry? We could cook dinner together.”

Cameron snapped out of his daze and nodded to me. “Yeah, that sounds good.”

We decided to make pasta. Most of the time, I ordered food, because it saved time, which meant more time to work on my business. But today, I didn’t feel the need to maximize every minute.

We took our time, laughing as we moved around the kitchen. It wasn’t long before a delicious, savory smell filled the kitchen, making my stomach rumble.

“I’m starving,” I said.

Cameron wrapped his arms around my waist as he stood behind me. He was tall enough to rest his chin on the top of my head, but he still had to lean down to do so. “You didn’t eat much today.”

“There’s been a lot of work to do.”

“There’s always a lot of work to do,” Cameron pointed out.

I turned around in his arms, my hands moving to rest on his biceps. “I don’t want to talk about work. I want to talk about what we’re going to watch while we eat.”

Cameron lifted an eyebrow at me as he glanced in the direction of the dining room. It was still in the main area with the living room, but it would’ve been inconvenient to try and watch television from where the dining table was situated. “We’re not going

to eat at the table? Or the island?”

“Not unless you want to. It’s usually just me eating here, and I hate eating in silence, so I like watching TV while eating,” I explained. I hoped that didn’t sound too pathetic.

Cameron smiled. “I know what you mean.”

“So, what do you like to watch?” I asked him, coming upon something that I didn’t know about him. We didn’t exactly take the time to chat about pop culture and media at work.

Cameron released me so that he could check on the boiling pasta. “Anything anxiety-inducing.”

A surprised laugh broke from me as I grabbed a strainer from one of my lower kitchen cabinets. “Anxiety inducing? You like watching things that stress you out?”

Cameron smirked and followed me to the sink with the pot in his hands. “It doesn’t stress me out, but it might stress other people out.”

“Like drama? Or horror?” I asked, holding the strainer steady as he poured the water out of the pot. Cooked noodles tumbled into the strainer, which I gently shook to get the rest of the water out.

“I like both,” Cameron said as we returned to the stove, completing the last step of combining the noodles with our simmering Alfredo sauce. “But let’s go in the middle. Thrillers.”

I nudged him with a pleased smile. “I love thrillers. There’s actually this new TV show I was wanting to check out. Want to try that?”

“Sounds perfect,” Cameron replied, his face brightening. “You know, I kind of pegged you as a crime drama type.”

I shrugged. “When I’m in the mood for it. Thrillers are my favorite, though. Something about the suspense.”

Cameron held my gaze for a few seconds. There was a shift in his expression, but I couldn’t properly read it before he looked away to toss the noodles in our sauce. “I think we did a pretty damn good job.”

“Only one way to find out,” I said as I plucked a fork from my silverware drawer. I swirled a small bundle of noodles around it and offered the bite to Cameron.

Cameron gently took hold of my wrist, steadying my hand as he tasted our concoction. “That’s great.”

I smiled, letting him take the fork from my hand to return the favor. My eyes met his as my lips wrapped around the fork, desire briefly flashing in his eyes. “Wow. That’s probably the best Alfredo I’ve made.”

“Probably had something to do with me,” Cameron replied.

Laughter bubbled from me as I shook my head at him. I didn’t fully realize how quiet my home had been until he showed up.

This was all so... domestic. It was a strange feeling, but it wasn’t unwelcome. Growing up, there were nice moments when I saw my parents hanging out in the kitchen together, whether they were making coffee in the morning or cooking dinner at night. I remembered watching them from the dining table while eating breakfast or doing homework, enjoying the peace of the moment.

“You okay?” Cameron asked as he tilted his head.

I snapped out of my distant memories, not realizing that I had been quiet for so long.

“Yeah, sorry. Let’s eat.”

Page 36

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

I served two bowls and we walked into the living room, sitting on the sectional together.

I put on the new thriller TV show and sat back, our arms brushing as we got settled side by side. As the show started playing, I tore my attention away from it for a second just to take in the moment. I didn't realize how much I wanted something like this until actually experiencing it.

The peace. The naturalness. The comfort.

I could see this becoming my new normal, but then uncertainty clouded my mind. How long would this last? Maybe soon, I'd crave having my own space — being alone again.

I fell deeper and deeper into my worries until I felt a gentle kiss on my cheek. Cameron shot me a warm look before turning his attention back to the television as intense music started playing.

If I didn't get out of my own head, I was going to miss the good part. And that didn't only apply to the television show.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

As the end credits rolled at the end of the first episode, I stretched my legs out in front of me, nuzzling my cheek against Cameron's chest as I leaned into his side. "I liked it. What about you?"

“Yeah, it’s good,” Cameron said, stretching an arm around my shoulders. “Frank’s suspicious, though.”

“Frank? No, I’m sure Kane’s the culprit. He won’t let anyone in his house.”

“Well, we’ll just have to see which one of us is right. Want to watch another episode?”

I glanced at the time on my phone, and was shocked to see it was already seven o’clock. “You get started,” I said, standing up and taking our finished bowls to the kitchen. I popped them into the dishwasher, then pointed down the hallway in the direction of my office. “I’m just going to check a few emails.”

I always checked emails in the evening. Hell, I usually checked my emails every hour. It was almost a compulsion at this point.

Cameron frowned. “Don’t tell me you’re going to do some work.”

I shook my head. “I’ll only check emails. I’ll be half an hour, tops.”

He nodded slowly. “This explains why you’re always up to date with everything. You never take a break, do you?”

I shrugged. Admittedly, I felt guilty, because I did have a guest over. But Cameron should have understood. He worked with me, after all. “It’s not a big deal. It’ll make me feel better if I check, and I won’t be long.”

If we were at the office, Cameron would’ve nodded and let me go. But instead, he stood up and walked over to me. “You should rest. You worked all day today, and there is a whole eight-hour workday waiting for you tomorrow when you can check as many emails as you like.”

“Work doesn’t exhaust me like you think it does. I love what I do.”

“Fine,” Cameron said, reaching out to rub my shoulders. “But tonight, give it a skip. For me.”

How could I refuse when he looked at me like that?

“I can’t start the next episode without you. You won’t understand what’s going on.”

“I can fill in the blanks,” I countered.

He shook his head. “I came over to spend time with you, Alison. Not sit on a couch by myself.”

As much as my fingers itched for the familiar keyboard of my home computer, I knew he was right. If my mother was here, she’d admonish me for being a bad host. And to tell the truth, I did want to watch the TV show with Cameron. I wanted to sit on the couch together, with his arms around me.

“Alright,” I said, defeated. I told myself that I had been silly — my company wasn’t going to be destroyed just because I took one night off. Besides, how was I supposed to figure out if things were going to work between us if I didn’t actually invest my attention and time into this relationship? “Let’s go watch that episode.”

Cameron grinned, and it was adorable. It was unfair how he could go from hot and assertive to cute, with that big, gorgeous smile.

“Do you want dessert?” I asked, pulling away from Cameron’s arms to check the fridge.

“I don’t have a big sweet tooth,” Cameron said, following me. “This body doesn’t

maintain itself.” He shot me a smile to show he was half-joking.

I hummed, checking the freezer. “I don’t have ice-cream or anything, but I have frozen berries if you want that?”

“Sounds perfect.”

A few minutes later, we were back on the couch, sharing a bowl of frozen berries and entirely engrossed in the thriller TV show. We ended up watching two more episodes, and I was just about to start the third when I felt Cameron running a finger under the hem of my skirt.

I looked up at him, and he gave me a sly look. “I’ve been thinking about tearing this skirt off of you all day.”

“We’ve been watching a TV show about murder, and you’re still turned on?” I teased.

“To be honest, it’s been a bit hard to concentrate with you in my arms.”

I laughed softly. “Come on. I’ll show you my bedroom.”

I stood up, took his hand, and led him down the hallway. After we entered the bedroom, I sat on the edge of my king-sized bed, watching Cameron look around.

“This is exactly how I’d imagine it’d look like.”

“Like how?” I asked.

“Clean. Huge. Pretty.” He walked across the carpet, passing by some framed artwork of flowers and gardens, towards the floor to ceiling windows that showcased the city. He drew the curtains, then walked over to me, standing between my legs.

When he leaned down to brush his lips against mine, we kissed deeply, and I immediately got to work unbuttoning his shirt. I was dying to see the work of art under his clothes again. Just as I managed to shove his loose shirt off his shoulders, I was pushed back so I was lying on the bed, legs hanging off the edge.

He knelt down in front of the bed, tugging my red panties down my legs. “Red, hmm? Looks good on you. Looks better off, though.”

He pulled them off, dropped them on the floor, then started kissing his way up my legs, making me feel like I was melting into the bed. Then he grabbed the inside of my thighs and pushed them apart. He groaned. “I thought about this all day. Do you know how much you drive me crazy?”

I sat up on my elbows, feeling myself grow wet just from looking at him kneeling between my legs. He looked so good there. “I was hoping you could show me.”

Cameron grinned coyly before playfully biting my inner thigh, making me gasp. “I’ll give you anything you want. All you have to do is ask for it.”

I blushed. “C-can you —”

“Use your words.”

Oh screw it. “Taste me,” I begged. “I want to feel your tongue on me.”

His breathing deepened, as he parted my folds with his fingers to expose my clit. When he dragged his tongue over the sensitive nub, I moaned and writhed. He chuckled softly, and it vibrated against my clit. “I’ve barely gotten started. Feels that good, doesn’t it?”

“So good,” I breathed out, my cheeks heating. My hips lifted on their own, chasing

his touch as he lapped at me again.

Cameron glided a finger over my slit, teasing my entrance before pushing it fully inside. He pulled his fingerback out, cursing beneath his breath at the sight of how wet I already was for him. “You’re so good for me, baby.”

His praise made heat swirl low in my stomach. I gripped the bed covers on either side of my body to keep myself from desperately writhing beneath him, the sound of my quick, faint breathing filling the room. “Only for you.”

He brushed his tongue over my clit over and over, and his finger sank inside of me again before pulling back out in slow, shallow thrusts, preparing me.

My eyes fluttered shut as the sensations crashed together and built up, bordering on overwhelming but feeling too good to stop. I was on fire, the pleasure burning all throughout me.

Cameron added another finger, working them inside of me as his tongue flicked and stroked. I thought he was dedicated and enthusiastic at work, but when he was between my thighs...

“Oh, fuck... I’m...” I gasped, feeling too hazy to finish my sentence. The intense pressure blew apart, sending vibrations of bliss through me, and soon I was shaking.

Cameron worked me through my orgasm, drawing it out even longer by slowing the licks against my clit until I was too sensitive to handle even that. He slid his fingers out, licking them clean before standing.

My eyebrows lifted in intrigue when I saw a visible ridge in the front of his work pants. “I could help you take care of that.”

Cameron smirked as he worked off the rest of his clothes before approaching me.
“Oh, really?”

I moved to sit on the edge of the bed, reaching out to wrap my fingers around his cock so that I could slowly stroke him. My eyes shifted up to his just as I leaned forward to slide my lips over the tip.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

Cameron groaned and ran his fingers through my hair, pulling the strands back from my face as he watched me bob my head. “That’s good. You suck my cock so well.”

I breathed in deeply through my nose, pushing my limits with more ease and comfort now. The more inches I took in, the more my eyes teared up, but neither of us minded. He definitely didn’t.

“You’re so beautiful. All teary-eyed. Lips around my cock,” Cameron murmured as he brushed his thumb along my flushed cheek.

My stomach twisted with desire as I sped up, feeling his cock harden even more as I edged him closer to orgasm.

“Not yet,” Cameron said as he pulled away from me, leaning down to kiss my forehead. “I want to be inside of you when I come.”

I nodded with eagerness and grabbed a condom for him from my bedside table before returning to the bed. Instead of him crawling over me, he dropped down onto his back and pulled me on top of him, coaxing me to straddle his waist.

My heart raced as I ground against his cock, moaning softly when my clit grazed the tip. Even that little bit of friction felt like ecstasy, and things were only going to get better. I lifted up on my knees and lined his cock up with my soaking wet entrance before slowly sinking down on his hard length.

“Oh...” I breathed, as I fully took him inside of me. I had to take a moment to get used to the tight fit all over again.

Cameron ran his hands over me, squeezing my thighs and my hips. “Incredible.”

I placed my hands on his chest, steadying myself as I rose my hips and then sank back down on him. I repeated the motion over and over, dropping down faster and harder each time until I bounced on his lap just like he wanted me to.

“Fuck,” Cameron groaned as he watched me ride him. He dragged a hand through his hair, his body tensing.

I watched his reactions, getting more and more turned on just by the sight of him. Pleasing him felt as good to me as pleasing me felt to him. He was nowhere near the selfish lover that I predicted Russell to be.

I rocked my hips back and forth, changing the angle and hitting a spot inside of me that almost made me double over with pleasure. My legs weakened, my strength fading into bliss, but I kept moving. We were both so close.

Cameron grabbed my hips, helping me move on top of him. His breathing started turning more into heavy pants and grunts. “Come here.”

I felt his hand on the back of my neck, dragging me down for a deep kiss. I cupped his cheek, my heart fluttering as our kiss became more passionate.

Cameron let go of my hips and caressed my back, holding me close like he never wanted to let go of me. He kissed his way along my jaw toward my ear, his hips lifting to thrust into me as I sank down on him. “Can’t get enough,” he murmured.

I couldn’t respond — I was too overcome by pleasure and breathlessness. Just as I tried to form a response, he lifted his hips, adjusting the angle enough for his cock to hit that one spot over and over.

I broke the kiss, unable to stop myself from crying out as I came, clenching around his cock and leading him to orgasm too with a few more deep thrusts. He grabbed my waist with his free hand, stilling me as his cock settled inside of me. He breathed in deeply, his eyes shifting to mine. We held each other's gazes for a few moments before he pulled me down for a sweet, slow kiss.

My heart hammered in my chest as our lips brushed and moved in perfect rhythm. I hadn't ever been kissed so passionately before, and I could've kissed him like that forever if we didn't need to breathe to survive.

"That was amazing," I told him as I trailed my fingers along his jaw, enjoying the light scrape of his stubble.

He smiled and stroked my hair. "You know you're incredible, don't you?"

Because of work, I was used to getting attention and praise. It all meant a lot to me because I worked so hard to do the things they praised me for. But this was different. I couldn't believe I had him, in my bed, telling me I was incredible.

To my own shock, I felt a burning sensation in my eyes.

No. I wasn't a crier.

"What's wrong?" Cameron asked, brow furrowing.

"Nothing."

He gave me a pointed look. "I've been around you enough to know when something is on your mind."

I took a deep breath. "I'm just really enjoying this," I told him.

His face softened. “Me too.”

I lowered my forehead to his, closing my eyes and basking in how good it felt to be so close to him. I pushed him away for so long, denying myself of the happiness that I didn’t even expect to feel.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

Deep down, I knew this wasn't some fleeting crush or bout of lust. This was something more.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“Alright, everyone. Let's keep up the pace.”

My department leads nodded and stood from the conference table, a mix of determination and panic charging the air in the meeting room.

I breathed in deeply through my nose, ignoring the ache in my head. Last week, the chief marketing officer of LearnQuest, Henry Johnson, had asked for a full campaign. I had been excited to win a new client, until he told us he needed the campaign ASAP — in two weeks, to be exact.

It would be a close deadline, but my company had finished bigger projects in less time, so I knew that we could handle it. That didn't make the past week any less gruelling though.

Exhaustion weighed down every muscle in my body, making my steps drag a little when no one was watching. I'd taken more than a few micro naps during lunch breaks, and with all the caffeine I had been drinking, my heart raced while I still felt exhausted.

I was in a constant state of discomfort, but I forged on because it was my job and my company's reputation on the line. I couldn't falter, especially when I was leading the charge and motivating the others to keep pace with me.

When I was the last person left in the conference room, I started to head toward the door, but Cameron walked inside before I could get there. I sighed as he shut the door behind him. “Not now, Cameron. I need to call Henry and give him an update on the campaign.”

Cameron held his arm out to keep me from leaving the room. “It’s time for lunch. He’s probably eating right now, so you can take a break and eat something too. You can call him when we get back.”

I shook my head, taking a step back from him. He meant well, but I couldn’t let him distract me from what I needed to do. “I’ll feel better if I call him first.”

Cameron reached out and took my hand, gesturing to how it slightly trembled. “You’re jittery. You’re drinking too much coffee and not eating enough.”

I parted my lips to argue, but I couldn’t think of what to say. He was right, but sitting down and eating a full meal during the day ate up too much of my work time.

Cameron sighed and pulled me closer, holding both of my hands now. “It’s lunchtime. We’re going to walk across the street and eat at that café that has that chicken salad sandwich you like.”

A faint smile formed on my lips. He knew me so well, which also made me a little sad. We could’ve been getting to know each other much more lately, but I had to keep turning down our plans after work. I didn’t have time to go out on dates, not when I had so much work to do. This client was pumping so much money into this campaign that it could be a disaster if we didn’t deliver what we promised.

“I can do a quick lunch,” I agreed, figuring it wouldn’t kill me to get some fresh air and a change of scenery before diving back into work for the rest of the day. I could always make up what I didn’t finish when I was at home.

He looked relieved, and his hands moved to my hips, stealing a quick moment while we were in the conference room away from prying eyes. “Good. Let’s try to limit your desk lunches, okay?”

“There’s nothing wrong with a desk lunch,” I replied stubbornly.

Cameron flashed me a pointed look. “All the crumbs on your desk beg to differ.”

I swallowed a laugh. If someone out in the hallway heard me laugh, they would know that something was up. That was probably kind of sad now that I thought about it.

There just wasn’t time for jokes when we were in the middle of a stressful campaign. Cameron got a pass, though.

“Let’s go to lunch then,” I said, giving in to his suggestion.

Cameron leaned down and captured my lips in a sweet kiss, his smile pressing against mine. I melted into him, forgetting about everything else going on for a few blissful seconds. The weight on my shoulders lifted. The ache of my tired eyes faded away. Just for a few moments, it felt like things were normal.

When we broke away, the weight returned. The warmth on my skin faded. All of my worries filled my mind again, but with Cameron next to me, the volume was at least turned down a little.

Cameron left the conference room first. It would’ve still looked innocent if we left together, but we needed to put as much distance between each other as possible unless we were actively working on something together. Even if we were overdoing it, we still had a better chance of not being caught.

I waited a few minutes before leaving the conference room, keeping my eyes forward

and my expression casual as I headed to my office to drop off my things. Afterwards, I met Cameron outside, waiting for me on the sidewalk. Together, we walked across the street where the little café was located, already smelling fresh bread and strong coffee.

“If you’ll grab us a table, I’ll get our food,” Cameron offered as he opened the glass front door for me.

I nodded and picked a small table by the window at the front of the café. I took a seat and peered outside, watching cars drive by and people walk by on the sidewalks. Downtown was always busy.

As a kid, I loved going to downtown, feeling entranced by the busy people, the chaos, and all the things to do. Now, I got to work in the place I grew up loving. Obviously, it wasn’t as magical as I thought it was back then, but I made it here. That was what mattered.

“Chicken salad sandwich and a water for you,” Cameron said as he placed my lunch in front of me. He sat down, with a Reuben and a water for himself.

“Thanks,” I said.

Cameron smiled a little as he got settled. “We should try to do this more. I know it’s not an actual date, but I like going out to places with you.”

“Once we get through this campaign, I’ll have more free time.”

Cameron’s smile wilted a little. “You’ll still be busy, though.”

“Well, being busy is part of my job description. It’s my company.”

“I know that. I’m just worried about you, Alison. I’m not saying you shouldn’t work,” he explained as he put his hands up innocently. “I just think you need to slow down a little. You’ve been really stressed out since taking on this campaign, and I can tell you’re tired.”

I blinked at him. “Oh, thanks.”

“That’s not what I meant. You zone out a lot. You’re drinking more coffee. I know you’ve been napping at your desk.”

I frowned and looked away from him, wishing he didn’t notice little things like that. Of course, his attention to detail and care were some of his best qualities, but I didn’t like that he could use them against me. How could I argue against him without seeming like a jerk?

“Naturally, I’m more tired and stressed than normal when working on a big project,”

I said, keeping my voice steady. “But that’s normal. I know you’re more on edge too.”

“I’m not on edge because of the campaign. I’m on edge because you’re running yourself into the ground,” Cameron stated with a straight face. He wasn’t playing around.

But neither was I.

“Have you forgotten that you’ve been working with me for years now?” I asked. “I’ve always been like this.”

Cameron sat back in his seat. “I know,” he said quietly.

Now, I felt insecure, like he saw me as some heartless machine. Needing to defend myself, I said, “I’ve always been like this. I did the same thing in college.”

“Why?” Cameron asked. He didn’t sound accusatory, though, but genuinely curious.

I couldn’t think of a direct, simple answer. “I’m not sure,” I said with a shrug. “I’ve always believed it’s important to give something my all. Maybe it’s a lesson I internalised as a child.”

“Are your parents like you?” he asked.

“They used to be. Now, they’re retired, living the life in Key West.”

“Well, I want you to be living the life now,” he said. “It’s good to take breaks. It’ll keep you from getting burned out or sick.”

“I did get the flu during exam week of my junior year in college,” I admitted, nearly

shuddering at the memory of me sweating and suffering that whole week. That had happened after several all-nighters and skipped meals. My immune system took a huge hit, and I paid the price.

If I got sick now, I was screwed.

“I...” Cameron began, and it was one of the rare moments he looks unsure of himself. “I’m sorry. I’m not trying to question your work ethic. I know you work hard, and it’s one of the things I admire so much about you. I guess I just...” he trailed off, then cleared his throat. “I guess I just wish we could spend more time together.”

My heart softened. “Me too,” I murmured. I really did want to spend more time with him, but work always came first

“Well, I’m going to suggest something,” Cameron said. “You’ll automatically want to say no, but just think about it, okay? Really think about it.”

I felt a mix of suspicion and nervousness. “Go on.”

“Promise to be open-minded?”

“Yes, yes. Tell me,” I replied, motioning for him to spill.

“Let’s do a weekend getaway.”

I opened my mouth to shoot him down, but when he gave me a stern look, I shut my mouth. I told him I would think about it.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

A weekend getaway meant two full days where I didn't do any work. I couldn't catch up on anything that I didn't finish, and I couldn't get ahead for next week. I would also be away from not only the company office, but my home office too.

While those things made me nervous, I forced myself to consider the positives too.

Cameron and I would be able to actually spend an extended amount of time together, which I had been wanting to do. I could get out of town and refresh my brain. Getting away would also help me see if my relationship with Cameron could be long-term material. And it would be fun. That was another upside.

"When would we leave?" I asked him.

"As soon as we submit the LearnQuest campaign," he said. "The project would be finished, so you could spend the weekend relaxing. It'd be a reward."

I nodded slowly. A reward to look forward to after this current project did sound nice.

"I was thinking we'd leave Friday evening after work and go to the beach. We'd stay at a hotel there, then come back Sunday afternoon. You'd still have Sunday night to prepare for the next week."

My heart pounded heavily as my face warmed. He really did know me well. "The beach, huh?"

Cameron grinned and nodded. "Hope you have a swimsuit."

I had a few, but I hadn't worn them for over a year.

Cameron leaned forward with a hopeful look on his face. "So, is that a yes?"

I held his gaze for a moment, thinking. What could a weekend away hurt? I wouldn't be in the office, and it was a chance for me to finally spend some time with him away from the office.

"Okay. Let's do it," I said impulsively. It would be a good thing for me to have a break, especially after the past few hectic weeks.

"You won't regret it," Cameron promised me. "We're going to have a great time."

I believed him. A weekend away would be amazing for both of us.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Beautiful streaks of orange, pink, and blue painted the sky as sunset hung over the ocean, its striking colors reflecting off the surface of the rolling waves. The ocean breeze flowed through my hair as Cameron and I stepped out of his car in front of the Saltbreeze Suites, a towering, white hotel building right on the beach.

"It's beautiful," I told Cameron with a smile of awe. Even the air smelled good — fresh and slightly salty.

He'd picked the perfect place for our weekend getaway, which was a few hours away from our city.

The valet walked over to us. "Would you like me to park your car, sir?"

Cameron looked sheepish as he handed his keys over. "The key fob doesn't work, so

you'll have to manually lock it.”

“No problem,” the valet replied before hopping in the car and driving off to park it in the hotel’s private parkinglot.

Cameron turned to me, rubbing the back of his neck for a moment. “I can check in and have our bags brought up to the room. Want to wait out here? There’s a great seafood restaurant down that way.”

I turned to see where he was pointing, which was toward a strip of restaurants, local shops, and other hotels along the beach. I turned back to him and nodded. “Yeah, that sounds good.”

Cameron smiled. He headed into the fancy hotel, leaving me outside to enjoy the sea breeze and the sound of the waves crashing in the near distance. I looked down at the blue maxi dress and espadrilles I was wearing. I’d changed at the office earlier today, once work finished and all the workers had left. I’d also taken a moment to fix up my makeup, applying a lighter shade of pink and adding some blush to my cheeks, creating a look that was a lot more playful and flirty than my usual corporate makeup.

As we’d driven down to the beach, I found that I was a lot more excited than I thought I’d be. Sure, part of it was relief — hours earlier, we’d finally submitted the campaign for LearnQuest. But also, I was looking forward to relaxing and spending time with Cameron.

I glanced at my phone, checking for work calls or emails. Luckily, nothing popped up.

“Checking work?”

I almost jumped. Cameron had returned from the hotel, and now he chuckled at my

guilty expression.

“Just having a look,” I admitted. “There’s no news, though.”

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

“Of course there isn’t,” he said. “We just finished Henry’s campaign, and now it’s the weekend.”

I knew it was unlikely there’d be any work updates, but it was a habit. “I can’t help it,” I said.

He reached for my hand. “Hey. How about we both turn our work notifications off?”

I stared. “Are...are you sure that’s a good idea?” To be honest, the thought of turning them off made me feel a bit anxious. It reminded me of the time I’d watched a movie at the cinema with Emilia and Brooke. I hadn’t been able to immerse myself fully into the film because there’d been a voice at the back of my mind worrying that I’d miss an important call while my phone had been off.

“We don’t have any current projects. No clients will be calling.” He shrugged. “We can still take calls from friends and family and only mute work.” He took a step closer. “That way, we can fully focus on each other.”

I inhaled. I did want to focus on Cameron, and if we blocked out work, then maybe we could forget we were boss and employee, even if only for a weekend. The truth was, I knew it was a good idea. I had an unhealthy attachment to my phone and my work inbox. It would be good for me to disconnect.

“Alright,” I breathed.

Cameron smiled, pressed a quick kiss against my lips and stepped back. We both took out our phones. I silenced my email notifications, as well as any contact labeled under

work. As soon as I did it, I felt a weight lift off my shoulders. I was already feeling more relaxed.

“Done,” Cameron said, popping his phone in his pocket. He took my free hand, our fingers twining together. “Let’s get dinner.”

We walked down the sidewalk as the sky slowly darkened, the streetlights and colorful outdoor building lights turning on. The fact that we could walk around holding hands made my heartbeat quicken. This was what it could be like if we could openly be in a relationship.

Since we’d been so busy with work, we’d yet to go on a proper date in the city. If we did, though, I’d probably spend the whole time looking over my shoulder. But if we weren’t working together...we could kiss each other goodbye in front of people. We could go to business galas together, and I could introduce him as my boyfriend. We could talk about how much we cared about each other to people we knew.

Like every other regular couple.

We arrived at the two-story restaurant, and Cameron requested a table on the balcony of the second floor that overlooked the ocean. We were led to a table which was covered with a white tablecloth and decorated with a vase of flowers and a flickering candle. We sat down across from each other and ordered a glass of wine each. After the waiter left, Cameron took my hand, brushing his thumb over the top of it. “I’m glad we did this.”

I nodded. “I was nervous about being so far away from the office at first, but I’m already feeling better.”

He smiled. “Out of sight, out of mind.”

“Thank you for arranging all of this,” I told him. On top of all his work responsibilities, he also set up this getaway for us, and it already felt perfect.

Cameron shook his head dismissively. “As long as you come with me, I’m happy to plan our little getaways.”

If this one worked out well, maybe we could do this more often. Maybe I could do what everyone had been pestering me to do for years — work less, live more. Enjoy life.

Once we got our glasses of wine and put in our orders for surf and turf, we clinked our glasses together and enjoyed our Chardonnay, looking out at the ocean as the sky darkened to black. A crescent moon and tiny stars glowed in the distance, reflecting off the rolling waves.

“Are you feeling relaxed?” Cameron asked me as he leaned back in his seat, soaking in the classy but comfortable vibe of the nice restaurant.

I smiled and took another sip of wine, pacing myself. I wouldn’t mind a nice buzz, but I wanted to be fully perceptive of everything going on. This was too great of a night to miss out on any details. “I am. It’s nice.”

Cameron nodded in satisfaction. “Good. Get used to it.”

“I’m guessing you have plans for us this weekend?”

“You would be correct, but I’m not telling you what they are.”

I cocked an eyebrow at him. “You’re supposed to inform me about all plans.”

Cameron wagged his finger. “Only at work. This isn’t work, baby. Standard rules

don't apply."

I laughed. "Have you been here before?"

"Not here, specifically, but I've heard good things about it. I've loved the beach since I was a kid, though. My family went on a lot of beach holidays during my childhood."

"Where did you go?"

"Too many to count, but my favourites were Hawaii and Australia."

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

“I didn’t know you travelled so much,” I said. “There’s so much I don’t know about you.”

He gave me a soft smile. “Have you travelled a lot?”

I shook my head. “I’ve been to Canada and Mexico, but that’s it. My parents worked a lot when I was young. In college, I was too busy, and when I started working, I got even more busy.”

Saying it aloud now made me feel a little sad. I wanted to travel, but I always put it off. Next year, or when Firth Marketing had this many employees or when I made this amount of money. I kept moving the goalposts.

I should live life more. I couldn’t spend the next thirty years in the same city.

I pushed down the uncomfortable feelings and shot Cameron a smile. “Where else have you been?”

“My grandma lives in London, so I’ve visited the UK. I’ve also spent some time in Japan.”

“Wow,” I said.

“If you could go anywhere, where would you go?” he asked.

I hummed as I thought about it. “So many. But if I had to choose...Rome.”

He smiled. “Me too. I’ve never been to Italy, but I’ve heard the food is incredible.”

“I would have so much pasta. Gelato too.”

We spent the next few minutes talking about what we’d do in Rome. Cameron wanted to visit sights like the Colosseum and the Roman Forum, while I wanted to see the artwork in the Sistine Chapel.

It was a fun discussion, but there was also a pit in my stomach because I knew that, realistically, I wouldn’t have time to travel to Rome until I retired.

That is, unless I did something about my current work schedule.

Our food arrived, and my mouth watered at the sight of a large lobster tail and a delicious cut of steak. As expected, the lobster tail was buttery and savory, and the steak was juicy and well-seasoned. I had the money to go to nice restaurants like these more, but they were sit-down experiences that took time and were better enjoyed with other people. I couldn’t see myself going to a restaurant like this by myself after a long day at work, especially when I planned to work later on at home.

But now that I was with Cameron, experiences like these made more sense. I could see myself doing them more, and who was I to turn down amazing food and great company? We didn’t have a view like this in the city, though.

I needed to cherish it while I could.

“Dessert?” Cameron asked once we finished up with our main course.

I lifted an eyebrow at him, my heel brushing his ankle under the table. “What kind?”

He gave me a coy look. “We can either have dessert here or back at the hotel room.”

“Back at the hotel,” I said quickly. I was sure this restaurant had great dessert options, but I hadn’t touched Cameron all day. Right then, all I wanted was to get him into bed.

He chuckled. “Good choice.” He motioned at the waiter. “Can we get the check, please?”

Once the bill was settled, he led me out of the restaurant and down the sidewalk back to the hotel. His hand was warm in mine. I must’ve been walking faster than usual, because when we stepped into the elevator, he gave me a teasing smile. “Eager, huh?”

I shrugged in a coy manner, my heart beating wildly with eagerness. “I’m excited.”

We got out at the thirtieth floor, and he led me to Room 3012.

I stood behind him, shifting on the spot as I waited for him to unlock the door. Once it clicked open, I followed him inside, my eyes widening at the sight of a large suite. Maybe flash didn’t impress me, but the thought behind every detail of this getaway touched me.

“Cameron...” I murmured as he turned on the lamps, allowing me to see the balcony with an ocean view and the king-sized bed.

Cameron kissed my cheek before leading me through a door, switching on the light to reveal the bathroom.

My eyes immediately darted to the huge spa-sized tub, my jaw dropping. I hadn’t ever seen a tub that large in a hotel room before. “A bath sounds amazing right about now.”

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

Cameron placed his hand on my back, rubbing gently as our eyes met. “One of the best ways to relax.”

My heart fluttered as I leaned forward to kiss him out of sheer gratitude. Happiness swelled in my chest like a bubble. “Thank you,” I murmured against his lips.

“Get undressed,” Cameron whispered.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Desire stirred within me as I watched him turn on the hot water to start filling the tub. I reached behind me and unzipped my dress, letting all of my clothes and shoes form a pile on the floor at my feet.

Cameron added bubbles to our bath once the water rose halfway. He took off his clothes, already half-hard as he looked over at me. “Come here.”

I took his hand, letting him help me into the tub. The hot water immediately felt comforting, and the bubbles smelled like lavender. I lowered myself down on one side of the tub, and sighed with pleasure. “Wow, that’s amazing.”

Cameron moved to sit behind me, my back against his chest. “If I ever get rich, I’m getting a tub this big.”

I leaned back against him, my eyes fluttering shut as warm steam lingered in the air. “You could be a CEO.”

“I don’t think I’m cut out for that.”

I glanced over my shoulder at him. “Why not? You’re smart, great with people, organized, and determined. You have all the right traits.”

Cameron shrugged. “I don’t think I want to be a CEO. I just want to do a lot of great work that is impactful, even if I’m under someone.”

I understood that. Being a CEO was a huge challenge, but it was incredibly rewarding too. Getting rich wasn’t the end goal for me, though. I wanted to make something of my own and build it up as big as I could so that it could impact as many people as possible.

Cameron placed his hands on my shoulders, pressing his thumbs into my back to massage me. “That’s part of why I got my master’s. I wanted to be as prepared and knowledgeable as I could before going into the workforce.”

I thought of the first time I’d seen his resume. There’d been that impressive masters degree from a prestigious university, and then...

“I remember there was a gap in your resume, after you graduated. You said you had been overseas. Something about a relative?”

Cameron moved his hands down my back, massaging around the middle. “I did have a corporate job lined up, but before I started, my uncle — Riko’s step-dad — fell ill. Riko was still in high school at the time, and her mom had to work to support the family, so, I took some time off to look after my uncle. I flew over to Tokyo to help them out.”

“I had no idea.”

“That’s why Riko comes over and cooks so much food. I tell her she doesn’t have to, but it’s how she shows her gratitude.”

“Is your uncle okay?” I asked.

“He’s okay now,” Cameron replied. “It was bad for a while, but he got the treatment he needed.”

“I’m glad,” I said, then paused. “Why did you go? Wasn’t anyone else available?”

“I was the most flexible out of everyone in the family. I hadn’t started my job yet, I didn’t have any kids and I was young. I was the best choice.” He said it matter-of-factly. That was the Cameron I knew — humble and generous. He’d put aside his own career for family.

“You’re a really good guy.” As I said it, I realized how true it was. I’d lusted after him for years, but he was so much more than his good looks. The more time I spent with him, the more I saw just how kind and generous he was.

I felt him shrug behind me. “It was the right thing to do.”

“Not everyone would do the right thing,” I insisted. “It was really selfless of you to do that.”

Then I froze. Would I put aside Firth Marketing for family?

Of course. If my parents were sick, I’d drop everything.

But...what about all the holidays I’d skipped because I had to work? How many times had I missed my parents’ phone calls because I was too busy?

I had to do better. I promised myself to make more time for those I cared about. My family, my friends...and Cameron too.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

I turned around, my heart swelling with emotion, and pressed a gentle kiss against his lips. His eyes slid shut as he wrapped his arms around me, holding me close as he kissed me back. The hot water had cooled to warm, the bubbles and foam starting to melt away.

When I gently grazed my teeth against his bottom lip, he groaned, which spurred me on. I parted my lips against his, our tongues brushing.

Cameron's hands moved, one gliding up and the other sliding down. He grasped one of my breasts, his thumb stroking my nipple until it hardened. His other hand slipped between my thighs, gently rubbing my clit under the water.

I leaned my head back against his shoulder, a soft moan escaping me as he kissed my neck. The water might not have been hot anymore, but my body burned with desire. I spread my legs more, giving him more room. "Cameron..."

His lips brushed the outer shell of my ear, making me shudder. "I can't wait to have you."

My chest tightened with anticipation. I leaned back against him more, feeling his hard cock pressing against my ass. I wanted him to take me, to bury himself in me.

Cameron gathered my hair in his hand, pulling it to the side so that he could attach his lips to a high part on the side of my neck. He sucked a mark into my skin where no one would be able to see unless I put my hair up. "Mine," he whispered.

"Yours," I breathed out, writhing against him as he continued to rub my clit. The light

friction felt so good that I couldn't stay still, and he wrapped his other arm around me to anchor me against him.

He kissed my shoulder, groaning against my skin as I pushed back against his hard cock. "I need to be inside of you."

I nodded fervently, wanting him so badly that it ached. "Yes."

He helped me stand before unplugging the drain. We stepped out of the bath, dripping and glistening, and he leaned over to grab us both a towel.

My skin was warm where he'd kissed me, and I had an uncontrollable need to feel more.

Once we dried off, Cameron grabbed the back of my thighs and picked me up, carrying me out to the king-sized bed with soft, white sheets. He set me down in the middle of the mattress and crawled over me, leaning down to kiss me sweetly.

My heart skipped when our kiss remained slow and patient. Usually, we were desperate, almost rough, but tonight felt...different.

We tasted, teased, and touched, enjoying every second as our warm bodies pressed together.

Cameron took my hand and twined our fingers together, using his other hand to keep himself propped up over me. "You make this place feel like paradise."

I smiled against his lips, shaking my head. "You're too sweet."

"You don't believe me?"

I'd never had anyone speak this way to me before. Past boyfriends had only grunted things like "you're hot." It was hard to believe that Cameron — cool, calm and collected Cameron, the man I'd worked with for years — could say such vulnerable things.

"Do you really feel that way?" I asked.

"I'd never lie to you."

I didn't know how to reply. I wanted him to know that I felt the same way, but I couldn't find the words. I wasn't sure if I was brave enough to say them. I'd spent so long keeping my desires locked up inside of me. It was strange to just blurt it all out to him.

So, I decided to try and show him how I felt. I ran my fingers through his hair and crashed my lips against his. Quickly, our kiss became more heated by the second.

He slid his cock into me in one swift motion, making me gasp. All the times we'd had sex before had been hot, but tonight this felt like we were truly becoming one.

He thrust deep inside of me, pushing my body into the mattress beneath him, his lips moving all over me. My face. My neck. My breasts. He caressed me, showing me how much he wanted me. How much he needed me.

Just like I needed him.

My hands roamed over his strong back and shoulders, feeling his muscles shift as he rocked into me. The coil in my stomach tightened more and more, preparing to snap soon because he was fucking me so perfectly.

"I've got you," Cameron murmured as he slid a hand under my lower back, tilting my

hips to hit a different angle.

“Oh, god,” I moaned, feeling overwhelming bliss and heat. “That feels so good. Please, don’t stop.”

Cameron pressed his forehead to mine. His breathing was rough and uneven as he pounded relentlessly into me.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

I felt like my breath had been stolen away. I didn't want this to end, but the moment he started playing with my clit, his thumb making soft circular motions, I snapped into a million pieces.

I raked my nails across his back as I came hard, shaking through the ripples of pleasure.

He drove into me one more time, burying his cock inside of me as he finished. He buried his face in my neck, his chest rapidly rising and falling as we both fought for air.

A few moments passed, and then he turned us over so we were facing each other. I suddenly felt exhausted, all my energy and strength fading away, and gave him a sleepy smile.

Cameron pushed my hair out of my face and gazed at me for a few seconds of silence.

“What's on your mind?” I asked.

Cameron smiled a little. “You.”

My stomach filled with flutters, and I had to look away. We lay there together, basking in the aftermath, comfortably silent.

My mind wandered. We hadn't been dating for long, but things felt different now. This wasn't just sex. This wasn't just casual fun. For so many years, I thought I just

wanted him to fuck me, but now I wanted so much more. I wanted to cuddle and to hold his hand and to learn more about him.

I didn't know much, but I did know that my feelings were deepening by the day.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

One of my favorite parts about hotels was the breakfast buffets.

In my day-to-day life, I didn't have a big breakfast — usually just a coffee and a piece of fruit. But that morning, I was hungry after last night's physical activity, and I was excited for a large selection of toast, cereal, fruit salad and hot food.

“Have we got any plans for today?” I asked Cameron as we took the elevator down to the lobby.

“I do. You just relax and let me take the reins.”

Honestly, that sounded amazing. It was nice to take a break from decision making, and I was excited to aimlessly float through the rest of the weekend without a worry on my mind.

“How do you always know what I need?” I ask.

“I'd say it's part of my job description, but it's more thanthat,” he said, wrapping his arm around my shoulders and pulling me against his side affectionately. “I don't know. I just get you, Alison.”

We shared a warm look before the elevator doors slid open, and we walked through the lobby to the dining room. The smell of eggs, bacon, sausage, and freshly toasted bread lingered in the air, making my stomach grumble. I grabbed a plate and filled it

with everything that caught my eye, later joining Cameron at a table with full plates and cups of orange juice.

“No coffee?” he asked.

“I’m trying to cut down this weekend,” I explained. Over the past few weeks, I’d swallowed an unhealthy amount of caffeine.

We were quiet for a few moments as we ate our food. I picked up my phone, about to open my email app. It was a habit of mine, but I caught myself at the last moment.

I glanced across the table, where Cameron was watching me. I flipped my phone over, screen down.

“I know, I know. No work,” I said.

He smiled. “I’m proud of you.”

I shook my head. “Don’t be. It’s nothing to be proud about.”

“But I am,” he insisted. He ran an eye over me, lips quirking. “You often get embarrassed when I compliment you. I’d have thought you’d be used to it by now.”

He was right. Over the years, I’d received a lot of praise and flattery about my accomplishments. I’d had interviews with magazines and won industry awards. But...

“It’s different when you say it.”

He gave me a long look, and my stomach flipped. Shit. Had I said too much?

I looked down at my plate and busied myself with slicing a piece of toast.

Page 47

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

Cameron reached across the table and gently placed his hand over mine. “We’re going to have so much fun today.”

I smiled at him, relaxing a bit. “I think this is the best breakfast buffet I’ve ever had,” I said, digging into my bowl of yogurt, granola, and raspberries.

“How do you like this hotel?” he asked.

“It’s amazing. Our room has a perfect view of the ocean.”

He smiled. “You know what else this hotel has?”

“What?”

“An amazing spa.”

I stared at him. “You didn’t.”

But of course he did. He remembered that I loved spa appointments.

After breakfast, we wandered into the hotel spa, where we were instructed to change into fluffy bath robes and white slippers. First, we got a massage, lying side by side on comfortable massage beds. My massage therapist was incredible, and under her talented hands, tension I didn’t even know I had melted away.

Afterward, I separated from Cameron. I went to get a facial and body scrub while he went to the steam room.

Hours later, we emerged from the spa in our normal clothes. My skin felt smooth and glowy, and my muscles felt relaxed.

“That was amazing,” I said. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” He took my hand. “Want to get lunch?”

After a delicious lunch at a restaurant by the beach, we returned to the hotel. It was mid-afternoon, and the sun was shining high in the sky. Since it was warm, we decided to take a dip in the hotel pool.

We returned to our hotel room, changed into our swimsuits and slathered on sunscreen. The hotel’s outdoor pool was large, with several different sections of various depths. Luckily, there weren’t too many other people there, allowing us to swim around and flick water at each other like silly teenagers.

“You’re paying for that,” Cameron told me before lunging through the water at me, wrapping his arms around my body and crushing me against him.

I laughed as I grabbed at his shoulders, kicking my feet to keep myself above water. “Sore loser.”

All weekend, he’d made me smile so much that my cheeks were hurting. I couldn’t ever remember feeling so hooked on someone before.

“You look really sexy in this swimsuit,” Cameron continued, his hands drifting up my sides, admiring the light pink, halter one-piece that hugged my body. The plunging v-neck was a tease, even if he already knew what was underneath the thin material.

“You look good yourself,” I replied, playfully snapping the waist of his dark blue

swim trunks.

“I aim to please.”

My stomach ached as I laughed at his ridiculous expression. “Alright, alright. I need to go put on more sunscreen.”

Cameron kissed my cheek before releasing me. I climbed out of the pool, pausing to look at him, moving through the water like some kind of Greek god. Oh, yeah. I was hooked.

I tore my eyes away from the sight and headed to the lounge chair where we had set down our things. I grabbed the sunscreen off the chair, but I paused when my eyes caught sight of my phone next to the room key. I glanced over at Cameron, but he was facing the other way, his back to me.

I’d told myself to put work out of my mind, but it wouldn’t hurt if I checked my notifications really quickly. It was a Saturday, so I doubted there’d be anything, but checking would give me peace of mind.

After drying off my hands, I picked up my phone and opened my notifications tab. My heart stopped.

I had received hundreds of emails and multiple missed calls. Most pressing of all were the missed calls and the emails from Henry. We’d submitted the campaign the whole company had worked for weeks on, so why was he calling?

“Oh shit,” I said, fearing the worst. I put my back to the pool, moving into the shade so that I could properly see my phone screen. I opened up one of the emails from Henry, my stomach twisting as I read it.

We've decided we want to revise the direction of the campaign. We discussed one version of the campaign when we first started talking before deciding on this new one. After talking with my team, I believe it's best if we return to the first version.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

My jaw dropped. I remembered the meeting we had a few weeks ago, when we'd agreed that the first version wasn't eye-catching enough, despite it being more informational. Where did this 180 come from?

I opened another email at random. It was from Hannah, head of the design team.

Did you see the new email from Henry? He wants us to scrap everything and start again. Are we still on the same timeline? If so, we'll have to do weeks of work in a few days. I'll wait to do anything until I hear from you.

My heart pounded with panic. I tried to get a grip. We'd had clients who'd changed their mind before, but I'd always been in the loop, ready to reroute to a new direction immediately. Now, I'd received the news a daylate because I'd made the stupid decision to put my phone on silent. Worse, I wasn't even in the city — I was hours away, at the beach, on a holiday.

"It's okay. It's okay," I repeated to myself under my breath. It wasn't a matter of money — Henry would pay us for the extra time. But I would have to call up employees, ask them to work overtime, and pay them for it. Everyone had already been through so much stress because of the last campaign, and now we had to do it all again.

While I tried to keep calm, I could feel my face heating up, my breathing becoming more rapid. I scanned through several more emails, but there were way too many to read, and I felt overwhelmed.

Focus, Alison. Focus.

I found Henry's number and hit the call button, listening to my phone ring over and over until I heard him pick up. "Hi, Henry. This is Alison from Firth Marketing."

"I've been trying to contact you since yesterday," Henry said, sounding frustrated. His tone made me sick to my stomach, reminding me of the times I got in trouble with my parents for doing something wrong. I hated those moments.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't expect any news on the campaign today, so I wasn't by my phone," I explained, needing to figure out how to put this fire out before it burned my whole business.

"I know it's out of business hours, but I chose your company because you offered assistance at all hours," Henry replied. "I expect you to uphold your promises."

I fought the lump in my throat. I had made that promise. If this was any other weekend, I'd have answered his phone calls immediately.

"Of course. I understand," I told him, trying to keep my voice sounding normal.

"Well, did you read my emails? I need changes made," he continued.

"I just took a look. So, you're wanting to return to the first version of the advertisements we spoke about?" I asked, trying to concentrate.

"Yes. After seeing the last draft of this new version, I decided the old version is better. Sure, it doesn't pop out at you as much, but it gets our point across," Henry said. "Are you able to do that? Because we still need all the advertising materials by our product launch date."

He switched everything up and still wanted us to be done by the deadline. Frustration seeped deep into my chest, but I tried to keep it at bay. He was a huge client, and he

was paying top dollar.

“Yes, we’ll change over to the old version. I’ll tell my team today, and we’ll get caught up. I’m sure we’ll be able to get everything to you by this Friday.” I already felt dread at the prospect of telling my employees that we had to pull off a miracle.

“Keep me updated,” he said.

I started to make assurances, but realized he’d already hung up. Asshole.

But could I really blame him? He’d been trying to get hold of me since yesterday evening. If I was in his position, I’d be annoyed too.

I tightened my grip on my phone, fighting the urge to throw it across the pool. You can do this. You’ve gotten through work emergencies before.

I cursed under my breath and called the lead of my design team. “Hannah, I’m so sorry to call you on a weekend. I saw you heard from Henry.”

“Yes, I was waiting to hear from you.”

“I’m sorry I took so long to get in touch with you. Henry wants us to return to the original version we talked about. Would it be possible to call everyone to the office?”

“Yes, of course.” Despite the polite words, her voice sounded tight.

“Thank you. I’m out of town right now, but I’ll be back at the office as soon as possible to help get as much done as possible,” I told her. “Just do your best. All of you will be well-compensated for the overtime.”

“We’ll get started,” Hannah replied.

After we ended the call, I lowered my phone, staring at nothing. This felt like a nightmare.

“Can’t let go of work for a minute, huh?” Cameron’s teasing voice sounded behind me.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

I slowly turned around to face him, watching his grinplummet off his face at the sight of me. “Are you okay? You look... pale.”

“I need to get back,” I said tonelessly.

He frowned. “What? Did something happen.”

“Work emergency.”

“I’m going to need more than that.”

How could he sound so calm?

“Henry wants us to redo the campaign. He’s been trying to reach me all weekend, and everyone is freaking out.”

Cameron took a step closer to me, hands out. “Hey, let’s just calm down.”

“Don’t tell me to calm down,” I snapped, dodging his hands. “You should’ve heard about this too, but no, you had the brilliant idea to turn off work notifications off. And like an idiot, I listened to you. I have no idea what I was thinking.”

He looked wounded. “I’m sorry. I had no idea this would happen.” He hesitated. “I just wanted to enjoy my time here with you.”

“We could’ve started fixing this immediately, but instead we’ve been wasting time, playing in the pool, having that spa appointment.” I glared at him “Even if we’re on

holiday, you're still my executive assistant. You should've been on top of this. I should've been on top of it." I wasn't just angry with him — I was angry at myself too.

"I thought that while we were here, we could stop being boss and employee, just for a moment," he said quietly.

"Well, we can't," I snapped. "No matter where we go, I'm still the CEO. And you're meant to anticipate disasters and be on top of things the moment they happen."

He looked stung, and I felt a pang of guilt, but I had more important things to worry about. "I'm heading back to the room," I said, voice like ice. "I'm getting changed and then I need to head to the office, ASAP."

"Alison, just hang on a second," he said, grabbing my arm.

I yanked it away. "Don't. I need you back in work mode right now," I said. "Check us out, organise how we're getting to the office, and call Henry's office to try and patch things up."

With that, I turned around and marched back to the hotel. Beneath the panic, I felt a twinge of regret. Yes, I'd been rude, ordering Cameron around, but at the same time, this was his job. He should've realised turning off our work notifications was a bad idea.

Then again, it wasn't only his fault. He hadn't forced me to put my phone on silent. I'd done that willingly.

I'd been so stupid.

I shook my head as I stepped into the elevator, jabbing the 30th floor button. I

couldn't dwell on Cameron and our relationship. I had more important things to think about.

If something bad happened to Firth Marketing, it didn't just affect me. It affected everyone who had a job there, including him. We could lose clients, drop in revenue, and collapse as our competitors took control of the market.

I couldn't be a failure, even if that cost my relationship with Cameron.

Why would he want to be with a failure anyway?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Half an hour later, I shut the passenger side door of Cameron's car behind me. Uneasy tension lingered between us as he drove from the hotel to the office. I checked my phone for any new notifications, feeling nauseous just from looking.

"Henry's request is unreasonable," Cameron said. He hadn't smiled since the pool. "We were already cutting it close before."

"Unfortunately, we're expected to turn unrealistic demands into reality. He is paying for premium service," I replied. "I'm going to make a few phone calls, if you don't mind?"

"Of course," he said, but he sounded robotic. "I'd be working too, if I wasn't driving."

I spent the rest of the drive calling various departments, answering questions and trying to assure everyone that we could achieve the project by the deadline. My fingers itched for a laptop, anything bigger than a phone, so I could do some real work.

When I looked at the time and realized it would be night by the time we arrived, my throat tightened. I was hoping to arrive earlier, so I had more time. But it would be okay — I'd just need to spend the night at the office.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

The only upside about the work emergency is that it meant I was too busy to spend too much time thinking about Cameron. Only yesterday, I had been imagining going on weekend getaways more frequently. I'd had ideas of spending nights together, and wasting away Saturday mornings. I'd even been proud of myself for taking more time to myself.

Look at how that worked out.

Now, I couldn't bear to look at Cameron, otherwise I'd see the hurt expression on his face. I felt guilty, but angry too. He was supposed to be my assistant. We'd both screwed up.

Maybe this wouldn't have happened if I'd been with another man. If I'd gone on holiday with someone who wasn't my employee, this wouldn't have happened. This imaginary other man wouldn't have encouraged me to unplug from work. Cameron would've alerted me immediately of a work emergency. He would've held the fort at the office while I drove from the beach.

There was no point wondering about it now.

Finally, we arrived at the office. Before Cameron could even turn off the car engine, I was already flying out of the passenger's seat.

I practically ran into the building, panic pounding in my chest as I hurried to the elevator. Once I stepped out onto the main floor where the design offices were, I rushed to Hannah's office, seeing her at her computer with two other designers huddled around her. "Where are we at?"

“We’re going over the documents and design notes for the original version and dividing up responsibilities,” Hannah explained as she showed me on her computer screen. “Video ads, web ads, promotional posts, everything.”

“Alright, once everything is divided up, put it in a document and share it with me so that I can keep up with progress made,” I told her, keeping my voice as strong and steady as I could. If I freaked out, they would freak out even more, and nothing would get done.

Cameron stepped into the room, breathing a little heavier than usual. He glanced at me, face tight, before looking away. “What can I do to help?”

“Stay with them,” I told him in a firm voice. “I’m going to keep an open line of communication with Henry and feed him updates as we go along.”

Cameron looked over at me again, like he expected me to change my mind and keep him by my side. But I couldn’t be near him right now.

I turned to Hannah. “I’ll be set up in my office. Put out a list of tasks. I’ll tackle everything that I can while dealing with Henry.”

Hannah nodded in understanding. “I’ll keep you updated.”

I strode out of the room, passing by Cameron without even looking at him. This wasn’t a problem that we could solve in a weekend, but starting today showed Henry that we were serious and dedicated to making him a satisfied client, and it also allowed us to get a head start on the new week of hell.

Once I reached my office, I shut myself inside and got to work, checking on my team’s progress and relaying them to Henry to get feedback. I just hoped this didn’t cost me good employees. I could feel the tension up and down the halls as everyone

rushed to fulfill Henry's last minute wishes. Their irritation and exhaustion didn't go unnoticed by me, and I knew that I would have to think of a good way to thank them all besides paying them overtime.

Around nine o'clock, Hannah appeared in the doorway of my office, looking tired. "There is still a lot left, but I think it can wait until tomorrow. In the meantime, I've sent off rough drafts for approval."

I tore my eyes away from my computer screen, blinking them a few times as they stung from staring at the screen for too long. I didn't even realize how much time had passed.

"Get some rest. Make sure the others leave too. Kick them out if you have to," I told her.

Hannah gave me a half-smile. "We're going to get this done. We'll just need to rally."

Hell, we needed a miracle, but I didn't say that out loud.

"We'll rally," I assured her. "Thanks, Hannah."

Hannah nodded and dragged herself out. I heard her voice down the hallway as she told the other designers to head out for the night. Employees from other departments slowly left too, and soon there wasn't any noise at all.

I put my head back down, reviewing everything that the design team had put together. I left some notes for tomorrow, adding my opinions and, more importantly, Henry's.

I still managed to find things to do, checking a few small things off the list of things to do that Hannah sent to everyone. It wasn't much, but it would clear up time for

Hannah and the others to focus on more important things.

A knock on my door dragged me out of my busy daze. Cameron stood in the doorway, looking concerned.

“You should head home, Cameron,” I said. “Get some rest before tomorrow.”

“I will, if you go too.”

I frowned. Why was he trying to bargain with me? “I’m fine. Go home. Get some sleep.” When it looked like he was going to argue, I added, “I’m saying this as your boss.”

Cameron flinched. “Don’t speak to me like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like I’m just an employee. Forget about work for a second. I’m telling you — as someone who cares about you — that you need to get some rest.” He walked up to my desk. “I’m sorry about what happened, Alison. I’m sorry that I took you away from the office on a weekend. If I knew there was a possibility of this happening, I wouldn’t have taken you so far away.”

“I know,” I said. He’d never do anything stupid on purpose, but I shouldn’t have let myself get swept away. “I can’t think about any of this right now. I have to focus on work.”

His shoulders sank. “What do you mean?”

“I mean,” I said, “that until this project is finished, I need to forget about this.” I gestured between us. “It’s a distraction.”

“So what?” he asked. “I should just treat you like a boss and nothing more?”

“Yes,” I said. “And I will treat you like my employee.”

He frowned. “We can’t pretend we’re nothing to each other, just because it’s convenient.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s unfair. And hurtful. Earlier today, when you snapped at me...” he

trailed off. “I know I’m your subordinate. But I thought we respected each other. Outside of work, I thought we saw each other as equals.” He took a deep breath. “I can’t be with someone who’s my girlfriend one second, and ordering me around the next.”

I sucked in a breath at the word girlfriend. I tried to keep my voice neutral, but it came out sounding colder than I intended. “I don’t know what you were expecting when you got involved with your boss.”

He was silent for a long moment. “Right,” he said eventually, taking a step back.

“Sorry,” I said, pushing a hand through my hair. Suddenly, I felt exhausted. “I’m sorry, Cameron. But...I don’t think I can deal with this right now. Please go home.”

For a second, I thought he might argue, and then I really would lose my patience. But instead he just nodded, looking defeated, and left the office.

After the door closed behind him, I heard his footsteps as he headed towards the elevator. Once he was gone, I felt empty. My bottom lip trembled for a second, but I pressed my teeth into it to still the motion. I took a deep breath and returned all of my attention to my computer.

I just had to work. That would fix the emptiness I felt inside.

Hours passed, but when it was two in the morning, I was yawning so much that I couldn’t ignore it anymore. I shut off my computer and my main light, only leaving on my desk lamp. There was still a lot of work to do, so I wasn’t going home just yet.

A nap would do fine for now.

I walked over to the couch in my office and laid down, pulling a fuzzy blanket over

me as I used my arm as my pillow. It wasn't the most comfortable sleeping arrangement, but I was so tired from today that I passed out in a few minutes.

The three hours of sleep that I allowed myself to have passed by quickly, leaving me feeling heavy and achy when I woke up at around five o'clock in the morning. The sky was still dark outside, but once I switched on the main light in my office, my brain woke up a little faster.

I walked through the hallway in a daze, fixing myself a cup of coffee before returning to my office to get back to work. I wasn't a fool. I knew how bad this was for me, but the only other option was to slack off and fail.

I just had to hold on.

An uneasy, jittery feeling hummed throughout my body as I stood at the front of the conference room.

"What do we think?" I asked as my eyes swept over my employees.

Hannah turned to me and nodded, looking as exhausted and worn down as everyone else in the room. "We went over all his notes and made all the changes that he told us to. This is our best."

Austin, the marketing specialist, nodded in agreement from the other side of the table. "Yeah, this is all we have in the tank."

I breathed in slowly, letting the air fill my lungs. I felt terrible today, but at least it was Friday. Finally.

This week had been absolute hell, but thanks to power naps in my office and numerous cups of coffee, I made it through in one piece. Mostly. At least we finished

every piece needed for the campaign, and now all we had to do was send it to Henry.

“I like it,” I told them as I crossed my arms over my chest, which had been feeling tense all week.

My eyes shifted toward the door of the conference room, catching sight of Cameron. He looked in my direction, but it didn’t feel like he was truly looking at me. His eyes seemed blank and empty like I was staring into pits of darkness.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

Recently, he barely looked at me in the eyes. We only discussed work, and there was a tense coldness separating us. I couldn't believe we had been having the time of our lives at the beach only a week ago.

I tore my eyes away from Cameron and turned back to my design team. "Let's send him what we have and close out this project."

A palpable sense of relief flooded the room.

"Thank you for all your hard work," I continued. "I know this blindsided us, but we all came together and got it done. I'm so grateful to have such hardworking and talented people working with me. Once we get confirmation that he's received everything and he's signed off on it all, everyone can go home early today." I hoped that Henry would be quick about it, so my employees could go home and sleep or see their families.

There were a few murmured responses, and then everyone poured out of the conference room, tired like zombies. I headed to my office, and kept checking my email, nervousness churning in my stomach as I waited for Henry's confirmation.

Around noon, my office phone rang.

"It's Henry," Cameron said. He used the same purely professional tone he'd used with me all week.

"Great, put him through. Thank you."

There was a click, and then Henry's voice came out of the speaker. "Alison," he boomed.

"Hi, Henry," I said, trying to sound calm. "Did you receive our email with your campaign products?"

"Sure did. Everything looks good to me."

Thank god. "Are you sure?" I asked, just in case. "We won't be able to make any last-minute revisions once you sign off on it."

"Yep, it all looks good. Thanks for getting it all to me by the deadline," Henry replied, sounding far too relaxed for someone who'd lit a fire under my company.

"Of course. Thank you for trusting us with your marketing needs," I told him, pitching the usual corporate line of gratitude.

We said our goodbyes and ended the call. I slumped back in my chair, closing my eyes as I reveled in the moment by myself for just a few seconds.

We did it. It was all over with. We could go back to normal.

I drew in a deep breath before drafting an email to send to everyone in the company.

With great pleasure, I'd like to inform everyone that Henry Johnson of LearnQuest has accepted our marketing materials without any complaints or requests for revisions. I would like to thank everyone for their hard work and diligence. Without all of you and your determination, this campaign wouldn't have been completed in time.

This project is officially closed. Please enjoy the rest of your day and have a restful

weekend.

I hit the send button, and it wasn't long before I heard people leaving their offices and heading out, sounding a lot more energetic than they had in the conference room. A huge weight had been taken off everyone's shoulders.

As for me, I could take a break. A short nap and then lunch sounded wonderful.

Before I could even get up from my desk, there was a knock on my door. I expected it to be Hannah or one of my other department leads, but it was Cameron. My chest tightened as we stared at each other, my body feeling frozen in place.

Cameron cleared his throat and glanced behind him. "Can we talk?"

I nodded and motioned for him to come in, trying to ignore the mix of guilt and hope I felt.

Cameron stepped into my office and shut the door behind him, a frown lingering on his face as he slowly approached my desk. He didn't make it all the way over to me, though, stopping a few feet away.

"I'm sorry," I blurted out, standing up. "Last week, at the hotel, I took my frustration out on you. I know it wasn't your fault. It was bad luck."

Cameron stared at me.

I swallowed, forcing myself to go on. "I know you had my wellbeing in mind. You just wanted us to have fun. I'm sorry I haven't made time to talk." I thought of the conversation we had. I don't think I can deal with this right now. Please go home.

Now that the project had finished, my mind had cleared enough. I knew our

relationship had gotten a bit messed up, but we could still fix it. I just needed to apologise, and things could go back to normal.

Cameron gave me a sad smile and somehow, that felt scarier than if he looked angry. “I like you so much, Alison. You’re one of the most amazing people that I’ve ever met. That’ll never change.”

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

“Cameron,” I began, my heart aching.

“I thought I would be able to do this,” he continued, “but the more I’ve thought about it, I realized I can’t. Like I told you, I can’t date a woman who will switch from being my girlfriend to my boss in a second. When we started this, I didn’t think it would be a big deal, but you have the power. Our relationship is unbalanced in a way I can’t ignore.”

I did have the power. Of course, I did. But naively, I also thought it wouldn’t matter.

I desperately searched for a solution, trying to keep calm, even though my body felt tight. “What if I promoted you to a higher position? You would still work for me, but you wouldn’t be directly under me. We would be more equal,” I suggested.

“I’m not saying this to get a promotion out of you,” he said, looking alarmed.

Shit. I didn’t want him to walk away. “What about a raise?” I asked, voice rising with panic. “I’ll give you a huge raise. You can buy whatever you want or move into a better apartment.”

Please say yes. Please say yes. Please say yes —

Cameron made an incredulous sound. “A better apartment? I know mine’s not luxurious like yours, but I figured it was good enough.”

I winced. “No, no. I didn’t mean that —”

“You’re just so far ahead of me,” he interrupted. “I’ve spent the past week wondering, what do you want with me? I knew you wanted sex. But is there anything I can give you? You earn more than me. You have your own company. You can buy whatever you want. I can organize a weekend getaway at the beach, but it won’t be anything special.”

“It was special,” I insisted.

He shrugged. “You’re used to fancy restaurants and 5-star resorts.”

What was I supposed to say? How was I supposed to convince him? “I’m sorry our getaway was cut short. I can reimburse you for the hotel. I know it would’ve been expensive —”

“No,” he said, voice firm. “It was a gift.” He sighed, sounding frustrated. “This is what I mean. I don’t want money. I don’t want a promotion. I don’t want a raise. I want —” He cut himself off and shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. Forget it.”

He’d given up. I could hear it in his voice and see it in the slump of his shoulders.

I took a few shaky breaths, and my hand moved to my stomach, steadying myself. “Are we ending this?” I asked, trying my best to sound calm.

Cameron gazed at me for what felt like a painful eternity, his jaw tensing as he gathered himself. “I’m sorry,” he said.

I tried to say something, but no words came out. And eventually, he turned around and walked out of my office, his apology lingering in the air.

We were done.

Tears finally fell from my eyes, coursing down my cheeks as my bottom lip trembled. My hand flew to my mouth, quieting a sob that burst from me. My knees weakened, forcing me to sit in my chair as my body shuddered.

I shouldn't have been shocked. I should've seen this coming. But still, it hurt so, so much.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

If I thought the previous week was awful, the next two weeks were pure hell.

Cameron and I were complete strangers. We spoke about work and nothing else. He wouldn't even smile at me.

I missed his smile. I missed him.

All I could do to take away the pain was to bury myself in my work. Our current projects weren't as intensive as the LearnQuest campaign, but I treated them as though they were just as urgent. It was the only thing that took my mind off Cameron.

I'd been hesitant to get involved with him because I thought it might affect our reputations. I didn't even consider the possibility that our relationship could end and I would have to see him every weekday. When my past relationships ended, I'd rarely seen my exes afterward. That was the best way to heal — no contact. Every time I saw Cameron's face, it was like I was being stabbed in the chest.

Now, I stood in my bathroom, slowly getting ready for work. I really didn't want to go to the office today.

There was a knock on my door and my heart rate spiked. Who the hell could be at my door so early in the morning?

I headed to the foyer, squinting my eyes for a moment as my vision briefly went blurry. When I opened my front door, my eyes widened at the sight of Emilia and Brooke standing out in the hallway. “What are you guys doing here?”

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

“You won’t pick up your phone!” Emilia told me, crossing her arms.

“You can’t just text us that you and Cameron broke up and go MIA,” Brooke added.

After Cameron had ended things, I had texted Emilia and Brooke the news. Afterwards, they’d sent me about a hundred messages, and I grimaced, remembering how I’d forgotten to reply to them.

“I’m sorry. I’ve just been really busy with work,” I said.

“We know you’re obsessed with work, but this is a big deal, Alison! You were so happy with him. What happened?” Emilia asked.

I sighed as I pinched the bridge of my nose, struggling with the pulsing and pounding in my head. I really didn’t feel like detailing how everything was my fault, but they were my best friends. Maybe it would be good for me to talk to them and get all of this off my chest.

They followed me into my living room. I needed to go to work soon, but I supposed I’d play my CEO card and go in a little later than normal. Work would still be waiting for me when I got there.

Once Emilia and Brooke sat down on my couch, I stood in front of them with pure guilt written all over my face. “First off, it’s my fault.”

“How?” Emilia asked.

Brooke looked confused. “What did you do?”

“He took me on a weekend getaway. It was so romantic and amazing... until there was a work emergency. He had been pushing me to relax and not get sucked into work so much, so I missed a bunch of calls and emails,” I explained. “I blamed him. I thought it was his fault we’d turned off our work notifications.”

“He didn’t do it on purpose though, did he?” Emilia asked.

“No,” I said, slumping. “Of course not. He couldn’t have predicted there’d be an emergency, not when we’d just submitted our latest campaign. But in the moment, I was panicking. He was trying to have a conversation, but I just snapped at him. I told him to get into work mode — to do his job and fix things.”

Brooke and Emilia were quiet for a moment.

“I’d feel awful if one second, I was on a holiday with my boyfriend, and the next second, he was reprimanding me like I was a bad employee.”

“I know,” I said, covering my face with my hands. “I know. In that moment, I was bossing him around like he was below me. When he broke up with me...he said he needed to be equals with someone.”

“Oh, babe,” Brooke said softly. She tugged me over and I fell onto the couch between them. Emilia wrapped an arm around my shoulder.

“We drove back to the office. I was so angry that he’d taken me on a holiday hours away, but he couldn’t have known...and the whole getaway had been so incredible and thoughtful. I just didn’t see any of that in the moment.”

Brooke rubbed my arm.

“Anyway, then we returned to the office, and I spent the next week working flat out. He wanted to talk but I dismissed him. I was overwhelmed with work, and all I could think about was how much of a stupid idea it was, getting involved with him.” I squeezed my eyes shut. “But as soon as the campaign was finished, and all the stress disappeared, I realised how much I missed him. We talked, but then...he broke up with me.”

“I’m so sorry,” Emilia murmured.

I blinked a few times, trying not to cry. “The worst thing is, I can’t even get mad at him. He said he can’t date a woman who’s also his boss, and I completely understand where he’s coming from.” I inhaled a shaky breath. “It’s not healthy to have such a power imbalance. I never would, but technically I could fire him whenever I wanted. I have influence over his career, his salary...” I trailed off, fighting the urge to wince. When I said it aloud, it was so obvious that a relationship with my employee wouldn’t work. How could I have been so blind?

Because in the moment, all of those reasons had faded away. All I’d cared about was being with Cameron. He’d made me laugh until my stomach hurt or smile until my cheeks ached.

He was special to me, and I lost him.

My eyes watered. “I feel terrible. I just miss him so much.” I had done far more crying over the past two weeks than I’d like to admit.

“It’s okay,” Emilia said, giving me a comforting squeeze.

“This doesn’t mean you guys are done forever,” Brooke added.

I sniffled a little before we all broke away from each other. “I’m not going to push

him. If he's over me, he's over me. I'll just have to move on too."

"It won't be that easy," Brooke said, her eyes big with sympathy.

"I know, but it'll have to happen eventually," I sighed as I brushed my hair away from my face. "I'm just going to put my head down for now and work."

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

Emilia and Brooke shared a concerned frown. Emilia squeezed my arm. “Don’t work too hard, okay?”

How many times was I going to hear that from people?

I had tried to have a better work-life balance. It had ended in disaster.

“It’ll be fine. Business is booming,” I replied, forcing a smile on my face. It was true, and I was grateful for that, because the last thing that I could handle right now was my company failing.

That would be the cruelest joke in the world.

“That’s great,” Brooke said. “Maybe you need a girls’ trip, though. To get your mind off things.”

Emilia gasped. “That sounds so fun! When was the last time the three of us left town for a little bit and had some fun?”

Brooke and Emilia shared an excited look with each other, but all I could think about was the last time that I went out of town with someone.

“Yeah, maybe later,” I said. I knew I was ruining the excitement, but I couldn’t bear to go on another holiday.

Their smiles faltered, but they didn’t totally disappear.

“Yeah, that makes sense. It would take some time planning and aligning all of our work vacations,” Brooke said, prompting Emilia to nod in agreement. “One day, though!”

I forced a smile and nodded. “Definitely.”

“Well, that doesn’t mean we can’t hang out in townsoon,” Brooke pointed out.

“You should come out for drinks with us. What about tonight?” Emilia asked.

I shook my head. “I really need to catch up on reading some reports tonight. Maybe another time.”

It would probably be a while. I loved hanging out with my friends, but they would probably bring Cameron up or ask how I was doing. That all would remind me of what happened, and I couldn’t deal with that right now.

I wasn’t ready.

Once again, Brooke and Emilia exchanged concerned looks, but thankfully they didn’t argue.

“Just let us know,” Brooke said.

“I will. I should probably finish getting ready for work, though,” I told them before gesturing to them. “You guys are going to work soon too, right?”

“Yep, I’m heading to court after I leave here,” Brooke replied.

“I’m only a few minutes away. I could stay with you while you get ready if you want extra company or just want to talk more,” Emilia offered.

It was a sweet gesture, but I just wanted to go to work.

“It’s okay. I’m just going to throw on some clothes and put up my hair. I won’t be long.”

Emilia looked disappointed, but she smiled and nodded. “Okay, sure.”

I led them back to the front door, hugging them goodbye before they left. Afterward, I threw on a pair of black pants and a simple blouse before pulling my hair up into a ponytail to get it out of my face.

When I arrived at work, I walked towards my office, nodding at a few people who were busy at their desks. Then I spotted Cameron across the room, and my pace slowed to a stop.

My heart sank as I realized that he was chatting with one of the interns, a pretty redhead with a bright smile. She said something that made him laugh, and the familiar sound of it hit me like a tidal wave.

My head felt light as I watched them interact. It didn’t seem like he was flirting with her, but I still hated how they were so friendly towards each other.

I was being ridiculous.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

I hurried to my office, putting Cameron's interaction with the pretty intern at the very back of my mind. There were plenty of things to work on, so I'd be busy today.

While I worked, Cameron popped in a few times to check in with me, relaying emails and confirming appointments. We spoke in short sentences, not making small talk the way we usually did. At noon, he said he was taking his lunch break, and asked if I'd like him to grab me anything.

"No," I said, keeping my eyes on my computer.

He hesitated, but then left without another word. He'd probably learned there was no point telling me to take better care of myself. I'd just ignore the advice like I always did.

At the end of the workday, Cameron came into my office again, to drop off some paperwork. "I have an update about the Power Corp campaign," he said.

I sat up and took my fingers off my keyboard. "Yes?"

As he launched into his update, my mind strayed, remembering the time he got on his knees and worshiped me, kissing and caressing me like he couldn't get enough.

Don't think about him like that. It's over. Forget those memories.

"And that's about it," Cameron finished, snapping me out of my heated thoughts.

I swallowed hard. "Great. Thank you," I told him. We weren't together. We weren't

friends. We were nothing but boss and employee. “You can go home for the day.”

But he didn’t leave. He stood there with an unreadable expression on his face. “Will you be going home too?”

“Soon.” That was a lie. “I just have a little bit more work to do.” That was another lie. I planned to work until I was tired to my bones. That way, I could go home and fall asleep immediately without having to think about anything.

Cameron opened his mouth, but then thought better of it and shut his mouth. He nodded before turning and leaving, looking tenser than he did when he entered my office.

I released a slow exhale once he was gone, then glanced at my reflection in the office window. My stomach dropped at the sight of myself. My ponytail was disheveled and limp, my face was pale and thin, and there were dark circles under my eyes.

I lifted my hand and pressed my fingers against my cheek, frowning when it didn’t feel as plump and round as it used to. I’d been having trouble sleeping lately and was eating less frequently.

Was I really surprised? The breakup killed me inside, stripping me of happiness and motivation to take care of myself. I knew that I probably worked too much, but at least it felt normal.

Speaking of work, I needed to get back to it. There were documents to look over, progress reports to review, and a whole list of other things that I could get a head start on.

A yawn broke from me, my entire body feeling heavy. My eyes strayed to the couch where I had been taking my power naps. A nap sounded so good right now, but I

knew it would turn into sleeping through the entire night.

I couldn't risk that. I needed to stay awake and finish up at least a few more things before going home.

That meant drinking yet another cup of coffee. I was starting to get sick of the taste at this point.

I stood up from my desk, pausing for a second when my head spun for a second. I reached out to steady myself as my stomach churned with nausea. After closing my eyes for a second, I regained my balance.

That was weird.

I walked out of my office, exhaling shakily as it felt like I was leaning to the side while I moved. I must've been really tired.

The office's kitchen was only just ahead, but black dots suddenly popped up in my vision, my head going from heavy to light. Incredibly light.

The hallway spun, and my legs gave out. I hit the ground, darkness taking hold of me.

CHAPTER TWENTY

White light slowly seeped into my vision and a ringing sound filled my ears. I grimaced as I fully opened my eyes, all of the bright, blurry shapes slowly forming actual objects. A heart rate monitor. A small television. A hospital room.

"She's awake!" It was Brooke's voice.

"Alison? Are you okay?" Emilia asked, appearing in my vision as she leaned over me

with a creased brow.

I blinked, feeling disoriented as my eyes swept around the room and over my body as I lay in a hospital bed. How the hell did I even get here? My mind was a shattered mess of memories that I couldn't quite put together yet.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

A voice calling out my name in the office. An ambulance and its wailing siren. A familiar hand squeezing mine.

“What happened?” I asked my friends.

They both looked pale with worry. There was no one else in the room. Did they bring me here somehow?

“You passed out at work,” Brooke told me, placing her hand on my shoulder. “The doctor said it was from exhaustion.”

My eyes widened. People had warned me about passing out from exhaustion, but I’d always thought they were exaggerating. “I was kind of tired, but I was just going to get a cup of coffee.”

“Cameron found you unconscious in the hallway and called an ambulance. He called us while he was in the ambulance with you,” Emilia added.

Cameron was the one who helped me? I didn’t even think that he was still in the building at the time.

I was lucky that he found me. If I had fallen differently, I could’ve hit my head and been seriously injured.

From what I could feel, it seemed like only my knees and my right shoulder ached. They must’ve taken the brunt of the fall.

“Where is he?”

“We had to force him to leave,” Brooke told me with a small smile on her face. “He refused to leave your side, but he was falling asleep in the chair he was sitting in.”

“He even pretended to be your husband so that he could be allowed to sit by your bed. They were only letting family in last night,” Emilia said. “He really cares about you, Alison.”

He pretended to be my husband? He sat by my side?

The thought of Cameron still caring made a sob rack my body. Tears spilled from my eyes as I dropped my head.

“Aw, Alison,” Brooke said as she leaned forward and wrapped her arms around my shoulders, pulling me into a hug.

Emilia took my hand and squeezed it, concern shining in her eyes. “What’s wrong?”

I cried into Brooke’s shoulder for a minute before releasing her, wiping my eyes with the back of my hand as I sniffled. My chest felt so tight that it was hard to breathe, but I pushed through. “I ruined everything between me and Cameron, but he’s still so kind to me.”

Brooke frowned and shook her head. “You didn’t ruin everything.”

I shook my head even harder, only able to picture how sad he looked when he broke up with me. How defeated he looked. “It’s too late. You didn’t see how he looked when we broke up. He was crushed.”

Emilia and Brooke shared a brief look. “Maybe we didn’t see his look then, but we

saw how he looked this morning. He had the kind of look you have when someone you love is hurt,” Emilia said.

“He was trying to hide it, but he was panicking on the inside,” Brooke added. “I think he was trying to be strong for you, even when you were unconscious.”

My heart thudded heavily as I tried to picture him with that look on his face. Did he really still care about me that much, despite all that I had done? It was hard to imagine, but I knew that my friends weren’t lying to me. They cared about me enough to give it to me straight.

“Did he say anything?” I asked them.

“Not much. He told us that he hoped you were okay, but he mostly talked to the nurse and doctor,” Emilia replied. “He kept asking them questions, wanting to make sure you’d be alright.”

I nodded. “Thank you for staying with me,” I told them, feeling immensely grateful. “How long have you been here?”

“Only a few hours,” Brooke said. “We arrived at nine, and it’s almost noon now. Cameron stayed the night, so we sent him home so he could change his clothes and have a shower.”

I turned to look at the window. Sure enough, the sun was shining outside. I’d been unconscious since last night.

I frowned at my friends. “Don’t you two have work?”

“We took the morning off,” Emilia said. “It was an emergency.”

“You didn’t need to,” I said, but I was touched. “That means you have to head back to work soon, right?”

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

“Stop trying to get rid of us,” Brooke teased me, making me laugh.

I sniffled and wiped away the rest of my tears, holding myself together for now. Honestly, I was getting too tired to even cry anymore. Even if Cameron didn't visit me again before I was discharged, I was still so grateful for what he did.

I hoped that he would let me thank him.

“Before we go, I'll flag down the nurse and let her know that you're awake,” Emilia said, squeezing my arm before heading out of the room to hunt down the nurse.

Brooke turned to me with a gentle expression on her face. “It'll all be okay. No matter what happens.”

I breathed in deeply and nodded. “Thank you.”

“As for Cameron...I think you should tell him how you truly feel the next time that you see him.”

Cold fear filled my chest. “I don't think that's a good idea.”

“It's something you need to do. You've obviously fallen in love with him, Alison. You should tell him so that he at least knows,” Brooke replied. “Maybe you can salvage the relationship.”

Was that true? Was I in love with Cameron?

I thought of his laugh. I thought of the way we sat in the bath together in the hotel, his gentle hands massaging my shoulders. I thought of him sitting by my side all night.

My heart ached, because I knew it was true — I did love him.

But could I really repair what had broken between us? I was afraid of hoping for too much. What if he didn't care that I loved him? What if that still wasn't enough?

I couldn't bear having my heart broken all over again.

"I'll think about it," I said.

Brooke gave me one more hug before Emilia walked into the room with a middle-aged, dark-haired nurse on her heels. The nurse picked up my chart and smiled at me. "Welcome back, honey." She noted my vitals before checking me over. "Any head pain?"

I shook my head. "Just my knees and my left shoulder."

"We can rule out head trauma then," the nurse said. "Luckily, it seemed like you fell in a way where your knees hit the ground first before your side. Way better than falling straight forward or back."

"They said I passed out from exhaustion."

The nurse nodded. "Dr. Adams is finishing up with another patient right now, but he'll be here soon to tell you everything you need to know and answer any questions."

"Okay," I said before looking over at my friends. "Thank you for visiting me."

Emilia and Brooke hugged me goodbye. As they left, they told me to get better soon. Once the nurse stepped out, I sank back into the pillows, my eyelids feeling heavy.

Approaching footsteps roused me out of the half-asleep state that I was in. I opened my eyes just as a doctor who looked to be in his late thirties strode into the room.

Dr. Adams paused. “Sorry. Were you trying to sleep?”

I offered him a polite smile and shook my head. “Just resting.”

He smiled back and grabbed my chart, looking over what was noted by the nurse. “Vitals look good. No serious pain or head trauma. We did a blood panel. Nothing serious, but it looks like your immune system is compromised. Are you dealing with a lot of stress?”

“You could say that,” I replied. “I work a lot. And...” I hesitated. “I recently went through a breakup.”

Dr. Adams nodded as he set my chart down and approached my bedside. “I spoke with the man who called for help for you. He told me that you tend to overwork yourself and that you hadn’t been eating or sleeping much lately.”

In the past, I would’ve been annoyed that Cameron ratted me out to the doctor, but now all I could hear was that he cared enough to let the doctor know what was going on. I hadn’t even spoken to Cameron about my sleep and appetite, but he knew me well enough to be able to tell just from being around me.

He probably saw all the half-eaten food in my trash can too, or caught me taking quick power naps throughout the workday to keep myself going. He knew the signs, and I stupidly ignored them because I was so heartbroken.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

I didn't care enough, and I suffered the consequences.

"That's true," I admitted. "I bury myself in my work, whether I'm at the office or at home."

Dr. Adams frowned. "Well, it's clear what happened. You got sick from overworking and exhaustion, which led to your immune system being severely compromised from stress."

I nodded as I listened to him. I did this to myself. How could I treat myself so horribly and expect everything around me to prosper?

"You need to rest and find balance in your life," Dr. Adams told me sternly. "The way you've been living isn't sustainable. You'll be looking at a whole slate of other health issues if you don't change."

"What kind of health issues?"

"Heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and gastrointestinal diseases can be linked to stress," Dr. Adams replied.

My stomach dropped. I'd heard stress could kill, but I thought it was just an exaggeration.

"I did get the flu after pulling all-nighters in college," I admitted. "But other than that, I've been fine."

“You should’ve learned your lesson back then,” he said. “You might be okay now, but think about what would happen if you keep this up for another ten or twenty years.”

“Work’s just such a big part of my life,” I said in a small voice.

He nodded. “I understand. As a doctor, even I struggle maintaining a proper work-life balance, but it has to be done. You need to balance your work with adequate sleep, exercise, and time with friends and family to recharge. Limit your work only to the office if possible.”

I couldn’t argue with that. “I’ll do better,” I promised.

No wonder Cameron was so concerned. He could see me deteriorating right in front of his eyes, and I was so damn stubborn that I didn’t listen to him.

Dr. Adams offered me a kind smile and patted my shoulder. “There are more important things than work.”

How many people had said that to me, and how many times had I brushed those words off? I felt uncertainty and guilt. Guilt about how I treated myself and how I treated others. I put work first because it was the most natural thing for me to do.

Sure, I wanted success. But was I ready to pay the cost?

“Thank you,” I said. “I needed to hear that.”

“A lot of people do. The good thing is that you’re young, and you have time to fix your habits and your health.”

“I will,” I assured him.

“Get some rest. I want to keep you here overnight for observation. Tomorrow, we’ll check your vitals and hopefully send you on your way,” Dr. Adams told me before bidding me goodnight.

I watched him leave, exhaling slowly and shakily. I wasn’t anywhere near dying, but it felt like I took a glimpse of my death. Weak and tired. Sick and pale.

That wasn’t what I wanted for myself. I wanted so much more for my life, and for once, work was the last thing on my mind.

The next morning, I was dying to leave the hospital. As nice as all the nurses and doctors were, there were things I wanted to do and people I wanted to talk to. Being in the hospital just reminded me of all the mistakes I made. Not failures. Mistakes.

“Vitals look good,” Dr. Adams told me as the dark-haired nurse handed him my chart. “How are you feeling?”

“I feel much better,” I said. I’d had big meals, got a lot of sleep, and my mind felt much clearer. The sunlight was warm and seemed brighter today, and I hoped that things were going to look up from here on out.

“Good. You can be discharged,” Dr. Adams told me with a pleased grin. “We’ll get you the paperwork, and then you can leave.”

“Great, thank you.”

Once the nurse brought me the discharge paperwork, I signed everything and changed back into my clothes, feeling relieved to be out of the hospital gown. I strode out of the hospital room stronger than before, but I didn’t push it. I didn’t magically heal over two days, even if I felt better. Dr. Adams had given me a list of vitamins and supplements that I could take to help repair some of the damage that I had done to my

body. I was going to have a pretty stacked shopping list this week.

When I stepped into the reception area, I froze in place at the sight of Cameron signing in at the front desk. “Cameron?”

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

Cameron turned to me, setting down the pen in his hand. He walked over to me, his eyes sweeping over me. “They already discharged you? Are you feeling okay?”

“I’m feeling better. A little weak, but the doctor said that would pass with time. I just need to rest,” I told him.

Cameron looked wary. “And are you going to do that? Rest?”

I smiled a little and nodded. “I’m going to take a week off work and delegate my duties to my leads while I’m gone.”

Surprise filled his face before being replaced with relief. “That’s a great idea.”

If I wasn’t so nervous about figuring out what his feelings for me were, I would’ve laughed a little at how shocked he sounded. The fact that he reacted that way meant that I was on the right path. I just had to keep going down it.

“Thank you for calling for help the other day,” I told him. “And thank you for calling my friends and staying with me until they kicked you out.”

A small smile formed on Cameron’s face as he nodded. “Yeah, they were pretty firm. I was just about to come check on you again.”

I lifted my phone. “I was just about to call an Uber and head home.”

A moment of silence hung between us as we gazed at each other, tension and anticipation charging the air. There was so much that I wanted to say to him, but

where did I even start? What if we weren't on the same page?

"I can take you home," Cameron offered. "So you don't have to wait on an Uber."

My face softened as a fluttering sensation filled my chest. "That would be nice. Thank you."

Cameron nodded and led me out of the hospital, glancing back at me every so often to check on me. "Do you need to pick anything up on the way? Something to eat?"

I shook my head and touched his arm as we stopped by his car. "I'm fine. Thank you."

When he looked down at my hand, I pulled it away with a racing heart, hoping I hadn't overstepped.

Cameron didn't say anything, though. He merely opened the passenger's side door so that I could get in.

Once I got settled, I released a nervous exhale as he walked around to his side of the car. I truly didn't know what to expect, but Brooke's words echoed in my head. I owed it to him to be honest, even if he didn't feel the same way.

Today, I could either get closer to him than ever before or I could lose the chance of being with him forever.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The car was silent as Cameron drove me to my apartment.

There was a lot that I wanted to say, but it didn't feel right to blurt it all out while he

was driving. He would only be halfway focused on my words, and I wanted his full attention.

Whether they were together or apart.

“Thank you for taking me home,” I said as my apartment building loomed ahead down the street.

“Of course,” Cameron replied as he parked along the side of the street. “I’m glad you’re taking some time off work.”

“Me too.”

Cameron’s expression softened a degree. He almost looked... proud. “I’ll walk you to your door.”

I smiled. I didn’t know what was going on in his head, but I hoped to find out soon.

We walked across the street and into my building.

“If you need anything during your week off, just let me know,” Cameron told me as we wandered down the hallway to my apartment.

“You can take the week off too,” I replied, seeing his eyebrows lift in surprise. I stopped in front of my door and turned to him. “You helped me so much. You deserve a much-needed rest too.”

Page 61

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

“Thank you,” Cameron said, holding my gaze. “That’s very generous, but I’m happy to work. I want to keep things running smoothly while you’re away.”

I nodded. “Okay. I know you’ll do a great job.”

He gave me a small smile. “I’ll let you rest,” he said, taking a step back.

My chest tightened as I tried to figure out what to say first. What if I said the wrong thing and offended him again? The last thing that I wanted was for him to think that I didn’t respect him.

Without thinking, I reached out for his hand, stopping him from leaving. “Stay. Please.”

He looked down at where I held his hand. “Stay?”

“I need to talk to you,” I said.

He hesitated, but then nodded. “Okay, let’s talk.”

Relief rushed through me for a second as I unlocked the door, but it was soon replaced by another bout of nervousness. I had to get this right. I led him to the living room and gestured to the couch.

Cameron sat down, looking up at me as I remained standing. He tilted his head at me. “What’s wrong?”

What was wrong was the fact that we weren't together. When we were secretly dating, things were right, even if they were risky. Despite having our differences, we fit together like puzzle pieces.

I just wished that I listened to him when he expressed his concerns over me. If I had taken him seriously, we wouldn't have broken up. I wouldn't have freaked out. And I wouldn't have landed myself in the hospital.

"First off, I just want to apologize again for the terrible things I said to you. I can't stop playing them over and over again in my head," I admitted, feeling my stomach churn just at the thought. "I never should've spoken to you like that. I shouldn't have blamed you for the emergency. It wasn't your fault."

Cameron nodded slowly. "I appreciate that."

"I should've listened to you when you said that you were worried about me," I continued, feeling a lump form in my throat. He expressed so much care for me, and I essentially spat in his face. I was an asshole.

"I wasn't trying to hold you back, but I know that the company means the world to you," Cameron replied with a slight nod. "I can understand why it rubbed you the wrong way."

Because I was conditioned to think that taking breaks meant that I wasn't working hard enough.

"You didn't do anything wrong. You just wanted the best for me. I shouldn't have been so awful to you, not when I care so much about you."

I walked over to him and sat on the couch next to him. I took a deep breath, readying myself for my next words. "The truth is...I want a relationship with you. A real one."

“A real one?” he echoed.

“One where we don’t have to hide. One where work doesn’t get in the way. One where I’m not your boss.”

His beautiful blue eyes widened. “What are you saying?”

“I can give you the best reference that I can so that you can work at another company. I don’t want to let you go — you’re incredible at your job. But you can be hired as something better than an executive assistant.”

“I never minded being an assistant,” he said.

“I know,” I said. “But if you moved to another company, we wouldn’t be boss and employee anymore. We could take another shot at this relationship as real equals this time.”

Cameron looked away from me, furrowing his brow as he weighed the option. It would mean him losing his job, but he might find an even better one where he could be in a higher position. He deserved it.

Of course, I would be devastated to see him go. He helped me and the company thrive so well because he was so damn good at his job, but I wouldn’t want him to be my assistant forever. He had too much potential.

“Well, you are well respected around here. I’m sure that reference will take me far,” Cameron finally said.

“It’s only an idea,” I said, trying to hide my nervousness. “We don’t have to. It’s only...only if you want to try this again.”

He was silent so long that I started to panic. Oh god. Had I insulted him again? Was he going to say no?

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

Suddenly, he nodded, taking a deep breath. “I do,” he said. “I’ve missed you, Alison.”

My heart skipped a beat. “You did?”

Cameron nodded. “That night in the office, I wanted to tell you, but I chickened out. But then, as I was heading out, I told myself to take a chance and tell you the truth. So I came back to the office, but then I saw you on the floor.” He shook his head. “I’d never felt so scared. I thought I was going to lose you.”

I took his hand. “You won’t lose me.”

“Riding in the ambulance with you...waiting by your bedside...I was terrified,” he admitted.

“My friends told me you stayed by my side all night, until they kicked you out.” I squeezed his hand. “That means so much to me.”

“Did they tell you I pretended to be your husband?”

I chuckled, and some of the tension in my body loosened. “They did.”

He squeezed my hand back. “I do want you. I want to give this relationship another shot,” he said. “I have been looking at other jobs because I had the same idea as you. I love working at Firth Marketing, but...” he trailed off.

“I’ll write that reference,” I promised. “Besides, over the years, you’ve built a good

network, haven't you?"

Cameron had charmed every client who walked through the office doors. He was friendly with everyone at business events. I had no doubt his connections would help him find an excellent job.

"I have," he agreed.

"I'm sure you'll be snatched up quickly," I said. Whoever picked him up would be incredibly lucky. They would get to have one of the kindest, sharpest people in the city working for them. "I'll support you however I can," I promised.

Cameron smiled at me, but it quickly wilted. He glanced away, and it was one of the few moments he looked uncertain. "But am I the kind of guy that you want to be with? I don't have a fancy apartment. I don't drive an expensive sports car. I know Russell MacArthur's a dick, but...isn't he more on your level?"

My heart ached as I heard the vulnerability in his voice. How could he think he wasn't good enough for me?

I placed my hand on his cheek, making sure that he was looking me in the eye. "I don't care about apartments or cars or expensive things. I know that's easy to say when I have them all, but it's true. Someone like Russell would only see me as an accessory. He doesn't see how much I care about my company. He doesn't respect my career, the way you do. I love how down to earth you are," I continued. "You never brag, and you don't need to impress me. You have everything I want — you're sweet and gorgeous and you have my back. You listen to what I say and you make me laugh, and sometimes you know me better than I know myself."

His face softened. "You're the most incredible woman I know, Alison. You're beautiful and successful and smart. I know you don't need anyone to look after you,

but I want to. I want to take care of you. I want to cook dinner with you, and watch TV together, and go on holidays.”

I wanted all of those things too. “You helped me realise what I should’ve learned a long time ago. There’s more to life than work, and I don’t want to miss out on this.”

“Me neither.”

I felt like with happiness. “So that’s a yes? We’re doing this —”

My words were cut off as Cameron leaned forward and kissed me. Immediately, I melted into him, relishing the familiar feel and taste of his lips. I clutched his arms, feeling the strong body I hadn’t touched for weeks.

“I’ve missed this,” Cameron murmured against my lips, one hand cupping the back of my neck.

“Me too. So badly,” I told him.

He lowered his hands, placing one on either side of my hips, and pulled me onto his lap. “When you were in the hospital, I realized how deeply I care about you.” His voice was tight, and I could only imagine how he had felt. If it had been Cameron in the hospital bed, I would’ve been wrecked.

“It won’t happen again,” I promised. “The doctor gave me a stern talking to, and I’m going to take care of myself.”

Cameron tucked a strand of my hair behind my ear. “I’m glad you’re okay now.”

I flattened his hand so that I could press it against my cheek. I’d never felt so happy before. It’s like my body wanted to explode with love, relief, and joy.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

We kissed and kissed for what felt like an eternity. I savored the sensation of his lips against mine, his body heat, his sturdy body. Eventually, though, our kissing got more heated — he placed a hand on my breast, squeezing possessively, while I rocked my body slowly over his lap, feeling his erection grow harder and harder.

At one point, he tipped his head back and groaned. “Alison.” He wrapped his arms around my waist. “I want to show you how much I missed you.”

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

My breathing quickened as I ground down, pressing against his firm body even more. “I’d like that,” I said, desire stirring within me.

Cameron leaned closer, his nose brushing mine. His lips ghosted over mine before moving to my ear. “I can be gentle.”

He probably thought I was still weak after my hospital visit, but most of my strength had come back. “You don’t need to be,” I replied. “I can handle it.”

He kissed me again, and then, before I knew it, he’d stood up. Quickly, I wrapped my legs around his waist so I didn’t fall, but he carried me easily down the hallway and into my bedroom. There, he gently laid me on the mattress, and looked down at me with smouldering eyes.

I started to pull my clothes off, but he put up a hand.

“Stop. I’ll do it.”

So I let him, and soon I was completely naked. I knew I didn’t look fantastic — I’d showered at the hospital, but I hadn’t styled my hair and I wasn’t wearing any makeup. Despite that, Cameron looked at me like I was just as attractive as all the other times we’d had sex.

“God,” he said, eyes devouring me. “I missed this.”

Then, in a few swift motions, he pulled off his clothes. His body was just as incredible as I remembered it, with its defined muscles and dusting of dark blond

body hair. His cock was so hard it was almost flat against his stomach, the head a deep, flushed pink.

“Please,” I said, voice tiny and broken.

That was all I had to say though, because Cameron crawled over me, his skin hot against mine, his mouth placing wet kisses down my neck. I reached for his cock, my fingers playing with the sensitive tip, and he groaned. The noises he made were so sexy, and I felt myself growing wetter and wetter with every second.

His mouth moved to my breasts, kissing and teasing my nipples with his lips. “I could devour you for hours.”

The sensation of his talented tongue against my nipples made me let go of his cock, and I grabbed his shoulders, needing something to hold on to. My nails left deep red marks as my body fluttered with desire. I wanted more, needed more.

“Feels so good,” I murmured, eyes fluttering shut.

Cameron took one of my nipples into his mouth, sucking firmly as his fingers twisted and teased the other nipple.

My hands roamed until they found the back of his head, my fingers diving into his hair. I gripped the short strands, feeling him moan against my skin.

He lifted his head and slid two fingers up to my lips. “Open.”

I obeyed and parted my lips, my tongue gliding along his fingers as I sucked on them.

His erection throbbed against my inner thigh. “You’re killing me in the best way,” he said before before sliding his fingers out. He pushed his hand between my thighs,

rubbing my clit with his wet fingers.

I dropped my head back, my eyes rolling up to the ceiling as moans escaped me. Pleasure crackled through me like electricity with every movement of his fingers. He knew exactly how to touch me to make me fall apart.

Cameron kissed under my breasts before sucking my skin, marking me as his.

Afterwards, he kissed his way down my stomach until he reached my needy pussy. His warm mouth replaced his fingers on my clit and my body jerked from the sensitivity and pleasure. “Oh, fuck.”

Cameron ran his tongue up and down, licking from my clit to my entrance. He didn’t miss an inch of me, using his fingers to part my folds so that he could effectively pleasure me.

I whimpered as I arched my back and bucked my hips, aching for more of him. No one could do to me what he was doing. They couldn’t match the pleasure he gave me.

Cameron shifted two fingers down to my slit, pushing one inside before sliding in another. He watched them disappear inside of me, his eyes darkening with arousal at the sight. “This never gets old. You take me so well.”

“Yeah?” I asked breathlessly.

He nodded. “I can’t wait to slide my cock inside. You’ll feel so wet and hot around me, won’t you?”

I nodded quickly, unable to speak. He smiled, then worked his fingers in and out of me. Oh shit. It felt so good, but I wanted more — something longer and thicker inside me. I wanted to feel his weight on top of me.

I knew I was soaking, because there was a wet noise every time he thrust his fingers. When he crooked his fingers, I gasped as he hit my g-spot perfectly, and my stomach tightened as I clenched around him.

“That’s... yes...” I moaned, unable to string together a complete sentence as the euphoria claimed me. I came with a broken moan, my thighs shaking around his head as he continued licking me and fucking me with his fingers.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

Cameron slid out his fingers, and sat up. He grabbed the base of his hard cock and stroked it, the wetness of his fingers covering his length. “I could come just from eating you out.”

The sight of his cock turned me on all over again. I crawled over to him, lowering my head to slide my lips down the length of his erection. My eyes shifted up to his as I bobbed my head, taking him in inch by inch until the tip teased the back of my throat.

Cameron pushed his fingers into my hair, pulling the strands back from my face. He slowly rocked into my mouth, thrusting deeper. “I love your mouth. You have such pretty pink lips, and now they’re stretched around my cock.”

Some spit leaked out from the corners of my mouth, sliding down my chin, but I didn’t care. All I could focus on was hearing him groan in pleasure and feeling his cock pulse against my tongue.

“You’re so gorgeous, Alison. You’re so hot, sucking me so eagerly.”

The praise encouraged me and I sucked even harder. It only lasted a few seconds before Cameron grunted and quickly pulled out.

“Fuck,” he said, looking down at his cock, which was flushed and wet and throbbing. “I almost came.”

I wiped up the spit on my face, my chest quickly rising and falling. Cameron cupped my chin and kissed me deeply, his teeth playfully scraping against my bottom lip. “Now, how should I fuck you?”

“You’re the boss,” I told him, willing to take him any way. Anything would feel good with him.

Cameron grinned and lowered me down onto my side. He laid down behind me, his chest pressing against my back. He leaned closer so that he could whisper near my ear. “I want to hold you while I fuck you.”

I shuddered as his breath hit the back of my neck. I wanted that badly. “Do it.”

Cameron draped his arm over my body, his hand pressing against my stomach. He slowly rocked his erection between my thighs, the tip gliding over my drenched pussy. His forehead leaned against the back of my head, a whispered curse drifting from him. “Everything feels so damn good with you.”

I turned my head and kissed him over my shoulder just as he pushed his cock inside of me. I moaned into his mouth, my breath hitching as he filled me to the hilt.

Cameron grabbed the underside of my knee, lifting my top leg so that he could thrust into me. He went deep and slow, burying himself fully inside of me over and over again.

Our sounds of pleasure mingled, filling the room as we moved and kissed.

Cameron kissed the back of my neck and my shoulder. “So good. You’re perfect.”

I felt myself begin to spasm around his cock, my orgasm approaching faster as he thrust into me harder. “Make me yours.”

He released my leg, sliding his hand between my thighs instead so that he could rub circles over my clit. “Come for me.”

I whimpered as the pleasure ramped up, my body writhing against his. Every thrust got me closer and closer.

“I’m close too,” he groaned, his movements starting to lose rhythm as we both chased our orgasms.

I turned my head and crashed my lips against his, my cry of pleasure becoming muffled as I fell apart at the seams.

A moment after I came, Cameron buried his cock inside of me one last time before finishing. He kissed me deeply, cupping my cheek as we lightly panted to catch our breaths.

“I love you,” I breathed out against his lips, unable to keep the words at bay any longer.

Cameron smiled and rested his forehead against mine. “I love you too. So much.”

I leaned into him as we shared a light laugh, pure warmth and happiness filling my chest. As he wrapped his arms around me, I sank into his comfort, knowing that this was where I belonged.

“So, what now?” I asked him, lifting an eyebrow at him playfully.

Everything was about to change for us. Instead of being scared of the new tide coming, I was excited for it. Things were only going to get better from here on out.

“How about we go on our first official date?” Cameron suggested.

“That sounds perfect,” I said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:31 am

The following month was a time of change.

I'd given Cameron the best reference letter I could, and it hadn't taken him long to find a new job at Baltect, a huge media company. Once he'd officially resigned, it hadn't taken Julia long to find a replacement assistant. Hayley was a recent college graduate, and while she couldn't completely fill Cameron's shoes, she was determined and a quick learner. That was all I needed, and it was a relief to not be in love with someone working for me.

On a Friday, at exactly 5:00, I shut off my computer and locked my office behind me, feeling content with the amount of work that I had gotten done. These days I was only at the office during working hours and I always pre-planned what I wanted to get done ahead of time. Even when I didn't get every single thing done, I didn't panic.

I no longer worried that I'd be a failure. Firth Marketing wouldn't collapse overnight. Things would be okay.

Of course, it was still a learning curve. I didn't let go all of my unhealthy habits overnight, but with Cameron's support, I replaced work hours with exercise, sleep and socializing.

Besides, I was excited to leave the office tonight. I had a date with Cameron.

As soon as I stepped out of my office building, I saw Cameron parked on the side of the street. I hurried over and slipped into the passenger's seat, leaning over to peck him on the lips. "Hey, how was your day?"

Cameron squeezed my knee as he drove away from my office building. “It was good. Ready for dinner?”

I nodded, my hand moving to my stomach. “I’m starving. I ate a chicken club earlier, but I’m still hungry.”

“Good. I’m taking you somewhere special tonight,” Cameron replied as he shot me a wink.

I smiled. “Still want to go to the movies tomorrow?”

“Of course,” Cameron said as he took my hand.

Even if we didn’t get to see each other all that much during some weeks, we always made it a point to hang out on the weekends.

Cameron brought us to a rooftop bar and grill with an incredible view of the city. We ordered mixed drinks from the bar and sat at a table near the edge just as sunset painted the sky with beautiful streaks of color.

“This is amazing,” I told Cameron. “Thank you for this.”

“My pleasure,” he said with a grin.

I sipped my rum punch, enjoying something different from wine or a martini. It was nice changing things up over the past month, even little things like what I drank or my nightly routine.

Emilia and Brooke were also supportive of all the changes I made. I made sure to carve time out for them, and these days we met up for drinks or brunch much more frequently. We even had a girls’ trip planned for early next year. If things went great,

it could become an annual thing that we all do together.

“How are things at work? Doing okay?” Cameron asked me.

“We finished up a project early,” I said. “Part of the reason is I’ve been delegating more tasks. If I have less on my plate, I can dedicate more time to the important things.”

“That’s great to hear. How’s the new assistant?”

“Hayley’s great. She’s learning more about how the company works every day, so it won’t be long until she’s an expert,” I said. “How’s work been for you?”

“We’ve just finished up a project too. The client loved the team’s ideas, so it won’t be long until you see the billboards and posters all over the city.”

“That’s amazing! I can’t wait to see them. I’m so proud of you.”

He waved an embarrassed hand. “It’s nothing.”

“It’s not nothing!” I insisted. “I know how talented and skilled you are.”

He shrugged. “Well, I had you to teach me the ropes.”

We smiled at each other, my heart warm. “They’re lucky to have you. You’re going to blow them out of the water.” I reached over to squeeze his hand.

He grinned, squeezing it back, then picked up his glass. “To new beginnings,” he toasted.

I lifted up my rum punch. “To new beginnings,” I repeated, and we clinked glasses.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 6:32 am

This new beginning of our relationship was the best thing that could've happened to us. We could learn a lot from our past mistakes, but there was a lot that I wanted to leave behind.

After our celebratory toast, our waitress came by so that we could officially kick off dinner. We enjoyed spinach dip, steak, and baked potatoes, finishing everything off with a slice of cheesecake.

"What do you want to do after this?" I asked him.

Cameron gathered some of the sweet cheesecake on his fork and offered it to me. "Whatever you want. We can take a walk. Watch a movie. Whatever."

I wrapped my lips around the fork, humming in delight at how good the cheesecake tasted. I couldn't believe there used to be some days where the only things I consumed were coffee and stale granola bars.

"Is Riko coming by tonight?" I asked him.

"Tomorrow. She wants to make fried rice for us," Cameron replied. "I meant to tell you that my family is having a cookout this weekend. They told me to invite you."

"I'd love to," I said, feeling touched by the invitation. I hadn't met his family yet, and part of me was nervous, but mostly I was excited to learn more about the man I loved.

Life was so different now. Sure, many things were the same. I had the same job, the same apartment, the same best friends. But now I had a wonderful boyfriend, new

priorities, and a brand new way of seeing life.

I was so much happier now, and it made me realize how miserable I used to be.

“After this, let’s go back to your place,” I said.

“You want to sleep over tonight?”

“We might not do much sleeping.”

Cameron grinned and motioned for the waitress to bring us the check. “I like the sound of that.”

Oh, I bet he did.

“I may or may not have bought something new to try on,” I teased him.

Cameron groaned. “Don’t tell me that. You’re killing me.”

Laughter bubbled from me. I was so much less uptight these days.

Once he paid, we rose from our table, but I paused as we stood next to the railing on the edge of the building. I placed my hands on top of it and peered out at the beautiful view of the city at night, a soft breeze coasting through the air. The sounds of the city rang out from below, completing an atmosphere of peace and excitement.

Cameron stepped up next to me, his hand caressing the small of my back as we enjoyed the moment together. He leaned closer to me. “I love you.”

His voice floated on the breeze, tickling my ear and making me smile. I turned to him, my hand resting on his bicep as our eyes locked. “I love you.”

Cameron leaned down and captured my lips in a kiss, the rest of the world fading away around us. I lifted up on my toes, kissing him deeper for a second before we broke apart with breathless smiles. “I’m so glad you interviewed for my company.”

That had been the start of everything. Everything was a domino effect, right? That interview was the first domino that fell, leading to a series of events that produced some of the toughest moments of my life, but also some of the most rewarding. If I was taken back to that first day when he walked in my office for that interview, I would do everything the same.

I wouldn't change a thing because that would alter this moment right now, and it was too perfect to change.

I would go through the pain and the heartbreak and the stress and the exhaustion all over again if it meant finding myself in this moment. That was how in love I was. That was how content I was with my life.

It took forever to get to this point, but things worked out when they needed to.

Cameron kissed the side of my head. “Ready to go home?”

I smiled and nodded. Wherever we went together felt like home, and I couldn’t wait to build a life together. One that was uniquely ours.

THE END