







# The Good Billionaire (Billionaire Hart #1)

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**Category:** Romance

**Description:** He's a sexy rich surgeon who wants me to pretend I'm his wife for a weekend.

The twist? I AM his wife...

That's my husband, Dr. Sebastian (Break My) Hart.

Celebrity surgeon who forgot he had a wife.

So I left him.

Then his sister asked me to be her maid of honor.

Which meant he never told his family we split up.

Seriously?

Now they're all coming into town for the wedding.

And I have to pretend we're still together.

By sleeping in a hotel bed with him.

I can do this.

I can resist him.

Until we get behind closed doors.

He's good at removing my defenses and my panties.

Not to mention leaving me a sore aching mess when he's done with me.

It's just forty-eight hours. And I missed him.

Missed the man I fell in love with.

The man who took my virginity in medical school ten years ago.

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Sebastian

“ Kennedy’s knocking Cal out, huh?” Ward, my best surgical assistant said, washing his hands.

Every nerve in my body went taut and fire rushed through my veins watching Kennedy from the small oval window of the scrub room. “She’s the top anesthesiologist here at Mercy.”

My Kennedy.

My wife.

My wife who left me six months ago because I’d let fame go to my head, according to the note she’d left me.

You’ve let fame go to your head, Seb...

So much visceral emotion shouldn’t have dominated my body right before surgery. I just couldn’t take my eyes off her narrow shoulders, round ass, violet eyes, and thick ash blonde hair pulled back and tucked under a blue cap.

Mine...

I’d not seen her in six months, not been in the same room with her. Having her so close kicked my pride to the curb and wildly inappropriate ideas passed through me.

That note she'd left me in the foyer of our townhouse had also said she felt invisible for close to two years. It sure felt that way for me too, but fame had crept up on me like a whirlwind. Shocked the shit out of me, really.

The hours I'd spent away from Kennedy had burned me too because I'd have given anything to have my wife by my side, go through all the excitement with her.

But she had her own career, her own demanding schedule.

I hadn't faulted her for it, yet I'd gotten plenty of blame for letting success go to my head.

I had become the celebrity orthopedic surgeon all major athletes demanded. Some price of success. In exchange for all that adoration from strangers, I'd lost the only woman I ever loved.

I glanced at my patient lying on the operating table from the scrub room. Cal Sweeny, the rookie NFL quarterback got crushed in a blitz during today's 1 p.m. Jet game at MetLife Stadium.

I was so famous Cal had screamed my name before Jesus on the thirty-yard line as refs pulled the entire Miami defensive line off his throwing arm.

"Shit, here she comes," Ward mumbled.

I set my shoulders back and jut my hips outward, knowing my scrub pants were tight enough to outline my cock. I hadn't put a mask on yet, but Kennedy had hers on so all I saw were those eyes. And damn they were right on me.

"Dr. Hart." That voice of hers kicked up riotous emotions like a beast clawed beneath the surface of my skin.

Her voice had rung out in my head occasionally during these months apart, remembering how she'd yelled out my name in bed.

Because fuck, we'd had great sex for years.

After a decade together, the fever hadn't died down.

I'd never lost the drive to make her mindless in bed, I just ran out of hours most days.

"Dr. Hart ," I shot back, reminding her that her name was my name. The name I'd given her.

As if nothing was wrong between us, she rattled off Cal's vitals and fed me the typical pre-surgery anesthetist report including which medicines she planned to use, and how much based on the patient's weight and medical history.

Steely-eyed, I replied, "Is that it?"

She blinked and looked at Ward, who just grinned. Damn, Kennedy radiated with professional brilliance at the moment. Then again, Cal's injury was stupidly easy to fix. Ward could do it.

"Yes, Seb, that's it."

Hearing her say my name sent a wave of lust through me.

That's it, Seb, right there, I'm gonna come.

I'd fought how much I missed her all these months. It took those quiet lonely nights with a glass of expensive scotch to let Kennedy's leaving consume me. That's when I'd texted her. Repeatedly. Please come home. I miss you. I love you, Kenna. Damn,

you, you're mine. Texts that had gone unanswered.

Every damn one.

Clearing my throat, I said, "Let's get started, then."

If she wanted to pretend the mountain of tension wasn't there, I could too. I had to for the sake of my patient.

Kennedy returned to the OR and sat by Cal's head, ready for me to begin. Even though I'd met Cal in a pre-op room, I strutted in and greeted my patient one last time before I gave him back his throwing arm.

"Doc, tell me again this ain't the end for me. I'm just getting started here."

With my magical operating skills, the QB, who allowed Jets fans to dream of going to the Super Bowl, would be back next season better than new. "It's not the end for you, Cal. I promise," I answered the quarterback, but looked over at Kennedy, who kept her head down reading her equipment.

"Are we ready, Dr. Hart?" I called out to her.

Assistants' eyes wandered all over the room. Kennedy and I had never operated together at Mercy. The surgical team looked confused by the same name being thrown around.

Athletes from all over the world came to New York City to lay on my table.

Only, they'd rushed Cal to Mercy Hospital after the tackle and not the Center for Surgical Excellence where I saved careers.

The Center was for scheduled surgeries. NFL, MLB, NHL, NBA, and Olympic stars sat on waiting lists for me to fix their gifted hands, arms, ankles, shoulders, and knees.

Kennedy nodded. “Ready, doctor. Cal, I’m...” Her instructions to him drowned in a blur, instructions I had heard hundreds of times at hundreds of surgeries with hundreds of anesthesiologists. This felt like a dream come true, not just being with her again, but working with her again.

Slowly, Cal’s eyes closed until he was out cold.

“He’s all yours, doctor,” Kennedy said to me with a voice as cold as ice and her eyes on her equipment.

I glanced down at my scalpels and cracked my neck. “Let’s make Jets fans sleep a little easier tonight, folks.”

KENNEDY TURNED OFF her equipment and changed out the Propofol bag for a saline cocktail to bring Cal out of his state of unconsciousness slowly and beautifully. She had a gift. A damn unrecognized one because I grabbed the spotlight.

Nurses took over getting Cal off the operating table and back to his bed where he’d soon be wheeled into recovery.

The clock on the wall flashed six p.m. Could I just...ask my wife to go for a drink? I needed her and I’d had enough of waiting for her to come around.

“Kennedy, we’re getting some dinner at Patsy’s, you coming?” one of the nurses said, tucking Cal into a heated blanket.

It was December. A couple of weeks before Christmas.



When we'd first moved to New York City, I'd brought her up to the Empire State Building observation deck so she could see the whole city.

My city. She'd marveled at all the lights while holding me close.

I couldn't remember the lights right now because I'd been focused on her. When had that changed?

Kennedy typed something in her phone and with an even face, she glanced at me, her eyes still distant. "Can't, Amy. I have a date. Thanks anyway."

An icy wave crawled up my spine. With the surgery behind me and not another one scheduled for two weeks at the new center I had opened in San Francisco, I let a tidal wave of emotions flood my system.

When Kennedy left the OR, I jogged to catch up to her as she headed to the doctor's locker room. "A date, huh?"

"It's none of your business, Sebastian."

"You're still my wife, that sort of makes you having a boyfriend my business."

She stopped short. "It's a date."

"A first date? Second date?" My stomach twisted. "A...third date?"

She smirked, killing me. I'd taken her virginity the first week of medical school and when she'd left our townhouse six months ago, I was the only man who'd had her.

She continued walking to the locker room, her ass bobbing in the scrubs. She'd always been packed in the trunk, firm and beautiful. "Second date," she said over her

shoulder.

Which meant the first date had gone well and she liked the fucker. Who was he? Another doctor? That burned me even more. Lost in anger, I blurted, “Are you bringing him to my sister’s wedding?”

Kennedy lowered her head and swung back around.

Mentioning Savannah’s wedding next weekend changed Kennedy before my eyes. As if time had folded in on itself, her shoulders softened. Biting her lip, she rushed up to me, fast and furious. I set my foot back wondering if I were about to be punched.

“Of course, I’m not bringing him to Savannah’s wedding.”

“Then you’ll do what I asked you?” Pleaded, really. Over several texts when I’d figured out Kennedy wasn’t coming home.

“I’m your sister’s maid of honor. Your parents don’t know we’re separated.” She breathed. “I love them, Sebastian. I won’t hurt them. Especially Savannah. It’s up to you to tell your father what’s going on. Not me.”

Kennedy and I had to fool everyone for my sister’s wedding next weekend, make my family believe everything between us was hunky-dory. She’d been living somewhere downtown for six months.

Clearly, things weren’t hunky-dory.

With my sister teaching in Cincinnati and my parents retired in Atlanta, it’d been easy to keep my separation from Kennedy a secret.

I had only told my cousins Luke and Tristan because they were my best friends.

They agreed to keep my secret. Then my sister had gotten engaged a few months ago and wanted a Christmas wedding in Manhattan.

A small family affair, and that made Kennedy the prime candidate to be Savannah's maid of honor.

"What's going on, Kenna? What the hell are we doing?" I pulled her into my chest, my mouth hovering above hers. I didn't think a kiss would make the last miserable six months go away, but it was a damn good start.

Those gorgeous eyes of hers went heavy-lidded on me. There. I cracked her open.

"Come home with me, Kenna," I whispered. "Our home."

Shaking her head and wriggling away from me, she said, "I can't. Didn't Luke show you the papers from my lawyer? We're getting a divorce."

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Kennedy

I left Sebastian feeling like a stunned mess. Being so close to him and almost kissing him had sent me into a freefall of emotion. I grabbed my coat leaving my clothes in the locker, and then headed out in my scrubs. Didn't want to risk another run-in with Sebastian.

Didn't trust myself.

Why had I ignored Seb's texts? His voice could break me, that was why. And why had I refused to see him? The man was barely human, he was so gorgeous. Classically. Tall, broad, strong cheekbones with heart-melting green eyes.

Almost melted this Hart...

Sure, looks weren't everything. In fact, the stunning Adonis he'd turned into came with age. I met him as a skinny boy at Johns Hopkins ten years ago. Sebastian had been different from other guys there. Sweet, kind, funny. Oh God, he'd cracked me up. I fell in love with him after the first kiss.

I'd been twenty-two and unprepared for how much a man could rock my world. But Seb had fallen hard too. We'd dated all through med school and got married a few months before graduating. He'd proposed the year before.

I would never forget his reasoning for getting married while we were still in school.

"You're it for me, Kenna. Forever. I want you to practice medicine as Dr. Hart, like

me. The two of us, we're a team."

And for years we were. The surgeon and the anesthesiologist at Lincoln Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland being my home state.

Moving to New York had been the first nail in the coffin when I'd gone to one hospital and he went to another.

Then came the opportunity to start his own surgery center.

He'd asked me to join him, but I'd made a name for myself at Mercy.

Was this partly my fault?

Sure, he'd offered to make me head of the department at the Center, but that would have been a hollow, unearned victory. I had my pride too. I could never compete with a brilliant surgeon. They were rock stars. Anesthetists were staff. Dispensable.

Still, my own victory had arrived. And all on my own. Right after Savannah's wedding, I would start my new job as Head of Anesthesiology at Memorial Hospital. My grand achievement and I couldn't even tell my best friend because that was Sebastian and I was furious with him.

All these thoughts pounded in my head during the cab ride downtown to the apartment I'd been renting since leaving my husband.

Inside my apartment, I closed the door and breathed.

Willed away tears from seeing Seb and almost kissing him.

A few hours in that operating room with him had wrecked me.

A moment near his lips made me dizzy. Being with Seb was one unending rollercoaster ride.

But lately, we'd been riding on separate tracks.

How in the world would I survive an entire weekend with him?

Savannah was arriving next Friday. A weekend wedding blowout at Seb's cousins' hotel, The Sterling in the heart of Manhattan.

That reminded me to call Tristan.

Exhaling, I shrugged out of my coat and poured a glass of red wine first.

I'd lied about the date. Mean, I know...

From my pantry, I took out a box of Kraft mac and cheese. With the macaroni cooked and mixed with the cheese and milk, all bubbling up, I grabbed my planner for Savannah's wedding and called Seb's cousin Tristan, the COO of The Sterling.

"Hey you," Tristan answered the FaceTime call. Now, if there was a face that closely rivaled Sebastian's it was Tristan's. "I thought you were calling me a few hours ago?"

"I scrubbed in on an emergency surgery." I sipped my wine. "With Seb."

"Oh." He narrowed his amber eyes on me. "Is that red enough? Can I send you down a bottle of Balvenie?"

I snorted in my wine. "No. Even though I'm off tomorrow. Numbing myself with your favorite scotch sounds tempting."

“How is my jerk cousin?”

“Don’t say that.” There I was defending him. “You’re a workaholic, you know how it is.”

“I’m a workaholic because I don’t have a woman waiting for me at home.” Home was a penthouse apartment at The Sterling. He, Luke, and their younger brother Grayson each had one.

Sebastian’s fortune came from his father’s shares in The Sterling. Not many people knew exactly how many commas Seb had in his bank account. I did and couldn’t care less about his money. He’d shared everything with me. Everything, except his most precious commodity. His time.

“It is what it is. Are we all set for next weekend? As far as the rooms for everyone?”

Not living in New York and wanting a wedding pulled off in three months, Savannah had empowered me to work with a wedding planner and make most of the decisions. Flowers. Music. Favors. How had six months gone by without my husband so fast?

Savannah’s wedding plans, that was how.

“Yeah, my villas are all blocked off.”

I shuddered. Seb and I had to share one of those villas to keep up the ruse we were still happily married. “And they have two bedrooms, right?”

Tristan barked a laugh. “Do you think my cousin would be deterred by a bedroom door?”

“If there were ever a time I wished I had a big dog.”

“We don’t allow pets in the hotel. For family, I’ll make an exception.”

“You’re so sweet.”

“Not really,” Tristan said with a devilish grin. “See you next week.”

“Bye, Tristan.”

I missed the happy hour cocktails at The Sterling with Seb and his Hart cousins.

Going back there would dredge up those happy memories. Despite the hotel’s majestic beauty, The Sterling hotel would be my prison for seventy-two hours.



## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Sebastian

Worst hangover riddle ever.

My eyes were on fire reading my cousin Tristan's text. I'd got home to my empty townhouse the night before and started drinking.

What in the world did that message mean? Who was at—

I bolted up in bed, my head searing with pain.

Bakery.

My sister's wedding.

Kennedy would be there.

I scrambled from the bed and showered to sober up while gargling industrial strength mouthwash the entire time.

How the hell Tristan knew she'd be there, I planned to ignore. I knew they'd been in contact for the wedding. I never expected Tristan or any of my cousins would make a play for Kennedy. But Hart men had damn good genes. It would be damn tempting for her.

Need Tom, I texted back to Tristan, asking for his limo driver.

The dots appeared after a few minutes. OTW.

Thanks, I replied and finished getting ready.

Ten minutes later, Tristan's shiny black Town Car rolled up to my white brick townhouse. I opened the door, not making the driver treat me like a prima donna. My cousins and I had all grown up middle class.

"Hey, Tom," I greeted the chauffeur as I slid into the back seat.

Showing up in a fancy car like this

wouldn't impress Kennedy. Besides being a rich surgeon, I was also a billionaire thanks to the investment profits my father had gotten from The Sterling hotel.

My dad had loaned his brother the money to get The Sterling up and running back in the early days in exchange for a profit balloon ten years later.

That had fattened up my joint bank account with Kennedy.

Never for a moment had I thought to sock it away somewhere she couldn't touch it.

And I knew Kennedy would never ask for a penny of that money. Didn't need it. She made a good living in her own right.

I wore a pair of dress slacks, a button-down shirt, and a simple sports coat under my charcoal cashmere winter coat. The temperature had plummeted last week when another New York winter had blown into town and would stay to freeze everyone out until late March.

"How long will it take to get to Park Slope?" I asked Tom.

“GPS says thirty minutes, sir. Bridge is always clogged, though.”

My Gear watch read 12:30. I expected to beat Kennedy to the appointment. Be waiting there for her. I brought the bakery up on my phone and zoomed in to find a florist nearby. Screw flowers, my wife would prefer a cookie. She loved sweets. Loved licking whipped cream off my chest and other places...

Thirty minutes turned into two hours and I started sweating the last five blocks, ready to ditch the Town Car and run.

The orange and white polka dot awning came into view and I had the car door open before Tom stopped. “Am I waiting, sir?” the driver called out.

“No,” I yelled over my shoulder. “Yeah. No. I don’t know.”

Through the bakery’s decorated windows, I saw the back of Kennedy’s head. Her blonde waves flowed down her back. God, I used to wash that gorgeous silk for her in the shower. I fucking missed her so much.

A tall skinny woman stood next to Kennedy. Catching my breath, I opened the door. Bells on the handle chimed, turning Kennedy around.

Her jaw tipped open until her eyes narrowed. “Let me guess. Tristan?”

“Wrong Hart, babe. He’s the crazy, daring one. I’m the handsome, sexy one.” I sauntered in and came up to the glass case filled with shiny frosted cakes.

Predictably, Kennedy rolled her eyes, but I noticed how the corners of her mouth curled up as she held back a smile. I could still make her laugh. That was a good sign.

“Zelda, this is Sebastian, Savannah’s brother. Sebastian, this is your sister’s wedding

planner.”

“Hellooo,” she said with a wry smile. “You’re the ex, huh?”

“Um...” Kennedy blushed. Like those damn divorce papers were already signed, sealed, and delivered.

Nope. Not signing them.

Kennedy folded a wad of papers and shoved them in her purse. Glancing at me, she said, “We’re done here.”

“Not exactly. And I’m not her ex.” I gripped the back of her head and kissed the shit out of her, deep and wet.

Kennedy staggered back acting surprised by the enthusiastic tongue action. “Jesus, Sebastian. We’re in public.”

“I don’t give a shit,” I murmured.

Chuckling, Zelda walked away.

“Thanks a lot. Do you know how hard it was to get the wedding planner to meet me here?” Kennedy lowered her head.

Her ash blonde hair had fresh streaks of gold like she’d gone to the hairdresser just for the wedding.

Or maybe just for me. “Thanks for ambushing me, by the way. I assume you don’t just leave Manhattan to stroll around Brooklyn looking for cookies. ”

“For your cookies, I’d leave the planet,” I joked.

It occurred to me, if Cal Sweeney hadn’t been sacked by so many three-hundred-pound linemen, I wouldn’t be there with Kennedy right now. Surely, she’d been slogging along to appointments for the wedding the last couple of months. Tristan had tipped me off this time. Why? The date...

“How was your date last night?” My throat swelled, fearing her eyes would light up.

“Good. Mac always puts out. Keeps me warm and completely fills me.”

I died a bit inside. She’d gotten involved with some asshole named Mac.

“You remember Mac, don’t you?” She taunted me. “My old dinner buddy in med school when I didn’t know how to cook much else.”

Dinner buddy? Back in med school, she’d lived on mac and cheese... “Ah.”

She smiled. “Took you long enough to figure it out.”

Relieved, I said, “So, no date.”

“No date. I’m sorry. I said that to mess with you.”

“Thanks for saying it after the surgery or Cal might have lost the arm.”

“That’s not true. You’re a consummate professional.”

“Don’t tell the AMA, but that would have wrecked me. Did...wreck me. Happy?”

She stared at me, pursing her lips. “No.” After a breath, she said, “So what are you

doing here?”

“What do you think?”

“Oh, helping me with the wedding plans?”

“I would have if you asked.”

She frowned. “You would have carved out time from your one-hundred-hour work week to help me pick out cocktail napkins for Savannah when for two years you’d left me at restaurants waiting for you?”

“That’s not fair, Kenna. You tricked me with that question. I guess, no, I wouldn’t have skipped repairing someone’s knee or back or arm to pick out napkins.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry. I have to go.”

“To work?”

“No. I’m off. For a...while.”

My heart stopped. “What do you mean a while, Kenna? What’s up?”

Her breathing hiccupped. “It’s nothing. Just built up lots of time off. I knew last-minute stuff would come up for the wedding.”

I stared and let the silence stretch out while I looked at her. Smelling fresh roasted beans, I said, “How about a cup of coffee and something sweet?”

She smirked, glancing at the baked good case. “Their cupcakes are famous.”

“Chocolate with vanilla cream icing, right?” I remembered her favorite.

“Damn you. I’ll go get a table.”

Thank you, Tristan...

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Kennedy

What the hell am I doing?

I had cried through hours of therapy, alone, assuming my leaving was irrational just because Sebastian worked a lot.

Finding out, I wasn't completely off the wall, and knowing he'd never change, I then cried to a lawyer and asked for a basic divorce with a third party appointed to divide the assets.

Since there was, well, a lot of money at stake.

Seb's father Charles Hart had handed me and Seb close to a billion dollars of The Sterling's investment capital. Every account some financial planner opened up to spread that money around had my name on it. I'd said it didn't feel right, but Seb had looked at me like I was insane.

He really never thought we'd break up. But that made him complacent thinking we were so damn bulletproof. His money looked the furthest from his mind as he strutted over with two coffees and my favorite cupcake.

"My teeth hurt looking at that sugar frosting." The thick layer of icing doubled the size of the monster cupcake. "And thank you." I took the coffee from him.

"No need to thank me. What's mine is yours. I always said that." He took a spoon and tunneled out some frosting.



Wearing a devilish smile, he dropped the spoon and dipped his finger in the whipped-up swirl instead. Bringing it to my mouth, he drawled, “You know you want it.”

Seb? Yes. Of course, I wanted him. I loved him and despite being with him for ten years, I was still so damn attracted to him. Painfully so. My body hurt wanting him to hold me. But when the loneliness soared, my pleas for him to scale back his patient-load had been ignored.

Figuring what the hell, I licked the whipped cream off his finger, a fire rising up in his green eyes and deep down in my core.

I shouldn’t have had to leave to get his attention. And no way would I have done something so serious as a bluff. Him not prioritizing me over his work told me that despite loving me, he loved his job a little more.

Loved the limelight a little more.

“How’s Cal?” he asked me.

Case in point. Always thinking of his patients, even after I just sucked on his finger.

Sebastian Hart was the real Good Doctor. And I felt like shit for hating him for it. “The nurses at Mercy are kick ass. He’s being taken care of.”

Nodding, Seb sipped his coffee.

“How’s the new surgery center out west?” I asked.

His eyes turned sad. He’d not waited for me after all. He opened up another center and from what I’d heard through the grapevine, he planned to practice out there for a year to make sure it ran to his standard of excellence.

Last nail, meet coffin.

“Ribbon cutting on Jan one.” He put down the cup and picked at crumbs from the cupcake I now devoured despite needing to squeeze into a skin-tight bridesmaid dress in a week. “Ward’s staying in the townhouse. Just easier. I grabbed an Airbnb.”

“Right.”

“Do I have to say it, Kennedy? Come with me.”

“Quit my job and follow you?”

“You’re an anesthesiologist. You can work anywhere. You think that makes you dispensable or replaceable, but it gives you flexibility, and that gives you power. Wasn’t that the plan for when we had kids?”

“You have to be home to make those kids, Seb.” I had lived a very scheduled life being a surgical anesthesiologist. Only, I’d come home every night to an empty townhouse. Woke up to grunting in the second bedroom, Seb running on the treadmill covered in glistening sweat.

Instead of making me sweat with his cock the way we used to enjoy morning sex. I’d felt forgotten about.

He threw down his napkin. “You know the last two years have been crazy because I had to keep going out west to operate.”

“Now you’re gonna live there.”

“It’s temporary. You left me before we could make proper plans to deal with this.”

“What plans? You want me to quit my job to be with you. End of story, Ralph Kramden.”

He bit his lip. “Or, I could have commuted back and forth.”

I stood up, furious. “When? You didn’t have time for me when I was in the bed next to you. Where would that time have materialized if I were three thousand miles away?”

“I don’t know. But I get it now, Kenna. You made your point. Come with me and—”

“No.” I’d gotten a job as head of the department at Memorial Hospital. Double my salary at Mercy. I wasn’t giving that up to follow the rockstar surgeon around like a groupie. “I have to go.”

Seb kicked his chair out, standing too. “No. We’re talking. That’s a step.”

“A step to what? I want a divorce.”

“No, you don’t.”

Okay, no I didn’t, but who was he to tell me that? Even if I were still madly in love with my husband. I’d just been mad for so long...

I choked back a sob, not knowing how to let go of the anger. Not in one day, anyway.

“Kennedy, why didn’t you answer my texts? We’re shoving too much into one conversation over coffee and a shitty cupcake because you wouldn’t take baby steps with me. If you feel like a tidal wave just hit you, then so do I.”

Fury kicked up even more. He didn’t know why those texts had gone unanswered.

“You were a husband via text for two years. You did everything via text. We planned a trip to Cancun, which of course you told me to cancel via text. So, texting me to get me back, meant I still wouldn’t have a husband.

I had a chime on my phone and words on the screen.

I wasn’t worth the time or energy of a phone call, even.

” I grabbed my purse. “I deserve better than that. And I thought you were smart enough to figure that out. I’m sorry I let it go for six months, I’ll own that, but I’ve been wrapped up with your sister’s wedding and doing my own damn job, Sebastian.

I work a lot too. I’m important too, damn it. I’ll see you Friday.”

“No!” He held my arm. “Please. Sit. Please .”

We’d both made mistakes. I should have been stronger and saved Sebastian from himself, as I watched him turn into a greedy surgeon, playing God, acting like he could walk on water.

My head pounded and I got into blurt-mode, pushing my emotions down. “Tristan is putting us up in a villa next weekend.”

“Is he now?” Apparently, he’d not been told any specifics of the wedding.

“It has two bedrooms. I’m counting on you to respect me and let me sleep in one by myself.”

Seb shook his head. “And you think no one will wander into our room for something , see your clothes in there and ask questions?”

My legs felt weak. He was right. Now I'd stress over who'd see a damn dented pillow.

I had to sleep in a bed with him. Or kick him to the couch.

"I'm meeting with the events manager and Tristan to finalize everything Thursday night."

"Mind if I tag along? It is my sister's wedding."

"Of course. It's a free country, Seb. And it's your cousin's hotel." I wondered if he still did happy hours there. Had he taken anyone up to one of the rooms? The thought of him with someone else made me want to vomit. "I'll see you Thursday night."

Only, I didn't get very far. Sebastian gripped my hand and pulled me into his lap.

His mouth landed on mine again in an aggressive kiss this time, his hold more demanding, his lips more punishing.

I ached to feel passion from him again. Why had it taken six months, or heck, me moving out to kickstart the hunger I always relied upon?

His tongue swirled in my mouth, his grip tight on my waist. "Please," he groaned.

"Seb," I managed in a hoarse whisper. "This is a public place."

"I don't care. Come home. Right now. Stop this madness." He sounded sincere, but he'd never give up his drive to operate on athletes. Leave that limelight.

"I have to go."

Seb stood up. “Tristan’s Town Car is right outside, let me take you home.”

I shuddered, afraid he’d find out where I was living. Not that I’d kept it a secret. And being in a limo with a lethally gorgeous man I missed so damn much? I shook my head. “I’ll grab an Uber, or just sit on the train.”

I rushed out of the bakery in search of a stinking subway to get the smell of Sebastian’s sexy cologne out of my throat.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Sebastian

The Sterling's lobby bar was jumping for a Thursday night. Then again, it was Christmastime in New York City.

"Do you think you should be drinking the hard stuff?" Tristan asked, bringing expensive scotch to his mouth.

"Of all our problems, enjoying a few scotches a night didn't even make the top one hundred. Plus, Kennedy liked her wine at night. This was a mutual vice." I shook my drink to loosen up the clinking ice and downed the sweet tangy burn.

"Another?" Tristan arched an eyebrow.

"That was to take the edge off. I'll wait for her to have the next one." I sat back and crossed my arms. Looking down at my attire, I wondered if showing up in a suit made me look like I was trying too hard.

I suspected Kennedy seeing me in scrubs last week hadn't helped my cause. Despite her telling me how fucking sexy I looked in them early on in our marriage, now those damn things just shoved our problems in her face. I'd rather her see the man. Not the surgeon.

"Hey..." I nudged Tristan. "That cruise of yours is coming up, huh?"

My cousin narrowed eyes at me. "Monday after the wedding. Why?"

Every year Tristan disappeared on a weeklong singles cruise where I had found out my cousin turned into a maniac fulfilling every no-strings fantasy a man could want.

It'd all been above board. Women were there for the same reason.

It may have made Tristan sound like a manwhore, but there were men all over Manhattan sweet-talking women into bed, getting their hopes up and never calling them. All year long.

Tristan had been drowning in his own heartbreak, never really getting over his college girlfriend. If anyone was ready to fall in love again, it was Tristan.

I shrugged. "I have a few days off after the wedding too. Maybe I'll crash in your suite. You can keep it down, right? All the sex?"

"No." His boldness was chilling.

"Just a thought. I need to get away from here for a while. Before I go out west. Do something fun for a change, but going away alone isn't fun. You're single and my best option right now."

"Gee, thanks. Glad to be a convenience to you when you need me. Now I know how Kennedy felt."

"Ouch."

"Here's a better thought. Take your wife somewhere."

I scoffed a laugh. "We'll both go on your sex cruise and I'll show her what's in store for her if she wants to be single."



Tristan put down his glass, loudly. The thick-cut crystal hit the wood table in protest. “First off, stop being an ass. To Kennedy and me. Second, it’s not a sex cruise.

And third, you’re right. Being single absolutely sucks.

Give that woman whatever she wants, Sebastian.

I promise you, you don’t want to lose her.

” He snagged both our glasses and then sauntered to the bar.

Every fucking female eye in that lobby of Tristan’s slid his way. I smiled in amusement, then looked up.

Kennedy stared at me from the railing near the stairs that led down to the entrance.

The Sterling’s front lobby rose up in tiers with seating areas on each level.

The lobby bar sat at the top tier followed by a long stretch of marble leading to the check-in desk toward the back.

The hotel was magnificent, and the glittery snowflakes against red and green lights all over Fifth Avenue glowed through the floor-to-ceiling lobby windows.

None of that, however, distracted me from Kennedy’s beauty.

I shot off my bar stool. An aching need for her had my feet moving fast to get to my wife. I wanted to kiss her again so damn bad. I’d cracked her veneer the other day with one coffee and one lick of whipped cream. Now I had a whole weekend to wear her down even more.

“Hi.” I leaned in to kiss her cheek, relieved that she let me.

“Hi. Having fun?”

“What?”

She looked around. “Lots of pretty girls here.”

“Yeah, and they’re all looking at Tristan.”

“Jealous?”

I took her hand and my heart leapt when she squeezed it. “Not even a little bit.”

Tristan came back with drinks and walked me and Kennedy through the weekend’s events. A cocktail party and rehearsal dinner on Friday night. The wedding on Saturday. Brunch on Sunday.

We returned to the bar area and Tristan steered us to a set of seats roped off from guests. “We keep these reserved for family.”

I nudged Kennedy’s back. She was still a Hart. Still had my heart. She was still my family. I was gonna fight like hell to keep it that way.

ONLY, KENNEDY STOPPED smiling after two sips of the red wine Tristan brought over for her. The more Tristan talked about the wedding and the plans, I saw dread in her eyes. All the hours she had to stand at my side pretending nothing was wrong.

It rocked me to think we’d reached a stalemate.

Kennedy had a damn good point. Why should she leave her job to follow me?

Why wasn't just being an orthopedic surgeon enough for me?

I hadn't planned to become a celebrity. It'd been thrust upon me when a tennis player with chronic pain and a drug pusher for a manager kept shoving pills at her.

The asshole had ignored that his star client had shredded tendons.

I had fixed the pro up and the word spread like wildfire. My practice had been overrun so much that I had to start an entire surgery center. New York had six major sports teams, more than any other major city. Not to mention collegiate sports.

The last few years, I'd been training damn fine surgeons at the center who'd assisted me, but star athletes wanted the star surgeon.

And I had been unable to say no.

"Where's Luke, Tristan?" Kennedy finally spoke up to ask about my nemesis. In a friendly, love the hell out of your cousin way.

Growing up, we'd felt more like brothers. Luke was the oldest, then me, then Tristan, and years later, Grayson the baby popped out.

Luke and I were ultra-competitive. I went to Harvard and Luke went to Yale.

Luke thought he'd won when he flew off to California to attend Stanford Law School while I trekked down to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore to be a doctor like my dad.

I'd have never met Kennedy if I'd gone to UCLA Medical School.

Tristan rolled his eyes. "Luke is upstairs getting changed. Another gala tonight. That's all he does, he goes to parties. I do all the work around here."

“He’s the CEO,” I said. “That is a showboat title, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, my father gave him that title. I got stuck with COO. Operations. Look around. That’s all this place is. Staffing. Security. Facilities. HR. Events. It’s all operations.”

“What about Grayson?” Kennedy asked.

Tristan just exhaled, giving us the answer. Poor middle child, Tristan. Got slammed with all the work while his brothers partied.

“Are you excited to see your mom?” She followed up with something she knew would make him smile.

“Yes,” he answered right away, that grin reaching his eyes.

“Hart boys and their mamas,” Kennedy cooed.

I grunted in my scotch, figuring talking about mothers wasn’t getting me laid anytime soon. The hum of laughter around me, happy tourists in New York for the holidays annoyed me. So many people giddy while my plan to get Kennedy back was dying a slow death.

“Can I say something?” Tristan broke the aching silence. “You two are not going to fool anyone this weekend with those resting bitch faces. There’s no shame in having problems. Maybe just come clean.”

“No.” Kennedy shook her head. “Not this weekend. I won’t take the focus off Savannah. I know your parents, Seb. Yeah, your mother is in La-La land with this wedding, but you are her moon, her stars, and the sun in her sky. If she finds out we’ve split up...”

“We haven’t split up,” I grunted. “Yet.”

“If she finds out I’ve moved out, Savannah’s wedding will be napalmed. Your mother won’t be able to help herself. I won’t do that to your sister.” She took a breath and forced a smile on her face. “Is this better?”

“No,” Tristan said. “Now you look scary.”

“Can’t I just be tired?”

Shit, that’s good.

Tristan smirked and slipped a card out of his wallet. “Can I make a suggestion?”

“Please,” I answered.

My cousin tossed the card on the coffee table. “This is a spare Master Key. It goes to PH1 our penthouse floor, and will open Gray’s apartment. He’s not coming home until tomorrow. The villas on PH2 are all booked up tonight.”

“And?” I said, my heart pounding.

“Go fuck your brains out. Forget your troubles and get naked. Enjoy each other for a few hours. That’ll put a smile on your faces.”

Kennedy’s eyes hit the table, staring at the card.

Permission to have sex. Sex didn’t solve problems, but, fuck, it kept couples from drifting apart if there was constant intimacy.

I realized now I’d dropped that ball big time by ignoring my wife’s sexual needs.

Always thinking, next weekend, next weekend, next weekend, and then some superstar would get hit by a pitch or take a hockey stick to the knee.

What Kennedy didn't realize was it'd all happened so fast for me. My fame had been a runaway train.

Tristan stalked off toward the front desk, answering his phone to deal with more hotel business.

Kennedy drank her wine, while I had an ache in my pants spiraling out of control. I had no choice but to tell her what she was doing to me. Just to see if she were up for Tristan's suggestion.

She exhaled and the look on her face told me no way would Kennedy go for something so rash. So out of left field.

Then my heart stopped .

Down in my lap...

Kennedy's hand.

One glass of cabernet had emboldened that wicked woman enough to stroke my cock under the table.

What the fuck?

My erection strained against my briefs. Her face glowed with ecstasy, those violet eyes shining on me. I swallowed and leaned into her. "That feels fucking fantastic."

"I bet." Her fingers pressed against the hard length now stretched out past the elastic,

the tip dripping on my thigh.

My head dipped back and I moved my hips to push deeper into her hand. “Don’t stop,” I whispered.

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But the sensation had stopped. Clearing the haze from my eyes, I saw her ass wiggle away in a short skirt as she headed toward the elevators. The key card on the table gone.

Game on...

“THIS IS CRAZY, RIGHT ?” I lifted Kennedy and pressed her back against the elevator wall.

“Considering I’m trying to divorce you,” she answered me, wrapping her legs around my waist. “Very.”

“Look how that’s working out.” I pushed harder against her, trying to get as close as possible.

I gazed into her violet eyes sparkling again and they struck me like the first time I’d seen them ten years ago. Last weekend during the surgery, anger clouded the color. The grayish-blue had popped off her creamy skin at the bakery after I kissed her. Now they blazed with lust.

Even though we were humping in a New York City hotel elevator, I swore I tasted the briny air of Johns Hopkins Medical School. Memories of the first time we’d had sex flooded me. How good it’d felt to slide into her knowing I’d been the only guy to do so. That she’d waited for me.

That feeling returned to me. No way had she been with someone else. Neither had I.



Her tongue boldly swept into my mouth with kisses that always unglued me. She only stopped kissing me to run her hands all over me like she'd die if she didn't touch every inch of my chest.

Waiting to reach the penthouse floor, I dropped more kisses on Kennedy's mouth and tasted the cabernet on her lips.

I'd never wanted her so much. I'd never wanted anything that much.

When she left me, she'd taken what was left of my sex drive with her.

I punished her in that elevator with kisses growing more possessive with every sip of her lips.

If she asked again for the divorce, I may be an idiot and sign the papers just so she wouldn't stop kissing me. Nothing compared to this glorious mouth of hers. Both on my lips and my dick.

Kennedy kissed me harder in that elevator and sent me hurdling into so many flashbacks, reminding me how ravenous she'd once been for me. How I thought I'd hit the jackpot finding a woman who couldn't get enough sex.

Why was that damn elevator so slow?

"This doesn't change anything," Kennedy said, squeezing my cock now, licking her lips.

Jeez, if she went down on me, that was a fucking game-changer for me.

This better not be a dream.

Would having sex change anything? Feeling her against me now answered that question.

The explosion of heat between us confirmed what I suspected for six months: there was no way she really wanted a divorce.

This past week proved that despite all the ignored texts, she wasn't impervious to my charm.

She just needed a blaring green light. And I was no better, I melted from a hand job.

"This is so good," I breathed, lifting her again. "Let's just..."

The elevator door to the penthouse level opened and Luke jumped back. "Hey, Seb. Hey, Kennedy. You two made up?"

I put my wife down and glared at Luke. "Shhh," I hushed my cousin. "We're still together, remember?"

"Looks that way to me." Luke shrugged, adjusting shiny cufflinks that matched his hair, spun gold, thick, and swept up. Chicks fell over themselves for those blue eyes and women had often mistaken us for brothers, citing our near-identical chiseled features.

"Don't you look nice." Kennedy pushed her skirt down to hide creamy thighs I wanted to lick all night. "Are you wearing that tux to the wedding?"

Luke threw on an overcoat. "No. This is my fundraiser tux."

"And it's getting quite a workout," Tristan said, coming out of the second elevator. "Tom is waiting for you."

“If I’m fun, people will think the hotel is fun, Tristan,” Luke chided him.

“That’s a horrible marketing strategy, Luke,” Tristan murmured as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

I seized Kennedy’s hot little hand, almost grateful for the break and the Hart brothers bickering. I’d not had sex in close to a year and after one more stroke, I’d lose it in my pants.

“Am I tearing up those divorce papers?” Luke asked from inside the elevator. He may have taken a leave of absence from his law firm to run the hotel, but Kennedy had sent him her divorce papers.

“No,” she said and smirked at me.

“Yes,” I called out.

The elevator closed and Tristan shook his head. My cousin then turned back to me and Kennedy. I’d already started making out with her again, my hands gripping her ass. Sensing I was being watched, I stopped and glowered at my cousin.

“Do you need something, Tristan?” I asked, inching my wife down the hall toward Grayson’s sweet empty crib. “This was your idea.”

“Actually...” Tristan started and I groaned, wanting to hit my head against the wall. “I checked that thing we just talked about and it’s a go. If you...want.”

“ Thing ,” Kennedy mocked Tristan. “What’s the thing ?”

I dropped back a step and put a finger against my lips to shut him the fuck up. Tristan better not have answered Kennedy and spill how I considered crashing his annual

singles cruise leaving Monday.

I took a breath and tugged Kennedy closer. “It’s a surprise for Savannah.” I hated dragging my sister into the lie. Or thinking about her when all I wanted to do was bury my cock deep inside the only woman I’ve ever loved.

“Whatever,” Kennedy said. “You four Hart boys are always playing games.”

That we were.

“Goodbye, Tristan.” I grabbed my wife and swiped into Grayson’s penthouse apartment.

“Which is Gray’s bedroom?” Kennedy asked as we breezed past the foyer, the open kitchen, and a living room with leather sofas and mirrored walls.

“Last time I was up here I saw him come out of that one.” I pointed to a hallway that led to bedrooms.

Kennedy rolled her eyes. “He was naked, wasn’t he?” She scanned the rest of the place with a curious gaze as if she were picturing the six-foot-five actor and his naked ass on every piece of furniture.

“Hey, you don’t need to be thinking about my cousin prancing around here naked. You’ve got me. Ready and waiting for you, Kennedy.” I walked backward down the hall, sliding off my sports jacket.

“Ready, huh?” Kennedy returned the seductive move by unbuttoning her blouse.

Her fluid and natural move startled me. Like being single had turned her into a sex kitten. Was I still the only man to ever have her? Taste her? Bury myself balls deep

with and without a condom in her?

Christ, I couldn't handle the word yes coming off her plump lips answering that question. Or any variation of my horrifying concerns.

Tonight, I wouldn't ask any more questions.

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*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Kennedy

“Do you have condoms?” I asked Seb, biting my lip.

“Condoms? Plural? As in you think I carry several on me now at all times.”

I watched Seb remove his charcoal sports jacket. So rich against the buttery yellow walls and bright white comforter making the bedroom glow.

“You’re single, you have that right.” I unzipped my platform suede boots and slid them off, dropping me down several inches below Seb’s six-three frame. The burgundy carpet felt soft under my feet.

“I’m not single.” He came up to me and pulled me in by the waist. “And neither are you. You’re my wife.”

The man made me melt and feel gooey with his green eyes, dark hair, and wide shoulders. I wondered if he’d gotten out of his own way and finally gotten some tail in the past six months. Women tripped over themselves watching him. And in scrubs? Calling Doctor break my Hart...

Would sex with Sebastian put me back to square one? Would all the suffering I’d endured over the last six months trying to get over that man be for naught?

“Where were we, Kenna?” Seb kissed me.

What a question? Where were we? Getting a divorce.

And he was going to San Francisco for a year.

Even if we weren't divorcing, he'd go and probably forget to call me for days and weeks.

He'd get too wrapped up in the lifestyle out there.

And I'd be back here, alone, waiting for him. Just like these past couple of years.

This would be our last time together, but I didn't want to think about that now. I sat on the bed and tugged him by the belt. "Open this."

"Oh yeah."

After this weekend, I was pretty sure I was never having sex again.

"Remember him?" Seb gripped his cock.

"Mr. I'll Take Your Virginity, thank you very much," I joked, breathing in his skin, loving the smell of soap and musk.

"Taste me, Kenna." Seb's voice turned low and husky. "I'll return the favor, I promise."

A man who made a woman go crazy between my legs with his mouth was a nuisance to society because he could get whatever he wanted.

Like convincing his soon-to-be-ex-wife to pretend to still be married. Not that I needed to be convinced. I was sincere about not wanting to ruin Savannah's wedding.

Now Sebastian wanted head. But he didn't lie, he'd return the favor, all right. He

loved going down on me.

Oh, what the hell. I licked my lips and let him rest his cock against my mouth.

“Oh, babe. I missed you. He missed you.”

I doubt that.

But I parted my lips because I wanted to taste him. Oh, the flavor, musky and rich. Inch by inch, he slid in, until his cock tapped the back of my throat. “No one’s taken me this good, Kenna. Ever.”

I doubt that too.

Although, I was good at giving head. Seb had taught me well. And I enjoyed it. Enjoyed the power it gave me.

“You didn’t answer if you have any condoms on you,” I said, licking the sides.

The way he groaned, he may not last, rendering that point moot.

“I don’t have any, Kennedy. I don’t carry condoms in my wallet.” He stroked my forehead, pushing in and out of my mouth. “I trust my cousin has some lying around.”

“I’d be very disappointed if Grayson didn’t use up a full pack every time.”

“Like we used to in school?” Seb lowered his mouth to mine. “Are you not on the pill anymore, babe?”

I breathed and wondered what to tell him. Figuring what the hell because I wanted



sex, the dirty, messy kind with the man I loved, I uttered, “Yeah, Seb. I am.”

He stared at me and the wicked gleam in his eyes tightened my nipples. “Take off your clothes.”

Standing, I undressed with his eyes on me, raking over every inch of my skin. What was happening? Had I looked so forlorn in the OR, the bakery, and when I showed up at the hotel? Yet, there I was sliding off my thong.

“Do you always wear a thong nowadays?”

“No.”

“Is that because you were meeting me?”

“I wore these all the time, Seb.”

“I’m a moron for not noticing.”

In fairness, he wasn’t around when I put them on and when I took them off in defeat at night because he hadn’t come home.

His mouth landed on mine, hard. His hands touched me everywhere since I was now naked.

“You’re so wet,” he moaned, his fingers sliding into my slick folds. “Lay down.”

This weekend I would pretend to still be happily married. Still be in love. I didn’t have to pretend about the love part. Only the happy part. He lowered to his knees and with my leg over his shoulder, he teased my skin. One lick and I’d barrel over the edge in a few seconds.

“Don’t stop,” I whined, writhing against his hot mouth.

“I didn’t want to stop,” he said, now rubbing me with his fingers.

I looked down and caught his eyes, blazing green. “Are you holding my orgasm hostage?”

He winked and next, his mouth disappeared between my thighs. I shattered under his tongue and my world out spun of control.

“On the bed. Facedown,” he commanded after my waves stopped.

“Yes, doctor.” I climbed up on the bed and his hands gripped my hips.

“Fucking gorgeous, Kenna. Mine. This is still mine.” He pushed his way into me. Bare.

This was wrong. So wrong.

Sex with the ex. Only, I wasn’t his ex. He refused to sign the divorce papers.

“No one, Kenna. No one got me this crazy. You... I was made for you.” He punished me with deep, hard thrusts.

Lying facedown, I let him fill me with his cock, burying himself so damn deep. Hitting the end of me, shattering me as I grunted. Seb was always vocal in bed. He gripped my butt cheeks spreading me wider.

“This is mine too, babe. Don’t forget it.” One of the many truths that flipped my world upside down.

Pretending we were still together that weekend meant holding hands and kissing which would lead to more sex, more of him taking me at night. Destroying me.

Sebastian filled me after several more minutes of just raw sex. Sex that I loved way too much. This... I gave into Seb because I'd been on edge. Close to cracking.

Please let me come out of this weekend in one piece.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Sebastian

I grabbed coffee in the hotel lobby early the next morning. Not to wake up, but to stay awake. I lost count of how many times I'd taken Kennedy throughout the night. I couldn't help myself.

Tristan came walking toward the seating area in the front lobby with a woman wearing a pale green dress. My cousin's double-breasted navy suit looked like it'd been painted on him. The guy could have been a freaking model. "Seb, this is Samantha, our event planner."

"Nice to meet you, Samantha," I said, shaking her hand.

"We're all set for this weekend," Samantha said. "When Kennedy gets here, tell her to come see me. My staff will go over everything with her, but we'll take it from here. All she has to do is be a doting maid of honor. Shower your sister with attention."

Tristan smirked at me.

When Kennedy gets here.

She was upstairs, naked, catching her breath while standing under a hot shower because, well, I got kind of messy with her.

Samantha sashayed off and Tristan grinned knowingly at me. "Yeah, so when Kennedy gets here..."

“Dick.” I punched him, nearly spilling my coffee.

“Did my idea help?”

“You have no idea.” I breathed in, feeling great.

“Sorry about bringing up the vacation last night.” Tristan brushed a hand down the back of his long neck.

“Mmmm.” I burned my lip on the coffee. “Yeah, I didn’t think Kennedy would sleep with me if we started talking about me going on your sex cruise. And let’s make sure we’re clear, I’d just be going to get some sun, warm up from this freaking cold snap.”

“It’s not a sex cruise.” Tristan rolled his eyes and sat in one of the lobby’s wing chairs near the elevators. “It’s a regular cruise, but when you spot someone there for the same reason, it’s game on.”

“And does anyone ever tell you no?”

“Me? No.” Tristan sawed off a laugh.

“And in all the years you’ve gone on this cruise, have you ever met a woman you think you could have something real with?”

“Nope.” Tristan checked his phone.

“No, because you never met someone you’d want something with? Or you’re just not open to it, period?”

Tristan’s face turned red. “Who would want something real with me after a week of giving myself away to strangers?” His eyes turned hooded and I saw shame there.

I used my swig of coffee to look away. “I’m no one to dish out relationship advice, I guess. Kennedy, my wife won’t come to San Francisco with me.”

“You asked her again?”

“Yeah. At the bakery. Thanks for the heads-up that she’d be there, by the way. Gave me the chance to talk to her before doing it in front of my parents.” I breathed. “She said no. That woman is stubborn.”

“Takes one stubborn goat to know another one, Seb.” Tristan leaned forward. “What happened to you guys?”

“Life. Our jobs. My job, really. She’s on a rock-steady schedule.”

“You’ve been together a long time.”

“I know, and it’s worth saving, right?”

“Maybe being together this weekend, you guys will come up with a solution you hadn’t seen before. Being angry can cloud your judgment.” Fixing his suit jacket, Tristan said, “I have to get my staff all set for this weekend. Everyone’s getting here soon.”

Luke had sent his private jet early that morning to collect Harts from all over the country.

Luke and Tristan’s mom, my sweet Aunt Marissa in Florida.

My parents in Atlanta, and Savannah and her fiancé along with his brother, the best man, in Cincinnati.

All the people Kennedy and I were lying to this weekend.

Pretending nothing was wrong. Pretending Kennedy hadn't moved out and wasn't living in the West Village somewhere.

I stifled a laugh at Luke waltzing in the hotel lobby, his golden blond hair all askew, his tuxedo wrinkled, and the bowtie undone. Not exactly the pristine put-together piece of work who'd left here twelve hours ago.

"Don't say a word, Seb." Luke waved a finger at me as he disappeared down the hallway to the elevators.

I checked my watch and headed out into the cold snap to get Kennedy her favorite egg sandwich for breakfast.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Kennedy

The hot spray hit my skin, and I winced in pain until it felt delightful. An hour of sleep never felt so good. Soon enough, pangs of regret from having sex with my soon-to-be ex-husband would start to kick me in the stomach.

Towelings off, I heard the apartment door open and determined footsteps sounded down the long hallway. I needed coffee and food. And to tell Seb, this wasn't happening again.

I hated this purgatory he'd kept me in because he wouldn't sign the divorce papers. Not that I needed the divorce. I had zero plans to get married again.

Groaning, I found my clothes from last night. The sheer blouse, tight skirt, lace bra, and matching thong lay scattered all over the bedroom floor. I slid all that lace on yesterday morning never imagining I'd be staring at them on the floor of a freaking Hart penthouse apartment.

Keeping my long blonde hair wet, I brushed it out thanks to the comb I kept in my purse. I left the bedroom in a towel to find Seb.

In the living room, the tall body stilled me. Skin. That's all I saw. Wide shoulders, smooth muscular back, and a sexy curve down to a delicious naked bubble butt. Okay, how could it hurt to bite and kiss it one more time?

Hang on , my brain fuzzed out.



Why had Seb gotten naked in the living room?

My naked God tensed up and turned around.

“Jesus!” Grayson shrieked and covered his crotch. “Kennedy?”

The rumor the youngest Hart brother had a thing for walking around naked had been proven true. “Hey there, Grayson,” I managed, staring at his angled pecs and grooved abs.

He sauntered up to me. “If this is some kind of game to get back at Seb for being a jerk, baby, I’m on board.”

I laughed. The Hart brothers were rakes and playboys. They’d all flirted with me, but only on the surface to see if they could make me blush. “If Seb hadn’t worn me out all last night, I might have said yes.”

“Really?” His voice got low sounding terrified that I’d called his bluff.

“No.” I wanted to lean in for a kiss hello. I hadn’t seen Grayson in nearly a year. But he was naked and I was in a towel. “Tristan said you were...somewhere else.” I tried to put my eyes somewhere else, but the man was breathtaking.

“I’m home this weekend for the wedding.” He shifted from side to side, all while holding his junk.

I glanced back at the hallway leading to the bedrooms. “Oh shoot. Do you have a...a date here?”

“Not right now.” He dropped his hands.

“Grayson!” I blinked. “I’m still standing here.”

“You’re a doctor.” He waved my concern away. “Nothing you haven’t seen before.”

“She’s a fucking anesthesiologist, Gray,” Seb bellowed, charging into the living room with a white bakery bag and a tray of coffees. “Not a urologist or proctologist. Please put some clothes on.”

“This is my damn apartment. Did you bring me any food?”

Seb put down the bag and coffees on the open kitchen counter. “No. Tristan said you were out gallivanting. That’s why we’re in your apartment. The villas were booked.”

“Which bed did you use?” Gray asked.

“That one.” Kennedy pointed to the right.

“Interesting.” He scratched his chin, still not covering up.

“Which is your room, Gray?” Seb asked, moving in front of me. “I’m sorry if we violated your space.”

“No problem.” Gray slapped Seb’s chest and headed back toward the bedrooms. He bent over and grabbed a duffle bag from the floor with a pair of jeans and a plaid shirt hanging from the sides.

Seb shook his head and glanced over his shoulder. “Sorry about that.”

“We should get going. Give him his apartment back.”

“We’re supposed to be staying here at the hotel, though. That was the plan, Kenna.”

“Right.” I nodded tightly, looking in the bag he brought in. The smell of eggs, cheese, and bacon made my mouth water. My favorite, damn him.

Seb exhaled. “Can you please get dressed? Both you and Gray naked in the same apartment gets me very nervous. I’ll get us some plates and napkins.”

“Like this?” I dropped the towel and skipped back to my room, laughing.

“That’s not funny, Kennedy!” Seb hollered as I scampered away, giggling.

Sleeping with Seb wouldn’t help with my divorce quest. Threatening to sleep with one of his cousins gave me a better shot. Although, there wasn’t a man I wanted more than Seb. I wanted him . Home with me every night and not poking athletes.

In the bedroom, I slipped my clothes back on then found Seb in Gray’s kitchen.

I smiled, noticing his clothes from last night, trousers, dress shirt, and sports jacket were as adorably wrinkled as mine.

A far cry from the polished look he maintained nowadays.

I’d met that guy in jeans and tee-shirts goofing off in medical school.

Now he was a famous surgeon and a billionaire.

In a kitchen of stainless-steel appliances and bright red subway tiles with matching pendants over the breakfast bar, I stared at the food.

“You know what, give the other sandwich to Gray, I’m gonna head out.

I need to pack up in time to take Savannah to the dress shop.

We have an appointment to grab our dresses shortly after she gets into town. ”

“I was kind of hoping I could tag along with you guys today. That is...what I would have done, Kenna.”

I stared at him, biting back the comment that he probably wouldn’t have taken the entire weekend off for his sister if he rarely had taken a day off for me . “Okay.”

He nudged the plate toward me. “Eat something. Then we’ll leave together and meet back here.”

The entire family was staying on PH2, a floor with six villas below that one. Needing strength, I bit into the sandwich. That chemistry when Seb looked at me for more than thirty seconds was my undoing.

“Kenna, thank you,” he whispered, pushing his sandwich around on a plate.

“You said that already.” I sipped my coffee. “I told you, I don’t want to ruin Savannah’s wedding. I’m doing this for her really, not you.”

“Can we...” He bit his lip.

“Eat, Seb. We got quite the workout last night.”

“No shit.” He lifted the sandwich and took a bite.

The man was too damn handsome for his own good.

In medical school, he was a dorky boy with glossy dark hair and a tall lean build.

In the last ten years, he’d filled out. His face had the hard lines of a man in his early

thirties.

His body had transformed into a work of art with deliciously cut muscles, and a sexy thickness about him. Everywhere.

We were both gym rats, but our schedules had always been upside down. Only once in a while had we been able to go for a run in Central Park together.

How many Susan G. Komen races had I done alone, and he'd not even gone to cheer me on because some idiot dove for a ball to win the game and then needed emergency surgery?

Yay, team!

Too many to count, causing my marriage to crumble.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Sebastian

That's what I get for telling the world's biggest lie.

No way would I have wanted to tag along with my sister to pick up her wedding dress. Not because I didn't love her. I adored my sister.

When Savannah and her fiancé Brandon had gotten to the hotel, my future brother-in-law looked happy to be the aloof groom.

I watched longingly at Brandon sitting in the hotel lobby with Tristan and Grayson while my parents, sister, Aunt Marissa, and Kennedy shuffled to Luke's limo.

When I got in the stretch and Kennedy's thigh brushed against mine, I wished the trek out to Brooklyn would last forever.

But Savannah eventually wedged herself between me and Kennedy and yapped on and on about the wedding details.

I tipped my head back hoping to catch a power nap.

Zelda, the mean-looking wedding planner sat behind the limo driver barking at all the wedding vendors on her speakerphone.

She better not think she could boss Luke around.

If she tried, I hoped I would at least have a chance to watch.

Luke was as wound tight as they come and, well, a guy like that was begging to be challenged by someone who wasn't afraid to put the bossy pain in the ass in his place.

Zelda's harsh calls, however dissolved Savannah's spirit as she whined more and more concerns to Kennedy.

My wife calmed her down, speaking so softly and lovingly.

Kennedy managed Savannah flawlessly, impressing the hell out of me.

The kindness in her voice sounded far from fake reminding me how much Kennedy truly cared for my family.

At Kleinfeld's in Brooklyn, my mom, dad, and my Aunt Marissa sat on a white silk sofa swooning over Savannah in her ball gown. The bright white monstrosity made her look like an hourglass-shaped marshmallow.

Even though my late Uncle Larry, my dad's only brother had divorced Aunt Marissa, she'd stayed in touch with my mom and never stopped being an aunt to me or Savannah.

Kennedy sat on the couch between my mom and Aunt Marissa as if the last six months never happened, letting my mom hold her hand. It wasn't lost on me that Kennedy was just like Aunt Marissa. Not letting our problems affect my family.

Kennedy and I had been through so much to get where we were, medical school, the boards, residencies, I thought it'd made us bulletproof. If nothing else, Kennedy's father was a doctor too. How could she not have been prepared for the life we would have?

I grumbled, thinking of those damn divorce papers. Getting them out of nowhere had

torpedoed my pride. When the option to lead the surgical team in the new San Francisco center came up, I agreed, all while knowing I'd be killing any chance with Kennedy.

Chance... Kennedy's last name was Chance, yet she wasn't giving me one.

After leaving the couch to go in the dressing room, Kennedy sauntered out and my blood spiked in my veins, heating me up.

Jeez! Where? When? Had I seen a picture of that dress?

That was a maid-of-honor dress. While I preferred her naked and spread out for me so I could touch and kiss every delightful inch, that emerald green gown was way too tight and low-cut. It showed off every curve that belonged to me.

Used to belong to me. Until I let my job get in the way and she left me.

No. No. No.

"Who the hell picked that dress out?" I bellowed, turning heads everywhere.

"I did," Savannah said, pushing her veil away, panic rising in my sister's voice.

"What's wrong?"

I snapped my fingers at Zelda making more angry calls. She better help my sister, but my dad was there to calm his daughter down.

Kennedy rushed up to me. "What's the matter with you?"

"Do you really expect me to keep my hands off you wearing a dress like that?" My eyes raked over my wife.



“Sebastian!” my mother yelled from the couch. “What’s wrong with you?”

Kennedy

I 'm divorcing him.

That's what's wrong with him.

He's gotten all these reminders of what I'm going to offer other men.

Not that I wanted another man.

"He's fine, Mom," I said, still calling Seb's mother, Mom because to not do so would be a tip-off. "Honey, come here." I hugged Seb and whispered in his ear. "I forgot about that blurt-mode setting you have."

His hands closed around my waist. The hug may have been a mistake if I wanted to keep a physical distance from him and not fall into the trap we plummeted down last night. "This dress shows every curve of your body. My body. You still belong to me."

"Yes, I'm still yours," I released in a breathless rush, and right there, it all came back and the pretense felt easy. "This weekend, I'm yours. This weekend we can put a pause on..."

"What are you saying? This weekend you'll give me a chance to make up for whatever I did wrong?"

"Whatever you did wrong?" I crossed my arms. "You don't know?"

He rolled his eyes. “Right, I worked too much.”

“Glad you thought that was no big deal.”

“What’s going on?” Aunt Marissa came up to us, tugging me at the waist.

She also narrowed her eyes on Seb.

Uh oh. She knows.

Luke, Tristan, and Grayson knew Seb and I were faking it, so one of those Hart brothers had to have spilled to their mother.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

“We’re fine,” I said with a smile and held on to Seb.

“Okay.” She winked and wagged a finger at us. “This is Savannah’s weekend. You guys had your turn.”

A day I could never forget. My wedding may not have been as grand as a Christmastime, Fifth Avenue, five-star hotel shindig.

But Seb and I were more than happy to be married in Maryland at a simple, but fancy Baltimore Harbor restaurant.

I got to marry my best friend, the only man I ever loved. So yeah, a great day.

“You’re right. Sorry, Aunt Marissa. Work’s been busy. We haven’t...” Seb trailed off.

“You have something special,” Aunt Marissa said. “I wish my boys would find

women who will love you the way Kennedy loves you, Sebastian. Just for you. And nothing else.”

That punched me in the gut, but loving Sebastian for who he was hadn’t been the problem. Work and schedules and his misguided priorities had torn us apart.

“How does the dress fit, Mrs. Hart?” One of the store people came up to me. “We pinched it in at the waistline since the last fitting. I can take some of it out.”

“She looks perfect,” Seb said and kissed me on the mouth.

“I’ll be back in the dressing room in a minute,” I said to the seamstress then pulled Seb behind a poofy dress. “I said I’d smile and hold your hand. You can’t keep kissing me like that Seb, it’s not fair.”

“I never said I would play fair.” He gripped my ass and pushed it against his groin.

“Free love time is over. Tristan was right, sex released the built-up tension and I can smile again. We took what we needed. But sex won’t change what we’re left with when everyone gets on Luke’s plane Monday morning to go home.” I stared at him. “And when you leave for California.”

“Maybe,” he grumbled.

My heart pounded. “What?”

I went dizzy wondering if he’d actually not go. He didn’t have to operate on superstar athletes. We didn’t need the money. No one needed fame.

The answer was right there in front of him. Why couldn’t he see it?

SEVEN HOURS LATER IN one of the penthouse villas, Seb shuffled in behind me. With his dark hair and gray suit, acting all king of the world, he'd taken my breath away.

I'd smiled all night at the rehearsal dinner held at an amazing restaurant overlooking the Central Park skating rink. Another thing we never did anymore. Drunk ice skating. Falling didn't hurt as much when I was tipsy.

"I changed my mind." I leaned on the wall near the hallway to the bedrooms. "I'll make sure the second bedroom doesn't look used."

"Please."

"Please what?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. I just really liked how it felt this morning."

Nodding, I said, "I bet. Even when I was there, Seb, you didn't touch me." Yet, at the table earlier, his hand had crept up my dress. Keeping me wet and on edge.

And confused as hell. I'd set a horrible example that he could get whatever he wanted with that body of his.

"I know. That was wrong," he miraculously admitted. "And I swear... I can't promise to not work endless hours, but I will never ignore your needs again, Kenna. Never."

An amazing promise, but it didn't change he was leaving. Or that I had my own superstar job waiting. Should I tell him? See what he'd say? A pit formed in my stomach, dreading the 'so what' on his face.

Or anger that I'd taken an anchor position, wedged myself in so firmly here in New

York, I could never leave. Killing any chance of me going with him to San Francisco.

Staring in his green eyes, my resolve began to shatter. I needed to bolt into that second bedroom, lock the door, and push a dresser in front of it. I feared I'd cave and sleep with him.

"Good night, Seb." With an aching heart, I slid against the textured wallcovering, wishing it was a sticker bush to kill the lust storming through me.

Thirty-six hours to go feeling like shit.

Any word on when the next asteroid would kill everyone on earth?

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Sebastian

K nuckles rapped my bedroom door and I pushed the covers away, angry. Spoiled sure, for not getting what I wanted. Was it so much to fucking ask, that I wanted my wife?

Ugh, I wasn't sure how I would face everyone now. Yesterday had been easy, having had sex all night. I'd barely slept last night as well, but for all the wrong horrible reasons.

I'd slept alone the last six months and that had utterly sucked. One damn night with Kennedy and now it was agony.

"What?" I swung the door open, horror spreading through me.

Kennedy stood there, her hair in an unwashed ponytail, a pair of jeans, low riders showing off her cute tummy thanks to the tight tee-shirt. "Bagels in Savannah's suite. Everyone's there. Let's go."

More faking it. Great.

"Five minutes." I pushed the door open and wandered back into the bedroom.

"Sleep okay?" she asked.

"No. You?"

“Barely a wink.”

I stopped and turned around, my fingers sliding into my boxers. Her eyes crawled over me, taking me in. My heart pounding, I skimmed the cotton groin-hugging Hanes past my waist.

Her breath grew ragged and she glanced away. “Five minutes.” She left and closed the door.

Shit...

I REMEMBERED MY WEDDING day from an entirely different perspective. I’d woken up in my bed alone which I hated even back then because Kennedy wanted to be traditional and not see me until she reached the altar.

All I’d had to do was put on a tux and let a photographer snap some pictures of me. Luke and Tristan had been there, but Grayson was still in school at UT Austin and couldn’t get to Maryland for the weekend.

What fun we had, sitting around my and Kennedy’s cramped Baltimore apartment smoking cigars in our boxers. Before the photographer had arrived, that is.

Before we were all billionaires too.

A woman getting ready for her wedding felt like a bell had gone off at a bull-riding event.

Hand in hand, Kennedy and I padded into my parents’ suite next door. The entire family loitered in the kitchen picking at a spread of bagels and pastries.

Hair and makeup people arrived along with a Kleinfeld rep who showed up just to put



Savannah in her dress. All while Zelda paced in front of the balcony wearing a whistle and used it when all the cats she'd been herding weren't moving in the right direction.

After the fourth toe-curling screeching sound, Luke stormed in wearing jogging pants and a white tee-shirt, sweat beading on his forehead. "Who the fuck is blowing that whistle?" he yelled.

"Luke! Savannah, I'm sorry." Aunt Marissa rushed toward her son holding a mimosa. "What's wrong with you?"

"I gave everyone an entire floor," Luke said. "All of my villas. But we're getting calls about a whistle."

"We're on a schedule, Mr. Hart. It is a wedding," Zelda said with the plastic noise-maker dangling out of her mouth like a cigarette. "What a grump."

This may have been the exact showdown I had wanted to see, but I didn't want it happening in front of Savannah.

Before I could break up the potential cage match, Tristan sauntered in, dressed in a tight-fitting sweater and jeans. He calmed Zelda down, even took some items off her to-do list.

With the whistling gone, Luke ran a hand through his hair. "Tristan, I swear, if you'd gone on your cruise this week instead of next week, I would have killed you."

"What cruise?" Kennedy asked, pulling apart a bagel.

"Just something I do once a year," Tristan said, blushing.

Luke strutted out of the villa suite, presumably to finish his workout.

Kennedy narrowed her eyes at me. “Are Tristan and Luke planning to give Savannah a cruise for her honeymoon?”

I sawed off a much-needed laugh. “No.” Then quickly dismissed the vision of my prim and proper sister, the kindergarten teacher on a sex cruise.

“Why was that funny?” Kennedy crossed her arms.

“I didn’t laugh.” My pulse raced, not wanting the cruise to come up anymore. I more than likely wasn’t going.

“Yes, you did.”

“You did laugh, honey,” my mom said, steering Savannah to one of the spare bedrooms to get her hair done.

“See?” Kennedy opened her mouth, but the whistle blared.

“Florist. Downstairs. Who’s letting them in?” Zelda barked, holding her phone.

“You’re the wedding planner, why aren’t you doing it?” I asked her.

“I plan. I don’t do .”

I shook my head. “I’ll go downstairs and let Samantha know.”

“Samantha?” Kennedy asked, standing in front of me. “The blonde walking around the lobby in a short skirt?”

“She’s the event planner and I believe that’s a suit.” I loved how jealous she got so suddenly.

I knew I had shit to fix in our lives, but one thing that had never ruffled any feathers between me and Kennedy was the idea that I would have been unfaithful to her. Perhaps reminding her how lethal I was in bed had her worried what I’d be giving to another woman once I signed those papers.

Fuck, that. I wanted Kennedy.

I wanted my wife .

Shaking my head, I reached for her hand. “Come with me and we’ll talk to Samantha in the short suit together.”

“Oh, Samantha has the florist guy. They’re setting up in the ballroom,” Zelda announced.

False alarm.

“Photographer is here.” Grayson waltzed in wearing jeans hanging very low on his hips, no shirt, and bare feet.

“Whoa,” I said to the group of six guys and one woman all dressed in black. “You guys are early.”

“No, Seb.” Kennedy made notes in her wedding planner book. “Savannah wants the whole day captured.”

I watched the lone female in the photography entourage snap photographs of Grayson who stood against the wall flexing his muscles for her.

“How tall are you, handsome?” The woman crouched down with the camera pointed up at Gray like he was Mount Everest.

The woman was cute as hell and the way Grayson posed, fluffing up his shaggy reddish-blond hair, I worried Savannah would be down one photographer in a few minutes.

I snapped my fingers at Aunt Marissa and pointed to the soon-to-be X-rated photoshoot.

“On it,” my aunt said, scampering that way. “Grayson, honey, let’s go find a shirt for you to wear.”

“Was it like this at your parents’ house the day we got married?” I asked Kennedy, tugging her closer.

“No,” she snorted.

I had a vision. If we renewed our vows, I’d be the one with the whistle, cheering for the underdog because Kennedy and I made it work.

But how?

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Kennedy

I stared at The Sterling's ballroom set up and breathtakingly beautiful with red roses, a carved bridal canopy, silver candles on the tables, and a glossy wood stage for the band.

Zelda tied emerald green sashes to the backs of silken wrapped chairs singing Here Comes Santa Claus.

Her whistle had mysteriously disappeared.

I smiled, fingering it in my pocket.

Savannah and Brandon, who broke with tradition and saw each other before the ceremony were on the roof deck taking pictures by the pool, the lights of the city all gussied up for Christmas sparkled in the background for sure.

I loved how Seb had looked at me in the maid-of-honor gown at the dress shop and now I couldn't wait for him to see me in it again.

He'd stopped seeing me at one time. Since Cal's surgery, something had awoken in us.

Us , I thought. The way we used to be in Maryland, years and years ago.

Shoulder to shoulder. Falling asleep together.

Waking up together. Spending the day together at Lincoln Hospital.

Warm hands closed around my waist, and it startled me at first, this was the big city after all. But smelling Seb's aftershave, I relaxed and melted into his chest.

"How did pictures with Brandon go?" I asked him, watching Luke, Tristan, and Grayson all in suits swaggering over to the lobby bar.

"Great. No mountain climbing. And no whistle." He kissed me, and aw hell, I let him, too worn down and exhausted from stopping him. "God, this dress, I..."

"You've seen me naked for the first time in I don't know how long. And yet, you like me in a dress too?" I threw my arms across his shoulders.

"When you're naked, you're just for me. When you're dressed up and other men look at you, licking their lips, and adjusting their cocks, that gets me crazy."

"You're so bad, Sebastian."

"I'm so bad, I'm good."

"You're a good man. I will give you that. The good doctor who always takes care of his patients."

"Now I'm a good billionaire. And it looks like it will stay that way." He frowned.

"What way?"

He stepped back. "I did read through those divorce papers."

"No, you didn't."

“Okay, Luke read them. Why didn’t you ask for any money?” He leaned against one of the monolithic columns of the hotel lobby.

“Because I make a good salary and we don’t have children. That’s your family’s money. I wasn’t going to—”

“ You’re my family, damn it. My father gave that money to me and you. To us .”

I cleared my throat, alarmed at how passionate he got.

“I’m sorry. I’m not playing around here, Kennedy.” He held my face, my erratic breathing had him pulling me in. “I don’t want the divorce. I love you. I never stopped. You know that.”

Yeah, I knew that. Nodding, I caught his eyes, hooded like he longed for me to tell him I still loved him too. That wouldn’t solve anything, though.

I also believed he hadn’t gone all stalker on me when I left because I’d damaged his pride. The Hart pride was legendary. The texts were his passive-aggressive attempt to straddle that line.

With his trip to San Francisco looming, time had run out. I’d never given him a chance to make things right, had I? I’d packed up during one of his marathon knee replacement surgery days. I’d moved out and left my key on the kitchen counter.

“Babe, talk to me,” he said, touching my face.

“I, uh...” I stared into his green eyes.

The definition of insanity meant doing the same thing over and over.

Seb and I sounded like a damn broken record.

I had one card left in my deck. My promotion.

I'd made my career unimportant by keeping the new job from him. Hadn't given him a chance to react.

Zelda strutted past me. "Fifteen minutes."

Damn, Seb and I had an important, knockdown, drag-out brawl to the finish ahead of us. But I couldn't strip away all the crap of the last couple of years and fight for my career and my marriage... In fifteen minutes.

But I'd do it after the wedding. "I need a drink."

"Come on." Seb took my hand and led me to the seating area in the front lobby.

Luke, Tristan, and Grayson sat in saddle leather chairs around a cocktail table dressed in their finely cut suits sharing a bottle of champagne.

"Have room for two more?" Seb said when we reached his cousins.

"Got a seat for you right here, Kennedy," Grayson said, patting his lap.

"You're funny, Gray. Touch her and I'll kill you," Seb said in a deadly serious tone.

"And I'll get you off," said Luke, the lawyer turned hotel CEO.

Tristan stood, shaking his head. "Come on, Seb, let's get two more glasses."

"And another bottle please." Grayson waved the empty one.



I took Tristan's seat, pleased at the warmth and musky scent he left behind. I watched him and Sebastian at the bar and then glanced around the lobby. Tristan and Luke may not have expected to be running a hotel, but they both looked so utterly perfect in their roles.

I echoed Aunt Marissa's sentiment and hoped Seb's cousins found good women. Although, I worried with their billionaire status came opportunists. I wondered if their money made them more guarded.

Tristan and Seb came back with another bottle and I felt guilty for sipping expensive champagne with the four most beautiful men in Manhattan instead of doting on the bride. This was more fun. Luke stood up and let Tristan have his seat facing me while Seb sat on the arm of my chair.

Grayson filled each flute and said, "To Savannah and Brandon."

"Cheers," everyone said and clinked our glasses.

"And that crazy woman with the whistle," Gray added, laughing. He may have been a rake, but he was a sucker for strong-willed women.

Tristan's assistant, a woman with long dark hair and glasses came up to the table. "Oh, Sebastian, I need you to fill this out if you're going on the cruise."

Tristan jumped up. "I got it, Jessie."

"What cruise?" I said and looked up at Sebastian, who'd gone white.

"She meant me," Tristan said. "Thanks, Jessie."

I leaned forward and snatched the paper. "This has your name on it, Sebastian Hart.

You're going on a seven-day cruise? On Monday? "

"You invited Sebastian to go on your sex cruise?" Grayson asked. "I've been asking you for years if I can go with you."

"A sex cruise?" I blinked, feeling sick.

"It's not a sex cruise," Tristan snapped.

I tugged on Sebastian's jacket. "What the heck is he talking about?"

With gaping looks all around, I bolted from my chair to chase after the brunette. "Jessie!"

"Kennedy, what are you doing? That's Tristan's assistant." Seb barreled after me, tugging me by the waist so hard he made a small tear in my dress. "It's okay, Jessie, you can go."

"No. She can't. I'm sorry, hun." I held out the paper to Jessie. "What kind of cruise is Tristan going on?"

"Jessie, you can go back to the office." Tristan's deep voice sailed across my shoulders. "Thank you for working this weekend."

Jessie lowered her head and left.

"That's my assistant, Kennedy. I don't discuss what happens on my vacations with her. Do you understand? This is a workplace. She works for me."

I felt a catch in my throat. With Tristan and his brothers also living in the hotel and hanging out in the lobby bar all the time, it was easy to forget The Sterling was a

workplace for them.

“You’re right, Tristan. I’m sorry. Be straight with me. Both of you. Where are you going?”

Their faces paled as they looked at each other, waiting for the other to speak up.

Gah, men!

The answer to my marital problems had been so simple. Seb needed to work less. And not go on a sex cruise. I felt my hopes for a reconciliation slipping away.

I pointed the question at Tristan. “Tell me more about this cruise?”

“Tristan, if you—”

“Stop it, both of you.” Seb’s cousin blew out a harsh breath.

“Look, Kennedy, running this hotel leaves me no time for a relationship. Luke is the CEO, but I run things here. Day in and day out. I don’t want to hurt a woman by neglecting her.

So once a year, I go on a fantasy vacation where there are women who give themselves to me, no questions asked.

Including my name. Do you have a problem with that? ” He crossed his arms.

“No, Tristan. Of course, I don’t have a problem with that.

You’re a single man. You can do what you want.

In fact..." I wiped my brow, wondering what kind of fantasies the man had, that he had to go into international waters to get them fulfilled.

"I respect you for not wanting to string someone along. Neglect someone."

"I didn't mean to neglect you," Seb grumbled.

Tristan brought me to his side. "Guys, you're getting loud. Sebastian, go sit with Luke and Grayson. I want to talk to Kennedy." Tristan steered me away from Seb, and brought me to a seating area closer to the elevators. "Sit."

I smirked, thinking Tristan may also play sex games on that cruise. Nodding, I let my legs give out.

"Kennedy, I've known you for a long time.

I like you. Heck, I love you. You're my cousin too.

Six months is a long time to be separated from someone you love.

The guy's been a ball buster to be around.

"Tristan removed his glasses. "Sebastian just wanted to get away. I see how he looks at you. He doesn't want anyone else. "

Was it all really about pride?

"He's not attempted to fix anything. He's not taken a day off since..." I looked around. "And yet he'll go on a cruise . Whether it's to get laid or not." I shook my head so hard a pin flew out of my tacked-up maid-of-honor curls. "It's a slap in the face."

Tristan lowered his head. “Maybe I shouldn’t go either.”

Now I felt terrible, injecting my drama into the man’s once-a-year chance for female company.

I didn’t expect Tristan to have the answers for me and Sebastian.

But looking at the man, blushing and even sweating a little over his secret being spilled out minutes before a wedding, maybe I had some answers for him.

“Don’t give up your vacation because of us. Is there a way you can get on the cruise and just...”

“Not sleep with everything on two legs?” His devilish voice got so low it scared me, seeing a glimpse of the man he became on his fantasy vacation.

My heart sped up. Sebastian took my breath away, but Tristan with his broad sculpted shoulders, chiseled cheekbones, and square jaw could make a girl forget her own name.

“Yeah. Or...use it as an opportunity to meet someone. Find a nice girl and just talk to her. It doesn’t have to go anywhere.

Come on. I dare you. Be the man you were when you dated Beth. ”

My love life was in the shitter, Tristan deserved another shot at happy ever after.

His jaw ticked up. “I don’t know where that guy went.” Men didn’t take heartbreak very well. “But you’re right. I’ll have women coming at me from every angle. It would be interesting to just...talk to someone.”

“It’s time, my cousin. And yes, you’re my cousin too.

” I held his hand, warmed by such large fingers closing around mine.

“So, go. Find that woman who doesn’t want anything from you, not your money, not your.

..” I cleared my throat. “Someone who just wants to stare into those amazing whiskey eyes and give you everything she has to give. Just for you. I dare you.”

“You make it sound very intriguing.” He kissed my hand. “Are you up for a dare too?”

Uh oh. I should have known he would turn the tables on me.

“Seb and I... I don’t think we’re gonna make it.

He had six months to come up with a solution.

All he did was go all alpha on me and tell me I should go to California with him.

Give up my life here. That’s not a compromise.

That’s an ultimatum. I don’t know. Maybe he didn’t try because he was glad I left.

Didn’t want to be married to another doctor anymore. Maybe he doesn’t want me anymore—”

A hand gently covered my mouth. “That’s not true,” Tristan said. “One thing we all have in common, me, my brothers, and Seb is an ironclad sense of pride. You leaving Sebastian hurt him, Kennedy. Shut him down.”

With the minutes ticking away until the wedding, my obligation to stand by Sebastian crept closer to being over.

I stood up and caught Seb watching me. Staggering up to him, I said, “The ceremony will start soon. I have to find your sister and keep pretending to be your wife.”

“You are my wife.” He tried to grab me, pull me back in. “And I’m not signing those papers, Kennedy.”

I turned around and walked backward, giving him a sly smirk. “We’ll see about that.”

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Sebastian

I now pronounce you man and wife.

I heard the minister say the final blessing and with those words, I would lose Kennedy all over again. Her job as maid of honor was done.

God, watching her walk down the aisle lit me on fire. How beautiful she looked. But she hadn't glanced at me. Not once. Not even to glower at me. Or sneer at me.

Zelda moved people from the ceremony into the lobby where Tristan's team set up the cocktail hour. Samantha's staff immediately started converting the ceremony room into the reception hot spot.

It really was great for Luke to let Savannah have his five-star hotel for her wedding. During the Christmas rush, no less. As far as I knew, Luke and Tristan weren't charging my dad a penny. My cousins were great men. When they found the right women, I knew, they'd go all-in like I had.

And I wished with all my might their relationships wouldn't fall apart and they wouldn't go through the agony of losing someone. Like I just lost Kennedy. Again.

She felt stiff and distant as we posed for the family photos before the cocktail hour. When Savannah pulled Brandon away saying something about having to check out a chocolate fountain, Kennedy looked wobbly, like she was ready to collapse from the charade.



The weight of this pretense for the wedding had ruined me too.

To see new love starting out killed me while Kennedy and I hurtled toward bottoming out.

To get a last-minute stay of execution, a weekend where we weren't that broken couple, then to get yanked back had me losing my mind.

No wonder Kennedy looked like she couldn't breathe.

Then she...left. To get away from me, I assumed.

I thanked the heavens I had one more night with her to make things right. One more chance. My chance. My Dr. Chance Hart. Would she give me another chance with her heart?

"Things got crazy before," Tristan said over my shoulder. "I'm officially uninviting you next week. I never meant for it to become an issue."

"It really hurt, man. Hearing why you go on those vacations. I work those crazy hours too. I know the loneliness. And I respect, like Kennedy said, you not wanting to hurt someone with neglect. I never knew she felt that way. I came home every night. I slept next to her every night." My stomach twisted.

"It wasn't enough. Just being there, was it? "

"But now you know." Tristan pushed his hands into his trouser pockets. "You know what you did and how it made her feel. She told you. Go find her and make it right."

My gut burned, confusion swamping me. Make it right , like it was that easy. Like I could just...

My phone buzzed with a text from Ward sharing pictures from the Center's Christmas party. A party I had no problems skipping to be with family. To be with Kennedy. There... Why was that so easy?

I flicked through the pictures. Ward must have gone around and captured everyone.

I gazed at my surgical staff all lined up.

Handpicked by me, all graduates from the top of their classes, superstars with test scores through the roof.

They came to the Center with glowing reports from their surgical intern coordinators.

One by one, I looked at the team in New York.

And then the others going to San Francisco. Both Centers had top docs.

I'd not been able to see the forest through the trees because I'd been going from OR to OR, surgery to surgery.

Those pictures in my phone were the exact wake-up call I needed. The jolt.

Ward... Ward should go to San Francisco as the chief surgeon and not me.

My heart pounded. They didn't need me, did they? Sure, athletes wanted me, but I wanted my wife. My marriage.

The answer was simple. I'd shined enough for long enough. Time to step aside and put my marriage first.

A weight lifted off me and I felt unbelievably free because out of nowhere the future

felt so damn positive and not bleak and lonely.

I looked around and when I didn't see that green satin, I worried Kennedy had already gone upstairs and started packing. No. No. No!

I ran for the elevator and it felt like a year to get to PH2. After swiping furiously, I burst into my suite, ran down the hall, and stopped short in the second bedroom. Her red shiny suitcase was gone.

"She was in tears, man," Grayson said from behind me. "She asked me to let her use the private elevator." My cousin explained about the exclusive elevator that only runs between the back of the hotel and PH1, my cousins' penthouse floor above.

No, this wasn't happening. At top speed, I ran down the stairs hating those fucking elevators. Before I got a step outside, I cringed at how hard the snow came down, blanketing Fifth Avenue as far as my watery eyes could see.

No...

Kennedy was walking around in high heels in the snow. She'd get sick. She'd get...

"What's going on?" Tristan clapped his hand on my shoulder.

Behind us, the sounds of my sister's wedding roared, the party in full swing. A low murmuring of the band and everyone's joy spilled out from the ballroom and into the lobby.

"He helped Kennedy escape." I pointed to Gray. "She's gone."

"That was kind of shitty, Gray," Tristan scolded his brother.

“I saw mascara running down her face and I panicked.” Grayson brushed his hand through his hair. “I didn’t want my mom to see her. Or your parents, Seb.”

“You should have called me. I would have left with her. I would have brought her anywhere she wanted to go. Instead of staggering out of here alone.” I caught the flashing hazards of Luke’s limo as Tom cleaned fresh snow off the back windshield. “I need your limo, Tristan.”

“Take it.” Tristan smiled.

As I turned to leave, a frantic voice called out. “Sebastian!”

“What?” I spun around.

Savannah ran up to me in her wedding dress at top speed. “It’s Dad. He passed out.”

Kennedy

The city was truly beautiful at Christmastime. I'd thought those two days staying at The Sterling hotel on Fifth Avenue would have been spent window shopping, getting a warm salty pretzel, and gazing at the amazing tree at Rockefeller Center.

The past two days had not gone like I planned.

At all.

In a taxi heading back to the West Village, I took out my phone and found the text messages from my lawyer earlier in the day. The plan had been to sweet-talk Seb into signing my divorce papers. Instead, he sweet-talked me into bed.

Anything? the lawyer had texted.

No. He won't sign them. What are my options? I responded.

In New York, you can now sue for a no-fault divorce. It means going to court.

He's leaving for San Francisco soon. I don't suppose we'd get a date before then.

He'll have to fly back to New York for the hearings.

Ugh, I'd be dragging him to New York. Any goodwill I earned with his family would be blown apart if this turned into a war.

Maybe I should ask for half his money. Maybe that would light a fire under his butt.

I didn't want money. I wanted another weekend like that one.

Where I was the center of his attention.

My mother had taught me not to show emotion to men. If a man loved me enough, he'd give me everything. Don't ask for anything because it was a sign of weakness. Year after year, my marriage crumbled more and more.

My pride got in the way too.

Stupid.

I started typing my lawyer another text, but my phone closed down from the lack of juice.

The cab stopped in front of my building.

What would Seb tell everyone the following day when I didn't show up for the brunch? The wedding was over, his family deserved to know the truth. But it wasn't my family and I had no obligation to reveal that truth to them.

Inside my large and lonely apartment, I kicked off my wet stilettos and filled my clawfoot tub with hot water to warm my feet. I left my luggage, my purse, and even my phone to rot by the door. I only wanted a bottle of red wine and a bath.

MONDAY MORNING, I brEEZED into Memorial Hospital, grateful to start my new job.

Fall into the abyss of learning a new routine and meeting new people.

Being Head of the Department meant I'd have a full day of work ahead of me.

No word from Sebastian. Or anyone. I guessed they'd taken the news well.

What was done was done and they all went on with their lives.

Savannah and Brandon were on their honeymoon, and Tristan had gone off on his salacious cruise.

With or without Sebastian, that was the question burning in my mind.

"Dr. Hart, there's a call for you," one of the surgical assistants said to me as I placed my workbag down on my desk. A desk I hadn't even set up yet.

It starts...

I picked up the desk phone. "Dr. Hart."

"It's Mason Tether, cardiology. Check your cell. All your calls are going to voicemail."

Horried, I yanked it out of my bag. It'd died two nights ago and I'd been in such a fog, I hadn't even noticed. "Looks like I had a battery issue, Dr. Tether. Thank you for letting me know." Scary that the head of cardiology took time out of his busy schedule to tell me about my phone.

"That's an old friend I've got scheduled for the bypass in OR 6. I assume you want to scrub in as well. I know it's your first day, but considering..."

A chance to prove myself to my new team tickled my insides.

But didn't that make me as bad as Seb? Unable to delegate.

"Dr. Tether, we have the best anesthesiologists here at Memorial. I'll send down my top.

..." I scanned the online charts for Dr. Tether's patients and gasped. "What... What happened to Dr. Hart?"

"You didn't know your father-in-law needs a triple bypass?"



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*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

Sebastian

“I can’t believe you lied to us,” my mom said, holding my father’s hand in the ICU.

“I didn’t lie. I just kept something from you. I didn’t want to blow up Savannah’s wedding.” I paced, watching my father’s vitals crash. Then stabilize. Then crash again.

The last twenty-four hours had been a roller coaster.

I’d never felt so utterly useless in my life.

All my fancy orthopedic handiwork couldn’t do dick for my father who had a blockage.

Kennedy’s phone went straight to voicemail all goddamn day on Sunday.

My mother looked ready to collapse, I couldn’t leave her to go hunt down Kennedy’s apartment.

Not that there was much she could do. She made it clear she wanted no part of the family anymore.

The fucking divorce papers put those terms in black and white.

Savannah and Brandon hadn’t left for their honeymoon, instead, sat in the waiting room looking worried.

Tristan left for his cruise with my blessing and insistence. Luke had a jet to go grab him from one of the Caribbean island stops if things turned dire. My dad's life wasn't in danger, we just needed him stabilized to do the damn surgery.

"Okay, we're gonna do this in about an hour." Dr. Mason Tether, chief cardiologist came into the curtained area. "My team will start coming in to prep. Oh, and your wife will be putting him out, Seb."

"What?"

"Your wife."

"My wife works at Mercy."

"Not anymore. She's the Anesthesiology Department Head here. Just started today."

"What?"

Why hadn't she told me that? Had I even listened to her about being unhappy at Mercy?

I pushed off the wall. "Where is she?"

"At the nurse's station."

My head went foggy as I zipped around the curtain and there she was.

She typed into a laptop sitting on a med cart, but looked up.

Her eyes were so violet against the blue surgical cap, hiding all her luscious hair.

Her body hidden behind the boxy scrubs was the sexiest damn thing I'd ever seen.

She gave a hard swallow and rushed toward me.

"I was just checking your father's chart, I—"

I kissed her with a pounding heart. Had her lips always felt so satiny? "I'm sorry. I've been an asshole. I'm sorry. I'm not—"

"I have to go see your dad." She slid her hand in mine. "You're not what?"

"I'm not going to San Francisco."

"Your father will be fine. He's just going to need some therapy."

I spun her around. "Not for my father. For you . I figured it out on Saturday. It all clicked. But you were gone. And then, Dad... But Kennedy, oh my God. A department head? You're thirty-three years old. That's an amazing accomplishment."

"The last six months, I've had some free time."

"Good. I mean, I'm so sorry."

"I have to see your dad. We have to get him prepped for surgery. Did Dr. Tether give you all the details?"

"Yeah. I'm so glad it'll be you putting him under.

" I kissed her again. "You put me under a spell ten years ago." I fell to my knees.

"Don't divorce me. Please. I can't live without you.

I'm sorry I didn't see all of this before.

I'm staying right here in New York. I'm sending Ward to California.

And you know what? I don't even need to be the chief at the center here.

I'll go back to private practice. Someone will hire me.

Even with my terms. No calls at crazy hours.

I'll do whatever works for us. I have a billion dollars, for crying out loud.

"I kissed her hands. "Correction, we have a billion dollars."

"You're really putting me on the spot, Seb." She breathed in, going shaky. "I have to think about the surgery."

I nodded. "You're right. But I'm not going anywhere and I'm not letting you go." I winked.

"Dr. Hart?" a nurse said, coming out of the curtained area.

"Yeah," we both said together and laughed.

"We're ready for you."

I tucked her under my arm. "She's right here. She's the Dr. Hart you want. Not me. It's your turn, babe. I'm right behind you."

"Forever?" she said, staring up at me, her eyes glassy.

“And always.” I kissed her.

“I love you, Dr. Hart,” she said, as she had for years since we’d gotten our licenses.

“I love you more, Dr. Hart. Cross my heart.”

Two days later...

Sebastian

I breathed in quick puffs, running in place.

“It’s fifteen degrees,” Kennedy said, sashaying into the living room in tight leggings and a zip-up jacket.

“Perfect running weather. I’m just warming up.” I bent and did squats, feeling the burn in my legs. Not from all the running Kennedy and I had been doing the last couple of days, but all the sex.

We were training for next year’s New York City marathon and already signed up for the lottery. Kennedy didn’t hesitate when we signed up under the team, Dr. and Dr. Hart.

“Don’t forget your phone,” she said, sliding it in the zipper compartment of my jacket, then laid a kiss on me that had me dreading being out in the cold.

“Thank you, babe.”

I kept the phone on me to get updates on my dad, who was recovering from the surgery. It’d gone off without a hitch and his doctors scheduled him for discharge the following day.

“And I have something for you.” I reached into my workout bag which had been

doubling as an overnight bag. During my dad's surgery, I'd gone to my townhouse, our townhouse, and packed up to spend the next few days with Kennedy at her place.

From the bag, I took out a key.

Kennedy stared at it. "Is that?"

"Yep. Your key. To our townhouse. Whenever you're ready to come home. I'm happy to put my head on a pillow here for as long as you need. I won't drag you back to a place you felt neglected. But this is me saying, I want you to come home when you're ready."

I was ready the minute I saw her at Mercy hospital with Cal needing his arm fixed.

"You don't like it here?" She spun in the narrow galley kitchen.

God, she was so adorable.

"I like any four walls with you in them." The two-bedroom pre-war, high ceiling, carved moldings, parquet floors, and clawfoot tub were all the charming luxuries Kennedy wanted.

I had interviews lined up for January. Sure enough, several private practices wanted me. And I'd made my conditions very clear. A schedule designed for a human and not Superman.

A beep to my phone brought it right up to my eyes. Old habits. I blinked, reading. "Hold on a sec, Kenna. I got a text from Tristan. The guy sounds panicked."

She leaned over my shoulder, reading with me.

I'm glad you worked things out with Kennedy, and I'm sorry if I'm interrupting all the makeup sex, but you're not going to believe what I've gotten myself into here, Seb. Tell me what to do!

"He's only three days into that cruise of his," Kennedy added.

Details, please, I wrote back.

Tristan responded: One word.

Woman. Curvy. Innocent. A body that won't quit.

Okay, that's more than one word.

Tell Kennedy I said thank you. Took a dare and it was brilliant.

Only now the tables have been turned on me. You won't believe what this woman has asked me to do. Me!

Fuck, battery low.

What dare? I texted back and then looked at my wife. I always thought she was brilliant since she kicked my ass in medical school. "What did you dare him to do?"

Kennedy rolled her lips in like she had a secret. "I told him to consider opening his heart."

"On a sex cruise?"

She tilted her head to me. "It's a fantasy cruise. Maybe he asked for the girlfriend experience and got more than he bargained for."



“Or someone asked him for the boyfriend experience and he’s out of his depth.” I shook my head. Waiting for a reply, I watched the dots cross the screen while Tristan typed.

But the dots disappeared.

And never came back.

“His phone must be dead,” I said, putting mine back in my jacket. “I’m sure we’ll find out what’s going on.”

“Do you regret not going with him?” She slid her body against mine.

“Not on your life. Whatever the problem is with this dare thing, he’ll figure it out. He’s a smart guy with a good heart.”

“I got one of those.” She tapped my chest. “A good Hart. A good billionaire.”

I kissed her. “Me too,” I said because with those divorce papers shredded and burned, Kennedy Chance Hart was also a billionaire. My billionaire wife.

“I guess we’ll have to wait until Tristan gets back to tell us what happened.”

“I expect nothing less than a doozy of a story.” I smiled and snagged my wife by the back of her neck. “Now, where were we ?” I captured her lips. “Got any dares for me?”

“I dare you to skip your run this morning.” She devoured me, her tongue tasting my lips and tangling with hers. “Or delay it until you’ve had the proper...warm up.”

I knew once we hit that plush bed of hers, we wouldn’t be going running.

That morning, the good billionaire doctor prescribed another type of workout.

And my Kennedy always followed doctor's orders...

Thank you for reading The Good Billionaire . Find out what's happening to Tristan on that cruise in Daring the Billionaire . Read Chapter One right here ?

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

### BOOK TWO IN THE BILLIONAIRE HART SERIES

#### CHAPTER ONE

Laney

I tripped and performed a spectacular faceplant in front of an entire lobby full of people. Not the best way to start a cruise. You don't get a second chance to make a first impression. That first impression got blown, didn't it?

My fractured mind unscrambled and screamed: Stand up. Pick up your phone. Put your shoe back on. Cry. In that order, please.

Hot tears didn't cooperate, though. My stinging eyes blurred my vision.

Yet, I still caught Jonathan strolling off without looking back.

Pushing off the plush printed carpet, I closed my legs against the New York winter chill that followed me up the gangplank.

Thanks to the ridiculously short yellow dress I wore on a dare, everyone behind me enjoyed a view of my bikini wax.

"Hey buddy, your wife is on the floor!" Powerful hands closed around my waist and yanked me to my feet.

My forehead smashed into the muscular chest of a stranger who yelled over my head,

presumably at Jonathan who had barreled onto the ship ahead of me.

“I’m not his wife,” I corrected the man and loosened myself from the warm embrace that left a trace of fresh soap and leather stuck in my nose. “Thank you.”

“Are you okay?” the man asked, sliding my phone back into my shaking palm, our skin making contact.

“Yes.” I brushed long waves of hair away from my face, but several strands caught on my lip gloss. Gross. “I don’t know what happened to me there.”

“Here’s your shoe.” The man held it by the heel, and I hoped he didn’t catch the Payless label.

“Thank you.” I collected my other scattered belongings as embarrassment flooded through me, hot and fast.

The man kept his hand on my waist while I got my bearings. “If that guy was your boyfriend, he’s a jerk.”

His touch triggered fire that heated my cheeks. “He’s not...” I began, ready to explain Jonathan was my boss. When I glanced at the man’s face, the rest of my sentence couldn’t have been pried from my mouth with a crowbar.

Holy shit. A gasp burned in my chest as crowds of boarding passengers parted around us. Hyperventilating, I mumbled to the Adonis towering over me, “Who...who are you? Do you work here?”

“No.” He slipped on expensive-looking sunglasses, signaling he was ready to get on with his cruise. And robbing me of exquisite and unique golden eyes.

“There you are.” Nikki, my design assistant, bumped against my back. “You raced up the gangplank so fast I was afraid you’d trip.”

“She did,” Adonis said, maneuvering around us.

“Oh my God. Who are you?” Nikki followed his stare as I gaped in wonder at the most beautiful man I’d ever seen. “Laney, who is this?”

“Have a good day, ladies.” Adonis grasped his Louis Vuitton bag and beat feet to the elevator.

“Who was that?” Nikki took hold of my arm.

“I don’t know!” I brushed away the lint stuck to my bare knees, but I’d bet that brown and gold leather case was real and not a Chinatown knock-off.

Nikki steered me away from the rest of the passengers spilling into the cramped holding area. “Where’s Jonathan?”

“He...” I spun around to search for him. “I don’t know.”

For Jonathan to not even glance behind him to see if I made it onto the ship, surprised the hell out of me.

Just five minutes before we boarded, he’d been his usual suave and flirty self.

Then he marched up that gangplank like a man on a mission, forgetting all about me.

If he’d turned around and seen me on the floor, of course, he would have stopped.

How noble of Adonis, though, to fling harsh words at Jonathan because he’d thought

we were a couple.

Feeling embarrassed all over again, I was glad there were thousands of people on the ship. The likelihood of seeing Adonis again was slim to none.

“Okay.” Nikki took charge and collected my bags. “It’s just the first day. You have plenty of time to tell Jonathan you want to sleep with him.”

I now regretted spilling my secret crush to Nikki. At first, having a wing-girl on this cruise seemed helpful. Now, I worried Nikki might assist too much and push me if I got cold feet. I’ll buy a pair of socks.

For weeks, I’d been scratching my head wondering why Jonathan wanted to be on a seven-day Caribbean cruise out of New York the week before Christmas.

Ironic, because I wanted to tie him to a bed with a big red bow.

But a cruise was perfect. What happened in international waters, stayed in international waters.

“What time does this thing start moving?” Nikki nudged me toward the elevator bank, ripping away thoughts of hot and sexy Jonathan.

“The confirmation email said the ship leaves at four pm.” I cleared the lust out of my throat. “Why we needed to board at two pm, I have no idea.”

A uniformed agent twisted around and gaped at me and Nikki with disdain. “We don’t board . We embark. And we don’t leave . We set sail!” She raised her hand with a flourish.

I snorted in derision. Airports went out of their way to make waiting for a plane as

convenient as possible with an absurd variety of food, alcohol, and charging stations. The cruise lines' pathetic waiting rooms lagged far behind.

"Most folks got here at ten this morning." A nice-looking gentleman in a blue uniform loaded our bags onto a brass luggage cart without asking. "They want to get an early start." He winked.

"Early start on what?" I asked while Nikki launched into full assistant mode by reorganizing the pile. "Alcohol isn't free anymore."

The steward gave me a complete once-over, his eyes lingering on my bare legs. "Just look for the devil horns symbol on stickers. The whole thing's gone underground," he whispered. "Don't forget to wear your fire pin so the men know you're willing."

I opened my mouth to ask for clarification, but he took off with our luggage. Horns? Fire pins? Willing? He must have us confused with another party group. Nikki, Jonathan, and I were boring textile folks.

Although people who met under a devil symbol and needed a flaming fire pin to show they were willing sounded intriguing. To do what, though?

"What's your cabin number?" the steward asked over his shoulder.

"Um..." I fumbled with my reservation printout.

Nikki barked out the number to our two-bedroom outside suite with a balcony.

I preferred privacy, but agreed to double up in the event I fell off the rear of the ship.

At least Nikki would know if I went missing.

Hell, she'd probably convince the captain to turn around and scoop me out of the water.

"We'll take the port-side cars up to your deck." The steward pushed our luggage down a narrow corridor. "Hold the elevator, please."

A beautifully sculpted hand smacked the polished door to keep it from closing.

"Go ahead ladies," the steward said, waving us in.

Inside the dark-paneled elevator, Adonis leaned against the wall, stone-faced with his gaze fixed on me.

"Oh, hello again," I blurted before my brain could stop me.

"Hello." He matched my tone and my greeting.

From the corner of my eye, I caught the shiny brass luggage cart barreling toward me. Wrenching out of its way forced my body against Adonis's arm. The man brimmed with heat underneath a gorgeous cashmere coat.

"Excuse me," I said softly, scooching a few inches away.

"No problem." His eyes lingered on my neck, but never crawled down to my breasts. A first, given my voluptuous D-cups. Was he looking for something specific?

The elevator jumped to a stop and I slammed my palm against the paneling to prevent another fall into Adonis.

"Sir, after you," the steward said to the handsome man. "I have to get the cart out."



“Ladies, first,” he responded, bowing his head to me.

I smiled and prayed I’d make it out of the elevator in one smooth glide. Bracing myself, I stepped gingerly on six-inch heels Nikki dared me to wear along with this ridiculously short dress. All to get Jonathan’s attention.

“You’re just at the end of the passageway, ladies,” the steward said once he lugged the cart off the elevator. His phone buzzed and after a glance, he said, “Oh, shoot.”

“Everything all right?” Nikki asked as Adonis whizzed by us.

“My boss is yelling at me to get back to the holding area. I’m not supposed to give guests special attention. But you guys are our best customers.” He winked again.

Getting this cruise instead of a bonus was bad enough. Having my bags brought to my cabin sooner wouldn’t soften the blow.

“I got this,” Nikki said, already pushing the cart.

“No, I got it.” Adonis reappeared. He slapped a twenty-dollar bill in the steward’s hand then tossed his expensive luggage on top of my Samsonite special from TJ Maxx.

I opened my mouth to protest, but Nikki snapped my arms down and glared at me. “Let the man push your luggage.”

“What’s your cabin number?” he asked, removing his coat.

Nikki spilled the details while I followed, frowning at the ugly taupe wall covering. Mr. A’s high round ass made for a much better view.

Wow. Wow. Wow.

When we reached mine and Nikki's stateroom, Adonis glanced around the passageway. "Looks like we're neighbors." He yanked his bag off the cart.

"Yay us." I took out my room key, but Nikki pulled me to the side. "What?" I asked.

"That guy stared at you the whole time we were in the elevator. Give it a try."

"Give what a try?"

"Flirting."

"Nikki, he's not..." I noticed Adonis resting his shoulder against the wall glaring at his phone. A hopeful woman would construe that as a stalling tactic. His mumbled expletives implied otherwise.

"You need to practice flirting," Nikki whispered. "Look him in the eye and give him a sexy smile. Then in a seductive tone, say: thank you, see you around, handsome."

As ridiculous as Nikki sounded, she had an excellent point. I had to work on my moves and facial expressions. If nothing else, I'd get free drinks out of it.

"Okay." I flipped my hair, took a step, and fell facedown into my luggage.

Tristan

## Page 19

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:18 am*

“WE HAVE TO STOP DOING this.” I lifted the woman off the floor. Again. I should have minded all of these interruptions, but damn, she felt nice. “Tristan Hart, by the way.”

“Laney. Hathaway,” she said breathlessly, regaining her balance.

A stare stretched between us for a palpable moment.

Was she there for the same reason I was?

The steward had thought so. A newbie, perhaps?

Ordinarily, I’d stay far, far away from those.

I was there to find my vacation fling, preferably an experienced woman who wanted lots of sex, and nothing but sex. A newbie couldn’t handle me.

In all my years doing this, no other woman smacked me upside the head with such a heart-stopping rush of lust after a few seconds.

Touching Laney sent sparks through my body like never before.

I felt like something had grabbed and shaken me.

I usually closed down my emotions on this cruise.

Perhaps it was because she fell and I touched her before I had a chance to disconnect

from my world.

Surrender my real life for this annual erotic fantasy.

Or...that dare sat in the back of my mind. My cousin dared me to approach this cruise differently. Just...talk to a woman.

Here goes...

“How’s your knee?” I asked her, pointing hesitantly. “From, you know, the fall.”

When she looked down, waves of glossy brown hair tumbled across her shoulder, the lavender scent overwhelming me. “Fine. Don’t tell anyone,” she whispered and leaned into me like a fantastic secret was coming my way. “These aren’t my shoes. I might be tripping a lot on this cruise.”

Why did I find that so damn adorable? The knight in shining armor in me, perhaps. The real me. Not the tongue-wagging dog I turned into on this cruise. “I’ll listen for any loud thumps out here in the hall,” I remarked, resisting a woof.

“Or screaming.”

Thinking she meant in an orgasmic rush, I dropped my hands to hide a growing erection. “Excuse me?”

“What?”

“What?” My eyes locked on hers. With everything I had, I pushed my thoughts into her brain. Are you hiding a fire pin from me?

Caught in stunned silence, all I did was breathe and stare. Then Laney’s friend tiptoed over, and I could have sworn the blonde gave Laney a gentle push. “I’ll be in the

cabin unpacking,” the friend said.

Laney shook her head then stepped back. “Right. We have to unpack. Bye, Mr. Hart.” Her hypnotic blue eyes cast a lingering gaze over her shoulder.

I stayed frozen in that spot until the loud click of Laney’s cabin door knocked me out of my dirty thoughts.

Every year, I boarded the cruise ship in peace without anyone noticing me. I came here to blow off steam. My job and pain in the ass older brother built up a year’s worth of stress. Escaping land hadn’t stopped Luke from flooding my emails about our hotel, though.

After several fumbling tries, I got my key card into the slot and shoved the door open.

I immediately frowned at the bland suite and brown carpet.

Man, I hated how it reminded me of my own hotel’s guest rooms. Minimalist made sense for the cruise people who didn’t want passengers hiding in their cabin.

Not when the alcohol now costs an arm and a leg.

With all the beige surrounding me, Laney and her red hard-case luggage and yellow dress stuck in my mind.

I was swamped with misplaced frustration.

I hadn’t gotten a good look at the jerk she’d boarded the ship with, the one who’d just kept ambling along when she fell. That dick move sure pissed me off.

When several bottles of hair product flew from the bathroom counter, I realized I’d been slamming shit. I bent down to pick them up and put them next to my shave kit

when I caught my reflection in the mirror.

A haggard and shaken man stared back at me.

I should have kept walking and not touched Laney.

Weeks of prepping for a cruise that permitted me to check my emotions at the door went to shit the minute I touched her.

I couldn't walk past a woman lying on the floor.

Especially one with long legs in a short skirt.

Yeah, that's what I liked. Dark, shiny hair, long and flowing.

It stirred my insides the moment I saw her sashaying up the gangplank.

The guy she was with had looked familiar, but after one glance at her tight ass, my eyes and mind stayed put.

When she fell, and the asshole kept walking, I got ripped out of mindless screwing mode. The real Tristan Hart had been thrust onto the scene. The quiet guy who lived in the shadow of my playboy brother. Except for that one week, where I was the sexual force to be reckoned with.

I swallowed and scrubbed my hands down my face. "Right," I murmured.

I unzipped my luggage. Expensive bags I didn't put proper tags on, preferring to hide my real identity: a billionaire looking for a fling on vacation.

I'd already given Laney my real name. "For fuck's sake," I said, rubbing my forehead. Anonymity reigned supreme on the devil cruise. No one used their real

name.

I turned my thoughts away from my momentary lapse in judgment, concentrating instead on putting all of my crap away to get on with this cruise. The place where every year, I lived out my wildest fantasies for a week, then went back to my boring life working with Luke in our late father's hotel.

To light a fire under my ass, I reminded myself women were waiting for me. Me . The alpha. The one to be with. The one to please. That tasty brunette next door would be a nice treat.

I took in the suite's separate bedroom. Large bed. Good. Tris got a little crazy in bed.

When my phone rang, I groaned. "Yeah, Luke."

"Did that boat leave yet?" My brother knew what happened on these cruises.

"No." I froze. "Is Uncle Charlie okay?"

"He's fine. Surgery went great." Luke sounded serious. "It's about the hotel."

My brothers and I owned The Sterling, a New York City hotel that had been dumped on us after our father's death.

Our cousin, Savannah had been married in the hotel the weekend before.

All had been going great until her dad, my uncle collapsed.

Last I heard, the guy was stable. Just a blockage and a routine bypass would fix him right up.

Meanwhile, Sebastian, Savannah's brother and wife, Kennedy had laid into me about

this cruise. Kennedy had even dared me to take my fantasy to a new level. Find a nice girl and just talk... That seemed crazy at the time, except a nice girl just happened to be in the cabin next door.

“So, what’s up?” I asked Luke, wanting to get my brother off the phone.

“I don’t want to ruin your ability to concentrate and get a hard-on.”

A sick relative might have done that. Other than that, I never had a stamina problem before. On the cruise, or anywhere. “I’m listening.”

“The offer from those crazy sons of bitches came in.”

“And?”

While everyone had been mooning over the hotel for the family weekend wedding, Luke and I had been waging a silent war. Luke was trying to sell the hotel. He even put out a request for bids to developers.

I had mixed feelings about selling my posh five-star baby. Sure, it’d been more work than we had imagined, but our efforts were finally paying off.

Before naming myself chief operating officer, I had made a small fortune in the marketing consulting game, but running the hotel had brought out a different set of passions. The place could use some work, though. The Sterling needed a killer facelift and Luke didn’t want to make that commitment.

No surprise. I didn’t secretly call my brother No-commitment Luke for nothing.

“It’s sweet, man.” My brother sounded like Uncle Charlie had, telling us Sebastian got into Harvard.



That ‘sweet’ offer would drive a wedge between us. Shit, I felt my dick shrinking already. No, I didn’t want to think about the hotel. I wanted—no, deserved seven days of peace a year.

“I want to make sure there’s Wi-Fi on that big canoe,” Luke added. “I already emailed you the paperwork to look at. Send me your comments.”

“You mean you’ll read my emails this time?” My ears pricked when I heard giggling next door.

I shook the distraction away by hanging up my custom dress shirts and exquisitely tailored slacks. Looking like I stepped off a Tom Ford runway added to my alpha persona. My heart rate ticked up picturing that damn brunette tearing my favorite two-hundred-dollar shirt off my body.

“You know my messages get buried,” Luke responded, bringing my thoughts back around. “Or Lucy deletes them by mistake.”

“I’m tired of hiring assistants for you.” I stopped mid-step. “Please tell me you’re not sleeping with her.”

“No!” Luke huffed. “How fucking stupid do you think I am?”

And if he’d tried, at least she had the good sense to turn him down. “Fine. Next time I have something important to tell you, I’ll ride up the elevator and bust into your penthouse apartment.”

“Make an appointment, please.” Luke gave a throaty laugh. “I want all of this to be over, Tristan. It’s been a shitshow. I don’t know how Dad did it, to be honest.”

“Running a billion-dollar hotel is easy when you don’t have a family to care about.” I clenched my teeth as the anger I felt toward my father for leaving our mother when

we were young flooded in.

“He’s made us a ton of money. After we sell, we’ll be billionaires ten times over. Mom, too. She always gets a cut.” Luke’s ‘living well was the best revenge’ excuse rang hollow.

I pushed away the bitterness. And thinking of Mom, who now lived in a Florida mansion was the ultimate hard-on killer. “You know how I feel about this. If we invest—”

“Save it. Haven’t you thought for a second what you would do with billions of dollars in cash that’s not tied up in this crumbling atrocity?” Sounded like Luke wasn’t itching to go back to his law firm, either.

It’d been three years since we had our lives turned upside down by our father’s death. Luke, our younger brother Grayson, and I became hotel owners overnight, a job none of us expected or wanted.

Luke had snatched up the ceremonious title of CEO. Grayson, a rebel and struggling actor, brought a long line of dubious guests to the lobby bar, and always dashed away without paying the check. Or leaving a tip. That was his involvement in our father’s prized possession.

With so many billions of dollars, none of us would have to work ever again. The billion or so we already pocketed had corrupted Luke enough. If forced to sell, I might invest in something small and innovative—a start-up, perhaps.

“We’ll talk more about it when I get back.” I happily lived in Luke’s shadow on dry land, but this was my turn to be a god. “Have Lucy pencil me in for dinner.”

“You got it.” My brother cleared his throat. Luke and I were not all that different, only my brother screwed women nonstop throughout the year. “Oh, Tris ?”

Now how did Luke know that's what women called me on this cruise? "Yeah?"

"Lick some good pussy for me," Luke crassly blurted then hung up.

My body seared hot and fast when my dirty mind pictured Laney and her gorgeous ass spread out before me.

I dragged a hand through my hair. What the fuck? She wasn't there for the same reason I was. I was sure of it. "A damn shame," I mumbled under my breath.

Those were some great tits I felt against my chest. All that perfumed hair...I could get lost in there. How would that silky mane feel all over my naked chest?

How would those innocent lips feel on my body knowing I'd be the only man to have her that week. The real dare was trusting myself with someone so precious and naive.

Did I have it in me?

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