



His Boss for Christmas

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Peter Hayes has everything a man can wish for: a successful career as a lawyer, wealth, good looks, people falling at his feet—and Justin, to do all the grunt work for him. Justin is (“Not your slave!”) his personal associate. Until the day he suddenly isn’t, and Peter’s perfect life stops making sense. His associate wants a personal life? He wants to find his soulmate? Unacceptable. Peter can’t believe Justin believes in that nonsense. Soulmates don’t exist.

Or do they?

His Boss for Christmas is a short, standalone novella with explicit MM content and a happy ending. ~13,500 words.

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The world went crazy on Wednesday.

Or at least it felt like it.

Peter Hayes was less than impressed as he watched his employees buzz around like bees, practically jumping in excitement, as if they were in a madhouse instead of the most prestigious, successful law firm in the city. For a moment, he wondered if it had something to do with Christmas, but no, his employees were unlikely to let the holiday season affect them to that degree.

“What’s going on here?” he said.

Everyone froze, then there was a mad scramble to return to their desks, paralegals, associates and partners alike studiously avoiding his gaze.

Peter walked forward, toward the associates’ cubicles, and his lips thinned when he saw the empty cubicle of his personal associate. “Where’s Justin?”

“He’s—I think he’s in the file room, Mr. Hayes,” a dark-haired associate to his left (Dan, Dean?—they all looked and sounded the same to him) stammered out.

“Find him. Tell him I need the Sabatini briefs on my desk in five minutes.” Peter turned around and headed for his office. He became more bemused as he walked, noticing the same frantic, excited behavior everyone around him demonstrated before they saw him and scrambled to act like the sane, mature adults they were supposed to be.

He entered his office and sat down in his chair, glowering at the leather couch his associate usually occupied. Where the hell was Justin?

Fifteen minutes later, the door opened and Justin ran into the room before slamming the door shut.

Peter glared at him. "You're late."

Justin dumped the folders he was carrying on Peter's desk, a scowl firmly set in the creases of his mouth, green eyes flashing mutinously. "Late? I never left! I didn't sleep at all last night to get these proofed for you. This is slave labor!"

"Is that why you look like you slept in your suit? Change your clothes. You look like a mess. My associate's appearance reflects on me."

"I don't have another suit here," Justin said in the same sulky tone, raking a hand through his messy, reddish brown hair. "Not all of us have walk-in closets full of designer suits at work."

Peter wondered why he still hadn't fired that mouthy little shit. No one else at Hayes and Turner dared to backtalk to him, even senior partners. Peter was the managing partner. Justin was just a lowly second-year associate.

"Fine," Peter said. "Take one of my shirts. My suits will look too big on your scrawny frame."

"I'm not scrawny," Justin grumbled before disappearing into Peter's walk-in closet. "I just don't have the time or money for a personal trainer to get me looking like I stepped off a GQ cover."

"Your poor-little-me act would be more convincing if I didn't know your salary."

\$250,000 a year is more than enough to afford a gym membership.”

“I still have student loans,” Justin said from his closet, his voice a little muffled. “And I need to help my brother. Rent in Manhattan isn’t cheap, either. Not to mention that I literally have no time to go to the gym, because I basically live at work, thanks to you.”

“Maybe you should really live in the office. You’ll save on the rent.”

“An ingenious solution,” Justin snarked, finally emerging out of the closet in a white shirt. Peter’s shirt. Truth be told, Justin really wasn’t scrawny. He was lean but fit, his shoulders pretty broad—but not as broad as Peter’s. The shirt was a little big across his shoulders and chest, but it wouldn’t be noticeable under his suit.

Peter nodded. “Passable. Put on a tie. No, the gray-green one—it suits your eyes. Now tell me what’s wrong with everyone. What’s gotten everyone acting so strange?”

Justin blinked, his green eyes filling with confusion—and then pure delight, as the little shit realized that he knew something Peter didn’t. “You don’t know? The great Peter Hayes, the best corporate lawyer in the city, doesn’t know something?”

“You’re fired.”

Justin scoffed. “You fire me every week, but you wouldn’t know what to do without me if I actually took it seriously and walked out.”

“I asked you a question. Enough chitchat. Tell me what you know.”

Justin let out a chuckle. “It’s been all over the news since last night. I’m surprised you haven’t heard it yet. Basically, the witches of the Eastern European coven cast a

spell last night, to destroy the thrall the Hungarian vampires have over the people they enslaved. The spell was supposed to make the enthralled people feel an irresistible urge to go home, breaking the vampires' control over them, but they messed up."

"Of course they did," Peter said, his lips twisting derisively. He didn't have a high opinion of magic. He was a fan of law and order; magic was something that was hard to define and order. He utterly despised the way things became unpredictable in court if anything supernatural was involved. "How does it explain everyone acting like an idiot this morning?"

Justin plopped down in the chair across Peter's desk and yawned. "Basically, as I understand it, it was a bastardized version of the Christmas Wish spell, tweaked to suit their purposes. But the witches didn't take into account that last night was some kind of rare planetary alignment, which made their spell much larger in magnitude. Instead of being aimed at Hungary, the spell affected all of Europe and part of North America. Moreover, they apparently used an ambiguous combination of runes for 'home,' and the spell interpreted it as the person's home. Their soulmate."

Peter sneered. "Do people actually believe that bullshit?"

"You know they do," Justin said with another yawn, rubbing his face like a sleepy kitten.

Peter narrowed his eyes, wondering if he really should go a little easier on the kid. It wouldn't look good if his personal associate fell asleep during a meeting with a client—or in court.

"It's actually pretty fascinating," Justin said. "The spell apparently makes the person feel extremely antsy, urging them to reunite with their other half, and they can sense the general distance and direction their soulmate is. That's why people are so excited.

They want to go look for their soulmates before the spell wears off. It's not every day you basically get a free soulmate spell cast on you. Granted, this spell doesn't seem as precise as the tailor-made soulmate spells, but it still directs you to the general vicinity of your soulmate. And it's free. Do you know how expensive those spells normally are?"

"Only idiots pay for them," Peter said. The notion of soulmates had always seemed like juvenile nonsense to him. Witches insisted that they were real, that every person had their other half, someone who supposedly completed them. And never mind that millions of people lived perfectly happy lives without ever meeting their soulmates. But of course witches had an answer for that too: they claimed that the soulmate connection wasn't necessarily romantic in nature, that it was possible to be happily married to someone else but the person would always be missing out on the connection that would make them "complete." What utter nonsense. It was beyond belief that there were idiots who paid fortunes for those spells.

Justin shrugged with a wry smile. "Rich people have a lot of money to burn. Didn't you spend half a million on a car last month?"

"Don't compare my car to a parlor trick." Peter hummed thoughtfully, drumming his fingers over the armrest. "The North American coven must be pissed that the Eastern European coven encroached into their territory and ruined a very profitable side of their business. Arrange a meeting with the coven. We might get some nice billables thanks to this mess if they want to sue."

"Only you," Justin said with a laugh. "Can you even practice international magical law?"

Of course he could. He wasn't one of the best lawyers in the country for nothing. "As my associate, you should know the answer to that question."

Justin rolled his eyes. “Anyway, people are excited. HR probably isn’t though.” He smiled. “Some people actually tried to butter me up to convince you to let them take a leave of absence. Isn’t it amusing that people think I can make you do something?”

Peter wasn’t amused in the slightest. Leave was something unheard of in a high-profile law firm like theirs. He couldn’t even remember the last time he was on vacation. Possibly five years ago. “Leave? Have they lost their minds?”

Justin smiled again, blinking at him sleepily. “I told them you’d say that. But I think some of them were hoping you’d feel the urge to look for your soulmate too and would be more understanding.” Justin yawned again. “They don’t know you like I do. As if you’d ever allow some silly nonsense like that to control your actions.”

“Exactly. Now get back to work. Contact the North American coven and offer them legal counsel. Tell them that we can offer them the services of any lawyer except for me. I’m obviously too busy for them.”

“And what if they don’t fall for it and request another lawyer?”

Peter raised his eyebrows. “They won’t. A complex, international case like that would require the best. I’m the best.”

“The most arrogant for sure.”

“It’s not arrogance if it’s true. Don’t forget that we have a meeting with Sabatini in fifteen minutes.”

“Unless he went searching for his soulmate too.”

“I doubt it. Billionaires don’t have souls.”

Justin chuckled, getting to his feet. “Neither do millionaire lawyers, apparently.”

“You’re hilarious.”

“I know.”

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Three days later, Peter had to admit that he had really underestimated how much the soulmate nonsense would affect their firm. Most of their employees had requested leave, and when they had been denied, some of them had quit and quite a few threatened to. HR had been working hard, trying to appease the unhappy employees. To Peter's distaste, in the end they were forced to compromise. They gave everyone some time off but staggered it, to make sure the firm ran smoothly—as smoothly as possible when people had lost their fucking minds. Everyone seemed distracted either by the urge to find their soulmates or the elation at having found them. It was utterly disgusting.

Peter felt like the only sane person in the building. Well, with a few rare exceptions. He was somewhat surprised that Justin didn't seem affected by the craze, either. Normally his associate had a soft, bleeding heart, and the soulmate nonsense seemed right up his alley. But to Peter's surprise and pleasure, Justin remained as efficient and useful as ever. Not that Peter ever let Justin know that he considered him useful. Associates needed a firm hand to toughen them up, not praise to stroke their fragile egos.

Though, truth be told, Justin probably deserved some praise—and a nice bonus. Not only did he not let this nonsense affect his work, but he was also more dedicated to his job than ever, working in Peter's office all night long to pick up the slack of other associates. Strictly speaking, Justin shouldn't be working in Peter's office—or sleeping on his couch, for that matter—when he had a perfectly functional cubicle next to the other associates, but Peter decided to take pity on him. He wouldn't have been able to bear being around those idiots 24/7, either. Besides, Peter had a study in his penthouse in the same building as the offices of Hayes and Turner, so he had no need for his office at night. Justin could sleep in it.

“When will this goddamn spell wear off?” Peter said, glowering at yet another leave request on his desk. A request from a senior partner. He’d had a higher opinion of his partners’ intelligence before this debacle. Only Turner seemed as uninterested in the soulmates bullshit as he was.

Justin looked up from the paperwork he was proofing on Peter’s couch, a yellow marker in his hand. “The North American coven estimates that the spell will last at least another week. Which you would have known about if you didn’t foist the case on me. If only those poor people knew that they’re paying for your ridiculously high billable hours when they should be paying my much lower rates.”

“You’re my associate. You’re here to do the boring work that’s beneath me. I’ll take over the case once we’re at the negotiation table. Until then, you do the grunt work. Your work is mine, because you’re mine.”

Justin stared at him. “I don’t think that’s how it works,” he said faintly, clearing his throat. His face was a little red.

“Besides,” Peter said, dropping his gaze back to the Sabatini merger files. “You’re already a better lawyer than most junior partners, so they have nothing to complain about.”

“Okay, did you just praise me?” Justin pinched himself. “It must be the lack of sleep. I must be losing my mind.”

Peter just scoffed. That was what he got for trying to be nice for a change.

For a long while, they worked in companionable silence. Justin was probably the only person of his acquaintance who didn’t make silence awkward in the slightest. This felt truly companionable. Familiar. They’d spent countless hours in this office sharing space—and sometimes thoughts—as they worked on different things. Peter knew

what Justin looked like right now without even looking at him. There was probably a tiny furrow between his brows as he frowned in concentration, and he tended to chew on his bottom lip when he thought. It always looked a little red and swollen because of this habit.

“Can I have tomorrow off?”

Peter snapped his gaze up. “Tomorrow off?”

Justin rubbed at his eyes. “Yeah. It’s Sunday. I know the concept is unfamiliar to you, but people normally leave their workplace for a day or two. It’s called a weekend.”

“We don’t do weekends. In fact, you know as well as I do that most of our clients mess up on weekends.”

“I know,” Justin said with a sigh. “But my brother is arriving tomorrow morning. I haven’t seen Riven in five months, Peter.”

And why should I care? That was what Peter should have said. Instead, he said, “I thought you said he’s a brat who doesn’t want to have anything to do with you?”

Justin pursed his lips, suddenly looking far younger than his twenty-seven years. “He is. But he’s still my baby brother. And I miss him, even if he doesn’t miss me. I barely talked him into spending Christmas with me.”

“It’s not Christmas yet,” Peter said. “There’s no need to take an entire day off. You can take two hours off.”

Justin rolled his eyes with a laugh. “God, you’re impossible. Tomorrow is Sunday . I’m not supposed to be working on Sunday at all.”

“You’re getting paid for your work.”

“Money isn’t everything. I need some me time, Peter. I don’t actually remember the last time I left this building. I swear this couch has permanent indents from my ass. Don’t get me wrong—it’s pretty soft and comfortable, but I actually miss sleeping in a real bed.” He grinned. “Surely you can survive one day without me?”

Peter leveled him with a flat look. “Fine. Have a day off. I expect you here on Monday at seven sharp.”

“Yessir,” Justin said with far too much cheek for someone still working at eight PM on Saturday, and nearly ran out of the room, as though afraid that Peter would change his mind.

Peter scowled and turned his attention back to the contract he had been reading, but try as he might, he couldn’t seem able to focus on it, his mood souring.

Sighing, he rolled his chair back and got to his feet.

He might as well take the evening off. Have a shot of scotch and maybe get laid.

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He did have a shot of scotch at the bar across the street, but the getting laid part of the plan wasn't going great.

Not for lack of opportunity. For all Justin's jokes about his arrogance, it wasn't based on nothing. Peter simply didn't suffer from false modesty: he knew he was attractive, and other people knew it too. He was tall, he worked hard to keep himself in shape, and his dark hair was still thick and without a hint of gray. Peter had never had trouble getting laid even when he'd been an awkward teenager. As a successful lawyer of thirty-nine wearing a bespoke suit, he certainly didn't lack for offers that evening, both from women and men alike.

He just wasn't interested.

Peter scanned the bar with his eyes, silently observing over the rim of his glass, but no one caught his interest, despite the low hum of need under his skin. He wanted something, but he wasn't sure what. He wasn't even sure it was sex he wanted.

"Can I buy you a drink?"

Peter looked at the tall blonde who had just taken the seat next to him. She was his type—gorgeous, elegantly dressed, and confident—and from the way she was smiling at him, he could tell that she was looking for a good night and nothing more. She was practically perfect in every way.

But there was still nothing: he didn't feel even a flicker of attraction, his body completely uninterested, as if he didn't have an objectively stunning woman trying to pick him up. It was starting to unsettle him. He'd never had a problem with his sex

drive. He was a healthy man in his prime.

“Sure,” Peter said, pushing away his unease.

She signaled the bartender to refill his drink. “I’m usually not so forward,” she said with a smile. “But you have really striking eyes. So blue. I couldn’t resist. I’m Karen.”

Peter smiled back. “Peter.”

Over the next hour, he smiled and flirted, going through the motions of a mating dance and trying to ignore the strange urge to move and do something.

By the time they got to his penthouse, he was more than a little buzzed, the alcohol dulling the sense of wrongness and the urge to be elsewhere. She was shivering and moaning against his mouth, her hands roaming all over his shoulders and back.

He still felt nothing—nothing but the urge to pull away. His cock remained soft. That never fucking happened to him.

Trying not to freak out, Peter gently pushed the woman away. “Look, I’m sorry about this, but I don’t feel good. Raincheck?”

She stared up at him with a mix of disbelief and annoyance. “Figures,” she said with a sigh. “I knew there must have been something wrong with you if you were alone at the bar looking the way you look.”

“Thanks,” Peter said wryly. “It’s not you, really. I’m just not in the mood. I thought I was, but I was wrong.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Is it the soulmates thing?”

“What?” Peter laughed. “No. I don’t believe that bullshit.”

She studied him thoughtfully. “Maybe you should. I’ve heard that some people are having problems down there if they aren’t with their soulmates. I thought you were like me—people lucky enough not to be affected by that spell, but maybe you aren’t.”

Peter frowned, starting to get irritated. “I don’t have a soulmate. That silly spell doesn’t work on me.”

Karen just shook her head, picked up her purse, and left.

Peter’s mood went downhill from there.

Shrugging off his suit jacket, he walked to the mini-bar and poured himself another shot of scotch. He stared at its surface.

Maybe it was just the alcohol. It was possible that he couldn’t get it up because of the alcohol. Yes, that must have been it.

Feeling relieved for finding a plausible explanation for tonight’s failure, Peter set his drink down and walked to the floor-to-ceiling window.

Christmas lights made the city look even brighter than usual. The view was unbeatable, but he was so high up that people looked like small ants, moving in groups. He could imagine the bright smiles on their faces as they did some last-minute Christmas shopping.

He’d never felt more removed from them.

Peter sighed, his shoulders hunching. He didn’t hate Christmas, but he had to admit he didn’t love it, either. This time of the year never failed to make him feel like an

outsider, an observer watching life pass him by.

Grimacing at his bleak thoughts, Peter turned away from the window. Even if he were the type to be happy with 2.5 kids and a house with a white picket fence—which he wasn't—there wasn't a person in the world he wanted that American dream with.

He glanced at his phone, wondering if Justin was asleep already.

Fuck it. Even if he was, Peter was his boss. Justin's time belonged to him.

Unlocking the screen, Peter brought up his most recent contacts and tapped on Justin's name.

Justin picked up on the third ring. "No," he said, sounding half-asleep. "I won't come back to work. You gave me permission to sleep in my bed. I'm in my bed, in my favorite Batman pajamas, and you aren't allowed to ruin it with a work emergency."

"There's no work emergency," Peter said, kind of wishing there was.

"Then why are you calling me at ass o'clock?"

"It's barely ten."

"I don't care, Peter. God, I can't escape you even in my dreams... I was having a beautiful dream starring two gorgeous women and me on the beach. We were having so much fun, but then you appeared like the worst kind of cockblocker, in your Tom Ford suit—on the beach!—and you ordered me to clean your fancy Italian shoes with my tongue. And the worst part was, I did it—while those gorgeous women were watching. I've never been more ashamed of my subconscious."

Peter cleared his throat a little, his stomach clenching from the mental image of Justin

licking his shoes. There was something... almost appealing about it.

He said with a smirk, “It’s not my fault your subconscious knows whose bitch you are.”

“I hate you,” Justin grumbled. “You’re the worst boss I’ve ever had.”

“I’m the most lenient boss you’ve ever had. Anyone else would have already fired you for your lack of respect.”

“There’s no lack of respect,” Justin mumbled. “You’re the best lawyer I’ve seen, but sometimes I don’t think you’re human. I’m convinced you were born in your fancy suits, with your smug, stupidly handsome face and arrogant smirk. Do babies smirk?”

Peter snorted, amused despite himself. “I’d ask my parents—well, if I spoke to them in this decade.”

“I’m sorry,” Justin said after a moment, his voice disgustingly soft.

Peter grimaced. “Nothing to be sorry about, Danvers. I’m hardly the only person in the world with estranged parents. It’s fine.”

“Do you know that you call me ‘Danvers’ when you feel uncomfortable? It’s a tell.”

“Quit psychoanalyzing me and go to sleep,” Peter said with a smile. “You’re making even less sense than usual.”

“Whose fault is that?” Justin murmured before hanging up.

Peter was still smiling as he put his phone down, relieved that the tension building under his skin was gone.

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Peter woke up the next morning feeling extremely antsy. At first he thought it was just the hangover, but the feeling didn't go away after he fixed his hangover with some greasy food. If anything, the more time passed, the worse his anxiety got.

He didn't fucking do anxiety.

It wasn't normal.

Peter could no longer deny that something was wrong. He could no longer ignore the itch under his skin, an itch to be elsewhere, go somewhere. And as much as he hated admitting being wrong—and as much as he scoffed at the idea of being affected by that bullshit spell—he could no longer deny that he did seem to be affected by it.

He had a soulmate.

The mere thought made him cringe. Damn it, it was ridiculous for a grown man to even consider nonsense like that. But Peter was a realist. As a lawyer, he liked facts. And the facts spoke for themselves. He'd been seemingly unaffected until Saturday evening. His soulmate must have been close enough for him not to feel the pull toward them—which meant they had been in the same building all week.

He could find out how many people had been in the building the previous day easily enough. He had contacts. But why make an effort when he had his personal associate to do the grunt work?

Besides, he hadn't spoken to Justin since yesterday. It was... strange. He was used to brainstorming ideas with him all the time. His associate was excellent for that kind of

thing. And his arguments didn't annoy Peter even when he was wrong. That was rare. Most people were annoying even when they were right.

"No," Justin said as he picked up. "It's Sunday, Peter."

"It's an emergency," Peter said, slipping into a shirt and buttoning it up with one hand.

"It always is," Justin said before sighing. "What sort of emergency?"

"I need you to research something for me. Find out how many people work in this building—and which of them aren't here today."

"Are you fucking serious?"

"Watch your language. I'm still your boss."

"Not on Sunday."

"Even on Sunday. I expect a report within the hour."

"What? Fuck off! You can't seriously expect me to—"

Peter hung up, knowing that for all Justin's bitching, he'd do as he was told. He always did. He was the only person Peter could always rely on.

Once again, Peter wondered if he should give his associate a Christmas gift. It felt... right. Justin's efficiency and loyalty should be rewarded. Last year Peter hadn't given him anything, even though he'd kind of wanted to.

Hmm... Maybe he could gift him a couple of spare suits, to put in Peter's closet.

Justin often needed to change after his all-nighters.

By the time Justin called him, Peter felt very pleased with himself. He'd managed to purchase five designer suits for Justin despite the short notice. The number of suits might seem a bit excessive, but they weren't bespoke, so some of them might not fit as well as they should. Never let it be said that Peter wasn't a thoughtful boss.

"You're late," Peter said, glancing at his watch. It had been an hour and two minutes.

"And you're a giant dick. Do you know I can be sued for stalking for this?"

"Stop whining and talk."

"Why do you need this information, seriously? If I'm going to get sued, I'd like to know why."

"None of your business," Peter said. "You're trying my patience, Justin."

Justin sighed. "Fine. There are approximately sixteen thousand people who live or work in the building. They mostly work, though. There are four residential floors, including your penthouse, but the other floors are taken by various firms, including Hayes and Turner. You're very lucky I know a guy in security, who was able to help me out—and now I owe him a huge favor, by the way. He said that there are only two hundred and twelve people still there, including you."

Damn it. Sixteen thousand people. It didn't really narrow it down much.

"Now will you tell me what the hell is going on?"

"No. Have you seen your brother yet?"

“I’ll pick him up from the airport in a few hours. It’s still early. Why?”

Peter had to literally bite his tongue to stop himself from ordering his associate to come back to work. The little shit would never let him live it down.

“Nothing,” he said tersely and hung up.

He stared unseeingly out the window, wondering why he’d even wanted Justin to come. They didn’t really have a difficult case that required them to work on Sunday. Surely he wasn’t being a horrible boss for the sake of being a horrible boss? He wasn’t that cruel. Or was he?

Shaking his head, Peter forced himself to think about the more pressing issue: his soulmate. Then again, was it really pressing? He could just ignore the issue altogether. The spell would supposedly last just another week. After a week, this dissatisfied itch under his skin would be gone. He would be back to normal.

Just a week.

He could do it.

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By Monday morning, Peter was starting to revise his opinion. He felt beyond agitated, his normally sharp mind distracted and unable to focus on work.

It was extremely aggravating. But not completely irresistible. The itch to go somewhere was very persistent, but it wasn't the irresistible need some of his employees claimed it to be when they had tried to convince him to give them time off. Which proved that either they were full of it or Peter's self-control was superior. Probably both.

Peter was half-tempted to ignore the issue altogether, to prove that it could be done, but he couldn't deny that he was... somewhat curious. He might not believe in soulmates, but who could possibly be considered a perfect match for him? Had the person not been so close, Peter wouldn't have bothered to look for them. But they were close. And he couldn't entirely suppress his curiosity.

So when the itch to go somewhere lessened at 7:12AM before entirely disappearing, Peter called security and asked for the names of the people who entered the building in the past few minutes.

"Eh, I'm not sure I should be telling you this, Mr. Hayes," the security guard said hesitantly. "People's privacy is—"

"I'm a lawyer, Sam," Peter said, as if that made him more trustworthy. "I'm not asking this for any nefarious reasons. This is a matter of great importance."

The man hesitated before sighing. "All right, I'll text you the names in a little while, Mr. Hayes. I'll need to look at the computer. I don't know every person in this

building.”

Peter smiled. “Thank you, Sam. You’re a lifesaver.”

He hung up and leaned back in his chair, looking at the door. It was 7:19 already. Where the hell was Justin?

As if reading his thoughts, his associate entered the room.

Something inside Peter eased at the sight of him—but he tensed up again when he saw that Justin was carrying a cup of coffee, which he put in front of Peter.

Peter narrowed his eyes. “What did you do?”

Justin blinked innocently. “What do you mean?”

“This.” Peter gestured to the coffee. “If you’re bothering to bribe me, you must have messed something up.”

“I resent that! Can’t I just be nice?”

Peter gave him a flat look.

Justin grinned impishly, plopping into the opposite chair. “Really, Peter. I’m just in a good mood today.”

“And why is that?” Peter said, picking up the cup.

“I have a soulmate!”

Peter’s hand froze in the air. He set the cup down. “What?” he said sharply.

Justin smiled wider, looking at him with his ridiculous eyes. “Yeah. I thought I didn’t have one, but apparently I do. Can you believe that?”

Peter’s first thought was a hard No . He unclenched his jaw, unsure why the idea bothered him so much. Justin simply wasn’t allowed to—he wasn’t supposed to believe that nonsense, much less want a soulmate. The thought was inconceivable. Unacceptable.

“Soulmates don’t exist,” he said, glaring the idiot down. “We’re lawyers. Lawyers deal in facts, instead of believing in fairy tales created to sell trashy books to ignorant and foolish people.”

He had expected Justin to roll his eyes or scoff, but his expression was... sad?

“I know I joke about you being a heartless dick, but surely you don’t actually...” Justin shook his head, biting the inside of his cheek. “I’m not like you, Peter. I don’t think I can be happy with having a fat bank account and leaving a trail of one-night stands behind me. I want a connection. I’m not saying I necessarily believe that soulmates are forever, but... I really want a human connection.” His green eyes were suspiciously shiny. “I don’t have anyone, Peter. My parents are gone, my only brother hates me, and I don’t have any time for a personal life or friends because of my job. I don’t have anyone. No partner, no friendships, no nothing.”

Something ugly and vicious twisted in Peter’s chest before curling in his stomach. “What about—your job? Is that nothing too?”

Justin laughed, his lips twisting into something bitter and fragile. “I might be masochistic, but I do like this job. I love it. It’s the only good thing I have going right now. But it’s not enough. It doesn’t replace a—a personal relationship, a friendship. I’d like to think that we’re—friends, but for you, I’m just a lowly associate you like bossing around and treating like your personal slave.” Justin swallowed, averting his

gaze, his face a little pink. “I want a human connection, Peter. A connection that’ll be reciprocated. This is my chance to finally get it.”

“No,” Peter said.

Justin shot him a startled look. “What?”

“I forbid you to look for your so-called soulmate.”

Justin blinked slowly. “You forbid me. To look for my soulmate.”

“That’s correct.”

“Are you fucking serious?” Justin hissed, springing to his feet. “You can’t forbid me anything, you overbearing dick.”

“Sit down.”

Justin glowered at him, breathing hard. “Fuck you.”

“Sit.”

Justin didn’t sit down, still scowling fiercely.

Peter got to his feet and rounded the table. Justin watched him approach suspiciously. He flinched a little when Peter put a hand on his shoulder, his green eyes fixed on him with something like wariness.

“You’re a capable, talented lawyer with a very promising career,” Peter said, squeezing his shoulder before moving to fix Justin’s tie. It was an eyesore. “Focus on that and I’ll put you on partner track next year. You’ll be a junior partner in three

years. A senior partner within a decade. That's not nothing. A 'soulmate' would only hold you back. Focus on your job as my associate. Nothing else matters. Your 'soulmate' doesn't matter."

Justin's lips curled into a weird expression that wasn't quite a smile. "Only you matter, right, Peter? God, you're such a self-centered dick. Admit it: you like that my life consists of nothing but you and the work you give me."

Peter chuckled. "Who is the self-important one now?"

"Bull. Shit." Justin leaned into his personal space, his eyes boring into Peter's. "I know you, Peter. Maybe you don't consider me a friend, but I know you better than anyone else does. You like being the most important thing in my life. I'm not sure why you like it, but you do. Maybe it's just an ego thing, but you like it. You actively discourage me from having friends in the office—"

"That's not true," Peter said with a scoff.

"It is. You never let me have lunch with the other associates—"

Peter sneered. "I didn't know it was such a hardship for you to eat with me in high-end restaurants. If you preferred eating fast food with the other associates, you should have said something."

Justin gave him a bitter smile. "That's the thing," he said quietly. "I don't. You've trained me into preferring your company to anyone else's."

"And that's a bad thing?"

"It is, when you treat me like a thing you own but don't like. You treat me like a pet you keep on a leash and don't want to share but refuse to pet yourself."

“You want me to pet you?”

Justin flushed bright red and scowled at him. “You know what I mean,” he muttered, not quite meeting his eyes.

Peter smiled, amused and fascinated by his embarrassment. “Are you saying that if I pet you, you’ll give up on your soulmate?”

Justin glared, something uncertain about his expression, before dropping his gaze. “Don’t joke about it, Peter. Please.”

What?

Placing his hand on Justin’s chin, Peter tipped his face up and studied it, his amusement gone.

“You will,” he said slowly, his stomach clenching. “You will actually give up on your soulmate for me.” The mere thought was... Fuck, it was heady.

Christ, what was wrong with him? Why did the idea of having such power—completely unprofessional, inappropriate power—over his associate made him exhilarated, as if he was on the verge of closing a multi-million-dollar deal? Was the boy actually correct and Peter liked being the center of his life? The thought was disturbing on several levels.

But not enough to stop him from pushing. Not enough to suppress the need to know.

“Admit it,” Peter ordered.

Justin laughed a little. “Wow, you’re actually as cruel as people think you are.”

Peter pressed his thumb against the corner of Justin's mouth. Justin didn't seem to be breathing at all.

"Admit it," Peter repeated, more quietly.

Justin sucked in a breath, his pupils blown wide. He gave a shaky laugh. "I'm not sure what your purpose is. To humiliate me? If it is, congrats—I'm sufficiently humiliated."

"Just say it, Justin." Peter looked him in the eyes steadily. "Do you want me?"

Justin's throat worked. "Everyone wants you, and you know it, you smug dick."

"Objection," Peter said, allowing a tiny smile to curl his lips. "The question was addressed to you, not everyone."

"The objection is irrelevant because the answer is the same, regardless of who it's addressed to." Justin glowered at him, his face red. "Happy now? Now stop groping me. I'm already thoroughly humiliated."

"I'm holding your chin. It's hardly groping."

Justin scoffed. "You might as well be holding my dick, Peter. The effect is the same. Let go."

Peter didn't let go. He was well aware that he should, that he was edging closer and closer to sexual harassment territory—which was something he was normally very responsible about—but he couldn't seem to stop now. He shifted his grip, turning it into a caress of Justin's cheek, perversely enjoying the shiver it elicited. "Look at you. If your soulmate walked into this room right now, you wouldn't even look at them. You wouldn't care. All you'd see is me." Me, me, mine.

“God, I fucking hate you right now,” Justin breathed out, his eyelids growing heavy as he turned his head and nuzzled into Peter’s hand like a touch-starved thing.

Watching him, transfixed, Peter pressed his thumb against Justin’s lips. They parted, soft and wet, sucking his thumb in, and Peter nearly groaned, arousal making him lightheaded. He burned to replace his thumb with his cock.

Fuck. He should stop. He must stop. He was taking it too far. He was the boy’s boss and the managing partner of the firm. He couldn’t possibly risk his sterling reputation and career for the chance to stick his cock in his personal associate’s mouth, no matter how good it might feel. It didn’t matter that Justin clearly wanted the same. Their respective positions made any sexual relationship between them impossible without ruining their careers. Justin wouldn’t want to be known as the guy who sucked his boss’s cock in order to be put on a partner track.

“We should stop,” Peter said, his eyes on Justin’s mouth around his thumb.

Justin lifted his heavy-lidded eyes to him. “We should,” he mumbled breathlessly around Peter’s thumb.

“This can’t happen,” Peter said. To his disgust, it didn’t sound as firm it should have.

Get a grip, Hayes.

He removed his thumb from Justin’s mouth.

“Why not?” Justin almost whined, blinking at him dazedly. His lips looked very red. And shiny. They’d look so good around his cock.

“The power imbalance between us is so vast, I can’t initiate anything without being accused of sexual harassment—”

“I wouldn’t!” Justin protested.

“You might not,” Peter said softly. To his surprise and annoyance, he wasn’t really worried about being sued by Justin. He trusted his associate that much, apparently. “But other people would not see it that way. So I can’t touch you. I won’t.”

Justin grabbed Peter’s tie. He pulled him down by his tie until their foreheads pressed together. “No,” he said, inhaling shakily, his pupils dilated. “You can’t do this. I want you. You want me. I can feel it.” Justin’s mouth touched his, the touch barely there, his lips trembling. “Peter,” he whispered. “Peter.” And then the kiss became hungrier, deeper, his lips clinging to Peter’s, his tongue shoving into Peter’s mouth clumsily, ravenously, as if Justin wanted to consume him, whining, kissing hard, desperate, and needy, curling his fingers around Peter’s tie and trying to pull him closer, standing on his toes to reach him better. “Please. Kiss me—kiss me back—”

And god help him, Peter kissed him. Justin’s moan was loud and shameless, his fingers burying in Peter’s hair as Peter thrust his tongue into his mouth, kissing him deep and hard. Christ, the way Justin opened for him went straight to his cock.

Justin whined in protest when Peter broke the kiss. “No...”

Peter gazed into his associate’s glazed eyes, his cock so hard he could barely think. “We should stop,” he said hoarsely, stroking Justin’s shiny, kiss-swollen bottom lip with his thumb. He was so, so fucking hot. “We’re at work.”

“Right,” Justin said dazedly, staring at Peter’s mouth, before leaning in for more kisses.

Peter found himself indulging him—couldn’t not indulge him, powerless against the desire that consumed them both. They were clinging to each other, lips and bodies, making out like teenagers, gasping and groaning, until the shrill sound of the phone

finally penetrated the fog of lust clouding Peter's brain.

"Fuck," he said, pushing Justin away and all but jumping back from him. He turned around and took a deep breath and then another, loosening his tie. He felt hot and breathless. "Get out."

"Peter—"

"Out." He regretted the coldness of his tone, but there was no other choice. He had to get Justin away from him before he ended up fucking a second-year associate at their workplace. Jesus. What had he been thinking?

"Didn't take you for a coward."

Peter went rigid. "You're forgetting yourself," he ground out. "I'm still your boss."

"You're the asshole who just had his tongue down my throat and is now trying to pretend it didn't happen. I felt your erection against mine, Peter. You can't pretend it didn't happen."

Biting the inside of his cheek, Peter turned around and stared him down. "This is my own fault, I guess. For letting an associate have an attitude like that with the managing partner. Anyone else would have already fired you—years ago."

Justin rubbed his red, wet lips with the back of his hand, his eyes glistening. "Guess what? You don't have to worry about my attitude anymore." His lips twisting, he said with relish, "Find yourself another personal slave. I'll return to my cubicle, Mr. Hayes." He stormed out before Peter could say anything, the door slamming shut after him.

Peter leaned back heavily against his desk and sighed, looking at the door unseeingly.

There was a tight feeling in his chest, almost like panic.

His phone chimed with a message.

It was probably the security guy messaging him with the names of his potential soulmates.

Peter didn't open the message. He couldn't bring himself to care. He didn't give a damn about his supposed soulmate anymore.

He wanted his associate back.

He had to get him back.

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The good thing about being the boss was that Justin couldn't refuse to talk to him even if he no longer was his personal associate. He was still an associate in Peter's firm. He had to answer if the managing partner called him. Even if Justin were that irresponsible, other associates would start gossiping if he didn't pick up the phone in his cubicle. But Justin was too responsible for that.

"Yes, Mr. Hayes," he bit out when he picked up.

It had been three hours and twenty minutes. It seemed his temper hadn't cooled yet. Pity. Peter had thought he'd waited long enough. It surely felt long enough for him.

Peter frowned, drumming his fingers on the desk restlessly. "Call me by my name. Other associates would think it strange if you suddenly started calling me Mr. Hayes."

"That's what all the associates call you, Mr. Hayes. I'm just one of them now."

Peter pinched the bridge of his nose. "Quit throwing a hissy fit and get your ass over here."

"No thank you. I'm good here. Loving the view from my cubicle."

Peter considered several approaches. He wasn't the best lawyer in the city for nothing. He was good at reading people. Good at giving them what they wanted.

"I need you," he said.

There was silence on the line.

“You manipulative asshole,” Justin hissed.

Peter grinned. There was a reason he’d tolerated Justin’s attitude for years. He knew Peter, could read him better than anyone.

“Maybe it was a little manipulative,” he conceded. He could easily imagine what Justin looked like right now: he probably had the cutest fierce scowl on his lips, green eyes flashing murder. Peter dropped his voice as he added, “But it doesn’t mean it’s not true.”

“I swear you were a villain in your previous life,” Justin said darkly. “A slimy mafia boss in a Dolce and Gabbana suit.”

“Not my style,” Peter said. “Armani is more me.”

Justin laughed. “God, you’re impossible...” He heaved a sigh. “You have a meeting with the Stanford Group in forty-five minutes. Stop wasting your time on bothering me and get ready for it.”

“I will, once my associate gets his ass over here.”

“I’m not your associate anymore.”

“Says who? It’s not something you get to decide, sweetheart. Unless you’re ready to quit the job altogether, you don’t get to say no when the managing partner chooses you to work with him.”

“It doesn’t work like that, Peter.”

Peter smiled, sensing victory. His name was a good sign. “It does, if I decide that it works that way. It’s my firm. And you’re my associate.”

Justin sighed again. “It’s a bad fucking idea, okay?” he murmured, barely audibly. “Surely you understand that. You aren’t that emotionally stunted.”

Peter drummed his fingers on the desk, considering his response. One that hopefully wouldn’t infuriate his associate. “We are both adults,” he said carefully. “Not teenagers. We can ignore some inconvenient attraction and work well together. We are good together, Justin. That’s rare. I...” He grimaced, not wanting to say more, but revealing needs and vulnerabilities could be beneficial in negotiations. “I trust you the way I trust no one else in this firm. I need you by my side. It’s not the same without you.”

“God, I hate you,” Justin ground out. “I hate you so much.” He sighed and said before hanging up, “I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

Peter grinned, triumph coursing through his veins like a heady drug.

Justin was his again.

Now he just needed to figure out how to keep their relationship strictly professional.

In theory, it should be easy. He’d been working with Justin for two years without sticking his cock in him.

He could do it.

He was Peter fucking Hayes. He hadn’t gotten to where he was by making stupid decisions that could ruin his career.

Justin was just his associate. And nothing more.

In retrospect, Peter had been a tad too optimistic.

Yes, he had managed to keep his dick out of his associate for two years. But keeping the streak was much harder when he knew how good touching him would feel. When he knew how sweetly Justin would moan and suck on his tongue. How good he would feel in his arms.

Peter did manage to keep his attention on the meeting with the Stanford Group—because he was a professional—but his gaze kept straying to his associate far more often than the situation called for. Thankfully, he didn't need to speak much. Justin did most of the talking, as usual. He really was the best associate in the firm, smart and eloquent; Peter hadn't been keeping him around for his pretty face.

Though the pretty face didn't hurt.

Peter grimaced on the inside. Damn it. If he couldn't stop thinking about how attractive his associate was during a work meeting, he was in trouble.

"You were distracted," Justin commented as the door closed after their clients.

"Yes," Peter murmured, already thinking of possible solutions to the problem.

The obvious one—to get rid of Justin—was out of the question. He didn't want to get rid of him.

But this kind of distraction was unacceptable in a field where the sharpness of his mind and instincts was paramount.

That left only one solution.

“I’ve changed my mind,” Peter said. “I’ll need to fuck you once to get over this useless attraction.”

Justin blinked at him owlishly before flushing. Like that of all redheads, his blush was very obvious. And pretty. His cheeks were almost as red as his mouth now. “Wow,” he choked out. “That was weird, even for you.”

“Was it,” Peter said, leaning back in his seat and folding his hands on his flat stomach. “It’s distracting me, and I can’t afford distractions.”

“I’m a distraction,” Justin said.

You have no idea , Peter thought grimly, barely resisting the urge to grab his associate and shove him on the desk. “You are. Return to your cubicle and stay away from me. After the workday is over, come up to my penthouse.”

Justin opened his pretty mouth and closed it a few times before huffing and storming out of the office.

Peter made a concentrated effort not to look at his ass.

He failed.

Well, it was a good thing he would get over this soon.

Peter looked at his watch and grimaced.

Not soon enough.

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The day dragged on painfully slowly.

Or perhaps it seemed to drag more than usual because Peter wasn't used to working alone. More than once, he found himself turning toward the empty couch, a sardonic remark on his lips—and no one to share it with.

It made his mood absolutely foul. Not Justin's absence in itself—how much Justin's absence was souring his mood. He told himself there was a difference. If there was, it was elusive.

Finally, his last meeting was over, and Peter left his office a little after nine.

Justin wasn't in his cubicle. He must have already been waiting for him in the penthouse. He had his own keycard.

The thought gave him pause.

He couldn't even remember why or when he had given Justin a spare keycard to his apartment. Perhaps he'd sent him upstairs to grab something from his apartment and forgotten to take it back. That must be it. Either way, Justin was likely already there.

Peter pressed his keycard to the private elevator's panel, and the elevator began rising to the top floor.

He stared at his reflection in the mirror. Besides the tension at the corners of his mouth and the glint of impatience in his eyes, nothing betrayed that he was less than calm.

Frankly, Peter wasn't entirely sure what to expect. The evening could go a few ways. Justin might be resentful and moody and would have to be talked into it. Or he might be eager and excited and would throw himself at him as soon as Peter walked into his apartment.

The reality proved different.

He walked into the penthouse and looked around, bemused. It was quiet. Justin was nowhere to be seen.

Frowning, Peter dropped his briefcase to the floor and walked deeper into the apartment.

He pushed his bedroom door open and went still.

Justin was asleep in his bed.

Slowly, he walked closer and stared at the boy.

The first thing he registered was that Justin was under the sheets. He hadn't just fallen asleep waiting for Peter. He'd undressed and gotten under the sheets either with the intention of waiting for Peter naked—or with the intention to sleep. The cheek.

Chuckling, Peter considered waking him up. But it wasn't worth the fuss. Justin loved his sleep and hated being woken up. And frankly, with this job, they never got enough sleep. He could always fuck the boy in the morning.

Sighing in disappointment, Peter finished his bedtime routine, undressed, and got into the bed beside his associate.

Justin mumbled something sleepily and rolled toward him, nestling under his arm.

His hair seemed completely red in the yellow light of the lamp, the contrast striking against his alabaster skin. Soft lips pressed to the side of Peter's chest, and Peter inhaled sharply, trying to will his arousal away.

This was ridiculous. He was nearly forty. He'd survived two years without sticking his cock into his associate. He could survive a single night.

It was still strange. Peter couldn't remember the last time he'd shared a bed with someone without having sex with them first. This was... odd. A travesty.

The boy would pay for this in the morning.

The thought didn't help his erection. Nor did the warm, naked body snuggled up against his side.

Peter sighed through his gritted teeth and slipped his hand down to wrap around his cock. He'd have to deal with it if he wanted to get some sleep anytime soon.

He stroked his cock slowly, leaning down to bury his face in Justin's hair. Christ, he smelled so good. Was it perverse that he was getting off on this closeness while Justin slept peacefully? Maybe. On the other hand, the boy had known what he was in for when he'd gotten into Peter's bed naked.

Peter wondered how long his associate had wanted him. Justin had alluded to it not being a new thing, but how long? Months? A year? Since their first meeting?

Peter still remembered their first meeting.

Their firm had been working on a very difficult case, and Peter had been desperate enough to send a memo to all the associates, saying that anyone who found a loophole to win the seemingly lost case would be granted the position of his personal

associate. And never mind that he'd never had a personal associate, preferring to bully whoever was available into doing the grunt work for him.

When a few hours later, a redhead arrived at his office, claiming that he had the solution, Peter listened with a great deal of skepticism. The boy looked too young and green—and completely unfamiliar, which meant that he was one of the new guys. Turner was the one who handled the associates, so it wasn't surprising that Peter hadn't met this one yet.

He would have remembered him.

Judging by the starstruck expression the boy was trying and failing to hide, he knew Peter by reputation only. They'd never talked before.

The boy was pretty, all high cheekbones and striking features, with a lush mouth that seemed very bright compared to his pale skin.

Peter could easily imagine him on his knees sucking on a thick cock—

He quashed the thought ruthlessly, appalled at himself. He was hardly a saint, but he never thought about his subordinates in such a way. Never.

Until then, apparently.

Even as it became obvious that the boy's solution really could work, the thought of that pretty mouth wrapped around a cock still lingered at the back of his mind.

Over the following years, Peter had learned to ignore Justin's attractiveness—for the most part.

But now he wondered what would have happened if he hadn't suppressed that filthy

thought during their first meeting.

What if he'd rewarded the clever boy with his cock?

"Good boy," he could have told him. "Now come over here and get your reward." He would part his legs to make it clear what he meant.

Justin would flush, of course, his pale cheeks staining red with angry disbelief, embarrassment—and arousal.

"I—that's sexual harassment, Mr. Hayes," he would say, licking his lips.

"No, it's a reward," Peter would tell him, holding his gaze. "You can walk out now and we'll pretend it never happened. Or you can come over here and have the privilege of sucking my cock." It wasn't arrogance. He knew his reputation in lawyers' circles. For many young lawyers, sucking his cock would be a turn-on.

The boy would hesitate, but then he would kneel down between his legs and open his pretty mouth for Peter's cock, looking up at Peter with hero worship in his eyes. Peter would grab his bright hair and fuck into the associate's mouth, fast and hard, abusing his power over him and forcing him to take it, owning him completely—

Peter groaned and, turning onto his side, slipped his aching cock between Justin's thighs. His skin was so soft... Fuck, it felt so damn good... A few rough thrusts between Justin's thighs was enough to push him over the edge. He came with a low moan, muffling it against Justin's neck.

Breathing hard, Peter pressed his lips to Justin's throat. Justin mumbled his name in his sleep.

His chest tight with affection, Peter kissed him on his warm cheek. Justin didn't

awaken, only smiled a little and squirmed even closer to him. He looked so damn endearing. Peter kissed him on the forehead, breathing him in.

He froze, realizing what he was doing.

He didn't kiss people on their foreheads or cheeks. He most definitely didn't grind against them like a teenager while they slept.

Fuck. He couldn't believe Justin had reduced him to this.

He would pay for this in the morning.

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The shrill sound of his alarm woke him up.

Groaning, Peter reached for his phone, trying to find it without opening his eyes.

He failed, of course.

“What’s that noise?” Justin mumbled, burying his face tighter against Peter’s armpit, as if trying to hide there.

Opening his eyes, Peter finally located his phone and turned his alarm off. “My alarm. Rise and shine, Danvers.”

“No,” Justin mumbled. “I refuse. It’s Christmas Eve. And it’s still dark.”

“It’s six.”

“Six? Why are we getting up at six? Our office is a short elevator ride away.”

“We have just enough time to have sex if we’re efficient.”

“You put sex into your schedule?”

“Of course,” Peter said. “Now get on it.”

“You’re a tyrant,” Justin said, slipping his hand down Peter’s bare chest and wrapping it around his morning wood. He sighed. “I kind of hoped you’d have a small cock. But of course you don’t. Life isn’t fair.”

“Shut up and suck my cock, dear. We’re running on a tight schedule.”

Laughing into his armpit, Justin started stroking his cock. “I’m too sleepy to suck you off. A handjob will have to do. It’s your own fault for scheduling sex at ass o’clock.”

“It’s your fault for falling asleep yesterday. If I’d fucked you last night, the issue would have been fixed.”

Justin groaned. “God, why is it that your horrible attitude doesn’t piss me off? It shouldn’t be endearing. I need help.”

“What you need is my cock in you.” Peter slid his hand down Justin’s bare back, groping his perky ass. “We’re wasting time, Danvers. Get lube from the drawer.”

“Figures you’d be unbearably bossy even in bed,” Justin grumbled, but he let go of Peter’s cock and did as he was told. “Fucking control freak.”

“Don’t pretend you don’t like it,” Peter said. “Get on your stomach.”

With much grumbling, Justin flopped onto his stomach.

Peter took a moment to look at him, stroking his erection to take the edge off.

Justin was beautiful, all smooth, pale skin and a plump, muscular ass Peter wanted to sink his teeth in.

So he did.

Justin yelped. “Peter!”

Laughing, Peter kissed the mark he’d just left and opened the bottle of lube. It was

strange. He couldn't remember the last time he'd laughed during sex. It wasn't as though he wasn't aroused—he was, to the point that his cock fucking ached and throbbed, already leaking precome—but there was lightness and warmth in his chest he usually didn't feel during sex.

He prepped the boy carefully but quickly, barely touching his prostate as he stretched him with his fingers. Justin was still squirming within minutes.

“Fuck.” Justin's voice was a mix of a groan and a whine. He turned his head to look at Peter over his shoulder. “Come on, I'm ready. Want your cock. Wanted it forever.”

Peter had to squeeze the base of his cock to stop himself from coming like a green boy. He spread lube all over his cock with his left hand, his eyes flicking back and forth between Justin's sweet profile and the way his hole was sucking in the tips of Peter's fingers. He thrust his fingers in and out, watching Justin's eyes become more heavy-lidded, his face flushing and lips parting as he panted.

“Come on,” Justin whined, pushing back onto his fingers. “Aren't we on a tight schedule? I'm ready, Peter.”

Pulling his fingers out with an obscene slick sound, Peter nudged his cockhead against Justin's hole. He went still, teasing them both, but Justin lifted his ass higher, practically fucking himself back on his cock.

They both groaned as the head popped in.

Fuck, he was so damn tight.

Peter mouthed Justin's bare shoulder, breathing hard as he resisted the urge to just pound into him.

He pushed inside slowly, relishing the way his associate's hole took him easily, surrounding his cock in velvet, pulsing heat.

“On second thought, this is the worst idea ever,” Justin ground out breathlessly. “I’ll never be able to look at you without remembering what your cock feels like inside of me.”

Good , something whispered at the back of Peter’s mind viciously. I’ll fuck you so good you won’t be able to live without my cock in you.

Shaking the insane thought off, Peter sank his teeth into Justin’s shoulder and started thrusting, aiming for Justin’s prostate. He was rewarded with quiet, helpless whimpers that quickly grew in volume.

“Oh—ahh—there—Peter...”

There was something about the way Justin moaned out his name that went straight to his cock. The boy was fucking born to moan his name, born to take his cock, born to have his hickeys all over his body.

Peter sucked hickeys into his neck and shoulders, his thrusts becoming harder and shorter, like that of an animal pistoning into a bitch in heat. Justin’s moans turned into high-pitched whines, and he was slamming back onto Peter’s cock as though he couldn’t get enough of it, getting on his elbows and knees.

Slipping his hand down, Peter grabbed Justin’s hard, heavy cock and started stroking it in time with his thrusts, watching Justin’s face hungrily. His own cock was an afterthought; he couldn’t look away from Justin’s profile: his parted lips and slack jaw as he let out blissed-out moans at every thrust of Peter’s cock. Watching his face was the biggest turn on of Peter’s life. He couldn’t look away, snapping his hips harder and harder, until Justin’s face crumpled into sobs. He spilled into Peter’s hand

with a cry and his knees gave out beneath him. But Peter slipped an arm around him and hauled him back so that he was leaning weakly back against Peter's chest. Groaning, Peter fucked into him with hard, desperate thrusts until he felt his own orgasm ripping through him.

He slumped on top of Justin, completely spent.

Christ. So damn good. He'd never felt better in his life.

For a long moment, the sounds of their heavy, panting breaths filled the room.

"You're heavy," Justin mumbled.

"I'm not moving." His limbs felt too heavy to move. All he wanted was to close his eyes and go back to sleep like that, still buried inside his associate.

"Didn't say I wanted you to move. This is nice."

"Mhmm. We still have about fifteen minutes before we have to get up."

Justin snickered. "We're ahead of schedule, then."

Smiling, Peter mouthed his sweaty shoulder. "That's why we're the best team in the firm. We're very efficient."

"We are," Justin said softly—fondly?—turning his head and pressing his cheek against Peter's. "Your face is all prickly," he said with a laugh, but it didn't seem as though he minded.

Peter breathed him in, suddenly wondering if fifteen minutes was enough for another round. He didn't want to pull away, didn't want to pull out of him.

It was ridiculous. He'd always had a very healthy sex drive, but fifteen minutes was nowhere near enough for him to get it up again.

Besides, it was supposed to be a one-time thing.

This must be enough for him, to stop being so distracted by his associate.

It had to be, for both of their careers' sakes.

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Peter's hopes that he would no longer be distracted at work were crushed after they walked into the office.

He couldn't stop noticing how good Justin looked in the clothes he'd had to borrow from Peter's closet. It had little to do with how good Justin actually looked, and everything to do with the fact that Justin was wearing his shirt and tie. It was hardly the first time Justin had worn his clothes—far from it—but it was the first time Peter had been aware of where the satisfaction stemmed from. He'd always liked seeing Justin in his clothes; it seemed he'd just been in denial about the real reason he'd liked it.

Damn it, this was bad.

To Peter's credit, he managed to keep his hands off his associate for the first three hours. It wasn't easy, when Justin looked positively delicious and kept blushing every time their eyes met. Those flustered looks slowly but surely eroded Peter's self-control, and soon enough, he found himself shoving Justin onto his desk, crushing their mouths together, and all but climbing on top of him. He needed to get inside him again.

Afterward, both of them had to change their clothes.

But hopefully he'd gotten it out of his system now.

He hadn't.

He couldn't even keep his hands off Justin in the file room. They were supposed to be searching for an important document needed for a very important case, but they ended up making out like horny teenagers instead. Peter wasn't proud of himself, but he dragged his associate into the nearest restroom and they jerked each other off, kissing desperately and moaning into each other's mouths.

It was fucking horrible. Horrible and more than a little mortifying. He was Peter Hayes, the managing partner of the best law firm in the country. He was nearly forty. He wasn't supposed to act like—like a besotted youngster who'd just discovered what his dick was for. This wasn't supposed to happen to him.

And yet it was happening.

Again, and again, and again.

The firm didn't work on Christmas.

That meant Justin had to leave for his own apartment and spend Christmas with his brat of a brother while Peter would spend it in his silent, empty penthouse, pretending that it was just another day of the year and he was perfectly happy to be alone.

"Fuck that," Peter said, tightening his arm around Justin when he moved to get up. "Stay. Stay with me."

Justin went very still in his arms. "You want me to spend Christmas with you?" he said softly.

Scoffing, Peter buried his face against his nape. "It's just a day." His neck felt hot. "There's nothing special about it."

Justin hummed, taking Peter's hand and entwining their fingers idly. "Riven is waiting for me back home, though."

"Do you really want to spend Christmas with a sulky brat who resents you for having the nerve to leave Bumfuck, Iowa and achieve your dreams instead of babysitting him and being a nobody?"

Justin sighed. "You know it's more complicated than that... And I do have a responsibility to him."

"You have a responsibility to me ," Peter said.

Turning around, Justin smiled, threading his fingers through Peter's hair. "You? And what kind of responsibility is that, mmm?"

Peter stared at him hungrily. Justin looked so lovely with his soft, dreamy gaze, flushed and fucked out, lips still swollen from Peter's kisses.

Fuck, he wanted to devour him.

It was ludicrous. They'd fucked how many times over the past few days? Four? Five? It had to get boring by now. It had to. But it didn't. Peter was hopelessly addicted to touching the boy. He couldn't seem to get enough, no matter how many times he'd kissed him or fucked him. "I'm still not sick of this," he said roughly. "You have to help me get over this."

Justin's smile faded a little.

"Why?" he said after a moment, his expression hesitant. "We aren't hurting anyone, right?"

Peter stared at him. The mere idea of not getting over this was as foreign as it was

tempting.

He tried to remember why they had to stop. It was surprisingly hard with Justin's warm, naked body in his arms.

"We are hurting our careers," Peter said at last. "We're being reckless and stupid. You make me stupid and distracted. I want to fuck you all the time instead of doing my job. It's a disaster. I can't have a personal associate who makes my brain relocate to my dick."

"I don't see a problem," Justin said with a small smirk. "We're still getting things done."

"Yes, because even when we're slacking off, we're better than most other lawyers, but at some point it won't be good enough. And people are starting to notice." Peter leaned in and kissed the pulse at the base of Justin's throat, breathing him in. "Even Turner said yesterday that I seemed distracted, and he's shit at noticing things like that."

"What are you suggesting?" Justin said, threading his fingers through Peter's hair.

"In all honesty, I should probably replace you with another associate. Someone who won't distract me so much."

Justin's fingers stilled. "Will you?" he said.

Peter lifted his head and looked him in the eyes. "I should. That would be the smart thing to do, for both of our careers. Yours will be harmed more than mine if— when people find out. You'll lose your credibility as a lawyer if people find out that you're sucking the managing partner's cock."

"That would suck," Justin said quietly. "People are going to think we've been fucking

all along, that I'm not here on merit."

"Exactly," Peter said grimly.

They looked at each other, and Peter could see the defeat in Justin's eyes. They were dim, and sad, and so very lost.

Peter hated it, hated seeing him upset. It was strange. Peter would be the first to admit that he had always been a self-centered bastard. He couldn't say he'd ever cared about another person's happiness.

But he cared about this one's. He wanted Justin happy. He wanted him to stay here, in his arms, in his bed, in his home.

He wanted him to stay—and never leave.

Peter's breath caught in his throat as the realization crashed into him with the brutal force of a hurricane. It should have been frightening, and it was. And it wasn't. It was a relief too. All the uncertainty of the past few days was gone, turning into a clear goal. He knew what he wanted.

And Peter Hayes always got what he wanted, damn it.

"There has to be another solution," Peter said, his mind racing as he considered and discarded possibilities. "We're fixers. We are the best at fixing our clients' problems. We can fix this one."

A wrinkle appeared between Justin's brows. "I don't know how you would fix something like that." He looked at Peter with... what was that soft feeling in his eyes? "But if there's anyone who can find a solution, it's you."

The expression on Justin's face—the faith —made him feel powerful and powerless

at the same time. Peter wanted—needed—to prove him right. To fix this impossible situation. Find a loophole that would allow them to be together without it ruining their careers.

A loophole.

Peter straightened up, his heart starting to beat faster.

“Workplace relationships aren’t always frowned upon,” he said. “There are exceptions.”

“Yes, married couples.” Justin flushed. “Which we most definitely aren’t.”

Shaking the sudden image of Justin with Peter’s ring on his finger from his mind, Peter cleared his throat. “You’re forgetting something. There’s also a soulmate bond.”

“What?” Justin said, blinking.

“We can claim that we’ve discovered that we’re soulmates thanks to the spell. That way it isn’t our fault—and it will make it clear that it’s a new development, so no one will think that you sucked my cock to get promoted to my personal associate.”

A tick or two of silence ensued. Justin’s expression was somewhere between astonished, horrified, and amused. “You want us to pretend that we’re soulmates?” he said, chuckling. “Are you out of your mind? You can’t fake something like that!”

“Why not? People don’t have to verify and register a soulmate bond. As long as we claim that we are, no one will doubt it. That way, our professional reputations will be mostly unharmed—and we can carry on.”

“Carry on fucking.”

Peter nodded.

Justin gave him a pinched look. “You’re unbelievable. You don’t feel uneasy about lying about something so monumental? What if—what if you meet your real soulmate?”

Peter scoffed. “You know I don’t believe that bullshit. Besides, I practically know where my ‘soulmate’ is, and I have no intention of meeting them.”

“You—you have a soulmate?” Justin blinked a few times, looking... Peter was excellent at reading people, but right now he couldn’t possibly be right. Surely Justin wasn’t crushed. But he looked crushed.

“You didn’t say anything,” Justin said faintly. “You acted normal since the spell was cast.”

“Well,” Peter said. “I started feeling the anxiety only last weekend.”

Justin narrowed his eyes. “That’s why you had me research how many people work in this building.”

Peter brushed his hand against Justin’s cheek, unable to resist the impulse to touch him. He wanted to touch him even when he wasn’t fucking him.

“Smart boy,” he said, in a tone aiming for sardonic and landing much nearer fond.

A deep wrinkle appeared between Justin’s brows. “And you stopped feeling antsy on Monday? What about at night? Surely—” He cut himself off. “Peter,” he breathed out, looking at Peter with wide, bright eyes. “I felt this terrible pull all weekend and stopped feeling antsy on Monday too.”

They stared at each other.

“That would be ridiculous,” Peter said roughly. But now that he thought about it, the antsy feeling had disappeared shortly before Justin’s arrival at the office. “It’s likely a coincidence.”

“If it’s a coincidence, that would be a hell of a one,” Justin said. His lips parted, something like uncertainty flashing in his eyes. “You said you knew how to find your soulmate?”

“Yes. I have a list of people who could be my soulmate. It’s somewhere on my phone.”

“Let’s look at it, then.”

Peter studied him. “Why? It doesn’t matter to me.”

Justin dropped his gaze. “We should look at the list. Maybe there are—maybe there are people more suitable for you.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Peter said with a scoff.

Justin blinked slowly at him before a small, fragile smile curled his lips. “So it wouldn’t be so terrible if I was your soulmate?”

Peter hesitated. That felt like a trick question. If he said that it would be terrible, he would hurt Justin—and the mere idea was intolerable—but saying no felt... too risky. He would make himself vulnerable, and he’d never liked that. He hadn’t gotten to the top by allowing himself to be vulnerable.

But this was Justin.

Over the past two years they’d worked together, Justin had seen him at his worst. He’d seen Peter angry and snappish, he’d seen him stressed and exhausted to the

bone as they worked on difficult cases. He'd seen him drunk on an occasion or two, drowning in guilt after winning cases for corporations against good people who needed the win more. (People said he didn't have a conscience. If only it were true.)

This was Justin.

"I guess it wouldn't be the worst thing," Peter said stiffly, looking Justin in the eyes. His face felt hot. "You would be... a tolerable choice as far as soulmates go."

"Tolerable?" Justin choked out indignantly, but his eyes were smiling. This was Justin. He knew how to read him, how to read between the subtlest lines as far as Peter was concerned.

"Decent," Peter said.

Brushing his fingers through Peter's hair, Justin smiled. "Not good enough. Try again."

Peter looked at that lovely, hopeful little smile and felt something in his chest squeeze. It wasn't an altogether unpleasant feeling, but it felt like his heart was too big for his chest. "If I have to have something as trite as a soulmate, you're the only person who doesn't feel wrong."

Justin's eyes widened. "Oh," he said. "Peter." Leaning in, he kissed him gently.

They'd shared many kisses over the past few days. They'd all felt good. But this one felt achingly lovely—loving.

It made Peter's heart do that disgusting squeezing thing again. He kissed back, trying to pour the excess of emotion into Justin's mouth. It didn't really work. He still felt too much. But he wouldn't trade it for the world. Nothing could possibly feel better.

“I love you,” Justin said against his mouth.

Well.

He’d been wrong about nothing could possibly feeling better.

This did.

“I’ve loved you forever,” Justin murmured, pressing their foreheads together and gently cradling Peter’s face with his hands. “But I thought I had no chance with you. I thought—I thought you couldn’t possibly love me back.” He smiled wetly. “I’m so happy I was wrong.”

“You’re making quite the assumption here, Danvers,” Peter said, clearing his throat a little.

Justin laughed against his face. “Remember what I told you about calling me by my last name? It’s a tell. So if I’m reading it right... my assumption is correct, Mr. Hayes.”

“Possibly,” Peter admitted, smiling. “Or I would have fired you ages ago for being a mouthy little shit and showing me no respect.”

“Oh, I respect you plenty,” Justin said, slipping his hand down Peter’s chest and cupping his half-hard cock through his underwear. “Let me show it to you?”

Peter chuckled. “Go ahead, dear.”

“Soulmate,” Justin said, settling between his legs.

“No offense, but I’m never calling you that.”

Putting his chin on Peter's thigh, Justin smiled at him teasingly. "Shall we bet on that?"

Looking into those green eyes shining with happiness, Peter had a sudden thought that there was nothing he wouldn't do to keep them so bright. Fuck. This boy had him wrapped around his little finger, didn't he? And Peter didn't even mind. Because Justin was right, damn him.

Peter loved him.

It didn't feel like a new thought—or a new feeling. Perhaps he'd simply been blind. The thought was disconcerting and more than a little humbling. Had it not been for that dodgy, messed up Christmas spell, would they ever have figured it out? It was ironic that Justin's desire to go look for his soulmate—who happened to be Peter—had made Peter realize that he'd already thought of his associate as his , regardless of any bullshit spell.

"No," Peter said softly. "I wouldn't bet on that. By the way, I do."

Justin blinked, looking endearingly confused. "What?"

"I do love you," Peter said.

Grinning, Justin jumped into his lap and kissed him hard.

"What about my blowjob?" Peter said with a laugh.

"Don't ruin the moment, you dick," Justin said, pressing their foreheads together.

"God, I love you. I can't believe this is real."

There was so much wonder in Justin's voice it made Peter's heart clench. He knew Justin had a hard childhood. Unlike Peter, Justin had had to fight tooth and nail to get

where he was now, and he'd always done it alone.

He would never be alone again.

Peter wrapped his arms around the younger man and, nuzzling his cheek, kissed his soft lips. They felt like home. "It's real. Merry Christmas, sweetheart."

The End