



The Boss (Straight Men #2)

Author: *S.H. Azanon*

Category: LGBT+

Description: Starting over in a new city is hard. Falling for your straight, engaged boss? Disastrous.

Fresh out of college and eager to prove himself, Chris is ready to take on his first real job. But he never expected his boss to be the real challenge. Powerful, brooding, and devastatingly handsome, Zac is completely off-limits—just months away from marrying the perfect woman.

Zac has spent years building the life he always thought he wanted. His business is thriving, his wedding is set, his future secure. But from the moment Chris walks into his office, everything changes. There's a spark that shouldn't exist. A chemistry neither of them can ignore.

Desire ignites. Lines blur. Temptation turns reckless. And as the wedding draws closer, both men must make a choice: play it safe and lose the one thing that makes them feel alive... or risk everything for love.

This is the third entry in the Straight Men series, but each story can be read as a stand-alone with no cliffhangers. Themes include age gap, first time, bi awakening, straight-to-gay, and gay-for-you (with plenty of Queen references, hints, and innuendos).

Total Pages (Source): 35

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

There's a specific type of nausea that comes with new beginnings. It sits low in your gut, somewhere between excitement and fear, and churns like a centrifuge. I'd felt it before—the first day of freshman wrestling practice, the morning of my final exams at Gettysburg College, and now, pulling into the parking lot of Nova Systems, Inc. The building loomed ahead, all mirrored windows and sharp lines, like a steel-and-glass monolith in the heart of Providence, Rhode Island, my new home. It was a corporate fortress like a million others across the country, but the thrill of breaking into the professional world made it feel special.

As I stepped out of my car, the early fall breeze swirling around me, I caught my reflection in the glass and gave my hair a quick fix. Adjusting my tie for the hundredth time, I wished I'd thought to size up my wardrobe. My white dress shirt and beige chinos fit fine only a year ago, but college wrestling had a way of transforming 'fit' into 'painted on.'

Not much I could do about it now—I just hoped nobody would notice. Starting a new job meant dressing the part, even if my lucky jockstrap was cutting into my gluteal folds under these stupid trousers. Lucky or not, it wasn't exactly comfortable, but superstitions die hard. Especially ones that made me win the NCAA Northeast Wrestling Regional Championship. Hey, everyone needs their talismans sometimes.

My phone buzzed inside my pocket and I swiftly pulled it out. It was my buddy Tyler.

'Good luck on your initiation into the capitalist grind, C-man ,' the message read. 'Break a leg or something.'

For a moment, I was tempted to respond with something flirty, like I always used to before. But then I remembered that Tyler now had a boyfriend—his ex-coach. He was happily in love, now a senior at Williams College, and I was happy for him. We had become really good friends over the past year, and it was sweet of him to offer support. So, I simply typed, ‘ Thanks, T-bag. I’ll let you know if I shit my pants .’

His reply was instant: three flexed biceps emojis.

Stuffing my phone back inside my pocket, I took a deep breath and walked into the building.

Inside, the lobby was a cathedral of corporate ambition. The ceiling stretched high, the sleek light fixtures looking like modern art installations. The receptionist’s desk, a sculpted slab of marble, gleamed brightly, and on the wall behind it, a massive logo spelled out Nova Systems in brushed steel letters. The air was warm yet crisp, laced with the faint aroma of fresh coffee and expensive cologne.

“Excuse me,” I said to the receptionist/security guard, a bald, serious-looking man in a dark blue suit. “I’m starting today and I’m not really sure where I’m supposed to go.”

He gave me a once-over, then returned his gaze to his computer. “Position?”

“Excuse me?”

“What position are you starting?”

“Oh. Software engineer.”

“Ninth floor.”

“Thanks.”

I went to the elevators trying not to look like a lost kid, the suit squeezing my body with every step. Several people gathered while I waited, and all of us entered the elevator together. One by one they dispersed, leaving on their floors, until I was alone again. I used the chance to check myself in the large mirror and adjust my tie one more time. My pants were too fucking tight—so tight I might as well have been wearing my wrestling singlet. On the plus side, my ass looked amazing, the thin fabric hugging my glutes like a second skin. Let’s just hope my new coworkers appreciate the view rather than report me to HR for inappropriate dress code—at least until I get the chance to update my office attire.

At last, the number nine appeared above the door and I stepped out into a large, open-plan office filled with dozens of desks and people. Everything gleamed, from the huge wall-to-wall windows to the bright glass partitions separating workstations. The floor was carpeted in a neutral shade of gray, and several strategically placed plants jazzed up the space. It felt so different from the old-school campus vibe I’d left behind that for a moment I stood paralyzed.

“Christopher Landry?”

The voice snapped me out of my awestruck daze. Turning, I saw a woman striding toward me, a clipboard in one hand and a wide, welcoming smile on her face. She was maybe in her mid-thirties, her dark brown hair swept into a sleek bun, and her tailored blazer screaming efficiency.

“Yes, that’s me,” I said, reaching for my tie again before I stopped myself.

“I’m Alicia. Office manager, onboarding specialist, and resident problem solver. Welcome to Nova Systems,” she said, extending a hand.

“Thank you. I’m excited to be here,” I said, shaking her hand and hoping my voice didn’t betray how overwhelmed I felt.

“Good energy. We like that,” she said with a grin. “Come on, let’s get you settled.”

She led me through a maze of glass-walled conference rooms and rows of sleek desks, each one outfitted with dual monitors and an ergonomic chair. People moved with purpose, their conversations low and clipped, punctuated by the occasional burst of laughter. Alicia narrated as we walked, pointing out break rooms, meeting spaces, and the all-important coffee machines, her tone light but practiced.

“So, Nova Systems specializes in software solutions for logistics and supply chain management,” she explained. “Perhaps not the sexiest industry, but we make it work. We have offices in Toronto and London, but our headquarters are here, in Providence. We’re big on collaboration here, so don’t be afraid to ask questions or pitch ideas.”

“Got it.” I nodded, trying to absorb everything and suppress the feeling that I was in way over my head. “And what’s the vibe like? I mean, the workplace culture?”

Alicia smiled. “Good question. We’re a mix of buttoned-up professionalism and laid-back camaraderie. We employ promising candidates like yourself soon after they graduate and offer them a chance to hone their skills and advance through the ranks. Many of them stay with us for their entire careers. That’s why our workforce is filled with people of all ages, from mid-twenties upward. Mr. Steele sets the tone from the top—he’s the CEO and our boss. He founded the company fifteen years ago as a small start-up and transformed it into a multi-million-dollar business.”

“Wow,” I said, stopping myself from giving a whistle at the last second. “Respect.”

“He took risks when others played it safe,” she continued, the esteem plain in her

voice, “and somehow, they always paid off. That’s why Nova Systems is where it is today. He has high standards and can seem a bit intimidating, but he’s fair. You’ll see.”

We reached a desk near the corner windows, where Alicia set her clipboard down. “This is you. Great view, huh?”

It was. The window overlooked the city skyline, the late morning sun glinting off distant rooftops. For a moment, I let myself imagine what it would feel like to belong here, to climb the ranks and make my mark.

“Here are your onboarding materials,” Alicia said, handing me a stack of papers. “This packet covers everything from company policies to emergency procedures. Your computer is all set up, so you can log in and get yourself familiar with your tasks. Feel free to look around, chat, and get to know your coworkers. The cafeteria is on the first floor when you feel like taking a lunch break. I’ll come by and see how you’re settling in later, but right now I got to take care of something with our marketing department.” She gave me a reassuring smile. “You are now officially part of the Nova family. Are you ready for the big leagues?”

I laughed nervously. “I hope so.”

* * *

The first few hours flew by in a blur of introductions, logins, and learning the quirks of Nova’s systems. A couple of coworkers stopped by my desk to say hello, confirming Alicia’s words about the team being a mix of seasoned professionals and younger hires like me. One of them, a cute-looking guy named Darren, leaned over my desk with a grin.

“Newbie, huh?” he said. “They’ve got you on Alicia’s onboarding speed-run?”

“Something like that,” I replied, chuckling.

“She’s great, but watch out. She’ll have you signing up for committees before you know it.” Darren smiled and gave me a wink.

“Noted,” I said, grateful for the easy companionship.

By mid-afternoon, I was settling into a rhythm. The work was straightforward but engaging, and I could already tell this was a place where I’d learn a lot—if only I could keep up. I was halfway through reviewing some code when Alicia reappeared at my desk, trusty clipboard in hand.

“How’s it going?” she asked, her tone brusque but kind.

“Good, I think. Nobody’s yelled at me yet, so that’s a win,” I said with a smile.

She smiled in return. “That’s the spirit. Listen, I was supposed to run this report up to Mr. Steele, but I’ve got a situation in accounting that needs my attention. Think you’re up for it?”

I hesitated, the earlier nerves creeping back. But this was my chance to prove myself. “Absolutely,” I said, standing up and taking the file she handed me.

“Perfect. You’re about to meet the man himself. Come on, I’ll walk you to the elevators.” Setting a brisk pace, she talked while I strode beside her, trying to keep up. “I wouldn’t normally ask you to do this, but Melissa, his PA, had to leave early for an appointment with her obstetrician. She’s eight months pregnant, and she’s wrapping up her last week in the office before maternity leave. We’re already a little lost without her, but Mr. Steele has a firm health-first policy. His office is on the top floor, end of the hall. Big mahogany double doors. Since Mel isn’t there to announce you, just knock and go in. Don’t worry—he doesn’t bite. Usually,” she added with a

grin.

My stomach flipped as we reached the elevators. “Any advice?” I asked, trying to sound casual.

“Just be yourself,” she said, pressing the buttons. “And maybe don’t spill coffee on him. It’s happened before.”

“Got it.”

As she stepped into an elevator going down, I took the one going up. The ride to the executive floor felt endless, the soft hum of Muzak doing nothing to calm my nerves. When the doors slid open, I entered a quieter, more refined atmosphere. Plush carpeting replaced the commercial covering below, and the walls were adorned with tasteful art. I took a deep breath, steadying myself. It was just a report. Just a quick delivery. How bad could it be?

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

I liked order. Not the sterile, obsessive kind of order that turned people into punchlines, but the kind that made the chaos of running a company tolerable. On a good day, the rhythm of meetings, emails, business calls, and deadlines felt like a symphony I conducted from my office on the top floor of the Nova Systems building. On a bad day, it was more like herding cats with MBA degrees. As for today... the jury was still out.

I sat behind my desk, the city skyline stretching beyond the glass wall to my left. A single folder lay open in front of me, its contents meticulously highlighted and annotated. Numbers. Projections. The lifeblood of a business I'd spent over a decade building from the ground up.

When the phone buzzed, I almost reached for the big one on the desk. But it was my cell phone, which meant only one person: Chantelle. Her picture lit up the screen as I glanced at it before answering—lustrous dark hair and smiling red lips on a face that could easily grace a Vogue cover or a silver screen. Still in her early thirties, she was ten years my junior, and a successful corporate lawyer to boot. I really hit the jackpot when I started dating her. Which is why last month I finally proposed. Yes, the sworn bachelor was finally ready to tie the knot.

Hitting the speakerphone button, I leaned back in my big leather chair. "Shouldn't you be dazzling a courtroom somewhere, Counselor?" I drawled.

"I dazzled them this morning," came Chantelle's reply, smooth and confident. Her voice had the same sharp precision as her legal arguments, cutting through any noise. "Now I'm in the office, prepping for tomorrow. Thought I'd check in on my favorite CEO."

“Flattery this early in the day? You must want something,” I teased, a corner of my mouth lifting.

“You caught me. I need you to pick up a bottle of that Bordeaux I like for dinner tonight,” she said, her tone playful. “I’ve got a late meeting, so you’re on wine duty.”

“Anything else, Your Honor?”

“Just show up looking devastatingly handsome, as usual.”

I chuckled, a low, rich sound that filled the room. “I’ll do my best.”

“Good. Don’t let me down. Oh, and don’t work too late,” she added, her voice softening slightly.

“Can’t make any promises,” I replied, though I hoped the warmth in my tone made it clear I appreciated the sentiment.

Chantelle laughed. “You’re impossible. See you tonight, Steele.”

“See you tonight, soon-to-be Mrs Steele,” I echoed, and the line went dead.

For a moment, I let the silence settle. Chantelle had a way of cutting through my defenses, and I liked a woman who wasn’t intimidated either by my physical or social stature. Hell, she came from money, while I had to build my wealth from zero. Too bad she couldn’t match my sex drive, but then again, I’d never met anyone who could. Aside from that little issue, we were a good fit—the best one I was ever likely to find. And if that wasn’t marriage material, then I didn’t know what was.

The knock at the door snapped me out of my thoughts.

“Come in,” I said, already dreading another interruption, when the door cracked open.

A young man I hadn’t seen before stepped in, clutching a file like a lifeline. He was tall, blond, broad-shouldered, and clearly nervous. His dress shirt strained across his chest, the fabric of his pants clinging to his legs as he walked in, his steps stiff with effort. “Hi, um, Mr. Steele? I’m Chris Landry, the new developer. Alicia asked me to bring this to you.” He held up the file, as if to prove he hadn’t just wandered in by mistake.

I gestured for him to set it on my desk, watching as he approached. There was something earnest about him, a kind of awkward energy that almost made me smile. “Football player?” I asked, noting the way his frame practically screamed ‘former athlete.’

He seemed lost for a moment, but then he caught my drift and smiled. “Wrestler.”

“Ah. I was a linebacker, back in the day.” It felt like a lifetime ago. “These days I only have time for the gym, but I take it just as seriously,” I added, instinctively flexing my pecs under my shirt. My workout regimen was brutal, but it helped me keep my body in top shape over the years and I was proud of it.

“It shows,” he mumbled, and then seemed to immediately regret it, his face turning pink.

I had to bite the inside of my cheek to keep myself from smiling. Picking up the file, I flipped through it. “So how’s your first day going?”

He hesitated, as if debating whether to give the polite answer or the real one. “It’s... good. Busy, but good,” he said finally, his hands fidgeting at his sides.

“Busy’s good,” I replied. “Keeps you out of trouble.”

That earned me a small, tentative smile. He seemed like the type who wanted to impress, though he hadn't yet figured out how to do it without tripping over himself. It was almost endearing. Almost.

I glanced back down at the report, already marking a couple of errors. "And Alicia didn't warn you that delivering things to me comes with a risk of critique?"

"She... might have mentioned something about high standards," he admitted, shifting on his feet.

"Good. I like her honesty," I said, setting the file aside. "Where are you from, Chris?"

"Er, I was born in Portland, Maine. But I studied in Pennsylvania. I just graduated from Gettysburg College this spring," he said quickly, as if he'd rehearsed the answer. The moment would've passed uneventfully, but then, in his eagerness—or maybe nerves—he tried to shift the file closer to me. It slipped from his grip, scattering papers across the floor. Without thinking, he turned his back to me and crouched to retrieve them—and that's when it happened.

A sharp, unmistakable rrrriip tore through the air and his bare ass flashed before my eyes. My eyebrows shot up.

Chris froze, half-crouched, his profile turning a deep, mortified red. When he felt the air hit his exposed butt, he straightened and swirled to face me, one of his hands clutching the scattered pages in front of him like a shield, the other one instinctively reaching behind to... assess the damage.

I couldn't help it—I laughed, loud and rough, the sound echoing through the office. "Well," I said, leaning back in my chair, "that's one way to leave an impression."

"I—I'm so sorry," he stammered, looking like he wished the floor would open up and

swallow him whole. “This is... I don’t even...”

“Relax, Chris,” I said, waving a hand to stop whatever apology he was about to blurt out. “Shit happens. And going commando to work is a ballsy move—I respect that. Though I have to say, I wasn’t expecting to get mooned right in the middle of my office.”

“I—I’m not commando,” he said, his voice small, hesitant. “I’m wearing my lucky jockstrap.”

“Oh?” I grinned. “It’s still funny.”

That earned a nervous chuckle from him, though he wouldn’t quite meet my eyes.

I stood, smoothing the front of my shirt, and rounded my desk until I stood right in front of him, half a head taller and almost twice as beefy as this blond pup. “Tell you what. It’s almost four o’clock and I say you worked long enough for your first day. Let me take you to my tailor now, and we’ll get you sorted out with a proper suit. My treat. Sound good?”

“You don’t have to do that,” he said, stunned.

“Well, you can’t spend the rest of the day flashing everyone, and you clearly need clothes that fit. A good suit is an investment, just like a good employee. Consider it part of your orientation.”

“But I—” He hesitated, glancing back at the door.

“You’re not going to argue with your boss on day one, are you?” I asked, raising an eyebrow.

He shot me a wide-eyed stare. “No, sir, of course not!”

“Good.” I picked up my suit coat from the hatstand by the door. “Let’s go.”

“But how will I—”

I offered him my jacket. “Put this on. It’ll cover your ass.”

He took the blazer and shrugged into it. Just as I thought, it was a size or two too big for him, and provided a perfect cover for his exposed derriere. “Thank you, Mr. Steele.”

“And don’t give me any of that ‘sir’ or Mr. Steele nonsense. My name’s Isaac—but you can call me Zac. I’ve seen your butt, so we might as well skip the formalities.” I felt bad for the guy and didn’t want him to feel traumatized on his first day. There would be plenty of time to traumatize him later. Nova Systems wasn’t a place for the weak. But everyone deserved a fighting chance at least. Heroes are shaped by the hardships they endure, and we were about to see if this kid had what it took to become one of ours.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

Isaac Steele drove the kind of car that turned heads—a sleek, black Mercedes-Benz—because of course he did. It smelled of new leather and a faint note of his cologne, something woody and expensive, that seemed to cling to the space like an invisible signature. The seat hugged me, the smooth material cool against my naked butt, the gaping tear in the back of my pants a stark reminder that I was one ill-timed movement away from full exposure.

The man behind the wheel was nothing like I'd pictured. He was... striking. There was no other way to describe him. Early forties, maybe, with buzzed dark hair dusted with gray at the temples, a heavy stubble threaded with the occasional silver strand, and piercing blue eyes that seemed to take everything in. With his strong jawline and powerful body, Isaac Steele looked more like an action star or an NFL player than a corporate executive. And he seemed so down-to-earth—mostly—like he wasn't a tycoon and I wasn't some poor newbie he felt sorry for. He was imposing, for sure, but not intimidating.

Or maybe mooning him in his office was the magic icebreaker.

The silence in the car was punctuated by the low hum of the engine as we pulled from the underground garage onto the main road. The city unfolded in front of us—steel, glass, and motion—a world of noise, separate from us. As if reading my mind, Isaac turned on the music, and Queen's Fat Bottomed Girls blared from the stereo. We looked at each other and chuckled at the same time.

“Not the best choice of song, considering the circumstances, eh?” Isaac said, still smirking.

“Oh, if Freddie Mercury wants to call me a fatass, I suppose I should take it as a compliment,” I replied.

He grunted. “The greatest voice of all time. Shame he was a queer.”

I wasn’t sure how I was supposed to react to that. I guess I could’ve stayed quiet and ignored it, but I was never good at letting homophobic comments fly. Even if the asshole saying them was my new boss. “Well, your loss is our gain.”

Isaac froze as the meaning sank, throwing a sideways glance at me. “Shit. I didn’t mean— fuck . I’m sorry. I didn’t know you were...”

“Gay?” I supplied, as it seemed he couldn’t bring himself to say it. “Well, now you know.”

For the first time since I met him, Isaac seemed the uncomfortable one, and it made me kind of happy that the roles were reversed for a change. “I meant because of the way he died,” he said, face serious, eyes on the road. “That’s all. But it came out wrong, and I apologize. I don’t want you to think I’m some judgmental jerk, when it’s really not the case. At all. Live and let live is my motto.”

The cynical part of me thought he was obliged to say that, being the CEO of a big international company, regardless of what he believed in. But he seemed sincere, so I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt and take his word for it. After all, he was being super nice to me when he didn’t have to. “It’s fine,” I said, smiling.

He didn’t press any further and we drove in silence for a while, Queen’s music filling the space between us.

“So, what made you apply to Nova Systems?” he asked after some time.

I wavered for a moment, the question catching me off guard. “Honestly? It seemed like a good opportunity. Solid company, good benefits. I heard Providence was a great place to live.” I shrugged. “And I like solving problems.”

Isaac smirked. “That’s the most practical answer I’ve heard in a while.”

A dry laugh escaped me. “You were expecting something grander?”

“Most people your age like to talk about ‘making an impact’ or ‘changing the industry,’ but you’re just here to do good work. I respect that.”

Glancing at his profile, I tried to gauge him. “What about you? Did you always want to run a company?”

He seemed to consider that for a moment. “Not exactly. I knew I wanted to build something. To be in control of my own future. But the road to getting here wasn’t a straight line.”

I regarded him, curious. “What was it like, starting out?”

Isaac let out a breathy chuckle. “Brutal. Long hours, impossible expectations, people doubting me at every turn. They’d thought a brute-force jock could never become a sharp businessman. I took it as a challenge to defy the stereotype. When I was your age, I was a junior analyst at a consulting firm, working eighty-hour weeks, barely sleeping. My boss once told me I was too green, too soft, that I didn’t have what it took to lead. So, I worked twice as hard. Learned everything I could.” He glanced at me, giving me a knowing look. “Turns out, the best way to prove someone wrong is to outlast them.”

I tipped my chin, absorbing that. “Sounds intense.”

“It was,” he admitted. “But if you want to get ahead, you have to decide what kind of man you’re going to be. Are you the guy who waits for opportunities? Or the guy who makes them?”

I mulled that over, watching the buildings blur past the window. “I want to be the second one,” I said finally.

A small smile tugged at his lips. “Good. Then start now. Pay attention. Learn fast. Speak up when it matters. And don’t be afraid to take up space.”

I nodded, feeling the knot of tension in my stomach begin to unravel. By the time we pulled up to a small boutique nestled between a jewelry store and an art gallery downtown, any lingering awkwardness between us had faded away and I’d almost forgotten about the tear in my pants.

The shop before us was the kind of place that looked expensive before you even stepped inside. The polished brass nameplate by the door gleamed in the afternoon light, the swirling letters reading Sullivan’s , and the window displays were a shrine to high-end fashion: Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Armani. Even the mannequins looked like they knew they were too good for the likes of me.

“Come on,” Isaac said, stepping out of the car with the effortless confidence of someone who belonged in places like this.

Inside, the shop was all warm wood and soft yellow lighting, with racks of pristine suits arranged like works of art. A faint scent of cedar and fabric dye lingered in the air, mixing with the polished tang of shoe leather. Two men stood behind the counter, examining the roll of fabric stretched over it: a younger, lanky man with round glasses, and a short, gray-haired man in his sixties. Both raised their heads at the sound of the bell above the door as Isaac and I entered.

“Mr. Steele!” The older man called out, coming around the counter to greet us. His tailored suit was impeccable, and his smile was a mixture of genuine warmth and the practiced charm of someone who catered to the elite.

“Edward,” Isaac said, extending a hand. “How do you do?”

“Oh, I can’t complain. But I wasn’t expecting you today—your wedding suit is still not ready.”

“I’m not here because of that.” He grabbed his jacket off my shoulders and pushed me in front of him, turning me around so that my backside faced Edward. “This is Chris. He’s new at Nova Systems, and, well, he’s had a bit of a wardrobe malfunction.”

Edward’s eyes flicked to the tear in my pants, and he let out a soft chuckle. “I see. Welcome, young man. We’ll have you sorted in no time.” He left the store in the hands of his younger associate and led us deeper into the shop, past rows of designer labels that made my wallet ache just by looking at them.

“Feel free to pick whatever catches your eye,” Isaac said, his tone casual.

“I—uh—thanks, but…” I trailed off, staring at a price tag that was easily more than a month’s rent.

“Don’t worry about the cost,” he said, brushing off my hesitation with a wave of his hand. “I’ve already said it’s my treat and I don’t like repeating myself.”

Well, the man was my boss, so I decided to shut up and do as he said. In the end, I settled on a deep navy Tom Ford suit, classic but not too formal. Edward nodded approvingly and gestured for me to follow him to a fitting area tucked away at the rear of the shop.

“Right this way, young man. Let’s see what we’re working with.”

Isaac stayed behind, texting on his phone and roaming around the store.

The fitting room was cozy and lined with mirrors that made it feel larger than it was. Edward gestured toward a small bench where I could set my things. “Strip down to whatever you’re comfortable with. The fit needs to be precise, so go with what you usually wear under the suit. This usually means your underwear, but some men prefer to go without.”

I considered his words, then figured my lucky jockstrap had already seen me through one disaster today. Why not double down?

As I undressed, Edward moved with the practiced efficiency of someone who had done this a thousand times. But his eyes never left me, his gaze sharp and focused as it swept across my almost-naked body. When I was finally standing only in my jocks and my socks, Edward’s mouth opened a little, like he was about to gasp. Instead, he told me to step onto the small dais in front of the largest mirror.

Measuring tape in one hand and a small notebook in the other, he danced around me humming softly to himself while he took notes. He measured my shoulders and my chest, my biceps and my waist, my thighs and my calves, all the while making comments—“broad chest, excellent posture, prominent backside”—bordering on personal. Years of wrestling had killed any trace of shyness in me so I felt at ease, almost like a model in an art class.

Edward’s touch lingered just a fraction too long as he measured my inseam, the back of his hand grazing my balls. It was the most action I had in a while, and despite myself, I felt my cock stirring to life.

“The secret of a perfect suit is customization,” Edward said, his tone almost

confidential. “Anyone can come and buy a suit off the rack. But with the small, careful adjustments, you get a personally tailored fit that becomes a unique work of art.”

“How long will that take?” I asked, eyes on the mirror, trying not to get hard.

Edward chuckled, his hand sliding down my leg. “Rushing me already? Perfection takes time, my boy. But since Mr. Steele is one of my most valued clients, I’ll have it ready by tomorrow. Leave your home address to my assistant, and it will be delivered first thing in the morning.”

“Thank you.” I kept my eyes forward, focusing on our reflections, until the sound of footsteps made me glance toward the door. Isaac stepped inside, his expression unreadable, just as the old tailor withdrew his hand.

“How’s it going?” he asked, his tone light.

“Nearly finished, sir,” Edward said, seeming a bit flustered.

Isaac nodded, turning his attention to me. If I’d felt I might’ve gotten hard from Edward’s fondling, it was nothing compared to standing almost naked and being scrutinized by my sexy-as-hell boss. But his gaze left me too soon. “And what about my wedding suit?”

“The shirt and the tuxedo still need more work, but the pants are almost fitted. Would you like to try them on while you wait?”

“Yes, I would,” he said, and then he was gone, following Edward into the shadows.

Left alone, I adjusted my jockstrap to accommodate my growing boner. It took all my willpower not to keep touching myself, but no matter how horny I was, this wasn’t

the time or the place for that. The last thing I needed was for my boss to catch me whacking off, so I looked around for my clothes and started dressing. But as I buttoned up my shirt, I realized my pants were gone. The old tailor must have taken them away to fix them. I had no choice but to venture out of the dressing room in just a shirt and jocks, hoping I wouldn't run into any customers. But instead of going into the main area of the shop, I followed the sound of two muffled voices—what sounded like Isaac and Edward deep in conversation.

Further down the passage, I discovered another fitting room, hidden behind a thick, dark curtain. When I took a peek, I saw Isaac half-dressed, his shirt covering the top of his round ass, his muscular legs spread in an assertive stance on the small dais. His back was turned to me, but I had a perfect view of his reflection in the mirror, and my gaze slid to his crotch. There, the biggest bulge I'd ever seen jutted between the flaps of his shirt, the outline stark against the thin fabric of his white briefs. Edward was crouching beside him, stealing glances as he worked.

For a moment, I froze, the sight of my scantily clad boss stirring something that felt both thrilling and deeply inappropriate. He was built like a force of nature—tall, broad-shouldered, and packed with powerful muscle, the kind forged through raw strength rather than vanity. Every movement carried effortless control, his presence commanding without a word. Veins traced his thick forearms, hinting at the power in his grip, while his chest pulled the shirt taut, barely containing the raw masculinity he exuded. There was nothing delicate about him—just sheer, unshakable strength, the kind that made you instinctively step aside and let him take charge.

The sound of someone clearing his throat behind me made me start. When I spun around, Edward's younger associate was standing there, my pants in his hands.

“Um, I fixed your trousers,” he muttered, offering me the torn chinos without meeting my eyes. Unlike his boss, the sight of my exposed ass seemed to make him uncomfortable.

“Thanks,” I said, examining his handiwork. The stitch ran along the seam in the middle, almost undetectable. “Nice job,” I added, but the guy was already gone.

I went back to the first dressing room and put my pants on, hoping they would hold on at least until I got back home. But as I tied my shoes, the image of Isaac in a state of undress flickered through my mind, vivid and unshakable. The way his briefs clung to his ass, the fabric almost swallowed by those round, hairy cheeks. The way his bulge stretched the material in the front, leaving little to the imagination. The way those thick thighs flexed with every shift, igniting thoughts I had no business entertaining about my boss.

I could say one thing for sure, though: this was not how I’d imagined my first day.

Not at all.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

The city was a shimmer of light and movement as I steered my car through the streets, the quiet purr of the engine a comforting hum beneath my hands. The trees lining the sidewalks were just starting to blush with gold, a reminder that the days were growing shorter, the air cooler. Chris sat beside me, wiggling in his seat, the lingering embarrassment of his wardrobe mishap still fresh in his mind. I had to admit, the whole situation had been funny as hell. But I'd seen enough of the kid today to know he didn't need me rubbing it in.

"You said you wrestled in college?" I asked, cutting through the companionable silence.

Chris blinked at me, then nodded. "Yeah. Gettysburg."

"Good program?"

"Decent. DIII, but competitive." He smirked. "I won the Northeast Regional title my senior year."

I hummed, one hand casually draped over the steering wheel, the other resting on the gearshift. "Explains the pants-tearing quads," I said, grinning.

Color rose to his face again, but he laughed. "Yeah, they've been known to bust a few seams."

I couldn't help but chuckle. "What weight class?"

"One eighty-six," he said, more relaxed now.

I nodded. “You still train?”

“A little. Gym, mostly. Not much time for rolling on the mat anymore.”

His restless energy now made sense. He was used to movement, impact, the grind of pushing his body to its limits. I knew the type. Hell, I was the type—even with boardrooms and balance sheets taking most of my time now.

“What about you? You said you played football? Linebacker, right?”

It seemed like an attempt to shift the spotlight, but Chris didn’t strike me as the type to suck up to the boss. He seemed genuinely interested. “Yeah, middle linebacker. Team captain, too. But it was all for fun. I never had any interest in pursuing it as a career. My body just craves the exercise, the action, the discipline—always had. And I liked hitting people.”

Chris chuckled. “Bet you had a killer hit stick.”

I glanced at him sideways. “Why’s that?”

He shrugged. “You seem like the kind of guy who’d read the game three steps ahead. Calling the shots. Keeping everyone in line. Making the big plays when it counts.”

I huffed a laugh. “You get all that just from sitting in a car with me?”

“Some people just give off that vibe,” he said with a grin.

“Yeah? And what vibe do I give off?”

He tilted his head, considering. Then he grinned again. “Like the kind of guy who never let a receiver cross the middle without making them regret it.”

I smirked. “I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“Wasn’t meant as anything else.”

He was quick. Observant. I liked that. “I still hit the gym most mornings before work. If, for some reason, I can’t make it, then I go in the evening. Running on the weekends, too.”

“I should really get back into the drill as well. I just need some consistency.”

“There’s a gym on the ground floor of our building. All Nova employees get a free membership.”

“Oh? That’s good to know.”

The conversation meandered through weightlifting routines and favorite workouts, and I started to see the real Chris—the confident young man with great potential, not the awkward, panicked guy who first barged into my office. He had the easy enthusiasm of someone who still enjoyed the physicality of training, who hadn’t yet let the corporate world siphon the joy out of sweat and exertion. By the time I pulled up to Nova Systems, we were talking like old chums.

I put the car in park and glanced over at him. “You should be all set for tomorrow. Ed can be a little handsy, but he’s a master of his craft. The suit will fit you like a glove.”

Chris unbuckled his seatbelt, then looked back at me. “Thanks for doing that,” he said, smiling. “I mean, really. You didn’t have to.”

I shrugged. “Can’t have my employees walking around with their asses hanging out, can I?”

He flushed, but grinned. “Guess not. Well... Goodnight, Mr Steele.”

I tilted my head. “Zac .”

A flicker of hesitation. Then a nod. “Zac.”

I watched him climb out, standing for a moment under the glow of the streetlights, the light forming a halo around his golden head. His reflection ghosted across my windshield before he turned, offering a final wave as he made his way to his Honda Civic.

I exhaled through my nose, rubbing the back of my neck before shifting the car into drive. Time to see Chantelle.

* * *

She lived in a luxury high-rise overlooking the Providence River, her apartment a minimalist’s dream—clean lines, bright colors, a perfect blend of modern design and personal elegance. She didn’t clutter it with unnecessary things. Everything was curated, intentional. Just like she was.

I turned the key and let myself in, the smell of something rich and fragrant wrapping around me like a warm welcome. Both of us still kept our own apartments, a habit born from years of independence and busy careers. Most nights, we alternated between her place and mine, never feeling the need to rush into merging our lives completely. But now, with the wedding on the horizon, we were on the hunt for a house—something classy and stylish, with enough space for two people who valued their autonomy. We still had enough time, though, and neither of us seemed in a hurry to give up the comfort of having a place that was solely our own.

Inside, candlelight danced against the marble countertops. Chantelle stood at the

stove, barefoot, wearing a silk slip dress that skimmed over her body like water. Her dark curls were twisted into a loose bun, strands escaping around her sharp cheekbones. She didn't look up.

"You brought the wine?" she asked without turning, stirring whatever she had simmering in the pan.

I held up the bottle of Bordeaux. "As requested."

She smirked, finally glancing over her shoulder. "Good man. Pour us some."

I set the bottle on the counter, stepping behind her, my hands finding her waist as I pressed a slow kiss against the curve of her neck. She smelled like jasmine and something slightly spicy—maybe saffron from whatever she was cooking.

She hummed but didn't stop stirring the pan. "Hungry?" she asked, leaning into me briefly before returning to her work.

I was a man of big appetites, and she knew it. "Ravenous," I murmured, letting my fingers drift along her hip before stepping back to grab the glasses. I liked watching her like this—relaxed, at ease, a different version of the razor-sharp woman who eviscerated opposing counsel in courtrooms across the city.

Dinner was slow and indulgent. She told me about her day—another case, another judge who annoyed her, another victory she accepted with the grace of someone who never expected anything less. I listened, appreciating the way she dissected every detail, how shrewd she was. When it was my turn, I told her about Chris. About the accident. About Sullivan's .

She laughed, shaking her head. "That's some major case of bad luck," she said. "And on his first day, too! Poor guy."

“He took it well.”

“And you took him to see Ed?”

“Of course. Can’t have my employees looking like disasters.”

She smirked, sipping her wine. “You’re such a control freak.”

I lifted my glass. “I prefer the term generous .”

“Some might say soft ,” she countered. “It’s fortunate you look like a brawny brute or some might take advantage of that.”

“Then I guess I have to prove how not soft I am.”

We made our way to the bedroom just before midnight. Chantelle stripped with the kind of calculated sensuality that felt almost rehearsed, climbing into bed with a knowing smile. She was warm against me, familiar, her skin silky beneath my hands. We moved together easily, a rhythm practiced and perfected over the two years we’d been together. I knew what she liked, how to touch her, how to make her moan my name in that breathless way that told me she was close.

But afterward, when she curled against me with a satisfied sigh, her hand drifting lazily through my chest hair, I was still restless. My body buzzed with leftover energy, unsatisfied need. One round was never enough. Yet she yawned, already slipping into slumber.

“Ready to tap out?” I asked, my voice low.

“Mmm,” she murmured. “Big case tomorrow.” She reached for her silk sleep mask, slipping it on without another word. Within minutes, her breathing slowed, deepened.

I stayed awake, staring at the dark. My body still thrummed, tight with a frustration I couldn't name. My cock was still semi-hard, heavy on my thigh, aching for attention. But no extra treats were coming that night—unless I took matters into my own hands.

Eventually, I exhaled and closed my eyes, willing myself to sleep.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

It had been a week since my first shift in the wage cage, and with October settling into its crisp, golden rhythm, I was finally starting to feel like I belonged. The first few days had been a whirlwind—getting my bearings, figuring out office dynamics, learning the ins and outs of my responsibilities. But by now, I'd settled into a rhythm. I'd even put together a whole new wardrobe, several pairs of affordable suits for more casual occasions, when the one I got from Isaac felt like too much. The people in my department were cool enough; I'd already gotten friendly with a few of them, especially Darren, grabbing lunch together or exchanging memes on Slack when the workday got slow. My workload was manageable, and I liked what I was doing. It was a good job. A real one.

The only thing missing, oddly enough, was Isaac himself.

After our trip to the tailor, I hadn't seen much of him. His office was up in the executive suites, well above my floor, and since he was technically my boss's boss's boss, his direct involvement in my work was minimal. A part of me—one I wasn't quite ready to admit—felt disappointed. Not that I wanted him breathing down my neck, but I'd liked talking to him. Liked the way his presence commanded attention without him even trying. And, yeah, I liked looking at him.

That was why, when I stepped into the elevator that morning and saw him inside, I felt a jolt of something sharp and electric shoot through me.

A bunch of people entered the elevator with me, bodies shifting to make room as I squeezed in. I barely had time to mutter a quick, "Morning," before the doors slid shut.

Zac gave me a nod. “Morning, Landry.” His voice was low, rumbling. He looked... tense. He was dressed as sharply as ever, dark suit crisp, his white dress shirt unbuttoned just enough to hint at the strong column of his throat, his shoulders filling up the tight space. He had that look about him—like he’d already been up for hours, busy making powerful decisions before I’d even rolled out of bed.

I had only a few seconds to take him in before the elevator lurched upward. As I turned away in the packed space, my back now to him, I still felt his presence like a furnace behind me, radiating heat that seared my spine. Someone beside me jostled forward, forcing me to draw back—right into Isaac.

My ass pressed against his crotch.

Heat shot through me so fast it made me dizzy. I went stiff all over, willing my body not to react, not to acknowledge the firm, solid presence of him behind me. But fuck, I felt him. The bulk of him. And my brain short-circuited.

When I tried shifting left or right, it only made things worse, because then my ass kept brushing against him. I forced myself to move forward as much as I could in the confined space, throat tight. If Isaac noticed, he didn’t react. Instead, he let out a short, irritated exhale that sent a prickle down my spine.

“Hard day?” I asked, instantly regretting my choice of words.

“My PA went on maternity leave,” he muttered, his lips just above my ear.

I latched onto the change of subject, desperate for a distraction. “Melissa, right?”

“Yeah.” I could hear his jaw working. “She’s been with me for nine years. Knows everything before I even have to ask. And now, I’m stuck without her.”

I glanced at him over my shoulder. “They didn’t get you a temp?”

“They did. Some guy named Greg. Doesn’t know a damn thing.”

I smirked. “So, you’re basically helpless.”

His mouth quirked, but his frustration didn’t ease. “Let’s just say I don’t have time to babysit.”

The elevator dinged. My floor. I dug my way through the crowd and stepped out, forcing myself not to look back.

“See you around, Zac.”

“See you, Landry.”

I didn’t turn, but I felt his gaze on my back as the doors slid shut.

* * *

That evening, after work, I made my way down to the company gym, figuring I’d put in a quick workout before heading home. It was convenient and I was finally getting back into my routine of daily lifting sessions. The gym was spacious and modern, the kind of high-end fitness center you’d expect from a company like Nova. It was mostly empty this time of day, just a few people scattered around, but the moment I stepped in, my eyes landed on him.

Zac.

He stood at the weight rack, loading plates onto a barbell, wearing a loose gray stringer that showed off his broad, muscular torso and massive arms. His black shorts

hung low on his hips, showcasing powerful thighs. A sheen of sweat clung to his skin.

I swallowed hard.

He spotted me and took his earbuds out. “Landry.”

“Hey.” I tried to sound casual, like I hadn’t just been standing there, gawking. “I thought you said you work out in the mornings?” I asked, stepping over.

He sighed, low and measured. “I usually do.” He finished setting up his weights, then rolled his shoulders. “Needed to blow off some steam.”

“I hear that.” When he offered no further explanation, I looked around, trying to think of something to say. “So, what’s your workout playlist?”

He glanced at me, then pulled his phone from his shorts and smirked as he showed me the screen—Queen’s Greatest Hits.

“Should’ve guessed,” I said, chuckling.

Sliding the phone back into his pocket, he jerked his chin toward the bench press. “You lifting?”

I lifted a shoulder. “That was the plan.”

“Good. You can spot me.”

So I did. I stood behind his head as he lay back on the bench, watching as he gripped the bar, muscles flexing as he pushed through each rep with perfect form. The weights were heavy—heavier than I could handle—but he made it look effortless.

The man was as strong as an ox.

When he finished his set, we switched. I slid onto the bench, and Zac stood over me, hands hovering beneath the bar as I lifted, his crotch above my head. His closeness was... distracting. The way he loomed, the heat of him, the faint scent of his sweat mixed with cologne. It took everything in me to focus on the exercise instead of trying to sneak a peek up his shorts.

We worked out together for an hour, and by the end of it, my body was wrecked. I could barely keep up with him, but I liked the challenge. Liked the way he pushed me.

“Sauna?” he asked on the way to the locker room.

“Sure,” I said, trying not to sound too eager.

* * *

The sauna was dimly lit, the air thick with steam, pressing down on my skin like a weighted blanket. The heat seeped into my muscles, loosening the tension from the workout, but it didn't do a damn thing to stop my brain from short-circuiting every time I snuck a glance at Isaac.

He sat on the wooden bench across from me, towel wrapped loosely around his hips, legs spread wide enough to make my pulse stutter. It was just the two of us there, the sound of our breaths rumbling in the quiet space. His chest rose and fell in a slow, steady rhythm, sweat trailing down the planes of his torso, through the fur on his pecs and the ridges of his abs. If he was aware of just how indecently good he looked, he didn't show it.

I needed a distraction.

“So, Queen, huh?” I said, leaning back against the wood, letting my arms sprawl over the bench. “Didn’t peg you for a classic rock guy.”

Isaac gave me a look, his blue eyes glinting in the semi-dark. “Are you suggesting I have bad taste in music, Landry?”

“Not at all. Just... quaint.”

He huffed, scratching his hairy chest. “Some things are evergreen. Queen’s one of the greatest bands of all time. Any other opinion is just flat-out wrong.”

My lips curved. “That’s a strong stance.”

“It’s the only stance.” He tilted his head, watching me through the steam. “And, since you apparently know their music, you agree with me.”

I tapped my fingers against the bench. “I mean, I don’t disagree. My dad is a huge fan, so I grew up with their songs.”

“Mm. What’s your favorite?”

I pretended to think. “Hard to choose, but I gotta say Don’t Stop Me Now always puts me in a good mood.”

He snorted. “Predictable.”

“Predictable? It’s one of their best! What, are you about to tell me yours is Bohemian Rhapsody ?”

He shot me a sly look. “Actually, no. Who Wants to Live Forever .”

I gave a slow nod. “Good choice. Big, dramatic, a little tragic...” I smirked. “Kind of fitting.”

Isaac shook his head. “And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“Just saying, you’ve got the whole brooding intensity thing down.”

He scoffed, mirth laced in the sound. “I do not brood.”

“You do, though.”

“Landry, if you keep running your mouth, I might make you do extra sets next time we work out.”

I grinned. “Empty threats, old man. You’re all talk.”

His eyes narrowed, but there was no real heat behind it. “Old man?”

“Well,” I drawled, stretching out my legs, “I heard you’ve been running Nova for, like, fifteen years?”

“Yeah, so?”

“So...” I squinted at him dramatically. “That means you were, what, already an adult when I was born?”

Isaac exhaled through his nose. “Jesus Christ.”

A laugh escaped me. “Hey, I’m just doing the math.” I tapped my chin, thoughtful. “Did you ever get to see Queen live?”

A glint of amusement danced in his eyes. “As a matter of fact, I did.”

I jolted upright. “Bullshit.”

He nodded, smug. “1992. The Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert at Wembley.”

My jaw dropped. “You saw that? Live?”

“I did. My mother was from the UK, so we were there at the time, visiting family in London. Both my parents were Queen fans and decided to take me. I was only ten, but it changed my life.”

“That’s so fucking unfair.”

Isaac snickered, tilting his head back against the wall. “Now who’s brooding?”

I let out a dry chuckle. “I mean, come on. George Michael’s Somebody to Love ? Bowie and Annie Lennox? Metallica? You got to witness actual music history.”

He gave a lazy shrug. “Perks of being an old man.”

I narrowed my eyes. “I take that back. You’re ancient .”

“Keep talking, Landry, and I’ll start critiquing your music taste.”

I gasped. “How dare you. My playlist is pristine.”

“What, Ariana Grande and Beyoncé? Drake and Kanye West?” He snorted. “Your generation doesn’t know what good music means.”

“Hey, we have Adele!”

He only grunted. “The exception that proves the rule.”

“Fine.” I leaned forward. “What’s your guilty pleasure song?”

Isaac gave me a look. “I don’t have one.”

I rolled my eyes. “Oh, come on. Everyone has one.”

“I don’t feel guilty about my music choices.”

I smirked. “So, you admit you listen to embarrassing songs.”

He sighed, low and measured, like he was regretting ever engaging in this conversation. “I… might have a soft spot for I Want It That Way .”

I almost choked on my own breath. “The Backstreet Boys?”

He shrugged. “Classic.”

I gaped at him. “The big manly honcho listens to boy bands in his free time?”

“Correction—one song. And it’s a banger.”

I flashed him a crooked smile. “So, you do have a guilty pleasure song.”

Isaac shook his head, but there was something different in his expression now. Less tense. More relaxed. His eyes weren’t so sharp, his shoulders weren’t so rigid. Like the weight of his day had finally started to lift. I liked seeing him like this. He exhaled, rubbing a hand over his face. “I needed this.”

“What, the sauna? Or me clowning you?”

“Both, it seems.”

I gave a sly grin, leaning back again. “Happy to be of service, boss.”

Isaac’s lips curved, but he didn’t reply. He let his head rest against the wall, eyes half-lidded, body loose with the kind of relaxation I’d never seen on him before. Like, for the first time all day, he could just be . And fuck if that didn’t make me feel some kind of way. I noticed his towel had loosened even more, exposing his dark pubes, the root of his cock emerging above the fabric.

I looked away.

“I’m gonna hit the showers,” he said, standing up and securing the towel around his waist. “I’ve had enough heat for today.”

“I, uh, I’m gonna stay here a bit longer,” I said. The fact of the matter was, I couldn’t stand up at the moment. I needed a minute to calm down.

Isaac nodded and left me alone in the sauna. I didn’t move until I heard the water running. Thank the Lord this gym didn’t have open showers, because I had officially lost the battle with my body. Gripping my towel, I practically sprinted to my cubicle, my erection bouncing with each step. At least the locker room was empty. But as I reached my stall, I noticed a small crack in Isaac’s curtain—and I couldn’t help but take a peek inside.

I caught a glimpse of him—naked, standing under the spray, head tipped back as water cascaded down his big body. His cock was fucking huge —straight, uncut. Half-hard, swinging thick and heavy between those hairy thighs, his balls hanging low and full.

My stomach clenched. My dick twitched. I turned away fast, stepping into my own

shower. But it was too late. The image of him—wet, powerful, perfect—was burned into my brain. And there, with only a wall between us, I gave in.

My hand slipped down and closed around my hard-on. Biting my lip, I tried to stay silent as I stroked myself to the thought of him.

To the thought of Isaac Steele, my boss.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

Melissa's absence was like a slow, creeping migraine—one I couldn't shake no matter how much coffee I drank or how many deep breaths I took. She had been the backbone of my work life for nine years. She anticipated my needs before I even recognized them, kept my schedule airtight, filtered the constant stream of requests and demands into something manageable. Now, without her, everything felt... unbalanced. Like I was running a marathon with my shoelaces tied together.

I wasn't a man who tolerated disorder. Yet, that's exactly what my days had become—messy, inefficient, frustrating. Calls stacked up. Emails went unanswered. Meetings blurred into each other, and my schedule was a mess because no one was there to remind me where I was supposed to be at any given time. My mornings were consumed by admin work I had no patience for, and my evenings were spent nursing headaches from dealing with things she would've handled in minutes. I hated it.

Worst of all, she wasn't coming back anytime soon. She was on maternity leave, about to give birth in a few weeks, and would be staying home for the next year to raise her child. I was happy for her—truly. After nine years of putting up with me, she deserved the time off. But without her, I felt like I was trying to steer a ship without a rudder.

I exhaled sharply, rubbing my temple. I needed someone. And that someone sure as hell wasn't Greg.

The agency sent him as a temp, and he tried, but he wasn't cut out for it. Keeping him any longer would've driven us both mad. Yet the thought of breaking in another stranger, someone who wouldn't know how I liked my coffee, wouldn't know which contracts to prioritize, wouldn't know that I hated small talk first thing in the

morning... it exhausted me before I even started.

Then my mind drifted, unbidden, to Chris Landry.

I hadn't meant to make a habit of working out with him, but somehow, I had. We never planned it, never texted about it, but in the past few days, we kept running into each other at the gym. In the mornings or the afternoons.

I didn't mind. Chris was... easy to be around. He was sharp, but not pretentious. Playful, but not obnoxious. The kind of guy who had a quiet confidence about him, someone who made you feel lighter just by being around him. Our banter was effortless, our workouts competitive but not too competitive. I liked that. More importantly—he worked hard. And I don't mean only in the gym.

The kid had potential. I saw it in the way he pushed himself, the way he took instructions without ego, the way he absorbed information like a sponge. Maybe I could use that.

The idea struck suddenly, so suddenly that I was already out of my chair before I had time to second-guess it. I left my office and rode the elevator down to the software engineering department, a part of the building I rarely visited. It was a different world here—more casual, less polished. Open floor plan, people hunched over screens, the steady click-clack of keyboards filling the space. Rows of desks, the air buzzing with the quiet hum of concentration.

I spotted Chris at his desk, stooped over his workstation, headphones on, sleeves rolled up, the sharp angles of his forearms flexing as he typed. He was smiling at something on his screen, that easy, relaxed grin pulling at his lips.

I walked up to him and cleared my throat. "Landry."

The reaction was immediate. The entire room stilled. Conversations halted. Keyboards stopped clacking. Like I said, I didn't visit this floor often, and I certainly didn't single people out when I did.

Chris blinked up at me, taking the headphones off. "Uh—yeah?"

I tilted my head, lips curling. "Come work for me."

The room was silent. A thick, weighted kind of silence, the kind that pulled people in, made them listen closer, made their eyebrows shoot toward their hairlines.

Chris stared at me. "Excuse me?"

"Melissa's out on maternity leave. I need a replacement. You're the guy."

A beat. Then, his eyes widened. "I'm... what?"

"You heard me."

Chris looked at me, then around the room, then back at me. "Are you serious?"

I raised a brow. "Do I look like I'm joking?"

"I—" He waved a hand around him. "I'm a software engineer. I don't know the first thing about being a PA."

"You'll learn." I tapped my finger against his desk. "You'll learn more about this company working with me than you ever will staying here. You want to climb the ladder? Consider this a shortcut. That is, unless you like running bug fixes all day."

Chris hesitated. I could see the conflict in his expression—the shock, the doubt, the

glimmer of something else. Curiosity? Interest? His coworkers were staring, waiting to see what he'd do. It was an unorthodox offer, and it wasn't lost on me how it might look to the rest of the floor. But none of that mattered. Him saying yes was the only thing that did.

I crossed my arms. "What's it gonna be, Landry?"

He exhaled, rubbing the back of his neck. "What if I suck at it?"

I gave a crooked grin. "Then we'll both suffer until I find another replacement, and you'll go back to engineering. No harm done."

Chris considered that for a moment. Then, slowly, his lips curved into that lopsided grin of his. "All right. I'm in."

A murmur rippled through the office.

I clapped him on the shoulder, feeling something loosen in my chest. "Good boy. Pack your things and come upstairs. I'll inform Alicia about the transfer."

As I strode back to the elevator, I could feel the stares, the weight of the entire floor's curiosity pressing down on my back. The sheer audacity of what I'd just done. Let them talk. This would either be the smartest decision I'd made in months—or an absolute disaster.

* * *

Back in my office, I sank into my chair just as my phone rang. Chantelle. A small smile tugged at my lips as I picked up. "Hey, beautiful."

"Hey yourself," she purred. "Busy?"

I sighed, rubbing the bridge of my nose. “More than I should be.”

She clicked her tongue. “Still drowning without Melissa?”

“You have no idea.”

“Well, you’ll be happy to know that I finally found the perfect wedding venue.” There was a proud lilt in her voice. “Grace Church. It’s stunning, Isaac! Classic, elegant—exactly what I wanted. And they have an opening in January, so I booked it immediately.”

I smiled, leaning back in my chair. She described the place in vivid detail, her voice alight with excitement. I let her words wash over me, picturing it, seeing the way her mind had already begun shaping our future. But as she chattered, my focus drifted, my thoughts returning to the scene downstairs, to the stunned look on Chris’ face when I offered him the PA job. The light in his eyes when he accepted it. My lips stretched even wider, and I had to force my attention back to Chantelle. “That’s great, babe. Can’t wait to see it.”

“Oh, you better. I don’t want to hear any complaints when you show up on the wedding day.”

I chuckled. “No complaints. Just tell me where to be, and I’ll be there.”

She hummed in satisfaction. Then, her voice dipped into something sultry. “I’ll see you at your place tonight.”

That got my attention. I sat up straighter. “Yeah?”

“Mhm. And FYI, I’m wearing the lace garter belt and stockings.”

My mind flashed back to the last time she'd spent the night—her nails dragging down my back, her long legs wrapped around me. Her breath hot against my ear, the sound of her moaning my name in the dark. I exhaled slowly. This . This was what I needed. A reminder. Something solid. Something real. “You’re cruel, you know that?”

She laughed. “I know. But you love it.”

She wasn’t wrong.

We wrapped up the conversation, and when I hung up, I felt lighter. The restless itch in me hadn’t fully vanished, but I ignored it. For the first time in days, things were falling into place. A new PA. A wedding date set. A beautiful fiancée waiting for me at home. What more could a man ask for?

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

The days blurred together, each one slotting neatly into the next, a comfortable routine settling between me and Isaac before I had time to question it. I woke up, went to work, sat at my new desk outside his office, and got swept into a whirlwind of emails, meetings, and last-minute requests that would've overwhelmed me if Isaac wasn't—well, Isaac.

If I had any doubts about switching roles, they'd evaporated quickly. We had an easy rhythm, one that bled seamlessly from the office to the gym and back again. I learned to anticipate his needs, learned his quirks—how he liked his coffee strong and unsweetened, how he took exactly three seconds to respond to an email before moving on, how his fingers drummed against the desk when he was deep in thought.

It was in the middle of one of those routines, sitting at my desk with the quiet hum of the office around me, that I heard Isaac's voice through the intercom.

“Chris, I need that report from Tuesday.”

“Which one?”

“The one I was very specific about needing before lunch.”

I frowned at my screen, scrolling through my emails. “Uh... what's the subject line?”

““ This is the report you need to send Isaac before lunch, dumbass .””

I snorted. “Oh. That report.”

“Mhm. And?”

“I’ll have it to you in five.”

“You have two.”

“Under pressure,” I muttered.

I could hear the smirk in his voice. “You don’t fool me.”

Apparently, we had inside jokes now. Little things that would make no sense to anyone else. It had started as a one-time thing—a random Queen lyric dropped at just the right moment, a reference that I didn’t even realize I’d made until Isaac responded without missing a beat. After that, it became a game, our own little secret language woven through the monotony of the workday.

At first, I thought I was imagining it, that he was just humoring me. But the more it happened, the more I realized Isaac actually enjoyed our back-and-forth. His usual sharp, businesslike demeanor would slip for a second, revealing something looser, more natural. One time, he’d whispered, “I want to break free,” right before slipping out of a board meeting early. It was stupid. And I loved it.

Yes, he was my boss. Yet I never felt like I was walking on eggshells around him. If anything, I felt freer, looser, the way you do with someone who gets you without needing an explanation. And it wasn’t just at work. Twice more that week, we met at the gym after hours, trading jabs and workouts. When it hit me just how much I enjoyed those sessions, especially our banter in the sauna, I had to admit to myself that I’d developed a little crush on Zac.

I knew he was straight, taken, and soon-to-be-married. It was ridiculous and impossible, not to mention inappropriate. I had to get over it ASAP, so when Darren

asked me out that Saturday evening, I accepted. It wasn't exactly a date—there were a few more people from work there with us, and we all went bowling together.

The place was a little rundown but had its charm, the kind of old-school bowling alley that smelled like greasy fries and beer, with neon lights flickering against the waxed wood floors. The music was loud, the air thick with laughter and the occasional groan as someone missed a strike by an inch.

Darren was already at the bar when I arrived, waving me over with a grin. “Hey, man. Wasn't sure you'd show.”

I shrugged, grabbing the beer he slid toward me. “Needed a distraction.”

“Oh?” His brows lifted in interest. “Anything—or anyone—in particular?”

I took a sip, forcing a smirk. “Just work. Isaac's got me running around like an intern on steroids.”

He laughed. “Bet he's a nightmare to work for.”

I hesitated. Lying would be easier. But instead, I found myself saying, “Nah. He's actually cool.”

Darren gave me a long look. “Really?”

Before I could answer, our coworker Maya appeared beside us, dragging another girl from accounting with her. “Enough work talk, boys,” she declared, nudging Darren toward the lanes. “We're here to drink, bowl, and embarrass ourselves.”

I grinned. “In that order?”

She shot me finger guns. “Damn right.”

The night passed in a haze of laughter, terrible bowling scores, and way too many cheap beers. At some point, Maya convinced me to do a tequila shot with her, and Darren got competitive about our scores, demanding a rematch every time he lost.

It was fun. I should’ve been in it, fully present, soaking up the moment. But every so often, my thoughts wandered. Back to work. Back to Zac. Back to the way his eyes crinkled when he was amused, how his voice dropped when he was focused, how he smelled after a workout—clean sweat and something expensive underneath, warm and masculine.

I shook it off, shoving those thoughts aside, and focused on the next round.

By the time I stumbled into my apartment later that night, pleasantly buzzed and tired, I felt lighter than I had in days. The night had been exactly what I needed—drinks, bad bowling, and even worse karaoke choices. No Queen songs. No lingering thoughts about a certain someone, no second-guessing my own feelings. Just me, my friends, and a few too many tequila shots.

I kicked off my shoes, collapsed onto my bed, and let out a long sigh. For once, I hadn’t spent the entire night overanalyzing every glance, every joke, every casual touch of my straight, engaged boss. Progress.

* * *

I spent Sunday alone at home, sprawled out on my couch, mindlessly scrolling through Netflix. A half-eaten carton of takeout sat on the coffee table, and the TV cast a soft glow over the dim room. It was one of those nights where I had no real plans, no real thoughts, just me, the sofa, and whatever mediocre series I landed on.

Freshly showered, T-shirt and boxers my chosen attire for the evening, I was debating whether I had the energy to start something new when my phone buzzed. I glanced at it, remote in one hand, the other hand idly resting on my stomach, expecting a text from Darren or Maya with some blurry photos from last night. The moment I saw the name on my screen— Zac —my stomach dipped. The notification said it was a photo message.

I swiped it open without thinking, expecting some random work-related screenshot or a workout meme. But the very second my eyes landed on the image, every coherent thought in my head vanished.

Oh.

My.

God .

It wasn't just a dick pic. It was Isaac's dick pic. Thick, hard, heavy in his grip. The head flushed a deep, angry red, veins running down the big, girthy shaft in stark relief, disappearing into his fingers. And below it, a message:

'Can't wait to slide it inside you tomorrow .'

My brain short-circuited. My mouth went dry. Heat shot through me, a bolt of electricity straight to my groin. I stared, unblinking, at the screen, pulse hammering, cock swelling, torn between a thousand different reactions. Horror. Amusement. Pure, unfiltered lust.

This was a mistake. Had to be. No way Isaac meant to send this to me. The logical thing to do would've been to ignore it. Pretend it never happened. Delete the message, throw my phone out the window, move to another country.

Still, my lips twitched. No way was I letting this golden opportunity slip by. So, I typed out a quick reply:

‘Bold of you to assume I’d bottom .’

I hit send before I could second-guess myself. The read receipt popped up almost immediately. A second later, my phone rang.

I answered with a grin already on my lips. “Yes, boss?”

“Chris. Fuck.” Isaac’s voice came through the speaker, horrified and strangled, like he wanted to die. “I—shit. That wasn’t—Jesus fucking Christ.”

I bit my lip, struggling to hold back laughter. “You all right over there?”

“No. No, I am not all right.” He sounded like he was pacing. There was a clink of ice against the glass. Was he drinking? “I meant to send that to Chantelle. You’re right below her in my contacts, and I—I didn’t check before I hit send. I just typed the first two letters and clicked the first name that popped up.”

I figured as much, but I wasn’t ready to waste the chance to mess with him just yet. “Oh?” I drawled. “And here I thought we were taking our boss/PA relationship to the next level.”

Zac groaned. “I’m so fucking sorry. Just—just delete it. Forget it ever happened.”

I bit my lip, savoring this. “So, you’re saying you don’t want to slide it inside me tomorrow?”

“Chris.” His voice was taut.

I grinned, flipping onto my stomach. “Relax, I’m fucking with you. It’s not a big deal.”

“It is a big deal. It’s sexual harassment. And I’m a fucking idiot.”

“Debatable.”

“Not debatable.” He blew out a sharp breath, and I could hear him swallow. “I’ve had a few drinks.”

“I can tell,” I chuckled, stretching out on the couch, rubbing my boner against the cushions. “But, seriously, though. I’m not offended. And it’s not like I’m gonna report you to HR or something. It’s fine. In fact... I gotta say, impressive.”

Silence. Then, cautiously, “Impressive?”

“Oh yeah.” I dragged the words out, letting my admiration drip. “You’ve got a very... photogenic asset.”

There was a pause. Then, “Jesus Christ.”

I licked my lips. “I mean it. You’ve got nothing to be embarrassed about. That’s a porn-worthy cock, Zac.”

Another pause. Then he exhaled, and I swore I heard the faintest hint of smugness. “Well. Thanks, I guess.”

Something curled low in my stomach. “You’re welcome.”

He let out a choked laugh. “Now we’re even, I suppose.”

“How so?”

“Well, you flashed me your ass the first day you came to work. And now...”

“And now you flashed me your cock.”

A soft breath escaped him. “I can’t believe we’re having this conversation. I should hang up.”

“If you say so.”

A beat passed. He still didn’t hang up.

I flipped onto my back again, massaging my hard-on through my boxers. It had started leaking, leaving stains on the thin fabric. “So, what are you wearing?”

“Really?” he said. But his voice sounded a little looser, a little warmer. “That’s what you’re going with?”

“Hey, I’m just trying to conjure up a scene. Now answer me.”

“Well, you saw the picture. You know exactly what I’m wearing.”

Meaning nothing. “Mmm,” I made a thoughtful noise, imagining him naked and in need of release. “Are you still hard?”

“Yeah,” he murmured, his voice dropping even lower. “Chantelle is spending the weekend in Boston and I was...”

“Alone and horny,” I finished his sentence. “Too bad I can’t help you with that.”

He let out a small gasp and his breathing became heavier. “Help—how?”

“Well,” I said, my hand slipping inside my underwear, my horniness making me reckless, “if I was your fiancé, I’d go down on you in a second. I’d love to take that big cock into my mouth... To feel it stretch my throat, as it sinks deep down... To have my tongue swirling around it, until my nose is buried in your pubes.”

“Fuck,” he moaned. “This is so fucked up.”

“If you want me to hang up, just say so,” I offered, my pulse pounding with anticipation.

“No,” he said, his voice firm and decisive like we were at work. “Go on.”

Was he jerking off? The thought made me drunk with desire. I pulled my boxers down and grabbed my cock, already aching. A groan slipped from my lips. “Bet I’d suck you so good you’d forget your own name... dragging my tongue up and down your thick shaft, licking, teasing, swallowing you deep... Then I’d take my time on your balls, mouthing them, rolling them on my tongue, until I stretch my lips around your whole sack... And when I go back to your cock, I’d let you grab my head and fuck my throat deep and rough, until I swallow down every last drop of your cum...”

“Fuck —!” he made a strangled sound, and I knew he was cumming, his breath loud and ragged in my ear.

Fire exploded through my veins, white-hot and unstoppable. The pleasure hit like a tidal wave, dragging me under, pushing me right over the edge. A ragged moan tore from my throat as I shot all over myself, warm streaks coating my T-shirt. His name fell from my lips, breathless, broken, forbidden. My hips thrust into the air, my fist working through the last shudders of release. I came harder than I had in weeks, wrung dry and utterly wrecked.

As I lay there catching my breath, my phone still clutched in my hand, my heart still hammering, it took me a moment to realize that the line had been disconnected.

He had hung up.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

Monday morning came too soon. I barely slept, tossing and turning in my bed all night, and when I did, my dreams were disjointed and hazy—flashes of last night bleeding through like ink seeping into paper. The rasp of Chris's voice in my ear. The sound of him coming apart on the other end of the line. My own desperate groans tangled with his. The raunchy images he put in my mind.

The logical part of my brain tried to rationalize it. I'd been drinking. Not much, but enough to lower my guard. It had been a joke at first, nothing serious. But then it wasn't. Then I was stroking myself to the sound of Chris's breath, to the filthy things he was saying, to the way my name rolled off his tongue like something decadent.

I scrubbed a hand over my face, scratching my beard. It didn't mean anything. It couldn't mean anything. I was straight. Engaged. But the truth was, a part of me was... curious. Intrigued. In the two years we'd dated, Chantelle had never shown half the enthusiasm to suck my cock as Chris showed last night, at least in theory. And if he was able to make me that fired up with only his words, what could he do if he'd blow me for real?

I forced myself to get up, shower, and go to work like it was any other day. But as soon as I stepped out of the elevator, a sharp awareness settled over me. Chris was already at his desk, preparing for the tasks of the day ahead, and the moment I saw him, something twisted in my gut. I never really paid much attention before to how handsome he was. Not that I was suddenly attracted to him—but, objectively speaking, Chris was a very good-looking guy. Blond and blue-eyed. Athletic. A model's face—high cheekbones, chiseled jawline. A firm, round ass that would make anyone look twice. And those sinful, succulent lips made to be wrapped around my cock.

Fuck.

He looked up as I passed him, those tantalizing lips twitching into a devilish grin. “Morning, boss. Feeling... refreshed?” His voice was teasing, laced with amusement, making my stomach clench.

I kept my face blank. “Morning.” That was it. No smile. No joke. No return fire. Just the single word, curt and dismissive.

Chris blinked, his smirk faltering. “Uh, right. Okay.” He cleared his throat and glanced at his computer screen, like suddenly it was the most fascinating thing in the world. “I’ll have the Masterson report on your desk in half an hour.”

“Good.” I kept walking without looking back.

It was the right thing to do. The necessary thing. But when I reached my office and shut the door, I couldn’t shake the uncomfortable tightness in my chest. I could still feel him there, outside, like some part of me was attuned to him in a way it hadn’t been before. It made me feel fucking crazy. I chose to ignore it.

I buried myself in work, in meetings, in emails. Anything to keep my brain occupied. Anything to keep myself from looking at him. But I wasn’t an idiot—I knew he noticed the change. I could see it in the brief, puzzled glances he shot me when I walked past his desk without our usual morning banter. The way his posture stiffened when I addressed him in clipped, professional tones instead of teasing him like I normally would.

Is this how it’s going to be now?

I hated it. I hated the distance I was forcing between us. I missed our ribbing, the easy camaraderie. And yet, after what happened yesterday, I didn’t know how to get back

to that.

By noon, I felt suffocated. My brain felt fried from back-to-back meetings, and I stepped out of my office for a quick stretch. Chris was at his desk, typing away, brows furrowed in concentration.

“Drowning in spreadsheets already?” The words slipped out before I could stop them, my voice carrying the familiar teasing lilt I always used with him.

Chris glanced up, a flash of relief passing over his face like he’d been waiting for me to act normal again. “Yeah, and I’m going slightly mad,” he quipped, tilting his head as if daring me to play along, eyes bright with mischief.

Without thinking, I started to reply— it’s a hard life , or something along those lines maybe. The words sat right there on my tongue, part of the natural rhythm we’d fallen into over the past weeks. But at the last second, I clamped my mouth shut. Instead, I nodded stiffly. “Make sure it’s done by lunch.”

Chris’s smile faded, his fingers hovering over the keyboard like he wasn’t sure what just happened. “Uh. Yeah. Sure thing, boss.”

I turned and walked away, jaw clenched, ignoring the faint twist of regret in my gut. I needed air, space, something to shake this off. Normally, I’d hit the gym and sweat it out—maybe go with Chris, bullshit with him in the sauna afterward. But now the thought made my stomach twist.

What the hell was I supposed to do? Pretend like nothing happened? Pretend like my skin hadn’t gone hot at the sound of his voice last night, like my cock hadn’t throbbed to the image of him on his knees before me?

I had no fucking clue.

For now, I decided it was best to avoid him. I avoided him like a coward, like a man who didn't want to examine the thing slithering just beneath the surface.

* * *

At least Chantelle was back at last, and I took her to dinner that evening. I needed the normalcy, the familiarity. I needed to remind myself of who I was. And if spending some quality time with my fiancée wouldn't do it, then fuck if I knew what would.

I pulled up in front of her building and spotted her immediately—impossible to miss, standing there in her long fur coat, poised and elegant, scrolling through her phone with a practiced ease. Even in the dim streetlights, she looked impeccable, her dark hair cascading in smooth waves over her shoulders, her makeup subtle but polished. She always carried herself like she was on display, like she knew eyes would be on her.

When I jumped out of the car, she glanced up, her lips curving into a smile as she tucked her phone into her coat pocket.

“Hey, handsome,” she murmured, rising onto her toes to kiss me.

I caught her waist, pulling her flush against me for a second, inhaling the familiar notes of her perfume—jasmine, with a crisp undertone of citrus. It was nice. It was comforting. “Hey yourself, gorgeous,” I said, my tone warm and easy as I pulled back and opened the car door for her. “I missed you. The weekend felt like an eternity.”

“Same.” She slid into the seat with a graceful motion, smoothing her coat as I shut the door. I rounded the car and got behind the wheel, glancing at her as I pulled into traffic.

“How was your trip?” I said, keeping my voice light.

She launched into a recap of her weekend, recounting court arguments and networking events, dropping the names of partners and judges as if I should recognize them. I nodded all the same, making the appropriate sounds of interest, but my brain kept trying to drift elsewhere. Kept stirring with a hunger that had no place here, in this car, with my fiancée beside me.

I clenched my jaw and refocused, gripping the wheel a little tighter as I steered us toward the restaurant. It was one of those fancy, modern places where the lighting was dim enough to make everything look expensive, the wine list extensive enough to impress, and the waitstaff trained to be both attentive and invisible. I barely glanced at the name on the awning when I pulled up, too caught up in my own head.

Before we sat at our table, Chantelle removed her fur coat, revealing a black satin dress that hugged her figure, the open back exposing smooth, milky skin. The waiter appeared, reciting the evening's specials. Chantelle ordered a salad—"No dressing, please"—and a small plate of risotto. I ordered a steak, rare, something solid I could cut into, hoping it would ground me. We got our drinks—red wine for her, whiskey on the rocks for me—and settled into small talk while we waited.

Taking a sip of her Merlot, Chantelle leaned forward, eyes bright with excitement. "Oh, I forgot to tell you—I won that case on Friday. It was a slaughter. The other attorney barely put up a fight."

I smirked. "So... another one bites the dust?"

She blinked. "What?"

I let out a short laugh, shaking my head. "It's a Queen song."

"Oh. Right." She gave me a polite smile and tapped her nails on the stem of the glass. "That was before my time." No teasing about my age. No amused roll of her eyes.

Just indifference before she moved on, already telling me some ridiculous gossip about one of her colleagues.

It shouldn't have bugged me. It was a throwaway joke. But I could hear Chris's voice in my head, the way he would've latched onto it, topped it with a quip of his own. I took a slow sip of my Jack Daniel's, letting the burn scrape down my throat.

"Anyway," Chantelle continued, her tone turning more businesslike, "I've got a huge case coming up. High-profile. I'll have to be in New York for a couple of weeks while the trial's going on."

I looked up. "Two weeks?"

She nodded, checking something on her phone before setting it back down beside her plate. "Yeah, it's a big deal. Could be great for my career if it goes well."

"That's... great," I said, trying to mean it.

She smiled, but there was a distracted quality to it, like she wasn't really looking at me. "I'll be swamped, but we'll still talk every day, obviously."

"Obviously."

A beat of silence stretched between us. She scrolled idly on her phone, and I picked up my drink, taking another slow sip. Around the restaurant, couples leaned into each other, laughter and murmured conversation filling the air. Across the room, a woman traced the rim of her wineglass as she laughed at something her date said. Easy. Natural. Intimate. When had Chantelle and I stopped being like that? Had we ever been like that?

I let out a heavy breath and reached for my whiskey again.

“Something wrong?” Chantelle asked.

“No.” I met her gaze and offered a weak curve of my mouth. “Just stressed.”

She nodded like she accepted that, then turned back to her phone. “I won’t be able to deal with all the wedding stuff while I’m away, so I’ll delegate to my mother. She finally accepted that I didn’t want any bridesmaids. God, you wouldn’t believe the drama over floral arrangements.” She sighed, shaking her head. “I told my mom she could handle the details, but she’s been calling me nonstop with options. Apparently, peonies are out this season, and now there’s a crisis.”

I forced a chuckle. “Tragic.”

She rolled her eyes but smirked. “Tell me about it.”

The waiter finally brought our food, giving me an excuse to eat instead of forcing the conversation. But my mind, fucking traitorous, kept yanking me elsewhere. Kept replaying last night in sharp, unrelenting detail. Chris’s voice in my ear, low and rough. The way my body had responded. How easy it had been. How natural.

“I feel like you’re a million miles away tonight.” Chantelle’s voice pulled me back. She was watching me closely now, her pale blue eyes sharp with something that wasn’t quite suspicion but was definitely curiosity.

A smile ghosted across my lips, but it didn’t reach my eyes. “It’s been a long day.”

She hummed, swirling her wineglass between her fingers. “Sure it’s nothing more?”

I clenched my jaw. I needed to get laid. That was the problem. My horniness was making me distracted, insane. So I decided to be honest. “Well, I’m a bit concupiscent, if you really want to know.” I knew she liked those big words, and this

one tugged at the corner of her lips.

“It’s only been two days, Isaac,” she said.

“Like I said—eternity.”

“Fine,” she sighed. “Hurry up with that steak and let’s go home.”

* * *

When we got back to my place, I wasted no time. The door had barely shut behind us before I was shrugging off my suit jacket, tugging at the buttons of my shirt. My shoes hit the floor as I unbuckled my belt, steering Chantelle toward the master bedroom, our mouths locked in a kiss that was more instinct than passion.

She laughed against my lips, fingers skating down my chest. “Someone’s eager tonight.”

“Can you blame me?” I murmured, pressing my mouth to her throat.

She kissed me back, slow and deep, but when my hands drifted lower, she pulled back slightly. “Let’s take our time,” she said.

Patience had never been my strong suit, but I nodded, letting her set the pace.

Between lingering kisses, our clothes disappeared, and soon we were tangled in bed, the city lights casting faint, shifting patterns on the walls. She didn’t blow me—she only did it on special occasions—and I didn’t press her. Instead, I let my hands roam, tried to lose myself in her body, but the moment I closed my eyes, Chris’s voice slipped through the cracks.

“I’d go down on you in a second.”

My throat went dry. I pushed the thought away, forced myself to focus—on Chantelle’s warmth beneath me, the soft rise and fall of her breasts, perky in my hands. I trailed kisses down her stomach, working to re-anchor myself in the moment. But when I settled between her thighs, she tensed.

“You don’t have to,” she murmured, caressing my beard. “Come here.”

She pulled me up, guiding me into position, and I let it go. It wasn’t the first time she’d turned me down. Chantelle liked sex, but she didn’t need it the way I did. And I did need it—desperately. I took what she was offering, gripping her hips, driving into her with a single-minded focus. But then, unbidden—

“Bet I’d suck you so good you’d forget your own name.”

I clenched my jaw, burying my face in Chantelle’s shoulder. What the fuck was wrong with me? I moved harder, faster, trying to shake the thought loose. She had to tell me to slow down, my thrusts hurting her, and I tried to go easier when all my instincts screamed to go rougher. When my release hit, it felt hollow. Mechanical.

Afterward, I lay on my back, staring at the ceiling, trying to steady my breathing. Chantelle stretched beside me, letting out a sigh.

“Isaac,” she murmured. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

I tensed. “What do you mean?”

She turned onto her side, propping her head on her hand, her gaze unwavering. “I know you, Isaac. You get... restless. And when you do, you get moody like this.”

Restless. That wasn't the word for it. Restless was needing to burn off energy in the gym, pushing myself too hard in sparring, fucking Chantelle hard enough to make the headboard slam against the wall. Restless wasn't... this. This slow, insidious itch under my skin.

She hesitated, then exhaled, like she was weighing her words before speaking. "I was thinking... maybe we should keep things open. Until the wedding."

I stilled. She said it so casually, like she was offering me an extra side with my meal. No big deal. Just an option. "Open," I repeated, just to be sure I heard her right.

She shrugged one shoulder. "We're both busy. And honestly? You've always been the one with the higher sex drive. We've known that since the beginning. I don't have the time or the energy to keep up. Especially now." She smiled, a small, wry thing. "If you need an outlet, I don't mind. As long as it doesn't mean anything."

I stared at her, my mind scrambling to process it. She was serious. She was giving me permission to fuck someone else. And for the first time in my life, my brain didn't immediately conjure up another woman.

I swallowed hard. "That's... a hell of a thing to bring up after sex."

She laughed softly, brushing a kiss over my fuzzy jaw. "It's pragmatic."

I breathed out, rolling the thought over in my head. The idea should have been appealing. Should have been a solution. A way to burn off the tension without thinking too hard about why I was tense in the first place.

And yet.

"You're not seeing anyone else?" I asked, keeping my tone light.

She shook her head. “God, no. With the hours I work, I can barely manage one, let alone two lovers. Besides, sex has never been that important to me.”

I did know that. Had known it from the start. Sure, it had nagged at me sometimes, but I’d convinced myself I could live with it. No woman I’d ever been with could match my libido. But then last night happened. And after so long, the way someone had wanted me—the hunger in their voice, the unabashed filth of their desire—had cracked something open inside me. Something I couldn’t seem to shut.

I rubbed my beard, my chest tight with questions I wasn’t ready to ask.

Chantelle tilted her head, studying me. “You don’t have to decide right now. Just think about it.”

I did. Long after she’d fallen asleep, I lay awake, staring at the ceiling. I wasn’t going to do it. Of course I wasn’t. The woman sleeping beside me was the one I was going to marry. The one I loved. But the fact that the idea didn’t immediately repulse me? That was something I didn’t know what to do with. And in the back of my mind, a voice lingered, whispering things I couldn’t unhear.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

The following morning, I took the elevator up to our floor with a knot in my stomach.

The day before had dragged by in a haze of overthinking, running on autopilot at the gym, and fighting the urge to check my phone every five minutes. I told myself nothing had changed, that I'd see Isaac today and things would go back to normal. That we'd joke around like always, that he'd call me a dumbass in that dry, amused way of his, that I wouldn't have to sit at my desk analyzing every word I said to him. But as I stepped into the office, I wasn't so sure.

I made it to my desk and went through the motions—powering on my computer, skimming emails, flipping through my notes from yesterday. But the whole time, my focus was stretched thin, straining toward Isaac's office.

He wasn't there yet.

Fine. Cool. No big deal. It wasn't like I was waiting for him.

When I heard the elevator ding and his familiar footsteps crossed the threshold, my whole body tensed. Isaac walked past my desk without a glance. Not a nod, not a morning greeting, not even the usual half-smirk that said he'd barely slept but was ready to bulldoze through the day anyway.

My stomach dropped. So that was how it was gonna be.

I swallowed hard and forced my eyes back to my screen, my fingers tight around my coffee mug. This was fine. I could handle this. I could handle a little awkwardness, even if it gnawed at my nerves. I could—

Isaac's footsteps stopped. For a second, nothing happened.

Then, just as I started to turn my head, I saw him backtrack in my peripheral vision. He came to a stop beside my desk, shifting his weight. I looked up, trying to keep my expression neutral.

His eyes flicked to mine, then away. "Okay," he said, scratching his beard. "This is dumb."

I blinked. "Uh... what?"

He released a frustrated sigh, shaking his head like he was annoyed with himself. "This whole thing. I've been acting like an idiot."

I let out a slow breath, the tension inside me finally lifting. "So... you're saying you don't hate me?"

The corner of his mouth lifted. "I'm saying I was weird about it, and I shouldn't have been. It was all my fault, anyway." He finally looked at me then, and his expression softened just enough to smooth out any remaining tightness in my chest. "We're good, yeah?"

I studied him for a beat, then nodded. "Yeah."

Isaac nodded too, like we'd just shaken on some unspoken agreement. "Good." Then, as if to cement it, he added, "You still suck at sparring, by the way."

A grin broke across my face before I could stop it. "And you still grunt like a goddamn caveman when you lift, so I guess we're even."

His smirk was brief but real. "Get back to work, Landry."

He turned and walked into his office, and just like that, the knot in my stomach unraveled. Things were back to normal.

At least, on the surface.

Because as I sat there, staring at my screen with a stupid smile, something heavier settled in my chest. I liked Isaac. A bit too much, to be honest. Not in the casual, easy way I had before. Not just as a friend, or a guy I admired, or even a straight dude I found attractive but could keep at a safe emotional distance.

No, it was worse than that. I'd seen another side of him—heard it, felt it through the phone. And now, every time I looked at him, I couldn't stop thinking about it. About the way his voice had dropped, rough and wanting. About how he'd let down his guard and welcomed what I had to give.

I leaned back in my chair, rubbing a hand over my face.

Normal. That's what I needed. To focus on work, on our routine, on whatever made things feel easy again. I could do that. Even if, deep down, part of me wasn't sure I wanted to.

* * *

Lying on my bed, I stared at the ceiling, phone in hand, debating whether to hit call. It wasn't like Tyler would ignore me—he never did—but I felt stupid for needing this conversation in the first place.

I'd been in Providence for almost two months now, but outside of work, I hadn't made any real friends yet. My coworkers were friendly enough, but there was a difference between office camaraderie and the kind of friendship where you could confess, "Hey, I think I might be falling for my boss, and it's a fucking disaster."

Tyler was the only person I could talk to about this. He'd been in a similar situation last year, crushing on his coach, and now they were living together, happily in love. If anyone would get it, it was him. We texted all the time and he was already aware of my situation, but sometimes, I needed an actual voice, not just words on a screen.

With a sigh, I tapped the Facetime icon, and a moment later, Tyler's face popped up on the screen, grinning wide. "C-man! What's up, my dude?"

I stretched, cracking my neck. "Not much, just hanging... in all the right places."

Tyler let out a cute chuckle. "Two months in the corporate world, and you're still using every opportunity to make dick jokes. I'm proud."

I chuckled too. "You walked right into that one, T-bag."

"Yeah, yeah. One day you'll have to grow up."

"Doubt it. Where's the fun in that?"

Tyler leaned back against his headboard, arms crossed. "So, how's living in the real world? Finally learned how to use a spreadsheet?"

I scoffed. "Please. I could build you a spreadsheet that tracks every time you've been pinned this season."

His jaw dropped in mock offense. "Excuse you, I'm undefeated this semester."

"Seriously? Guess the competition must be trash this year."

"Asshole," he muttered, but he was grinning. "How about you? Still hitting the gym, or did you trade in your muscles for an office chair and a dad bod?"

I turned the camera slightly, flexing my arm. “You wish. I still lift more than you.”

Tyler snorted. “Right. Keep telling yourself that, desk jockey.”

The easy banter eased something in me, like stretching out a stiff muscle. But then Tyler’s grin softened into something more knowing, and he tilted his head. “So, are we just gonna talk about my winning streak, or are you finally gonna spill whatever’s eating you?”

I hesitated, rolling onto my side. “There’s been some progress with Zac. We talked it out, and things are back to normal. At least, that’s what I keep telling myself.”

Tyler squinted. “Uh-huh. That sounds suspiciously like bullshit. Start from the beginning.”

So I did. I told him about the awkward tension after the Dick Pic Fiasco, how I wasn’t sure if Isaac and I could go back to the way things were. About my relief when we did. And about the problem that still lingered beneath it all.

Tyler listened without interrupting, nodding here and there. When I finally stopped talking, he released a slow breath. “Damn, dude. That’s rough.”

“No shit.”

“But let’s be real—you like him.”

I scratched my chin, making a face at him. “I didn’t say that.”

“You didn’t have to. I know the symptoms. Trust me.”

He wasn’t wrong. He went through it. I groaned, dragging a hand down my face. “I

don't want to."

"That doesn't change the fact that you do." He changed the angle of his camera, like he was shifting in bed. "Do you think he likes you back?"

I frowned at the screen, thinking of the way Isaac looked at me sometimes—too long, too intense. But he was like that with everyone, those ice-blue eyes piercing through the person on the other end like an arrow. "I don't think so," I admitted. "He's in a relationship, and he's straight."

Tyler huffed. "You sure about that last part?"

"I was. Now?" I exhaled. "I have no fucking idea."

Tyler hummed, thoughtful. "I mean, look at me and Blake. He never thought he was into guys, and it took him a while to accept that he wanted me like that. Now he can't keep his hands off me. And he's the best thing that's ever happened to me."

A small, bitter laugh escaped me. "This isn't like you and Blake," I said.

"I didn't say it was." His tone was gentler now. "But... just be honest with yourself, bro. If you're into him, pretending you're not won't make it go away."

I closed my eyes. "Yeah, well. Doesn't matter. He's unavailable. End of story."

Tyler was quiet for a second. "I'm just saying," he said, then. "You're the only guy I know who's had phone sex with a straight dude."

I snorted despite myself. "That was a fluke. It won't happen again."

"Not with that attitude, it won't."

I rolled my eyes, but a small smile tugged at my lips. It was just like Tyler to be optimistic even when I couldn't be.

We talked for a while longer—about his training, my job, the usual bullshit—before he yawned and said, “Oh! I almost forgot. I'll be in Providence for Christmas.”

That got my attention. “For real?”

“Yeah, spending it with my mom this year. Figured I'd give you a heads-up so we can finally hang out in person.”

“I'm supposed to go back to Maine for a week and spend holidays with my family, but I'll be back here right after New Year's.”

“That's fine. I'll probably stay at my mom's place for the entire winter break. Plenty of time to catch up.” He grinned. “You still look like the same cocky fuck who beat me at the regionals, by the way.”

I smiled. “And you're still as easy on the eye as ever. Happiness suits you.”

Tyler's smile widened. “It'll be good to see you, man.”

“Yeah.” I nodded, meaning it. “You too.”

After we hung up, I lay there for a moment, staring at my phone screen. Hearing from Tyler did make me feel better. It reminded me of who I am. And I didn't do pining. I didn't do moping. I was a sexy motherfucker in my prime, and any guy would be lucky to score with me. This thing with Isaac? It was bound to fizzle out eventually. It was just a little crush, and once I got out of my head, I'd realize I was making a big deal out of nothing.

So, I'd let it be what it'd be. Not like we had a date with destiny.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

I woke in the middle of the night, my cock throbbing, precum slicking my stomach. I'd thought jerking off before bed would knock me out for the night and give me my seven hours of peace. It didn't.

Groaning, I rolled onto my stomach, pressing my face into the pillow like that would somehow make a difference. My erection rubbed against the mattress, smearing precum over the sheets, and sending my mind straight into a lustful haze. There'd be no more sleep for me tonight. The ache between my legs wasn't the kind that just went away, and at this point, ignoring it felt like stubborn self-punishment.

With a grunt, I flipped onto my back, reached down, and got to work.

Chantelle came to mind automatically—her body, her curves, the way she moved beneath me. It had only been three days since she had been gone, but it already seemed like a month. I tried to focus on how she sounded when she moaned, the way her nails raked over my back, the way her breath hitched when I drove into her.

I tightened my grip, jaw locking as I picked up the pace. My mind started wandering, conjuring visions of multiple women, crawling over the bed from all sides, vampire brides ready to feed on my body. Two sucking on each of my nipples, the other two between my legs, sharing the goods. I kept stroking faster, moaning in the dark, feeling my balls tighten.

Then, one of the women between my legs looked up at me, smiling, and— fuck . It wasn't a woman at all. It was Chris.

“Bet I'd suck you so good you'd forget your own name,” he said.

My whole body locked up. My stomach flipped, nausea and panic hitting at the same time. I jerked my hand away like I'd been burned, but it was too late—I was already cumming, shooting all over my chest. My cock pulsated, my body spasmed, finally finding a temporary relief. And the worst part? The worst part was that, for one brief, terrifying second, my body had responded in a way it hadn't to anything else all fucking week.

“Jesus Christ.” I scrubbed a hand over my face, dragging in uneven breaths. What the fuck was that?

When I looked at my phone, it showed five a.m. Too early to get up, too late to hope for more sleep. Maybe a session in the gym would help rid me of this goddamned itch. So, I threw back the covers and stalked to the bathroom, naked, cum still cooling on my skin. Turning the water to ice-cold, I stepped under the spray.

* * *

The days dragged on, and my mood only got worse.

I buried myself in meetings, in emails, in troubleshooting a server issue with the IT department, pretending like I wasn't so fucking on edge that I wanted to break something. Everything irritated me—Alicia's constant chatter, the never-ending pings of my inbox, the way people knocked on my door with questions they should already know the answers to. I snapped at my team over the smallest mistakes, barked at a junior developer for missing a deadline by a few hours, and by the end of the week, I'd officially become that kind of boss.

Even Chris had started giving me wary looks.

The gym wasn't much better. Usually, lifting helped clear my head, but now, every time I tried to focus, my attention kept slipping. And it was even worse when Chris

trained with me. I tried aiming my workouts early before work, when I thought he wouldn't be there. But he kept surprising me, appearing when I least expected him to, almost like he tried to synch his schedule to mine. He was just... there. All the fucking time.

I couldn't flat-out tell him to bugger off. We had finally smoothed things out, and I didn't want to make it weird again. So, I grinded my teeth and kept working out with him. But every now and then, my gaze caught on him, noticing the way his shirt rode up when he stretched, baring the sharp V of his lower abdomen. The way sweat trickled down his throat and into his collar. The way his shorts clung to his bubble butt.

And that? That was unacceptable.

It fucking pissed me off. It pissed me off because I shouldn't have been noticing these things. Because my body wasn't listening. Because, at the end of the day, no matter what I did, no matter how many times I jerked off, it just wasn't enough.

* * *

The next Monday, the inevitable happened.

Alicia knocked on my office door that afternoon, stepping in hesitantly. "Isaac, do you have a minute?"

I didn't look up from my monitor. "What is it?"

She faltered. "I was going over the DevOps reports, and I think there's a discrepancy in the—"

"Alicia." I cut her off, already exhausted. "I hired you because you're good at your

job. So do your damn job. I don't need a play-by-play of every minor issue!"

I had no reason to snap at her. She was just being thorough. But my voice came out sharp, clipped, the tension slipping out. Her face barely flickered, but I caught it—the tightness in her jaw, the way her fingers curled at her sides. Then, just as quickly, she smoothed her expression and gave a curt nod. "Understood."

She turned and left without another word.

I blew out a heavy breath and dropped my head into my hands. Fuck. I wasn't that kind of boss. Didn't want to be that kind of boss. I just... I just needed to get my head on straight.

The next knock came harder. The door opened before I could answer and Chris stepped in, gaze sharp. "Okay, what the hell's up with you?"

I stiffened. "Excuse me?"

Chris crossed his arms. "You've been an ass all week, Zac. You're snappish, you're scowling, but that?" He jerked his head toward the door. "That was unnecessary. You just chewed out Alicia over nothing. She looked like she was ready to quit."

"Stay out of it," I muttered.

"Not until you tell me." Chris stepped closer, eyes narrowing. "What's going on?"

Teeth grinding, jaw tight, my fingers pressed into the wood of my desk like I was about to snap it in half. "Chris, I'm not in the mood—"

"Yeah, no shit. But that doesn't give you the right to take it out on everyone else."

He was right, and I knew it. But knowing that didn't help me in the slightest. So I kept glaring at him, hoping he would take the hint and get the hell out of my office. He didn't back down.

“And quit glowering at me like that. You won't scare me that easily.”

I rubbed my temples, trying to force the tension out of my skull, regretting the day I asked this brash, impudent brat to work for me in the first place. “I'm just stressed. Chantelle's been in New York for the past week.”

He blinked. “That's it?”

“She's been gone for a week,” I repeated with added emphasis.

It took him all of two seconds to put it together. His eyebrows lifted, and for a second, he just stared at me. Then he sighed, scrubbing a hand through his hair. “So you need to get laid.”

I let out a humorless laugh. “Thanks for the insight, Freud.”

“I'm serious,” he said. “Go jerk off in the bathroom or something before you make another employee cry.”

I looked away, flexing my jaw. “Already did.”

Chris hesitated. “Well, do it again.”

“Did that too,” I muttered.

He stared at me, incredulous. “And it didn't help?”

I didn't meet his eyes. Silence stretched between us. I don't know why I said what I said next. "Before she left... Chantelle said that if I wanted to... I could do it with someone else. She's busy all the time and she thinks we should keep things open until the wedding."

The air in the room changed. When I finally dared to look at him again, he was gaping at me, mouth hanging half-open. My gaze slipped to his lips, pink and glistening, just as he licked them. He swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing. "Okay, look. I'll do it for you if you promise to stop being a dick."

My eyes snapped to his. "What?"

He shrugged, completely unfazed, like we were talking about something as casual as grabbing lunch. "You need a tug job? Fine. I'll handle it. You let me get you off, you stop acting like an asshole. Deal?"

My stomach clenched. My skin went hot, then cold, then hot again. A sharp jolt of something slammed through me, curling tight in my gut. This is a joke. It had to be a joke. Except Chris didn't look like he was joking. I swallowed hard, hands clenching into fists beneath my desk. "You can't be serious."

Chris held my gaze, unflinching, folding his arms. "If that's what it takes for you to be normal again, then yeah, I'm serious."

"Chris—"

"Zac. Look me in the eye and tell me you don't want it."

I looked him in the eye. And I had every intention to tell him to fuck off. But for some reason, I couldn't find my voice. My face burned, a sharp, indignant heat crawling up my neck. My pulse roared in my ears. My throat worked, my fingers

flexing at my sides. “Go back to work,” I muttered. “We’re not doing this.”

“Suit yourself.” And with that, he turned to leave.

A sharp breath left my lips. “Wait .”

He paused, his hand already on the door handle.

A heavy beat of silence. Something inside me twisted, fierce and undeniable. The air between us tightened, stretched so taut it felt like it might snap. Then, finally—too desperate, too far gone, too fucking reckless—I let the last of my resistance slip. I swallowed hard, and in a voice that barely sounded like my own, I rasped, “Lock the door.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

I stepped forward, watching Zac's jaw tighten as I came around his desk. His hands gripped the armrests of his chair, knuckles turning pale. His whole body was coiled, tense, like he was bracing for impact.

It's happening , I thought. It's actually happening. I'd fantasized about this moment so many times that, even now, as it was about to happen, I could hardly believe it wasn't just another one of my private dream scenarios. The ones I played out under the shower or before falling asleep. But no, this time it was real, and Isaac and I were about to cross the line forever. I could feel the weight of his stare, but I didn't meet it. Not yet. Instead, my gaze flicked lower, to the bulge between his legs, my mind dizzy with desire. I let my knees hit the floor, the plush carpet soft against my trousers, and reached for his belt.

His breath hitched. "Chris—"

"Mmm?" I flicked open the buckle. The metal clinked in the silence.

"This is a bad idea." His voice was low, strained, like he was trying to hold onto something already slipping through his fingers. But he didn't stop me. His legs were already spread, his hips pushed forward, his erection straining against his slacks, betraying him.

I dragged the zipper down. "Just relax. This ain't my first rodeo."

Zac made a strangled noise deep in his throat and turned his head away, tilting it toward the window like he could will himself somewhere else. Like he could pretend this wasn't happening.

I wasn't about to let him.

He wasn't touching me, wasn't looking at me, wasn't doing a damn thing except sitting there, stiff as a board. But the second I reached into his briefs and wrapped my hand around him, his whole body shuddered.

"Wow," I said, running my fingers over his length. "It's even bigger in person." It was fucking enormous. Thick as a beer can. Heavy in my hand, hot and throbbing, a bead of precum already slicking the tip as the foreskin rolled down. I swallowed, my mouth suddenly dry. I'd imagined this—so many times—but the reality was a thousand times better. I gave him a slow stroke, squeezing just enough to make his hips twitch.

"Fuck," he exhaled. His head stayed turned, his jaw clenched like he was still trying to fight it, but his body told a different story. His legs tensed, his breathing came faster, and when I twisted my wrist just right, dragging my thumb over the head, a deep, guttural moan slipped past his lips.

That sound shot straight through me, hot and electric. I wanted more. "Does this feel good?"

"Stop talking," he whispered, eyes closing.

I adjusted my grip, stroking him harder, faster, testing different angles, trying to find exactly what made him fall apart. His hands clenched the armrests so tightly I thought he might break them. His lips parted, his brows drew together, and then—another sound, raw and helpless, spilled from his throat.

He was fucking gorgeous like this—and I wanted to ruin him.

Without thinking, I leaned in. My breath ghosted over the tip of his cock, and before I

could second-guess it, my lips parted and I took him into my mouth.

Zac gasped. His entire body jerked like he'd been shocked.

“Oh God —”

I didn't stop. I couldn't. I licked over the tip, tasting him, letting the weight of him press heavy against my tongue. His scent filled my head, clean sweat and something dark, masculine, addictive. I hollowed my cheeks and took more, sliding my lips down, feeling his cock slip deeper into my throat, his girth throbbing inside my neck.

His hand shot to my head. He didn't push me away, didn't try to stop me—just tangled his fingers in my hair and groaned, his hips lifting off the chair like he couldn't help himself. He was close. So close.

I sucked harder, faster, my hand working in tandem, stroking the base while my tongue flicked over the sensitive underside, alternating between deepthroating him and sucking the head. His thighs trembled. His breath came in ragged gasps. His grip in my hair tightened—tight enough to hurt, but I loved it, and I moaned around the thickness in my mouth to let him know it.

“Aaaahh fuck —” And then he was cumming, pulsing hot and thick into my mouth, his head falling back, his entire body seizing as he let out a deep, broken moan. I kept sucking, swallowing, savoring the salty taste of him. And I took it all, every drop, until he finally slumped back in his chair, boneless, wrecked, his chest heaving.

For a long moment, neither of us spoke. Then Isaac scrubbed a hand over his face and tucked himself in, still not looking at me. “Jesus Christ.”

I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand and sat back on my heels, watching him. He was trying to pretend it hadn't happened, like he hadn't just come down my

throat, but I knew better. He'd loved it. He wouldn't admit it, but I'd felt it in the way he lost control, in the sounds he made, in the way his body had responded to me and only me. I grinned, standing up and straightening my clothes. "Feeling better now?"

Isaac let out a heavy breath and turned back to his computer. "Yes. I, uh... Thank you."

"Anytime, boss." I said it casually, not as a statement or a promise, but as I left his office, I caught the look he gave me. Like he took it literally. And he was going to call me out on it.

I knew it. He knew it. It was only a matter of time before it happened again.

* * *

Well, I didn't expect it to happen again the very next day. But when Isaac called me into his office, I knew exactly what he wanted.

To his credit, he'd kept his end of the bargain—after yesterday's blowjob, he was back to his usual self. Focused, efficient, fair. No more barking at employees, no more taking out his stress on anyone else. He'd even apologized to Alicia. But we both knew it wouldn't last. He was one orgasm away from turning into a boss from hell again, and apparently, it was my job to keep the demon from reappearing.

Yeah. Like I needed an excuse to suck his cock.

This time, there was no hesitation. No weak protests. As soon as I stepped into his office, he locked the door, went to his desk, and leaned back against it, hands braced on the edge like he was presenting himself to me. I barely had time to smirk before I dropped to my knees.

From that moment on, it became routine. At least once a day—often more. In his office, between the meetings, with the door locked. In the gym sauna, when there was no one else around, and the heat made our bodies slick with sweat. In the showers, where the steam thickened the air, and his groans echoed off the tiles as he buried his hands in my hair, fucking my mouth with a desperation that only grew stronger each time.

Zac was insatiable. And I was more than happy to provide my services.

“Your cum tastes so fucking good,” I said one time as I cleaned him up.

He only grunted, non-committal, but I knew he loved the ego-stroking almost as much as the sucking. Millionaire CEO or not, Zac wanted to feel wanted, just like everybody else.

Some days, he hardly even spoke before unzipping his pants and taking his cock out as I settled between his legs. Other times, he tried to act normal—talking about work, going over reports—until I caught the way his fingers flexed, the way his voice tightened, and I’d give him a knowing look before rubbing his bulge and sinking to my knees. He never stopped me. Not once.

And the more I did it, the more I craved it. The taste of him, the weight of his cock on my tongue, the way he lost control when I took him deep and pushed him over the edge.

I told myself it was just fun. No strings. No complications. But deep down, I knew the truth—I was completely hooked.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:24 am

I convinced myself it was just a temporary thing. A way to take the edge off, a momentary indulgence to get me through the week. I even tried to justify it as a necessity—better to be satisfied and functional than wound-up and irritable, snapping at my employees and making everyone's lives a living hell. Chris was helping me out, and I was taking advantage of what he offered. That was all.

But by the time Friday rolled around, I couldn't lie to myself anymore. Because I couldn't wait to get to work and shove my cock into his hungry mouth. I fucking craved it.

It should've been hard to accept that I was getting off with another man every day, but it was even harder to deny how much I enjoyed it. Chris was too damn good at it—better than anyone I'd ever been with. He was eager, confident, completely unashamed of how much he liked doing it. And Christ, did that make a difference.

I used to think the whole guys give better head stereotype was a load of bullshit. A joke people made to get laughs. Now I knew better. Knew firsthand just how much skill and enthusiasm mattered. Chris had both in spades, and every time I leaned back and let him do his thing, I felt the stress melt away, leaving me clearer, sharper, more in control than I had been in years.

And now I was addicted.

I felt it the moment I woke up Friday morning—my last day before Chantelle came back. I was excited, anticipating her return, looking forward to the weekend with her. Still, my thoughts went back to Chris. My body was already primed for it, knowing I'd see him soon, knowing I could call him into my office whenever I wanted and

he'd drop to his knees without hesitation.

I ran a hand down my face, exhaling hard. Now that I knew what his mouth could do, how the hell was I supposed to stop?

* * *

That night, I cooked for Chantelle. A welcome-back dinner, something special just for her. I pan-seared salmon, roasted asparagus, and made a lemon-dill sauce from scratch. Poured her favorite wine, set the table with candles. I wanted the evening to be good, to make her feel cherished, to prove to myself that nothing had changed.

Because it hadn't. I was still Isaac Steele. Still the same man. Still straight. The thing with Chris... it was just about release. About scratching an itch. Nothing more.

I heard the elevator doors slide open, and a few seconds later, the familiar click of heels echoed through the hallway. Then came the sound of a suitcase rolling over the marble floor.

I rushed to the door and opened it just as Chantelle reached it. She stood before me in a crisp navy suit, her hair free yet immaculate, not a strand out of place despite coming here straight from the airport. Her gaze flicked over me, sharp as ever, before she let out a measured breath and dropped her carry-on handle.

"Hey, handsome," she said, arching a perfectly shaped brow.

"Welcome back," I said, stepping forward and pulling her into a tight hug. She felt small against me, delicate, but her posture remained poised, her arms resting lightly on my back rather than clinging. Her perfume tickled my nose, heady like a memory of summer. When she tilted her chin up, we kissed—a soft, perfunctory brush of lips that deepened as I took more control.

She pulled away too soon. “You’ll have my lipstick all over your face.”

I didn’t care about the fucking lipstick. But I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand and said nothing.

She smoothed a hand over her blazer. “God, I need a drink.”

I stepped aside, letting her roll her suitcase inside. “Long flight?”

“Long week ,” she corrected, already making a beeline for the bar. “Depositions. Meetings. Schmoozing clients. That insane gala on Wednesday. My feet still hurt from those damn Louboutins.” She poured herself a glass of Bordeaux and looked around the kitchen before turning back to me. “The dinner smells delicious.”

“Only the best for you,” I said, coming in for another kiss, but she already moved away, surveying the table. So I poured myself a bourbon, neat, and took a sip.

“And you brought out the candles? I should be going away more often.”

I smiled, eyes cast down on my drink.

“By the way, I heard you’ve been naughty.” This made my gaze snap at her, as she perched on a stool, smirking at me. “Mom said you’ve been avoiding her calls.”

“Er...” I didn’t know how to get out of that one. Because it was true.

Chantelle only laughed. “It’s all right. She’s been driving me insane, too. She’s now convinced we have to have white roses because it’s tradition. I don’t even like white roses.”

I huffed out a laugh. “So tell her no.”

“I did. She called me ungrateful and said I had no taste.” Chantelle exhaled, taking another sip. “I swear, at this point, eloping doesn’t seem like such a bad idea.”

That made me pause. “Would you?”

She met my gaze, then laughed. “Don’t be ridiculous, Isaac.”

Of course not. Chantelle was all about the presentation, about the show. Even now, tired after her trip, she looked polished as ever, her hair sleek, her makeup flawless. She never let herself appear anything less than perfect, even in the privacy of our homes. What was the point of getting married if not to throw an extravagant event to dazzle everyone and make them jealous?

She set her glass down and stood. “Anyway, enough about my week. What about you? I assume you survived without me?”

I pulled the chair for her. “Let’s eat and I’ll tell you all about it.”

We sank into a mannered conversation as we ate, talking about mundane stuff with no real depth or meaning. It was almost a kind of rebellion when I decided to put an end to it with my admission. There was no point in hiding it. I valued honesty too much, and in my eyes, cheating was as low as a man could get. I knew firsthand what it could do to a family, and I swore a long time ago not to be the kind of guy my old man was. Let it never be said I was untrue.

So I set down my fork and said, “You know, I took you up on your offer.”

Chantelle blinked, spearing a piece of asparagus. “What offer?”

“The one where you said if I was so damn horny, I should go find someone else to take care of it.”

“Oh?”

I studied her face over the rim of my glass, looking for a reaction, but there was none. Not surprise. Not anger. Not even curiosity—just calm, detached acceptance. I should’ve expected that. After all, this was Chantelle.

She took a sip of her wine, then leaned her elbow on the table, resting her chin in her palm. “Did it help?”

“Yeah,” I admitted. “It did.”

“Good.” She smiled, cutting another bite of salmon. “I’m glad you’re not all pent up and irritable. You get impossible when you’re frustrated.”

That was it. No outrage, no jealousy. Just... business as usual. She didn’t even ask who it was. Something about that settled uncomfortably in my chest. If the places were reversed, heads would roll. I could never accept it, never share the person I loved with someone else. The mere thought of it—of someone else being that close to them, touching them, in ways only I should—I couldn’t stand it. Call it possessive, call it old-fashioned, I didn’t care. It was how I felt. Love was mine to protect, and the choice to fully commit yourself to another person was exactly what made it so special.

We moved on to other topics, as if I just told her I switched to another brand of shampoo, and that was that. I nodded at her remarks, spoke when it was my turn, but the unease didn’t fade.

And later, when I took her to bed, it only got worse.

Chantelle lay beneath me, beautiful, willing, her arms looped around my neck. I kissed her, touched her, slid inside her, expecting to feel the usual rush of relief and

satisfaction that came with sinking my cock into a tight warm pussy, with finally being with a woman again. But something was missing.

She made all the right noises, moved the way she always did, but there was no heat . No hunger. No urgency. It was routine, a practiced rhythm, something she did because she thought she had to, not because she wanted to.

I moved faster, trying to find the spark, trying to lose myself in her, but all I could think about was how different it felt. How different Chris felt. How eager he was, how readily he dropped to his knees, how his eyes burned with desire every time he looked at me. How he groaned, moaned, devoured me like he couldn't get enough.

And the worst part? I liked that better.

I finished quickly, rolling off her, staring at the ceiling in silence. Chantelle didn't seem to notice anything was wrong. She murmured something about being tired, kissed my cheek, and turned over to sleep, pulling her sleeping mask over her eyes.

I lay awake for a long time, my mind racing. This wasn't supposed to happen. But it had. And by Monday morning, I had made up my mind.

* * *

Chris was already at his desk when I arrived at the office. I skipped the gym that morning, choosing to run around the block instead and clear my head. But no matter how fast I pushed myself, my mind was coming to the same conclusion: I wanted to keep doing it. Keep getting head from Chris. For as long as I could.

He looked up as I walked past his desk, and something in his gaze—curious, knowing—told me he was waiting to see if our arrangement was over.

“Hi,” I said. “How was your weekend?”

“Good,” he said. “How was yours?”

“Good.” We stared at each other. The silence wasn’t awkward—strange how it never felt that way with him—but it was definitely charged. It was time. I cleared my throat, nodding at my office door. “Can you step inside for a moment?”

He followed me in, closing the door behind him.

I shrugged off my coat, hung it on the hatstand beside the door, then went to my desk and leaned back against it, arms crossed, trying to appear composed. “I, uh... I wanted to talk to you about last week.”

Chris smiled. “Okay.”

I cleared my throat again. “Chantelle’s back.”

A flicker of something crossed his face—disappointment?—but he just nodded. “Right. So... that means... we’re done?”

A smarter, stronger man should’ve said yes. Should’ve thanked him, moved on, put this whole thing behind me. Instead, I heard myself say, “Not necessarily.”

His lips parted slightly, and my heart skipped a beat.

I scratched my beard, exhaling through my nose. “I want to keep going.”

Chris’s slow grin was downright sinful. “You do?” he said, stepping closer. “You sure about that?”

I let my eyes drop to his mouth. “Yeah,” I murmured. “I’m sure. Until the wedding, that is. If you’re okay with that.”

He stood in my personal space, smirking, looking up at me with eyes full of hunger that matched my own. His hand went to my crotch, caressing my cock over my pants. “I’ll take what I can get.”

And with that, he sank to his knees, unzipped my fly, and made good on his word.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

I wasn't sure when exactly my job became my whole life. Yeah, I'd looked forward to coming to work from day one, especially when I knew I'd run into Isaac in the gym. But now? Now, I rolled out of bed every morning with a shit-eating grin, all fired up to start the day, knowing I'd be on my knees eating dessert before I even had breakfast.

Best. Job. Ever.

November had sunk its teeth into the city, the mornings dark and edged with frost, the air sharp enough to bite. None of it mattered when I knew Zac's heat would soon warm me up. I mean, sure, I had other responsibilities. But what could I say? I was a dedicated employee, and Zac was a demanding boss. Someone had to take care of him. And lately, that someone had been me.

I never thought I'd be the type to get off on submission, but fuck, there was something about Zac—about how he carried himself, how he looked down at me with those intense blue eyes, how he took what I gave him like he had every right to it. And weirdly, I liked that. It made it hotter, like we both knew I'd be back on my knees again soon, waiting for him to use my mouth however and whenever he wanted.

Somehow, Zac and I had settled into this easy, almost playful rhythm, blending filthy hookups with inside jokes and casual teasing. At work, we were back to our usual dynamic—him pretending he was some all-powerful CEO, me pretending to respect him. And outside of work? Well, let's just say I was getting very familiar with the grain of his office carpet.

Like yesterday, for example.

It started in the break room. I was making coffee when Zac strolled in, looking as cool and controlled as ever in his tailored navy suit. His tie was slightly loosened, his buzzed hair immaculate, and he had that sharp, unreadable expression that made people scramble out of his way.

I, of course, was not people.

“Taking a break?” I asked, watching as he poured himself a cup of black coffee—no sugar, no cream, because of course he drank it like that.

“Mhm.”

I smirked at the clipped acknowledgment. Like he hadn’t shot his load down my throat only two hours ago. “Wow. So chatty. Must be my lucky day.”

Isaac took a slow sip, not sparing me a glance. “You know, you talk too much.”

“I’ve been told I have a big mouth,” I mused, taking a sip of my own coffee.

“Maybe we should do something about it,” he shot back, the corner of his mouth twisting. He looked around the room before turning that icy stare to me. There were others around, but no one was close enough to overhear our exchange. And it was a good thing, because my knees felt like giving up when he looked at me like that.

I swallowed and licked my lips. “You know I’m always at your service... boss.”

Zac’s bulge swelled right before my eyes.

I chuckled, pleased with myself, while he pierced me with a barely-there glare.

“Try not to make a fool of yourself before noon,” he muttered, turning to leave.

I gave him two thumbs up. “No promises.”

But hey, at least I knew I was getting my throat fucked again before lunch. And when a text from him lit up my screen only minutes after— ‘My office. Now.’ —I smiled and jumped out of my chair like it was a life-or-death emergency. Grinning like an idiot, I practically ran to Zac’s office. When I barged inside and locked the door behind me (a very important step), I found him standing in front of his desk, already unbuckling his pants.

“Second time already?” I teased, dropping to my knees before him. “Someone’s horny today.”

“Shut up and suck it.”

God, I loved when he got bossy.

I palmed him through his wet briefs, feeling how hard he already was. “Look how much you want it,” I said. “You’re leaking so much, your underwear is a mess.” He only grunted as I pulled his pants and briefs down his legs. I took a moment to admire the view, his cock pulsating, his thick, hairy thighs tensing with anticipation. I placed my hands on them for support and leaned in, nuzzling his balls and breathing in his scent. His sack was freshly shaved, as usual, and I started licking his nuts, which always made him growl. “You ever think about me when you’re at home?” a question escaped me before I could help myself. “Or do I only exist between office hours?”

Zac’s jaw ticked, but he didn’t answer. Instead, he threaded his fingers into my hair, tilting my head back. “I thought I told you to shut up.” His voice was rough, his grip firm but not painful. Just the way I liked it.

I licked a slow stripe up the length of his shaft, then smirked up at him. “Make me.”

And he fucking did.

* * *

The following morning, I didn’t wake up early enough to catch Isaac in the gym, so I knew he’d come horny to the office. As much as I enjoyed our workout sessions, I wasn’t a morning person like he was, and sometimes I preferred an extra hour or two of sleep before dragging my ass out of bed and into work. The gym could wait until the evening.

I had only enough time to turn on my computer and grab a cup of coffee when he emerged from the elevator, looking like he’d stepped off a runway rather than a treadmill.

“Morning, boss,” I greeted him.

“Morning,” he said, then looked around to make sure we were alone. “Busy?”

“Depends. What do you want?”

He leaned in, searing my cheek with his breath. “I want it all. And I want it now .”

Ah, the master of innuendo was back. I followed him into his office, taking my place beside his desk like a well-trained dog. When he saw me kneeling there even before he’d taken off his coat, Zac’s whole body went rigid, his eyes dark with desire. “Such a good boy,” he murmured, his voice rumbling across the room. If I had a tail, I’d be wagging it like mad.

He plonked into his chair and started sifting through his files while I settled between

his legs, unzipping his pants and taking his cock out. It wasn't fully hard yet, but it reached its full size in my hand before I had the chance to swallow it. His virility never failed to amuse me; no matter how many times I sucked him off, he was always ready for more. And that meaty cock of his deserved worship—which is exactly what I gave it.

Zac leaned back against his chair, releasing a shaky breath as I worked my mouth down his shaft, taking my time, savoring every second. I was in deep—both figuratively and literally. Zac's cock was heavy on my tongue, thick and pulsing, and the way his fingers threaded through my hair, guiding my movements with just enough pressure, made my own dick ache in my pants. He was already close. I could tell by the way his breath turned uneven, his stomach flexing each time I took him deep.

I fucking loved this. Loved feeling him twitch in my mouth, loved the way his fingers dug into the arms of his chair as he fought to keep himself composed. He always tried to act like he was in control, like I was just some convenient outlet for his frustration, but I knew better. The way he bucked into my mouth, the way his breath turned ragged—I was the one unraveling him, one slow, wet stroke at a time.

I was really getting into it, sliding my hands up his thighs, hollowing my cheeks to suck him deeper when the absolute worst thing happened—someone knocked on the door. I barely had time to process the sound before the door swung open. I forgot to lock it.

Oh, fuck.

I panicked so hard I nearly choked, pulling off him with a wet gasp and scrambling under his desk just as Alicia stepped inside. My heart hammered so loud I swore she could hear it. I ducked between Zac's legs, my knees on the carpet, hands gripping his thighs for balance.

“Isaac?” Alicia’s voice rang out through the room, casual as anything.

My eyes darted up to Zac’s, but his expression didn’t so much as quiver.

“What is it?” he asked, his voice as smooth as ever.

From my hiding spot, I could just barely make out her feet under the edge of the desk, standing near the door. She sighed. “It’s about that quarterly report I sent you yesterday. I need your approval before I forward it to Finance.”

Zac exhaled sharply, like she was testing his patience. Which, to be fair, she was—though she had no idea just how much. “And you couldn’t have emailed me?”

“You’re the one who always says face-to-face communication is more efficient,” she shot back. “Besides, you didn’t respond.”

Jesus. Pick a worse time, why don’t you? I sat there, frozen, my whole body tense, hoping Alicia would take the hint and leave. But she didn’t.

Zac shifted in his seat, angling his hips slightly, and his cock pressed against my cheek. “I see.”

I should’ve just stayed still, let him suffer a little for putting us in this situation. But I was an idiot. A careless, sex-starved idiot, because when I saw the way his balls were flexing, his thighs tense from the interruption, my hunger won out. So I leaned in and slowly, carefully, wrapped my lips around the tip of his cock again.

He stiffened. I glanced up at him, testing the waters, and—holy shit—his jaw was locked tight, eyes dark with a warning. But he didn’t push me away.

Alicia didn’t seem to notice anything unusual. That shouldn’t have been as hot as it

was. “You gonna approve it or what?” she pressed.

Zac cleared his throat, his voice only a touch tighter than usual. “I’ll look it over later.”

My tongue swirled around the glans, and I felt a twitch against my lips. I suppressed a smug grin. Oh, you like that, huh?

Alicia sighed. “Fine. But don’t forget this time.” She hesitated. I froze, holding my breath. “Are you okay?”

Zac’s fingers curled in my hair, tugging—maybe a warning, maybe a plea. I flicked my tongue against his slit in response. “I’m f-fine,” he ground out.

A beat of silence.

“You sure? You look kind of—tense.”

I had to bite the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing.

To his credit, Zac didn’t miss a beat. “I have a headache,” he said smoothly. “Alicia, unless this is life or death, I’d like to get back to my work.”

“All right,” she muttered. “I’ll leave you to it. Just don’t forget the report.”

I listened as her heels clicked toward the door. Then, finally, finally , she left the office, and the door shut behind her.

The next moment I fucking lost it. I pulled off Zac’s cock, muffling my laughter against his thigh. “ Oh my god. ” I wheezed. “She must’ve thought you were constipated or something. I wish I could’ve seen her face!”

Zac just let out a long breath, running a hand down his face. “You reckless little shit. How many times have I told you to always lock the damn door?” Then, to my utter surprise, he laughed. An actual, full-bodied laugh. It was low and warm, the kind of laugh that sent heat curling in my gut. It wasn’t a mocking scoff, wasn’t condescending—it was real. Genuine. And fuck me, that was even sexier than anything we’d just done.

I grinned up at him. “Sorry. I guess I was too impatient to suck you off.”

His jaw ticked. “You did it while she was talking to me.”

I licked my lips, my smile turning wicked. “You seemed to enjoy it.”

His glare could’ve melted iron. His fingers brushed my cheek, a butterfly’s wings against my skin. “You’re going to be the death of me.”

I wanted to say something cocky in response. Something flirty. But the way he looked at me, the way he touched me, left me speechless. I couldn’t say what I really wanted to say. It would spoil the moment, make him uncomfortable, maybe even drive him away. So I simply smiled, gripping the base of his shaft.

He let out a deep breath, rolling his chair back just enough to spread his legs wider. “Now... finish what you started.”

Well... who was I to deny my boss?

* * *

By mid-afternoon, I was back at my desk, sorting through Isaac’s endless stream of emails and scheduling his meetings for the rest of the week. It was a mindless, routine task, but for once, I didn’t mind it. My body still hummed with satisfaction, my lips

tingling from earlier, the taste of his cum still lingering on my tongue. I'd spent the morning on my knees, having Zac's cock lodged inside my throat, and he had let me. Again and again.

There was something intoxicating about it—knowing that a man like him, powerful and controlled, crumbled under my touch. That I could make him tense and shudder, his whole body going rigid as he spilled into my mouth. I took pride in it.

And yet... a quiet hunger simmered beneath my ribs, something deeper than just physical attraction. I wanted more . Needed more.

I'd always been the kind of guy who liked to take control, who liked to be the one calling the shots in bed. But with Zac, it was different. Something about him made me ache to submit, to feel the weight of his body pressing me down, to let him take me apart. I wanted him inside me. And that thought alone should've scared the shit out of me—yet, somehow, it didn't.

I was still lost in that realization when the elevator dinged. I looked up, expecting some delivery guy or another executive stopping by, but when the doors slid open, a tall woman in a long fur coat and sunglasses stepped out.

She was simply stunning. The kind of gorgeous that made people stop and stare, with raven-dark hair falling in soft waves over her shoulders, and blood-red lips curved in an imperious smile. She walked like she belonged in the pages of a high-fashion magazine—elegant, poised, every movement smooth and deliberate.

I sat up straighter without realizing it, my stomach tightening as she approached my desk.

“Hi,” she said, taking off her sunglasses. Her voice was clear and lofty, and her pale blue eyes sparkled under the office lights. “I'm Chantelle. Isaac Steele's fiancée.”

The words slammed into me, knocking the air from my lungs.

Oh.

Oh .

I blinked, momentarily stunned, my brain scrambling to keep up. This was her. Zac's Chantelle. The woman he kissed. The woman he fucked. The woman he was going to marry. And she was breathtaking. Hell, even I wanted to fuck her, which was saying something. How the fuck was I supposed to compete with that ?

I forced a polite smile, my fingers gripping the edge of my desk. "Uh, nice to meet you. Should I announce—?"

She held up one gloved hand, flashing me a conspiratorial grin. "Don't. I want to surprise him for his birthday."

My stomach dropped. His birthday ? I didn't even know it was his fucking birthday.

I swallowed down the lump in my throat and nodded, slumping back into my chair as she breezed past me like a goddess descending from Mount Olympus. I watched her disappear into Zac's office, the door clicking shut behind her.

Then I just... sat there. Staring at my computer screen, suddenly unable to focus on a single goddamn thing. From inside his office, I heard his voice—low, warm, affectionate in a way I had never heard before. Then her laugh, light and musical, like wind chimes in a summer breeze.

A sharp pang of something nasty shot through me. It coiled in my gut, dark and insidious, and I hated it. Hated that I felt so betrayed. Hated that the sound of them together made my skin feel too tight, my heart hammer too fast. What the hell was I

expecting? This thing between us—it wasn't real. Not really. Zac had a life. A fiancée. A future that didn't include me. I was just... a convenient distraction. A fun little indulgence. And maybe that had been enough for me at first, but now, I wasn't so sure.

Minutes passed. I couldn't help but wonder what were they doing inside—were they kissing? Were they making out? Would he let her touch him, maybe jerk him off, at the same spot where I swallowed his load only hours ago? I barely moved, barely breathed—until finally, the office door swung open again.

I glanced up just in time to see them stepping out together, Chantelle's hand curled around his arm, her body pressed to his side.

Zac's gaze flicked to mine. "Chris, I'm heading out early. Alicia can handle things without me for one day."

I swallowed hard, forcing a neutral expression. "Right. Have a good night."

His brow furrowed slightly, like he noticed something in my tone, but he didn't press. Instead, he nodded and led Chantelle toward the elevator.

I watched them go, my stomach twisting as the doors slid shut behind them. And then I was alone. Alone with the crushing realization that this—whatever this was between us—was never going to end the way I wanted.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

The bar hadn't changed much. The same exposed brick walls, the same dim lighting, the same whiskey-soaked scent hanging in the air. The soft jazz music playing in the background. Even the bartender looked the same, polishing glasses with that same slow, practiced ease.

"This place takes me back," Chantelle said as we slid into a booth near the back. She draped her coat over the seat beside her, the black satin shirt cascading over her torso, the soft fur brushing against her shoulder. "Remember that night?"

Of course I remembered. It was the night when we first met, and now she brought me here on purpose, so we could relive that moment. She had been standing at the bar in that skin-tight red dress, flipping her hair and laughing with a group of friends. I had been here with some of the people from work, and when she caught me looking, she smirked—just a little—like she already knew I'd be coming over. And I had.

I gave her a slow smile. "You mean when I spent the better part of the evening fending off every other guy who tried to approach you and charming you into giving me your number?"

Chantelle laughed. "You were charming. And very persistent."

I chuckled. "When I see something I like, I go for it. And it worked, didn't it?"

She rolled her eyes, but she was smiling. "Apparently."

I leaned back, exhaling. For a moment, the memories felt real again—the thrill of chasing her, the easy flirtation, the way we had sparked against each other like flint

and steel. Maybe this was exactly what we needed—to remember how we started, to remind ourselves why we had fallen into bed, into love, into a life together.

A waiter came by, and Chantelle ordered a cocktail while I got a scotch. We kept reminiscing while we drank, teasing each other about who made the first move, who kissed who first, who had fallen harder. The conversation flowed easily enough, like muscle memory. She was beautiful. She was charming. She was mine. So why did it feel like I was going through the motions?

Chantelle pulled a sleek black box from her purse and slid it across the table. “Happy birthday, stud.”

I lifted the lid. Inside, cushioned against black velvet, was a Rolex. Clean, elegant, expensive.

I whistled. “Damn, babe. You didn’t have to.”

She leaned in across the table, a satisfied smile playing on her lips. “Of course I did. You deserve it.”

I turned my wrist, letting the light catch on the polished metal. It was a beautiful watch—classic, refined. But somehow, it felt like I was looking at it through glass, like I wasn’t really there.

Chantelle’s smile turned sly. “And there’s more waiting for you tonight.”

I didn’t have to ask what that meant. A year ago, I would’ve grinned, leaned in, whispered something filthy in her ear just to watch her blush. But now, my first thought was: She only ever does this on special occasions.

She liked sex well enough, but blowjobs? That was different. It was never something

she craved, never something she initiated. Usually, I had to talk her into it, ease her into it. She wasn't bad at it—she knew what she was doing—but it always felt like something she was giving me rather than something she wanted for herself. And now, unbidden, another image slid into my mind—Chris, dropping to his knees without hesitation, his mouth eager, hungry, like he got off on it just as much as I did.

I pushed the thought away. Smiling at Chantelle, I lifted my glass. “To another year.”

She clinked her cocktail against my scotch. “To you, birthday boy.”

The rest of the night played out like a script—drinks, dinner, laughter in all the right places. When we got to my apartment, Chantelle wasted no time. She led me to the bedroom, kissing me as she unbuttoned my shirt. “Lie back,” she murmured, pushing me onto the bed.

I did as I was told, trying to summon the excitement I should be feeling.

She climbed between my legs, her hands sliding over my stomach before reaching my belt. She unbuckled it, her movements slow and deliberate. Without a word, she pulled me out, stroking me a few times before taking me into her mouth. I groaned at the contact. She was good at this. I knew she was good at this.

But it wasn't the same. Her touch was too cautious, too hesitant. She took me in at her own pace, controlled the rhythm, never let me get too deep. I let my head fall back, trying to lose myself in the sensation, trying to focus on the warmth, the wetness. Yet I couldn't help thinking how much better it had felt when Chris did it.

Chris, who sucked me like he needed it. Chris, who groaned around my cock, who looked up at me with those mischievous eyes, winking, like he took pleasure in just seeing me fall apart. Chris, who had sucked me off under my desk while I was trying to hold a conversation.

My abs tensed. I clenched my fists against the sheets.

Fuck.

Chantelle pulled off, mistaking my reaction for pleasure. Smiling up at me, she continued to jerk me off at a safe distance, expecting me to shoot at any moment. She never swallowed, never even let me finish in her mouth, because cum grossed her out. “You like that?”

I nodded. “Yeah. Feels good.” It wasn’t a lie. Her hand did feel good. It just wasn’t enough. And maybe that was the most dangerous realization of all. Because for the first time, I wasn’t simply craving more.

I was craving him.

* * *

Chris was sulking.

At first, I didn’t notice. The morning started like any other—meetings, emails, a quick blowjob in my office, a stack of reports to go over. I was running on too little sleep and too much coffee, my mind a mess of tangled thoughts I didn’t have the time or energy to sort through. But then, little by little, it started to register.

The way Chris scarcely looked at me when he handed over my schedule. The short, clipped answers to my questions. The missing smirk when I teased him about wearing that ridiculous green tie again. The distracted, perfunctory way he blew me.

It followed me throughout the day like a shadow. Whenever we crossed paths, I caught the slight stiffness in his posture, the way he kept his tone polite but distant, the way his usual easy, teasing energy was just... gone.

By mid-morning, it was undeniable. Chris was sulking. At me.

I caught him near the break room, cornering him by the copier. “All right,” I said, folding my arms. “What’s going on with you today?”

Chris barely glanced my way, shrugging as he grabbed a stack of printed documents. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“Bullshit. You’ve been weird all day. What’s wrong?”

He let out a short, humorless laugh. “I’m surprised you noticed. I thought the world revolves around you and your needs.”

I blinked. “What?”

“You didn’t even mention it was your birthday yesterday.” His eyes flicked up, and there was something raw in them—hurt, frustration, something deeper than just petty annoyance. “I had to find out from your fiancée, ” he added, voice quieter now.

A flare of guilt stirred in my gut, but I shoved it down, crossing my arms tighter. “And?”

“ And ? Jesus, Zac.” He shook his head. “Do I really matter that little to you?”

That hit somewhere it shouldn’t have. I felt my patience snap, heat surging in my chest, and before I could stop myself, the words came out too sharp, too harsh. “What exactly do you think we are that I’m obliged to tell you about my private life? Do you think because—” I looked around to make sure no one could overhear, lowering my voice— “do you think because you suck my cock you have some claim over me? That this is a relationship ?”

Chris's expression didn't change—no flinch, no anger, just a quiet disappointment that was somehow worse. So much worse. "I thought we were friends," he said, voice flat. Then he turned and walked away.

I stood there, heart pounding, staring at the empty space he left behind.

* * *

The guilt gnawed at me for the rest of the afternoon. I'd been an asshole. I knew it. I'd snapped because I was frustrated, because I was confused, because the last thing I wanted to think about was how much of my time and energy was already orbiting around Chris fucking Landry like he was the goddamn sun. I cared about his feelings and I hated that I'd hurt him. But admitting that didn't make me feel any less like a dick.

By lunchtime, I couldn't take it anymore. I grabbed my coat and stormed out of my office. I found him at his desk, shoulders hunched as he focused on his computer.

"Chris."

He didn't look up. "Boss."

I sighed. "Look, I'm sorry, okay? I didn't mean it."

He kept typing. "Yeah, you did."

I rubbed my beard, my breath escaping in a quiet rush. "We are friends, Chris. I..." I swallowed, the words catching in my throat. "I don't have many, so I'm not used to opening up to people. And I don't like making a big deal out of my birthdays. Perhaps I should've mentioned it." You do matter to me, I wanted to say. But I stopped myself before those words could take shape, leaving them to hang at the edge

of my tongue. When he didn't say anything, I spoke again. "Let me make it up to you. Come grab lunch with me. Please."

Chris finally glanced up, expression unreadable. "You asking me on a date, Zac?"

I snorted. "It's an apology, not a marriage proposal. Now get your ass up and let's go eat."

A beat. Then, finally, a slow, pondering nod. "Typical Scorpio. I should've known."

"Is that a yes?"

"All right. But you're paying."

"Obviously."

We ended up at a small restaurant, one of those tucked-away gems you could walk past a hundred times without noticing—an old converted rowhouse on a quiet street off Benefit. The kind of place that had probably been standing since the 1800s, its brick facade weathered by time, its wooden sign swinging gently in the breeze. Inside, the floors were dark-stained hardwood, creaking softly underfoot, and the walls were lined with shelves of wine bottles and framed black-and-white photos of old Providence—cobblestone streets, gas-lit lanterns, men in suits and hats from another era.

The air smelled rich—garlic and butter, simmering stock, the faintest hint of fresh bread baking somewhere in the back. Low jazz played from an old speaker, blending with the quiet hum of conversation and the occasional clink of silverware against ceramic plates. It was cozy, intimate, the kind of place that felt effortlessly warm even on a gray, drizzly Rhode Island afternoon.

Chris went for fried cod, swiping a fry through a pool of aioli before popping it into his mouth. I cut into my steak, the juices pooling on the plate, and for the first time all day, things felt easy again.

“You know, I basically lived on instant ramen in college.”

I smirked. “That tracks.”

“Hey, it’s a classic. Cost, like, twenty cents a pack. Kept me alive.” He pointed a fry at me. “Bet you never had to survive on that kind of struggle meal, huh?”

I raised an eyebrow. “I went to MIT, Chris. You think I didn’t spend at least one all-nighter living off shitty dorm food?”

Chris chuckled. “Okay, fair. And what about now? Do you cook? Or do you have one of those sleek, spotless kitchens that exist purely for aesthetic purposes?”

I leaned back, sipping my Sauvignon Blanc. “I cook.”

Chris raised a skeptical brow. “Really?”

“Really. I actually enjoy it. And I’m not half-bad at it, if I do say so myself.”

“Huh.” He considered me for a moment, then smirked. “What’s your signature dish, then?”

I shrugged. “I make a mean chicken piccata.”

Chris hummed, tapping a finger against the table. “Sounds fancy. Gonna have to judge that for myself someday.”

I grinned. “That a request?”

Chris flashed that cheeky smile of his at me. “More like a challenge.”

I shook my head, chuckling. Chris plucked a fry off my plate, completely unbothered, like my lunch was just an extension of his own. I should have been annoyed, but instead, I only laughed under my breath. And that was the thing. With Chantelle, last night had felt like a performance—hitting the right beats, saying the right things, playing the role I was supposed to play. But here, now, with Chris? It felt easy, natural. I wasn’t trying. I wasn’t acting. I was just... me.

I wasn’t sure what to do with that.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

I needed to get Zac out of my system, fast .

Even after things went back to normal—after his apology, after lunch, after everything—I knew we couldn’t keep going like we had before. Sure, I kept sucking his cock. But I needed some distance, some perspective, something to remind myself of the rules of our deal, of the boundaries that come with having a crush on a straight man. Because every time he smirked at me, every time he leaned a little too close or let his hand linger on my shoulder, every time he looked at me like I was the only person in the room, I felt myself slipping further into something I had no business feeling. And I knew, with a kind of bleak certainty, that if I didn’t do something about it soon, I was going to fall so deep I wouldn’t be able to climb back out.

So I did something about it.

It was Saturday night, and I had options. Darren had been chasing me for months, but even though he was cute and made it clear he was very available, I wasn’t exactly eager to go down the road of fucking someone I worked with again. Instead, I did what any self-respecting horny and emotionally compromised gay man would do. I downloaded Grindr.

It didn’t take long.

The guy—Tim? Tom? Something with a T—was cute enough. Decent face, toned body, nice ass, knew exactly what to say to push the right buttons. We traded some flirty messages, which quickly turned into straight-up sexting, and within an hour, he was asking me to meet him at the park.

My fingers twitched, indecisive. It wasn't like I'd never hooked up with a dude in a public place, but this late at night? In an unfamiliar city? Yet I was restless. Wound too tight. Desperate for something—someone—to distract me from the gnawing hunger I refused to name. So I said yes.

* * *

Roger Williams Park was quiet when I got there, the air damp with the lingering chill of late November. The trees stood skeletal against the inky sky, their bare branches shifting in the breeze like bony fingers. I pulled my beanie lower over my ears, hugged my jacket tighter around me as I followed the path, checking my phone. The Grindr sound alert pierced the dark stillness, too loud in the otherwise silent night.

‘Wait by the bushes off the trail. I’ll be there in a minute.’

Yeah, okay, maybe that should have been my first red flag. The kind of text that, in the moment, seemed fine. In hindsight? Dumb as hell. I was thinking with my dick, not my brain, so I stepped off the paved path, moving toward the shadowy tree line.

I was expecting one guy.

Two showed up.

Neither one was the guy from the photo. And I knew the second I saw them that I'd fucked up.

“Hey there, lover boy,” the bigger one said, stepping closer. The other one flanked me on the right, his body angled just enough to cut off an easy escape. They moved like they'd done this before. “You got any cash?”

My stomach turned. Shit. “I think you’ve got the wrong guy,” I said carefully,

shifting my weight, keeping my stance loose. My pulse spiked, but I kept my voice steady. If I provoked them, this could turn into something really bad.

The smaller one—slim, tattooed, early twenties maybe—let out a low laugh. “Nah, man. We got the right guy.” He pulled something from his jacket, flipping it open. A knife. Not huge, but enough. The streetlamp overhead caught the blade, a thin gleam of silver slicing through the dark. “Wallet. Phone. Now.”

My fingers clenched around my phone in my pocket. I could give them my wallet. Fuck, I’d have to give them my wallet. But my phone? My fucking phone ? Not a chance. I tossed my wallet toward them, the leather landing with a soft thud in the dirt.

“Phone,” the tall one repeated.

“No.”

The knife glinted under the lamplight as the smaller guy stepped closer. “Oh, don’t be like that. You don’t want me to mess up that pretty face, do you?”

The moment stretched tight. The wind stirred through the branches, the distant hum of traffic barely reaching past the trees. My breath fogged in the cold air. They hadn’t worn masks, I realized then. They hadn’t cared that I saw their faces. Which meant they hadn’t planned on letting me go, even if I gave them what they wanted.

I did the only thing I could think of. I threw my phone—hard—right at the guy with the knife. He flinched, instinctively dodging it, and in that split second, I turned, punched the other guy square in the jaw, and ran. I ran like my fucking life depended on it. Because it probably did.

Footsteps pounded behind me. Voices shouting. My heart slammed against my ribs.

But I was fast—faster than them. The path opened ahead, leading toward the main road, toward streetlights and people and safety. My lungs burned, my pulse thundered in my ears, but I didn't slow down.

Then, out of nowhere, flashing red and blue lights cut through the trees. A cop car.

I nearly slammed into it.

The driver's side door swung open, and a uniformed officer stepped out, hand hovering over his holster. "What the hell—"

"I was mugged," I gasped. "Two guys. One had a knife."

The officer's face shifted instantly from suspicion to alertness. "Where?"

"Back there—" I turned, breath ragged. "Off the trail."

He grabbed his radio. "Dispatch, I have a possible 10-64 in progress, requesting backup at Roger Williams Park..." His voice was clipped, efficient. No panic. Just procedure. As he waited for a response, he opened the car door. "Get in," he told me.

I wavered for a moment. I didn't like cops. Not in a fuck the police way, just... a general wariness, especially as a guy who'd spent most of his life getting into one trouble after another. Most of them by my own fault. Cops had never been on my side before—no reason to think they would be now. But I didn't have a choice, so I slid into the back seat, and he slammed the door behind me, locking me into a dark world of silence.

* * *

The station was cold. Sterile. The kind of cold that wasn't just about temperature—it

was in the walls, the flickering fluorescent lights, the dull hum of a vending machine in the corner. The kind of place that made you feel guilty even when you weren't. Pretty much like every other police station anywhere. You see one, you've seen them all.

The desk officer barely glanced up when the patrol cop brought me in, handing her my ID. She was middle-aged, chubby, with red-died hair and deep-set eyes that flicked over me without much interest, like I was just another file in an endless stack of paperwork.

“Victim of a mugging,” the cop explained. “Tossed his phone at the suspect and ran. We found it at the scene, along with his empty wallet. They took the cash and ditched the evidence. Probably got spooked.”

The desk officer nodded, scribbling something down. The scratch of her pen filled the silence. Then she looked at me. “Take a seat while we process the case. If you want, you can call someone to come pick you up.”

I blinked. “Thank you.”

As I went to the bench by the opposite wall and flopped onto it, my mind raced. The hard wood was ice-cold through my jeans, and the whole place smelled faintly of burnt coffee and something chemical—disinfectant maybe, or whatever they used to clean dried blood off floors.

I didn't have anyone to call. All my friends were back in Maine or Pennsylvania. Darren? Not a chance.

I swallowed. My throat felt tight.

There was only one choice.

* * *

Zac showed up pissed . Fifteen minutes. That's all it took.

The glass doors swung open, and he stormed into the station, a force of nature in black wool and barely contained fury. His fitted sweater stretched over wide, tense shoulders, his coat unbuttoned like he'd thrown it on in a hurry. His beard shadowed his clenched jaw, and his ice-blue eyes cut through the room like a blade.

“Where the fuck is he?”

The desk officer lady hardly had time to react before Zac was on her, slamming his hands on the counter.

“Christopher Landry?”

Without a word, like he'd heard some silent call, his head snapped toward me. His eyes locked on mine. The next moment, he was standing in front of me, gripping my face before his hands slid to my shoulders, holding tight.

“Jesus Christ, Chris.”

I swallowed, losing myself in the blueness of his eyes. “Hey.”

He stepped back, releasing me from his grip and exhaling. He shook his head and dragged a hand over his face. “What the hell happened?”

The cop who'd picked me up appeared from around the corner just in time to witness our interaction, his eyes darting from me to Zac. “Sir, your boyfriend was the victim of a robbery and possible aggravated assault. Per his testimony, he was walking alone in the park, and two offenders had ambushed him. He had already given his statement

so he's free to go. We have recovered his wallet and phone, but since they're evidence, we need to hold onto them."

Zac's expression didn't flicker at the cop's assumption about us being a couple. He didn't correct him, but his eyes hardened. Something dangerous moved behind them, like a fuse had been lit but not yet reached the explosive. Then, in the calmest, deadliest voice I'd ever heard from him, he said, "No, you don't."

"Sir—"

"That's his property," Zac cut in, voice like a razor. "And unless you're charging him with something, you have no right to keep it."

The officer looked like he wanted to argue.

Zac took a step forward, a mountain of muscle ready to level anything before it. This was a man who wasn't used to being told no, and even the policeman backed away a bit. "I promise you, Officer..." He glanced at the badge. "Jeffords. If you don't hand over his belongings, I will have my lawyer on the phone so fast your fucking head will spin."

The desk officer looked at the cop. The cop looked at Zac. There was a long, tense pause. Then, with visible reluctance, he reached into a plastic evidence bag and slid my phone and empty wallet across the counter toward Zac.

"Thank you," Zac said coldly, picking them up. Then he turned to me, his anger softening just enough to let something else slip through—something tight, something raw. "Come on." His voice was quieter now. Not gentle, but steady. "I'm taking you home."

He guided me out of the station with a hand on the back of my neck. I walked in a

sort of trance, his touch searing my skin, the night air hitting me like a slap of reality. Cold asphalt, distant sirens, the glow of a streetlamp casting long shadows over the pavement. The real world, still moving, like nothing had happened.

Zac opened his car door for me and I slid into the passenger seat like someone else was in control of my body. The leather was smooth and cool beneath me, a familiar scent wrapping around me—cologne, the lingering bite of coffee, the faintest hint of something woody, like cedar.

A memory surfaced—my very first ride in this car. The rip in my pants, my bare butt on the leather, Queen playing on the stereo, Zac and I testing each other to see what kind of a man the other was. A stark contrast to now.

This ride was silent. No music. No playful jabs. Only the hum of the engine, the muted hiss of tires against wet pavement, and the sound of Zac's tense breathing.

When he took a turn toward a different part of the city, I forced myself to talk.

"My apartment is the other way."

"You're staying at my place tonight," he replied without taking his eyes off the road.

I stared at him. "But—"

"Chris."

That was it. Just my name. But there was something in his voice that made my throat close up.

So I nodded and settled into the seat.

* * *

Zac's penthouse condo in Waterplace Park was exactly what I should have expected—a spacious Art Deco symphony of elegance and luxury, with a private elevator entrance, floor-to-ceiling windows, and a massive wraparound terrace overlooking the river. It was all open-concept designs and modern aesthetics, but not in a sterile, minimalist kind of way some rich guys preferred. The place had warmth, a lived-in coziness that softened the expensive furniture and high ceilings.

Full-height bookshelves lined one wall, stacked with hardcovers, paperbacks, and coffee table books, their spines a riot of color. Vinyl records leaned in neat rows against a vintage turntable, and next to them, an entire shelf was packed with Blu-rays—more than I'd ever seen in one place outside a store. The walls were covered in framed artwork, some abstract, some detailed landscapes, others clearly souvenirs from places far beyond Providence. A bronze statue of a Hindu deity stood on a side table. A Venetian mask with intricate gold filigree hung near the windows. On a chest of drawers, a polished wooden stand held a pair of samurai swords gleaming under the soft light.

I didn't pause to take it all in. I barely processed it. The moment we stepped inside, Zac shrugged off his coat and tossed it over the back of a sofa. I did the same with my jacket, taking off my shoes too, before I smeared his lush carpets with mud.

“You should eat something,” he said, heading toward the open kitchen.

I shook my head. “I'm not hungry.”

He turned, eyeing me. “You sure?”

I nodded, arms crossed tight over my chest. The adrenaline had worn off, leaving me cold and shaky. Food was the last thing on my mind.

Zac didn't argue. Instead, he pulled a mug from the cabinet, filled it with water, and put it in the microwave. A minute later, he dropped a tea bag in, then set the mug on the counter in front of me.

"Drink," he said.

I dithered but took the mug anyway. The heat seeped into my hands, grounding me. I inhaled the soothing scent of chamomile, steam curling up into my face.

Zac leaned against the counter, arms folded, the sleeves of his black sweater rolled up. To stop my mind from racing, I focused on his big, hairy forearms, the muscles knitting under tanned skin like vines of flesh. He was still quiet. I waited for him to start—to demand details, to lecture me, to tell me what a dumbass I was for walking through the park alone at night.

He didn't.

He just watched me, eyes unreadable, then finally pushed off the counter. "Come on. I'll show you where you're sleeping."

I followed him down the hall. He stopped at a door and pushed it open, revealing a guest room that was as stylish and inviting as the rest of the place. A queen-sized bed, layered with plush pillows, stood between two nightstands with sleek, low-lit lamps. A dark wood dresser held a single decorative vase, its polished surface catching the dim light, while a round velvet ottoman sat in the corner. Thick gray curtains veiled the windows, muting the city skyline beyond.

Zac gestured inside. "This okay?"

Okay? Hell, the room was almost bigger than my whole apartment, not to mention better-looking. I nodded.

He leaned against the doorframe, arms crossed again. “Get some rest. We’ll talk in the morning.”

That was it. No further questions. No lecture.

I exhaled, some of the tension slipping out of me.

Zac turned to go, but before he stepped away, he glanced back. “If you need anything... call me. My bedroom’s just across the way.”

“Zac—” I swallowed, forcing myself to speak again. “Thank you.”

He left without saying anything, pulling the door shut behind him.

Alone, I stripped off my jeans, socks, and hoodie, tossing them onto the tufted ottoman. I kept my T-shirt and my trunks on, a shiver running through me despite the warmth of the room. The en suite bathroom felt almost too pristine as I stepped inside, flipping on the light. I turned the faucet and splashed cold water on my face, but the shock never quite registered. My skin felt numb, my mind fogged. Blinking at my reflection, I shut the light off and made my way back to the bed, pulling back the heavy covers and slipping underneath.

The mattress was firm, the sheets impossibly soft. The scent of clean linen and faint detergent clung to the pillows that felt like clouds beneath me. But I couldn’t sleep. I still felt like I was floating just outside my body, untethered, as my mind kept spinning, replaying the night in jagged, disjointed fragments—the sound of footsteps behind me, the glint of something metal in the dark, the moment my body braced for impact that never came.

I could’ve been killed .

The thought hit me like a punch to the chest, knocking the air from my lungs.

I rolled onto my side, pressing my face into the pillow, but it didn't help. The panic didn't fade. I squeezed my eyes shut. Forced myself to breathe. One... two... three...

At some point, exhaustion finally dragged me under.

I dreamed—of what, I couldn't remember. Only the feeling lingered. Something pressing in, heavy and stifling. A presence I couldn't escape. My pulse pounded, my limbs sluggish, like wading through a thick, endless tar.

The next moment, I woke up gasping.

Cold sweat clung to my skin, my T-shirt damp against my back. My chest heaved. The dream was already slipping away, but the fear remained, lodged deep in my bones. I couldn't stay here.

Throwing back the covers, I stumbled out of bed and yanked off my shirt, my heart still hammering with each step across the hall. I didn't think—I just pushed Zac's door open, my voice raw as I called his name. "Zac?"

The sheets rustled, then Zac's voice cut through the dark, groggy but alert. "Chris?"

I swallowed, gripping the doorframe. "I can't..." My throat closed. "I—"

There was a pause, heavy with understanding, before he reached out and flipped on the lamp. The soft glow spilled over him, catching on the bare planes of his chest where the covers had slipped low. His brows knitted as he took me in, his concern visible even beneath the lingering haze of sleep.

"Come here," he said.

I moved on an instinct.

Zac lifted the covers, a glimpse of naked skin flashing beneath, and I crawled into the bed next to him. He didn't ask questions. He didn't push. He just shifted closer, wrapping an arm around me, pulling me back against himself. His body was warm. Solid. His chest hair tickled my back, the heat of him seeping into me from behind. The weight of his arm over my ribs was steady, grounding.

I let out a slow breath, melting into him.

Zac's voice was quiet, right by my ear. "Go to sleep, baby."

I did.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

Warmth. A solid weight pressed against me, soft yet firm, molding to my body like it belonged there. My morning wood throbbed, snug against round, muscular flesh, heat bleeding through the thin barrier of fabric.

I exhaled, shifting slightly, rubbing against the firm curves that pushed against my crotch. Chantelle. I let my hand curl tighter around her waist, fingers skimming over a taut abdomen, tracing the edge of a waistband. And the body beneath my hand was... lean, sinewy, but not feminine.

Not Chantelle. Chris .

My stomach clenched. I went rigid, every inch of me suddenly hyper-aware of where I was, of the way my cock was lodged between the cheeks of his ass. A shiver slithered down my spine, a slow, traitorous thrill that had no business being there. The scent of him—clean, warm, tinged with the faintest trace of last night's chamomile—lingered in the sheets, in my skin. I'd been holding him all night, spooning him like he was my fucking girlfriend. And worse— worse —was the way my cock twitched at the realization. I swallowed hard, pulse hammering in my throat.

This was wrong. It should have felt wrong.

Why the hell didn't it?

I yanked my arm back, peeling myself away from him with careful movements. He didn't stir, his face peaceful in unconsciousness. Deep, even breaths told me he was still asleep. Good. Maybe he wouldn't realize I'd been grinding up against him like a horny teenager.

Ignoring the stubborn ache in my groin, I swung my legs over the other side of the bed and stood, scrubbing a hand over my face. A cold shower. That's what I needed. Something to snap me the hell out of it.

I padded naked to the en suite, my erection bobbing with each step, but before entering the bathroom, I couldn't resist one more look behind, at the sleeping boy in my bed. He was lying on his side, facing me, blond hair messy, head buried in the pillow. He looked younger like this, more vulnerable, and my heart felt heavy at the thought of what could have happened to him in that park.

I forced myself to turn and close the bathroom door behind me. The moment I stepped under the spray, I let out a long breath, tilting my head back, letting the water pound against my skin.

Chris. Alone. Out there in the dark.

I squeezed my eyes shut. It could have been worse. So much worse.

I could've lost him last night .

Last night, when he'd stumbled into my room, shaken and fragile, I'd wanted to pull him close and never let go. To promise him he was safe with me.

Protectiveness . That's all it was. A natural reaction. I braced a hand against the shower wall, my chest tight. Then why did I feel like I'd almost lost something more? Why was my cock still throbbing as the image of his face burned so bright behind my closed eyes? I stroked myself fast, still feeling the echo of Chris's body pressed against mine, his butt hugging my cock like it was molded to hold it. Even now, the phantom heat of him clung to me, an imprint I couldn't shake. My hand moved faster, chasing relief that felt just out of reach, like trying to hold onto smoke. When I finally came, my breath shuddered out, my cum swirling down the drain, but instead of

satisfaction, all I felt was hollow.

I stepped out of the shower, dried myself off, and pulled on a pair of gray basketball shorts I'd found in the bathroom. No shirt or underwear. I rarely wore either at home, and right now, I didn't care enough to bother.

Sneaking out of the bedroom as quietly as I could so as not to wake him, I shuffled barefoot into the kitchen. The tension still sat heavy in my chest, coiled tight like a fucking vise. But Chris was okay. He was safe. That was what mattered.

I set a pot of water on the stove, measuring out oats with automatic precision. He'll need something warm and nourishing in his stomach when he wakes up. I moved through the motions, taking two bowls and pouring in a dose of vanilla-flavored protein powder, then adding almonds and berries. My body ran on muscle memory while my mind churned, tangled in last night. The way Chris had looked, curled into himself, all sharp angles and fragility. The way he'd clung to me, seeking warmth, seeking safety. My jaw tightened. No one should ever have to feel that vulnerable. Not him .

My phone sat on the counter, face down. I should call Chantelle. We were supposed to browse for our future house today. I should let her know I wouldn't make it. The thought was interrupted when I heard movement behind me.

Chris emerged from the hallway, barefoot, wearing nothing but his dark gray trunks. His hair stuck up in unruly tufts, sleep-tousled, and his eyes were heavy-lidded, a little puffy. But there was color in his face again. Life. A hell of an improvement from the way he'd looked last night. He yawned, rubbing his face before blinking blearily at me, his eyes traveling across my bare torso. "Morning."

I leaned against the counter, crossing my arms. "Sleep well?"

Chris hummed and padded over to the kitchen island, dropping onto one of the high stools with a dramatic sigh. “I feel fucking amazing compared to last night.”

I grabbed a couple of bowls from the cabinet. “You scared the shit out of me.”

His expression wavered, something guarded passing through his eyes. But he didn’t look away. “Sorry.”

I didn’t say it was fine. Because it wasn’t. Instead, I grabbed the pot, pouring steaming oatmeal into both bowls before sliding one in front of him. “Eat.”

Chris’s lips twitched like he wanted to argue, but instead, he picked up his spoon and took a bite.

Silence stretched between us for a moment, filled only by the scrape of spoons against ceramic. His eyes kept darting back to me, keen, as if he were studying each hair on my chest. I let him eat a few bites before I asked, “What the hell were you doing in that park?”

Chris was silent. He swallowed, a glimmer of hesitation crossing his face. Then he said, “I was looking for a hookup.”

I went still. For a second, I thought I’d misheard him.

But Chris just sat there, waiting, his expression blank. Like he was daring me to react.

Heat flared in my chest, and not the good kind. “You—” My voice came out rough. My grip tightened around my spoon until the metal bit into my palm. “You went to the park. Alone. At night. To hook up with some random guy?”

Chris scoffed. “Didn’t exactly get that far, did I?”

My jaw clenched. A sharp, hot anger burned under my ribs, a fire that made no goddamn sense. “For fuck’s sake, Chris. Do you have a death wish?”

“Oh, please,” he muttered, rolling his eyes. “I know how to handle myself.”

“You could’ve been seriously hurt. Or worse.” My voice came out harder than I intended.

Chris’s fingers traced the patterns in the marble of the counter, his gaze fixed on his meal. Then, after a beat, he said, “I only did it because... I needed a distraction.”

I frowned. “A distraction? From what?”

His lips pressed together, like he was weighing something in his head. Then he huffed a dry, humorless laugh and muttered, “From you, dumbass.”

The floor felt like it tilted beneath me.

Chris gave me a look that was all exhaustion and exasperation, rubbing his nose. “I couldn’t stop thinking about you. I... wanted something more. More than just sucking your dick, however amazing that is. And since you’re clearly not interested in giving me that, I figured I’d go find someone who was.”

Something cracked open in my chest, a feeling both strange and frightening. He kept his voice casual, but I saw it, the raw emotion behind his eyes. “We had a deal,” I said, my voice quieter now. “Blowjobs only. I thought I made it clear.”

Chris sighed. “Yeah. I know. And I don’t expect anything from you, really. I knew what this was from the start.”

Neither of us said anything for a long moment. The only sound was the hum of the

refrigerator, the soft clink of Chris's spoon against the rim of his bowl. I should've said something. Should've told him we needed to stop this before one of us got hurt. Before he got hurt. But the words never came. I just shook my head. "Eat your damn breakfast."

Chris finished eating first and pushed his empty bowl aside. He slouched in his chair, stretching his arms over his head with a soft groan before letting them fall to his sides. His fingers drummed against the counter, restless.

I wasn't much better. My body felt tight, wound up with tension I couldn't place. I finished the last of my oatmeal, then got up, reaching for his bowl before he could, my fingers brushing his in the process. Chris shot me a look but let me take it. I rinsed the dishes, jaw tight. Behind me, I felt him watching.

"You're quiet," he said.

I turned off the tap and grabbed a towel, drying my hands. "Just thinking."

"About what?"

I didn't answer. The truth was, my mind was still caught in what he'd said earlier. I couldn't stop thinking about you. I tossed the towel onto the counter and turned toward him, bracing my hands on the island, caging him in. He stiffened slightly as I leaned in, close enough to catch the warmth of his skin.

"You're not gonna give me another lecture, are you?" he murmured.

"No."

Chris didn't seem convinced, his gaze darting down to my mouth before snapping back up.

I didn't move. I liked having him this close, where I could see every flicker of emotion in his face. Where I could touch him without thinking. Which made what I was about to say even harder. "But this thing between us?" I said, voice lower. "We might have to put an end to it."

Chris's expression didn't change, but something flared in his eyes. "Why?"

"You know why."

He let out a short breath, almost a laugh. "Because I want more?"

I clenched my jaw.

Chris tilted his head, gaze sharp now. "You're acting like I'm in love with you or something."

Eyes boring into his, I reached for his hand. "Are you?" My voice came out lower, rougher than I meant it to. My fingers flexed around his wrist, feeling his pulse jump beneath my grip.

Chris smirked. "Oh, totally. Been planning our wedding and everything."

"Chris."

His grin faded. His eyes dropped to where I still had a hold on him. He didn't say anything for a while. Then, quietly, "I just like being with you." His fingers twitched beneath mine. "Even when we're not..." He swallowed.

I knew what he meant. Even when I'm not on my knees for you. My grip tightened.

Chris drew in a breath, then let it out slow and measured. "Do you mind if I take a

shower? I feel kind of sticky.”

I didn’t let go immediately. Not until I sank so deep in the ocean of his eyes that I forgot where we were and what we were talking about. Then I released him, watching how those trunks clung to his ass as he disappeared down the hall.

The moment I heard the bathroom door close, I grabbed my phone and scrolled to Chantelle’s name. My thumb hovered over the screen before I hit call .

She answered on the second ring, her voice clear and alert. “Hey, handsome.”

I scratched my beard. “Hey.”

“You on your way?”

I glanced toward the hallway, listening to the faint sound of water running. “Sorry, babe, but I can’t make it. Something came up.”

A pause. “Again?” Her voice sounded annoyed. “Do you even want us to buy a damn house, Isaac?”

I turned toward the windows, staring out at the gray morning sky. “I do, but—” I hesitated. “Chris, my new PA, was mugged last night. I need to take care of it.”

Silence stretched for a few seconds. “The attractive blond guy I met at the office? What’s that got to do with you?”

“He’s pretty shaken, Chantelle. I can’t leave him alone.”

There was a pause, just a fraction too long. “I didn’t realize you were so involved in the private lives of your employees.”

Now she was being sarcastic and I had to bite my tongue to keep my temper in check. “We’d grown close since he began working for me. He’s not just any employee. He’s a... friend.” I didn’t offer anything else, and she didn’t ask.

After another charged pause, she simply sighed. “Fine.”

I blew out a sharp breath. “I’ll call you later, okay?”

The line clicked dead before I could say anything else.

I tossed the phone onto the couch and followed, dropping across the soft cushions. What the hell was I doing? Ditching my fiancée so I could babysit my PA? It wasn’t rational, but it was what every cell in my body wanted—needed —me to do. The thought of letting him go right now felt like severing one of my limbs.

I was still lying there, sprawled over the couch and musing, when I heard him coming from the bathroom.

Chris strode toward me, a towel slung loose around his shoulders, damp hair curling at the ends. He was still only in his trunks, his skin flushed and glistening. “I should probably get going,” he said. “You mind calling me a cab while I go get dressed?”

I didn’t even think before I answered. “You’re staying here.”

Chris paused mid-rub, then dropped the towel onto the headrest, his eyes going over my reclining body. “I am?”

“Yeah.” I looked at him from below, scratching my chest. “Figure we’ll just hang out. Be lazy. Besides, I promised to cook for you. And I’m a man of my word.”

He grinned, shaking his head like he couldn’t quite believe his own ears. He lifted my

feet from the couch, settling into the seat before resting them in his lap. His touch sent a jolt through me, sharp and electric, but it was the way his hand lingered that undid me. Such a small gesture—ordinary, absentminded—and yet it felt impossibly intimate. “A hard-ass CEO wants to spend his Sunday spoiling me in his fancy-ass penthouse?” he said, gently massaging my feet. “Fuck, sign me up.”

For the first time that morning, I smiled too, thinking how I’d do more than just cook for him if it meant seeing him like this, off-guard and happy, lounging around my place in nothing but his underwear, like he belonged here. Like he belonged to me . And maybe that was the problem. Because the longer I had him here, the more I wanted to keep him.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

Zac stretched on the couch like a big cat, his long legs sprawled in easy dominance. His feet still rested in my lap, too tempting to ignore, and I couldn't resist brushing my fingers over his soles. He jolted like I'd zapped him, his large body twisting as he yanked his legs away.

"Don't do that!" he chuckled. "I could've kicked you in the face."

I laughed. "Who knew the stoic Isaac Steele was ticklish?"

"It's my greatest secret," he said with a smug grin, arms behind his head, his hairy armpits exposed before me like a challenge.

I didn't mean to make it sexual when I touched him, I really didn't. It was just a joke between two buddies hanging out, nothing weird about that. Except, now there was something very weird about it. Something dangerous. Because every shift of his body, every idle flex of muscle, every absentminded stroke of his fingers against his stomach drew my gaze like a goddamn magnet. He wasn't even trying, yet he had me wound tight, my skin buzzing from his presence like a live wire. The heat of his body seeped into me, making it impossible not to imagine what it would feel like pressed against mine. My eyes darted to his crotch, the thin fabric of his shorts molded to his bulge, leaving little to the imagination.

I needed to get a grip.

Before my thoughts could spiral further into dangerous territory—and before my body betrayed me—I nudged his feet aside and sprang up from the couch. "You've got some cool stuff in here," I said, forcing my voice to stay light as I wandered

toward the shelves. “Are you a collector, or do you have an interior designer with an obsession for clutter?”

I could feel Zac’s gaze on my back as I trailed my fingers over the books and small trinkets, taking in the collection of items that made up his world. Anything to keep my mind off the temptation lounging behind me, looking like sin straight out of my dirtiest fantasies. But as my gaze traveled along these mementos, my curiosity got the best of me. I wanted to know more, to learn about his interests and hobbies for real.

Zac’s voice came from behind me. “Every piece here has a story. I don’t do meaningless décor.”

My gaze drifted over the neatly stacked spines of well-worn books. A mix of business, philosophy, and classic literature. The Art of War sat next to a biography of Steve Jobs, which in turn was stacked beside Dune and some old, leather-bound novel whose title had faded with time. I grabbed a small bronze figurine of a dragon and held it up. “All right, so what’s this one’s story?”

He yawned. “Gift from a business partner in Hong Kong. It’s supposed to bring good fortune and protection. Not sure if it works, but I haven’t gone bankrupt yet, so who knows?”

I snorted and kept browsing. There were sculptures, framed certificates, and a collection of old vinyl records ranging from Queen and Pink Floyd to U2 and Bon Jovi. But what really caught my attention sat atop a chest of drawers near the corner of the room—two Japanese swords displayed on top of each other on a black lacquered stand. I noticed them last night when I first entered the room, but I wasn’t in the right frame of mind then to pay them closer attention. Now, I stepped nearer, eyeing the swords in admiration. “Are these—?”

“Daish?,” Zac supplied, pushing off the couch to join me. “A matched set of original

samurai swords from the late Edo period. Katana and wakizashi. I'm told they're worth a fortune."

My fingertips traced the smooth curve of the hilts, itching to unsheathe the blade. "That's insane. How'd you end up with these?"

Zac leaned against the dresser, arms crossed. "A Fujitsu executive gave them to me years ago in Japan, back when I was still proving myself in the industry. He was one of the first major investors to take me seriously. Said he saw something in me—potential, drive. Told me that in another life, I would've made a damn good warrior. Then he gifted me these as a sign of respect. I only later learned how great of an honor that was."

I glanced at him, impressed. "That's pretty damn incredible."

Zac grinned, taking the katana from its stand and weighing it in his hand, still sheathed in its gilded scabbard. "Afterward, I took sword-fighting classes to learn how to wield it. I'd show you some moves, but it's too dangerous to do it here. This thing could slice through bone."

"Okay, that's probably the coolest thing I've ever heard."

He took a fighting stance—legs spread, knees slightly bent, the sword raised—and with a perfectly straight face, he said, "There can be only one."

I blinked. "...Huh?"

"It's from Highlander ." His grin faltered. "Tell me you've seen Highlander ."

I shrugged. "Uh, I know of it?"

Zac looked shocked. “Of it? You mean to tell me you’ve never actually watched it?” His face twisted in exaggerated horror, then he put the sword back in its place and strode toward the TV stand. “No. Absolutely not. This must be rectified immediately.”

I laughed as he pulled out a Blu-ray case and held it up like it was a sacred artifact. “Dude, is this really a must-watch situation?”

“You have some other plans?” he asked. When I just shrugged, he smiled, already queuing up the movie. “Sit. We’re fixing this right now.”

I shook my head but did as told, sinking into the plush couch and watching him. Zac strode over to the windows and drew the curtains, plunging the apartment into a warm twilight. The faint glow of the TV flickered across his face as he dropped onto the couch beside me, his shoulder brushing mine, casual yet electric. Then the screen came alive, with Sean Connery narrating the prologue, and soon the opening notes of Queen’s score rumbled through the room.

“Okay, now I get why you love it,” I said, as *Princes of the Universe* swelled through the speakers.

“Shut up and watch the movie,” Zac said, smiling, already lost in the film.

Before long, I was just as absorbed, the movie pulling me in so completely that I forgot everything else—where I was, who I was with. That’s why I didn’t notice when his arm curled around me, or when my head fell to his shoulder. Neither of us acknowledged it, but by the time *Who Wants to Live Forever* started playing, we were practically snuggling, him sprawled over the couch, me draped over him. He’d once mentioned this was his favorite Queen song, back when we were little more than acquaintances. Now, watching him, it made even more sense. The sweeping tragedy of it, the way it showed how immortality wasn’t a gift but a curse.

I turned my head slightly, looking at him in the dim glow of the screen. “You’re a closeted romantic, you know that?”

Zac huffed, but his lips twitched. “Shut up.”

“You totally are. You act all tough, but deep down, you’re just a softie who wants true love to conquer all.”

With a low, dramatic growl, Zac crushed me against him, his arms locking me in like he could squeeze the teasing right out of me. I laughed, breathless. “Do I need to remind you that I’m your boss?” he said.

I could’ve pulled away. I didn’t. The heat of his thigh against my groin sent a wave of arousal through me, and when my hand drifted down—curious, impulsive—I found him hard too. So much for the boss/employee boundaries.

“You’re going to make us miss the ending,” Zac murmured, his lips just above my head. But he didn’t stop me. He never did.

“Pause the move,” I said, my hand slipping under the waistband of his shorts.

“What about our earlier conversation?” He grabbed the remote, his words already breathy, gasping as my fist closed around his shaft, stroking it.

“Don’t care,” I only managed to mutter before I slid down his stomach, pulled his shorts down, and took his cock into my mouth.

“Chris—” he panted, his hand on my head as I started to suck him. He never did that before, never called my name during sex like that. Like he was acknowledging it was me who was giving him pleasure, not some imaginary woman from his fantasy. Me .
“You’re trouble, you know that?”

I only hummed around the girth in my mouth, my hands sliding up to his chest, twisting his nipples. My head bobbed faster, my tongue swirling over the silky organ, and I could feel him getting close already. So I pulled back and sank lower to lick his balls. God, how good he smelled there! I nuzzled those big nuts, inhaling the scent of him, letting my tongue draw circles over the smooth sack. That made him squirm, and he wiggled underneath me until he got rid of his shorts completely. I pulled down my trunks too, releasing my throbbing cock from its confinements, never breaking contact between my mouth and his balls.

Zac fisted my hair and guided himself back between my lips, his hips rolling into me, urgent, unrestrained. My hand fell to my dick and I stroked myself in the same rhythm, as I let him use my mouth the way he wanted. His cock pushed past my tonsils and sank deep into my throat just as it started shooting, a flood of cum going straight to my stomach. Hearing him moan in orgasm made me cum too, and I jizzed all over his leg, fighting for breath. He pulled back just enough to let some air into my lungs, but his cock stayed inside my mouth until I licked it clean. Then I crawled lower and licked my own cum from his leg too.

Wordlessly, I settled back on top of him, and with one hand, he found the remote and pressed play. His other arm curled around me, anchoring me against his chest. Neither of us reached for our clothes. We stayed like that, naked, bodies tangled, watching the movie in silence. Even when the credits started rolling, and *A Kind of Magic* blasted from the speakers, we lay in silence, letting the moment sink in.

“Okay,” I finally admitted. “That was pretty corny—but also kind of great.”

Zac shot me a smug look. “Told you.”

I stretched, feigning nonchalance even as my skin still tingled from being pressed up against him. “All right, my turn. If I had to experience your pop culture blind spot, you have to suffer through one of my picks.”

He gestured toward the shelves filled with Blu-rays. “Knock yourself out.”

Feeling a bit naughty, I went to the TV stand and got on my hands and knees, sticking my ass out as I rifled through his collection. I arched my back just enough to make sure Zac had the perfect view, biting my lip to keep from grinning as I gave a slow, deliberate wiggle. I couldn’t see his face, but I knew he was staring, his breath coming in irregular huffs behind my back. Good. Let him see what he was missing.

I was hoping he would stand up, come to me, and mount me from behind. Stick his cock inside me and fuck me right there on the rug. The idea was making me hard again, and to provoke him further, I said, “Ugh, The Godfather. So overrated.”

Zac stirred behind me. “I’m sorry, what?”

I smirked. “I mean, I get why people love it, but it just drags. Like, could something actually happen in the first hour?”

“I won’t tolerate such blasphemy in my presence.” He stood up from the couch and reached for his shorts. “Brando is a god !” he said as he pulled them on. “And you—you’re an absolute heathen!”

“Is that right? Maybe you should spank me and teach me a lesson.”

It was the first time I saw Zac speechless, mouth open, his eyes roaming over my ass, his fists flexing. Bullseye . I must’ve hit a nerve. Because he wanted to do it, I could tell. Unfortunately, his self-control was stronger. “I’m going to make us lunch. You got any special requests, or are you one of those ‘just feed me’ types?”

I grinned. “I seem to recall you boasting about your chicken piccata.”

Zac sighed dramatically. “So I did.”

I grabbed my underwear from the floor and put them on, then I followed him into the kitchen, leaning against the island while he got to work.

Zac moved with easy confidence, navigating the space as if he'd done this a thousand times—barefoot, relaxed, every motion efficient yet unhurried. He worked methodically, pounding the chicken cutlets with the flat of a knife, dusting them with flour, then sliding them into the sizzling pan with a practiced ease that had my mouth watering long before the rich aroma filled the air. He wasn't just tossing things together—he was in his element, moving with the kind of instinct that came from muscle memory. The pan hissed as he swirled the sauce, the flick of his wrist sending up a burst of steam laced with butter, lemon, and wine. It was effortless. Sexy, even.

“Since when do self-made millionaires have time to master the art of cooking?” I asked, my elbows resting on the counter.

Zac smirked without looking up. “Since they figured out cooking is just another skill—learn the technique, refine it, perfect it. I like knowing I can make something exactly the way I want it. And, I don't know... there's something about the process. The rhythm, the precision. It clears my head.”

“Mhm. Have you tried meditation?”

He snorted, plating up our food. “Cooking gives better rewards.”

We sat across from each other at his large, dark-wood dining table, forks clinking against the ceramic plates. Annoyingly, the meal was incredible. The first bite melted on my tongue—the chicken tender, the sauce tangy and rich, with just the right balance of lemon and butter.

“Not bad,” I said as I chewed, trying to downplay it, but he saw right through me.

“Not bad?” Zac raised a brow as he cut into his chicken. “Is that why you’re moaning after each bite?”

“I didn’t moan!”

“You totally did. Practically pornographic. Just like when—” He stopped himself there, his eyes boring into mine, but we both knew what he meant. Just like when I’m sucking his cock . And he wasn’t wrong. I was always vocal about my pleasure—food, sex, it was the same.

We kept eating, trading jabs about pop culture—him being personally offended that I thought Daniel Craig was better Bond than Sean Connery, me roasting him for thinking The Matrix sequels were good. There were also things we both agreed upon: not being able to choose between Alien and Aliens , or that the new Star Wars trilogy was trash. It was easy, effortless, the kind of back-and-forth that made time blur at the edges.

And maybe that was what got me. Not just the banter, or the meal he made like it was second nature, but the way everything about this moment felt... right. Comfortable in a way I hadn’t let myself acknowledge before. Like we’d done this a hundred times already. Like we’d keep doing it.

I glanced at him, watching the way his lips curled around a smirk, the way his biceps flexed as he lifted his glass of wine. And for once, I stopped fighting it. The feeling that had been creeping up on me for weeks, stealing in through the cracks.

I was so fucking gone for this man. And there wasn’t a damn thing I could do about it.

Shit.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

The day passed in an effortless haze, the kind of easy rhythm I hadn't felt in years. Hours melted away between bites of chicken piccata and the low hum of conversation, Chris sitting in his chair with one leg up, one arm resting on his knee, his skin milky in the pale afternoon light. He was unguarded like this, loose-limbed and drowsy with contentment, spinning stories with his hands, teasing me about my taste in movies, rolling his eyes when I scoffed at his pick for the evening: *The Mummy* .

“You don't understand,” he said, dropping onto the couch beside me as the movie flared across the big screen, the glow catching in his eyes. “Rick O'Connell was my sexual awakening. Young Brendan Fraser was so hot.”

I smirked. “You have a thing for tall, rugged adventurers?”

He nudged my thigh with his knee, but his grin gave him away.

I pulled him close and let myself enjoy it. The warmth of him beside me, the scent of his skin, the way our laughter filled the room like something solid, something I could reach out and touch. For once, I wasn't thinking about work, or obligations, or the endless cycle of responsibility that usually dictated my every move. For once, I let myself just be. And before I knew it, night had fallen.

When the movie was over, we were cuddled together on the couch in the near-dark, reality slowly reasserting itself.

“I should get home,” Chris said, stretching, skin rubbing against mine.

I didn't want him to go.

"You could stay," I offered. "We'll go to work together in the morning."

Chris smiled but rose from the couch. "I need to change. All my stuff's at my place."

I let out a deep breath, hauling myself into a sitting position. "Fine. I'll drive you."

The look on his face was gentle, but he couldn't resist arguing. "You do realize I've survived on my own for years, right?"

"Don't care," I said as I stood up, and slapped his ass. "Get ready."

He went to the guest room in search of his clothes, and I padded to my bedroom to find something I could wear. The November nights were getting cold, but I didn't need many layers for the simple drive from my place to his. So I ditched my shorts and pulled on a pair of track pants and a zip-up hoodie. As I was slipping on my running sneakers, Chris showed up in his clothes from last night, wrinkled but wearable.

"Let's go," I said.

Together, we left my penthouse, rode the elevator down, and stepped into the crisp night air.

The drive unspooled in silence—not empty, but weighty, dense with things neither of us said. It sat warm in my chest, thick as honey, an unspoken connection stretching between us like a taut wire. Streetlights flared and faded in streaks of amber, the city slipping past, but my focus was on him. The way his fingers flexed on his knee as he glanced at me. The way his lips parted, like he was on the verge of speaking but thought better of it. The gear shift separated us, but some unseen force held us

together, magnetic and inevitable.

When I pulled up in front of his building, he moved to open the door, but I stopped him with a hand on his arm.

“I’m coming up with you.”

Chris frowned. “Zac—”

“They had your wallet,” I cut in. “Your driver’s license and ID. They could know where you live. I’m not leaving you alone until I know you’re safe inside.”

He exhaled, shaking his head, but this time he didn’t argue.

We climbed the stairs side by side, my hand on the back of his neck, footsteps echoing in the dimly lit hall. At his door, he hesitated, fingers curling around the key, but not turning it. The air between us thickened, the silence pressing in close.

I didn’t want to leave.

I wasn’t sure when the shift had happened—maybe somewhere between the careless sprawl of his body over mine and the way he moaned around a mouthful of chicken—but today had felt perfect. Real. And I wasn’t ready to let go of it yet. The need to protect him burned like a wildfire within me, all-consuming and uncontrollable. And beneath it... something deeper. A desire as powerful and electric as a thunderstorm rolling in.

Chris finally opened the door of his apartment and turned to me, eyes searching, something unreadable in the set of his mouth. “Well, as you can see, I’m safe.”

I only grunted, peering into the darkness inside, then back at him. My jaw was

working. My fingers twitched at my sides. We stood in the doorway, neither of us moving.

He smiled and said, “Goodnight, Zac,” then closed the space between us, pulling me into a hug.

It should have been goodbye. Instead, I caught his face between my hands and crushed my mouth to his.

He gasped—a soft, startled sound—before he melted into me, his breath hitching as my fingers twisted into his hair. He was warm, pliant, but when I licked into his mouth, he met me with heat. Teeth scraping, hands pulling, bodies pressing like we were trying to fuse into one. It wasn’t tentative. It wasn’t hesitant. It was raw, desperate, every unsaid word devoured between us, every pent-up desire spilling into the frantic slide of lips and tongues. Our very first kiss, and already it felt like it could undo me.

I groaned, deep in my chest, and then we were stumbling inside, the door slamming shut behind us, hands groping, clothing tugged loose, mouths never breaking apart. He pressed me against the wall, his erection straining through his jeans, and then I spun him, trapping him between my body and the cool plaster, my thigh pushing between his legs from behind, his ass rubbing against my hard-on.

“Zac,” he gasped, his head falling back as I licked down his throat. “God.”

I bit his ear and he shuddered, clawing at my back, pressing me into him, pushing his butt into my groin. Wanting his lips again, I spun him to face me, yanking his hoodie and his T-shirt over his head in a single motion. The moment they were gone, I surged forward, locking my lips with his in deep, wet, sloppy kisses that made my blood boil with lust. He tugged at the zipper of my hoodie, dragging it down to uncover my chest. As soon as he unzipped it, he dove for my nipple, flicking his

tongue over it before he took it into his mouth and started sucking on it.

Fuck ! No one had ever done it to me like that, and my head fell back as I shrugged the hoodie off. Chris grazed his teeth over my nipple, dragging me to his bedroom, our feet tangling as we crashed onto the mattress in a jumble of limbs. I rolled on top of him, his body hard and soft beneath mine, heat pouring off his skin. He arched up, hips grinding into me, and I swore, breath shuddering, as I reached between us, fingers popping the button on his jeans.

Chris was already pushing at my pants, tugging them down just enough to free me. His palm wrapped around my cock in a slow, torturous stroke.

“This okay?” he murmured, breathless.

I pumped into his fist, my heart hammering. “Yeah,” I rasped, meeting his gaze. “But I want more.”

His pupils blew wide. “What—what are you saying?” he whispered.

“I want to fuck you.”

Without a word, he reached for the nightstand, fumbling for a condom and lube, finding them by touch alone.

I took both from him while he shed the rest of his clothes, his eyes never leaving mine. Then he sat back on his elbows, watching as I stood at the edge of the bed and stripped the rest of the way, the air between us thick with heat, with want. The bedside lamp cast a soft, golden glow over the room, illuminating every inch of him—the flush spreading down his chest, the rapid rise and fall of his breath, the way his cock twitched against his stomach, already leaking.

My cock throbbed in rhythm with my heartbeat as I took him in, precum hanging in a thin, glistening strand. His breath hitched as I slicked my fingers, as I pressed them between his thighs, below his balls, and against his hole. The moment I pushed inside, he went still, lips parting, a sharp inhale. Then his head fell back, and he moaned.

I watched everything. The way his face shifted, the way his body responded, the slow unraveling of tension as I worked him open, stretching him, preparing him. He was tight, his hole clasp around my fingers, so I took it slow, easing two in before adding another. By the time he was writhing, panting my name, I was barely holding myself together.

I rolled the condom on, slicked myself up, and settled between his thighs, my cock nudging at his entrance. His legs locked around me, hands gripping my arms, eyes heavy-lidded but clear, waiting.

And then I pushed in.

Tight, hot, perfect .

His lips parted in a silent gasp, his body arching beneath me, and I drank it all in. The tight heat swallowing me, the way his fingers dug into my triceps, the soft flutter of his lashes as he blinked up at me, his gaze wide and glazed with pleasure. I rocked forward, filling him inch by inch, until I was buried balls-deep, until there was nothing between us.

“Look at you,” I murmured, my voice thick.

Chris’s lips curved into a breathless smile. “I love how your cock feels inside me. So thick. So full. Give me more.”

I pulled back and thrust in again, a slow, deliberate stroke, and his head tipped back, a groan spilling from his throat. I braced myself above him, watching the way his muscles flexed, the way his body took me in. I wanted to see everything. The way his mouth fell open every time I filled him. The way his pleasure built, the moment it took him over completely. I set the rhythm slow at first, savoring it, the slide and heat, the way his hole clenched around my cock, the way he whispered my name like a prayer. But soon, neither of us could hold back, and I drove into him harder, deeper, chasing that edge, pushing him closer.

“Oh God, Zac,” he whimpered. “Yes! Right there.” He reached between us, stroking himself, his movements frantic.

“Come for me,” I murmured, voice rough.

He tensed, muscles going taut, his whole body shuddering as he spilled between us, his moan breaking into whimpers that made my vision blur. I lost it then, my hips bucking, pleasure coiling tight and snapping, rapture flooding through me as I buried myself one last time and came with a groan.

Chris’s breath came in ragged gasps, his body still trembling from his orgasm, but his legs remained locked around me, keeping me inside him. His eyes fluttered open as I collapsed onto him, his skin slick beneath mine, his chest heaving. His arms slid up my back, his fingers pressing into my skin like he didn’t want me to move. The light bathed us in orange warmth, casting shadows along his flushed skin, catching in the sweat dampening his hair.

I groaned, feeling the tight clutch of his body around my cock, still buried deep, still hard and refusing to go soft. The heat, the slickness, the aftershocks of his pleasure squeezing down on me—it was too much, and not enough.

“Zac...” His voice was wrecked, hoarse. But when his hips rocked up, a needy little

roll against me, I knew exactly what he wanted.

“You want more?” I murmured, sliding my hands beneath his thighs, pushing them higher, opening him even further.

He let out a shaky breath, his lips parting. “Yeah.”

“Say it.” I dragged my cock almost all the way out before slamming back in, watching the way his body arched, the way his eyes rolled back in his head.

“Fuck,” he gasped. “I want it—I want you to fuck me again. Now.”

I grinned, dark and hungry, bending down to nip at his lower lip. “Good boy.”

Then I gave it to him. I set a brutal pace, driving into him, the sound of wet skin slapping filling the room. Chris clung to me, nails raking down my back, his face flushed, his mouth falling open as I fucked him even harder than before.

“God, you feel so fucking good,” I growled, my balls smacking his butt with every thrust. “So tight, taking me so deep. You love it, don’t you?”

“Yes,” he gasped, voice breaking. “Fuck, Zac—I love it.”

I gripped his jaw, forcing his gaze on me. “You love having me inside you?”

His eyes shone, pupils blown wide. “Yes.”

“You love getting fucked by me?”

“God, yes.” His breath hitched, his cock hard again between us, leaking against his stomach.

I groaned at the sight, at the way his body begged for more. “Then come for me again,” I commanded, angling my thrusts until I hit that perfect spot inside him. “No touching this time. I want to feel you lose it while I’m still inside you.”

Chris let out a strangled cry, his body tightening, and then he was coming again, untouched, spilling between us with a shuddering moan. The way he clenched around me sent me spiraling over the edge, ecstasy rushing through me like an earthquake.

With a final, deep thrust, I buried myself to the hilt, shuddering as I pushed past that tight inner ring—deeper than before—where his body gripped my cock in a way that made my vision blur. Chris whimpered, his fingers digging into my back, and the way he squeezed down on me sent a bolt of pleasure straight to my spine. My entire body locked up as I came, my cock pulsing, filling the same condom that was already slick with my first release.

For a moment, the world went silent, nothing but the harsh rasp of our breathing, the lingering tremors in my limbs as I collapsed onto him. His skin was flushed, damp, his eyes glassy as he looked up at me.

And fuck, he was beautiful.

For a long time, neither of us moved. My cock finally went limp, and I pulled out carefully, slipping off the condom and tossing it aside before slumping onto my back. Chris turned into me immediately, pressing his face to my chest, his breath warm against my skin, legs tangling with mine. I wrapped an arm around him without thinking, holding him close, fingers drifting lazily over his spine. Mine .

The moment stretched, warm and endless. It felt... natural. That should’ve unsettled me. Maybe it did, in some quiet, subconscious way.

I stared at the ceiling, chest rising and falling, the aftershocks still tingling through

my limbs. My mind should've been racing—what this meant, what it changed—but I couldn't bring myself to analyze it yet. All I knew was that I just had the most intense, most mindblowing orgasm in my entire life, and that I wanted to keep touching him. That I liked the weight of him against me, the way his breath slowed to match mine. That I wasn't ready to leave.

Chris shifted, pressing closer, his lips ghosting over my collarbone. "You okay?"

I exhaled through my nose, my fingers still tracing his back. "Yeah." It wasn't a lie. But it wasn't the whole truth, either.

He didn't push. Just hummed softly, settling against me like he belonged there. And maybe—for tonight, at least—he did. But when tomorrow comes, when reality presses in, I wasn't sure what I'd see when I looked at him. Or worse—what I'd see when I looked at myself.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

The blare of my alarm tore me from sleep, dragging me up from the depths of warmth and exhaustion. I fumbled blindly over the nightstand until I found my phone, silencing the sharp, insistent ringing. Dim gray light seeped through the curtains, stretching soft, long shadows across the room. My sheets were twisted, pillows askew, the air still heavy with the remnants of last night—sweat, sex, Zac.

I turned onto my side, reaching out instinctively, expecting solid heat, the weight of a body beside mine. But my fingers brushed only the cool, empty bed.

Zac was gone.

I peeled back the covers and sat up, running a hand over my face, trying not to let the thoughts rush in too fast. He could have left early for work. Maybe he had things to do, clothes to change. It didn't have to mean anything. It didn't have to mean regret. But his absence felt like a missing breath, a note cut off too soon.

And the ghost of his touch lingered everywhere. My body ached in the best way—deep, pulsing soreness that made me shudder when I stretched. Flashes of last night surged through me—Zac's mouth dragging over my skin, the rough scrape of his stubble along my throat, the way his hands had held me down, pinned me open. The stretch of his cock as it filled my hole, the full weight of him bearing down until I could do nothing but take it.

I wanted it again. All of it.

I made my way to the bathroom on unsteady legs, yearning for a hot shower. But as I stepped inside, I caught sight of myself in the mirror.

Jesus.

Bruises bloomed across my chest, my ribs, my hips—faint traces of teeth and fingertips, evidence of just how hard he'd handled me, how completely I'd let him take me. I dragged my fingers over one mark just below my collarbone, pressing into the tender skin, and despite the unease curling at the edges of my thoughts, a slow grin spread across my lips.

Zac might have left. But he hadn't done it without leaving his mark.

* * *

By the time I pulled into the parking lot at Nova Systems, I'd convinced myself not to overthink it. Zac leaving didn't have to mean he was running. We worked together. I'd see him soon enough, and then I'd have my answer.

The second I stepped out of the elevator and into the office, I heard raised voices. No—one voice, sharp-edged and fraying, cutting through the quiet hum of the morning. Zac. Talking on the phone with someone. His door was shut, but the walls weren't thick enough to muffle the heat in his words.

"I told you, it wasn't intentional." His voice was low but forceful, the kind of restrained anger that could turn lethal if provoked. "I lost track of time." A frustrated exhale, followed by a pause. "I said I was sorry. How many times do I need to apologize?" Then— "Hello? Oh, for fuck's sake!"

The sound of a phone hitting the desk.

Shit. That didn't sound good. I hesitated for half a second before stepping up and knocking lightly.

“What?” Zac snapped.

I eased the door open.

He was pacing behind his desk, anger rippling through his frame, one hand braced against his temple like he was trying to shove something back into place. The morning light slanted through the blinds, streaking across his dark suit, the crisp white of his shirt, the rigid line of his jaw. He looked as put-together as ever, but I could see the small giveaways—the flex of his fingers, the tight pull of his shoulders, the restless energy coiling beneath his skin. When he saw me, something in his posture shifted, the edges of his frustration softening just a fraction.

I shut the door behind me. “Is everything okay?”

He let out a sharp breath, scratching his beard. “That was Chantelle.”

I leaned against the doorframe. “I figured.”

“She’s pissed because I promised to call her last night, and I forgot.” He huffed a humorless laugh. “I told her I lost track of time. Didn’t mention why. She hung up on me.”

I studied him carefully. The way his jaw flexed. The way his throat worked around unspoken words. Was he blaming me? Or was this the part where regret sank its claws in, making him question everything?

“You weren’t there when I woke up,” I said cautiously.

“I had to go to my place and change,” he replied looking out of the window, still distracted. “You slept so peacefully, I didn’t want to wake you up.”

I took a tentative step toward him, then another. It scared me to ask, but I needed to know. “So... where does that leave us? Do you wish yesterday didn’t happen?”

His head snapped up. And in two strides, he was in front of me.

The air between us thickened, charged. Before I could react, his fingers curled around my wrist, dragging my hand down to his groin, until my palm pressed against the solid heat of his cock.

“You tell me,” he murmured.

My lips curled into a grin. I rubbed my palm over him, just enough to feel his cock twitch beneath the expensive fabric of his pants. “Seems like that’s a hard no,” I said.

“Hard is a good way to put it.” His breath was rough against my jaw, his fingers flexing around my wrist like he wanted to pin me right here against the door. His gaze drifted from my face down my neck, where a purple hickey peeked from the collar of my shirt, and his other hand brushed my throat. “I did that?”

“Yeah,” I breathed out, feeling his cock swelling under my palm. “But I don’t mind. I like having your mark on me.”

“ Fuck .” He was fully hard now, his briefs barely containing his erection, his eyes glazed with desire.

Heat coiled low in my stomach, and I couldn’t take it anymore. I surged forward, kissing him, my arms winding around his neck. His lips crushed against mine, rough and hungry, his mouth parting, tongue sliding deep to claim me. God, the taste of him...

Then—a sharp knock.

We jerked apart just in time for the door to swing open. Alicia stepped inside, a stack of reports in her arms. She looked from him to me, oblivious to the tension in the air. “Isaac. Chris.”

Zac cleared his throat, stepping back. “What do you need?”

She handed him the reports. “Finance needs you downstairs.”

He took the files, flipping through them absently before glancing at me again. His eyes still burned, dark with promise. “Chris, I want that file we just talked about ready and spread over my desk when I get back,” he said.

My stomach flipped. I had to bite my lips to stop myself from smirking. “Don’t worry, boss. The file will be waiting and ready for use.”

His nostrils flared. “Good.”

He turned and strode out, Alicia trailing after him.

I let out a slow breath, still feeling the weight of his touch on my wrist, the lingering heat of his mouth. My hole tingled at the realization: Zac wanted me. And I was going to let him have me. Again.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

Reconciliation with Chantelle was swift. That was the thing about her—she never let emotions get in the way of her goals. No sulking, no passive-aggressive digs, no waiting for me to grovel. Honestly, I was surprised we even argued at all, though I suppose I had it coming.

That evening when I arrived at her place, there were no tearful accusations, no dramatic silences, icy stares, or anything unproductive like that. Instead, she opened the door with an arched brow, arms folded over her silk blouse.

“You’re on probation, Steele,” she said, her voice smooth as glass. “Behave.”

I could have fed her some excuse—finding a lawyer for Chris’s case, a late-night conference call, a drink that turned into three—but she wouldn’t have believed me, and she wouldn’t have cared. Chantelle wasn’t interested in explanations. She was interested in results. And the result she wanted was me standing beside her at our wedding, in the perfect tuxedo, in the perfect venue, with the perfect guest list looking on.

She knew there was nothing to be gained from dragging out an argument, so she let it go. She was good at that—compartmentalizing, filing things away, refocusing on the bigger picture. Not dealing with emotions—only the outcomes.

So, I kissed her cheek and murmured, “I guess I deserve that.”

She hummed, letting me into her apartment. And just like that, the matter was closed.

* * *

Later that night, as we lay in bed together, I watched the soft rise and fall of her breath. Her bedroom was dark, still. The only sound was the distant hum of the city beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows.

She curled against me, her leg draped over mine, her breathing already slowing into sleep's steady rhythm. The sex had been... fine. That was the problem, wasn't it? There was nothing wrong. No awkwardness. No tension. She'd responded as she always did—soft sighs, appreciative murmurs, the gentle roll of her hips meeting mine in a practiced, predictable flow. Nothing out of place. Nothing unexpected. And yet, the whole thing felt off.

Not because she had changed. Because I had.

I used to think sex with Chantelle was as good as it got—polished, effortless, the perfect blend of control and refinement. But now, lying there in the dark, I couldn't shake the feeling that it was missing something. Not just urgency. Not just passion. My body knew the difference now. My skin knew the difference.

I exhaled, rubbing a hand down my face. This wasn't about Chris. Couldn't be. It was about me. Maybe I was overthinking things. Maybe I was just exhausted. Maybe I just needed to let this feeling pass.

Beside me, Chantelle stirred, her fingers ghosting over my chest. I covered her hand with mine, staring at the ceiling. This was the life I'd chosen. This was the future I was building.

So why did it feel like I was still waiting for something?

Page 21

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

It didn't take long for me and Zac to fall into a new kind of rhythm. A dangerous, reckless rhythm.

At work, he barely let a day pass without dragging me into his office, yanking down my slacks, and bending me over his desk, fucking me fast and rough with one hand over my mouth to keep me quiet. If the office was too risky, the gym showers sufficed—me pressed against the slick tiles, water streaming over us as he drove into me, biting my shoulder to stifle his groans. Now that he'd gotten a taste of my ass, my mouth alone wasn't enough—he wanted to pound me constantly. And when we weren't stealing quick, desperate moments, he took his time with me at home.

At my home. Never his.

And maybe that should have bothered me, but I was too caught up in the way he ravaged me every time he had me beneath him, spreading me open, owning my body like he had a right to it.

Tonight was no different.

Zac had fucked me hard, pushing me to my limits, making me sob into the mattress as he pounded me open, sweat-slicked and relentless, stretching me past the point of no return until I shattered, boneless and wrecked in his arms. Now, tangled together in my bed, the heat of our bodies fading into the sheets, he traced lazy fingers over my ribs, mapping the bruises he'd left behind like he was proud of it, like he relished marking me as his property.

“You know,” I murmured, head resting on his shoulder, “I just realized something.

When you merge our names, you get Chris Isaac.”

He huffed a laugh. “Like the singer?”

“Yeah. Which means, it’s a wicked game we play.”

He smirked, fingers circling my nipple. “Are you saying... the world was on fire and no one could save me but you?”

I chuckled, rolling onto my side, facing him. “I’m saying, it’s strange what desire will make foolish people do.”

He was grinning, enjoying the tease, but there was an undercurrent of something serious in his expression. I felt it too, the deeper meaning I accidentally uncovered as I thought about another lyric from that song: No, I don’t wanna fall in love... with you .

The problem was, I already had.

I let out a slow breath, pressing closer, letting the weight of the realization settle over me. Somewhere between the stolen kisses, the frantic fucks, the way he looked at me when he thought I wasn’t watching, I had fallen. Hard. And there was no going back.

* * *

Rain drummed softly against the windows, a steady rhythm syncing with the low hum of the TV. The glow from the screen flickered over the couch, casting shifting light over Zac’s long limbs and the half-eaten takeout containers littering the coffee table. He was stretched out beside me, his head in my lap, our bodies tangled in that lazy, comfortable way we always seemed to end up after a good fucking session.

“By the way, I’m heading up to Maine next week,” I said, remembering the upcoming holiday.

Zac glanced up. “Spending Thanksgiving with your folks?”

“Yeah. My mom would lose it if I didn’t.” I smirked, stretching for a glass of water. “She’s already texting me every day, making sure I’m not backing out last minute.”

Zac made a low, thoughtful sound, tilting his head back against my leg. “Big family gathering?”

“Nah, just my parents, my siblings, and me.”

His gaze flicked to me. “I didn’t know you had siblings.”

“Yeah, I’m the oldest. Emily’s three years younger, and Josh is the baby. Well, not a baby anymore—he’s eighteen, but he’ll always be the kid I used to carry around on my shoulders.” I huffed a quiet laugh. “He followed me everywhere growing up. Wanted to be like me. Which is great, except now he’s convinced he wants to move to Providence for college because I’m here.”

Zac smiled. “That’s sweet.”

“Yeah. He’s awesome.” I reached for my drink again, taking a slow sip. “My parents are great too—high school sweethearts, still disgustingly in love after twenty-six years. Honestly, sometimes it’s nauseating.”

Zac let out a short chuckle, shaking his head. “And you’re out to your family?”

“Yeah, I came out just before my high school graduation. It wasn’t a big deal, really. I knew nothing would change. They still love me the same, and I love them.”

“Must be nice.”

Something about the way he said it made me glance at him. His tone was light, but his expression had shifted, his eyes growing distant.

I nudged his head with my thigh. “I just realized you’re closer in age to my parents than you are to me.”

Zac barked out a laugh, some of the tension breaking. “Jesus, thanks for that. Really needed the reminder.”

I grinned but didn’t let it distract me. “You never talk about your family,” I said after a pause. “What’s their deal?”

Zac hesitated, his fingers idly twirling his chopsticks against the rim of the takeout container. For a second, I thought he might brush it off. But then he sighed, setting the food aside.

“My mom was from London,” he said, voice low. “Came here for a visit, met my dad, and fell hard. Got married fast. And then I came along.”

I stayed quiet, watching him.

“For a while, I think they were happy,” he continued, staring at the ceiling. “At least, that’s what my mom always told me. But my dad—” He let out a humorless laugh. “Turns out, he liked other women too. A lot. And when I was old enough, I started noticing things. Long nights ‘at work.’ Lipstick on his shirts. My mom crying in the kitchen after she thought I’d gone to bed.” His throat worked, but he kept his voice steady. “Eventually, he left. Packed a bag one day and walked out. And then—” Zac swallowed hard. “Then my mom got sick.”

Something tightened in my chest.

“The doctors said leukemia,” he murmured, almost to himself. “But I always believed she died of a broken heart.” He blew out a heavy sigh, like he was trying to force the weight off his chest. “After that, I lived with my grandmother. My dad’s mom. She was the greatest woman who ever lived—loved me unconditionally. She passed a few years ago.”

I didn’t know what to say. So I didn’t say anything. I just curled my arm tighter around him, stroking his hair. For a long moment, Zac didn’t move. Then he let out a slow breath, sinking into me.

“What about your dad?” I asked softly. “Do you know what happened to him?”

Zac snorted. “Got remarried. New family, new life. He reached out a few times, but I never took his calls.” He shrugged, like it was no big deal, but the tension in his shoulders told a different story. “Last I heard, he lives somewhere in Virginia. That’s about all I care to know.”

I tightened my grip on him, my fingers pressing into the warmth of his temples. “Maybe he’s changed. Maybe he regrets the things he’s done.”

“I don’t give a flying fuck. It’s too late for forgiveness.”

“Sometimes we forgive, not for others, but for our own peace.”

Zac huffed, refusing to continue the subject. Then he sighed, tipping his head back to look at me. “See? You’ve got your Hallmark-perfect family, and I’ve got my family-sized trauma pack. We balance each other out.”

I tried to smirk, but it felt off. Instead, I only stared at him, my chest aching with

feelings I was afraid to confess.

After a moment, Zac shifted, rising from my lap to press a slow, lingering kiss against my throat. I pulled him up until we were facing each other, eyes locked, breaths mingling. Then I leaned in and kissed him, slow, soft, just a slide of my lips over his. I love you , the kiss said. I love you so much .

Zac moved even closer and pulled me into a tight hug, pressing me into his chest.

The rain kept falling outside, soft and steady, and for a long time, we just stayed like that. Wrapped up in each other. No past, no future—only now.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

Thanksgiving with Chantelle's parents was an exercise in precision. Everything was calculated—the seating arrangements, the menu, the conversation. The air smelled of roasted chestnuts and spiced bourbon, the scent thick enough to cling to my clothes. The dining room was cavernous, lined with antique walnut furniture and spotless white trim, the long mahogany table set with fine china and polished silverware that probably hadn't seen a dishwasher in decades.

Chantelle's mother, a crisp, well-preserved woman who looked like she stepped out of a New England lifestyle magazine, played the gracious hostess, keeping the wine flowing and the conversation controlled. Her father, a square-shouldered banker with a jaw like granite, discussed market trends between bites of dry turkey.

Chantelle, composed and poised to conquer, steered the discussion toward the wedding, the guest list, the budget, the catering. She spoke in clipped, assured tones, nodding along as her mother suggested vendors and her father mentioned tax benefits. She barely looked at me, like I was only there to fulfill a role she'd designed and little else.

Did she sense a difference in me? She wasn't the type to ask questions she didn't want answers to, but she wasn't stupid. Maybe she suspected something. Maybe she didn't care. I thought she loved me, but I'd come to realize that love had never been the foundation of our relationship, not in the way that made people reckless, foolish, desperate. She cared for me, sure, but she cared more for what I represented—the power couple we would become, the envious glances at black-tie galas, the jet-set life we could build.

And me? I sat there, listening to her plan our future, wondering if that was the life I

wanted to live. I made the appropriate responses at the right times. Nodded when I was supposed to. Smiled when she mentioned her father's latest real estate venture. Let her palm slide over the back of my hand as she went over seating arrangements and floral options. Yet something felt off. Not wrong. Not bad. Just... off.

Her fingers were soft, precise, controlled. Methodical. I should have felt comforted by her touch, reassured. Instead, I registered it the way I registered the weight of a watch on my wrist—present, expected, but hardly worth thinking about.

Which was stupid. Because it was Chantelle. My fiancée. Chantelle, who was perfect in every way. Smart, ambitious, stunning. I loved her.

Didn't I?

* * *

The Monday after Thanksgiving, I arrived at work early. The place was quiet, the hum of the heating system filling the stillness, the scent of freshly brewed coffee lingering from the breakroom. Chris wasn't there yet, his desk empty as I passed it on the way to my office.

Once inside, I shrugged off my coat, rolling my shoulders as I settled in at my desk. Anticipation coiled low in my stomach, an insistent, restless thrum. Four days without him had stretched unbearably, each hour dragging like a lifetime. I'd spent them playing the role I was supposed to play—dutiful fiancé, respectable businessman—but my mind had drifted too often, my body remembering a different kind of warmth, a different kind of surrender.

I shouldn't have missed him this much. And yet, the mere thought of having him close again, of seeing the hunger in his eyes when he looked at me, sent a rush of heat straight to my cock. I was addicted, and like any addict, I didn't want to stop. I only

craved more. Chris was my drug, and I was too far gone to care.

The soft click of approaching footsteps snapped me from my thoughts. A moment later, a familiar knock rapped against my door before Chris let himself in, moving with the kind of ease that came from knowing he belonged there.

I meant to greet him, to ask about his trip, but the second our eyes met, all rational thought evaporated. I was out of my chair before I even registered the movement, crossing the space between us in two strides, my hands gripping his waist as I pulled him in. His scent—faint cologne, something clean and warm—filled my lungs a moment before my lips crashed against his.

Chris melted into me, fingers clumsy with urgency, already fumbling at my belt. “I missed you so much,” he mumbled between kisses, his breath hot against my skin.

I should’ve said it back. The words hovered on the tip of my tongue, too big, too raw, too dangerous. I swallowed them down instead, blowing out a deep breath as he dropped to his knees.

And then thinking became irrelevant.

His mouth wrapped around me, eager, greedy, taking me in as though four days apart had left him starving. My fingers tangled in his hair, my breath hitching as wet heat enveloped me, his tongue teasing, lips sliding over sensitive flesh in a way that made my head fall back. God, he was good at this.

The office faded away. The entire world narrowed to the slick pull of his lips, the sinful noises he made as he worked me over, determined to take me apart. Pleasure built fast, sharp and insistent, pushing me toward the edge quicker than I wanted. I clutched at the desk behind me, trying to hold on, but Chris knew my body too well by now. He sucked harder, swallowed deeper—

Fuck .

My release hit, pleasure tearing through me in a blinding rush. He swallowed it all, his throat working around me before pulling off with a slow, satisfied hum. I breathed out, trying to steady myself. Brushing my thumb over his swollen lower lip, I helped him to his feet.

“Did you have a good time with your family?” I asked as I tucked myself back in, my voice rough around the edges.

Chris grinned, his cheeks flushed, his eyes still bright with heat. “Yeah, it was good to be back home for a while. But...” His fingers trailed over my collar, smoothing the fabric. “I’d rather be here.”

I hummed, brushing a kiss against his jaw. “I’d rather have you here,” I murmured against his lips, tasting myself on his tongue—salty, warm, delectable.

His lashes lowered, a pleased shiver running through him.

“But,” I continued, hands sliding down to cup his ass, squeezing the firm muscle, “if you don’t go back to your desk now, I won’t get anything done today. You’re far too distracting.”

Chris’s mouth quirked at one corner. “Okay,” he said, stepping back, “as long as you promise I’ll have you inside me before lunch break.”

I growled low in my throat, my fingers tightening around his hips. “I promise.”

With a wicked grin, he turned and sauntered to the door, each step deliberate, his ass swaying just enough to taunt me. He glanced back over his shoulder, winking before disappearing into the hall.

I chuckled under my breath, shaking my head as I sank into my chair. Damn tease.

Still riding the afterglow, I turned my attention to my emails, pushing through the work with a renewed sense of purpose. I was halfway through my morning correspondence when a knock sounded at the door.

“Excuse me, Isaac,” Alicia said as she stepped inside, a clipboard tucked under her arm. “Do you have a moment?”

“Of course.” I leaned back in my chair, still feeling loose and satisfied.

She adjusted her glasses. “The Miami developer conference is coming up. Want me to go ahead and book everything?”

I stretched, rolling the tension from my neck. “Yeah. Get the usual suite.”

She made a note, then glanced up. “Since Melissa isn’t here, would you need me to go with you?”

Melissa had always handled these trips before she went on maternity leave. But now...

“No,” I said, a little too quickly. Alicia’s brows lifted ever so slightly. I exhaled, reaching for my coffee to cover the slip. “Chris will handle it this year.”

She studied me for a beat, her gaze assessing. “You sure he’s ready?”

I kept my expression neutral. “He’s my assistant, isn’t he? No better way to learn than through experience.”

“Right,” she said slowly, tapping her pen against the clipboard. “I’ll make the

arrangements.”

I nodded, turning my attention back to my screen, my face carefully impassive.
“Anything else?”

“No, that’s all. See you later.” She left, closing the door behind her.

Alone again, I exhaled, a slow smile creeping across my face. A business trip to Florida. Warm sun. Soft sand. And Chris, all to myself, for three whole days. My cock twitched at the thought.

I pressed the intercom button on my desk phone and said, “Chris, could you step into my office for a moment? I have some news for you.”

Yeah. This was exactly what I needed.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

The first thing that hit me when we stepped out of Miami International Airport was the heat—thick, balmy, a world apart from the biting wind we'd left behind in Providence. The sun was relentless, hanging high in a cloudless sky, baking the pavement, making my sweater instantly unbearable. I tugged it over my head, stuffing it into my carry-on, and took a deep breath of the humid, salt-tinged air.

“Welcome to Florida,” Zac said beside me, smirking as he slid on his sunglasses. Unlike me, he looked entirely unbothered by the shift in climate, crisp and composed in his tailored dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up to show off his muscled forearms. He moved like he owned the place, like he belonged anywhere he went.

I, on the other hand, was still trying to process the surreal fact that I was here at all. Miami. I'd never been to Florida before, never seen palm trees lining the streets, never felt this kind of heat in December. It felt like stepping into another world. The city buzzed around us—cars honking, people moving in every direction, Spanish and English mingling in the air. Everything felt bright, fast, electric.

We slid into the black car waiting for us at the curb, and as the driver pulled onto the highway, I pressed my forehead to the window, taking in the sprawl of the city—the way the skyline shimmered against the blue sky, the sheer number of high-rises, the Art Deco buildings, the flashes of vibrant murals splashed across walls. It was impossible to take it all in at once.

“I know you said this was a business trip,” I said, still watching the city rush past. “But it feels more like a vacation.”

Zac chuckled, his hand resting on my thigh. “Well, it's not.”

“Could’ve fooled me.”

The ride to the hotel didn’t take long, but by the time we arrived, I was practically vibrating with excitement. The place was impossibly luxurious—towering glass windows, an elegant marble lobby, palm trees inside, for God’s sake. A grand staircase curved toward the upper floors, and just beyond the check-in desk, I caught a glimpse of a sprawling pool area, people lounging beneath umbrellas with cocktails in hand.

Two rooms had been booked—appearances mattered—but when we took the elevator up to the executive suite, it was clear where we’d actually be spending our time.

The suite was breathtaking. Floor-to-ceiling windows framed the view of the ocean, stretching endlessly into the horizon. A massive bed with crisp white linens dominated the bedroom, and behind it, a private terrace held an outdoor Jacuzzi, steam curling invitingly from its surface.

I let out a low whistle. “Yeah. Definitely a vacation.”

Zac gave me a pointed look but didn’t argue. Instead, he walked over to the balcony, loosening his tie as he glanced down at the city below. “Enjoy the view while you can,” he said. “Because we’ve got work to do.”

The conference was held in the hotel’s ballroom—an expansive, sleek space filled with round tables, towering screens, and men in pressed suits talking in low, serious voices. I recognized a few faces from Nova Systems’ past meetings, but most were strangers, exuding the kind of sharp, practiced confidence honed over years in the business.

Zac was in his element. He guided me through conversations with an effortless charisma, introducing me to developers, CEOs, and investors, weaving my name into

the discussion like I already belonged there.

Between meetings, he took the time to explain everything—the strategies behind certain deals, the unspoken rules of negotiations, the importance of relationships in this world. He spoke low, just for me, his voice steady and instructive, his hand always resting on my lower back as he guided me through the crowd.

I tried to absorb it all, tried to play the part of the ambitious assistant, but the truth was, I was distracted—by his constant touch, by the way his presence dominated the room, by the thrill of being here with him, of being his.

By the time we wrapped up for the day, my head was full, my feet ached, and my stomach growled.

“Hungry?” Zac asked as we stepped into the elevator.

“Starving.”

He smirked. “Let’s change and get out of here.”

We shed our business attire for something more fitting—light, breathable, easy. I put on a blue tank top, beige khaki shorts, and my white sneakers, while Zac opted for a crisp white button-up with dark gray dress shorts and black suede loafers. Even in something so simple, he looked good enough to eat—polished, cool, every inch of him screaming wealth and control. I wasn’t about to let that go untested.

Before we even left the suite, I dropped to my knees, pulling him deep into my mouth. He groaned, threading his fingers through my hair, his restraint slipping as he thrust against my tongue. I wanted to wreck him, make him feel as unraveled as I did every time he touched me. And from the way he shuddered when he shot his load down my throat, I knew I’d succeeded.

* * *

Lunch turned into an afternoon of exploring. Zac, despite claiming this wasn't a vacation, seemed perfectly content to play tour guide. He took me to Little Havana , where we walked down Calle Ocho, the air thick with the scent of Cuban coffee and roasting pork. We stopped at a ventanita for cafecito —tiny, potent cups of espresso that made my pulse race—and watched old men playing dominoes at Máximo Gómez Park.

After that, we strolled through Wynwood, admiring the massive, kaleidoscopic murals that transformed entire buildings into works of art. The colors were explosive—blues, pinks, golds—and as we walked past an open-air gallery, I caught Zac watching me, a small, private smile tugging at his lips.

“What?” I asked.

He shrugged. “Nothing. You just look...” He trailed off, then reached out, brushing a loose strand of hair off my forehead. “Never mind.”

Warmth spread through my chest, but I didn't press him. Instead, I let myself look at him, taking in every detail—the way the open collar of his shirt revealed his soft chest hair, the way his rolled-up sleeves framed his powerful forearms, the way his shorts clung to his thick, muscular quads. He was effortlessly masculine, rugged and refined in equal measure. And the fact that all that intensity, all that raw sex appeal, was focused on me? It was intoxicating.

By the time we made it back to the hotel, the sky had deepened into a rich purple, the city glowing with neon signs and headlights. Zac ordered room service, and we ate dinner in his suite. Afterward, we ended the night in the Jacuzzi, steam curling around us, thick and humid, rising into the night air as I leaned back against the tub's edge. The warm water bubbled against my skin, loosening every muscle, making my

limbs feel liquid, weightless. I sighed in satisfaction.

Zac smirked, sprawled across from me. “You look like you’re about to pass out.”

“I might,” I admitted. “I don’t think I’ve ever walked this much in one day.”

His arms were stretched along the ledge, his body loose and relaxed in a way I rarely got to see. The golden glow of the city lights outside bathed him in soft, shimmering warmth, catching in the damp strands of his dark hair. He looked so fucking good like this—dewy skin, chest rising and falling slow, his half-lidded eyes watching me in the low light. “You’ll sleep well, then.”

I swallowed, shifting closer until my foot brushed his beneath the water. Then I went further, letting my toes graze the length resting between his legs. “I’m not sleepy yet,” I murmured.

His breath hitched. A ghost of a smile tugged at his lips, but he only spread his legs wider.

Encouraged, I pressed my foot more firmly against him, feeling the thick shape of his cock stiffen under my sole. The heat between us had nothing to do with the water anymore.

Zac let me tease him for another minute before he moved closer, his hand gliding through the water to find my thigh. His fingers skimmed over my skin, slow, deliberate, before traveling lower, probing my hole just enough to make me shiver. Neither of us spoke as he leaned forward, closing the space between us. He reached for my neck, tracing a lazy line down its length, and then his mouth was on mine—hot, insistent, tasting like the lingering hint of rum from his drink.

I sighed into the kiss, my body sinking into his. My hands found his shoulders, solid

and slick with moisture, and then I was shifting, straddling him, pressing my chest to his, feeling every inch of him beneath the water.

“I want you,” I breathed against his lips.

His grip on my hips tightened, his fingers pressing into my flesh like he meant to brand me, claim me. “I know.” His hands slipped lower, kneading my ass, teasing, his touch possessive as he found my crack and traced a path to my hole. I gasped as his fingertips pressed against it, testing, circling, making me ache for more.

The water made everything slick and effortless, and when his cock nudged against my entrance, I opened for him without hesitation. Then he reached for the condom.

I stopped him, my fingers curling around his wrist. He froze, eyes snapping up to mine, sharp with question. “Take me raw,” I said.

His pupils flared. “Chris—”

“It’s all right,” I whispered. “I got tested at the beginning of the month. And I haven’t been with anyone but you since I moved to Providence.” I swallowed, searching his face, finding something wild and ravenous in his expression. “Please, Zac. I want you to breed me.” My voice was low, aching, my body burning for him. “Please.”

A sound tore from his throat, something between a growl and a groan, and then he was cupping my face in his big hands, crashing his lips to mine. His tongue swept deep into my mouth, his kiss desperate, greedy, and then—

I felt him, bare and hot, slipping inside me.

I gasped, breaking the kiss, my fingers digging into his shoulders. There was no barrier, no latex—just him. Just us.

He was shaking. His hands were still gripping my face, holding me there, forcing me to look at him. “You like having my big cock inside you?” His voice was rough, ragged.

“Yes,” I gasped as he pushed deeper, stretching me open, filling me with nothing between us.

He groaned, his grip tightening, his cock throbbing inside me. “You gonna take my load? Keep it safe and warm?”

I moaned, unable to do anything but nod. “Yes.”

That was all it took to shatter his restraint.

He grabbed my hips, holding me steady as he began to thrust, slow at first, testing, and then faster, deeper, harder. Water sloshed around us, splashing over the edges of the hot tub as he fucked up into me, every forceful shove sending a jolt of pleasure up my spine.

“You gonna let me knock you up?” he panted. “Let me fuck you as much as I want? Fill you every time?”

“Oh, God, yes,” I gasped, my head tipping back—

But he gripped my chin and forced me to look at him again. His eyes burned into mine, oceanic and endless.

“Who do you belong to?”

“You,” I choked out. “Only you.”

His smirk was pure sin. He rammed his cock deep, burying himself to the hilt, and I felt it—I felt everything. Pushing past my second hole, his cock pulsed inside me, and then I was full, his cum flooding my colon, claiming me. “Good boy.”

That was enough to push me over the edge. I came with a strangled cry, my release spilling into the bubbling water, untouched, my whole body shuddering in ecstasy.

For a long moment, we stayed like that, tangled together, breathing hard, our bodies still fused as the water lapped at our skin. And then, slowly, Zac leaned in and kissed me again—soft this time, lingering.

When we finally made it to bed, I collapsed onto the mattress beside him, spent and boneless, my ass thrumming with warmth, his seed still inside me. He pulled me into his arms without hesitation, tucking me against his chest like a dragon hoarding his treasure. I fell asleep fast, feeling warm, safe, and utterly content.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

The second day of the conference unfolded in a seamless rhythm—back-to-back presentations, handshakes, strategy discussions over coffee, the constant hum of money and ambition filling the ballroom. Chris kept up well, his sharp mind soaking in every lesson I offered, his natural charm glossing over any gaps in experience. I could see the confidence settling into him, the way he squared his shoulders when introducing himself, the way his eyes sparkled with understanding when I broke down the nuances of a negotiation.

It was fucking sexy.

More than once, I caught myself watching him when I should have been listening to a keynote speaker. The way he pressed his lips together in concentration, the occasional flick of his tongue against his lower lip. The way his fingers tapped absently against his notepad, long and elegant, the same fingers that had clutched at my back last night, dug into my arms as I—

I let out a slow breath, forcing my focus back to the discussion at hand.

At intermission, Chris excused himself to find the restroom, and I made my way to the bar at the edge of the ballroom, in desperate need of a whiskey to take the edge off. The bartender had just slid my drink across the counter when I heard someone call my name.

“Isaac Steele.” I turned to find Kurt Spencer approaching with his usual smirk, his gaze sweeping over me like he was sizing me up. “So it was you. I’d come to say hi yesterday, but I thought you were one of the security guys.”

I took a slow sip of my whiskey before acknowledging him. “Spencer.” He hadn’t changed. Still lean, blond, sharp-featured, wearing his self-satisfaction like expensive cologne. He enjoyed getting under people’s skin, stirring the pot just to watch the ripples. “So they finally invited you here?” I asked coolly.

He tried to mask it, but my taunt hit its mark. “I’m not exactly small-time these days.” He motioned loosely toward the ballroom, where the logos of a dozen rival companies flashed across the screen. “Apex Solutions is the number one tech company in Concord. We’re making waves.”

We exchanged the usual pleasantries and work-related news—expansion plans, industry trends, a few thinly veiled jabs at each other’s companies. The same game as always. Kurt and I had never been close, but we’d crossed paths enough in the industry to keep up the facade of professional respect.

“Melissa couldn’t come?” he asked after a moment, swirling the last of his drink.

“She had a baby recently,” I said. “She’s on maternity leave for the next year.”

Kurt’s eyebrows shot up. “A year? Paid?”

I took a slow sip of whiskey. “Of course.”

He let out a sharp laugh, shaking his head. “Christ, Steele. No wonder you’re bleeding money. A year of fully paid leave for a mid-level exec? That’s charity work, not business.”

I set my glass down deliberately. “It’s called investing in talent, Spencer. The kind of talent you clearly can’t afford to lose.”

He scoffed. “Please. You think she’s coming back after a year of free money? She’ll

take the payout and leave you hanging.”

“No, she won’t,” I said flatly. “Because she knows she’s valued. She’s not just a cog in a machine.”

Kurt’s smirk didn’t waver, but there was a glint in his eyes, like he was enjoying watching me dig in my heels. “That’s a cute little philosophy, but let’s be real. People don’t stay loyal to a company because you treat them ‘humanely.’ They stay because they need the paycheck. Period. You start handing out year-long vacations, and you’ll be bankrupt before the next fiscal quarter.”

I leaned in slightly, enough that he had to tilt his chin up to meet my gaze. “And yet, Nova Systems is still leading in three markets, with the highest retention rate in the industry. Strange how that works, isn’t it?”

Kurt’s smirk faltered for half a second before he covered it with a chuckle. “You’ve always had a soft streak. A little misplaced nobility. Thought you’d have outgrown it by now.”

I exhaled through my nose, my lips twisting. “And you’ve always been short-sighted. Someday, that will be your downfall.”

He only snorted, waving his hand dismissively. His interest in business ethics lasted all of five seconds before his gaze drifted past me, his attention already shifting. “So, who’s your new assistant? He seems so young.”

My jaw tightened. “Chris Landry. He’s got a bright future in the industry.”

“He’s got more than that, all right.” Kurt emptied his glass in one sip, eyes glinting. “Oh, come on, Steele. The boy is quite the looker. You’d have to be blind not to notice that firm, perky ass. And I’ve seen the way you act around him, how you can’t

keep your hands off him.”

Something in my chest coiled tight. “What are you implying, Spencer?”

“I’m just saying, you’re lucky to have him.”

“He’s good at his job.”

“I bet he is.” Kurt chuckled. “So, you’re telling me he’s nothing more than a PA?”

It felt wrong to say it. To strip Chris down to just that when he was already so much more. But I wasn’t about to share the truth with the likes of Kurt Spencer. “That’s right.”

He smirked. “Well, then you won’t mind if I make a move, will you?”

The world snapped into a razor-sharp focus. I scarcely registered setting my drink down. One second, I was standing there, pretending to tolerate his presence, and the next, I had him shoved up against the wall beside the bar, my forearm pressing hard against his chest. The impact rattled the glasses behind the bar.

Kurt’s smirk vanished, his expression contorting into shock. “What the hell, Steele—”

“You stay away from him.” The words came out low, lethal. A promise of violence.

He lifted his hands in mock surrender, but the flicker of fear in his pale eyes shifted to something vicious. “Bit possessive, aren’t we? Thought he was just your PA.”

My grip on his collar tightened. “If you so much as look at him the wrong way,” I said, my voice little more than a growl, dark and venomous, “I will make sure you

regret it.”

Kurt wasn't small, but I dwarfed him. We were hidden by a column next to the bar, obscured from view, but all it would take was one wrong move from him—one more word—and I'd have him flat on his back, breathless, regretting every syllable. And he fucking knew it. I could see it in the way he swallowed, the way his throat bobbed under my fingers.

“All right, calm down. Message received,” he said with a shaky breath.

I released him with a sharp shove, barely resisting the urge to throw a punch.

He straightened his rumpled shirt, exhaling like he'd just walked away from a loaded gun. His smirk returned, but it was edged with something warier now. “Say hi to Chantelle for me,” he said smoothly, and then he was gone, vanishing back into the crowd.

I exhaled, rolling my shoulders, willing the fury to drain from my limbs. Around me, the murmur of the conference continued as if nothing had happened, oblivious to the storm of violence barely contained in my fists. That's when I noticed Chris walking up to me.

He frowned, glancing between me and the direction Kurt had gone. “What was that about?”

I shook my head. “Nothing. Just an old rivalry.”

He didn't look convinced, but I wasn't offering more than that. Instead, I reached out instinctively, resting my hand against the back of his neck, my fingers brushing the warm skin beneath his collar. Grounding myself. Claiming.

Mine .

Chris stilled, his lips parting slightly, his eyes flicking up to mine. He didn't pull away. He didn't say anything, either. Simply let me guide him back toward the ballroom. Back to the world where none of this—my jealousy, my possessiveness, my inability to let him go—was supposed to exist.

* * *

By the time we made it back to my room, I could hardly keep myself from humping him. The door had barely shut before I had him against it, my mouth crashing down on his, all the tension, the jealousy, the unchecked hunger of the entire day boiling over. His hands were in my hair, gripping tight, his body arching into mine like he needed this just as badly.

“Bed,” I growled against his lips, but he was already pushing at my suit jacket, yanking my shirt loose.

We stumbled backward, stripping as we went, leaving a careless trail of clothing behind us. By the time we reached the bed, I had him naked, flushed, and hard, his lips swollen from my kisses, his pupils blown wide with need.

I didn't waste time. I pushed him onto the mattress, rolled him onto his stomach, and gripped his ass, spreading his cheeks open. His skin was hot beneath my hands, his muscles flexing as he exhaled, already anticipating what was coming. I reached for the lube, drizzling it down his crack, watching as it glistened over his clenching hole. Another slick stroke over my cock, and I was ready—aching to be inside him, to feel him raw again, just like last night. I lined myself up and thrust in, a single, long, unrelenting stroke.

Chris gasped, his ass arching, fingers clawing at the sheets. “Zac—fuck!”

I was already moving, driven by the memory of how he'd looked all morning—so put together, so fucking professional while I sat there, barely restraining the urge to drag him away and maul him. Now, I could. And I did.

I drove into him, hard and deep, gripping his hips in a bruising hold as I fucked him into the mattress, until he was gasping, pleading, mindless with pleasure. Until his eyes rolled back into his head, his body trembling beneath me, clamping tight, his moans turning into broken cries as he came, spilling into the sheets.

I followed him seconds later, burying myself as deep as I could go, shooting inside him with a groan, inseminating him, my entire body shuddering from the force of it.

For a long moment, there was nothing but the sound of our ragged breathing, the slick heat of our bodies tangled together, the slow thrum of satisfaction settling into my bones. I rolled us onto our sides, still inside him, still holding him close.

Chris made a soft, contented sound, pressing his back against my chest. His body was warm and yielding against me, his breath deep and slow. I ran my hand down his abs, smoothing over the sweat-damp skin, anchoring myself in the feel of him—solid, real, mine .

“Think we made enough noise for the entire floor to hear?” he mumbled, voice drowsy, amused.

I smirked, pressing a lazy kiss to his temple. “Let them.”

He chuckled, but it faded into a sigh, his muscles loosening further as exhaustion took hold. “We still need to go out and grab something to eat.”

“Or, we can stay in, order room service, and spend the rest of the day fucking.”

A sleepy hum. “Mmm. I like your idea better.”

I held him as he drifted off, my own eyes growing heavy. Outside this room, the world kept turning, but I didn't care. Right now, nothing existed but us. And for now, that was all I needed.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

By the third day, Zac and I fell into a familiar flow—early breakfast, packed ballroom, long hours of strategy talks and networking. But unlike before, when I'd felt like an outsider looking in, I was starting to feel like I actually belonged here. The endless jargon no longer blurred together, and I found myself jumping into conversations with ease, fielding questions, absorbing knowledge, watching the way Zac maneuvered deals like a master at work.

He had this way of making people feel like they wanted to impress him—like being in his good graces was a privilege. And yet, when he turned that razor-sharp focus on me, it wasn't to intimidate, but to teach. I drank in every lesson he offered, learning not just the mechanics of negotiations but the unspoken rules, the instincts, the subtle power plays.

The hours passed fast. Before I knew it, the conference was drawing to a close, and with it, the weight of formality lifted. I was more than ready to be anywhere but a hotel ballroom at that point. The endless handshakes, corporate pleasantries, and intricate strategies had been fascinating to watch—and even more fascinating to take part in—but after three days of it, I was itching to unwind.

By the time we stepped into the elevator, I could feel the weight of the past three days settling over me—equal parts exhilaration and mental fatigue. Zac and I made our way back to his suite, the door clicking shut behind us, sealing us away from the outside world. He loosened his tie with a sigh, rolling his shoulders as he tossed his suit jacket over a chair, looking every inch a man finally free of obligation. He turned to me then. “Well? How do you feel after surviving your first business conference?”

I dropped onto the edge of the bed, toeing off my shoes with a groan. “Like my brain

ran a marathon. But I actually enjoyed it. More than I expected, to be honest.”

Zac smirked, tugging at the top button of his shirt. “Told you it wasn’t a vacation.”

“It sure wasn’t,” I admitted, smiling back. “But it was also... I don’t know. Eye-opening. I’ve never seen that side of things before.” Watching Zac work, the way he handled people—it was like watching someone play a chess game where they already know every possible move. And yet, the way he played the game never felt ruthless. He didn’t just bulldoze his way to a win—he made people want to follow his lead. And I knew, without a doubt, that I wanted to follow him too.

He looked pleased at that. “Business is about control. Anticipation. Knowing how to guide the board without your opponent realizing you’re doing it.” He walked over, stood in front of me, and looked at me from above. “But you didn’t just watch—you held your own in a few conversations.”

“I tried,” I said, rubbing the back of my neck, his crotch at my eye level. “Half the time I was worried I’d say something stupid.”

“You didn’t.” His hand landed under my chin, his thumb tracing an idle pattern over my lower lip. “You listen more than you speak. That’s good. People reveal more when they don’t think you’re a threat.”

I considered his words, thinking back to the past few days, to the way I’d absorbed every conversation, every deal Zac had navigated. I could already see the patterns, the way certain men postured while others held their cards close. I let my lips part around his thumb, teasing it with the barest scrape of my teeth, savoring the way his breath hitched. “Any other tips?” I asked, leaning into him and pressing my face against his growing bulge.

He hummed in thought, slowly unbuttoning his shirt. “People like talking about

themselves. If you want someone to do business with you, ask them about their success, their company, their ‘vision.’ Stroke their ego just enough to make them think you care, and they’ll be putty in your hands.”

I snorted, nosing at his fly. “So business is just high-stakes flirting?”

Zac gave a crooked grin. “Not far off.” His cock twitched against my cheek. “Though I prefer my flirting a little less subtle.”

I glanced at him from below. “Oh? I hadn’t noticed.”

His gaze darkened, the air shifting between us, heat sparking beneath the surface. I licked my lips, pulling down his zipper, ready to test just how unsubtle he could be—until my stomach growled, loud and insistent.

Zac blinked, then barked out a laugh. “Get up. I’m taking you somewhere to eat.”

“I could start with something protein-rich,” I murmured, reaching inside his fly.

“Later,” he said, batting off my hand, and I groaned, flopping onto my back across the bed. He peeled his shirt off to reveal his powerful hairy pecs. “Come on. Let’s get changed and grab some snacks before you pass out on me.”

We slipped into our casual wardrobe, ditching the formality of the past three days for shorts and tank tops, then headed downstairs to the hotel’s restaurant. We ordered light—fresh seafood, cold drinks, nothing heavy enough to weigh us down.

As we ate, Zac shared more business tips and investing strategies, grooming me for a future in Nova Systems as his right-hand man. The conference might have been over, but the effect of it still lingered on his ever-working mind, buzzing with ideas, plans, and projects. This was a man who’d gone against every jock stereotype—brilliant,

driven, the kind of man who didn't just climb to the top but built the ladder himself. It was awe-inspiring to see.

But as much as I admired that side of Zac, it was the unguarded moments I craved most. The side he showed when he teased me about my prosaic tastes, or when he smiled at me like I was the only person in the crowded room. Those were the moments that sent warmth curling through my chest, hinting at something unspoken between us, a deeper sense of connection that transcended just the physical. And in those moments, I could almost believe he felt the same way.

After we finished eating, Zac sat back in his chair, sipping the last of his drink. "Let's enjoy our last day in Miami properly. Are you up for some adventure?"

I grinned. "Hell yes."

His lips quirked. "Good. Because I know just the spot."

* * *

I didn't have to ask where we were going—he told me on the drive over. Haulover Beach.

The moment we stepped out of the cab, I felt like a kid on summer break. The air smelled of salt and sun-warmed sand, thick with the scent of coconut sunscreen and distant whiffs of grilled food from the vendors lining the lot. The ocean stretched endless and blue before us, its surface glittering under the afternoon sun. The rhythmic crash of waves, the distant call of seagulls, and the easy laughter of beachgoers all blended into a heady, intoxicating soundtrack of freedom. I kicked off my flip-flops and dug my toes into the hot sand, grinning at the sheer, unfiltered joy of it.

“This is amazing,” I breathed, tilting my face up to the sky, letting the warmth soak into my skin.

Zac smirked beside me, sunglasses shielding his eyes, his demeanor lazy and knowing. “Oh, just wait.”

He led me further down the shoreline, past sunbathers stretched on their towels, past families wrangling excited kids, until we reached the nude section. Still, we kept on walking, and soon the crowd began to shift. The rainbow parasols were the first giveaway. Then, the men—lounging bare-skinned, strolling along the water’s edge, tangled together on beach chairs, their laughter carefree. Some walked hand in hand, some kissed openly, some lay in each other’s arms like it was the most natural thing in the world. Because here, it was.

A lump rose in my throat, unexpected and overwhelming. I’d been out since my senior year of high school, had been to my share of gay clubs and sex-positive venues, but nothing had ever felt like this—this paradise where no one had to hide, where love between men wasn’t something whispered behind closed doors. It was all here, laid bare in the sun, open and unafraid.

I turned to Zac, trying to keep my voice light even as my chest clenched with emotion. “How did you know about this place? Been here before?”

He reached out, skimming his fingers through my hair, his touch lingering. “Not this part. But I’ve heard of it, and I figured now was as good a time as any to check it out.”

“Look,” I whispered, jerking my chin toward a guy only a few feet away. “That dude’s doing yoga poses.”

Zac followed my gaze, frowning. The man was bent forward in a deep stretch, ass

high in the air, his skin glistening in the sun. Zac squinted. “Why is his butt hole shiny?”

I grinned, still staring. “I think he’s got a piercing on his taint.”

We looked at each other and lost it, shoulders shaking as we tried to stifle our laughter. A few nearby men glanced at us, amused, but we quickly composed ourselves and found a spot to lay out our towels.

The moment our trunks hit the sand, we bolted for the turquoise water, crashing into the surf like kids set loose from school. Naked, laughing, exuberant. The ocean welcomed us with warm, crystal-clear waves, enveloping us in its weightless embrace. Zac pulled me deeper, his hands on my waist, guiding me effortlessly through the swell. Sunlight rippled beneath the surface, catching on his golden skin, and when he kissed me, the salt on his lips only made me want more.

I hardened in seconds. When my body pressed flush against his, I felt his cock, thick and insistent between us. Instead of drawing back, he pulled me closer, one arm tight around my back, the other drifting lower, teasing, possessive.

“People can see us,” I murmured against his mouth, breathless.

“I don’t care.” His voice was a low growl, rough with need, and the desperate edge in it sent a thrill straight through me.

Then his hand slid lower, a finger slipping inside, stretching me open. I sucked in a sharp breath, clinging to him, waves breaking around us as he rocked forward, his cock pushing in, filling me. My body tightened, fought to adjust, then surrendered, melting into the rhythm of the tide, the slow, relentless thrust of his hips. I let the ocean cradle me, let the world melt away until there was nothing left but him and me, and the salt-drenched taste of his mouth as he pulled me in for a kiss.

We were completely exposed, out in the open—anyone swimming by, anyone glancing from the beach, could guess what we were doing. We weren't loud, but the movement of our bodies gave us away, our gasps swallowed by the crash of the surf. And that only made it hotter.

I wanted him. Here. Now. Everywhere. Always.

When he finally spilled inside me, raw and unrestrained, his mouth capturing mine as he shuddered against me, I felt it—joy deeper than pleasure, a sort of ecstasy only experienced by mystics and people in love. It was overwhelming, light as the ocean breeze, yet endless as the sky—and equally elusive. The feeling curled around my ribs and refused to let go. The waves lapped at our overheated skin, the sun casting its golden glow over the world, and for a moment, nothing else existed.

Zac gasped, too loud, his body jerking. At first, I thought it was just the intensity of release. But then he pulled back, his whole frame going rigid.

“What's wrong?” I asked, dazed, still breathless.

“I've been stung by a fucking jellyfish,” he gritted, shoving me off him and bolting for the shore.

For a moment, I just stared after him, then quickly followed, trying not to laugh. He emerged from the water with his cock still mostly hard, drawing a few scandalized glances, but he didn't care in the slightest. He made a beeline for his towel and plunked onto it, studying his leg.

I crouched beside him. “Let me see—where did it get you?”

He pointed at his foot, where an angry red welt was already forming just above his ankle. “There. Fuck, it burns.”

I examined it, pressing my lips together to keep from grinning. “Well, you know what they say is the best cure for that.”

His face turned sour as he looked at me, his eyes narrowing. “If this is your way of telling me you have a piss kink, it’s not gonna work.”

I snorted. “I’m just offering my help. If you don’t want me to do it, then do it yourself.”

“I can’t,” he muttered through gritted teeth. “I pissed in the water. I have nothing left in me.”

I shrugged, rising. “Your call, boss.”

He shot me a withering glare, but as another sharp pang made him wince, he groaned and extended his leg over the sand. “Fine. Do it.”

“Do what?” I asked innocently.

“Chris, I swear to God—”

“But how can I know what to do if you don’t say it?”

His jaw flexed. “Stop messing with me and piss on my fucking foot!”

A few heads turned in our direction, and I had to bite my lip to keep from laughing. Then I positioned myself, took my dick in hand, and aimed. When the warm stream splashed over his leg, Zac let out a soft groan—half in relief, half in sheer humiliation. All eyes on the beach seemed to be on us.

“Ah, I needed this,” I sighed dramatically. “You enjoying it as much as I am?”

He gave me a look that promised retribution, but I noticed his shoulders relaxing. This was actually working.

“Hey, it’s all about balance,” I said. “You came in me, I peed on you... Balance.”

Zac wiped his face, blowing out a heavy breath. “If you think this makes us even, you’ve got another thing coming.”

I smirked. “Bring it on.”

His eyes darkened slightly—calculating, wicked. He wasn’t joking. I could already see the gears turning, the way he was filing this away for later. And I was ready for it.

* * *

Later, as La Isla Bonita played from someone’s boombox, I rubbed sunscreen all over Zac’s wide, muscular back, my fingers trailing over the hard planes of his shoulders, the deep groove of his spine, the heat of his sun-warmed skin. He let out a pleased sigh, shifting under my touch, and when I finished, he pulled me down beside him, his hands skimming over my body with slow, teasing strokes as he returned the favor. He took his time, smoothing lotion over my back, my shoulders, the curve of my butt, his palm pressing just hard enough to make my breath hitch. If we hadn’t just fucked in the water, I would’ve gotten hard again on the spot. Hell, I was at half-mast as it was, my boner pressing into the sand underneath me.

We stretched out on our towels, sunbathing in lazy silence, the heat wrapping around us like a thick, golden cocoon. I took a few selfies, an obligatory ‘sun’s out, buns out’ TikTok video. Likes and comments started pouring in almost instantly. One was from Tyler—a single word: ‘ Jealous !’

Zac rolled onto his side and propped himself up on one elbow, watching me through

his sunglasses as I stared at my phone, liking comments and typing back my replies. The rhythmic crash of the waves, the cries of seagulls, the occasional burst of laughter from nearby men created a dreamy, hypnotic vibe.

When I finally turned my head to him, I caught the way his gaze lingered on me, his lips curving into something softer than his usual smirk. A rare moment of unguarded affection. My pulse stuttered, and he simply reached over and thumbed at my bottom lip, drawing me in for a kiss—slow, sun-dazed, intoxicating. We weren't in a hurry. There was no need to be.

Still, I could feel the weight of eyes on us. A couple of guys shot us lingering glances, and when I looked around, I noticed more people subtly watching.

“Everyone’s staring at you,” I murmured against his mouth. “They probably think you’re some former NFL star or something. And you have the biggest dick on the entire beach.”

Zac snorted, brushing a wet wisp from my forehead. “They’re staring at you, goofus. If there’s an ass here that could make a straight man question his sexuality, it’s yours.”

I rolled my eyes, but I couldn't stop the grin tugging at my lips. He said it so casually, so easily, like it was an undeniable fact. And maybe to him, it was. Everyone around us assumed Zac and I were a couple, and I let myself bask in that illusion for a while, let myself revel in the way it felt—easy, right, like this was how things were supposed to be.

We spent the next hour soaking it in, stretching out under the setting sun, Zac's fingers idly tracing circles on my butt. We took turns cooling off in the ocean, splashing each other before wading back to shore, water sluicing down our skin. At one point, Zac brought us cold beers from a nearby vendor, and we sat there sipping

and watching the sun sink below the horizon, the salt on our lips blending with the crisp, bitter taste. This was what happiness meant.

I should've known better. We had a plane to catch in only a matter of hours, and then we'd be back home. This moment was a fantasy, a dream too perfect to last.

And yet, for now, it was mine. Ours. Reality could wait.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

Chris's head rested against my shoulder, his breath slow and even, his body warm beside mine as we cruised through the darkened sky. The cabin lights were dimmed, casting everything in a soft, muted glow. Outside the window, the vast expanse of night stretched endlessly, the occasional shimmer of city lights far below reminding me that reality still existed beyond this fleeting moment.

I stared at the seat in front of me, not moving, scarcely breathing. Something had shifted. I could feel it in the weight of Chris's body against mine, in the way my chest clenched—not with lust, not with momentary satisfaction, but with something deeper, heavier. My hand twitched against the armrest, an instinctual urge to reach for him, to tangle my fingers in his. I didn't.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

Chris sighed in his sleep, nuzzling unconsciously closer, his warmth seeping into my skin, his trust in me absolute. And it hit me with brutal, suffocating clarity—this wasn't just about sex anymore. We'd crossed a line. And fuck, I needed to get back on the other side.

I turned my head slightly, looking down at him, at the way his lashes fanned against his cheek, at the barely-there curve of his lips, so content, so unaware of the war waging inside me. I should have felt in control. I should have been able to remind myself that this was temporary, that it was just physical, just release. But instead, all I could think about was how easy it felt. How right. How much I wanted to stay in this suspended moment, where no one was watching, where there were no expectations, no looming obligations.

Panic curled low in my stomach, tightening its grip with every breath. I felt lost. I didn't know what to do.

* * *

The plane landed in Providence just before midnight, the wheels jolting against the tarmac. Chris stirred beside me, letting out a soft, sleepy sound as he blinked blearily up at me. Then he stretched, long and slow, like a cat shaking off the last traces of slumber.

“We're home?” he murmured, his voice thick.

Something bitter twisted in my chest at the word. Home. I forced a nod, grabbed my bag, and led the way off the plane.

Outside, winter slapped the warmth of Florida off my skin. The Rhode Island cold seeped into my bones, creeping under my collar, and into my lungs. The scent of jet fuel and de-icer filled the air, a sharp contrast to the salt and sunscreen I could still taste on my lips. Down there it was easy to forget it was December; here, we didn't have that luxury.

We slid into the backseat of a taxi, the heat blasting too strong, making the air feel stale. The cab smelled faintly of pine, but it was artificial and cloying, doing nothing to mask the underlying scent of worn leather and exhaust. Chris let out a quiet yawn beside me, rubbing at his face, still lost in the hazy afterglow of our time in Miami. Just a few hours ago, we'd been naked on the beach, tangled together as the sun melted into the horizon. Now the city around us rose in sharp lines and frosted panes, unyielding and distant, just like the life I was about to step back into.

I sat rigid, my hands clenching and unclenching against my thighs. My pulse thudded too hard, something restless clawing at the inside of my ribs. I felt caged, like I was

already losing something I hadn't even let myself have.

Chris shifted slightly beside me. "You okay?" His voice was low, still soft with sleep.

A sharp breath left my lips. "I'm fine."

He paused. Then, "You sure? You seem—"

"I said I'm fine, Chris." It came out sharper than I intended, the words cracking through the stale air.

He flinched—just a flicker of movement, but I caught it. His lips parted like he might push back, but he hesitated. Instead, his leg brushed against mine, light and fleeting, like he wanted to ground me. I barely had time to register the warmth before he pulled away.

Guilt festered instantly, rotting beneath my skin. I almost said something, my hand landing on his knee as if it had a will of its own. But I kept quiet, and the rest of the ride passed in thick, heavy silence.

When the cab finally rolled to a stop in front of his building, Chris reached for the door handle, but I was already moving. I stepped out first, grabbing his suitcase from the trunk before he could protest.

"Zac, you don't have to—"

"Just come on," I muttered, dragging the luggage toward his building.

"Look, I'm a grown-ass man and I'm perfectly capable—"

"I'm not leaving you here alone."

Chris sighed but didn't argue, walking beside me, then passing me to lead the way up the steps. The lobby was quiet at this hour, the overhead lights buzzing faintly as I followed him up the stairs. We climbed in silence, my grip tightening on the handle of his suitcase.

At his door, he fumbled with his keys, then unlocked it. "You wanna come in?" he asked, voice quieter now.

"Not tonight."

Another pause. His gaze flickered to mine, uncertain, like he wasn't sure how this was supposed to go. Neither was I. For weeks, every time we'd parted, it had been with hands tangled in clothes, mouths desperate and claiming, his body flush against mine, reluctant to let go. But now the air between us felt different. Thick with things left unsaid. I know he felt it too, even if he didn't understand it.

Chris shifted his weight, biting the inside of his cheek. "I had a really good time," he murmured.

I swallowed hard. My throat felt tight. "Yeah. Me too." The words felt inadequate, too small for what they were supposed to hold.

He lingered, like he was waiting for something—for me to reach for him, to crack a joke, to do anything but stand there like a fucking statue. But I didn't have it in me.

Instead, I reached out and cupped the back of his neck, pulling him in—not for a kiss, not really, just to rest my forehead against his for a moment. He exhaled, leaning into it, his fingers ghosting over my shoulder.

Then I pulled away.

Chris searched my face, something flickering behind his eyes, but he didn't ask. Just nodded. "See you tomorrow at work."

I forced a small smirk that felt wrong on my lips. "Yeah."

He stepped back into his apartment, and I turned before I could watch the door close.

The cab was still waiting outside, its headlights cutting through the cold night. As I slid back into the seat, the warmth inside did nothing to thaw the chill creeping into my heart. I stared out the window at the snowy streets, where the lights cast pools of pale gold over the wet pavement as the city blurred past. The cab drove farther away, taking me to my home, every mile dragging me closer to a life I wasn't sure I fit into anymore.

* * *

When I stepped inside my condo, Chantelle was there, waiting for me.

She sat on the couch, legs crossed, scrolling through her phone with the air of someone who had all the time in the world. Flawless, despite the late hour—sleek ponytail, pressed slacks, a blouse that hugged her figure with ruthless precision. She looked up as I entered, her gaze flicking over me in quick assessment, taking in every detail—the way I hesitated at the door, the looseness of my stance, the faint scent of salt air still clinging to my skin.

"Welcome home," she said smoothly, slipping her phone onto the coffee table. She stood up with easy grace, crossed the room, and kissed my cheek, the scent of her perfume coiling around me like a noose.

I exhaled slowly, rubbing the back of my neck. "Thanks."

“Dinner’s waiting.”

Not so much an invitation as it was an expectation.

We sat across from each other at the dining table, candlelight glittering against the polished wood. The risotto was lukewarm, the salmon fillet slightly overcooked—microwaved, no doubt, after waiting untouched for hours. She didn’t comment on my delay. Instead, she talked while I ate, filling the silence with updates on the wedding preparations—seating charts, caterers, cake flavors. A house she’d found, one she was certain I’d love. “We should go see it before someone else snags it,” she said between sips of white wine. I nodded, answered when required, let the conversation move along its intended course.

I barely registered when dinner ended. She took my plate, cleared the table with quiet efficiency. I took a quick shower while she stacked the dishwasher, my mind still tangled in the Miami heat, in the press of Chris’s body against mine, in the memory of sun-warmed skin and the taste of salt on his lips. And then we went to bed.

She reached for me in the dark. Fingertips skimming my stomach, trailing lower, the smooth press of her body curling into mine. Familiar. Expected. Yet, something inside me recoiled. Being with Chris never felt like cheating. But this—this did. I pulled away before I could stop myself.

She stilled, her hand lingering against my skin for a second longer before she withdrew. A quiet beat stretched between us. Then—

“Well, that’s a first,” she murmured, propping herself up on one elbow, watching me with that keen, assessing look. “Are you all right?”

“Yeah,” I said, my voice rough. “Just tired.”

Her lips parted, but she didn't argue. There was no surprise, no anger—only a quiet, measured understanding, as if she'd already prepared herself for this moment. And knowing her, she probably did.

She held my gaze. “Are you still having sex with someone on the side?”

A long silence. But I had never lied to her. Never denied it. “Yes,” I said.

She inhaled slowly, exhaled through her nose. A flicker of something crossed her face—something almost like amusement, but colder, sharper. “I see.”

I swallowed. “You said you didn't care.”

“I didn't,” she admitted, smoothing a hand over the sheets. “It made things easier. You were relaxed. Focused. More manageable. It was fine for a while.” A small pause. “But now it's time to end it.”

The words landed like a stone in my gut.

No fight. No theatrics. Just a simple command. Because she knew I would listen.

I held her stare, my pulse hammering. “And if I don't?”

She sighed and settled against the pillows, her expression unreadable. “I know you, Isaac. You burn too hot, too fast. You get restless. You need an outlet.” Her nails traced an idle pattern on the sheets. “And before the wedding, that was fine. But it's one thing to let your fiancé blow off some steam—it's another to have your husband humiliate you by keeping a side piece. We're building something that's supposed to last. I don't have time for distractions, and neither do you.”

A warning wrapped in logic. A demand cloaked in reason.

She reached out, brushed her fingers over my wrist, her touch soft but calculated. “I need you to be steadfast, Isaac. I need you present.” Her voice was gentle, coaxing, but beneath it lay steel.

Chris’s face materialized in my mind—his head on my shoulder, his laughter in the waves, his voice rough with want. But it didn’t matter. He was still practically a kid with his whole life ahead of him, and this right here—this was mine. My future. I wasn’t about to throw it away over something that was never going to last.

I rolled onto my side, staring at the dark, my chest tight, my stomach hollow. Tomorrow, I’d end it. Tomorrow, I’d tell Chris it was over. Tomorrow, I’d do what needed to be done.

Even if the thought of it sat like a lead in my heart.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

I walked into Nova Systems the next morning, bracing against the sharp sting of winter air as I stepped through the revolving doors. The office was already alive with movement—phones ringing, the low hum of conversations, the clatter of keyboards filling the space with a familiar rhythm.

Zac had beaten me there. I knew without needing to be told. His presence had a gravity of its own, something you could feel in the air, an unspoken awareness of his authority. Also, I could hear him pacing inside his office, his voice sharp and commanding as he made deals, secured investments. Always in control.

I settled at my desk, powered up my computer. A second later, my intercom buzzed.

“Chris, come to my office, please.”

My pulse kicked up. My body knew this routine, had been conditioned to it. He always called me in first thing, and I’d lock the door behind me before dropping to my knees, hunger burning in his eyes as I took him down my throat. I could still taste the salt of him from Miami, still feel the ghost of his mouth on mine, the weight of his body engulfing me like the ocean. And the aching emptiness inside me where his cock had been.

But the moment I stepped into his office, I knew.

Zac stood in front of the massive windows, back turned to me, hands clasped behind him. He was perfectly put together—tie knotted just right, shirt crisp—but something was wrong. The air felt different. Heavy. When he finally turned, the morning light framed him, gilding the hard lines of his face. His expression was blank. Controlled.

But his eyes—cold, distant—they told me everything.

A faint unease prickled at my skin. “What’s up?” I asked, keeping my voice light, casual, like maybe I’d misread the tension in the air.

Zac inhaled sharply through his nose. “It’s over, Chris.”

The words slammed into me like a gut punch. I blinked. “What?”

He straightened, adjusting the cuff of his shirt like this was just another business conversation. “This—” he gestured vaguely between us, his voice devoid of warmth “—whatever this was. It’s done. I’m sorry.”

I heard the words, but my brain refused to process them.

He went on, efficient, ruthless. “From now on, we keep things strictly professional at work. Outside of here... we can be friends. But that’s it.” His gaze locked onto mine, unwavering. “No more sex. No more... anything.”

My throat felt dry. I tried to swallow, but it was like trying to choke down glass.

He wasn’t done. He barreled on, like he had to get it all out before I could argue. “I told you from the start—I’m not gay. Okay, I’m clearly not as straight as I thought, but I love my fiancée, and we’re getting married in a month. And I’m not about to throw everything I’ve worked for away over something that was never going to last.”

Something inside me cracked, like ice splintering under too much weight. I knew all of this. I’d always known. But hearing it, laid out so cleanly, so finally — it fucking burned. I forced my expression into something neutral. Unreadable. If he was going to end this so easily, I wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction of seeing me break.

“Okay,” I said, my voice tight, distant.

Zac’s brow twitched. Maybe he’d expected more of a reaction—anger, pleading. But I had nothing left to give. He exhaled, slow and measured. “Good.” A pause, then softer, almost reluctant, “Chris—”

I shook my head. “Don’t.”

His jaw clenched. He nodded once, then turned back to his desk like that was that.

I walked out without another word.

* * *

The rest of the morning was a blur. I went through the motions, answering emails, sitting in on meetings, pretending like my entire world hadn’t just imploded in Isaac Steele’s office. But it caught up with me eventually. The tightness in my chest, the way my hands trembled when I typed. The growing pressure behind my eyes, like a migraine waiting to break. I felt dizzy, unsteady, like the ground beneath me wasn’t solid anymore. I barely made it to the bathroom before the nausea hit.

Cold water. I needed cold water.

I turned the faucet on full blast, cupped my hands, and splashed it over my face. The sharp sting of it grounded me, yanking me back into my body. I gripped the edges of the sink, breathing deep, forcing air into my lungs. My reflection stared back at me—wide eyes, pale skin, the raw ache quivering just beneath the surface.

I couldn’t do this.

I wouldn’t do this.

I wiped my face dry, squared my shoulders, and walked straight to Zac's office, shoving the door open without knocking.

He was mid-sentence, phone pressed to his ear, talking numbers and projections. His eyes snapped to mine, irritation flashing across his face. But he must've seen something in my expression—something unmovable—because he didn't throw me out. "Listen, George, I'm gonna have to call you back," he said curtly, then ended the call.

I shut the door behind me. "I can't do this."

Zac released a frustrated sigh. "Chris—"

"I can't be your assistant anymore." The words tumbled out, breathless but firm. "I need some space before I can even think about going back to how things were, and I can't be around you right now."

Something flickered in his gaze. "I'm not letting you quit. You've worked too hard, learned too much. I'm not letting you throw away your entire future on a whim, because you made an emotional decision."

"Zac—"

"No, damn it!" His voice was harsh, cutting—but then the fire drained out just as fast, his next words softer, almost gentle. "You're... too valuable to lose."

I crossed my arms over my chest. "I'm not quitting."

His brow furrowed. "Oh."

I inhaled, steadying myself. "I want to go back to my old position. As a developer. I

was happy there. I want to earn my way up through my work, not because I was fucking the CEO.”

He flinched. Just a tiny, almost imperceptible reaction, but I caught it. His voice dipped lower. “Chris.” A pause. “You deserve better than that job. You’re talented. You’ve more than proved yourself. I was going to offer you a promotion—team lead—”

“I don’t want it,” I cut in. “Not like this.”

His jaw tightened. “You’re being stubborn.”

I let out a humorless laugh. “Yeah, well. So are you.”

For a moment, neither of us spoke. The silence stretched between us, thick with unsaid things.

Then Zac nodded, resigned. “Fine.” He picked up his phone. “Alicia? Come to my office, please.” When he hung up, he looked at me, unreadable. “I’ll tell Alicia to make the necessary arrangements and revise your contract. You’ll be back at your old post as of tomorrow.”

And so, with a word from Zac, it was done. We were done.

* * *

The next morning, I packed up my things and moved to my old department. It should have felt like a relief. Like slipping into a well-worn sweater, familiar and safe. And in some ways, it did—my old team welcomed me back with easy smiles, Darren slapping me on the back with a smirk.

“Back from the dark side, huh?” he teased.

“Escaped just in time,” I joked, forcing a grin.

“Guess that makes Isaac Darth Vader,” someone quipped, and the group laughed, rolling with the joke, oblivious to the knife twisting inside me.

I laughed along with them. Pretended everything was fine. That I wasn’t unraveling. That I wasn’t breaking apart inside.

Zac and I rarely crossed paths from then on. I asked him for space, and he gave it to me. Sometimes I caught glimpses of him—striding through the hallways, standing in the break room pouring coffee, his sleeves rolled up, tie loosened just enough to tempt. His presence filled the place even when he wasn’t near, and yet he never looked at me. I told myself I didn’t care.

On the rare occasions we did meet, we were polite. Cordial. Strangers dressed in familiar faces. That should have been the worst part—how easily we played our roles. But it wasn’t. It was the way my chest clenched every time I saw him. The way my stomach twisted when he looked past me like I wasn’t there. The way I still felt the ghost of his hands on my skin, the press of his body against mine, like a phantom bruise that refused to fade. The wound he left behind wasn’t healing. It was fresh. Aching. A hollow where he used to be.

But I kept going. Because that’s what you did when your world fell apart. You picked up the shards, even when they cut you. And you kept moving forward.

* * *

The elevator was crowded when I stepped inside one morning, packed shoulder to shoulder with people rushing to their floors. I didn’t pay attention, lost in my own

head, until I looked up and saw him. Zac.

A jolt ran through me, sharp and electric, like a live wire sparking in my chest. Our eyes locked and wouldn't break contact, and for a brief second, I forgot how to breathe. But then the rush of bodies shifted, pressing me forward—right into him.

I collided with his chest, solid and warm.

“Sorry,” I mumbled, my voice catching slightly.

“Never mind,” he muttered. But his body stiffened against mine, his breath just a little too sharp. “How—how have you been?”

“Good. You?”

“Good.”

“That’s... good.”

“Yeah.”

I felt it then—the unmistakable hardness against my hip. My stomach clenched. Heat flared low in my spine.

He went rigid, jaw tight, staring somewhere above my head as if sheer force of will could erase the way his cock was straining against me. An embarrassed flush crept up his cheeks, and something about that—about how affected he still was—sent a perverse thrill through me.

“How are things with your new assistant?” I asked, trying to act normal.

“Fine,” he almost growled. “She’s... adequate.”

“Glad to hear it.”

“Thanks.”

I tried to move, to put some space between us. But with with so many people around, I barely had room to shift—and ended up with my ass pressed against him. A sharp inhale hissed past his teeth.

“Fuck,” he whispered under his breath, so soft I wouldn’t have caught it if his lips weren’t just above my ear. His hips jerked forward, only for a second, like his body was moving before his mind could stop it.

A reckless rush of heat shot through me, but before my own arousal could betray me, I forced myself to step away as the crowd thinned. He exhaled roughly, a sound close to frustration. I turned my head slightly, just enough to see the way his hands curled into fists, the tension rippling through his body.

The doors opened onto my floor.

“Well... see you around,” I said, trying to sound casual.

“Yeah,” he grunted.

I should have walked out without looking back. Should have left him standing there, hard and frustrated, a reminder of what we’d been and what we could never be again. But I couldn’t help myself. I glanced over my shoulder.

Zac was staring at me. Not smiling. Not moving. Just watching, his eyes burning.

For a split second, the pull between us was unbearable. The same gravity that had drawn me into his orbit in the first place, that had held me there, reckless and weightless, like I belonged to him.

But I didn't. Not anymore. Maybe I never did.

The doors slid shut, cutting him from view, and something inside me cracked wide open. No, I wasn't over him. Not even close. But I had to be. Because this was the end. And no matter how much my body still craved his, no matter how much I ached for what we had, all I had left was the hope that someday, I wouldn't anymore. That someday, I'd stop looking back.

And I'd finally move on.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

The house was exactly what Chantelle wanted. A sprawling 19th-century mansion in College Hill, stately and refined, with columned porches and windows tall enough to drink in the late afternoon light. It had history, legacy—something solid, meant to last. The kind of house that didn't bend to the passage of time but stood through it, unmoving, unshaken. A statement both symbolic and literal.

The realtor, Laura, an attractive brunette in her late forties with impeccable posture and the kind of smooth, controlled voice that made every detail sound like a promise, led us through the cavernous rooms. "This property was built in 1882 by the Whitmore family," she explained as we stepped into the grand foyer, our footsteps muffled by the Persian rug stretched across the gleaming hardwood. "It's had only three owners since then, each one taking great care to preserve its unique character. The molding is all hand-carved mahogany, and the chandeliers were imported from France in the early twentieth century."

Chantelle ran her fingers along the sculptured banister as we ascended the grand staircase. "The woodwork is stunning," she mused. "Do you know if it's all original?"

Laura nodded, a pleased smile on her lips. "Yes, every inch of it. The previous owners took great care in preservation. The paneling in the library was even restored using traditional techniques to maintain its authenticity."

Chantelle glanced toward the high ceilings, the shrewd lawyer at work, no detail escaping her eye. "And structurally? No hidden surprises?"

Laura let out a knowing chuckle. "No, no surprises. My ex-husband was an architect,

so I know what to look for. This house has good bones—solid foundation, no major renovations that compromised the integrity of the original build. It's been updated where it counts, but nothing that takes away from its charm."

Chantelle drank in every word, eyes gleaming as she inspected the wainscoting. "It's perfect," she murmured, barely containing her excitement. "It has charm. Personality. And it's in the right neighborhood." She turned to me, expectant. "Don't you think, Isaac?"

I nodded because this was the part where I smiled, where I indulged her excitement and agreed that, yes, this house was everything we'd dreamed of. Even when the words felt foreign on my tongue, like I was delivering a line in someone else's play.

Chantelle kept moving ahead with Laura, their conversation shifting to logistics—offers, closing costs, potential restorations. I followed behind, distant, detached, taking in the house without really seeing it.

This was our future. But as I stood in the vast, light-drenched parlor, all I could think about was a cramped Miami hotel room. The press of a warm, sweat-slicked body against mine. The sound of my name, whispered in the dark, reverent and raw.

I let out a slow breath, shoving the thought down before it could take root.

This was the right thing. This was my life.

And Chris Landry had no place in it.

I signed the papers, put down the deposit on the house, and let Chantelle pull me into a nearby coffee shop to celebrate. She was all smiles, her voice a bright hum against the steady murmur of the crowd. I sipped my coffee, offering a weak curve of my mouth that felt foreign to my own face.

Then, through the clatter of cups and low din of conversation, I heard it. A slow, mournful guitar, curling through the air like smoke. A moment later, Chris Isaak's voice floated over the noise, and the words landed like a punch in the gut.

'I never dreamed that I'd meet somebody like you...'

My grip tightened around the cup.

'And I never dreamed that I'd lose somebody like you...'

I clenched my teeth, staring down at the dark surface of my coffee like it held all the answers. It felt like falling—falling deep, falling hard, falling through a black hole of half-forgotten memories, and landing on one perfect moment lost forever in time.

'No, I don't wanna fall in love... with you.'

The universe had a sick sense of humor.

* * *

The next morning, I was halfway through reviewing the latest financial reports when my phone buzzed. Paul's name flashed on the screen. If he was calling, it was probably about the bachelor party he insisted on throwing, despite me telling him not to.

I leaned back in my chair, pressing the phone to my ear. "Don't tell me—the strippers canceled?"

Paul snorted. "Nah, they just heard it was for you and decided to charge double."

I smirked, loosening my tie. "Remind me why I still put up with your bullshit?"

“Um, because I’m the best friend you ever had, Mr. Big Shot CEO?”

“Oh, screw you. You’ve been riding my coattails since freshman year. If anything, I should be charging you for my presence.”

“Right, because your hulking linebacker ass was such a hot commodity. Who carried the team to victory more times, the guy throwing the passes, or the guy smashing into people like a deranged buffalo?”

“Buffalo? That’s rich, coming from a guy who spent half his career flat on his back after a bad tackle.”

Paul snickered. “Hey, I was delicate! A precision instrument. You were a goddamn battering ram.”

“Delicate, my ass.” I laughed. “And even so, I was still better with the ladies.”

“Bullshit. You just had that ‘brooding asshole’ thing going for you. Women with daddy issues are into that.”

“Okay, delicate little prima donna, was there a reason for this call, or did you just want to practice roasting me for your best man speech?”

Paul chuckled, but then his tone shifted, a little more serious. “Well, I have good news and bad news. Good news is, I survived a near-death experience. Bad news is... I can’t come to the wedding.”

I straightened, an edge of concern creeping in. “What’s going on?”

There was a pause, then he sighed. “I fucked up. Went on a ski trip to Aspen last weekend—”

I rubbed my temple, irritation flaring to life beneath the surface. “Jesus.”

“Yeah. Took a nasty fall. Fractured my tibia and my fibula. Clean break, surgery, the whole shebang.”

A deep breath escaped me. “Shit, Paul.”

“Yeah, tell me about it. Doc says no travel for the next couple of months.” Another pause. “I hate to bail on you, man, but there’s no way I can fly out.”

I dragged a hand down my face, absorbing that. Paul had been my best friend since college, the one guy I actually trusted, and now—he wasn’t going to be there. “Damn,” I muttered. “That sucks.”

“Yeah. I feel like shit about it, but unless you want me rolling down the aisle in a wheelchair and a full cast—”

I huffed out a humorless laugh. “Would’ve made for some interesting photos.”

“Right? Chantelle would’ve loved that.”

I sighed. Paul didn’t even have to say it outright—Chantelle would never tolerate anything less than perfection, and we both knew it. “Well, it is what it is. Just focus on healing. We’ll grab a drink when you’re back on your feet.”

“Damn right we will. Anyway, sorry, buddy. I know this puts you in a tight spot. You’ll figure something out, though, as usual. I’m sure you’ve got options.”

I made a noncommittal sound. I didn’t. Not really. Paul had been my one real friend, and without him, I was left with acquaintances, colleagues—people who knew me, but not in any way that mattered. I had work connections. Business partners.

Associates who were more than happy to shake my hand at a gala and sip overpriced scotch while talking market projections. But I didn't have close friends. Not the kind who stood next to you on your wedding day.

Then, almost immediately, an idea formed. A stupid, reckless idea. One I already hated myself for considering. My stomach twisted.

No. That was a mistake.

And yet, ten minutes later, I was in the elevator, knowing I shouldn't, but doing it anyway.

* * *

I found Chris at his desk, laughing with his coworkers. The sound, warm and unguarded, sent something twisting in my gut. He looked at ease, his posture relaxed, his smile unrestrained—so different from the way he'd been with me lately. One of the other guys—Darren was his name, I think—was leaning in close, saying something that made Chris chuckle, their shoulders almost touching. I clenched my jaw, an ugly spark of irritation flaring before I could tamp it down.

The others noticed me first. The moment they did, the energy in the room shifted. Their laughter died, and they scattered like startled prey, mumbling excuses as they slunk back to their desks. Chris remained still, but the change in his demeanor was unmistakable. His smile faded, his shoulders tensed, and when he finally turned to face me, the light in his eyes dimmed.

Fuck, how I hated that. Hated knowing I was the reason.

“Can I have a word with you?” My voice came out rougher than intended. I cleared my throat.

For a second, I thought he might refuse. His hesitation was brief but telling. But he wasn't the type to cause a scene, not in front of his team. So he pushed back his chair, his expression carefully blank. "Sure."

I led him to the first empty conference room. He stepped inside, and I closed the door behind us, the soft click unnervingly loud. The air felt thick, charged with something I didn't want to name.

Chris turned to face me, arms crossed, expression wary. "What do you want, Zac?"

I faltered. I knew I should get straight to the point, say what I came here to say—but his presence still affected me in a way I couldn't deny. "How, um... how've you been doing?"

Chris blinked, like he hadn't expected that. "Fine." His tone was cautious, like he was waiting for the trap.

I nodded, tucking my hands into my pockets. "So... what's new?"

He gave me a look. "Really?"

I exhaled through my nose, tilting my head toward the space outside. "You and Darren seem pretty tight." The words were casual, offhand, but I felt the sharp edge beneath them.

Chris raised an eyebrow. "He's my coworker."

"Seemed like more than that."

A smirk tugged at his lips, but it didn't reach his eyes. "What's it to you?"

I shrugged. “Nothing.” I wanted to press, to demand something I had no right to, but Chris was already shifting his weight, brows drawing together.

“Are we done with the small talk?” he asked, voice edged with impatience. “Because I doubt you pulled me in here just to chat about my life.”

I breathed out, forcing myself back on track. “No,” I admitted. “I need a best man.”

His brows pulled together. “Excuse me?”

“My best friend—Paul—he broke both his legs. He can’t make it.”

Chris stared at me like I’d just spoken another language. Then, suddenly, he let out a sharp laugh—more disbelief than amusement. “And you want me to do it?”

I forced a nod. “Yes.”

His laugh turned into something closer to a scoff. “Wow. Do you even hear yourself? Do you even care how fucked-up this is?”

I stepped closer, the space between us growing smaller, heavier. “I care.”

His eyes glistened with something unreadable. “Then why me?”

Because I had no one else. Because despite everything, he was the closest thing I had to a real friend. Because the thought of standing at that altar with some near-stranger beside me felt unbearably hollow. Because I needed him near me, even if I couldn’t have him. “I need... someone I can trust,” I said instead. “You know how to handle yourself. You know me. And I know this is a lot to ask, but I wouldn’t be asking if I had another option.”

Chris searched my face like he was waiting for the catch, like this was just another way for me to twist the knife, a toxic power play of some sort. But then something in him shifted. A flicker of something resigned. “Okay,” he said, quieter now. “I’ll do it.”

I hadn’t realized how tense I was until those words landed. Relief settled over me, but it was short-lived.

Chris crossed his arms again, studying me. “Not just for you,” he added. “For myself. I think I need to see it—to see you marrying her. Maybe that’ll help me let go.”

A sharp pang lanced through my chest, but I ignored it. This was what I wanted, wasn’t it? For him to move on? I swallowed. “Thank you.”

Chris gave a small dip of his head, but the air between us felt heavy, laden with things neither of us could afford to say. I needed to leave. I needed to turn and walk away before I did something I couldn’t take back.

Instead, I lingered.

“Are you heading back to Maine for Christmas?” I asked. The words felt insignificant, but I needed to hear his voice a little longer.

He ran a hand through his hair. “Yeah, for a week. I want to see my family. I miss my home.”

A strange, hollow feeling settled in my stomach. “Right.” I wavered for a moment. “That’s good.”

Chris inclined his head, watching me like he was trying to figure something out. A beat of silence stretched, and I knew this was where it ended. I should let him go. I

should turn and walk out that door. But my feet betrayed me. Instead of stepping back, I took half a step closer.

Chris's lips parted, eyes locking onto mine. His throat worked, like he was about to say something—but then, just as quickly, he stepped away.

“See you around, Zac,” he murmured.

My throat tightened. I nodded once, turned, and forced myself to walk out. Every step felt heavier than the last. But I was doing the right thing. I was.

Then why the fuck did it feel like I was bleeding out?

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

I pulled into the driveway just as the first hints of dusk crept across the winter sky. The house looked the same as always—modest but warm, its gabled roof dusted with snow, twinkling Christmas lights wrapped around the porch railing. A wreath hung on the front door, the scent of pine, smoke, and firewood carrying faintly on the crisp air. Through the windows, I caught a glimpse of the Christmas tree in the living room, glowing softly in the dimming light.

For a second, I just sat there, hands resting on the steering wheel. This was home. It always would be. But as I stared at the familiar scene, a dull ache settled in my chest. For the first time, I wasn't sure if coming back would make me feel any less lost.

I barely had a moment to dwell on it before a blur of black fur came hurtling toward me from the porch. As soon as I stepped out, Moose, our massive Newfoundland, launched his full weight against me, almost knocking me flat against the car.

“Hey, buddy,” I grunted, laughing and petting him as I staggered back under his enthusiasm. “Who’s a good boy?”

Moose let out a deep, happy woof, his tail thumping wildly as he tried to climb into my lap despite being a hundred and fifty pounds of fur and muscle.

“All right, all right,” I chuckled, scratching behind his ears while he drooled all over me. “You’re getting clingier in your old age.”

By the time I managed to detangle myself, the front door had opened, and Josh came bounding down the steps, looking every bit the ardent, wide-eyed teen he was.

“Took you long enough,” he said, grinning as he pulled me into a tight hug.

“Sorry, bro. The traffic was insane.” I squeezed him back, feeling a warmth settle in my chest. Josh had always been the most openly affectionate of the three of us—especially when we were younger and he followed me around like a shadow. Even now, at eighteen and almost as tall as me, my baby brother still looked at me the way he had as a kid—like I was some kind of hero.

Emily appeared in the doorway, arms crossed against the cold. “Jeez, you saw him, what, three weeks ago?” she deadpanned. “You’re acting like he just got back from war or something.”

Josh shot her a look. “Oh, look at me, I’m too cool to care,” he said in a mock feminine voice. “Spoiler alert: you’re not. And we all know you’re gonna turn into a total pest in about five minutes.”

Emily smirked, then turned to me with a more subdued, but still tender smile. “About time you showed up.”

“Hey, Em.” I pulled her in for a quick hug before stepping back. “Still rocking the bangs, I see.”

“If it ain’t broke...” she said smoothly.

Before she could add to it, another voice called from the doorway. “All right, don’t keep your mother waiting. Get inside before you all freeze.”

Dad stood on the porch, hands tucked into the pockets of his jeans, watching us with that same calm presence that made him seem unshakable, no matter what life threw his way. He looked the same—an old flannel shirt layered over a faded tee, a baseball cap pulled low over his salt-and-pepper hair, the sharpness in his gaze always there,

like he was measuring the world around him and filing away what mattered.

“Hey, Dad,” I said as I stepped up onto the porch.

He clapped a hand on my shoulder, giving it a firm squeeze. “Hello, son.” He grinned. “Look at you. Every time you come back, you seem more like a real grown-up.”

That simple statement sent something warm and bittersweet curling in my chest. A smile ghosted across my lips. “Thanks.”

We all shuffled inside, Moose padding after us, his massive paws thudding against the hardwood. The warmth hit me instantly, the unmistakable scent of home wrapping around me like a blanket—wood smoke from the fireplace, something sweet baking in the oven, and the vague trace of my mom’s favorite holiday candles. The Christmas decorations covered nearly every surface—garlands over the mantel, stockings hanging in their usual spots, the tree blinking in the corner, its ornaments a mix of delicate glass baubles and messy childhood crafts.

I had only enough time to take it all in before Mom bustled in from the kitchen, her wavy blonde bob gleaming under the light, still holding onto that youthful softness despite the years. Her smile lit up her face, and her eyes twinkled with warmth, the kind that made you feel instantly at home. She opened her arms wide. “There’s my big boy.”

I let her pull me into a tight hug, exhaling against her shoulder. “Hey, Mom.”

She pulled back just enough to look at me, her keen gaze scanning my face. “You look tired. Have you been eating enough?”

“Yes, Mom.”

“Sleeping?”

I hesitated a fraction too long, enough for her brows to knit together. “It’s just work stress,” I cut in before she could press, forcing a smile. “I’m fine, really. I promise.”

Josh groaned from the hallway. “Can we have this heartwarming reunion over food? I’ve been waiting for Christmas dinner all day.”

Mom shook her head but laughed, waving us toward the dining room. “Fine, fine. Go wash up first.”

* * *

Dinner was everything I’d missed—loud, chaotic, filled with teasing and laughter. Josh inhaled food like it was a competitive sport, Emily provided her usual running commentary on the latest gossip, and Dad threw in the occasional dry remark that had Mom shaking her head but smiling.

“So,” Emily said, fixing me with a knowing smirk as she reached for the mashed potatoes. “What’s the scoop from Providence? Any boyfriends?”

I nearly choked on my food.

Josh snorted. “That means yes.”

“No, it doesn’t,” I shot back, feeling heat creep up my neck. “There’s no one.”

For a split second, I felt the name forming on my tongue, the shape of it dangerous, too familiar. But he was never my boyfriend. And I was never his anything. I reached for my drink, swallowing both the words and the ache threatening to surface.

My parents exchanged a look while Emily arched a skeptical eyebrow. “Uh-huh. And that totally unconvincing response isn’t suspicious at all.”

I groaned. “Can we talk about someone else’s love life? Like, I don’t know, yours?”

Emily shrugged. “I’ve been seeing this guy from my art history class for a few weeks, but it’s nothing serious.”

Josh made a dismissive sound. “Sounds like a total nerd.”

“Oh, shut up,” Emily shot back. “You’re just mad because you’re still single.”

“By choice,” Josh muttered around a mouthful of food.

I snorted. “Sure, buddy.”

The teasing and laughter continued, and for a little while, I let myself get lost in it. Let myself pretend I wasn’t carrying a hole in my heart the size of an ocean. But no matter how much I laughed, no matter how many times I let myself get caught up in the moment, there was always something lingering at the edges. A quiet ache. A shadow just behind the smile.

Of course, Mom noticed. She always did.

She caught me alone tomorrow evening, while we were cleaning up after dinner and a Harry Potter movie marathon, her hands buried in soapy water, her gaze flicking to me as I dried the plates. “You’re quieter this time,” she said, not accusing, simply observing. “You’re usually bouncing off the walls when you’re home.”

I breathed out a chuckle. “Work’s been a lot lately.”

Her brow creased. “Are you sure that’s all?”

“Yeah, Mom. I’m fine.” I reached for another plate, keeping my focus on the task, but I could feel her studying me, like she could read between the spaces of my words.

She sighed, drying her hands on a towel. “I just worry about you, living all alone out there.”

“I’m not alone.” The lie slipped out too easily. “I have friends. I have a life. I’m staying busy.”

She hesitated, then nodded, letting it go. “Well, don’t get too busy. Enjoy yourself. Be happy. And always remember that your father and I are very proud of you.”

“Thanks, Mom. I will. But honestly, I am happy.”

And I let myself believe, just for a moment, that if I said it enough times, it would become true. But later that night, lying in my childhood bedroom and staring up at the glow-in-the-dark stars I’d stuck to the ceiling as a kid, with Moose curled up against my side, the weight of it all came rushing back.

The house was quiet now, nothing but the faint creak of the old radiator and the muffled wind outside. The Christmas lights outside my window cast a soft, golden glow, their twinkle almost mocking in its warmth. Moose let out a long, heavy sigh, his warm breath fanning gently over my arm. His weight was solid, grounding, the slow rise and fall of his chest steady against my side. I focused on it, on the quiet comfort of him, anything to keep from thinking about the absence of another body next to mine.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

Christmas Eve passed in quiet, calculated normalcy. Chantelle had insisted on staying in this year—just the two of us, a low-key dinner, chilling in front of the TV. “No traveling, no obligations, no small talk with people I don’t care about,” she’d said with a small, satisfied smile as she poured herself a glass of Merlot. “Just peace.”

And it was peaceful, in a way. Her apartment was still and warm, bathed in the soft shimmer of candlelight. The air was thick with the scent of roasted duck and winter spices, curling into the corners of the room. Outside, the city lay hushed beneath a fresh blanket of snow, the streetlights casting a dim golden haze over the silent roads, muffling the world beyond our windows. The whole evening should have been perfect. But something was missing—a piece of me I didn’t even know I’d lost.

It started small. A fleeting thought, a trick of the mind. As I set the table, I placed two wine glasses down and, without thinking, imagined someone else beside me. Someone who would have nudged my arm playfully and shot me a teasing look. “Look at you, Mr. Fancy. What, no champagne? No fireworks?”

The thought almost made me smile. I shook it off, poured the wine, and sat down.

Chantelle talked as we ate—something about a PR disaster with a major client she represented, a petty fight between two of her friends. I responded like I cared, but I wasn’t really there. The whole time, my fingers itched for my phone without me even realizing it, a restless urge I shoved down before it could take shape.

Later, we curled up on the couch, watching a movie, but even that felt off.

“I don’t get it,” Chantelle said, swirling the last of her wine lazily as Harry Potter and

the Prisoner of Azkaban flared across the screen, the blue glow from the television casting long, shifting shadows on the walls. “Why do people love this so much? It’s so... juvenile. It’s even worse than those movies about a magic ring.”

A dry laugh escaped me but I didn’t answer. I knew many people like Chantelle—people who only found value in things tethered to immediate reality, who outgrew the magic of fantasy and never looked back. Who was it that said stories of imagination tend to upset those without one? I couldn’t remember. But it always made me wonder what happened to people like that—what moments in their lives chipped away at them until they let their inner child die.

Then I remembered how Chris’s face had lit up when he mentioned wanting to visit the Wizarding World that one time—how he’d rattled off some trivia, laughing at himself for being a ‘nerd about it.’ I could hear him in my head now, making some dumb joke that would have had me rolling my eyes, biting back a grin. I had the sudden, ridiculous urge to book a first flight to Orlando just to take him there, just to see his eyes light up the way they always did when he was excited about something.

My hand crawled toward my phone.

‘Tell me you’re a Gryffindor without telling me you’re a Gryffindor.’

The message sat there, cursor blinking. All I had to do was hit send. Instead, I stared at it for too long, then sighed and deleted it.

The rest of the movie dragged. Chantelle barely watched, scrolling through her phone, making an occasional comment I didn’t respond to. I reached for my phone again. Opened my last conversation with Chris. Scrolled up. Stopped myself.

For fuck’s sake . This was getting pathetic. I needed to pull it together. Chris was only a friend. That was all. And I was fine.

Except I wasn't. Because it was Christmas, and I was sitting on my couch with the woman I was supposed to marry in three weeks, and I had never felt more alone.

Chantelle shifted beside me, resting her head against my shoulder. "You're quiet tonight," she murmured.

I gave a weak smile, pressed a kiss to her hair. "Just a headache."

She hummed in acknowledgment, but she didn't push.

We used to talk more. We used to fill the quiet. Now, it stretched between us, thick and heavy, settling into the spaces where conversation used to be, where closeness used to be. And neither of us seemed willing to acknowledge how little we had to say.

* * *

Melissa's townhouse smelled like baby powder and vanilla, the air warm and slightly humid from whatever she'd been cooking before I arrived. The second she opened the door, barefoot and wearing an oversized sweater, a big smile stretched across her face.

"Zac! It's so good to see you!"

I huffed a laugh, stepping inside and shaking off the cold drizzle clinging to my coat. "Good to see you too, Mel."

She pulled me into a quick hug, eyeing the glossy white gift bag in my hand. "What's this?"

"For the baby." I handed it over, watching as she peeked inside and pulled out the oversized plush teddy bear I'd picked up on a whim. It was ridiculously large, soft to

the point of being obscene, and completely impractical.

“Oh my God,” Melissa breathed, cradling it against her chest. “This is adorable.”

“You said he likes soft things,” I muttered, feeling unreasonably self-conscious.

“He does. I love it.” She beamed, then turned and beckoned me to follow. “Come on, I was just about to put him down for a nap. Coffee?”

“Please.”

We moved into the living room, where a bassinet sat next to the couch, a pale blue blanket shifting slightly with the baby’s tiny breaths. Melissa set the bear down, then leaned over the bassinet and scooped up a bundle of soft cotton and warmth, cooing under her breath.

“Meet baby Connor. Connor, this is Uncle Zac.”

“Hi there,” I said awkwardly, looming over them like a mountain.

“Can you hold him while I get the coffee?”

I stiffened. “No, I—”

But she was already pressing the baby into my arms. I barely caught him in time, heart lurching at the sudden weight of him. He was so small. Warm. His tiny face scrunched up in protest before settling, one hand balling into a fist against my chest.

Melissa smirked. “You’ll be fine. Just don’t drop him.”

“Very reassuring.”

She disappeared into the kitchen, leaving me standing there, holding an infant like he was made of glass. I'd never wanted kids. Never saw the appeal. I didn't know what to do with them, how to talk to them. I didn't even like them. And yet...

The baby made a soft sound, snuggling deeper against me. His scent—milk and something faintly sweet—rose up, triggering some deep, primal part of me I hadn't known existed. Before I realized it, I'd adjusted my arms, holding him more securely. The feeling was strange, almost foreign. Like holding something too delicate for a man like me. Like I wasn't built for this—but for some reason, he didn't seem to mind. He was soft, fragile, completely defenseless. The thought stirred something unsettling in my chest.

Melissa returned a few minutes later, mugs in hand. Her eyes flicked to me, to the baby curled against me like he belonged there. A knowing smile touched her lips. "I knew you'd like him."

I scowled. "I never said that."

"Uh-huh." She put the mugs on the coffee table, then carefully took the baby from me. His teeny hand curled around my finger, and for a moment he wouldn't let go. Melissa smiled. "He likes you, too." She flopped onto the couch, rocking the baby in her arms as she motioned for me to sit.

I settled into a sofa chair across from her. "So, how's mom-life treating you?"

Melissa let out a breathy laugh. "Don't even get me started. It's exhausting, messy, and I don't think I've had a full night's sleep since he was born." She shook her head, but there was warmth in her eyes. "John helps as much as he can, but with work, he's gone a lot, so most of it falls on me. Some days I feel like I'm running on fumes." She glanced down at the baby, a small smile curving her lips. "But then he looks at me with those big eyes, like I'm his whole world, and somehow, it's all worth it. I

wouldn't change it for anything."

I couldn't help but smile. "I'm glad. Motherhood suits you."

She leaned in and took a sip of her coffee, her eyes roaming over my face. "So, catch me up. What's going on at Nova? Who's suffering in my absence?"

I smirked. "Everyone. But mostly me."

She laughed. "I warned you this company would fall apart without me."

"Your replacement did a decent job."

"Did?"

I exhaled, trying to sound casual. "He's one of our new software developers. Chris Landry. I... got to know him better and thought he had potential. So, I made him my PA. But things didn't work out, and he went back to his original post. Now I've got Shirley."

Melissa pulled a face. "Shirley?"

"She's... competent."

"That bad, huh?"

I didn't answer, but she got the message. We talked shop for a while, covering the usual chaos of Nova Systems—the board's latest grumblings, a merger in the works, the endless struggle to keep certain departments from killing each other. After a while, Melissa leaned back, tilting her head.

“And how’s the wedding coming along? Only two more weeks, right?”

A spike of tension ran through me. “It’s fine.” The words came out clipped, automatic. Too automatic.

Melissa’s brow lifted. “Just fine?”

I hesitated, then lifted a shoulder. “Chantelle has everything under control.”

She rolled her eyes. “I bet she does. But how do you feel about all of it?” When I didn’t answer, her gaze sharpened. “Zac,” she said softly. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“Bullshit.”

I sighed, rubbing my beard. “I don’t know. Maybe nothing’s wrong. Maybe everything is.” A humorless laugh escaped me. “Maybe I just don’t know what the hell I’m doing anymore.”

Melissa studied me, then set her mug down with a quiet clink. “I never liked her, you know. Chantelle.”

I looked up. A muscle ticked in my jaw. “You’ve never said that before.”

“You never would’ve listened before. And it’s not my place to pry in your personal life, but... I don’t know. She always struck me as fake. Too perfect, you know? Like, nobody’s that refined all the time. Besides, you two are nothing alike. She appears charming and gracious, but underneath all that polished exterior, she’s cold and ruthless like a shark.” Her voice softened. “You, on the other hand, are the exact opposite. You only act cold and harsh, but you’re not. You never have been.”

A lump formed in my throat.

Melissa studied me, head slightly askew. “And do you want to know something else?” I didn’t answer, but she continued anyway. “The only time you’ve smiled since walking in here was when you talked about that new PA guy. Chris, was it?”

My breath caught. I gripped my mug a little tighter, but the warmth of the ceramic did nothing to ground me. Had I really been that transparent? I shifted in my seat, but I didn’t say anything. Couldn’t. I felt... raw. Exposed.

Melissa reached over and squeezed my knee. “You deserve to be happy, Zac.”

I swallowed hard, my grip tightening even more around the mug. “I don’t even know what that looks like anymore.”

Melissa only smiled, like she knew something I didn’t. “You’ll figure it out. You always do.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

The wind cut sharp as I stepped out of my car, breath curling into the cold January air. The streets were blanketed in fresh snow, trampled down to a patchwork of slush and ice. Storefronts still twinkled with lingering holiday lights, their windows fogged from the warmth inside. Providence in winter had a different kind of charm—quieter, more intimate, like the whole city had exhaled after the seasonal chaos.

The festivities were over—at least for those of us with jobs. But the students were still on break, so Tyler was sticking around, crashing at his mom's new place with his older brother. It worked out for me. I'd been itching to see him for months, and we set up a meeting as soon as I got back from Maine.

We didn't get to do this often. This would only be our third time hanging out in person—the first was in Gettysburg, after the match where we'd met, and the second was that spring, when we met up halfway between our homes. The rest of our friendship had been built over texts, late-night calls, and voice messages full of trash talk and easy laughter. But even with the distance, Tyler had become one of the few people I actually counted on.

'Try not to cry when you lay eyes on me,' I'd texted that morning. 'I know it's been a while.'

He'd answered right away. 'I'll be sure to bring tissues. For you.'

Smirking at the memory, I tugged my scarf higher against the bite of the wind. I spotted Tyler before he saw me, leaning against a lamppost outside the café we'd picked, hands stuffed into his coat pockets. His dark hair was a tousled mess from the wind, his cheeks pink from the cold. He was still as hot as I remembered, and the

sight of him made the tightness in my chest relax.

“Hey there, T-bag.”

Tyler turned, grinning as he pushed off the post. “C-man!”

Before I could react, he pulled me into a solid hug, the kind that lingered long enough to say yeah, I missed you too . I clapped him on the back before we pulled apart, shaking off the moment with a smirk.

“Look at you,” Tyler said, giving me an exaggerated once-over. “All grown up, working a real job, dressing like a corporate drone. What happened to the beast I fought in Gettysburg?”

I scoffed. “He evolved. Got a paycheck. Pays rent. You’ll see it for yourself soon. What, one more semester and you’re out in the big wide world?”

“Yep. Which is why I’m sticking to my poor, starving college student aesthetic for as long as I can.”

“Well, you’re pulling it off quite nicely.”

Tyler flashed me a wide smile. “You haven’t changed. Can’t have a single convo without flirting.”

I barked out a laugh. “I’m nothing if not consistent.”

Yeah, Ty and I didn’t get to see each other often. But when we did, it was like no time had passed at all.

He nudged his chin toward the café. “C’mon. I need coffee before you make me

regret this meetup.”

I followed him inside, shaking off the cold as the door swung shut behind us. The scent of espresso and melted chocolate enveloped us like a warm hug. Golden light pooled over wooden tables, and a string of twinkling fairy lights framed the fogged-up windows. The soft hum of conversation and the clink of ceramic cups filled the air, making it feel like we’d just stepped into some little snow globe world where time moved slower.

We slid into a booth near the window, shedding our snow-dusted coats. A little chalkboard on the table read Try our special: Peppermint Mocha! in loopy handwriting. We ordered our drinks, settling into the cozy warmth as streetlights outside reflected off slushy pavement.

“So, how are you liking Providence?” I asked, pulling off my scarf and tossing it onto the seat beside me.

Tyler leaned back, stretching his arms along the booth. “Not bad. My mom’s new place is nice—not as big as our old house in Stamford, but still. And the city’s got a good vibe. Feels historic but, like, not archaic, you know?”

I nodded, looking around the place. “Yeah, it grows on you.”

Tyler’s mouth quirked. “Like a fungus.”

“You should put that on a postcard.”

He grinned, then drummed his fingers against the table. “Actually, my brother Matt’s the one really getting a kick out of this place. Dragged me to see Lovecraft’s house the other day.”

I blinked. “Who?”

“Some old-timey horror writer Matt’s obsessed with.”

“I’m more of a Stephen King type of guy.”

He chuckled. “Good thing Matt isn’t here to hear that. He’s at the cemetery right now visiting the guy’s grave. Tried to get me to go with him, but I figured I’d rather hang out with someone who doesn’t spend his holidays lurking in graveyards.”

The waitress brought us two steaming cups of coffee, smiled, and disappeared. My lips curved. “Glad to know I rank above dead horror writers.”

Tyler smirked, lifting his cup in a mock toast. “Barely.”

The warmth of the café, the low murmur of conversation around us, the ease of being here with him—it all settled into something comfortable, familiar. Maybe I didn’t know anything about old horror writers, but I knew this . And it felt good. “So, what’s new? Tell me everything.”

Tyler launched into an update—his last semester at Williams, his wrestling season going strong, his relationship with Blake. He couldn’t keep from smiling when he said, “We’ve already started making plans for after graduation.”

There was a quiet certainty in the way he said it, like it was just a fact, a natural step forward. I was happy for them—genuinely—but a whisper of jealousy twisted through me, quiet and sharp.

Before I could dwell on it, Tyler’s grin widened. “Oh, and get this—my dad proposed to his boyfriend.”

My eyebrows shot up. “Your childhood friend?”

“The same.”

“Holy shit. No way.”

“Yep. Full-on romantic gesture and everything. Got down on one knee, made a speech, probably made Danny cry. They’re getting married in April.” He shook his head, but his smile was warm, a little awed. “Nuts, right?”

“Not really. From what you’ve told me, your dad seems crazy in love with him.”

“Yeah, I know. It’s just wild to think about. But, on the other hand...” He trailed off, glancing down at his coffee before looking up again. “If Blake asked me, I’d say yes in a heartbeat.”

Something in his voice made my chest tighten—not with bitterness, not even jealousy, exactly, but... something else. Longing, maybe. Tyler was a year younger than me, yet he had found his soulmate already, the love of his life. And here I was, scarcely a week away from standing beside a man I’d foolishly thought I could have, watching him say ‘forever’ to someone else.

I forced a grin. “I bet you two are next.”

Tyler smiled, almost shy. For a moment, he looked like the same guy I’d met in Gettysburg, back when he was still figuring himself out. But he was different now, more confident, more open, happy. He nudged my foot under the table, pulling me out of my reverie. “Okay, your turn. What’s new in Chris Landry’s tragic love life?”

I groaned, leaning back against the worn leather of my seat. “Where do I even start?”

“Start with the day you ripped your pants and flashed your ass at your boss. I need all the details.”

I let out a breathy laugh, shaking my head, and then—because if there was anyone I could tell, it was Tyler—I told him. Everything. The whole messy, convoluted saga of me and Isaac Steele. The slow build-up. The shift from friendship to something more. The stolen moments, the dizzying highs, the inevitable heartbreak. And now, the absolute mindfuck of standing next to him as his best man.

By the time I finished, Tyler was just staring at me, his brows furrowed like he was trying to solve a puzzle that didn’t have a solution. “Chris, what the actual fuck .”

A dry laugh escaped me. “Yeah. That about sums it up.”

He ran a hand through his hair. “Okay, I gotta be honest with you. I have no idea what to say here. This is some next-level shit.”

“You think I don’t know that?” I shook my head, exhaling slowly. “But it is what it is.”

He studied me for a moment, his teasing gone. “You sure you’ll be able to handle it?”

I lifted my cup, took a slow sip, letting the warmth settle deep. “Well, I better be,” I said. “The wedding’s a week from now. There’ll be a rehearsal two days before it, so we’ll see how that goes.”

Tyler let out a low whistle, then shook his head, his eyes soft with sympathy. “Man, I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes.”

A quiet chuckle slipped past my lips, but it didn’t quite reach my eyes. Neither would I , I thought. But there was no folding now. The cards were on the table, and all I

could do was play the hand I'd been dealt—keep my face blank, my guard up, and hope like hell I didn't lose the last pieces I was still holding onto.

The show must go on.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

The show must go on .

That's what I kept telling myself as I buttoned my cuffs, my hands steadier than they should have been.

Freddie Mercury had recorded that song while he was dying. Weak, exhausted, knowing his body was failing him, but still, he faced the microphone and sang like nothing in the world could break him. His voice soared—stronger than ever, defiant, transcendent. He delivered perfection on the first take, and the rest was history. 'Inside my heart is breaking, my makeup may be flaking, but my smile still stays on.' That was the kind of strength I needed now.

I stared at my reflection in the mirror. My tuxedo hung crisp and precise on my frame, a costume tailored for a role I was supposed to play. The rehearsal was about to start, this ridiculous performance where we'd practice standing in the right place, walking at the right time, pretending this was something natural and inevitable. A choreographed prelude to a day that would bind me to Chantelle forever.

My stomach clenched.

Chantelle wanted it to be perfect—flawless, seamless, a pristine execution of a future she had designed down to the last detail. Every step, every word, every gesture accounted for. And I would follow through because that was expected of me. Because that's what I thought I wanted.

'I'll face it with a grin, I'm never giving in, on with the show.'

I exhaled slowly, tugging at my bowtie. The sacristy was dim, tucked away from the grandeur of the main hall, its small stained-glass window casting muted colors over the dark wooden cabinets lining the walls. The air was thick with incense and aged linen, tinged with the faint chill of stone walls that had absorbed centuries of whispered prayers. A single arched doorway led back into the cathedral, where the others were already gathered, waiting.

Beyond that door, Grace Church stretched in solemn elegance—Gothic arches soaring toward the heavens, chandeliers suspended like frozen constellations beneath the high, vaulted ceiling. Stained glass fractured the fading light into kaleidoscopic patterns across the marble floor and polished pews. It was a place meant for devotion, for belief. But belief in what? That love was sacred? That vows were unbreakable? That standing at the altar meant something beyond a carefully arranged recital?

Before I could spiral deeper into cynicism, someone knocked on the door, and when I turned around, Chris was there, stepping inside the small chamber.

“Hey, are you ready?” he said, closing the door behind him. “They sent me to look for you. Duty of the best man, I suppose.”

My hands curled into fists. He was so fucking beautiful. Dressed sharp in his navy blue suit, his blond hair tousled just enough, his lips slightly parted like he was about to say something else—but didn’t. His eyes flickered over me, a fleeting softness before he schooled his expression into a mask of indifference.

I had tried to keep my distance from him, just like he’d asked. He wanted space, and I’d told myself I could give it to him. But the truth was, I couldn’t. I had slipped—small things, stolen moments, a perfectly timed encounter in the hallways when I knew he’d be there, a visit to his department I hadn’t meant to make. Because when I talked to him, it was the only time I felt like myself. Like I wasn’t suffocating under the weight of everything I was supposed to be.

“So, this is it,” I said, taking a step closer to him.

“Yeah.”

“I...” For a moment I got lost in his eyes. “I never meant to hurt you.”

He shrugged, casting his gaze down. “But you said it yourself. It was always going to end like this. You, marrying her. Me, being left behind. I knew it from the start.”

I took another step closer. “Then how can you still put up with me?”

Chris parted his lips as if to speak, then pressed them shut, like he was holding the truth back. He looked like he wanted to step back, to put more distance between us, but with his back against the door, there was nowhere to go.

When he didn’t respond, I stepped in, closing what little space remained between us, my body almost brushing his. “Tell me,” I pressed, my voice dropping to a whisper. “Why do you keep going along with this?”

His throat bobbed as he swallowed. “Because I’m a fucking idiot, that’s why.”

“No,” I murmured. “That’s not it.” I brought my hand to his face, my thumb tracing the edge of his jaw. His blue eyes fluttered shut, his breath catching. When he opened them again, something in them had changed.

“What do you want me to tell you? That I still—that I still have feelings for you?”

I swallowed hard. “Sometimes our thoughts and our feelings take us where we can no longer go,” I said quietly. “Feelings are not captive.”

Chris let out a small, bitter laugh, but there was no humor in it. “Maybe it would be

better if they were.”

I shook my head. “No, it wouldn’t.”

His gaze lifted to mine, searching. “Then tell me how to stop wanting you.”

I didn’t answer. Because there was no answer.

I moved before I could stop myself, pressing my body against his, grabbing him, crashing my mouth against his.

Chris whimpered, hands pushing against my chest, but I didn’t let him go. My fingers tangled in his hair, my other arm locking around his waist to pull him flush against me. He made a small sound—half protest, half surrender—and it was all the invitation I needed. My tongue slid past his lips, claiming, desperate, my kiss rough, searing, everything I had been holding back crashing to the surface in one violent, unstoppable wave.

He gasped against my mouth, his resistance faltering. “Zac—”

But I wasn’t listening. My hands roamed over him, greedy, starved. I grabbed his belt, yanked him closer, my fingers skimming down the back of his thighs. And then—

A sharp rip.

Chris tensed, jerking back. “Did you just—”

I didn’t need to look. I could feel a jagged tear across the ass of his pants and briefs, exposing bare skin underneath. I’d torn both in a single swipe.

For a beat, neither of us spoke. Then Chris groaned. “You have got to be kidding me.”

Just like that day in my office, when we first met. When his pants gave up the fight, and I burst out laughing at his predicament. But this time I wasn’t laughing. My hands locked onto the sliver of exposed flesh, my breath coming fast, ragged. Back then, at our first meeting, I didn’t know what I wanted. But now? Now there was no doubt. “I’ll buy you a new one. Ten more. Anything you want.”

Chris started to pull away, but I caught him, spinning him toward the sacristy credens and bending him over. He braced his hands against the polished wood, looking over his shoulder, eyes blown wide. “Zac, what the fuck are you—”

“I need this,” I rasped, my fingers splaying over his lower back, trailing down. “I need you .”

His breath escaped in a shaky exhale, his resolve crumbling as I dropped to my knees behind him. My hands gripped his hips, pushing his torn pants further apart, exposing him completely. I’d never eaten ass before—never wanted to, not with anyone else. But for him, I would. For him, I had to.

I spread his round cheeks, the soft golden fuzz dusting the creamy skin, my mouth descending right into his cleft. The first swipe of my tongue across his hole had him jerking, a strangled moan tearing from his throat.

I didn’t stop. I licked him open, slow and filthy, my hands locking him in place as my tongue worked deeper. Chris cursed, his thighs trembling, his body bowing forward over the cabinet, his ass pushing out into my face. His fingers curled over the wood, grasping for something—anything—to hold on to.

I groaned against him, my cock aching, straining against my zipper. We weren’t

prepared for sex, but it had to happen anyway. I'd die if it didn't. So I slicked him up, pressing my tongue into his tightness again and again, knowing there was no lube, nothing but this—my mouth, my spit, the heat of my breath against his shaking flesh.

Chris choked out my name, his voice cracking. "Zac—fuck, fuck —"

I dragged my tongue one last time over his entrance before standing, gripping his waist, pressing the length of my body against his back.

"Someone might come," Chris panted, his forehead dropping against the table.

"I don't give a fuck." I swallowed hard. "I need to be inside you now ." My hands moved back, my fingers trembling as I unzipped my fly. I took my cock and balls out without even unbuckling my belt, spitting on it and rubbing the saliva over the hard, throbbing length. And then I was pushing inside him, bare and unrestrained, my cockhead sinking into that impossible heat.

He let out a ragged sound, his fingers clenching. "Oh God—"

I held him steady, easing in, inch by inch, my jaw clenched so hard it hurt. He was so tight, so hot, his body clinging to me, taking me deeper until I was fully seated inside him. A shudder wracked through me. I didn't move right away. Just felt him. Surrounding me, holding me, his .

Chris bent his head, his breath hitching. His voice came out barely above a whisper. "I hate this... I hate that you can make me feel like this."

Like this . He didn't need to explain. I knew what he meant. The way the world narrowed when we were in the same room. The way logic ceased to matter. The way we existed in this strange, fragile space between defiance and inevitability.

I pressed my forehead against the back of his neck, my hands gripping his hips. “I can’t give you up,” I admitted, my voice wrecked, broken. “I don’t know how.”

Chris blew out a shaky breath. And then he pushed back against me, rocking his hips, wordlessly telling me it’s okay .

That was all I needed. I pulled back and thrust into him, hard, deep, my hands sliding up his chest, gripping him like I could keep him. Like if I fucked him deep enough, claimed him completely, he wouldn’t slip away.

He moaned, his body trembling, his hands fisting the tablecloth. “Love isn’t supposed to feel like this.”

“Like what?” I asked, rocking into him faster and faster.

“Like it’s killing me. But I’m willing to die anyway.”

There it was. The truth, laid bare. No confessions. No grand declarations. Just this—the quiet devastation of knowing we were way past the point of no return.

A sharp ache bloomed in my chest. I swallowed it down, tilting his chin up so he had to look at me. “Then why does it feel like coming alive?”

I bent over him, pressing my mouth to his neck, biting down, marking him. My thrusts turned frantic, desperate, my hips slamming into him, my breath ragged in his ear.

He was mine. Mine.

And yet, deep down, I knew—I was the one who was his.

And when I came, shuddering inside him, burying myself as deep as I could go, flooding his insides with my cum, I felt it—something breaking apart in me, something irreversible. As I slumped over him, my breath still mingling with his, I knew I'd already lost.

Because this wasn't just fucking. This was surrender.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

I staggered into the corridor, the cool stone walls pressing in around me as I tried to steady my breathing. My hands shook as I fumbled to straighten my suit jacket, hoping it was long enough to cover the damage in my pants. When my fingers moved lower, the torn fabric was a sharp, undeniable proof of what had just happened. Of the way Zac had taken me, claimed me, whispered my name like a vow even as his mouth moved over my skin.

His load was still fresh inside me. The heat of him lingered, seared into my body like a brand.

I swiped a hand over my face, took a deep breath, and forced myself to gather some semblance of composure. But it was impossible. I felt wrecked, ruined, my heart hammering so hard I thought it might break through my ribs. I wasn't sure if I wanted to collapse or run straight back into that room, grab Zac by the lapels, and demand to know what the hell came next.

The sound of voices up ahead snapped me back to reality. The others were waiting.

As I stepped into the main area of Grace Church, heads turned. There weren't many, thank God—the bride's parents, her maid of honor, the priest, and me. No bridal or groom party. The priest frowned, confusion etched into his features. Chantelle's father checked his watch. The maid of honor raised an eyebrow.

"Where's Isaac?" Chantelle's mother asked.

"He's... coming," I mumbled, feeling my cheeks burn under their stares. I felt exposed, like my dirty secret was visible to all, like they could tell what Zac and I had

just done behind that closed door.

Before anyone could question me further, the sound of heavy footsteps echoed through the church, and Zac strode into the cathedral, his bowtie loosened, his pants slightly mussed. His gaze skipped over me like I wasn't even there. I couldn't tell what he was thinking, what he planned to do, but the air around him crackled with tension, still charged from the way he claimed me.

He walked past me, toward the altar, his posture sharp with purpose.

"We're ready!" Chantelle's father called.

And then, with a rustle of white silk and lace, she emerged from the entrance, radiant and smiling, a snow queen coming for her prize. The light caught the delicate sheen of her gown as she glided down the aisle, every step graceful and deliberate. She took her place across from Zac, effortlessly glamorous, impeccable. The sheer veil trailed behind her like a mist, and the bridal bouquet was cradled in her hands, white roses matching the softness of her dress. "You may begin now," she said to the priest, her voice clear as a bell, ringing with authority and poise.

"All right," the priest said. "Thanks for the permission."

He started talking, but I barely heard a word of it. His voice seemed muffled, an indistinct murmur rising to the vaulted ceiling, drifting past me like the distant hum of a storm I couldn't escape. I couldn't focus on his words, couldn't grasp their meaning. All I could do was stare at Zac, standing there so damn sure, his eyes locked on the woman in front of him. My stomach twisted, like it was being wound tighter with every passing second.

The rest of us stood beside the bride and groom in reverent silence, the air thick with the weight of unspoken vows. Candlelight flickered against stained glass, casting

delicate shadows that seemed to dance in mocking synchrony with the ache gnawing at my chest. Everything felt surreal, dreamlike, as if I were drifting outside my own body, unable to feel anything but the crushing realization that the man I loved was slipping further away from me with every word the priest spoke.

It was happening. It was real. And I had to watch it unfold. My heart broke a little with each breath I took, and I was helpless to stop it.

And then—

“No.” Zac’s voice cut through the hush like a thunderclap. Every eye in the room snapped to him, but he didn’t flinch. His gaze was fixed, unwavering, as though the words had torn free from his chest against his will. For a moment, I thought I hadn’t heard him right—but then he spoke again. “I can’t marry you, Chantelle.”

Gasps echoed through the church. Zac’s words hung in the air, incense-thick with finality, as if time itself had stopped. The tension crackled like static, and for one frozen moment, everything—everyone—stood suspended in disbelief. Chantelle stiffened beside him, her veil trembling as she turned to stare at him, wide-eyed.

“What?” she breathed, her voice a tremulous whisper, as if the very idea of what he’d said hadn’t quite reached her brain.

“I can’t do this,” Zac said, loud and clear, his voice steady, resolute. “I won’t.”

“Oh my God!” Chantelle’s mother cried out, clutching her husband, and then silence fell. Stunned, weighted, suffocating.

Chantelle’s expression twisted, flickering from confusion to realization to fury in the span of a heartbeat. Then, suddenly, she smiled—a smile as beautiful as it was terrifying. “You are not doing this to me,” she said, her voice dangerously calm.

Zac inhaled, straightening. “I’m sorry, Chantelle. I do care about you. I always have. But I’m not in love with you. Hell, I don’t think I even knew what love was... until I found it where I least expected to.”

A murmur swept through the crowd. Chantelle’s father surged to his feet, his face darkening. “This is outrageous!”

“Think about what you’re doing, Isaac,” Chantelle spat. “Think carefully.”

But Zac shook his head. “Oh, I know what I’m doing,” he said. “I’ve never been so sure in my entire life. And I don’t mean to hurt you. But I won’t lie to you, either.” He exhaled, then turned to face the assembled party. “Because the truth is—I’m in love with someone else.”

The priest’s mouth fell open. Chantelle’s father paled. Someone let out a low, startled exhale.

I felt my entire body go still.

Zac’s eyes found mine, clinging like a lifeline. “I’m in love with him.”

For a moment, there was only silence—thick, stunned, absolute. And then, with a strangled noise, Chantelle’s mother wobbled in her seat and collapsed in a dead faint. The maid of honor gasped, clutching the back of a pew. A low hum of curses rippled through the church.

Chantelle’s face burned red with rage. She pivoted back toward Zac, her hand flying. The slap cracked across his cheek, loud in the cavernous space.

Zac stood silent, blinking. Then, with an almost rueful smile, he muttered, “Okay, I’ll accept that.”

She moved to slap him again, but Zac caught her wrist mid-air. Her chest heaved, her breath coming fast. For a moment, they simply stared at each other—something bitter, exhausted, and quietly resigned passing between them.

“You’re beautiful, Chantelle,” Zac said softly. “You’re successful. You’ll have no problem finding someone else. Maybe even someone with more money than me. I truly hope you’ll be happy.”

Her lip curled, but she yanked her arm free, her shoulders trembling with the effort to contain herself. Even at her weakest, her eyes remained dry, her pride unbroken. She drew in a sharp breath, steadied herself, then lifted her chin—regal, untouchable. And without another word, she turned on her heel and strode from the church, cold and dignified even in the face of defeat.

The maid of honor lingered for only a heartbeat before rushing after her. Meanwhile, Chantelle’s father was still fanning her mother, coaxing her back to consciousness. When she finally stirred, pale and unsteady, he helped her to her feet and they hurried out together, their hushed whispers and incredulous murmurs trailing behind them. And then, the grand cathedral was nearly empty—leaving only me, Zac, and the priest.

Zac stepped toward me, his gaze raw, unguarded. He took a deep breath, his hands trembling at his sides, his eyes burning into mine like he was afraid I might disappear if he so much as blinked.

“I know I hurt you,” he started, voice thick with emotion. “I pushed you away when I should have held you closer. I lied to myself when the truth was written all over my goddamn soul. But Chris...” He swallowed hard, his jaw tightening as he fought for control. “I love you. And I don’t just mean I want you, or that I can’t stop thinking about you—though I do, constantly. I mean you are the air in my lungs, the blood in my veins. Without you, I don’t function. I don’t exist.”

I stood frozen, hardly breathing.

“I told myself this was just physical. A distraction. I tried to put you in a box that I could lock away, something I could walk away from when the time came. But I was a fucking idiot.” His voice cracked, but he pushed through, his entire body taut with desperation. “Because from the moment you walked into my life, you ruined me for anyone else.”

My chest ached, my vision blurred.

“You are my person, Chris. The one who sees me, the one who knows me. The only one who has ever made me feel like I could be more than what the world expects of me. You are my home, my heart, my everything. And if I have to spend the rest of my life proving that to you, then I will. I swear to God, I will.”

He took a step closer, eyes pleading.

“I can’t promise I won’t make mistakes. I can’t promise I’ll always get it right. But I can promise that I will never, never let you go again.” He exhaled shakily, his voice almost a whisper. “I will love you until my last breath, and if there’s anything after that, I will love you then too.”

A single tear slipped down my cheek.

Zac reached for me, hesitant, as if he didn’t have the right anymore. “I think I’ve loved you from the moment you walked into my office, even if I didn’t know it yet. I just—I was a fucking coward. I let fear get in the way, and I almost lost you because of it.” He swallowed, shaking his head. “But I don’t care anymore. I don’t care what anyone thinks. I don’t care what it may cost me. The only thing I care about is you. Just tell me you’ll take me, Chris,” he begged. “Tell me I haven’t lost you forever.”

I stared at him, my throat too tight for words. The sincerity in his voice shattered something in me. I shook my head, fighting the surge of emotion rising in my chest. “Oh, for fuck’s sake,” I said, laughing softly, my eyes misty. “You could never lose me, you absolute dolt. I love you. Always have. Always will.”

Then, without thinking, without hesitation, I surged forward and crashed into him, my lips claiming his like they belonged there—because they did.

Forever.

Zac’s arms came around me in an instant, pressing me against him. His mouth met mine in a kiss that was searing, desperate, pouring every ounce of feeling into that one hungry claim. His hands roamed over my body, fisting my shirt, yanking at my suit jacket, like he wanted to tear the clothes off me and take me right there on the altar. I pushed even tighter against him, my body molding around his as if trying to crawl under his skin and—

A discreet cough came from nearby, breaking us apart.

The priest arched a brow. “So,” he said mildly, a tinge of amusement coloring his voice, “should I still proceed with the ceremony...?”

Zac turned to me, mischief glimmering in his eyes.

I smirked, my heart pounding with a giddy certainty. “Maybe some other time,” I murmured.

But as I looked at him—at the love burning in his eyes, the promise there, steady and sure—I knew. One day, it would be us standing at the altar. And when that day came, there wouldn’t be a single doubt in either of our hearts.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

The highway stretched ahead of us, a ribbon of asphalt unspooling beneath the golden light of an early April afternoon. I kept my hands on the wheel, while Chris lounged in the passenger seat, one leg bent up on the dash, thumbing through his phone as he texted his friend. Queen played on the stereo, Freddie Mercury's voice drifting through the cabin, underscoring the easy silence between us. It was the kind of silence that only came with time—the kind that settled into your bones, warm and unwavering, like the steady thrum of an engine on an open road.

Four months ago, I had walked away from my own wedding, breaking free from the life I was supposed to have. But fate—or whatever twisted sense of humor the universe runs on—had other plans. Because here I was, not as a groom, but as a guest at someone else's wedding, watching love play out in a way that actually made sense. Funny how life worked—you thought you had it all mapped out, only to realize the real plan had been written in invisible ink, waiting to reveal itself when you least expected it. And sometimes, if you were lucky, it turned out better than anything you'd dared to want.

The past months had been a lesson in how fast things could change—and how right it could feel when they did. Chris and I still worked together at Nova, but he'd made it clear that he wanted to keep our personal life separate from business. He stayed in his old position, turning down any suggestion that he report directly to me. What he didn't know—what I hadn't told him yet—was that I had other plans for him. A promotion was coming, one he had earned through sheer skill and dedication, not because he was sleeping in my bed. Head of Software Development. It was only a matter of time before I made it official. Maybe I'll tell him next week, on our trip to Barcelona.

And speaking of beds—he lived in mine now. The house I’d bought with Chantelle had never felt like home, just a gleaming monument to the life I’d been trying to force myself into. It was too big for us, too cold, too full of expectations. Neither Chris nor I had any desire to live there, so I sold it. My condo at Waterplace Residence suited us better. It was where we built our life together, where I woke up to the sound of him padding barefoot across the hardwood floors, where we spent nights tangled in each other, our bodies molded together like they were made to fit.

As for Chantelle—mutual acquaintances had mentioned she was seeing someone new. Younger than me, but not as wealthy. I didn’t know much beyond that, and I didn’t ask. Whatever she was doing, I hoped it made her happy. Maybe she was like me, finally figuring out what she actually wanted instead of what had looked good on paper. Maybe one day she would forgive me and we could go back to being friends.

That reminded me—Chris had somehow managed to convince me to reach out to my father. We’d spoken on the phone a few times, tentative conversations that still felt strange after so many years of silence. Now, he wanted me to visit him in Virginia. I wasn’t ready to forgive him yet, but... for the first time, I could see the possibility. And a year ago, that would have seemed unthinkable.

In any case, the future looked bright—clear and open, with no script to follow, just the life we were building together, one day at a time. And as for the present...

“So,” I said, breaking the comfortable quiet. “Who are these people again?”

Chris snorted, shaking his head like I was a lost cause. “Jeff is Tyler’s dad. He’s marrying his boyfriend, uh—Daniel? Dan? Anyway, they’ve known each other forever. Daniel used to be Tyler’s childhood friend and next-door neighbor.”

I let that sink in. “Wait. So Tyler’s dad is marrying his son’s childhood friend?”

Chris shot me a look. “Yeah. Keep up, old man.”

“Right.” I took a moment to process all that. “And Tyler is...?”

“My buddy, who invited us, you dumbass. He’s a wrestler, too. You’ll like him.”

I hummed, but my mind was stuck on the part where a man in his fifties was marrying someone barely out of college. I hadn’t expected to attend a wedding with an even bigger age difference than the one between Chris and me, but what the hell—love worked in strange ways. “Age gap thing, huh?” I mused.

Chris cast me a sidelong glance, his lips curving. “You’re the one to talk.”

I smirked but let it drop. The truth was, I didn’t give a damn about the numbers. Age, race, gender—none of it mattered. Love was love. And if I’d learned anything in the past few months, it was that the heart didn’t give a fuck about rules. That’s what made it so powerful. That’s what made it worth the risk.

* * *

By the time we reached the church in Stamford, the place was already packed. A quaint little chapel, nothing flashy, but it had that warm, timeless charm—the kind of place where vows felt sacred, where love was celebrated without pretense. The scent of old wood and candle wax lingered in the air as we stepped onto the stone pathway leading to the entrance. Soft chatter and laughter spilled from the gathered crowd, guests dressed in sharp suits and elegant dresses, their breath forming faint wisps in the lingering chill of early spring.

A voice cut through the noise. “Chris! You made it.”

A broad-shouldered guy in his twenties waved us over, dark-haired with a strong

build that hinted at years of athletic training. His easy grin stood out against the crisp black of his suit, his whole demeanor radiating warmth. Tyler, I presumed.

Smiling, Chris pulled him into a quick hug. “Wouldn’t miss it. Um, this is Zac.”

Tyler turned to me, his grin widening as he gave me a once-over, his eyes sharp with curiosity and amusement. “The infamous Zac. Good to finally meet you.”

I arched a brow, shooting Chris a look. “Infamous?”

Chris just smiled, all innocence. “I might have mentioned you a couple times.”

Tyler smirked, exchanging a glance that suggested a lot more had been said.

“Nice to meet you too, Tyler.” I shook his hand, his grip firm and assured, a silent display of confidence. He carried himself like someone who never second-guessed his place in the world. Chris was right—I liked him instantly.

“Guys, this is Blake,” Tyler said, shifting as his boyfriend stepped forward.

Jesus. If Tyler was built, this guy was a damn fortress. Blake was a towering beast of a man, his suit straining against thick, corded muscle, the fabric hugging broad shoulders and arms that looked capable of crushing skulls. He wasn’t as tall as me, but he was even denser, his sheer presence commanding attention.

I extended a hand. “Bodybuilder?” I guessed.

Blake let out a deep, rumbling laugh, his grip like a vise as we shook hands. “Former MMA fighter. Now just a coach.”

“Remind me never to piss you off.”

Blake's lips curved. "You look like you could put up a fight." His gaze flicked over me with quiet assessment, sizing me up the way fighters do.

Chris and Tyler burst into laughter.

"Why don't you pull out your dicks and measure who's bigger while you're at it?" Chris teased, shaking his head. "Some dudes think everything is a competition."

"Seriously, guys," Tyler added, still chuckling.

Blake and I exchanged an amused glance. They weren't wrong. We were the older ones in our relationships, yet here we were, sizing each other up like a couple of teenage boys in a locker room.

At that moment, another pair of guys approached, their footsteps muffled against the stone. Tyler gestured toward them. "This is my brother, Matt," he said, pointing to a slightly leaner copy of himself. "And this is Finn, my friend."

Finn—messy auburn hair, a little scruffy, casual in a way that contrasted the rest of us—gave a mischievous smile and bumped fists with Chris. "His best friend," he corrected. "BFF. Ride or die."

Chris snorted. "Oh, we're doing this?"

"Now who's competing?" I murmured, leaning into Chris, and he elbowed me lightly.

Tyler ignored us and spoke to Chris. "You remember Finn from Gettysburg?"

Chris smirked. "How could I forget? Bad at darts, good at drinking."

Finn beamed, unbothered. “Damn straight.”

Matt shook his head. “Speaking of straight, I think we’re the only ones here.”

“Yeah, and the only single ones,” Tyler added, making everyone chuckle.

“And where are the grooms?” I asked. “Do we get to meet them?”

“After the ceremony,” Tyler said. “They’re getting ready to enter the stage. I should probably get over there and see if they need anything.” He clapped Chris on the shoulder. “We’ll catch up after, yeah?”

“No worries, T-bag,” Chris quipped. “Go and help your dad. We’ll be here.”

Tyler rolled his eyes at the nickname but grinned as he and Matt moved toward the front of the church. Blake and Finn lingered, their presence comfortable.

Blake nodded toward the entrance. “Come on, I’ll take you to your seats. Ceremony’s about to start.”

As we followed him inside, the chapel’s warmth embraced us, the murmuring guests settling into their pews. The soft strains of music played from the organ, a gentle overture to what was about to unfold.

* * *

Jeff and Danny stood at the altar, a striking contrast—one exuding strength and experience, the other radiant with youth. Jeff, rugged and broad-shouldered, carried his years with an effortless grace, his graying hair combed in a way that only made him look more distinguished. His silver beard, neatly trimmed, framed a strong jaw that gave him an aura of wisdom and reliability. He looked like an average Joe, but

possessed a kind of quiet confidence that commanded attention without trying. Danny, by contrast, was all lightness—slender and radiant, his dark blond hair falling in soft strands around his face, his features still untouched by time’s weight. There was something almost ethereal about him, the way his bright eyes shone with unguarded emotion, the way his entire being seemed to vibrate with quiet exhilaration.

Their fingers were entwined, their hands clasped in a hold that felt both delicate and unbreakable. The priest spoke in soft, measured tones, but all I could focus on was the way they looked at each other—like nothing else in the world existed beyond this moment.

When the time for vows came, the last murmurs in the church faded into silence.

Jeff cleared his throat, his eyes never straying from Danny’s. “As many of you know, I’ve been down this road once before,” he began, his voice steady despite the emotion thickening beneath it. “But it didn’t work out, because we weren’t the right match for each other. I don’t regret it—we had some wonderful years, and I got two wonderful sons—but I haven’t found love. Not real love. I thought that was something other people got to have. I told myself I didn’t need it, that I was fine on my own. And then... you happened.”

Danny’s breath hitched. His fingers tightened around Jeff’s.

Jeff exhaled, his lips twitching in something that wasn’t quite a smile, wasn’t quite a sigh. “I’ve known you for years, but you still managed to walk into my life like a storm I never saw coming,” he continued, his voice growing rougher. “And you turned everything upside down. You reminded me what it felt like to be wanted again. To hope. To dream. You taught me that true love knows no boundaries.” His breath wavered. “Danny, you are my second chance. My best chance. And I swear to spend every day proving to you that I will love you—fiercely, unconditionally,

without fear—until the very last breath leaves my body.”

Danny let out a wet laugh, swiping at his eyes. “Jesus, how am I supposed to follow that ?”

Soft chuckles rippled through the church, the warmth of it cutting through the heavy emotion like sunlight through stained glass.

Danny inhaled, centering himself. When he spoke, his voice was quieter, but no less certain. “Jeff, you were never supposed to happen to me. I never believed my teenage dream would come true.” A small, knowing smile touched his lips, his eyes brimming with something raw and unguarded. “But when I look back, you were always the one. You were my first crush. You were my first desire. My greatest desire. Yeah, I was a pervy kid. Sorry, Mom and Dad.” People laughed, but Danny went on. “And I realized that love doesn’t give a damn about plans. Or timelines. Or expectations. It just... is .” He swallowed hard, then lifted his chin, his gaze unwavering. “Some people might find this a bit... unconventional, to say the least. But I don’t give a damn. I always knew, from the moment I laid my eyes on you, I knew—I knew—I was yours.”

A hush fell over the church, reverent and thick with emotion, as if even the walls were holding their breath. Beside me, Chris interlaced his fingers with mine, his touch soft yet grounding. I turned my head slightly, taking him in—the shimmer of unshed tears in his eyes, the way his lips pressed together as if holding back a smile, or maybe something too big for words.

I knew he was thinking the same thing I was.

Some day soon, this would be us.

* * *

After the ceremony, the celebration spilled into a nearby venue, the space alive with light and music. The air hummed with conversation and clinking glasses, the scent of roasted meats and sweet champagne mingling with the crispness of fresh flowers lining the tables. A long banquet stretched beneath glowing chandeliers, guests laughing between bites of rich, decadent food, while waiters weaved between them, refilling drinks, keeping the revelry flowing.

At the center of it all, Jeff and Danny sat side by side, hands still clasped, their happiness a beacon. Their love, their joy—it was infectious.

The DJ eased into the classics, and soon the dance floor filled. Tyler yanked Blake into the fray, his laughter ringing out as Blake feigned resistance before giving in, spinning him effortlessly. Matt and Finn, being without partners, found their way to each other amidst the crowd, their movements unpracticed but full of energy, bumping into each other as they laughed at their own lack of coordination.

Chris gave a mischievous smile, his eyes bright as he watched them. “I think Tyler’s trying to turn them gay.”

I couldn’t help but smile. “It’s a solid strategy.”

And then, as if on cue, the opening notes of *Murder on the Dancefloor* blasted through the speakers. A collective cheer went up, bodies surging forward. Jeff and Danny took the center, hands linked, twirling, lost in their own world, the years between them dissolving into pure, boundless bliss. The lights flashed, the beat pulsed, and the entire space became a living, breathing thing—heat and movement, sweat and laughter.

Chris’s fingers slid through mine, tugging me forward. “C’mon.”

And for once, I didn’t resist. I let him pull me into the storm, let the music crash over

me, let the weight of the past, the weight of everything , slip from my shoulders. For the first time in years—maybe in my entire life—I let go. I danced like I didn't give a damn who was watching, like the only thing that mattered was the warmth of Chris's body near mine, the way his grin split his face, reckless and free.

At some point, he slipped away, weaving toward the DJ booth. I barely noticed, caught in the rush, until he was back, his hands on my shoulders, his breath warm against my cheek.

Then the song changed, and the opening chords of I Want It That Way drifted through the air.

I froze. My head snapped toward Chris. The goofus remembered .

He was grinning, smug and pleased with himself, eyes twinkling with mischief. "I put in a request."

A laugh burst out of me, breathless and disbelieving. "You asshole ."

But I was already pulling him in, pressing my forehead against his as the music wrapped around us like silk. Others followed suit, bodies swaying, couples folding into each other. Jeff and Danny, lost in their own slow orbit. Tyler and Blake, moving with easy, practiced rhythm. Even Matt and Finn, still goofing off, still caught up in the energy of the moment.

No one cared about labels. No one cared about expectations. It was just love. Pure and simple.

Chris's fingers curled in the back of my shirt, his voice barely audible over the music. "You know this means I win, right?"

Like it was even a contest. Like he hadn't already won a long time ago. But I wouldn't give him that. So, I just huffed, shaking my head, my lips brushing his ear as I murmured, "Shut up and dance with me."

And we did, laughing all the while.

The End

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 10:25 am

Finn drifted toward consciousness in slow, hazy waves, his head throbbing with the unmistakable ache of too much champagne and questionable life choices. The bed beneath him was soft, the sheets nice, and he sighed, burrowing deeper into the pillows like— wait . This wasn't his bed.

A warm, solid body pressed against his back, radiating heat. A heavy arm draped over his waist, a broad palm splayed possessively across his stomach. It felt nice . Really nice. Finn stretched, blinking at the sunlight filtering through unfamiliar curtains. Where the hell was he?

Blurry memories of last night's party flashed through his mind—the wedding. The dancing. The endless rounds of drinks. Tyler's dad and his brand-new husband sneaking off early, Ty dragging Blake away to his room, and him—where had he ended up?

The body behind him shifted, a slow inhale tickling the back of his neck. A deep, sleepy kind of breath that sent a shiver down Finn's spine.

Oh, God.

Bracing himself, Finn slowly—so slowly—turned over.

His gaze collided with a familiar pair of chestnut-brown eyes.

Matt.

Tyler's Matt.

His best friend's older brother .

They stared at each other, faces inches apart, lips almost touching, their shared breath hot between them. A long, silent beat passed. Then, in perfect unison—

“ AAAAAAAAAAH! ”

Matt flung himself backward, crashing against the headboard. Finn scrambled to get away, his mind a frantic slideshow of fragmented memories—Matt's arm around his waist, Matt feeding him cake, Matt grinding on him on the dance floor.

Oh fuck .

“Okay,” Finn said, voice too high, too panicked. “There's a reasonable explanation for this.”

“Like what?!” Matt sputtered, his voice hoarse. His hair was a wreck, dark strands sticking up in every direction.

“I don't know!” Finn clutched his head, the pounding behind his eyes intensifying. “Maybe we just passed out. I didn't know where to sleep, so—”

“Right.” Matt's lips twitched. “Totally innocent. No big deal.”

Finn exhaled. “Yeah. No big—”

And then, at the same time, they both lifted the edge of the sheet and peeked underneath. Two sharp, horrified gasps filled the room.

They were both naked.

For a second, neither of them moved. Just wide-eyed, frozen terror. Then they looked

at each other.

And screamed again .