



Until You're Breathless

(Insatiable #1)

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Category: Romance

Description: The ultimate revenge. A precarious second chance at love. And a dirty trick that plays so hard on hearts that one gets broken and the other one could lose everything.

So much for that. Its all I can think about after seeing the questionable text message. His reaction to it would be telling to anyone else. But me, stupidly, I trust him. Until I find out the truth and it sets me free. Jagger is the last person I want to go to, but in my line of work, I don't see how I have a choice. But the past comes back to bite me in the ass, just like I thought it would, and in more ways than one. Painfully, he's still the hottest man I know, and the smartest. And he holds the ticket to my future, but does he know that he may have the ticket to my heart, too?

I know she's coming back the second that I see her name on the list. Bowie is no more impressed by her decision to come knocking on my door than I am. But I get it. And with the industry and by that, I mean my brothers breathing down my neck, I haven't got a choice but to hire her. The past still haunts me. I try to hide it but, just like back then, Bowie can see right through me. It's a gift. So is she. But I can't tell her that, or it could cost us everything. He was a fool. But can I count on him being fool enough to stay away? If I don't play my cards right, I risk losing two of the things that I love the most in life.

and she's worth it. She just doesn't know it yet.

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Jagger

“J agger! Jagger, now! Don’t stop!” She squeals through a pant, as I thrust into her, thanking Christ that I sent the rest of my office staff home hours ago.

Tammy is bent over my oak desk, as I enter her from behind, so drunk on lust I almost forget about the fact that my brother Rush will be here in ten minutes.

Tammy mewls as I empty myself into her, grateful for the long overdue release, and I slow, watching as she lays her head down on the lid of my closed laptop, and closes her eyes, breathless.

“God, that was good, baby.” She says on exhale.

“Not bad at all.” I agree, pulling out of her, taking care of the condom.

She zips up her skirt and straightens her blouse. “Rush will be here in ten. Go fix your hair.” She says, turning to me, wiping a smear of her lipstick off my collarbone.

Hands through my hair, I walk over to the mirror next to my collection of diplomas hanging on the wall, and straighten my tie. “How’s that email blast coming along?”

“Good.” She swallows, as she ties her hair back up. “I’ll just get another pair of eyeballs on it and get it out first thing tomorrow morning.”

“Send it to me. I’ll look it over.”

Her guffaw is telling. “You’re meeting with your brother, the consultant, who is working towards accelerating Lawson Enterprises from a billion-dollar to a multi-billion-dollar company, in ten minutes, and yet you want to edit an email to staff? Talk about micro-managing, Jagger.”

“It’s not beneath me.”

I may come from a family of billionaires, but we all started from nothing.

“That’s why you hired me.” She argues kindly.

“Actually, I hired Gretchen for editing, and emailing, so that’s where you’re wrong. You are my personal assistant, and you should have delegated that email in the first place.”

After she fixes the chignon at the base of her neck, she rounds on me. “What are we talking about here, Jagger? I mean, you’re up to your ears in fucking work, that’s why your brother is coming, isn’t it? The last thing you need is to edit a fucking email, or to tell me how to run this office.”

“You don’t run this office. Stella, the office manager does. And in all the time that we’ve been arguing about it, that email would be done.”

With a huff and an eyeroll, she walks out of my office.

Her attitude sucks but she’s a no-bullshit kind of person and she gets the job done.

Plus, it doesn’t hurt that she has loose morals and the libido of a high school boy.

She never makes it obvious that we’re fucking, either, and she has no interest in a relationship, so it’s a win-win for both of us.

Five minutes later, there's a tap on my door.

"Yeah." I call out, knowing that it's Rush.

He walks in, carrying his briefcase. I swear to God that thing is an appendage. He never goes anywhere without it. Rush takes a seat without any eye contact and gets down to business, pulling his laptop out of the briefcase. "Halen's gonna be coming by shortly with some leads."

"Yeah? Good." I mutter while opening my laptop. Tammy's face print is still on it. Rush looks up at me as I wipe it off with a disinfectant wipe from the receptacle on my desk. "Ever feel like you're drowning?" I ask rhetorically.

"You're not drowning, Jagger. You're moving to the next level, and aside from a lack of manpower, you're well on your way."

"It's not just that. I've got one hell of a hurdle to get past, with the bid on the European markets."

"It's in the bag. You are the most sought-after engine manufacturer in the northern hemisphere.

You're the only one with a patent for the hybrid vehicles that doesn't have all the environmental bullshit that the other ones do, and you know it.

You've just got to get your fucking head out of the sand and focus.

And the only way you're going to do that without a hitch, is with the proper team in place. That's your weak spot."

"And you think you can fix that."

“I identify your vulnerable areas and advise you on what to do to fix them, and Halen has the highest retention rate for hiring fit personnel in the business. That’s why you hired us, man. It was the smartest thing you did.”

We hear a knock at the door and Halen’s face appears. “Come on in, brother. Perfect timing.” I tell him.

He, too, has a briefcase in his hand. “Sorry I’m late. But it couldn’t be helped.”

A look of concern crosses over my face. “Is everything okay?”

Halen looks at Rush, like they have a mutual secret.

Rush looks at him, but ultimately pays more attention to his laptop.

“I didn’t want to say anything, and Rush told me to keep it under wraps until things calm down, but you’ll fucking kill me if you find out that I knew and didn’t tell you, regardless of my reasons. ”

Rush rakes a hand through his hair and closes his laptop.

Fuck.

Halen clasps his hands together. “It was only through the grapevine until this morning that I’d heard.”

“Heard what?” I ask, sitting up higher in my chair.

“Kruger Manufacturing.” He says with a head tilt upward, as if saying the name of my competitor is explanation enough.

“What about them?” I ask, dividing my glance between both my brothers. I watch Rush scrape a hand down his face and I feel my stomach start to knot up.

“It seems that there’s been a divide in the company.” Rush offers.

“What kind of divide?”

Halen pulls up an article on his laptop and turns it so I can see it. “I know that you’ve been up to your balls in work, so you wouldn’t have noticed. But it’s my job to pay fucking attention, so here it is.”

I look at the article. I’m shocked but confused. “Shouldn’t this be good news? I mean, Kruger’s losing his right-hand woman. I don’t get it. Why should I fucking care, man?” I feel my stomach loosen a little, but it’s just a moment too soon, as I’ll find out more in the next five minutes.

“She leaves him he’s a loose cannon, for one.” Rush points out.

“So? Isn’t that good for me? I don’t get it. What’s the catch?”

My brothers once again exchange a look.

I’m growing frustrated. “Fucking out with it, guys. Quit fucking around. What’s the problem.”

Rush sighs. “It’ll divide your focus.”

“Why? Why the fuck should it divide my focus? I’m up to my fucking ears in work, I’m looking for like twenty new heads to help out around here, minimum, I’m bidding for the biggest opportunity that my business has had to date, so why the fuck should I care that Boston Kruger and Bowie Ritter are calling it quits? ”

Rush shakes his head. “Only because Bowie was, and I quote, ‘the love of your fucking life’, and now she’s a free agent.”

I laugh out loud. “Maybe fifteen years ago, man, but not anymore. Hell, she signed her walking papers the second she went out with that douche bag back in high school. You guys are both off your rockers. I couldn’t give two shits about her anymore.

As far as I’m concerned, Bowie can go hop in the sack with the goddamn CEO of the Ford Motor Company, and I wouldn’t give a shit. ”

“Riiiiiiight.” Rush says, unconvinced.

I give him a look like he just asked me how many balls I have in my shorts.

“What the fuck is your problem, man? I haven’t even seen or spoken to Bowie in ten years, and the only reason why I spoke with her at the high school reunion is because her fucking boyfriend was too drunk to drive her home, the asshole. ”

This is where Halen gets annoyed. “Please. You kept her fucking bra for five years after you porked her. You were so devastated that she chose Boston over you that you even turned down goddamn Stacey Milligan, the hottest chick in high school, for senior prom. Why the fuck she wanted to be seen with a pissant like you is beyond me, but whatever. You lost your chance with two of the sexiest girls in North Carolina, and you’ve been a mess ever since. ”

A ‘v’ forms between my brows as I crane my neck backward.

My voice is almost a squeak. “What is this? The fucking Sally Jesse Raphael show? Since when do you two dickwads care about my love life? And since when is any of this relevant? For all we know, this could be a fucking media ploy. You know as well as I do that Boston Kruger pulls out all the stops. That dude plays dirty. He and

Bowie could be sitting in their airport-sized living room, sipping wine, clinking glasses to the beat of us idiots that are buying into the whole stupid story.”

“I doubt it, dude.” Rush guffaws, shaking his head.

“First of all, Boston isn’t smart enough to pull that shit off, even with the proper PR.” Halen points out. “I ran it past Stevie, and she agrees.”

Stevie is our sister. She owns a PR firm.

“So you know for a fact that this shit isn’t fake.” I check, half irritated, half pissed off. I hate it when I’m wrong.

“She’s still digging into the whole story, but so far everything checks out.” Halen confirms.

“Fuckoff.” I whine. “This stinks of Boston and his antics. You remember him in high school? Cheated on every fucking test, stole my fucking girlfriend, copied my goddamn assignments. Hell, I wouldn’t be surprised if the asshole has some spy on my premises, poaching my bloody patents.”

“That’s why we’re hiring you a team of lawyers.” Rush states. “I’ve got two more on a retainer right now, as we speak.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t trust anyone.” I state, miffed.

“And that’s number three of four reasons why we’re concerned about you, Jagger.” Halen adds.

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“What’s wrong with that? Hell, I’m not going to risk losing everything I’ve worked my ass off for, just for not keeping up with shit.

That’s also why I have you guys. I’m aware that outside threats exist. I’m not stupid.

But I think that you guys are way off base here.

Look, I know Boston. We both learned from the same goddamn teachers, and we studied the same programs in almost the same fucking classes in college.

If we’d gotten along better, we might have gone into business together, but since he ruined my fucking life, thanks to him, we’ve been enemies for as long as I can remember. ”

“And you don’t think that if this story is true, which it is, that it’s going to affect this business?” Halen checks. “You don’t think that once the news spreads, that Boston is going to lose his shit? That he’s going to be out for blood?”

I shrug. “Why the fuck would that have anything to do with me?”

Rush speaks frankly. “Because Bowie was the brains behind that company. She kept that idiot in check. You remember the conference two years ago? When she didn’t show up and he got smashed out of his mind? Almost started a brawl with that dude from Ford?”

“Yeah, that’s where I benefit.” I point out.

“If she’s left him, then it’s a win for me.

But I don’t believe that she left him. She’s got too much at stake.

They’ve been together since high school.

He’s just as rich as me and she’s got more education than that dillhole has.

He wouldn’t be stupid enough to let her walk.

” Bowie went to an ivy league school after being offered an academic scholarship, while me and Boston attended the University of North Carolina and started getting our feet wet opening our separate businesses.

Bowie didn’t come from money like we did, so she paired up with Boston, like everyone expected, and went into business with him, since he had the money, and she didn’t.

“I agree it would be messy. Depending on their agreement, she could take him for all that he’s worth, since she’s got just as much of a stake in that company as he does.” Halen volunteers.

“Yeah, but the asshole never put a ring on her finger, man.” I point out. “Who knows what sort of complication that causes.”

Rush scoffs, smirking. “With all your money and all this business and shit, do you see yourself ever tying the knot? Would you be stupid enough to do that?”

I look at him like he just asked if he could whizz in my Ficus. “Fuck no. I could never trust anyone that much, are you kidding? Plus, I’m married to this place, man. This comes first. Nothing else would ever come in the way of what I have.”

“Here here.” Rush taps my fist with his.

“That goes double for me.” Halen adds.

I change the subject matter slightly. “So, Stevie’s been sniffing around? Making sure that this whole thing isn’t a PR stunt?”

“At least within her realm of PR people, yes. She’s got contacts that her other contacts can report back to and that’s what she’s working on right now.

But if Boston is as cunning as you think he is, who knows.

I doubt that the dude is that smart to pull off losing his closest business partner as a gag. And what for, anyway?” Rush shrugs.

“To make me think that he’s vulnerable.” I lift my chin. “It’s the perfect alibi with this international deal looming. If word gets out that he’s weak then he thinks we’ll lay off a little. Sit back and let him put his foot in his own mouth.” I reason.

“But isn’t that a risk for the deal?” Halen asks. “I mean, if his CEO walked, won’t that make him look like a sitting duck?”

“Well, so far, the media in the states has been made aware.” Rush responds. “Nobody across the pond or elsewhere knows, according to Stevie.”

“It’s a small world, man.” I counter. “Word will get around.”

“But you don’t buy it.” Halen tests.

“I don’t.” I agree, resting my feet on the desk, sitting back. “And even if he was caught without a CEO, you don’t think that since Bowie’s female, that that’ll make

him look more appealing across the pond? Those Europeans...not too hot on chicks pulling that much weight.”

“Yeah, and besides, think of the pool of fucking Kruger Manufacturing wannabees that’ll be coming up out of the woodwork. Hell, how much of a coveted spot is Bowie’s, hm? He’ll have that position filled in the blink of an eye.” Halen confers.

Tapping my fingers on the desk, I draw in a deep breath and release it. “So, what have you got for me, Rush? What’s behind door number one, two and three for me for recruitment?”

Again, Rush and Halen exchange a look. Halen looks at his watch. “Shit, I’ve got a dinner meeting at seven. Come by my place in the morning and we’ll talk it over.”

“What?” I almost squeak. “What the fuck did you come all the way over here for then?” I’m skeptical and feeling played, but in my heart of hearts, I know that my brother is a straight shooter. Nonetheless, I feel like there’s more to this story than they’re both letting on.

“Gotta go.” Halen says, rising abruptly from the leather guest chair that he was sitting on.

I know better than to press him, so I let him go, and resign myself to berate him tomorrow. When the door closes behind him, I look at Rush. “What the fuck is his problem.” I say as more of a statement than as a question.

Rush looks at me with conviction and I freeze in place. “You want my advice, little brother?”

After a sigh, I sit back in my chair, wondering what other good news I’m about to get today. “Hit me with it.”

“Forget about Bowie.”

“I did. Fifteen years ago.”

He looks me straight in the eye. “Don’t fuck with me, Jagger. I know you too well.”

“Fine.” I speak through gritted teeth.

Rush tucks his laptop into his bag and rises. He walks to the door. But before he leaves, he turns to me.

“And stop fucking your goddamn assistant.”

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Bowie

His phone pings that he's got a message, but I barely hear it, with his heavy breathing in my ear.

The heat sends shivers down my spine, but there is no mistaking that his pace slows, and his focus is split the second the ding reverberates through the room.

"Baby, I'm almost there." I whisper to him, feeling myself climb.

His cock tells me that he's almost there, too, but he speeds so fast, throwing me off my rhythm.

Seconds later, he shudders and grunts, and his seed spurting inside me normally throws me over the edge, but this morning, it's different.

"Boston, I..." I trail off, half wanting to tell him that he didn't bring me home, but half concerned for why his mind is elsewhere. We're transparent with each other about everything, and I know that he'll tell me what's on his mind. I just wish that he told me before we made love.

Expecting him to start talking, I back off, not worrying about the fact that my needs were not met.

"Is it Mackenzie?" I ask, wondering if it's our connection to the Ford Motor Company, whom we've been back and forth with.

It's somewhat of a back door approach, I'll admit, but it's our edge against our competitors.

Boston walks to his phone, still fully erect, still panting, but the look of concern still crosses my face.

"No, it's not." He says, turning his back to me, also turning his phone off. "Sorry, baby. I need to take a shower."

"Who was it?"

"Fucking spam. Same number that's been pissing me off for weeks.

" He says dismissively. And he's not wrong.

The same phone number has been harassing him at the most inopportune times since last month.

Although this is the first time that it's interrupted us during sex.

It's nothing for Boston or myself to drop everything when our phones ring.

That's the life that we signed up for when we started this business.

"I'll let Helga know to dig around and get you taken off their call list." I sigh, mentioning our office manager. "Go get showered. I'll make breakfast."

We've got a long day ahead of us and I can't stand starting one on an empty stomach.

It's an itch that needs to be scratched. But something else needs to be scratched, too. As Boston walks into our ensuite bathroom, I can still feel my pulse humming

between my legs. I could join Boston in the shower, but I already know that his mind is elsewhere now. My battery-operated friend sits in my nightstand drawer. Boston is well aware of it, since it's used often with us, but in circumstances like this, it calls for a solo job.

Laying on the bed, I part my legs and grab my pink buddy, rubbing it along my clit, sliding it inside me, trying to keep the groans quiet.

The bathroom door is closed, so he can't hear me, but still.

It feels so good it's almost too much. My back arches against the mattress as my pulse sings through my veins, bringing me to the edge quickly.

One hand squeezes my nipples while the other controls the vibrator, and in minutes I feel myself over the edge again, only this time way deeper, way more satisfying, and I come like thunder with the warm silicone gadget planted deep inside me, while the tiny nub teases my clit, giving me dual pleasure.

I cry out, letting myself feel it fully, and just in time.

The water in the shower stops flowing, as I come down.

My clit pulses happily as my insides calm, and I place my friend back in its spot, quietly closing the drawer.

As I slip my robe over my shoulders, I feel pleased and satisfied, with one hell of an appetite.

We've made it a rule to travel to the office separately, and we don't have lunch together, unless it's with the office crew.

Keeping a healthy distance is the glue that keeps our relationship intact.

Boston is in our home office, and I can hear him talking to our head engineer.

I've got a meeting with the finance team in an hour, so I head out before him, not bothering to interrupt to say goodbye. My phone rings on Bluetooth as I drive to the office. "Jinny. I'm just on my way in."

Jinny is my best friend and our head of Human Resources.

We went to high school together, lost touch, and then reunited by accident at a club when Boston and I were celebrating an anniversary.

We were in the ladies' room together and I needed a tampon.

She came to the rescue, but only after I held her hair up while she puked in the sink, since all the stalls were in use.

She gave up drinking since then and started earning six figures working for a large company, but when we opened our doors and offered her better treatment and a better overall package, Jinny was offered something that she couldn't refuse.

She's been on vacation with her mother for the past two weeks, returning just yesterday, and we talked about catching up at the office today.

"Good. I've got coffee so don't bother picking any up. Boston's not here yet."

"No, he's on the phone at home."

"See you in a few."

When I arrive, she's in my office, which is only two doors down the hall. "God...sunscreen...ever heard of it?" I chuckle, observing her golden-brown skin. She's fair like me, so her with a major tan is a little jarring for me.

"Jealous much?"

"You went away with your mother." I point out.

"You do know my mother, right?"

Her mother bought us our first condoms and vibrators.

And she took us to the bar for the first time.

Her mom is the only mom on earth that would allow us to have sex, drink, and even smoke marijuana in her house, and she left us unattended hundreds of times, so that we could have unchaperoned parties, even though having her around would be akin to having just another girlfriend present. "Fine. You had a good time I take it?"

"Fabulous time. You and Boston should consider taking a vacation. It's good for the soul."

I roll my eyes. "The last vacation we took together was ten years ago."

"That wasn't a vacation. You were scoping out another plant."

"Touché. Still. It was just us."

Jinny sits in the leather guest chair as I close the door.

Helga knows to only interrupt me for emergencies when my door is closed.

Meetings are generally in the boardroom, but when my door is closed, I'm usually ankle deep in something that deserves my undivided attention.

"So, tell me all about it." I say with a sigh, sitting at my desk chair.

"I met a guy." She brags.

"Yeah? Did you get laid?"

"Several times. He's a fucking god. I never came like that before in my life."

"No shit." I mutter. My sex life with Boston is fine. It's nothing like what it was in high school, but then, neither are our hormones. And we're both so busy with work, this morning was the first time in weeks, and even at that it was interrupted. "Are you seeing him again?"

She waves. "Na. It was just a fling. Plus, he's from Spain. Doesn't speak a word of English. But his body language said enough."

I wince. "Gross. What did your mother do while you were having multiple orgasms?"

"She was having them, too. She met someone in our cabana and that was the end of it. We barely saw each other. Best vacation ever."

I chuckle. "Only you two could pull that off. I'm glad you took her. It seems that if you took me, we might have been off in the corner, playing Euchre."

A flash crosses her eyes.

"What?"

She sits up higher in her chair. Her expression changes.

The teasing, playful look in her eyes is gone.

Jinny is a master at being serious. And she's also a whiz at justly reprimanding errant staff and weeding out the ones that aren't worth the time.

The woman is a marvel at reading people, too.

She knows the second that she's in a room with a person, just what kind of a person that they are.

It's an art. It's a gift. And she's got it. "I met someone else there, too."

"Yeah? A guy?"

"No. A girl."

"Don't tell me you had mind blowing sex with her, too. Or was it a threesome?" I wouldn't put it past her.

She ignores my comment. Her face is set. "I thought about it all the way home."

"Thought about what? How to smuggle your Spaniard friend into the states?"

Her expression remains. "I went over this in my mind, when would be the best time to tell you, and I decided that it's now or never, with this deal hanging over us."

Jinny likes to joke around, but I know the difference. She's not kidding. I can feel my stomach start to clench. "What's going on?"

“I was sitting at the bar, waiting for my friend, when this chick comes over and asks the bartender for a drink for her friend. When I looked back, there was a table with a bunch of ladies, all wasted. I thought nothing of it, until they started to get really loud, and one of them made a toast.”

Normally, Jinny doesn't have long-winded stories, so I know that every detail is meaningful and leads to something. I listen intently, waiting for the punchline. When it comes, I nearly vomit. “What was the toast?”

She swallows and looks at me, like she's about to tell me the true meaning of life. “They were thanking some guy named Boston for paying for the trip.”

I tilt my head, wondering if I heard right. “What do you mean?”

Lifting a hand, indicating that there's more, she proceeds.

“I went over there and played dumb, you know. Since they were all wasted, it was pretty easy to pump them for information. I made like they got the name wrong and were naming a state. But one of the silicone queens said, and I quote, ‘Boston Kruger’. She proceeded to brag that the guy is a millionaire, and he paid for her boob job and the trip, and other things that she couldn't pronounce. ”

My nostrils flare. “Did you get the bitches' name?”

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“Well, luckily, she was so fucked up that she dropped her clutch and her driver’s license fell out. I looked her up and she’s some fucking whore from a car dealership. A used car saleswoman named Rita Lindsay.”

It takes me a moment to process. I stare at a spot on my desk, shaking my head. “I’ll fucking kill him.”

“Before you do that, you better figure out what you want out of this, Bowie. Because you’ve got just as much of a stake in this company as he does.”

“Yeah, but the bastard put up the seed money for it, and you can bet your bottom dollar that he’ll lord that over me.

I knew I should have put that in the N.D.A.

, but no, all I did was give myself immunity if I ever wanted to walk.

I can leave him in a heartbeat, no questions asked, if I can prove that he cheated on me. ”

“Well, that should be easy.”

I look at her. “How?”

She reaches into her pocket and takes out her phone.

As she taps into her recorded messages, I’m mentally kissing her.

The message title is, 'Confessions of Rita Lindsay' and the date.

"Should I send this to you." She asks rhetorically, as she taps her way to her text messages. "That ought to do it."

My lips squish together like I've just eaten a lemon. "No wonder the asshole has been so fucking distracted lately."

"Lately, nothing, honey. Wait until you hear this recording. She and him have been fucking around for years. And if it checks out, she's not the only one, either."

I have to cover my mouth as I can feel the bile coming up my throat. "God, I think I'm going to be sick."

"Well, you better buck up, Bowie. Because this is going to call for a thick skin. There's no crying in hardball here. You want to lose your business, this is the ticket. Why that asshole risked everything for a whore like that is beyond me."

"It's classic, Jinny. That's all. Classic neanderthal men."

We've been together since fucking high school and this is the thanks that I get.

Fine, our sex life has been humdrum at best, and our lives are consumed by this business, but this is what we both signed up for.

If he couldn't handle that, if he wanted out, then there are many mature ways of dealing with it.

But he chose the juvenile way. The predictable way.

I gave him the best years of my life, goddammit. "

“I know you did, Bowie. You don’t deserve this. But you also don’t deserve to throw away what you’ve worked so hard for, and if you don’t play your cards right, you will.”

“I can be strong about this. I don’t need to cry over this shit. I can handle it. Boston and I can work together, so long as I don’t have to look at his face night and day.”

“So, you’re leaving him.” She confirms.

“Of course I’m leaving him. What the fuck.”

She lifts a hand. “I know you’re not that stupid, Bowie.

I was just doing a gut check. And you’re right.

You’re the strongest woman I know. And if you want the honest truth, you’re smarter than that asshole.

He didn’t think of the goddamn trail. If he had any brains, he would never have let that chick go on a trip unattended.

Not only is he a notorious businessman, but he’s also got a really unique name, and he’s a fool for not thinking about that. ”

“Don’t be silly, Jinny. She could have gone out to any bar in the states and done the exact same thing, you know.”

She gives me a look like she’s got all the answers. “But he approved that trip for me. If he paid any attention to detail, he should have known that we’d both be at the same damn location.”

“The only reason why he knew where you were going is because you work for him. If anybody else he knew had been there, it would have been the same thing. If he was smart about it, he would have paid her off to keep her mouth shut or threaten to sue her ass if she didn’t.”

“Hence why you’re smarter than him. And why you can outsmart him here, too.

I say you make your demands or threaten to call fucking Forbes magazine and tell them how much of a fucking whore he is.

” She rests her feet on the spare guest chair in front of her, satisfied.

“Hell, you can make any fucking demand you want to, Bowie. The ball is in your court.”

Drawing in a deep breath and letting it out, I let that sink in. “I’ll give him a chance to confess. To tell me everything.”

“You sure you can handle that?”

“Of course I can handle it.” I say without hesitation. It’s like the moment my best friend told me that Boston cheated on me, a switch turned off. “I’m no simp, Jinny.”

She pats my hand. “I know you’re not. That’s why I knew I could tell you.

Some women can’t fucking handle the truth.

If you’d built your life on your relationship with Boston, then I’d see how much more difficult this would be on you, but you built your life on your business.

That’s the difference. The only issue here is how you can keep it without losing

anything because he couldn't keep his dick in his pants. ”

“I’m not about to lose anything.” I say with conviction. “He’s not worth it. I’ll give him a chance to confess, and if he doesn’t, I’ll let him hear the recording. If he does, I’ll remind him of the N.D.A. clause and how it will affect our future business together.”

She lifts a brow. “Do you think you’re going to use this for leverage?”

“Does a bear shit in the woods?”

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Bowie

I decide it's best to do this at the office.

That way the son of a bitch can't make a scene.

That way he can't fucking scream and make himself look like ten times more of a dick for screaming at me, which he's never done in the office.

We've always maintained a strict code of respect within these walls.

And we're both one hundred percent committed to doing everything for this company, minus his unfortunate indiscretion.

After I send him a meeting invite for a personal meeting, so that nobody else knows about it, he confirms it, and I grease my wheels, counting down the minutes.

Listening to the recording is enlightening to say the least. And I can't wait to see the look on his face when he gets to listen to it, if it comes to that.

Half of me hopes that he's smart enough to just admit that he fucked up bad.

Boston Kruger doesn't fuck around when it comes to this company, and if he thinks ahead a little farther than the length of his dick, he might realize that I'm one step ahead of him.

This was a foolish move on his part. We agreed years ago, as a personal vow to each

other, instead of making vows under an altar, to be honest about everything.

If one of us or both wants out of this relationship at any time, we say so, and we part ways amicably, not letting Kruger Manufacturing suffer, and not jeopardizing either of our stakes in it, either.

Boston has nothing to complain about. As far as I'm concerned, I'm the one that's made all the personal sacrifices.

From turning the other cheek at a lukewarm sex life, to the lack of personal time that we spend together, to giving him the largest office, and so on.

I could be petty about it, sure. But none of those things made any difference to me.

Until now. The minute that rat bastard decided to bastardize his loyalty to me, he made the mistake of his life, and he'll pay for it dearly.

Now I hold the reins. Now he's got to answer to me.

Hell, I even let him name the fucking company, and I let him use his own fucking name, too.

There was nothing stopping us from naming the company Ritter Manufacturing, after me, but Boston's rationale behind that one was money.

He had it. I didn't. And his family name holds more water with the banks because of it.

As I step down the hall to our offices, and I approach his, I close the door behind me. "Hey." He says, lifting his head from his laptop for a moment. "That meeting was bullshit, huh."

Oh, so he thinks that this is a breakout session. Wrong. Try again. “It was, but that’s not why I’m here.”

He closes the lid on his laptop. Point for him. “What’s up, babe?”

His face changes, but then his phone rings, and we both know that he has to look to at least see who it is. “It’s Jefferson. I have to take it.” He says, referring to our lead consultant, who is conducting important research for us, so that we can tackle a hurdle that we’re dealing with.

As he picks up the call, I rise and walk to the window, which overlooks a man-made pond. Boston got the better office, too, the bastard. And as I look at the birds flying over the water, my minds drifts back in time...

“Like the artist?” The boy with the quirky smile asks.

“Yeah. My parents are huge seventies music fans, go figure.”

He smiles again. “Well, you’ll love this then.”

“What.” I grin at the boy that just walked into my tenth-grade math class.

“My name’s Jagger.”

“You’re full of it.”

“I swear.” He chuckles. “Some people call me Jag for short, but my legal name is Jagger.”

“Riiiiight.”

He laughs. "I'm serious. Here, go check the attendance sheet. I'll bet you twenty bucks I'm telling the truth."

I smirk. "I don't have twenty bucks, and I hate Mr. Sproul, so I'll take your word for it. But if I see you in the hall and you don't answer when I call you Jagger, you're meat." I tease, pointing at him, feeling flirty. He's really cute.

He winks at me and I'm not sure if he's pulling my leg, or what.

"So, do you mind if I sit here? That guy over there looks like he'll eat me alive if I sit in the empty spot in front of him.

" He points to this guy with a real miserable look on his face.

He's handsome, but he looks like the dog ate his homework or something.

"Sure. Nobody sits here."

"Cool. So, this Sproul...is he a ballbuster?"

"Yeah. He marks really hard, and he doesn't take any assignments unless they have a proper cover sheet."

Jagger looks him up and down. "He looks like a dipshit."

I like him. He doesn't have a filter. "Where did you come from? Are you new here?"

"No, I've been around. I was taking another math class, but I need the academic level if I want to go to university. The guidance counsellor screwed me over in the summer with my schedule and they just fixed it this morning. So, what did I miss the last few days?"

“I can give you my notes to copy.” I frown, opening my binder.

“Thanks.” He takes them and starts copying them onto a loose sheaf of paper.

He’s got a spare sheet of paper and he’s doing double time, taking notes as the teacher conducts the lesson, and copying my notes.

It’s nice to meet someone that takes math seriously.

I’m a math geek and sometimes I feel like I’m the only one. When he’s finished, he turns back to me. “Did he give out any assignments?”

I nod and show him what I wrote down in my day planner, as I listen to the lesson. The teacher leaves the room for a moment, and Jagger looks up the assignment that he missed. He starts working on it and I see him struggling. “You need help?”

“Yeah. I always get stuck on this stuff.”

“Here.” I say, gesturing for him to turn around. I explain the problem and help him figure it out.

“Hey, thanks.” He licks his lips. “Hey, do you want to work together? Like...study together and shit? I can help you and you can help me type thing? I promise I’ll keep my hands to myself.”

I smile. My eyes go to his lips, and he smiles back. I realize that I have a crush on him. “Sure.”

“Cool. Do you want to work on this assignment after school?”

“Okay.”

“Cool. You want to go out by that pond after class? Since this is the last period?”

“Sounds good.”

He pays close attention during class, and he doesn't nod off or doodle, or get distracted by anything, either. I'm half intrigued, but half disappointed that he's not paying any attention to me. He follows me to my locker after class. “Do you need to put something in here for now?”

“Na, thanks.” He waves, and I notice that he isn't ogling any of the pretty girls that are walking down the hallway. I start to wonder if maybe he's gay, but I don't think so, seeing as he keeps looking at my lips.

We walk down to the back of the school, where there is a small pond.

It's a big pit of erosion, from a small pocket of soil that has weakened over time.

Water collects in it all the time and the school board never closes it off, so we usually sit in the grass that surrounds it.

And when it's hot out, sometimes we take our shoes and socks off, and wade around in it.

I take my jean jacket off and place it down on the grass and then sit on it.

Jagger doesn't have a jacket, so he just sits down.

“What do you want to do after high school?” He asks me.

“I don't know. I know that I want to go to university. My family doesn't have any money and I sure as hell don't want to end up like that.”

“Oh yeah? What do you like to do?”

I turn to him, feeling like he’s going to talk all about me, and I hate that. “What do you like to do?”

“I love cars. I’m saving up for one now. I figure when I’m old enough to get my license, that I’ll have enough money for one by then.”

“I love cars, too. Some girls think that I’m gay or something, but it’s just what I like to talk about. Combustion engines and electrical systems, basically anything that makes the car make noise, I like to check it out.”

He’s impressed. “Yeah? That’s pretty cool, actually. Most of the girls that I know that like cars just want to sit on them and look like a fucking hood ornament.”

“Do your parents care that you swear?”

“Na, not really. Yours?”

“No. My friend Jinny...her mom...encourages it. She says it helps with stress.”

“Yeah? My buddy says that sex helps with stress.” He snuffles.

My face drops. “Oh.” My eyes bulge.

His face sobers. “Oh, shit. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“It’s okay.” I gasp, embarrassed at my own reaction to the word ‘sex’. I’ve never heard the word used by such a cute boy before, and given that I’m inexperienced, and clearly he’s not, it feels like it drives a wedge between us.

“God, I feel like your face just fell down. And you have such a nice smile.”

“You think so?”

“Yeah, you do.” He licks his lips. “Are you like a Mormon or something?”

“No, why?”

“I just...you really don’t like that 's' word. You reacted better when I said ‘shit’.”

It comes out before I can stop it. “I’m a virgin.”

He speaks like it’s no big deal. “So am I. And I didn’t take you for a slut, so I figured you were. There’s just...do your parents make you feel like it’s dirty or something?”

I’m shocked. First, to find out that he’s also a virgin, and second, to speak so openly about this. I don’t even know how to answer. I just met this boy. “No. I just...never mind...it’s silly, and you might be embarrassed. I’ll be embarrassed.”

“No, tell me. I promise neither of us will be embarrassed. If you’re straight up and don’t fuck around, there’s no need to be embarrassed.”

“Alright.” I concede, feeling so nervous. “I think I...I think I like you.”

“I think I like you, too. See? That wasn’t embarrassing, was it?”

“No.” I smile. “You’re nice. And you’re cute.”

“You’re both, too. I never met a chick like you. My sister, she’s a pain in my ass, and all her friends just bug me. And girls in this school are either sluts or too stupid for their own good. But you, you I could hang around with.”

“Yeah?”

He nods. “For sure.”

I look at him and he looks at me, and once again, it comes out before I can stop it.
“Have you ever kissed a girl before?”

“No. You?”

“No.”

“Have you ever wanted to?”

“No. You?”

Kids are far enough away from us that they can't see us. The bussed in kids are already gone and there are no sports playing tonight, so it's like we're all alone.
“Not....not until now.”

He looks at me, searching my eyes. “God, you are so brave. It would take me a year to work up the courage to say that to you.” He licks his lips. “Do you want to kiss me?”

I nod. “Yeah. Do you want to kiss me?”

“Yeah. Wait, do you mean, like, a French kiss, or just a regular one?”

“I don't know. I've never done either. What about you?”

“Me neither. But I just thought I better check, you know? I don't want to try to stick my tongue in your mouth and make you gag or something.”

I snort a laugh. “You’re funny.”

“So are you.” He licks his lips, eyes on my lips. “So, do you want to try it?”

“Do you?”

“Yeah. Kinda.”

The warmth coming from him next to me is making my thighs ache.

I’m dying to kiss him. To know what his lips feel like on mine.

They look so soft and full. We start to lean in and he parts his lips, so I part mine, and the next thing I know it’s like we’re in a movie.

What was supposed to be an innocent first kiss turns into the hottest kiss I could ever imagine.

His tongue tickles mine, his lips suck mine, like we’ve done this a thousand times before.

His hand moves into my hair and my hand grasps the hair at the nape of his neck.

My insides are quivering, my private area is pulsing and wet, and all I can think about is straddling him, but I don’t.

He pulls back. Both of us are breathless. “Man, that was hot.” He breathes.

I lick my lips, still tasting him. “It was.”

“Do you want to be my girlfriend?”

“Definitely.”

Boston ends the call as he walks up to me, as I stand by the window, a million miles away. My skin immediately crawls as I turn around and see him. I try like hell not to show it, but I see the look on his face change, and I know that he’s read me right.

“Something’s wrong.” He guesses.

I get straight to the point. “I’m giving you one chance to tell me the truth, Boston. We made a promise to each other in the beginning to be transparent, and I believe that you haven’t kept your end of the bargain.”

For a split second I think that he’s going to refute.

The flash in his eyes comes and goes as quickly.

Then he looks at the floor and swallows.

He says nothing. He’s calculating. He’s bargaining with himself.

I decide it’s been too long and he’s going to come up with something to make this worse.

But then he speaks. “Look, I did it because I got spooked. It was a long time ago and I’ll put the money back if you want. ”

A ‘v’ forms between my eyes. Something tells me that I should just let him talk and see what else the fucker will confess to. So, I say nothing. I just stand there glaring at him, and I can feel my nostrils flaring. He glances up at me to see if I’m satisfied with his response. “Keep trying.”

“What do you want me to say...I’m sorry?”

Well, I am. I was going to tell you about a year after I did it, but the money was growing exponentially, and I figured I’d keep it from you so that when we retire, we’ll have some hidden money.

Or in case the business flopped and then we would have some money left. ”

I speak through gritted teeth. “You’re reaching.”

He rakes a hand through his hair. “I’ll get on the phone right now and put it back with the rest of our money.”

“God, you are such an asshole.” I practically growl. “Why don’t you tell me about Rita Lindsay.”

His eyes close tightly and then they open again, as he tilts his head, defeated. “Fuck.” He mutters.

“No, that’s what you did. You fucked up . You fucked up so bad you need to invent a new word for it.”

He draws in a deep breath and releases it. “Fine. I fucked up.” He says it like this is less offensive than him hoarding money dishonestly. “What do you want to do about it?”

Stunned. I’m utterly stunned. I blink twice slowly, trying to comprehend what he just said and how he said it.

Like he didn’t just throw away a fifteen-year relationship and make irreparable damage to the business that we’ve built together in said fifteen years.

“We’ve already got a contingency plan for this, Boston. And you just bought it.”

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Bowie

My back is up when I see his BMW pull into the driveway.

Boston agreed not to be here until three o'clock, at which time I would be gone.

It's the arrangement that we have until I can find a place of my own.

We've shared this mansion for several years, and it's taken some time to find somewhere to live, and even now, it's just with Jinny temporarily.

The look on his face says that he's got business to discuss. I know the difference.

"What are you doing here." It's not a question, it's an accusation.

"Look, Bowie. This is crazy. We can work this out."

I look at him like he just told me it's my fault that he fucked the used car saleswoman. "Is it now?"

He hesitates, like he's rehearsed this whole speech on the ride over. "I know I fucked up. I know I fucked up bad. But half of what we have isn't about us, Bowie, it's about the business. And we are on the cusp of something great here. Do you really want to miss out because of this?"

"Boston, this isn't a fucking science fair project.

This is a fifteen-year relationship, both personal and business.

And you completely obliterated my trust on both fronts.

We had a contingency plan in place. You're not happy, you tell me, and vice versa.

You totally went against all that and betrayed me.

How can I ever trust you again." I tell him, I don't ask.

"So, what do we do about Kruger, hm? Are you just walking out?"

"I'm not walking, Boston. Sure, I'm walking away from this house and from this relationship, but I'm not walking away from the business that I worked hard to build.

I'll continue with my role, and you'll continue with yours, and we make agreements just the way we always have.

And this time, you're going to tell me everything. No secrets. No lies. No more."

"Good. So, you're not going to go knocking on fucking Lawson Enterprises' door."

My head whips to his. "Why the hell would you even mention that?"

"Because I know you always had a thing for him."

I lift a hand. "Oh, don't even go there. You are walking on thin ice."

He stupidly gets brave. "Tell me I'm wrong, Bowie."

My chuckle is mirthless. "You are so wrong. Like worlds wrong."

“Bullshit.”

I round on him. “Boston, I haven’t spoken to the guy since high school, and you know it. But it looks like the cheating bug caught you, too, so I don’t know why you’re even bringing him up. All you men are so fucking alike.”

“Yeah, and he’ll get wind of us parting ways, and be right up your alley in a heartbeat. You know that son of a bitch never fucking married, right.”

“Neither did you, asshole.” I point out.

“I was too busy building the company.”

“And chasing tail, too, evidently.”

“Look, are you ever going to be able to get past this? Because if you can’t, then we’re going to have a real problem.”

I think about it for a moment.

“If you can’t separate our personal troubles from the business, then we’re both going to suffer.

” He adds. “And I think that we should keep this shit out of the media, too. The last thing we need is to show that we’re weakened in any way.

Not while we’re right in the middle of trying to get this deal.

Lawson will be all over that like fucking white on rice, and we both know it. ”

“Oh, and I’m supposed to just forget about the fact that you’ve been fucking multiple

women for years? It's easy for you to say, Boston."

"That's exactly what I'm getting at, Bowie. If you can't separate it, then maybe we need to rethink our strategy here."

"Was that your plan all along, Boston?" I level with him. "Because if it is, I could go after you for fucking everything. I've got proof. You need to decide what you want to do. Do you want to be fair about this or are you out for blood."

"I'll do what I need to do to protect what I've got, Bowie. And if that means crushing you, then so be it. I know women scorned are nothing to fuck with."

"Then why did you fuck with me." I point out.

He kicks at an imaginary fleck of dust on the floor. "I made a mistake."

"Lame." I scoff. "The fact that you could have easily just told me that you were unhappy makes it that, you realize. If you had come to me and said that you wanted to see other people—"

He cuts me off. "It would have been that easy, would it."

"Yes, it would have. You and I both know that our romantic life fizzled years ago. That's what we were both willing to sacrifice for the good of the company. I kept my end of the bargain."

"Yeah, and now you're going to spend the rest of your fucking life rubbing my nose in it, right."

"How would you feel? If I went around fucking other people? Do you think you would be taking this as rationally as I am? Likely not."

The muscles in his jaw are working. He's angry. He's staring at the floor. His wheels are turning. "Let me ask you this, Bowie. Were you happy? Like, truly happy?"

I think back to yesterday, and the many times prior to that, when I used my battery-operated friend, and how many times Jinny or other friends of mine would tell me about their recent romantic escapades.

Sure, it pained me a bit, but then I looked at everything else I had, and realized that I can't have it all.

And I was fine with that. I loved Boston.

But the truth is that we could never have what I once had.

And what I once had I'll never have again.

And I came to terms with that a long time ago. ..

"You look so beautiful." He says from the car.

He's standing, stock still, looking at me.

For a moment I thought he would faint. I'm wearing a pink silk dress with a sweetheart neckline, with my hair all down in curls, ready for the junior prom.

Jagger is in a suit, like, the slickest suit I've ever seen.

His hair is freshly washed, and he's shaved.

Just to look at him is making my heart skip a beat.

“You look really handsome.” I tell him with a smile.

I start to walk to him in my high heels, and he meets me halfway.

My mom is calling from behind us, wanting to get pictures, so we let her take a few.

I’m too scared to touch him. I’m afraid I’ll wrinkle his perfect suit.

When mom and dad have taken a dozen or so pictures, he opens the door for me, and we get inside his new car. “Wow. This is really hot.”

“Thanks. I saved up for like three years for it. My dad gave me half, but it cost a bundle.”

“Is it new?”

“Yeah.” He nods. “I’m scared to drive it to school, though. That Boston kid will key it for sure, he’ll be so fucking jealous.”

“Then just drive it after school.”

“Yeah. I think I’ll do that.” He licks his lips as he starts up the car. “Um, how late are you allowed to stay out?”

“My mom and dad didn’t give me a curfew tonight. They know that I’m with you, so they’re cool.”

He’s impressed. “Your parents like me, huh.”

“They do. My mom says that I’m always smiling since I met you.”

He looks at me and smiles. “My mom says the same thing.”

“My grades are always good, too. And she knows that we study together all the time.”

“Well, we both want to go to university, right?”

“Exactly.”

All night, while we dance together and with friends, we can't stop looking at each other.

It's like something has changed between us.

Like we grew up overnight, and I feel so connected to him, and I also feel like he feels the same.

It's the last dance of the night, a slow one, and he looks at me like he has a major confession to make.

“Bowie, I did something, and you can say no and we can forget it.”

My face goes serious. I was worried that maybe tonight, being the perfect night, was too good to be true. And maybe it is. “What did you do?”

“I...uh...I got us a hotel room.” He can't look at me for a moment. But then he draws the courage, and his eyes meet mine. “Do you want to forget about it? Because I can call and cancel it.”

The truth is, I've been thinking about sleeping with him for a while, but I was waiting until something special for our first time. “No, don't do that.”

“Are you sure?”

I nod. “Yeah. I’m sure.”

He leans in and kisses me sweetly on the lips, setting me in flames. “Thanks. I promise we’ll have fun, and I’ll get you home in time, so your parents don’t think that I’ve kidnapped you.”

I smile. Jagger always has the naughtiest yet the most innocent ways to say things.

As we drive to the hotel, I admit that my stomach is doing flip flops.

We’ve made out a thousand times, but I’ve never seen him naked or touched him below the belt, and the same for him.

We’ve always kept things sort of PG because we made a promise to each other to never cheapen what we have.

We both wanted to be ready and to make our first time special.

And although we never discussed doing anything like this for junior prom, I think it’s fair to say that both of us were thinking about it.

Hell, even Jinny, my best friend, has slept with some boys. I’m the only one left of our crowd.

He takes my hand in his as we check into the hotel. It’s a fancy one, too. “God, Jagger. How much did this cost?”

“A lot. I saved for a while.”

“Can I pay you back some of it at least?” I ask as we walk to the elevator.

“Not a penny, Bowie. No, that wouldn’t be right. This is my gift to you.”

Jagger’s family has money. I know that he doesn’t get things handed to him, but he’s got the smarts to be rich if he wants to. He knows how to save money and how to earn it, and he also knows how to spend wisely. “A gift?”

“Yeah.” He says, as he opens the door with the key card. Inside is breathtaking. There’s a bouquet of red mini roses in a vase on the glass table. And a box of chocolates beside it. “They knew I wasn’t twenty-one, or I would have had them include some wine, too.”

“God, this is...incredible.” I say in awe.

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“Pretty cool, huh.” He sets his car keys down on the console table and goes to check out the mini bar. “Hey, look. Mini cookies. You hungry?”

“No.” I’m too busy looking at the room. It’s gorgeous. “I can’t believe you did this.”

“Me neither. I thought I would do something like this for senior prom, but my brother said he’d let me use his credit card, so I grabbed that chance by the balls.” He scoffs.

I snort a laugh. I love his candor. He walks behind me as I look through the sliding glass doors leading to the small terrace that overlooks the marina.

It’s so beautiful I could stand here all night.

He wraps his arms around me and buries his head in my neck.

As he draws in a deep breath and releases it, he says. “This was so worth it.”

“Yeah?”

He nods. “Yeah. The second that I saw you coming out of your house in this dress, I knew I made the right choice.”

“Really?”

“Um hm. I can’t believe that you’re my girlfriend sometimes.

I mean, that Boston asshole has such a hard-on for you.

I wanted to plow him so bad tonight for looking at you with his googly eyes, but I figure what's the point?

You're with me and that's all that matters.

He's just a dipshit with a hard-on for someone that he can't have and that's tough shit for him. ”

“Exactly.”

He kisses my neck tenderly. “I love you, Bowie.”

It comes out so naturally. Like it's been on my tongue forever. “I love you, too.”

“Do you believe in love at first sight?”

“I believe in crushes at first sight.” I chuckle.

“Well, you may be right there, but no other girl ever made me want to be with them the way that you do.”

“Yeah?”

“Definitely. And my brothers are always bragging about getting laid and shit by girls that don't mean anything to them, but I feel like none of that matters if you're not with someone you love.”

“I think so, too.” My voice is a whisper as he trails kisses down my neck.

“You tell me to stop I'll stop, okay?” He murmurs against my skin. He knows that I want this as badly as he does. Some would say that all those words moments ago

were just lines, but I know better. Jagger has waited for me. We've been together for almost two years, and while all his friends were getting laid, we waited.

He was happy to. It's always been just as important to him to make our first time matter as it has to me.

"Uh huh." I answer numbly, feeling his hands slide up my thighs, bringing my dress with them.

"I've got condoms, too, Bowie. So don't worry about anything.

" He whispers in my ear, leaning his hardness against my backside, making me wet instantly.

I've felt him from over his jeans and I know that he's big, but I'm dying to feel his skin.

To touch his private areas. Carefully, he pulls my dress up over my head and lies it over the chair next to us.

I'm in just my bra and panties. He turns me around so he can look at me.

"God, I am the luckiest man in the world. You are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen and that includes the shiny nineteen fifty-seven Chevy Bel Air my grandfather used to own. "

In Jagger's world that means a lot. In mine, too. I've seen pictures of that car. "Take off your jacket." I tell him, not recognizing my own voice.

"I'll take it all off if you want me to." He says softly.

I nod, not taking my eyes off him.

I watch him remove his jacket, slipping it over the chair where my dress is, and then he undoes the buttons on his shirt.

As his skin is exposed, I bite my lip. He's got six pack abs under there, and his skin looks so soft, and his shoulders and biceps are so muscular.

I mean, I've felt them before, but I've never seen him naked.

Not even last summer. He's always got a shirt on.

He doesn't even wear tank tops, but he should. I've only ever seen such a beautiful man in magazines.

Suddenly, I take leave of my senses, and wrap my arms around him, not waiting for him to finish undressing, unable to wait another second to kiss him, to put my skin on his.

The moment our skin meets I breath heavily against him, as his tongue slides into my mouth, and I reciprocate, desperate to have him.

He kisses me voraciously, as he tears open his belt, loosens his pants, and lets them fall to the floor, not bothering to hang them neatly like the rest of our clothing.

Breathing choppy, hands all over each other, he leads me to the bed with his dick poking out from his briefs.

I've waited so long, I can't wait any longer, so I shove my hand down his underwear, feeling his girth.

He's so hard it feels like his skin will explode.

The head is so soft, but when I squeeze it a little, liquid comes out of the top.

As I squeeze it, he exhales against my lips, and his hips buck a little.

"God, Bowie, you've already got me so worked up.

" He pants, as my back hits the mattress, and he pulls back.

I watch him remove his briefs, freeing himself, and my eyes are glued to his cock.

It's so big, and I never thought I would describe one as beautiful, but it is.

He walks over to his jacket and pulls a small packet of condoms out.

After he tosses it on the bed, he hovers over me, cupping my face with his hands, looking at me.

He says nothing with his mouth...yet...but his eyes say it all.

He loves me. He loves me so much. Then he kisses me softly on the mouth before moving down my body.

His lips open as he warmly sucks every inch of me, like he's done this a million times.

"How do you know how to do all that?" I ask in short breaths.

"I just...it's what I want to do to you. Your skin is so soft, and it tastes so good." His voice is sultry but honest. He kisses down my belly as I explore his chest and dick,

feeling it pulse as I touch it.

“I’m gonna do something, and if you don’t like it, just tell me to stop.”

“Okay.”

His lips come back up, exploring my breasts, kissing them, sucking them, and I feel my private area vibrate.

My nipples are so hard and they’re tingly, but when he sucks them, I feel it at my clit.

It makes me want to rub it on him. On something.

And then it’s like he reads my mind. His fingers go down, answering my silent plea.

He makes circles with his finger on it, making me wiggle against him.

Sure, I’ve masturbated before, sort of like this, so I know what it feels like.

But I’ve never been able to make myself come before.

Close, but not like this. I guess it’s different when a guy does it to you.

With his mouth on my nipples and his hands down there, I’m so lost in lust I almost forget who I am.

My body feels like it’s not my own. “I’m going to do something else to you, okay?”

” He says breathily, leaving my breasts, trailing kisses down my belly, and his finger stops, making me writhe, hungry for more.

When his mouth goes down there, I don't know what to do, until he starts to lick it.

Right where his fingers were, his tongue is now.

“Oh...God!” I cry out, pulling at the hair at the sides of my head.

It's like I'm convulsing it feels so good, and then I feel a pulse, a delicious, back-arching pulse, and I cry so loud I think my mother will be able to hear me.

I come like thunder.

I know it's an orgasm because I've never felt anything like that before.

It's epic.

It's unforgettable.

Jagger lifts, grabbing a condom out of the packet, and I watch him slide it on himself.

It's the hottest thing I've ever seen. “I read somewhere that you get the girl off first, and then you go inside, that way she's all loose and it won't hurt as much.

” He explains, hovering over me, nose against mine. “Are you ready?” He checks

“Uh huh.” I answer, still breathless.

He kisses me tenderly, and then they turn more erotic, and I'm shocked that I feel turned on again, but I do.

Just the thought of his penis going inside is making my belly do flip flops.

The head goes in first, and he slowly pushes further and further in.

My hymen is already broken from my gynecologist, but he doesn't know that.

His cock slides in almost effortlessly, and I watch his eyes close as he draws in a deep breath.

"Are you okay?" I ask him.

"Yeah." He answers. "It just...it feels so warm. So good. Are you okay?"

"Uh huh. Don't worry, Jagger. I don't think I ever told you, but my hymen is already gone."

His eyes open.

"From my gynecologist. I've been on the pill for my periods."

"Oh, okay." He sighs, grinning slightly. He's so sexy.

"You know that I'm a virgin." I chuckle.

"Yeah. I know. I just...I never knew it could break any other way."

I smile at him.

He smiles at me as he moves slowly. "I love you."

"I love you, too."

"God, I can't believe we're doing this." He murmurs.

“Me neither.” As I say this, he goes in further, and the pressure feels good.

He reads me like a book, watching my face, moving more and more, and then he kisses me, thrusting his tongue inside my mouth.

I feel my fingernails digging into his back with equal parts nerves and lust. Suddenly I’m moving with him, feeling my own rhythm.

He kisses my neck, my breasts, driving me crazy.

I grab his ass, his beautiful, rounded, perfect ass, and pull him to me.

The bed squeaks with our movement and the sounds that he’s making are so sexy I could die.

“Oh, God, baby, you feel so good.” He whispers to me.

“You do, too.”

“I love you so much, Bowie.”

“I love you, too.” Hearing him say that turns me on more, makes the buildup stronger. “Say it again.”

He says it again, silkier. “I love you, baby.”

“Mmmm...again.” I mewl.

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“I love you so much, Bowie.” He pants, pushing all the way in, touching something inside me that sets me on fire, and I feel it again, that pulsing, that explosion.

“Oh....Jagger!” I growl, as he cries out, sounding so sexy, I know I’ll never forget that sound for as long as I live. His balls pound against my ass as he comes with me. As he slows, he starts kissing me, with open-mouthed kisses, soft, tender.

“I love you, Bowie. More than anything else in the world. You’re the only woman for me.”

I slide my fingers through the hair at the sides of his head. “You are it, Jagger. My one and only. I’m yours forever.”

“I’m yours forever, too.” He licks his lips. “Someday, when we’re both old enough, I’m gonna ask you to marry me.”

“I’d like that. I don’t want to spend the rest of my life with anyone else.”

“Same here.”

He kisses me once more. “I need to take this condom off. Just hang on and relax. I’ll be careful.”

I do as he suggests, and it slides out as easily as it went in. I watch him pull it off himself and toss it into the trash beside the bed. Then he crawls in next to me. “So, are you going to tell anybody?”

“What, that we did it?”

“Yeah.” He nods.

“Are you?”

“Not if you don’t want me to.” He answers honestly.

“I won’t tell if you don’t want me to, either.”

“I think you ought to tell Jinny. She’s your best friend, and I know that you can trust her. Plus, if you have any questions or whatever, I don’t want you to feel like you can’t ask.”

“Same with you. You can tell your brothers.”

“Well, I think Halen already knows, since he’s the one that let me use his credit card to get this room.”

“I’m okay with that. Just make sure that Boston doesn’t figure it out.”

“I’ll go to the grave with that. I’d rather die than have him find out.” He kisses me again. “I had a great time tonight. And not just when we got here, either. I love being with you.”

I slide a curl over his ear. “You know, you always say that you’re the luckiest man alive, but I’m the one who’s lucky. What man says all these sweet things without a motive?”

“A guy that knows what he’s got.”

I kiss him. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

“Please. You think Jagger loves you?” Boston says almost under his breath. “It was a line, Bowie. Don’t be stupid. Guys say shit like that all the time.”

“How is it any of your business, anyway.” I tell him, pulling my shirt tighter, since his eyes keep going to my cleavage.

The din of the senior class forces us to speak loudly.

Jinny’s mom is away, and she gave us permission to have a party.

Little did I know that word got around to Boston, and he snuck in, uninvited. “I don’t even know how you found out.”

“Everyone knows. Don’t you think that Jagger went and squealed the second that he bagged you?”

“That can’t be true. He waited almost two years.”

“Oh, how noble.”

“Seriously. I think it’s noble.”

“I think he couldn’t make it with anyone else.”

“That’s your opinion.”

“Trust me, Bowie. Get a clue. He doesn’t love you anymore than he loves me. And I

can prove it to you.”

My skin crawls. I refuse to believe that Jagger could be capable of behaving so insensitively. So barbaric. So selfish. He’s the sweetest man I know. “How can you prove it.” I say, wanting so badly to add, ‘asshole’, but I don’t want to set him off.

“Have you even seen your knight in shining armor in the last ten minutes?” He points out.

I know that Jagger has been drinking. It’s Jinny’s fault as she started a game of quarters and Jagger was the chosen one to drink in more than a few rounds.

His brother Halen drove him here but I’m staying overnight, so we met up here.

“Last I saw he was talking to some of his buddies about cars upstairs. Why?”

I don’t like the smirk on his face. “You should go check on him. I saw him putting the moves on Kayla Hartman.”

“You’re so full of it. He doesn’t even know who she is.”

“All the guys know who she is. Her tits enter a room before she does.”

“You’re disgusting.” I mutter as I walk away from him, having heard enough.

I decide to shut Boston up and set him straight.

Jinny’s house is large. To get to the upstairs, I have to pass through a living room, a family room, and a large foyer to the spiral staircase.

The landing on the upper floor has a long area rug, which leads to the games room,

where the game of quarters is happening.

Downstairs is the billiard room, where some people are playing pool, and the music is so loud, Jinny should be thankful that her closest neighbor is on another parcel of land.

There is a secondary staircase that leads from the back of the kitchen to the upstairs, from the other side of the landing.

The games room is full of pinball machines, an air hockey table, and a large table for playing cards.

About ten people surround it, playing quarters.

I look at Jinny, who is half in the bag. “Hey. Have you seen Jagger?”

“I think he’s puking in my mom’s ensuite.

” She says through a laugh. Sometimes she pisses me off when she’s been drinking.

It makes me a little irritated that her mom lets her and her friends drink, and they’re only seventeen.

If I ever told my mom what went on over here, she’d forbid me from seeing her.

I’ll put up with the drinking if it means that I can have her as a friend, but it’s still annoying at times like these, when they practically got my boyfriend drunk.

He doesn’t know any better. He wants to please me, and I think part of him wants so badly to fit in with my friends, that he’ll take the risk, especially when his brother Halen condones it.

I mean, he did drive him here, and he's going to pick him up, too.

The door is slightly open to the ensuite bathroom, that leads into her mom's room.

A girl from my biology class is just in there touching up her lipstick.

When she leaves, I walk into the bathroom.

The door into her mom's room is slightly open but the light is off.

I can hear the door on the other side of the room open, and the light from the hallway bleeds in.

It's Boston opening the door. "Did you find him?"

"No, I..." I stammer, as the light shines onto the bed.

In the bed are Jagger and Kayla Hartman. Jagger lifts his head, looking stunned, and Kayla lifts her head, shooting at me with daggers in her eyes. I gasp and run.

I never speak to Jagger again.

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Jagger

After I toss and turn all night, I decide to give up on sleep, at around four o'clock in the morning.

The only other dude I know that is up at such an ungodly hour is my friend Axl.

Well, that's what everyone calls him, but that's only because his real name is Walter, and he's a race car driver.

We've been friends since I got backstage passes to meet him during the Grand Prix one year.

And the only reason why I scored those is because the vendor sent me them when I opened my business and sent them a prototype to test out for free.

I've got to go to Rush's place later, but for now, I need to hang with my buddy that has the same passion as me.

Not any of my brothers or any of my other friends share the same passion for speed, acceleration, power or control.

Well, only one other person, but she's been out of the picture for as long as I can remember. ...

The room spins as I toss back another shot of Jack Daniels.

I think I've swallowed a couple of quarters, too, but I can't be sure.

Jinny is laughing her ass off at me. She's used to the hooch, but not me.

I'm a cheap date at best, especially with this hard shit.

"Come on, man. I've had enough." I chuckle, I think.

"You're looking a little green, there, Jag." Jinny teases. "Don't puke on my mother's floor or I'll kick you in the nuts. If you need to toss your cookies, the bathroom is down the hall."

I decide that the best course of action here is to just go to the john in an attempt to escape.

Those stairs seem cumbersome right now with my head spinning, so I resolve myself to stay on the second floor.

Bowie is downstairs but she'll be coming looking for me soon enough, and I'll get her to pump me with water or soda or something.

Anything other than this shit. I can't think straight and nothing looks like it's supposed to. The door is closed, so I knock on it.

"Yeah." I hear a female voice say. I have no idea who it is nor do I care. "Come in." She says.

When I walk in, I see Kayla Hartman bent over the toilet bowl, doing much the same as I feel like I'm going to be doing in a minute.

Her face is solemn, like she'd give anything to take the moment back, to not be so

stupid, and most of all, to not feel so horrible. “I need to puke but it won’t come up.”

“Yeah, I’m there, too.”

“Were you playing quarters?”

“Yeah.”

“Here. I’ll take the sink. I only had soup for dinner. And the other bathroom up here is too far.”

“Thanks.”

She barely makes it to the sink and tosses her cookies. Seeing and hearing her sets me off and I empty the contents of my stomach into the toilet. We puke in unison for a couple of minutes when she lifts her head and walks, with effort, to the door. “I need to lie down.”

I crawl to the door. She climbs, limb by limb, up the bed, and then sticks her hand out to help me. My head hits the pillow of the unmade bed. “It’s so loud.” She whines.

I pull the covers over her. “Here. Maybe this will help.”

“Thanks.” She breathes, almost whimpering, she feels so sick.

We’re both breathing into each other’s faces with our eyes closed.

She smells like a toilet, and I wager I do, too.

That’s when the back door opens and the brightest fucking light in the world shines in, and I see the biggest asshole on the planet on the other side of it.

I'd rather puke than see him again, but then I see Bowie coming in from the bathroom.

I try to tell her that I'm sick and to bring me some water, but she just gasps and runs away.

Probably because I smell like a trucker.

But who knows. About three seconds later the world turns black. ..

I don't see Bowie again for ten years...

"Hey, my man. How's it hangin'?" Axl says, sitting on his front porch, drinking coffee. "Why, I can't tell you, but I knew I'd see you this morning."

After I shake his hand, I sit down next to him. "You're so full of shit. You know exactly why I'm here."

"You found out about Kruger, didn't you." He surmises.

"Yeah."

"You want coffee?"

"Na. I'll have a cup with Rush when I go there next." I look at him. "Do you ever sleep?"

"I could ask you the same thing. And, no, I don't. Too much to do and too little time to do it in...that's my problem."

"What's going on?"

“Well, it’s the same old story, my friend. Engines that don’t cut the mustard. I believe you sent me one a long time ago, but we never did much with it.”

“I told you, buddy, I can’t do business with you.”

He takes a sip of his coffee. The sun is coming up at the horizon, which is a perfect view from his porch.

He’s got trees lining either side of his mansion, but the center pathway is clear, and it’s a perfect view to the small launching pad he has at the marina from there as well.

In his spare time, Axl loves to boat, since, like me, he was born and raised in North Carolina. “Tell me again why that is?”

“Because you can’t keep your goddamn nose clean, that’s why.” I chuckle.

He waves. “Ah, bullshit. A few indiscretions here and there never hurt.”

I lift my brows. “A few? Shit, you have no filter, Axl. The only time you keep your mouth shut and stay out of trouble is when you’re behind the wheel.”

He chuckles. “I get bored when I’m not racing. Look at all the fucking money I have. I’m not hungry anymore. Except for making the perfect race car. And don’t ask me to work with that asshole Boston Kruger, because comments like that will have you out on your ass.”

“So practice racing.”

“I’ve got a fucking track in the back, and goddamn raceways here. Shit, North Carolina is the NASCAR capital, my friend.”

“You don’t have to tell me, Axl. I was born here, too.”

“Then you know that your heart beats around engines and cars, too. I just don’t get why you can’t do business with me. I mean, you teased the fuck out of me sending me that goddamn prototype back in the day, and yet y’all won’t make an engine with me.”

“I told you, man. I’ve got to get my foot in international waters first. I don’t want to split my focus.”

“I don’t get why you’re so hell bent on that, anyway. That fucking engine you sent me kicked ass. It had all the nuts and bolts for racing success. With a couple of teams working on that thing, we’d have something viable in six months, Jagger.”

It usually ends there. Every time we meet up, it’s the same conversation. Every. Single. Time. He draws in a deep breath and releases it. “I see Boston’s still a dipshit. Glad Bowie finally saw through that asshole.”

“Don’t even get me started on her.”

The other problem with Axl is that he lives in the past. He can never let shit go. “If she’d heard you out, this would never have happened. You two would be married, running a business together, and you’d be designing and building racing cars for me, too, I’ll betcha.”

I let him take a walk down memory lane for a few moments. “Yeah, well, she crawled in the sack with Boston so fucking fast, I didn’t have the chance to explain.”

“It should have been obvious. You were both fully clothed and the bathroom smelled like a truck stop. Doesn’t take a genius to figure that one out.”

“She panicked.” I explain. “I get it. It’s taken me a long time to say that, but I do.

I was her first and seeing me in bed with someone else, innocent or not, spooked her.

The part that I have trouble understanding is if she loved me so fucking much, why the hell did she have no problem whatsoever hopping into bed with that asshole. ”

“Yeah, but you were her first, too. That should have accounted for something.”

I slap him on the leg. “Yeah, well it didn’t. And it’s been over ever since, so let’s just let it go.”

“Will you make racing engines with me?”

I smile. “You stop mouthing off to the media, and getting yourself in so much shit that you need to keep two lawyers on a retainer, and we’ll talk.” I rise. “See you next time.”

“You gonna crush Kruger now that he’s one man down?”

“We’ll see what Rush has to say about that.”

“I say go for it. Even if he didn’t steer you wrong since day one, you still deserve top spot, not him.”

“Thanks, man. I appreciate it. But we’ll see what happens.”

Rush’s place isn’t a house it’s a goddamn airport.

I could never live in a place where the living room looks like a fucking bowling alley.

Even the parcel of land is overwhelming.

It takes a team of landscapers to cut his lawn and manicure the brush and plants and cover he has.

If anyone ever wonders where his money goes to, this is it.

He's even got a fucking water feature at the front of his house.

If you ask me, he thinks that he's some kind of goddamn Greek god with a piece of shit like that masquerading on his lawn.

But that is what makes him happy. That and being the king of his own hill, that is.

"Hey, brother. Coffee's over there." He states as I walk in the front door. I've got a code to get in and I use it often.

"What was that bullshit about yesterday?" I query him, pouring myself a much-needed cup of brew.

"What bullshit are you referring to?" He asks, tongue in cheek, sipping his own coffee. He's already in his suit, and his briefcase is open on his kitchen counter, looking like he's been working for hours already.

"Where you came out to talk and ended up doing anything but?"

His tone raises an octave, like I'm being ridiculous. "What are you talking about? We talked."

"Fine. We talked. But you didn't give me the list of potential recruits. And don't think that I didn't catch the glances that you and Halen were exchanging, either.

Because I was on to you.”

“When you say it that way, it just sounds weird.”

“Quit trying to change the subject. What’s the deal with the pool?”

He exhales sharply. “Alright, fine.” He rises to grab his laptop off the counter. “Here, this is why I didn’t want to tell you.”

As he turns the computer around, I see the list with a snippet of each person’s resume attached, and my eyes go directly to what I’m guessing Rush was trying to hide from me.

My tone is clipped. “So what.”

“So what?” He almost squeaks. “So the whole deal isn’t a fake, man. Stevie dug deeper and found out that it’s all fucking true. Boston and Bowie are splittsville, and now she’s coming to knock on your door.”

“So? That doesn’t mean that I have to hire her, does it.” I point out.

“It doesn’t.” He’s matter of fact. “But did you see the rest of the pool? A loser, a former economist for the last shitty government, a guy that’s just received a pardon for fucking tax evasion, and her. That’s what we have so far.”

“So, someone else will come up.”

“You think it’s that easy, Jagger? This isn’t an internship for a fucking accounting firm.

We need someone with her background, with her integrity, with her vision, man.

Unless you want to hire Axl Lennon, she's it right now.

I mean, in six months, attrition might bring on a handful of other candidates, but dude, you haven't got six months.

You said yourself that you're fucking drowning.

And that's not even the worst of it, man.

How do we even know that she's being genuine? ”

“What the fuck are you talking about? I thought you said that she and him called it quits?”

“Exactly. How do you know that she's not knocking on your door for revenge, Jagger? We want someone with a heart for this company, not someone looking to get the ultimate revenge.”

“So, say she did come aboard for revenge. Wouldn't that make a great motivation to kick Boston's ass?”

He cranes his neck, looking at me like I just said that I want the cast of Friends to run my business. “And what about your head , Jagger?”

Now it's my turn to crane my neck. “What about my head?”

“Don't tell me that this won't mess with it.”

I scoff. “Look, Rush, I get that you're looking out for my best interests, man, but I'm a grownup, remember? And this is my business, my heart and soul, not some part-time job that I'd like to keep so I can save up for a set of wheels. I can be

professional.”

He lifts a brow. “Are you sure about that? Because I saw your assistant’s face print on your fucking laptop last night.”

A hand scrapes down my face. “That’s different. It’s just about sex. She doesn’t want anything more and neither do I.”

“Well, what if you take a ride in your wayback machine like your friend Axl just loves to fucking do, and suddenly you let your heart get in the way of business, hm? I know what you went through, man. I lived with you. You were just a kid.”

“Exactly. That was a long time ago, Rush. I’ve been over it for years, and that’s the way that it’s going to stay. You and Halen don’t have anything to worry about.”

The muscles in his jaw are working. “Do you want to wait it out? Make her sweat a while for old time’s sake? See if something else better pops up?”

The thought of steering this ship alone doesn’t scare me.

It never has. I have no interest in complicating my life further, and right now, I feel like doing it alone for a while longer is the lesser of two evils.

Bowie is the best candidate for this job, and she would kick the ass of anyone else that we could recruit, but the stakes are too high.

If she’s going to be here for any other reason than to drive this company to the next level, then I don’t need that any more than I need to hire an ex con. “Yeah. Yeah, let’s wait it out.”

He frowns and nods. “Good choice, brother. I believed in you.”

I smirk. “So, does Halen owe you fifty bucks for this now?”

He stuffs his laptop into the bag and gives me a wink. “A hundred, actually.”

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Jagger

Scrolling through my phone while I wait for some drawings to load onto my computer, I see an article pop up.

“Fuck, Axl!” I nearly shout. “Goddamn you. Can’t you keep your face out of the goddamn news for more than a month?”

” Sure, it’s a tabloid, but still. They’ve got his face blurred out, but as sure as the nose on my face, it’s him.

Especially since he’s wearing a shirt with his name and company logo on it.

‘RamYouRacing’ is a logo well-known to anyone not living under a rock, let’s just say that.

And he sure lives up to that standard, seeing as, according to the photo, he’s been caught getting head in a limo by some slut that looks like he picked her up in a back alley.

“God, I cannot do business with a dude like that!” I say to myself, hearing my family’s voice scream at me from inside my head.

The guy is great. He’s a world class race car driver, a genius, has a heart of gold, is as loyal as fuck, but when it comes to having his face plastered on a paper, he is a glutton for attention.

..and for punishment, evidently. His agent has a field day with him.

I've seen enough and I'm in terrible need of a coffee and a walk, so I head outside my office.

And I immediately regret it...

As I walk to the coffee carafe at the back of the reception desk, I see her coming into the building...Bowie Ritter.

I see her first before she sees me, as she's never been inside this place, to my knowledge, and she doesn't know where to look. But it's too late for me to hightail it back to my office and tell the girls at reception that I'm not available for a spontaneous guest. Also, I'm not a pussy.

"Hey, a...are you here to see me?" I ask her, as the girls behind the desk scurry to help. I raise my hand, indicating that I've got it.

"Yes, if you can spare the time." Bowie says.

She's dressed in a pencil skirt that goes below the knee, a double-breasted jacket done right up, a frilly scarf that pokes out from said jacket, to cover any cleavage that may want to peek out, conservative-length heels, and her hair is in a messy bun.

Bowie always knew how to be professional, and her clothes scream that.

"Sure. Come on in. I've got about five minutes before my next meeting." Which is the truth. My production team and I have a session every day around this time.

"Thank you." She says, her tone clipped but again, professional.

I gesture her into my office and close the door.

Again, I gesture to her, this time to have a seat.

After I pull the bottom button of my jacket open and give slack to my trousers before sitting, she sits and crosses one leg over the other.

“What can I do for you.” I say as more of a comment than as a question.

“This is probably very strange.” She scoffs.

“It’s not something that I planned on doing today.”

She exhales sharply. “Okay, I’ll get right to the point. I’m sure you know why I’m here and I’ve come to make you an offer. If you’re not interested that’s fine, just let me know if I’m wasting my time.”

I don’t let her start. “You’re wasting my time.”

Her mouth was open. She closes it. “You’re not even interested in hearing me out?”

“Not even a little bit. I just invited you into my office to avoid a scene and to not have my staff asking questions that I don’t want to answer.”

“Jagger, look. I’m not just here looking for a job. This is about what I can offer you.”

I chuckle mirthlessly. “Not without a lawsuit, you can’t. I know Boston too well, and he’s not stupid enough to not make anyone that walks through his door sign an N.D.A.”

“For the record, my N.D.A. is null and void, and the people that have teamed with me

had an N.D.A., but it didn't include a clause prohibiting them from being employed by a competitor, only for not sharing trade secrets."

I lift a brow. "And you've had this checked out by an attorney?"

She nods. "Yes. Boston lost all rights when he...um...dipped his pen outside of company ink...so to speak."

I refuse to let this be personal. "That still doesn't change my mind, Bowie.

" Her name feels weird on my tongue. Haven't said it in years, and especially not to her.

"I want people here that are dedicated to me and to my company. Not out for revenge. The team that stands between these walls have heart. They've been handpicked by my brother, who is the best in the business. "

She goes for cocky. "Word is that you're short staffed, Jagger.

How else would you know why I'm here. I'd say that if you have any sense, which I know you do, you'll at least consider my offer.

Treat me like any Joe Blow off the street and give me a probationary period.

Better yet, give all of us that treatment. We'll show you we mean business."

I have questions. "Just what are you proposing, anyway? Do you want to be front and center like you were at Kruger? And what sort of people are you bringing my way, anyway, hm? This isn't a fucking refugee camp, Bowie."

She raises a finger. "First, I'm looking for my place.

Whether that's front and center or not is up to you, but I'd rather be here at a place where I can shine and do what I love to do and not be dodging bullets all the time.

Second, I have an HR manager that'll knock the socks off any other in the state, as far as I'm concerned, and a bunch of suppliers that would rather follow me than stick with Boston, if that's any indication of where I've come from and where I'm willing to go.

Also, it proves that I was the brains and the heart behind that outfit.

Not tooting my own horn, Jagger, it's a fact.

And I think you know that's true as well. ”

I lift a brow. “Jinny walked, too?”

She nods. “Right after she plowed him one, she did. Didn't give it a second thought.”

“I always liked her.”

“And, based on the fact that your brother is headhunting for you, is my guess accurate that you don't have a proper HR department outfitted yet?”

“I won't discredit Celeste, but she hasn't got the eyes or the stomach to ground this place with what we have.

Rush is picky, for all the right reasons, so we've got Celeste standing in until we can find someone better, I'll admit.

But I'm not sure that bringing you and Jinny on board is the right thing to do.

The last thing I need is Boston up my ass.

And the media will eat this up, too. I don't want anything sully my chances of getting this European deal.

The cars slated to come into next year's and even the year after's markets are prime for my engine designs.

It's like the timing is perfect. And I don't want anything to fuck it up. ”

“I can appreciate that.”

“Can you.” I say as more of an accusation. “You're not just offering to come and work for me until Boston dangles some carrot in front of your face, and then you go running back to him?”

“That's never going to happen. I promise you.”

I'm not convinced. “And you walked away from everything without a second thought.”

“No, actually. I gave it a lot of thought, if you want to know the truth. I gave it a few chances, but I can't trust him anymore, and he's well aware of that.

It's like we're both waiting for the other to do something vengeful.

And It's not the way that I want to work. He gave me a decent package and I walked.”

“How noble of the asshole.”

“Look, I don't want to talk about him. It's over and I'm over it.

I just want to move on and do what I love doing.

Truth be told, I didn't realize until I took a step back, just how much of a back seat I've been taking for him.

This way, I can offer more of my strengths, instead of walking on eggshells and doing things that frankly, I never got credit for. ”

“Why come to me?”

She hesitates for a moment. “Because I know that you're the closest competitor.”

“Why not go work for Ford?”

“Because I can't stand them. They're the neediest fucks on the planet. They call night and day with no regard for boundaries.”

“I've got news for you, Bowie. I'm not much for boundaries, either. In fact, I went to visit Axl Lennon at five o'clock this morning, and then I saw my brother Rush right after that.”

“But would you call a staff member at two o'clock in the morning?”

I've wanted to. But I hold the keys to the building and there isn't a machine in this place that I can't handle on my own. “No.” I say honestly, feeling like I want to lie just for the satisfaction.

She's content with that answer but she doesn't make further comment.

“Look, I just...I don't think that this will ever work, Bowie. If you want the honest to God truth. I know your worth and I know what you're capable of, and I just think that

it's too much of a risk.”

After a swallow and a tight nod, she licks her lips and speaks. “I can appreciate that. If you want to know the truth, if the shoe were on the other foot, I wouldn't have even seen you. I sort of judge you for that.” She chuckles.

I rise as she rises, knowing that this conversation is over.

As I walk her to the door, she turns. “But understand that you'll never find another person that loves this business more than I do.

I've sacrificed everything for it and I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

There is nothing more fulfilling for me than watching a project come to fruition.

It's not about money to me. It's about the American dream.

And I'll put that front and center no matter what company I work for. ”

“Ever thought about starting your own?”

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“When you’ve been trained to feel like your company is your own that you share with the same person you share your life with, there is no comparison.

Besides, if I thought of that even ten years ago, I might have had a fighting chance, but now everything is a mess.

I may revisit that idea after the dust settles, but for now, I need to get back into the game.”

I stick my hand out for her to shake. “If you need some support, let me know. I’m not in this business to cut people down. That’s not how I got to where I am now.”

“And that’s why I came to you first, Jagger.” She smiles. “It was nice seeing you again.”

I nod. I can’t say the same. I know that this meeting is going to cost me days of interrupted sleep. To avoid questions, I don’t walk her to the door. I bid her adieu from the inside of my office and let her see herself out.

“All real.” Stevie confirms as I walk through her door. She’s sitting at her desk with her feet propped up on the desk, heels pointing out so far I’m afraid she’ll use them as a weapon.

“What. What’s all real?” I ask, closing her door.

The receptionist knows who I am so she just gestured me in.

Visits to my sister's office are usually spontaneous and never last more than five minutes, because that's all that we can stand of each other.

The love is fast and furious, but in under a minute, I can already feel my skin starting to crawl, and she's the same.

We both admit to it. Neither of us are offended.

It's just in our D.N.A. Evidently, she doesn't have that effect on anyone else, and neither do I, for that matter.

"Bowie Ritter and Boston Kruger. All real. None of that shit's made up. My source tells me that she tried to stick around but he was being such a psycho, watching her every move, just waiting for her to sabotage him, so she walked. The media is all over it now."

I already know all this, but I don't tell her as much.

"So, how much did he offer her?" She asks.

"How the fuck should I know." I say with a grunt, sitting in the guest chair.

"Because she came to see you and don't lie to me, I can see it in your face."

Skin starts to crawl. "How the fuck do you do that."

She shrugs. "It's a gift. You have it, too. Don't underestimate yourself. That's why you showed her the door."

My mouth opens. I repeat, only louder. "How the fuck do you do that!"

Stevie is unimpressed. Her eyes scan down a website as she scrolls through a page on her laptop. “Tabloids say three million.”

“What?” I squeal.

“Boston and Bowie. Pay attention.” She snaps her fingers.

“Three million was her parting price. I would have doubled that, personally, for pain and suffering. After living with that pencil dick all those years, standing in his fucking shadow, only to be thanked like that? I would have annihilated him for that much.”

“Which is why I showed her the door.”

“You’ll call her back.”

“Not in a million fucking years.”

She scoffs. “Don’t be stupid, Jagger. She’s your best candidate. Aside from the ancient past you had with her, she’s the perfect partner for you. Everyone else will be second fiddle.” Stevie says numbly, as though everyone else in the world is aware of it, and it’s old news.

That’s when I start to see the end of this meeting come. “Stevie, I’m not bringing her aboard my ship. I’ve already told her that and she took it like she saw it coming. It’s a done deal.” I rise and walk to the door.

“I see Axl’s back at it. I had a bet with one of my colleagues. I won.”

“Fuck you, Stevie.” I say as I leave. I salute the receptionist on the way out.

She knows the drill. Almost every conversation ends with one of us spurting an expletive to the other.

As I walk out the front door my cell phone rings.

It's Axl. It takes everything in me not to throw the phone across the lawn.

"Axl. Not in the mood today, buddy." I answer with as I enter my car and connect to Bluetooth.

"Ah, so you saw my face on that rag, did you."

"What is with you, man? Ever heard of getting head at home? What's the matter? Is your place getting fumigated, because I was just there."

He chuckles, pleased with himself. "What are you getting all bent out of shape for? It's not what it looks like."

"Really? What it looks like is that you were getting head from a whore in the back seat of a limo. Tell me I'm wrong."

"Well, I wasn't getting head."

I'm frustrated and I'm not interested in getting into this with him. "What can I do for you, Axl?"

"Nothing. I was just wondering if you've made up your mind?"

"About what?" I start driving to the office. Halen's meeting me there shortly. I wanted to hear it from the horse's mouth what the real story was with Bowie and Boston, hence the trip to see Stevie.

“About Bowie. If she comes crawling over to your neck of the woods.”

“Why is everyone so fixated on this?”

“I told you, man. I’m bored. Put me to work and I’ll stay out of trouble.”

Half of me wants to take him up on the offer, but the other half is screaming no.

Axl has a lot of smarts, and I’d love to collaborate with him, but he’s got to get his shit together.

I want a partner, not a fucking project.

“So, go design engines with Boston, Axl. It seems like you and him are made for each other. I gotta go.” I hang up on him.

I don’t have the time or the patience to deal with him right now.

I can picture him grinning, pleased with himself, and I know that he’s the type of guy to get over me hanging up on him fast. The dude knows that I’m busy and half the time he’s just amusing himself by calling me.

Either way I don’t have time for bullshit today, and I need to get back to the office for Halen.

When I arrive, he’s already in my office. “Sorry I’m late.”

“It’s cool. I knew you wanted to see Stevie, so I knew that would be short.” He chuckles knowingly.

“Yeah. She checks out. The story with Bowie and Boston is true. It’s not a charade.”

“But you knew that already.”

“Okay, how the fuck did you know that?”

He smirks. “Steve just told me. I just hung up to her.”

I tousle his hair. “Fuck you, man.”

He chuckles. “Fuck you, too.” I sit at my desk while he pulls out his laptop. “So, how did it go?”

“You mean the awkward, ever-so-scripted, bullshit impromptu meeting I just had with my ex? It went well.” I frown, nodding.

“What did she offer you?”

“In a nutshell? A great bargain if she wasn’t just freshly scorned by my closest competitor.”

“What was the offer exactly? Does she want to take over as CEO?”

I laugh. “No, she wasn’t so bold as to suggest that. She just wants to come work for me. Oh, and her buddy Jinny, too. I’d take Jinny over Bowie any day, if you ask me.”

“What, the HR Manager?” He’s surprised.

I nod. “Yeah.”

“She walked, too?”

“Well, why wouldn’t she? I mean, as far as I remember, those two were tight. How

would you be able to stay with the dipshit in that case? It would make things awfully awkward, don't you think?"

"And you'd take her?"

"Why not. I never had a problem with her."

"So, why don't you. Celeste isn't cutting the mustard, and we can't onboard some of these recruits without a decent HR Manager.

I've got a few here I can offer you, but if she's open for business, I'd take her.

Shit, I will take her. She's not on my radar yet, so this must be super fucking fresh news. "

"You take her I'll punch you out, man."

"So you are going to take her."

"I'll think about it. But until I reach my decision, you keep your paws off her."

"She'll be a package deal, Jagger." He warns, good-naturedly. "She's not going to come over to the dark side without her buddy."

"If either of them are professional enough, they will. This isn't fucking Romper Room, Halen."

He shrugs. "Don't say I didn't warn you."

"Fine. But respect my wishes and we won't have a problem."

He changes tack. “What is it, anyway. Is it because of your past with her, or because she used to fuck your closest competitor.”

“Both, man.” I reply, growing tired of the subject. “Look, give me a day or two. I need to get the testing done on this prototype. That’s got to be front and center. Then I can focus on the meat and potatoes.”

“If you had a decent HR manager already, it would be a simple meeting and I could take over.”

“Would you focus, Halen? Seriously.”

He rises. “Fine. You get one day. But if she shows up on my roster, she’s mine.”

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Bowie

“Y ou can go back. I’m sure he’ll take you.” I say to Jinny, returning to her place, where I’m staying temporarily.

“Like hell I will.”

“Well, what are you going to do? You need to earn a living.”

“I could say the same thing to you.” She points out. “We both need to, but neither of us are destitute. Shit, I could take the next five years off and still sit proudly on this leather sofa.”

“That’s not the point. I could do the same, Jinny. But you and I, we’re not made like that. There’s a reason why we got to where we were.”

“I could open my own firm. Become a headhunter. Hell, I’m sure that Jagger’s brother Halen could even take me on. I bet you he’s got wet dreams if he’s got any brains and knows that I’m a free agent. You and I, Bowie, are hot commodities. We’ve got nothing to worry about.”

“Sure. I’m such a hot commodity that Jagger turned me away. I got five minutes of his time, and I feel like that was too much for him.”

“Can you blame him?”

My gaze whips to hers. “What happened between us was years ago. I haven’t seen

him in ten years, Jinny. Surely, he's over that by now."

"I'm sure he is, too, but that's not what I mean. You've been sleeping with his archrival ever since. This has nothing to do with sex, my friend. This has everything to do with power."

"Are you saying that he's just doing this because he needs to show that he has power over me? That he can choose not to give me what he wants just to prove a point?"

"No, he's proving that he holds the cards. He's not a child, Bowie. A man with that much success has to behave like an adult."

"Better than he did when he was in high school."

Jinny points at me and glares. Her voice is firm. "There. That's it right there."

I'm confused. "What?"

"You maintain that you're over it, but you're not."

And he sniffs that out like a fucking Rottweiler.

You need to let that shit go, Bowie. God, you just said so yourself that it's been years.

He was a kid. You were a kid. Get the fuck over it and let that shit go or good luck getting over what fucking Boston did to you. "

I swallow and rake a hand through my hair. As I sit down slowly, I draw in a deep breath and release it. "Do you wanna know something strange?"

"What's that." She says, and then she licks her lips.

“It was like a switch.”

“What was like a switch?”

“When you told me about Boston and that slut. It was like one minute I was in love with him and the next minute I wasn’t.”

“But you’re still not over what happened. I mean, you lost your partner in business and in life, you lost your stake in the business that you worked hard to build, and you lost your fucking house, Bowie. Don’t tell me that you’re all over that, because I’ll tell you that you’re full of shit.”

I bite my lip. “The more I think about it, the more I realize how unhappy I was, Jinny.”

“Are you saying that you’re happy now? Homeless, jobless, manless? Not buying it, sister. Not even a little bit.”

“Okay, fine. I’m not pissed off about being manless, but the jobless and homeless thing is a little displacing.”

“A little displacing?” She says, her voice raising an octave. “You have no home, Bowie. You have no job. It’s just you and me and our bank accounts.”

“Is that so bad?”

She scoffs, shaking her head. “You’re fucking crazier than I am.”

“Well, you’re not at all upset about being out of a job, either, you know.”

A frown and a head tilt. “True. But then I’m flexible.

And I don't mind change. Plus, my functions are transferrable.

The only thing that's really going to change is my fucking office.

My assistant dealt with the day-to-day shit from current employees.

I just dealt with the hardasses and the newer hires.

My functions were top level. I can do that anywhere. ”

“Well, my skills are transferrable, too.”

“Sure, but CEO is something every company advertises.” She's facetious. “Those jobs are always on Indeed.com.”

I turn the tables. “How do I know that someone won't call me?”

“Is your phone ringing yet? The whole fucking northern hemisphere knows about the split by now, Bowie.”

“Well...not yet. But it's still new, Jinny. It's not going to happen overnight.”

“Why don't you call Axl Lennon?”

“The train wreck? Sure, there's a reliable source of employment.”

“Fine. I suggest you start sniffing around then. Because I can sit on my little lily pad for a while, but you, my dear, can sit still for a minute, and that'll be it. I know that you're already ready to crawl out of your own skin, Bowie, and don't try to deny it. I know you too well.”

“I’ve already got a plan. Not to worry.”

But my plan gets shot to hell tomorrow...

Jagger

You guessed it. I’m lying in bed and sleep won’t come.

My mind is, once again, racing. This time, it’s racing so bad, the only solution is to go to work.

When there’s nobody there in the middle of the night, I find it’s the perfect time to clear my mind and gain better focus.

My prototype engine still sits on the stand, almost like it’s beckoning me.

The new parts sit on the sideboard, waiting for one of my technicians to install them, but that won’t do.

I’m in jeans and a t-shirt, knowing that I have a shower, and various suits in my office, so that I can feel free to play in my sandbox anytime I like.

And now’s the time...

The only thing missing is a couple of buddies and a brewsky.

And that’s how this whole company started.

My first engine block was made from a stupid idea that my brothers and my buddies helped me put together.

Two of said friends now work for me. One of them is my head engineer.

That's what dreams are made of. As I fiddle with some of the pieces, greasing my gloves nicely, getting oil and grease all over my shirt, sort of like I was born to do this, I feel like myself again.

Sometimes focusing on the wrong things leads me down dark paths and bringing me back to my roots is the perfect way to get it all back.

Oftentimes, that's when better ideas come to life.

This time is no exception. And it's like the gods are watching me, or my brothers, same difference.

My phone beeps with a text message. I try to ignore it, but the messages keep coming.

It's Rush. It's four o'clock in the morning.

He's threatening to call me if I ignore him as he knows from me sharing my location with him on my phone, where I am.

I pick up the phone on the first ring. "Yeah."

"You've got a guest coming in five."

"You? Since when do you call first."

"It's not me."

"Do I get to guess?"

“No. Just open the gate and let her in.”

I exhale, exasperated. “Fuck.”

“Exactly.” He hangs up.

The door beeps a moment later. And when I expect to see Stevie on the other side of the door, I’m floored when I see Bowie instead. She’s also in jeans and a t-shirt, looking like she hasn’t slept a wink, either. “Insomnia. It’s a trait most successful people are graced with, huh.” She opens with.

I ignore her comment. “I’m working on an engine. Walk with me.”

She’s behind me, removing her purse from her shoulder, ready to dig in. I give her a quick rundown of what I’m doing, and she slides on a pair of gloves, joining me at the block. “I haven’t been this close to an engine in a while.” She comments.

“Yeah? How come?”

“Too much red tape to deal with.”

“I’m not much better. Sometimes I think that’s why I can’t sleep. Because I haven’t got my hands dirty enough that day.”

“Same.”

“You remember that Bel-Air my grandfather had?”

She nods. “Yeah. That thing was beautiful. Do you still have it?”

“Na. He sold it at an auction when he found out about the cancer. Not really sure

why. I would have given my right arm to have that thing, but I think he was avoiding the family fights over it. Can't say that I blame him. We all wanted that car."

"Yeah. I've heard about family squabbles when the head of the family passes away. Sometimes the whole family is never the same."

"He saved our family by doing that. Although I would have been the perfect fit for that car, but I think he knew that I thought that, and he didn't want us to fight because of that."

"Wise man."

"That he was."

She's got grease all over her gloves, and a spot of it on her cheek, but I don't dare wipe it for her. "So, how are you doing...you know...with all the bullshit going on?"

A shrug. "Surprisingly, I'm fine. I just...need to get back to work. Jinny's telling me that I'll drive myself nuts if I take any sort of sabbatical."

"You staying with her?"

"Yeah. I didn't need to deal with my parents or my siblings right now. None of them really liked Boston, anyway. My parents especially."

Her folks loved me, but I don't remind her of that. "How come? I mean, he's a successful guy and he and you built that company together."

"I think it's more because he never wanted to marry me, but I don't want to talk about that."

“I get it.” I lick my lips. “No offence, but I wouldn’t get married, either. I mean, I’m married to this place. It wouldn’t be fair.”

“Well, I’m not saying that I wanted to get married, either. If I did, it would just be to appease my family.”

“Cool.” We fiddle around for a few more minutes, and she gives me some ideas, reminding me of how fucking smart she is.

We really get down to the meat and potatoes of an engine and how the old mixed with the new is the best way to go for speed, efficiency and fuel economy.

And I stop to look at her. “I’ve gotta ask. ”

“What.”

“Tell me you headed the goddamn development team at Kruger. Because if you were shoved in a fucking office, that’s going to break my fucking heart.”

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After a swallow, she blinks. “Funny you should say that. Jinny and I were talking about this before I showed up here. You know...how I think that everything happens for a reason...like...as much as Boston fucked me over...I was really unhappy there, anyway. I just didn’t know it.”

“So you were stuck in a fucking office with your double-breasted suit and your hair tied up in a fucking bun. He stifled you, didn’t he.” I say kindly but matter-of-factly.

“Yeah. I guess he did. I just never noticed.”

“That’s a fucking crime, Bowie.” I tell her, irritated.

“You know, that’s one of the reasons why we were such great friends back in high school.

You had an imagination and a brain unlike any other girl I’d ever met.

Or anyone, for that matter. It’s no wonder you didn’t get along well with anyone else but Jinny, because while all the other chicks were holed up in the bathroom painting their lips and nails, you were in the parking lot or in the auto shop, but you weren’t a butch.

And I never understood why you ever mixed with Boston, because right off the hop, that guy was intimidated by you. ”

“Why do you say that?”

“A guy can tell, Bowie, when another guy is shitting in his pants. It doesn’t matter if it’s over a guy or a girl.

He was afraid of you, so the only solution was to nab you.

He knew that you would be a force to be reckoned with, so rather than beat you, he joined you.

It’s just too bad that you didn’t see that. ”

“I see it now.” She says, torquing the engine with a little more force.

“Better late than never.”

I really want to wipe that spot of grease off her cheek, but the more I look at it, the more I like it, and that scares me.

This chick is loaded with baggage, it doesn’t matter how long her and Boston have been split for.

As far as I know it’s been a couple of months, more or less.

“How come you gave that fucker so long before you left him, anyway?”

“We parted ways, relationship-wise, but I wanted to see if he could be mature about us still doing business together. As you can understand, I didn’t want to just walk away. But then he started being a dick and he offered me a decent severance package, so I figured I’d cut my losses.”

“Why didn’t you sue him?”

“For cheating?”

“No, for breach of contract.”

“Why would I want to muddy up my life for the next five years with lawyers and shit, Jagger? At the end of the day, I know that the business is in his name and he’s been sleazy about it, but he’s managed to make sure that as many staff and suppliers were in his favor as possible.

How the hell he did it is beyond me, since the writing is on the wall about his infidelity. ”

“He’s always been smooth, Bowie. You know this. How do you think he won you over?”

She smirks. “You didn’t make it that difficult, Jagger.”

Don’t say it. Don’t goddamn well say it . I decide that now isn’t the time to bring up the past, even though she’s asking for it. I look at the clock on the wall. It says that it’s almost seven o’clock. “I should go get cleaned up. My engineering staff will be here in a half an hour.”

She takes the hint. “Sure. Thanks for taking the time to see me. If you need a hand with anything, I’m here.

She pulls a business card out of her purse and hands it to me, not bothering to take her grimy gloves off first. Why, I don’t know, but that turns me on.

She’s a woman that cares more about how a car ticks than avoiding dirtying up her purse. “Call me if you change your mind.”

I don't say anything, I just walk her to the door.

"Thanks for letting me in."

I go for cute. "I hardly had a choice. My brother gave me the heads up."

"Sorry about that. I think he really wants us to work together."

"Yeah, Halen is good for getting his own way, I'll give him that."

She looks at me with Bambi eyes before walking to the main entrance door. "I'm not going to beg, Jagger. But I am going to tell you that you wouldn't regret it. I can promise you that."

I get it. After all the stifling that fucker Boston did, she didn't walk away until he betrayed her.

Point for her. But that still doesn't erase the fact that I can't trust her.

I still don't know if she's here genuinely or if she's just passing the time, until she goes crawling back to Kruger.

"I'll see ya." I tell her, and then it happens before I can stop it.

I wipe the spot of grease off her face. And I do it way too slowly, too.

She's still got the softest skin in the world.

She still smells the same, and her eyes are still as blue as they were years ago.

Goddammit, she's a beautiful girl. She needs to go. She needs to go now.

If she sees the nostalgia in my eyes, she doesn't respond as such. "Yeah. Thanks again."

I give her a thin-lipped smile and she walks out the door. Not a second later, my phone rings. It's Halen again. "What." I answer tersely.

"Not a good visit?"

"What, do you have a fucking crystal ball over there?"

"No. I just know that your day is officially starting soon, and you would have to kick her out if you hadn't made up your mind yet, or you'd be calling me to tell me to take her off my hit list. And since you're in such a shitty mood, I'd say it's the former."

"Fuck you. The visit went fine. I'm just not hiring her."

"Give me one good reason why not."

"I'll give you three."

"I'm listening."

"One. I'm not giving into you so you can dance a jig of glee at my expense. Two. She's been fucking Boston Kruger for the last fifteen years. Three. How the hell do I know she isn't a flight risk."

"Stop being a pussy, Jagger. Show her you've got balls and hire her. Give her a probationary period like she suggested. You know she's got the chops for what you need in that place, so don't try to deny it."

"Yeah, but she's got baggage, too."

“Did you ever tell her the fucking truth, man?”

“Why the fuck would I bother.” I seethe. “She was already fucking Boston before I could get the chance to. It would have been a waste of my fucking time.”

“You should tell her, Jag.”

“Like she’ll fucking believe me after all these years. It won’t make a shit bit of a difference.”

“It will and you know it.”

I’m not in the mood for yet another lecture or another trip down memory lane. “Look, Halen, I’m covered in shit and my team will be here soon. I’ve got to go.”

“You run this ship, man.”

“Yeah, and I’m running it the way that I want to. Don’t forget it.” I hang up on him and head into the shower. By the end of the day I find myself back at a familiar place...

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Bowie

J inny is out with her mom, so I have the house to myself, and it's long overdue.

Since leaving Boston, I haven't cried, I haven't punched anything or screamed, nothing.

And as much as I'm not the dramatic type, as I look around, I feel like I've lost my place.

Not just my home but in life, too. The strange thing is, while I was at Jagger's office, I felt a small semblance of what it was like to belong.

It sounds stupid, I know. But I haven't felt that way since high school.

It could be just because I haven't really seen Jagger since then, but still.

It felt really great to get my hands dirty again, to be at the front lines, so to speak, again.

I've spent too long cooped up in an office, dealing with vendors, suppliers, production teams, the media, you name it.

Jagger saw something in me today that I'd long forgotten.

It sort of scared me. This is the man that hurt me like no man has ever hurt me before.

Well, that part isn't true anymore. Boston takes the cake on that front now.

But back when I was a teenager and he was my first love, he crushed me.

It's silly to think about after all these years, I know, but I feel like I need to confront that demon again, and realize that by me moving on so quickly, by me running to Boston's side so fast after Jagger cheated, I robbed myself of the process of dealing with it then.

And while years have passed, here I am, still thinking about it.

The funny thing is that I feel like because I didn't just leave Boston, I gave us some time to figure things out, I didn't rob myself of that time to process.

That's probably why in my heart I've moved on.

I'm a survivor. I'm not one to dwell. My work is my therapy.

And being there, going through the inner workings of Jagger's prototype engine, brought me back to what is important.

It helped to heal me some. Nonetheless, nothing feels like home anymore.

Except being back in a place where I can use my brain and not be inhibited but appreciated.

The security gate beeps with an arrival.

Jinny has the security camera linked to her phone, so she must have let the visitor in.

Part of me is terrified that it's Boston.

He's the last person that I want to see.

But I'm pleasantly surprised when I see that it's Jagger.

"Hi." I say in greeting, trying to wipe the smile off my face.

"Hey. I would have called first, but I was in the area, and I just wanted to run something by you."

"Sure, that's okay. Jinny's out with her mother."

"You weren't busy, were you?"

"No. You actually came at the perfect time."

My mouth starts before my brain does. "Why did you cheat on me?" I cover my mouth, as if I've been possessed.

He shakes his head slightly, looking at the polished granite flooring. "I knew that this was going to come up at one time or another."

"I just...I have to know. I know it was ages ago. And it's not your fault that I never dealt with it properly, but now that I'm dealing with things the way that I should have dealt with them years ago, I need to know why.

What we had then was perfect. Everything was so perfect.

Was that why? I mean, were you scared that we were so perfect together?

Because I never would have forced you to marry me, Jagger. You know that."

He raises a hand. “Come. Sit.”

“Okay.” I breathe, following him.

He finds his way to the living room and sits down on the leather sofa. He pulls his phone out of his suit pocket and scrolls through it for a moment, before setting it on the table. I can hear ringing.

A girl answers. “Jagger. How’s it hangin’?”

“To the left.” He answers cockily. “Hey, Kayla, do you remember back in high school, that night at Jinny’s old lady’s house? When you and I got so drunk playing quarters that we both puked and then passed out in her mom’s bed?”

“I’m still hung over from that night.” She scoffs.

“Hey, how come you and I never fucked?”

“Jagger, if you remember, we both crawled from the bathroom floor to the bed, and I helped your sorry ass up onto the bed. We couldn’t walk down the goddamn stairs for twelve hours, do you honestly think either of us were in any condition to get it on?

” She chuckles. “Why? Is your ego still wounded? Hey, did you ever tell Bowie the truth?”

My heart is beating out of my chest. I can feel a lump in my throat. But I also feel my fist ball up with rage.

“No. It wouldn’t have made a shit bit of difference.”

“True. Besides, she got over you pretty fast.” Another scoff. “Hey, thanks for the

awkward trip down memory lane, man. But I've got a client coming in five. I'll see you in a few weeks for Stevie's birthday?"

"Yeah. I'll see ya."

He ends the call. He doesn't look at me. He rests back in the sofa, folding his arms over his chest.

I can't stop the tears. "Why...why didn't you tell me, Jagger?"

He scrapes a hand down his face before leaning up.

"Because you didn't even give me a fucking chance, that's why.

You ran off and hid, and when you finally came out of hiding, you'd already been fucking Boston.

You wouldn't return my calls, my letters, hell, I even came by your house once, and you wouldn't answer the goddamn door.

The rumor mill got the best of me, and I didn't bother wasting the energy trying to clear my name, because I'd already lost you, and I figured what does it matter now. "

"And nothing happened." I say again, testing the words on my tongue.

"Never." He scrapes a hand down his face.

"I should never have drunk that night. It was my own stupidity. I didn't know any better.

That was back when Jinny was drinking, and she made out like a couple of shots

wouldn't hurt me, but she was so fucking wrong.

I was sick as hell, and I've never done it again since. ”

Silence.

I wipe the tears from my eyes and sit up straight.

“I loved you more than life itself, Bowie. I would never have dreamed of sleeping with someone else.” A pause for emphasis. “You were right when you said that what we had was perfect. It was so goddamn perfect. I'd never loved anyone as much as I loved you, and...” He trails off.

“And what?” I sniff.

He hesitates, releasing a breath, before grunting the words. “Well, as luck would have it, I've never loved anyone since. I wish I could speak for the both of us, but I can't.”

This breaks my heart. I thought my heart was broken from Boston, but this, this takes the cake. More than fifteen years have passed, and I still feel like it just happened yesterday. Jagger reaches over, hearing me cry, and he places a hand on my back. “It's in the past, Bowie. Leave it there.”

“It's in the past for you, Jagger, but you forget that I didn't know the truth until just now.”

“Does it make any difference. I mean, you fell in love with someone else, and now it's over.

All of it. The only reason why I told you now is because you asked.

After all these years, you finally asked for the truth.

I would have given it to you a thousand times, but you didn't want to hear it.

It was easier for you to move on than it was to deal with the truth. ”

“Is that why you won't hire me? Vengeance?”

“No, that's not the reason.” He says, removing his hand.

I look over at him, wiping my eyes again. “Then why?”

He licks his lips. “Okay, just for the record, remember that you asked.”

“Fair enough.”

He swallows and looks at me. “The only thing I ever loved as much as I loved you is my work. You come and work for me and that turns to shit, for whatever reason, well...I'm not quite sure how I'd take that.”

“You'd take that just like you take everything else, Jagger.

Life is like that. But I can tell you that I put everything into my work, too.

And the time that I spent hovering over that engine with you today reminded me of how much I love what I do, too.

And I haven't had that pleasure in a long time.

” I want to add that I haven't had many pleasures in a long time, but I leave that part out.

“I don’t believe that you’re going to find anyone else quite as dedicated to the work as I am.

I’m not just tooting my own horn there, either.

You know that this is in my blood. It’s part of my D.N.A. ”

With another swallow, he pats me on the knee. “Okay, then.”

I’m confused. He rises and walks towards the door. “Okay then?”

He purses his lips together and looks at the floor, and then his gaze meets mine for a moment, before he draws in a deep breath and releases it.

“You can start tomorrow. I’ll put you on a probationary period.

I want you to sign an N.D.A., and I don’t want you breathing a word of this to the media.

You share anything with Boston or with anyone without signed consent from me and I’ll sue your ass so bad you’ll be in jail for ten years or buried in paperwork for that long.

I’ll end you or anyone else that tries to break what I have. You got it?”

My eyes widen as he speaks. He loves his business, and he’ll do anything to protect it.

Why that turns me on, I don’t know, but it does.

He’s the only other person I know with such passion and dedication to what they do

as I do.

I fully respect him for that. In fact, my admiration just grew for him.

He's a man of integrity and hasn't changed. "You got it, Jagger."

"And you get a signing bonus if you bring Jinny, too. But she's got the same red tape as you, okay? And you can tell her that."

"I'll tell her."

"Good. I'll see you in the morning."

"Yes. You will." I smile.

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He doesn't smile, but if I know him like I think I still know him, he's smiling on the inside.

He opens the door and I stand there, watching him walk to his car.

I close the door and rest my forehead on it.

The tears pour down my face uncontrollably.

My chest heaves with emotion. I haven't cried this hard since my baby cat Charles died when I was a kid.

I stand there, weeping against the door like a baby.

And nothing can stop me....except one thing. ..

Jagger

I'm not stupid. I know that was a huge blow.

She didn't see that coming at all. Not the truth about the past, not the hiring her on the spot, nothing.

Bowie is alone and has been to hell and back, and something in my stomach is telling me to go back and knock on the door.

So I do. As I approach it, I can already hear the strange noises, and I realize that she's

bawling her fucking eyes out on the other side of the door.

My heart breaks. I tap on the door and it stops for a moment.

She knows that it's me. It can only be me, otherwise the security would have tipped her off.

As she opens the door, I see her face covered in tears.

I swallow, looking at her like she's a lost fucking puppy, and I fold.

As I open my arms, feeling my own eyes prick with unshed fucking tears, I pull her to me, holding her tight.

Hey, I'm not a fucking heartless prick, okay?

We have a long history together. She was my first and last love, and when someone you care about, whether it was once upon a time or now, or both, if you've got any shred of remorse or care in your body, you're there for them.

While she whimpers in my arms, I find my grip on her getting stronger and stronger, as my arms snake around her body.

Goddammit, it feels so good to hold her again.

It's just like it was. Her body fits in mine like a glove.

As she cries softly in my ear, I want so badly to kiss her hair, like I used to.

To kiss her soft cheek. To comfort her more than I am right now.

But just being held seems to help. “It’s okay, Bowie.

Everything is going to be okay.” I murmur in her ear, wrapping my fingers around her stray curls, caressing her body, swaying slightly from side to side.

“I’m so sorry.” She breathes into my ear. “I wish I could take it back.”

“I wish I could, too. But we can’t, sweetheart.”

She nods numbly, still holding me close.

I tuck my head into her neck once more, drawing in a deep breath, smelling her hair, drinking her in.

But I know that I can’t feel for her what I want to feel.

We can’t work together if that happens, nor do I think she’d ever be ready for that, or that we can ever go back to what we once had.

That would be impossible. That would be unhealthy.

That would also be dead wrong, after all that’s happened in the time between.

So I resolve myself to what we have now.

A professional friendship, if you will. And that all depends on how things go starting tomorrow.

My mom always tells me that when someone need a hug, you let them be the one to pull back first, and this time is no exception.

Bowie finally pulls back, and it breaks my heart to see her like this.

She may come off all tough and ready to take over the world, but there's a world of hurt inside there.

"I'm sorry for what he put you through, Bowie. Truly, I am."

With that, she kisses my forehead. "You haven't changed a bit, Jagger. You're still the sweetest man I know. Always will be."

I go for cute, snapping my fingers. "Aw, shucks, ma'am."

That gets a chuckle. "And you always knew when to make me laugh and when to let me cry."

"Honey, timing is everything. It's a hard lesson to learn, but when you learn it, it sticks."

She's looking at me with dinner plate eyes again. "I'm sorry for what I put you through, too, Jagger. I was a silly teenager. I didn't deserve you."

"Like I said, honey. It's in the past. Leave it there, okay?"

A nod. "It's there for good now."

"Good." I don't want to let her go, but I know that I have to. "Now, no more crying, okay?"

"I promise."

"Okay." I kiss her forehead. "I'll see you tomorrow."

“Bright and early.”

She stands at the door until I pull out of the driveway. When I get home, I have not one, but two guests sitting at my front gate.

“Well, if it isn’t Mutt and Jeff.”

“I tracked you.” Rush admits. “Halen tipped me off though.”

“So you knew that I was at Jinny’s house, and therefore, with Bowie.”

“I won the bet.” Axl brags. “Got any beer in the house?”

“Nope. But you’re welcome to go to the bar down the street if you like.” I answer facetiously.

“Na, that’s okay. I brought some. It’s just in the car.”

“Asshole.” I snuffle. “Well, bring it in before my neighbors call the cops on me for drinking in public.”

“Who says they’re for you?”

“Fuck you, asshole.” I laugh, as Rush follows me into the house.

“So, are you going to make Halen stop fucking whining about Jinny and Bowie, and pull them off his roster, or what.”

“Yeah, did you cave, man?” Axl says, rubbing it in.

With an exasperated sigh, I answer. “Look, the girl is just about the smartest, most

hard-working chick on the planet. You know we spent two hours in my shop together this morning... two hours ...” I lift two fingers up in the air.

“And she already gave me like ten ideas, and she helped me confirm two of my own. I’d be stupid not to bring her on and that’s the truth. ”

“Good for you, man. But now you’ve got to worry about that other prick.” Axl states.

“Why, you’re already here.” I joke, and he elbows me. “Yeah, I know. But the ball is in her court this time, man.”

“Good.” Rush states. “It’s about time a woman of that caliber was on the top of the mountain instead of holding it up.”

“From the look of it, that asshole held her back. You know he’s had her doing all the fucking grunt work in the office, instead of letting her get her hands dirty? Fucking asshole.”

“That’s the difference between you two, man.

” Axl offers. “You see her potential totally different than he does. You see it as an opportunity and that insecure asshole sees it as a threat. It’s just too goddamn bad that she was blinded by love.

I’m glad he fucked around on her. Looks good on him. Karma is a real bitch.”

“Everything happens for a reason.” Rush confers. “It’s just too bad that she got hurt in the process.”

I breathe in deeply and then breathe out again. “Let’s just hope that she can get her head back on straight fast enough.”

“Why do you say that? Does she seem fucked up?” Axl asks.

“No, just hurting. She cried pretty hard.”

Rush lifts a brow. “Yeah? In front of you? Over Boston?”

“Not just over Boston.” I hesitate, but I know that there’s no point in holding back. “I told her the truth. I told her that I never fucked around on her.”

“And she believed you?” Rush inquires.

“She didn’t have much choice. I had Kayla on the phone to prove it.”

Rush high fives me. “That’s my brother.”

“It’s about fucking time. And the truth will set you free.” Axle concurs.

I look at him, and then at my brother, hesitating when I say.

...”Will it?”

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Bowie

Walking into my childhood home, feeling like I need to be there for some reason, I see my mom standing by the counter, putting on a pot of tea.

She takes one look at me and walks over, opening her arms to me.

I fall into them, letting myself vent, allowing myself the freedom to feel for once in so many years.

Although my mom can be judgmental at times, she always disliked Boston, and I could never figure out why.

They always say that a good mother knows, and she sure did.

“It’ll all be okay, honey. I know it.” She murmurs into my ear. “You are so strong, Bowie. Nothing can stop you.”

I pull back. “God, you are such a good mother, you know that?” I say, wiping a tear away.

She smiles. “That’s sure nice to hear, honey. But I just gave you a hug and told you things that you already know.”

“No, I mean, you never liked Boston.”

“You’re right.” She says, her tone raising an octave. “There was always something

sorta off about him. I could sense it.”

“Did you feel the same way about Jagger, mom?”

Her face changes. She smiles warmly at me, like she’s about to tell me the true meaning of life.

“The love that you two had was different. It was young love. And he adored you. I still don’t believe to this day that he could cheat on you, Bowie.

I think that was all just a rumor. Someone was out to sabotage your relationship with him, and I think I know who. ”

I swallow. “You were right, mom. All along, you were right. He told me today that he never did cheat on me, but I was too stubborn and stupid to hear him out.”

“You might have been stubborn, honey, but you weren’t stupid. You were protecting yourself. It might have been foolish at the time, but you were a child. It was a long time ago. I’m just glad that the air is cleared now.”

“God, I threw such a perfect thing away for nothing.” I sniff.

Mom looks at me, searching my eyes. “Bowie, sometimes things in life happen for a reason, you know. Every experience is a building block. Don’t see this as a bad thing. Now you can put that piece of your life to rest. You know both Boston and Jagger’s true colors.”

“He hired me today.”

Mom looks back at me as she walks back to the counter and prepares us both a cup of tea. “Jagger? He hired you?”

“Yeah.” I nod as I sit at the kitchen table.

“He’s a smart man. He won’t regret it. Boston was an asshole on so many levels, but especially since he let you walk away from Kruger. He’ll miss you for it. Mark my words.”

“I don’t care about that right now, mom.”

“Good. But you should also be aware that he’s now a threat. To both you and Jagger.”

“If he’s smart, he’ll stay his ass away, but I’m sure that Jagger is taking proper precautions.”

“And what about you?”

“Well, I’m staying with Jinny, and she’s got a fantastic security system. But are you suggesting that he’d come after me physically? Because I’m not worried about that.”

“You should be, Bowie. I don’t think I have to remind you what Jagger means to Boston. He’s not only his closest competitor, but he’s always hated Jagger. That’s a lot of motive.”

“The worst I’d worry about is him trying to sabotage our suppliers or the pending European deal.

I’d expect him to sink his tentacles in there, but you forget, not that I’m tooting my own horn here, but I’m on the other side now.

And I know things that I can use to my advantage.

And Boston can't do a goddamn thing about it.

I'm in a place of power, despite the fact that I walked away from the company.

I can muddy his waters all I want to if the shoe fits.

He's too afraid of what I'll do if he tries to sabotage anything. ”

“I'd still keep one step ahead of him. Do you still talk to anyone there?”

“Lots of people. Jinny is in touch with a few, too. They can keep their eyes and ears open.”

“Good. Good.” She nods and brings us both a cup of tea. After she blows on the top of her mug, takes a sip and swallows, she says. “God, this must be so exciting for you. A new beginning.”

“Mom, you sound almost envious.”

“I am, honey. At your age, you still can start over, but not at mine.”

“If you could, what would you do.”

She frowns. “Well, I wasn't saying that I'm unhappy doing what I do. I just mean that you still have so many more opportunities ahead of you.”

I smile at my mom. She's funny sometimes.

“So, how long are you going to stay with Jinny? Are you going to find a place of your own?”

“Not right now, no. She’s offered for me to stay as long as I want to. Hell, her place is big enough, and I literally have my own wing in the house. She won’t take a penny for rent, either.”

“Then buy her groceries for now, honey. She’s just trying to be supportive. And you know that you can always come back here if you feel like you’re starting to cramp her style.”

“Thanks, mom.”

“Fuckin’ aye.” Jinny says, doing a fist pump, when I tell her the news. “We rise again, sister.”

I can’t help but smile. “You are so great.”

“Quit making my head swell, girl. Let’s go shopping! We need to celebrate!”

“Didn’t you just come back from shopping?”

“Yeah, with my mother. Which means that we cruised the mall for hunks, not clothes. Have you met my mother?”

“God, sometimes I feel like I should live with her for a while.”

“Not without a snake bite kit, a tetanus shot, and a valid passport, or forget it.”

I snort a laugh.

She looks at me and is suddenly searching my face. “There’s something else, isn’t there.”

I give her a double take. “God, how do you do that?”

A shrug and a frown. “It’s a gift. Fess up.”

I’m sitting on the couch. I draw my feet up so that I’m sitting cross-legged, and I lean my back against the back of the couch. “Jagger never cheated on me.”

She claps her hands together once loudly and raises them into the air, shouting in a singsong voice. “I fucking knew it! I fucking knew that Boston was full of shit!”

“How did you know?”

“All that bullshit about Jagger fucking around on you when he was so drunk off his rocker, he couldn’t walk...that was such bullshit. So, how did you find out?”

“Well, basically, he called Kayla Hartman right in front of me and jumped into his wayback machine with her. I’m guessing Kayla is friends with his sister Stevie, and they’ve kept in touch. I felt like such an asshole.”

“And you know that he couldn’t put her up to that?”

“It was a spontaneous call. He literally called her a few minutes after arriving here. She was in between clients.”

“Well, now you know, right?”

“Yeah.” I say, my remorse showing. “I felt like such a shit.”

“You should.”

A ‘v’ forms between my brows. “Thanks a lot.” My voice says that I’m annoyed.

“Hey, look, I told you back then and I’ll tell you again now, Jagger isn’t capable of cheating on you.

Fuck, I was so jealous of how much he loved you back then.

It would have been easier for me to believe that he was a douche bag, but he wasn’t, and I knew it.

And he still isn’t a douche bag now, that’s why I knew that he’d hire us.

That’s why I wasn’t worried about walking out on that son of a bitch, and that’s why you and I, Bowie, are going places now. ”

“I don’t know how you do it.”

“Do what.” Her voice is flat, unimpressed.

“Stay so positive.”

“The world is our oyster, Bowie. I’m telling you, ever since I gave up drinking, I feel like I can conquer the world.”

“You gave it up in college.”

“Yeah and look where I am now. Think about how shitty my life would have been had I waited.”

I decide it’s time to change the subject. “My mom thinks that we need to worry about Boston being out for blood.”

“Well, of course he’ll be out for blood.

It's whether or not he has the balls to go after it.

The man is a pussy. Any guy that pulls shit like that.

..there's no other word for it. But if you ask me, he's not going to come after you or me.

No, he's going to go for the jugular, and try to shut Jagger down. ”

“He'll never do that. Jagger is one step ahead of him.”

“Let's hope.” She says. “Because we're about to sign up to be the official targets, Bowie.”

“Good morning.” Jagger says as we walk into the office.

“Good morning.” Both Jinny and I say in unison.

“I've got some papers for you both to sign in the boardroom, and then I'll show you to your offices.”

“Sounds good.” Jinny states. “How about you get your HR person to give me the lowdown while I peruse the documents. I'm a master at multitasking.”

“And I don't really need an office if one isn't set up yet, Jagger.” I inform. “I'm always on the run, anyway.”

“No, you need one. It shows integrity. But unless you're meeting with just one or two people, I suggest using the boardroom. Because that shows professionalism.”

“Exactly. I've never done anything different.”

“Good. Okay, I’ll get you set up with Led, our CFO.” Jagger says to Jinny.

Her eyes widen. “Oh my God! Led! I totally forgot about him! I haven’t seen him in years!”

Jagger smirks. “Yeah...and he’s... thrilled to see you again.”

She chuckles. “I’m sure. You know, he had a crush on me in high school.”

“And you never let him or anyone else forget it.” Jagger snorts. “You and him can negotiate, or fight to the death, on salary. I’ll take Bowie over to meet the production and design team.” He gives me a look. “Don’t worry, they all know who you are.”

“Greeeeaaat.”

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He winks at me and gestures for me to follow him.

When I walk into the same area that we were in yesterday, it's full of people milling around, like in a medical laboratory, only they're all in coveralls, some of them wearing safety goggles.

Thankfully, he doesn't stop them from working, he just casually takes me around to each individually, and they show me exactly what they're working on.

It whets my appetite so much I have to stifle the urge to throw on a pair of coveralls myself.

We go back to Jagger's office, and he sits down.

There is a package sitting on his desk, face down.

He pushes it towards me. "Take a look. Tell me what you think."

"Okay." I say, almost hesitantly, but the little smirk on his face tells me that I have nothing to fear.

When I review what he is offering me, I'm impressed.

It's seven figures to start, with any signing bonuses, plus a creative incentive plan that puts me front and center with him and his front-line team.

I couldn't ask for more. There is a long section regarding rights and legalities, which

I expected.

“Feel free to have your lawyer look over that before signing it.” He says fairly.

“Thanks. I’ll take this with me if it’s all the same to you.”

“Sure.” He licks his lips. “Welcome aboard.”

“Thank you. No. A million thank yous. You won’t regret it.”

“I already don’t. Something tells me that this is the beginning of a fantastic adventure that I’d be crazy to pass up.”

I can’t help the smile. “My mother is worried.”

“Yeah?” He’s impressed. “How’s she doing? It’s been a long time.”

“It has. She’s still a fan of yours.”

“The feeling is mutual.” He sits forward and opens his laptop. “We’re throwing a birthday party for Stevie in a couple of weeks. You should come. Bring your mother. She always loved my sister, too.”

“Are you sure you shouldn’t ask Stevie?”

He waves. “She’s all about ‘the more the merrier’. Nothing has changed.”

“Well, she does own a PR firm.”

“Yeah, she’s the one that put this party together.” He chuckles.

“She put her own birthday party together?”

He nods. “That’s Stevie.”

I want to change the subject. “I have to tell you...I’m dying to get back in that room and get my hands dirty again.”

“Did you bring a change of clothes?”

“Yeah.”

“Let’s go.” He gestures with his head and rises from the chair.

I actually squeal I’m so excited. He chuckles. “You’ll do well here. We avoid sitting in meetings unnecessarily. We’re all about getting dirty and playing in the sandbox.”

“I’m game.”

Jagger shows me the engine with one of his newest contraptions attached.

The function is to offer more speed with less fuel consumption.

He hooks it up to a meter that simulates driving and energy usage, and then he kicks it onto hybrid mode to show me the difference.

I watch, knowing that there’s one thing missing that I’d come up with right before walking away from Kruger, that Boston didn’t give me the chance to voice.

When he’s done, I show him the small tweak, and he’s immediately impressed.

“Fuck...me. How did I not think of that?” He says, raking a hand through his hair.

It's nine o'clock at night, but it feels like noon.

A true testament to time flying the most when one is having fun.

"Because you didn't stay up half the night eating cheddar cheese curlies like I did about six months ago. And I had P.M.S. Some say women are the weaker sex due to our hormones. I can prove the latter."

"I never doubted it, Bowie." He says with a smile.

"You're here early." Jagger says to me. It's six thirty in the morning, but I didn't finish some analytics that I was working on last night, and I couldn't sleep anyway, so I came here.

"Yeah, I'm just finishing those analytics. We need those to prepare for the big day." The big day, meaning the day that we submit our preliminary numbers to Drummond Motors, the biggest European car manufacturing plant in the world.

"Why don't you show me what you've got." He says, sitting next to me.

He still smells the same way he did back in high school.

It's not a cologne or a soap, it's just him.

I draw in a deep breath and release it nonchalantly, making it look like I'm just taking in a cleansing breath as the Excel spreadsheet populates. The heat from his body warms me instantly. While he's in a swiveling desk chair, rolled over to me, I can feel his breath on me, even though he's only in my personal space a little.

"Here." I tell him, pointing to a number, using the cursor.

His hand touches mine as he tries to take the mouse, and I leave it there for a second.

His hand stays on mine, almost like he's oblivious to it being there, or he doesn't care.

It's weird how our connection is very similar to how it was back then.

There are no preambles, no disengaging forethoughts, just getting the work done.

It's a natural thing. Like we were always meant to work together.

Like there is no awkwardness if his hand touches mine for a second longer, or if I brush up against him while grabbing a tool or a file that's next to him.

It's weird that it's not weird...

"Yeah. No, that's just what I suspected.

" He says and looks at me. I look at him, and for a second, my eyes go to his lips and his go to mine.

Oh, are we doing this now? Yet another thing that would be considered awkward and grounds for sexual harassment in any other workplace, but not here.

As he speaks, his eyes are going from my eyes to my lips. "It's the new relay."

"Exactly." I answer, trying to focus, but my body is so warm it's distracting.

He breaks the spell by turning away, rising off the chair. He rakes a hand through his hair. "You want a coffee?"

“Sure.” I answer, wondering if he feels as warm as I do.

We never made any promises about staying away from each other.

I think it’s supposed to be implied. I’m supposed to be healing from my previous heartbreak, most would say.

Some would say that I’m using Jagger to get over Boston.

Some would say that I just want him for sex and nothing else, simply because I no longer have someone to itch that scratch for me anymore.

However, those people would be wrong. The truth is, that itch hasn’t been scratched in the way it should be scratched in a long time.

...And nobody ever scratched me the way that Jagger did.

Not Boston.

Not anyone.

But I can’t think that way. We’re supposed to be professionals.

We have a professional relationship. And what would become of this if we acted on my impulses, and it didn’t work out?

And how do I even know that Jagger is having the same impulses?

For all I know he was just going to get coffee innocently. He wasn’t leaving for any other reason.

...or was he?

“I say fuck him and get it out of your system.” Jinny states benignly, with her mouth full of salad, as I run it by her during lunch. I might as well have asked her if my pants matched my shirt, the way she answers me.

“I’m not a whore, like someone I know, Jinny.”

She just chuckles. It’s not the first time I’ve called her a whore and it won’t be the last. “Think of how much more productive you’ll be once the sexual tension is gone.”

“How do I even know that he’s feeling any sexual tension?”

She lifts a brow. “He’s a guy, isn’t he.”

“Funny. He works with all sorts of girls, and that assistant of his keeps giving him googly eyes. It makes me wanna puke.”

“Beat the shit out of her or tell him you want her fired.”

“I can’t do that. I’ve only been here two weeks.”

“So what. If she’s on your nerves, you’re the fucking second head honcho here, and you have a say, Bowie.”

“What am I going to say? ‘Gee, Jagger. That whore that books your calendar and answers your phone calls wants you to fuck her, if she isn’t already .’...that’ll go over well, right?” My finger is on my cheek, and my eyes are focused on the wall, in jest.

We’re in the lunchroom, somewhere we’ve never been, and we both see Rush walk in. The look on his face tells us that he overheard. “He is fucking her. I told him to

cut it out already.”

“Shit. Sorry, Rush. Didn’t know you were there.” Jinny states.

He waves, grabbing a coffee from the carafe. “It makes everyone uncomfortable. She’s a great worker, according to Jagger, but I think she’s a fucking distraction.’

“I agree.” I say, not holding back. “She needs to wear something that covers the fucking silicone.”

“Well, he won’t listen to me, so maybe he’ll listen to you.” Rush suggests. “Halen’s got another assistant lined up for him, but he doesn’t want to let go of the head, if you know what I mean.”

“Gross.” I wince. “Yeah, we know what you mean.”

“So, who’s going to do it.” Rush says with a grunt, planting his ass on the chair next to Jinny.

Jinny says. “Do we want to draw straws?”

Jagger

The reason I couldn't sleep? Bowie. I don't know what to fucking do.

The way she looks at me. The way I look at her.

We've been spending a fuck ton of time together, and I feel like it still isn't enough.

I told myself that this wouldn't be a problem.

I told myself that we wouldn't go down this road.

But that look in her eyes tells me otherwise.

Tammy walks into my office with a quick knock first, indicating that it's her.

She's holding a file folder in her hand, which she lies on the desk, leaning a little too much over.

"Tammy..." I warn. She never does this during business hours and knows better.

"Why don't you look at me anymore?"

"Because I'm busy preparing for the most important deal of my life, that's why."

"It's because of Bowie, isn't it."

“No, it’s not.” I lie, but it’s none of her fucking business, and I’d rather not tell her. We’re not girlfriends.

“I see you two together.”

“You see nothing, and we’ve talked about this.” Tammy has never behaved like a teenager, but this behavior is close to it. “Do we need to have another talk?”

“If by talk you mean fuck, sure.”

I draw in a deep breath and let it out.

“I can lock the door and get on my knees right now if you want to, Jagger. It’s been weeks.”

Just the mention of head from her used to get me hard, but now it just annoys me. “Look, maybe later, okay? It’s too risky right now.” I lie, just wanting to throw her off. “You better get out of here. With the door closed it looks suspicious.”

“To whom.” She accuses. “And forget about it. I know that you have a meeting with Bowie later, so unless she gives you head, you’re out of luck. I’m done waiting for you.”

Thank fucking Christ . “I’m sorry you feel that way.” I say for good measure. She all but pouts and leaves my office as requested.

Not two minutes later, Rush storms into my office, without bothering to knock. “Don’t you have an office? A job?”

“Quit being a fucktard.” Rush spits back. “Look, we need to talk.”

I sigh. “It seems like that’s on everyone’s minds today.”

“Tammy’s got to go.” He says flatly. “Halen’s got someone waiting for you.”

I don’t want to give up this easily. I need to know why, but if I ask, it’ll make it too obvious. “Why does she need to go.”

“Because she’s making the hens ancy, man. You know this. Every chick and every dude in this place knows that you’re banging her.”

Everyone? Dare I ask...

“Before you ask, yes, both Bowie and Jinny know, too. The girl might as well wear a fucking sandwich board and piss all over your desk since Bowie started.”

I don’t even think about it. “Fine. She’s gone. Next.”

“Good. That’s all I had.”

“You seem awfully worked up for just having one issue.”

“I figured you’d fight me more.” He raises a brow. “How come you didn’t fight me more.”

“What’s to fight about. If she’s a distraction she’s a distraction. End of discussion.”

“But you’ve been fucking her for a while.” He says, and I’m pretty sure he’s already where he wants to be in his thought process. “I get it.”

“You get nothing and drop it.”

“Is this going to be another problem?”

“No, so like I said, drop it.”

He ignores my request. “So, is this like a ‘girl that got away’ syndrome thing, a ‘I gotta fuck her’ thing, another Tammy situation, or is this the real fucking thing, man? Because I’ve only got so much manpower for this place, and we’ve got the deal of a lifetime still ahead of us.

” He sits down on the guest chair and rests one leg over the other, propping his feet up on my desk.

He’s got that serious look on his face that warns me not to fuck with him.

“Look, I’m not about to fuck anything up. Give me a little credit. I just agreed to fire Tammy. I hired two of the best staff on yours and Halen’s recommendations, and Bowie is not putting any moves on me. She’s not there. I’m not there. Nor will we be there. This is about business.”

He’s still staring at me. His expression is blank, which means that his wheels are turning. “You’re lying to yourself.”

“About what.”

“Jagger, you’ve got to be straight here. You’ve got to decide where you’re going with all this.”

“What do you mean, man.” I ask calmly, hearing him out.

“I’m not about to tell you how to run your life, Jagger.”

“It sure sounds like it.”

He rises. “Fuck you.”

“Fuck you, too.” I seethe as he walks out.

“That was the best dismissal I’ve ever done.” Jinny brags, walking into my office.

I smirk. “You enjoyed that, did you.”

“Sure did.”

“You know that you could have gotten Margaret to do that, right.”

“And miss all the fun?”

I snort a laugh. “You are something else.”

“I am. Now, give me someone else to fire. I love it.”

“I can tell. But unfortunately, there isn’t anyone else. Unless you’re not telling me something.”

“Nope. Margaret sort of sucks but I’m stuck with her until Halen can find me someone better. Until then, I steer this ship.”

“And you’re doing a good job, too.”

“Thanks.” She says, walking towards the door. “And not just for letting me fire the whore, either.” A wink.

I wink back at her. But neither of us says anything else.

Numbers are flying through my head as I try to sleep.

I thought I got everything down on paper, but I guess I'm wrong.

From all the conversations with Bowie, I can guess that she's doing the same thing, so I text her.

Sure enough, she answers right away, saying that she's still up, but not just because of work. Then the phone rings. "Hey."

"Hey. Sorry to call, but I hate explaining this type of shit over text."

"What's up?"

She sighs. "Let's just say that Jinny has a guest over. And despite the fact that I'm in my own suite, I can still hear her."

"It's like high school all over again."

"Tell me about it."

"You wanna crash on my couch?" I hear it before it even comes out.

"Um...okay." She chuckles. "I wasn't expecting that."

I go for noble. "Well, what good are you going to be to me tomorrow if you don't get any sleep?"

"True."

“I’ll see you in a bit.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

“Don’t sweat it.”

Suddenly, there’s a bead of sweat dripping down my back, just thinking about Bowie staying over.

How the fuck am I going to get through this?

Okay, here’s the plan. I invite her in, have a tea with her, spend ten minutes reviewing numbers, make up the guest room and go to bed.

I’m not going to think about her, I’m not going to even look at her more than I have to.

I can do this. I’m a grown man. She’s a woman scorned and heartbroken.

Remember that. But the plan all goes to shit when she shows up in jeans, a t-shirt, and her hair all down, flowing on her chest.

She’s fucking stunning.

She’s as sexy as hell.

She’s as smart as fuck.

And she’s the best thing that ever happened to me.

In high school, and now.

But there's still a chance that a) she doesn't feel anything for me, and b) she's still just waiting for the perfect moment to run back to Boston. Also, this is supposed to be a professional relationship. I don't want to fuck anything up.

"Hey. Do you ever sleep?" She snuffles a laugh as I open the door.

"Not much." I admit with a sigh. "Come on in. I've got the guest room made up for you. Do you want some tea?"

"Sure. If you're making some."

"Yeah, sure." I say, taking her bag for her, bringing it to the guest room.

"Nice place."

"You want a tour?"

She yawns. "Maybe later."

I chuckle. "Ah, so you are tired."

"I am. I was almost asleep when the first climax hit." She snorts.

"Fun times."

"For her."

I bring her bag to the room and return as the kettle boils. "I've got chamomile, mint or lemon. Pick your poison."

"Chamomile. It helps me sleep."

“Sounds good.”

I pour us both a tea and we go sit in the living room. “I’m going to London to tour Drummond Motors with Wesley Hopkins. I haven’t firmed anything up with him yet on dates, but I thought you should come.”

Her eyes light up. “Are you kidding me? Of course I want to go! How did you even get him to agree to a meeting? I thought he only let his subordinates do the grunt work?”

“It appears as though he’s had a change of heart. He wants to be front and center with this new project. At least, that’s what his CFO says.”

“Oh my God. I’ve always wanted to meet Wesley. He’s got such charisma, such vision. I’ve watched every YouTube video out there of him. Do you know that he’s got the exact same car that your grandpa had? A nineteen-fifty-seven Chevy Bel-Air?”

“Yeah, I knew that. He’s a pretty cool guy. I’ve spoken to him on a Zoom meeting once. But I’ve never met him personally.”

“This is so exciting.” She says, sipping her tea. “I can’t wait to go.”

“Me neither if you want the truth. Axl’s busting my balls to take him, too, but I don’t need his attitude tagging along. The last thing I need is for him to spread his love all throughout fucking Europe, too.”

“Maybe he can go when it isn’t to do with business.”

“Oh, believe me, he has full intentions of chewing Mister Hopkins’s ear off about motors.”

“I get it. But he shouldn’t want to steal your thunder.”

I chew the pad of my thumb before speaking. “That’s something that I haven’t mentioned to you yet.”

She looks at me with those big blue eyes and I could fucking melt. Jesus Christ. “He’s been up my ass to make an engine with me. A racing engine.”

“I’m not surprised. Didn’t you send him a prototype light years ago?”

I nod. “Yeah. And although it was a hell of a lot of fun, and I learned so much from him, it’s also become a thorn in my side ever since.”

“Well, you should do business with him.” She advises kindly. “He’s your best friend, isn’t he? And he’s the dude with all the knowledge about racing engines. He just wants to do something together with you. It would probably mean a lot to you both.”

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“Bowie, the guy is a mess.” I level with her. “He can’t keep his dick in his pants, he’s an attention whore, and I don’t need to be more worried about fucking babysitting him than conducting business with him.” I lick my lips. “He’s a risk.”

“Am I not a risk, too?”

“Way less of one. All I need to worry about is Boston, and I can handle him with one hand tied behind my back.”

“Well, what about the European markets? Aren’t you afraid because now you’re working with a woman? I know that most of those men in the automotive industry, especially in Europe, frown upon women.”

“Then they can fucking deal with it. Once they see what you’ve got to offer, they’ll forget about the fact that you don’t have a fucking penis. Next.”

The ghost of a smile appears on her lips. “Do you really mean that?”

I search her eyes. “Of course, I mean that. Bowie, I have some of the most intelligent staff on my production team, including a few that I grew up with, took the same classes with, and none of them can hold a candle to you.”

Our gazes are glued together. It’s like there’s some cosmic, telepathic message that’s passing through us.

Something unspoken. Something innate. Like the bond that we had a million years ago never really dissolved.

As much as I tried to convince myself that it did, now that she's here, with me, in the flesh, and we've had this past month together, I know in my heart of hearts, that it never truly did.

She's always been there. In my heart. In my thoughts.

In my dreams. I never forgot her. I just don't know how to tell her that without risking everything.

"Jagger, I..." She trails off, stopping herself. Looking away.

"Don't say it."

"I'm all over the place, Jagger." She gasps, rising from the couch, raking a hand through her hair.

I can't stand to see her unglued. "What's troubling you."

She stands still and looks at me, pushing her hands in front of her, almost defensively.

"Can I tell you something as both a friend and as a business partner?"

"Absolutely."

"I've told this to Jinny and she...well...she had very bad advice."

"That's Jinny for you." I joke.

She licks her lips, and I can't stop looking at them.

I have to pull a couch cushion onto my lap so she can't tell.

“I don’t feel a goddamn thing for Boston anymore.

I don’t feel regret, I don’t miss him, I’m not angry with him, and I don’t care about him at all, and as long as he stays away from Lawson Enterprises, I don’t care if he lives or dies.

Is that psychopathic? Shouldn’t I at least miss him? ”

“Well, how did you feel back in high school, you know, when you thought that I cheated on you?”

She points a finger. “See, that’s what I was afraid of. I...shit...I knew that you would say that, yet I hoped that you wouldn’t.”

“Why do you say that?”

Her gaze is flat. Her voice cracks. Her eyes are glassy as she admits something that I suspect she’s been terrified to admit for the past month. “Because I was in your bed one day and in Boston’s bed the next.”

“Gotcha.” I nod, after a beat.

She wipes a tear from her face and sniffs. This realization is painful for her, but I think that it’s necessary.

“And you don’t want to make the same mistake with me.” I add, even though it’s implied.

She sobs. “Yeah.”

“Fuck it.” I say after a breath. I rise and stand in front of her.

I've been a man to follow his gut instinct all his life and tonight is no exception.

My hands go to her shoulders. She can't look at me.

Her gaze is on the floor, but I'm not going to force her to look at me.

No. This time...this time, she's got to look at me on her own.

"There's a difference, Bowie." I rub her arms with my hands as I search for the right words.

My eyes go to the ceiling for a moment while I think.

"Boston...the man never really loved you. I think that deep down you knew that. I think that you knew that all kinds, but you thought that because I was out of the picture, he was your only option."

Her eyes are still on the floor, but I know that she's listening intently.

She wipes another tear from her face, and I continue.

"And if you want the truth, I think that you loved him out of obligation, not because you truly loved him. That's why it's easier to walk away.

That's why it's easier for him to let you, too. "

Another sob, another wipe of her eyes.

I try like hell to word this properly. My eyes shut tight as they come out slowly, softly.

“And if you want the truth, you’re a perceptive lady, Bowie.

You always were.” I pause and lick my lips, drawing in a deep breath and releasing it before continuing.

When I do, the moment that I’m finished saying what I’ve got to say, I let go of her shoulders.

“What your heart is telling you is the honest to God truth. I never stopped loving you. And I never will.” I walk away from her.

Leaving her to do what she wants to do with that.

I don’t know if she watches me, I don’t know if she stops herself from stopping me, I’m not sure of anything right now.

...Except that I might have just made the biggest mistake of my life.

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Bowie

I have to rewind it in my head so I know that I heard him right.

Yes, he said that he loves me. I won't be so obtuse as to ask for clarification on that score, either.

I know what he meant. He didn't mean any other kind of love than what I know he meant. And I've never felt so confused before in my life.

But I'm not sure how he feels about telling me that.

It's like it was a deep, dark secret, that he promised he'd never share to anyone, ever.

And the fact that he walked away right after he said it makes me feel like maybe he's ashamed.

Or scared, maybe. Or maybe he regrets telling me.

All I can think about is why. And then I feel so stupid.

Of course he didn't want to tell me. This is a huge risk for Lawson Enterprises.

He hired me to add my professionalism to this company, not to add a complication.

He's probably feeling the same trepidation that I'm feeling, in that I want to put this business first, too.

It's quiet upstairs, where he is, and I assume that he's gone to bed.

I have no idea where anything is, but left to my own devices, I find the room where he placed my bag.

Footsteps a few doors down tell me that's where he is.

After checking my face in my powder compact, making sure that I don't look like a sickly teenager, having been crying, I walk down the hallway.

His door is open and he's standing in front of his walk-in closet, naked from the waist up.

I forgot how fucking beautiful he is. He's even more beautiful given the years that we've been apart.

I try to take my eyes off his chest by staring at his eyes, but that's no better.

Jagger Lawson is the sexiest, most handsome man alive.

My voice cracks as I speak, but this time, it's not out of emotion.

"So, what do we do? What do we do to keep this company front and center, and not let...anything get in the way of its success?"

His hair is disheveled in the back, from where he removed his shirt. It takes everything in me not to go over and slide my hands through it. I fold my arms over my chest, trying to conceal the fact that my nipples have hardened at the sight of him.

"I thought of that." He says softly, as he turns around and pulls a shirt out of the closet and hangs it on a metal nub on the wall.

The corded muscle on his biceps makes me want to bite my lip.

His back muscles hug his spine beautifully, like he was chiseled out of stone.

“I thought about changing the company name or at least adding your name to it.”

“That’s not necessary.” I counter. “And that would just add more paperwork. Steal focus. Besides, my name doesn’t need to be on the company for me to take it seriously.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“I know that’s not what you meant.” I argue kindly. “But what’s really at stake here is...this.” I gesture in front of me, indicating us, or whatever us is now or may be.

He bites his lip, looking at the wall, in thought. “Well, what do you think is the best solution here?”

“I think that what we have is great, Jagger.” I answer honestly. “I don’t want to hurt any of it.”

“Me neither.” He’s looking at me with puppy dog eyes.

I could melt. But all I can think about is his lips.

Those full lips that are begging to be kissed.

My heart is pounding as he stands there in just dress pants.

Tight dress pants that hug his behind perfectly.

God, he's such a beautiful man. I want him to say, 'But I can't stay away from you any longer.

I want to fuck you on every surface of this house and more', and it's taking everything in me not to go over there and suck those lips, nip his chest, and stuff his cock so deep down my throat that I forget I have a fucking gag reflex.

His eyes go to the floor. I've learned that means that he's avoiding looking somewhere on me.

I know it's my chest. My nipples are erect.

I can feel them. They're pulsing from under my shirt.

I was in just this t-shirt before I left, so I threw on only my jeans, and left.

It comes out before I can stop it. "Look at me, Jagger."

"I...can't." He says, almost painfully.

My voice changes to concerned. "Why not?"

He releases a breath as he drags a hand through his hair. "Fuck...me." He grunts. "Because you're not wearing a bra, Bowie. And unless you want me to fuck you right here and now, we've got problems."

My body tells me to act on that statement.

But my sensibilities say otherwise. I want him so bad.

I want him more than anything else in the world, but I'm so fearful that he's right.

That I'm just using him as a bridge to get over Boston.

I know that deep down it can't be true, but I'm still scared that it is.

The only thing I love right now is him and his company, and my work that goes along with all of it.

But if he takes one step towards me...if he says one more thing that. ..that tells me how much he wants me...

"I should go to bed." I say finally, breaking the silence.

He swallows. His gaze away from me is painful. Like me walking away is killing him. I don't dare look at him below the belt. If I can see the outline of his hardened cock that will be the death of me. "Good night." He manages, even though his voice is a mere whisper.

I walk away, not trusting my own voice. Just walking, the vibration from my jeans, is wetting me.

I'm already soaked through my panties. The moment I walk away, I hear the water running in the shower, like a cold one is his only solace.

It takes everything in me not to turn around and join him in there.

Wrap my legs around his waist, while he fucks me up against the shower wall.

God, I need a cold shower. But, instead, I do the next best thing.

The thing I did a thousand times over when I was with Boston.

It seems like it's almost by rote now. I've been masturbating for so long, it's sad.

Back to old times again, and it pains me to think that, but it's the lesser of two evils here.

My fingers slide inside me easily, gliding along my walls, rubbing my clit.

I come so fast, before the shower even finishes.

And I can't help but wonder if he pleased himself, too.

The thought makes me hot again, so I surrender myself a second time, rubbing harder and faster, and my climax is here with little challenge.

Fingers wet with my own arousal, I turn over in bed and try to sleep.

Thoughts of Jagger come to mind, but with a double orgasm behind me, my hormones have calmed, and I think about him lying next to me, holding me tight to him.

...and when I wake up in the morning, he's already gone.

"Just one bag?" Jagger queries as we prepare to board the plane headed for Heathrow Airport.

"Just one bag." I confirm, smiling. "I always travel light. I have dresses that smoosh down to nothing."

"Wow. Your bag is smaller than mine. I sort of feel like a pussy now."

"You look like one, too." I wink, teasing him.

Thankfully, we've remained completely professional since that night I stayed at his house.

It's like we've moved on. We're both aware of what happened, but we both respect the fact that until we nail down this European deal, nothing else matters.

We don't use a private jet, and, in fact, we ride coach.

Neither of us are too delicate for that, and it's the best for the business, not to jack up travel expenses.

Plus, it's a great flight, and both of us have a chance to discuss a lot of business, and shockingly, we both sleep.

When I wake up and I'm resting on Jagger's shoulder, I look up, and see that he's leaning on my head, slumbering like a baby.

I snuggle into him, enjoying the moment, knowing that if he was awake, that none of this would be happening.

I love the way that his body molds to mine easily.

And how he wraps his arm around me, like they were meant to be there.

When we arrive at Drummond Motors, I'm prepared for a lukewarm response, but Wesley shakes my hand and welcomes us both into the building warmly. "How was your flight?"

I keep quiet and let Jagger respond first.

"Good. Lots of rest and brainstorming."

Wesley addresses me, surprising me. “And you?”

“Same. Yes. It was a lovely flight.”

He takes us on a tour of the facility, impressing the pants off us both.

He has cutting edge technology and the finest equipment.

Plus, he’s got the smarts that most covet.

I can see why his products are so critically acclaimed.

And just when I think that Jagger’s eyes couldn’t be more popped out of his head, Wesley brings us into his trophy room, but for a car buff, it’s more like his nursery of previously lived automobiles.

Jagger’s jaw drops to the floor when he sees a nineteen-fifty-seven Chevy Bel Air, shiny and in pristine condition. “Oh...wow.” Jagger says in complete awe.

“She’s a beaut, isn’t she?” Wesley says.

“God...damn, that is my all-time favorite car.”

“Mine, too. I bought this one at an auction about ten years ago. I only drive it on special occasions.”

“What would be considered a special occasion?” I ask him.

“It depends.” He answers honestly. “Birthdays...definitely. When my favorite team wins...absolutely.”

“So, basically, any time you damn well can.” I chuckle.

He points at me with a smile. “I like you.”

“Well, thank you, sir. It’s a real honor to be here. I was telling Jagger that I’ve watched every YouTube video circulating about you. You’re sort of...an enigma to me.”

He changes the subject slightly. “If you want the truth, Bowie, I’m glad that you’re no longer with that asshole.”

I’m shocked. “Really, sir?”

He nods once. “Really. I have followed your presence as well. And I looked forward to meeting you, but not with Boston Kruger.”

Jagger interjects. “What didn’t you like about him, sir?”

Wesley licks his lips, leaning on his prized possession. “I have been in this business a long time, Jagger, and I can spot a fake from a mile away. That’s why I stay out of the spotlight. Because so many of them are fake. Boston is no exception.”

Smartly, Jagger just nods.

“I don’t enjoy doing business with phony people, but it’s a lot like politics. You have to vote for someone, despite the fact that all the candidates are monkeys.”

He smiles. “I’ve never looked at it like that, sir.”

He turns to me. “And, you, my dear, are brilliant. I’ve seen many of the projects that Mister Kruger has tried to pass off as his own, but when you take over and charm the

pants off the entire room with your knowledge, it's easy to see that you were the brains behind all that work."

His phone rings and he lifts a finger. "Pardon me for one moment. I need to take this."

"Please." Jagger says kindly as Wesley leaves the room.

Jagger frowns at me but his eyes are dancing. "You sure have him won over."

"And you thought he was against women."

"I stand corrected."

He places his hand over my shoulder. "I have a good feeling about this. How about you?"

"Me, too. I was purposely staying behind, keeping quiet."

"But it seems like you have a big fan here."

"You're cute when you're jealous."

He smirks. "I'm not jealous. This makes our lives a lot easier. We can show our chops now without trepidation. This opens up a whole new opportunity for us, Bowie. We can show him who we really are."

"But aren't we doing that already?"

"Sort of. Our whole presentation can be tweaked though." He tells me what things I explain better and what things he does. "If we sit down after we're finished here, and

rework the presentation, I think we've got this licked."

"I think so, too."

Truthfully, we've both worked equally on this project. Neither one of us have held back about anything. This way we can shine, showing Wesley that. And it'll be received a whole lot better now. Mr. Hopkins returns a few minutes later and immediately says. "Are you two hungry?"

We look at each other and frown. "We could eat." Jagger says.

"I know a fantastic restaurant. My colleagues will be waiting there shortly. I'll let you two get back to the hotel and get cleaned up and meet us there in an hour if that suits you?"

"That suits us just fine, sir." I say.

Mr. Hopkins smiles at me warmly. "Please call me Wesley, sweetheart."

"Okay." I smile.

"I'll send you with a car. That way you don't need to worry about a cab to the restaurant."

"Oh, sir, that's not necessary. I don't want to put you out." Jagger argues kindly.

He waves. "Nonsense. You are my guests. I would have invited you to stay at my home...but my wife is having the main kitchen renovated right now."

"That's fine. We're happy to join you for dinner at a restaurant." I say.

“Good, good. I’ll send for a driver right away.”

Adjoining rooms makes it easier for us to stay professional, even though I know on the other side of that door is Jagger, changing his clothes.

I consider using my battery-operated friend first, before we go, to keep my hormones in check, but I didn’t bring the damn thing.

Okay, I’m not a teenager, let’s just focus!

I hear a knock at the door and Jagger’s voice.

“You ready? The car should be downstairs.”

“I’ll be right out.” I grab my purse and open the door.

Jagger is wearing a suit and he’s freshly showered.

But it’s not his sexy attire that worries me, it’s the look on his face when he sees me.

I’m wearing a little black dress with black heels, and I’ve got my hair tied up in a bun.

The dress is open backed, with a decorative panel to hide my bra. The dress is silk.
“Holy....wow.”

I go for cute. “I know.”

“Dang...if we didn’t have the account, which I think we do...it’s in the bag now, if Wesley’s got as much of a crush on you as I think he does.”

I tease him. “Are you using me?”

“Yes.” He smiles.

“Good. Because I’m using you, too. I secretly need you to get to Wesley. I have a penchant for middle-aged married British men.”

“Then you better hope that Mrs. Hopkins doesn’t show tonight, or she’s going to kick your ass.”

I lift my leg, like in a rom-com and he’s kissing me. “With these heels...no contest.”

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Jagger

I am so up shit's creek without a paddle.

Bowie looks fucking amazing all decked out in her killer black dress.

The second that I see her calves, her chest, her ass, I thank Christ that I'm wearing a double-breasted suit, covering my zippered area.

She's so fucking beautiful it's painful.

And what's worse, once we get to the restaurant, Wesley starts feeding her wine.

Like, the most expensive wine available, so she can't say no to him.

They're talking it up so much so that it's like nobody else is here.

No, I'm not jealous, I'm absolutely intrigued by this woman that seems to have at least two men at this table completely under her spell.

"More wine, please." Wesley says, after ordering a round of desserts, even though we're so full of the beef wellington and other various delicacies he's taken the liberty of ordering. Bowie is very drunk, but thankfully she's just a giggly drunk, not a rude, lame-brained or a horny one.

"I need to go to the ladies' room." She says, and I take this as my opportunity to go along with her and make sure that she's okay. Nonchalantly, I grab her elbow to

steady her. “God, what do I do, Jagger? I’m ploughed.” She almost cries, as soon as we're out of earshot.

“It’s okay, Bowie. You’re handling yourself so well.”

“God, what if I puke all over him?”

“You won’t. I tell you what. I’ll order us some coffee.”

“It may be too late for that, Jagger. All my limbs are numb. God, I wish Jinny were here. She’d know exactly what to do.”

“It’s okay. You’ve got this.” I assure, as we arrive at the washroom. She can barely walk in the heels, so I have her lean on me while I remove them, so she can at least steady herself. “I’m sure this place has the cleanest floors in the world. We’ll wash your feet when we get back to the hotel.”

“Jagger...I don’t think I can walk by myself.” She all but cries.

I look to my left and to my right. There is nobody coming to use the washroom. “Come on.”

As I get into the ladies’ room, I see that the handicapped stall is free.

In fact, we’re the only ones in here, so I guide her into the bathroom, letting her hold me from around the neck.

Toilet seat covers are available, so I put on one and sit her down, dress still on, while I close the door. “Just hang on.”

Wrapping her arms around my neck, I help her lift, as she pulls her panties down.

“God, this is humiliating.”

“It’ll be more humiliating if you fall on your ass. At least this way, you won’t piss yourself, too.”

I listen to her pee while I hold her dress up, not looking anywhere else but at the wall. When she’s done, I get her toilet paper and hold her steady so she can wipe herself. “I can’t go back there, Jagger. I’m too far gone.”

“Listen, we’re going to splash your face with some water, and get you a coffee.

You’ll sit by me, and we’ll act like we’re getting a little too friendly.

Wesley’s tanked anyway so he won’t pick up on it.

And all the other guys are pretty much wasted, so it’s in the bag.

” I advise, feeling like it wouldn’t be difficult to act like we’re really friendly, but with how drunk she is, it wouldn’t be right.

“How come you’re not drunk, too?”

“Because I’ve had half a glass. And I’ve been talking shop with his head engineer, who’s a recovered alcoholic.”

“And you’re not mad at me for getting plastered in front of these guys? I mean, we’re supposed to be doing business with them.”

I grunt as I help her off the toilet. “How could I be angry at you? Thanks to you, I think that we got this deal.”

“It’s not just thanks to me, Jagger. Shit, I’ve only been with you for like six weeks. It’s you.”

I look at her glassy eyes. “Tell me something. Do you think that Wesley would even consider doing business with me if it weren’t for you?”

You heard the man say it himself, that he thinks Boston is an asshole, and it was you that was keeping Kruger afloat.

Well, right or not, Wesley feels like you’re doing the same for me, and I’m okay with that.

It’s not about power or ego for me, Bowie.

It’s about doing what’s best for the company, and what’s right.

Now, you can do this, okay? We’re going to go back to that table and I’m going to get you a coffee.

I know damn well that if I allow you to skulk your way out of this tonight, that you’ll never be able to forgive yourself. ”

“Do you really love me, Jagger?” She asks, eyes so glassy but so honest.

I slide a loose strand of hair over her ear. “I do love you. I only ever mean what I say.”

“Do you believe that I love you, too?”

“That’s the thing, see. We’re both honest people.

We only say what we mean and that's why we mix so well together.

"I lick my lips, feeling her slip downward a little.

"Come on. We've got to get you some coffee and some water, or else you'll feel like a bag of shit tomorrow, and we've got a long flight. "

"Kiss me, Jagger." She breathes, drunkenly.

"I'm not kissing you in a bathroom stall." I tell her directly, like she's a child. "Now, come on. Pull yourself together. We can do this."

She swallows and scrapes a hand down her face. "You're right. I can do this." Her voice is like she's suddenly turned into a life coach.

"Let the jury note that I'm holding you up with both hands."

"Details." She trails off as I open the stall door, listening to the automatic flush do its thing. "Besides, you said that we were supposed to pretend that we're lovers, so that's why you're doing that."

"If that were the case, then I would have fucked you in that stall, but I'm not."

She giggles.

"Come on, drunk drunkerson. Let's get you cleaned up." I chuckle.

I help her wash her hands, and I grab some paper towel to wash her face.

Bowie barely wears makeup, so this isn't an issue.

The girl could literally crawl out of bed and look fucking fantastic.

A natural beauty. The cold water on her face seems to help.

I hear a tap at the door. “Hey, mate. Are you two okay in there?” I hear Stephen Vittles, Wesley’s main engineer, call.

“Yeah.” I call back.

“Anyone else in there?”

“No.”

He sticks his head in. “Here, take this.” He hands me a bottle of water.

“Thanks, man. You’re the best.”

“No sweat. Hey, I told Wesley that you’re taking a call from home, so take your time. There’s an exit behind this wall. Go outside and get some air and I’ll get some coffee.”

“You’re a saint, Stephen. Thanks a bunch.”

He winks at Bowie. “You okay, love?”

“As long as I stay away from the wine.”

“Wesley’s in the john, too. He’s pretty drunk as well.”

I open the water bottle for her, and she starts drinking it. “I’ll get her some fresh air for five minutes and we’ll be back.”

“Sounds good. I’ll see you then.”

Holding her steady, I take her outside, not bothering to put her shoes back on her feet. Thankfully, the terrace’s floor is clean enough to eat off, so it isn’t a problem. She’s drinking the water like she just ran a marathon. “Take it easy or you’ll puke.”

“I’m so thirsty.”

“Yeah. Wine will do that to you.”

The fresh evening air seems to help her focus. As she draws in a couple of deep breaths, I place my arm over her shoulder. “You’re not cold, are you?”

“No, this is nice. Thanks for taking care of me, Jagger.”

“Hey, we take care of each other.” I correct. “If I was the one in there, you wouldn’t hesitate.”

“That’s true.”

I rub her arm with my hand. “You did well in there. Held it together well, even though you were falling apart on the inside.”

“Jagger, I have to tell you, I think the gods are looking out for me since leaving Boston.”

“That’s very valid. But it’s also got to do with making better choices.”

“Yeah, that too.” She takes another sip of water, and I watch the glassiness in her eyes start to dissipate a little. The air is crisp, and the moonlight illuminates the terrace perfectly. “It’s so beautiful here.”

“I won’t argue with you there.”

She turns to me. “You look so handsome tonight.”

I look at her and smirk. “You’re stealing the show in that dress, I have to tell you.”

Her eyes search mine. Her voice is soft. “You think you might ever kiss me?”

We’re not in a bathroom stall anymore. We’re alone.

There is nothing here except the moonlight and the Thames River off in the distance.

I lean in and give her a soft kiss on the mouth.

My lips touch hers gently, semi-chastely, and I let the touch linger for a moment, before pulling back.

Before I pull all the way back, I rub my nose on hers. “You still taste like licorice whips.”

“The wine is sugary.” She says, as her eyes still search mine.

“Quit looking at me like that, or we’ll never be able to stay out of trouble in the hotel later.”

“What if I don’t want to stay out of trouble.”

“Well, for the record, I don’t want to, either. But we’ve discussed this. We need to keep focus until we know that this deal is in the bag.”

That breaks the spell. “You’re right. All this wine made me lose my head.”

I slide a finger down her cheek. “That’s okay. You’re killing it tonight.”

She takes another sip of water. “We should get back in there. Wesley will think that we ditched him.”

“I think he’s probably too tanked to care, but you’re right.”

“One more kiss...for the road?” She asks, looking at me with puppy dog eyes.

I lean in and kiss her once more, making a playful, smacking noise.

“Let’s go.” She says, as if that’s all the motivation that she needed.

When we get back to the table, Wesley’s ordered a round of shots and a plate of bangers & nash.

Bowie takes one look at the disgusting delicacy, and I know that she’s about to toss her cookies.

“Oh, Wesley...” Bowie trails off. “I’m so sorry, but I’m terribly drunk. ” She admits, not looking at the food.

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“Not to worry, love. The car awaits you at the front. I’ll see you for breakfast?”

I look at Stephen and he winks at me. He’s a great guy. “Thanks, man.” I say to him under my breath.

“Not a problem, mate. I’ll catch you in the morning.”

The second that we get back to the hotel, I know we’re in trouble.

Since all the tension has worn away with us departing from the restaurant, Bowie seems to let herself go, and she’s all over me in the car.

She all but straddles me in the back seat.

“Bowie, honey.” I chuckle. “Look, the driver can see us. Do you want Wesley to know what went on back here?”

That seems to calm her down. Until we get into the hotel and step inside the elevator.

Thank God it’s the kind of elevator with a doorman, so at least she’s just trying to squeeze my ass from behind us.

Once we get off the elevator and start walking down the hall, I lay into her.

“Look, Bowie. I’m not going to fuck you when you’re like this.

I want you to remember it. I don’t want it to be some drunken fuck that lasts all of

two minutes. ”

“But I’ve waited for so long, Jagger.”

“I’ve waited for longer, remember.” I tell her soberly. She looks at me and I can tell that I’ve gone too far. Her face falls. “Look, I’m sorry if I’m being harsh. What happened tonight isn’t your fault, and you did fantastic at the restaurant, but I just don’t want us to fuck anything up.”

“I know.” She murmurs, with her eyes on the carpeted floor, as I push her key card through the reader. “Now, you go on in there to bed, okay? We’ve got a breakfast meeting with Wesley, and you’re going to have one hell of a fucking hangover unless you get some sleep.”

“But I don’t want to be alone.” She whines softly, not annoyingly. “Can you come in with me? Just until I fall asleep? I promise that I’ll behave myself.”

After drawing in a deep breath and releasing it, I relent. “Fine. I’ll make sure that you get into bed and that you’ve got a bucket next to your head, and then I’m going to hit the hay.”

That seems to please her. “Okay.” She stumbles inside, still holding me by the shoulder. I set her heels down on the console table. “My feet are a little sticky.”

“Okay. I’ll get a washcloth.”

I sit her on the bed and go into the washroom. “It’s too hot in here.” She says.

“I’ll adjust the thermostat.” I say as I walk to the other side of the room and turn the knob, making the air conditioning come on instantly.

When I return to the bedroom, there she is.

...completely naked.

...lying on the bed.

...on her back.

...just like she was the last time we made love in a different lifetime.

“Holy...fuck.” I murmur to myself, trying not to look, as I pull the sheets over her body, focusing on her face. Her eyes are closed, her nipples are hard, and so am I. “Jesus Christ.” I breathe.

“Jagger...” She trails off dreamily.

“I’m here.”

“It’s too cold.”

“I can tell.”

“I forgot to bring pajamas.”

“I can tell that, too.”

“I don’t want to be alone. Come to bed with me.”

I chuckle nervously, tone raising an octave. “I really don’t think that that’s a good idea, Bowie. You’re naked.”

“Am I?”

“Yes...yes, you are.”

“Why don’t you get naked and join me.”

“I really don’t think so.”

“You told me you loved me.”

“Yes, and that’s precisely why I’m not going to do that.”

She harrumphs. “You suck.”

I’ll tell you what I’d like to suck. Her nipples, her clit, her navel.

And I’d like to thrust my rock-hard cock into her so deep her fucking eyeballs bulge.

But I’m not going to do any of that tonight.

She’s so out of it, I might as well be fucking a dead person.

And I’m not into that. No matter how fucking beautiful Bowie looks, lying there, naked as fuck.

“Fine. I suck. If that’s the worst thing you can say about me tonight, I can live with that. ”

There is a small trash bin next to the console table. I grab that and make sure that it has a liner in it, before placing it next to her head on the floor. “Goodnight, Bowie.” I kiss her on the forehead.

“Jagger.” She whispers.

“Yes, sweetheart.” I whisper back, kneeling, so I can see her face.

“I love you.”

“I love you, too. Now get some sleep.”

Suddenly, she gasps, and real tears fall down her cheek. “I’m so sorry.”

“Sorry about what?”

“That I made us lose all those years together.”

I slide a finger down her cheek. “I’m sorry, too.”

She gasps again, tears flowing down her cheeks.

“Hey, now. What’s all this?”

“I don’t know. I get emotional when I’ve had too much to drink, I guess.”

“Okay, that’s fair. I become a horny son of a bitch when I’m drunk, if that’s any consolation.” I volunteer, wiping the tears off her cheeks with my thumbs.

“Jagger?”

“Yes, beautiful.” I answer, leaning my chin on the bed, so we’re almost eye-to-eye.

“Please sleep next to me.”

The hard-on left the second she started crying. “Fine. But I’m keeping my clothes on.”

“I don’t care.”

I climb in next to her after removing my jacket, tie and shoes. She’s almost asleep as I pull the sheets over me, but I still keep my distance. I don’t trust myself, as I leave the light on in case she has to hurl and I need to make sure she doesn’t drown in it.

...surprisingly, I sleep.

...until I’m jolted out of bed.

Bowie

My head pounding is only exacerbated by the phone ringing.

“God!” I gasp aloud, holding my head, as I sit up in bed.

It’s freezing in here, I smell like puke, and I don’t remember anything beyond sitting at the dinner table last night, talking to Wesley about old school combustion engines.

The phone won’t stop ringing, so I pick it up.

“Hello?” I say groggily, noticing that there is a pair of dress pants, a shirt, and basically an entire man’s suit, on the floor, and my eyes widen.

“Ma’am, I’m just calling to inform you that your car will be there to pick you up in thirty minutes.”

“Okay. Thank you.” I say and hang up the phone.

My first thought is that I did the stupidest thing ever and slept with Wesley.

That would be career death right there. The thought sickens me, but somehow, I feel like my stomach is completely empty.

Judging by the scent filling the room, I’d say that it is.

That’s when I hear the door beep and I flip out, wondering who the hell is coming

into my room.

Jagger sees me and raises a hand. “Relax. It’s just me. ”

I’ve pulled the sheets up to my neck, realizing that I’m completely naked under here. “Shit! Shit! What did I do?” I panic.

“You...got drunk. Very drunk. That thing you smell? Drunk.” He chuckles kindly. “You asked me to sleep with you, in the literal sense and the other, so I ended up sleeping right there next to you. Until you started tossing your cookies, and that’s when I realized that every man has a limit.”

“God.” I exhale, holding my head.

“Yeah.” He agrees on a sigh. “I brought your stuff over to my room so I can get you outta here. I’ve sent for housekeeping and gave them a huge tip and a heads up.”

He grabs a robe off the back of the door. “Here. Throw this on and come to my room. The car’s going to be here soon, and we’ve got to get you cleaned up.”

“I’m so sorry, Jagger. I never drink.”

“It’s not your fault. Wesley’s pockets were burning last night for expensive wine, and you were the innocent victim.”

He turns his head while I step out of bed, and he drapes the robe over my shoulders. “What about your clothes?”

“They stink so bad if they clean them, they can keep them.”

“Again. I’m so sorry.”

“Not to worry. Let’s just get you cleaned up. How do you feel?”

“My head hurts but I’m fine otherwise.”

“That’s probably because you puked up everything. It has its advantages.”

As soon as we leave the room, I feel slightly better.

“The adjoining room in this deal doesn’t work. I didn’t want to give you a heart attack by knocking down the damn door.”

He opens his door and I go inside. “Shower’s all yours.”

“Thanks.”

Ten minutes later, I’m fresh again, and Jagger’s got a glass of orange juice, some Advil, and dry toast waiting for me. “You’re a savior.”

He just smiles warmly at me. “You look better already.”

“Thanks. Where’s my dress?”

“Didn’t you see it soaking in the tub?”

“You’re a savior. That’s my lucky dress.”

“It paid off.”

“We should go. I don’t want to leave Wesley waiting.”

He wrings out my dress and stuffs it into a plastic dry cleaning bag, before stuffing it

into my overnight bag, and we're off.

To my chagrin, Wesley doesn't look any worse for wear when we arrive at the restaurant for breakfast. I opt for coffee and nothing else, and I nurse it the whole time we're there.

"So, when can I expect you two to find your way back to England?" Wesley asks.

"You say the word, sir, and we're out here." Jagger replies.

"How about next month...when we start on the first model." He says, smirking.

Jagger and I exchange a look, not sure if we heard him correctly.

Wesley's eyes are dancing and Stephen is grinning.

"Are you serious?" Jagger says on exhale, smile wide, hand on chest.

"My boy, I don't fuck around." Wesley says, pleased with himself.

"But...but you haven't even seen all of our concepts yet."

Wesley tilts his head but his eyes are still dancing. "Are you questioning my decision, boy?"

Jagger chuckles, rising, holding his hand out for Wesley to shake. "No, not at all, sir. Not one bit."

I rise, too, and then we're all standing, shaking hands. "Now, you can go back home to the office with the good news." Wesley informs. "I've taken the liberty of having my office draw up the papers. They've been sent to your inbox. Gives you something

to peruse on the flight back home.”

“Yes, sir.” Jagger nods.

“And have your lawyers look over the papers, too. Feel free to take as long as you like.” Stephen adds.

“Will do.”

Wesley changes the subject. “So, what’s on your agenda this weekend?”

“Work.” I chuckle. “Lots and lots of work.”

“Nothing in your personal life?” Wesley inquires.

Jagger shoots me a look, like he’s confirming that Wesley does, in fact, have a crush on me. It’s like he’s saying ‘I told you so’ with his eyes. “It’s my sister’s birthday. We’re having a party.”

“A big party?” Stephen asks.

“She’s in PR, so yeah, that’s all she knows.”

“How long has she been planning this party for?” Wesley asks.

“Just a couple of weeks. She’s got another six days, so who knows what celebrity she’ll be able to muster up in that time frame.”

“And what are you doing, dear?” Wesley asks me.

“I’m going, too.”

“Do you know Jagger’s sister well?”

“We met in a...previous life.” I say, watching Jagger from the corner of my eye.

He’s trying to be nonchalant, but I figured it out when he asked me.

I’m just going to play along, acting like I don’t remember, but I do.

And he’s going to shit himself when he realizes what I did because I remember. ..

Jagger

“No fucking way!!” I hear Axl shout from the back of the room.

He’s decided to hijack my production team while me and Bowie have been away.

We’ve just delivered the news that we got the European deal.

I don’t mind. When Axl isn’t getting into trouble with the media, he drips creativity and motivation, and the team adores him.

“Woohoo!!!” My senior guy shouts, too. “I knew it! I knew when that old son of a bitch invited you two out there, that it was in the fucking bag! Yahooooo!!!”

I lift a hand. “Okay, so we’ve got a lot of work to do. I’m having our attorneys look over the agreement, but in the meantime, we’ve got to put together all the engines, not just the prototypes. And I want several, so that Drummond Motors can test them on multiple bodies.”

“Got it!” My head engineer states. “Okay, boys! Let’s get to work!”

That's why I hired them. This fantastic team that I have.

I look at Bowie and she's already moving her way down the line, talking to some team members, giving them the scoop on what happened in London.

We reconvene later, in a meeting, and I can't take my eyes off her.

The woman is luminous. Just full of everything I've ever wanted in a partner, both in business and in life.

And I chide myself for thinking about such things at such a time, when this is the most important deal of a lifetime, but then it makes sense.

If it weren't for Bowie, I wouldn't be here, and I'll never forget that.

"So, how did it go there in London?" Axl asks me, once the throng of engineers and staff thin out.

"It was actually a fucking disaster if you want to know the truth." I chuckle.

"What are you talking about?" He laughs.

"Well, the initial tour and hobnobbing was fine, but then Wesley took us to this restaurant and got Bowie totally fucking tanked. We both thought we were sunk, but she killed it, and then the next morning Wesley told us that he chose us for the deal."

"I'm not fucking surprised." He scoffs. "You worry too much, man. And everyone around here thinks the same thing. Do you know that I can count on both my hands how many of your staff want you to make engines with me, too?"

I laugh mirthlessly. "That's the last thing that I need now that I have the European

deal.”

“You do want to keep this company growing, don’t you?” He points out.

“Yeah, but not like that.”

“You haven’t seen my face on any tabloids in the past three days, have you?”

“No, but that’s only because I haven’t looked, and Stevie is too fucking busy planning her big to-do to bother me about it, either.”

“I’ll twist your arm some day, man. Mark my words.”

“I’m sure you won’t. But keep dreaming, man.” I pat him on the back and walk away, before we get into it. It’s been a while and it’s probably long overdue, but now isn’t the time. As I follow Bowie’s lead and make my rounds with staff, I eventually end up back in my office.

Bowie taps on the doorjamb a few minutes later. “Hey. Do you want to do a debriefing later? Make sure that everyone’s on the same page?”

“We can probably add it to the daily engineering meeting and just invite the rest of the clan to join us for a half hour following. It’s probably best not to clog up everyone’s day with meetings right now. They’re all on a high and everyone hates nothing more than meetings.”

“Good point.” She points at me.

“How are you feeling?”

“Like I’ll never drink again for as long as I live.”

“You kicked ass.”

“So did you.”

And now she’s giving me that look again. Her eyes scan down my body as I stand next to my desk. “Stop it.” I warn playfully.

“Stop what.” She snuffles, acting like she doesn’t know exactly what I’m talking about.

“That look. Stop it. It took me every ounce of energy not to look at you like that when you were wearing that fucking black dress.”

“Well, I can say the same thing, Jagger. And you standing there in that suit is just as bad. And we got the deal. I thought that we said we would hold off until the deal is set in stone.”

With a sigh, I allow myself a small, quick glance down her body. She’s in a tailored dress that hugs her chest and ass perfectly. “We really need to stop dressing up for the office.”

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She chuckles. “Yeah. That’s what we need.” I detect facetiousness in her tone. “I think what we really need is to fuck like rabbits and get it out of our systems.”

“Is that all I am to you.” I tease, not daring to take a step towards her.

She swallows. “You know you’re not but we’re not going there right now, are we.”

I don’t know how much longer I can put this off.

She wants me and I want her and just her standing there she’s like a magnet to me.

I’ve made promises I don’t know if I can keep.

The fact that I slept next to her when she was naked puts me in the monk category.

But I’m no monk. And I’ve been acting like one around her for much too long.

We need to do something about it before we both lose our heads.

“Don’t do this. Not now.” I say weakly, lying to myself.

“Fine.” She says, and I detect a note of anger in her voice, as she walks away.

I feel like a fucking fool. How can I turn her down?

She is the most beautiful woman in the world, she has no hidden agenda, she’s not after me for my money, we have a past together, and most of all, we both love each

other.

And, at least for me, it's not just regular love.

This is a love that has grown for so many years I lost count.

I've loved Bowie since high school, and I never stopped.

Since reuniting with her, in whatever capacity you want to call it, I feel like my love for her has only grown stronger.

And I'm torn between loving her the way that I should love her, and risking our business, or solidifying the most beautiful relationship I could ever know.

And she feels it, too...

It sure looks like Stevie's doing. This place is packed with people.

Some I know and some I don't. The venue is giant.

Big enough to hold a conference or two, depending on which room you choose.

The place is decorated to the nines, so I know that Stevie hired only her top decorators and party planners, giving them a chance to show their chops on something a little funner than just the average schmoozefest. Bowie is off to the side, wearing a gorgeous cream silk dress that's scooped in the front and back, accentuating, once again, her beautiful chest and ass.

She grabbed a ride over with Jinny, and I can see that Jinny has aptly ditched her to do some flirting with Axl. When he sees me, he motions me over. "Were you planning on coming over to say hello, old man?" He teases.

“Not really.” I snuffle a laugh.

“I figured as much.” Jinny scoffs.

“Easy, killer. Remember I sign your paychecks now.” I joke.

“I am taking it easy, actually. You should hear what’s going on inside my head.”

“Enlighten me.” I dare, knowing that I haven’t got much to fear, since Jinny doesn’t drink.

“Well, you’re a pussy for not going after Bowie, and you know it.”

“Who said I wasn’t going after her.” I comment.

“You’re not over there talking to her, for one. She’s still sleeping in my fucking guest quarters, for two.”

“I just got here. And are you suggesting that I ask her to move in with me? Because even I’m sure that’s not what she wants.”

“And yet you’re standing here talking to us.”

“Axl invited me over.” I point out nonchalantly, grabbing an hors d’oeuvre off the plate being offered to me by a server dressed in a black and white tuxedo. The guy looks like a fucking penguin. Only Stevie’s sense of humor can explain that.

When I see my brothers Halen and Rush approach the DJ’s area, I roll my eyes.

The microphone is set up and the music stops.

When Stevie scurries up, I look down at the floor, knowing full well that her intentions are to embarrass the shit out of me.

“Hello, everyone.” Stevie says in a singsong voice, dressed in a flaming red pleather frock with matching six-inch patent leather heels.

My sister is not much for modesty. We are complete opposites.

“Thanks for coming tonight.” That’s when she spots me.

“Jagger, do you want to come up here and join me?”

“No, actually.” I say, intentionally loud enough for everyone to hear. But what I don’t know is that while my sister and brothers were making their trek up to the microphone, Bowie was approaching me from behind. And here she is, pushing me up to my sister.

Once I get up there, Stevie looks at me and says. “He’s my polar opposite, in case anyone here didn’t know that.”

Mom calls out from off to the side, where her and dad are watching. “You’d never know that the two of you shared a womb.”

Laughter.

Yes, Stevie and I are fraternal twins. We are nothing alike, and I can’t explain it, nor have I ever tried to.

“Anyway, Happy Birthday, brother.” She says, giving me a hug. I hug her back, ever so reluctantly, even though I love her to bits. And I reciprocate, just not into the microphone. Then she releases me and shouts into the microphone. “Let’s party!”

The music starts up again, and I plot my escape, quickly scouting out the nearest exit. But I can hear heels clicking from behind me, and I know that Bowie is following me. “Are you trying to escape?”

“That was the plan, yes. I don’t know if you remember this, but I hate parties, especially birthday parties, especially ones that my sister planned.”

She chuckles and takes my hand, surprising me. “Come with me.”

“Where are we going?”

“It’s a surprise.”

“Really? You know that I hate surprises.”

“I also know that it’s your birthday today, and here you are, all thinking that I forgot, but I remember.”

“I do give you credit for that. But my sister is the type that doesn’t let anyone forget. That’s part of the reason why I hate sharing a birthday with her.”

We walk down the hall, to the front of the venue, and then around to the side, and finally to the back, where we stop, just before an exit door. Bowie stuffs her hand down her cleavage, and I can’t help but watch as she pulls what looks like a fabric headband, out of there. “That was kind of hot.”

“Don’t worry. There’s nothing else in there.” She wiggles her eyebrows. “I’m going to blindfold you, okay?”

“Kinky.”

She gently places the thing over my eyes and then slaps me playfully. “Pig.”

“You ain’t seen nothing yet.”

She snorts a laugh, and then she takes my hand again, and I hear her open the door.
“Follow me.”

“Do I have a choice?”

“No.”

“Are there any witnesses?”

“No.”

“I don’t trust you.”

“You shouldn’t. Now, shut up and follow me.”

“You’re lucky you’re wearing a hot dress.”

“You’re lucky it’s your birthday.”

We’re walking, and I hear cars passing by from the neighboring street off in the distance. When we stop, she releases my hand. “Are you ready?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be.”

I can feel her removing the blindfold, but I keep my eyes closed. Her lips touch my cheek as she kisses me. “Happy Birthday.” She says. “Open your eyes.”

I open them slowly. Then they're wide. My heart starts to pound as I look at the most beautiful car I've ever seen in the world.

"Hoooooollly fuuuuuuuck." I murmur. It's exactly like the one that my grampa had.

"Where did you get this?" I ask, walking around it, looking at it like it's a fucking unicorn.

"It's a secret."

"God, this is exactly like my grampa's."

"That's because it is your grampa's."

My gaze darts to her. "What?"

She smiles. "Your brothers helped me out with that one. There was an old picture of it somewhere in your mother's attic, complete with the VIN, and we went on a hunt.

It turns out this car was bought at auction decades ago and then the owner passed away.

Evidently, all he wanted was this car, so he pre-paid for months of storage fees.

When his wife passed away, his son inherited it, and then they put it into storage.

But his son didn't want to part with it until his wife filed for divorce.

We just happened to stumble upon it at the right time. "

"Are you kidding me?" I bark. "This is my grampa's original Bel-Air?"

Another smile. “Believe me, your brothers were surprised, too. And if it hadn’t been for it being your thirtieth birthday, they would never have agreed to letting you have it.”

The car is still in mint condition. It’s like it’s been frozen in time. Not a scratch on it, not a dent, nothing. “Does it still run?”

“I drove it here.”

“Where was it being stored?”

“Here in North Carolina.” Her eyes are sparkling. “Happy Birthday, Jagger.”

I flash her a smile. “You want to go for a drive?”

A chuckle. “Well, aren’t you even going to thank me?”

I stick the key inside the passenger side door. “Get in.”

The car is perfect. Just like grampa only drove it yesterday. “God, I can’t believe this. It’s exactly how I remember it.”

“Your brother had Axl do some light work on it to get it going, but otherwise, this is how it was when we found it.”

“Unbelievable.” I beam as we drive.

...and somehow, I end up at my house...

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Bowie

I 'm not sure if he's just stunned or not, but I go along with it.

It's his birthday, after all. And if he wants to go cruising in his new classic car, instead of attending the huge party his sister put together, then so be it.

He cranks up the radio and puts the pedal to the metal as we pull onto the highway, over the speed limit.

Thankfully, there is no traffic, so it feels like it's just us here.

Once we're off the highway, he starts fiddling with the gadgets inside the car, seemingly still taking a trip down memory lane.

Then we take a turn, and he travels down the road that leads to his house.

"God, this is so awesome." He says, as he exits the car in his driveway, taking my hand in his. I don't ask questions, as it seems like he's in his own little world right now and distracting him is the last thing that I want to do.

We get inside his house, and he closes the door behind us.

He removes his jacket as I remove my shoes, and the moment that I turn towards him, he pulls me to him.

His hands are on my waist, his nose is pressed up to mine, as my heart races instantly.

It's the intensity of his gaze that ignites the flame in me.

Eyes hooded, pupils dilated, the heat from his skin heats mine as he drags his gaze over my face, barely touching me, driving me crazy.

When I part my lips, begging for him to kiss me, he tilts his head painfully slowly, as I graze the back of his neck with my fingers.

When his lips touch mine, I plunge my tongue into his mouth, and he reciprocates.

Our lips and tongues glide over and over as my fingers tease his hair, my leg slides up his thigh, and my breathing becomes choppy.

He lifts his lips from mine, sucking my bottom lip slowly in the process, making me melt.

His words are quick and poignant and breathless. "Thank you."

It takes half a second for me to go in for a second round.

His hands skate up my thighs, dragging my dress upward, until his fingers reach my panties.

Hooking his thumbs through the waistband, he pulls them down, and I step out of them, grabbing the button on his pants in my wake.

His lips are on my neck as I free him, so hungry for his hardened cock, and it's oh-so-rock-solid.

He's so ready for me it takes everything in me not to shove him inside me instantly.

But I soon learn that him and I are on a level playing field.

Suddenly, my dress is being hiked up over my head, and I'm scrambling to get his shirt off, while his pants and briefs lay at his feet.

He presses my naked body against the wall, lifting me to his waist, and he slides his cock into me so easily I cry out loud.

It feels so fucking good I can't handle it.

His thrusts are deep, his kisses lethal, his breath labored as he fucks me against the wall.

Large, beefy hands and arms encircle me, while his cock kisses every needy cell inside me, answering my silent plea each time he fills me.

It takes seconds for him to push me over the edge as I fist his hair, desperate for my release, panting, squealing, starved for it.

And he doesn't stop. He keeps fucking me hard until my mewls signal the end of my first orgasm.

His kisses soften, his thrusts slow, as he lifts me from the wall and carries me to the bedroom.

My arms are wrapped around his neck as our lips tangle on the way.

Mewls and labored breathing fills the silence until my back hits the mattress, and he starts moving again.

"God, you can still send me to the moon and back." I breathe.

“That’s because you’re an angel.” He whispers through kisses.

His tender words ignite me, as his warm, hard body presses up against mine, and his scent fills my nostrils.

God, he checks all the boxes. As if I think he couldn’t be any sexier, he leans up, hitting me in the perfect spot, displaying himself above me like a fucking god.

And he is a god. His hardened nipples form perfect peaks on his juicy pecks, bordering the most defined washboard stomach.

Biceps bulging with his weight and his cock moving in and out of me, shiny with my arousal, I could just fucking die.

By his sultry expression, he knows that he’s got me to the edge again.

“Come for me, baby.” He murmurs, and his tone sounds like something you’d hear on a nine-hundred number call line.

And it’s all it takes. My pelvis goes into flames once again, forcing my back to arch and my mouth to open wide, shouting expletives I didn’t know I knew.

“You are the sexiest fucking creature alive, Bowie.” He says softly.

His words do things to me. I push him onto his back, hungry to make him come like a fucking volcano.

My ears crave his moans, his sexy comments.

..I want to finish him. And it’s like it’s my dying wish as I straddle him, riding him aggressively enough that my tits bounce, which I know impresses him, as his cock

engorges fully.

He takes this gesture as a pleasure tug of war.

He lifts, sucking my breasts, licking them so good I feel it everywhere.

His fingers reach around my ass and circle my clit from behind, sending me spiraling once again.

“Oh...God...you better fucking come with me this time, Jagger!” I growl, feeling my third climax come quickly.

Eyeballs rolling into the sockets, I white knuckle the bedsheets, feeling his cock twitch, signaling his orgasm.

When his pulsing gets rougher, I feel the wetness of his juices, right before he growls loudly at my breast. Veins popping out of his neck, I feel him empty himself into me, soaking me, satiating me fully.

With each wave another growl comes, until they soften to mewls, and then he rests his head back on the pillow, squeezing my ass in the process.

“You’re welcome.” I pant, as he does.

He chuckles, raking a hand through his hair, looking at me.

I laugh softly.

“The thank you earlier was for the car. You said at the lot, ‘aren’t you even going to say thank you’.”

“I thought you were thanking me for letting you fuck me.”

He frowns. “No.” He leans up and kisses me deeply on the mouth. “But now I’ll thank you for that, too.”

I kiss him with a little tongue. “Oh, no. Thank you .”

He gives me more tongue. “Oh, no. Thank you .”

I chuckle. “We could go on like this forever, Jagger.”

“I know. I’m just looking for more reasons to kiss you.”

A snorted laugh. “You don’t need a reason anymore.”

He clasps his fingers behind my back, holding himself up, so we’re nose to nose. “I guess I don’t.” The look on his face changes. He looks like he wants to be serious. “I love you.” He licks his lips. “I mean it. I love you with all my heart.”

I slide my fingers through his hair. “I love you, too.” I search his eyes. “You mean everything to me and more.”

He kisses my forehead. “You, too.”

“Happy Birthday.”

He smiles a little, but his eyes are still serious. “You know, even if you didn’t buy me a car, this has been the best birthday ever.”

“Men are all alike.” I smirk. “As long as they get laid, they consider it the best day ever.”

He smirks. “Baby, I could have gotten laid all kinds. It’s you that I wanted. It’s you. You’re all I’ve ever wanted.”

My arms go tighter around his neck. “And now that you have me, what will you do with me.”

“I think I’ve done it.” He winks.

I chuckle on exhale. “You know, you’re the only man I know that would leave a party with two hundred guests for sex. Good luck pulling that lie off when we go back.”

“Well, it’s settled, then. We’re not going back.”

“You have to, Jagger. It’s your party.”

“It’s not my party. It’s Stevie’s party. I just happen to be one of the guests.”

“Don’t you think your family is going to look down on you when they find out what we were up to?”

“Who’s going to tell them?” He shrugs.

I give him a knowing look. “Twenty bucks says that your brothers and Axl have a bet going.”

“Nobody’s going to find out. For all they know we went for a cruise.”

“Do you really think anybody is that stupid?”

“I just don’t think any of them will care. It’s my birthday. I can do whatever the fuck I want. And I wanted to be with you. Simple as that.” He changes the subject. “Shit, I

better pull out.”

“It’s okay, I’m on the pill.”

“No, I knew that. I saw them in your purse when you were smashed in London. I just meant that that can’t be very comfortable.”

I lift a brow. “Comfortable?”

He snorts a laugh. “Hardy har har.” He grunts, lifting me off him gently, removing himself from me.

He lays down next to me, interlacing his fingers behind his head on the pillow.

The downy hairs under his arms stick out as he rests.

“So, what would you rather do. Go for another cruise, or head back to that lame party my sister threw?”

I rest my head on his chest and look at him knowingly. “Is there a third option?”

He smirks. “I could do this twenty-four-seven with you, Bowie, but I know that it’s bothering you to get back there.”

“Well, there are staff there, Jagger. I’m worried that they’ll think I’ll pull a Yoko Ono or something.”

“That only works if you’re not pro us, but you are.

You’re all in Lawson Manufacturing as much as I am.

But I get it that you're worried." He grunts again, rising off the bed.

I could stare at him all day. He's got an ass that might as well be carved out of a precious stone.

Even flaccid, his cock is just beautiful.

He grabs his shirt and throws it over his shoulders, making me sad.

"Come on, gorgeous. You sit like that, all naked and ready, and we're not going back.

" He says, walking out of the bedroom. I follow him, naked.

He watches me as I pull my panties on, then my dress.

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“You are so fucking sexy. When you didn’t have a bra on under that dress, I thought I would lose it.”

I wink.

“That was all part of the plan, wasn’t it.” He comments, pulling his pants on. Him standing there with just those on makes me bite my lip. “Behave.” He warns playfully. “We can come back here and fuck all night after we make another appearance.”

“Okay, but only if we can fuck all night.” I tease, mirroring him.

He throws his shirt and jacket on and then drapes a loose tendril of my hair over my ears. “You’re beautiful even just fucked. I swear to God you’re the only woman that can pull that off.”

I slide my fingers through his disheveled hair. “I like it better messy, but it’ll be too obvious.”

He winks at me and takes my hand. “Come on. Let’s go.”

When we arrive, Axl is schmoozing with Jinny, but she also seems to be surrounded by all of Jagger’s brothers, too. “What the hell is going on over here?” Jagger snorts a laugh. “Are you guys trying to convince her to do a strip tease?”

Axl looks me up and down.

“Hey, eyes over here, my friend.” Jagger warns. “She’s mine.”

“I was just about to say.” Axl quips, not missing a beat.

“So, I guess you liked your birthday present.” Halen says, and it’s like the cat’s out of the bag. They’re not stupid. They know what we were doing the past hour that we disappeared.

“Oh, leave them alone.” Stevie whines, intoxicated, based on her stance. “Jagger, do you care to catch up to me?”

“Not on your life.” He says. “Come on. Let’s go do some schmoozing so that we can blow this pop stand.” He takes my hand in his and we do our rounds, mingling, and we even throw in a dance or two for good measure.

“So, were you impressed by the car?” Axl queries. Halen and Rush are standing next to him at the bar.

“Yeah, you wouldn’t believe the fucking hoops we had to jump through to get that thing.” Rush states.

“Thanks, man. It was worth it.” He slaps his brothers on the back.

“Well, no other gift would have made as much sense.” Halen says. “Why buy you a sports car, when you can build a better one yourself, right?”

“Good thinking.” Axl says. “Speaking of which...”

Jagger lifts a hand. “Oh, don’t start on that shit again. It’s my birthday.”

Halen rescues me by changing the subject. “How was Wesley Hopkins, anyway? Is

he as much of an asshole as everyone says he is?”

I interject. “He’s very sweet.”

Jagger scoffs. “Yeah, to you, because he’s got a hard-on for you.” But the look on his face tells me that he’s only teasing.

“Who cares?” Rush whines. “You got the fucking deal. That’s what we were all in it for.”

“Exactly.” Halen agrees. “Hey, you should throw a party. Not lame, like this one, but a kick ass one, with Wesley himself, and a bunch of big wigs in the industry.”

“That’s not a bad idea.” I agree. “We could ask Stevie to invite some media to promote us and we could even hold a press conference.”

“We’d have to talk to Wesley about that.” Jagger reasons. “I’m not sure how much of a push he wanted, to start.”

“Wesley’s into promotion.” Axl says. “He’d be an idiot if he didn’t take an opportunity. And he’s no idiot.”

Jagger winces. “All the same, I don’t want to count my chickens. Every step is important here.”

“I’ll talk to him.” I wink at Jagger.

He looks at me like he’s still drunk on sex. “I’m sure you will.”

I reciprocate the look.

“Hey, can we amscray from this shit?” Jagger asks the circle, even though his eyes are still on me, still looking like he’d like to christen his Bel-Air with me on the way back to his place.

“Fuck it. Yeah. Go.” Rush says, letting us off the hook. “Stevie’s fucked, anyway. We’ll just lie to her and tell her you two closed the place. She won’t remember fuck all.”

“Thanks, man.” Jagger says.

“Just...make sure you say goodbye to mom and dad, at least.” Halen warns.

“Suck up. You do it.” Jagger argues weakly, taking my hand in his. “I’m outta here.”

“Let me say goodbye to Jinny, or she’ll never let me live it down.” I tell him, guiding us to her on the dance floor. She’s in her glory, dancing with a bunch of guys from our accounting department, that worship her. “See ya later, Jin.”

She just waves, like I’m old news, drinking in the dashing millionaires in suits.

Jagger is facetious. “She’ll miss you.”

“Like a fucking tooth ache.”

He changes the subject as we walk to the car. “What do you say you stay with me, hm? Clearly, you’re cramping Jinny’s style, right?” He opens the door for me, and I slide inside. “We can grab some things for you on the way?”

Jagger has never been a man to miss an opportunity. He lives in the moment. “Are you asking me to move in with you?”

He slides into the driver's side and starts the car. "Yeah. I guess I am." He licks his lips and looks at me. "We can make some ground rules, you know, so we don't smother each other."

We start driving. "Like what?"

"Well, we already know that living together and working together can sometimes equal relationship slash romance death, so maybe we can compartmentalize things."

"Like, act professional in the office, and save romance for home?"

"Yeah." He nods. "I think that would be best for staff, too. I don't want anyone worried about walking in on us fucking on the desk or anything, you know?"

I chuckle. "Although that idea is as sexy as hell."

"I won't deny that. But...I have a desk at home, too, baby." He winks.

My hand slides up his thigh. Just talking about fucking him again is making me hot. "You know, I think that this car is much too clean for my taste."

He lifts a brow. "Are you saying that you want to...um...dirty up my grandfather's car?"

I pinch my thumb and index finger together. "Just a little."

"Your wish is my command, baby."

Jagger

Her hand sliding up my leg and the tone in her voice sets me off. While I have no intention of fucking the woman I love in public, that doesn't stop me from making love in the privacy of Jinny's home...in the car. "So, is that a yes?"

"Yes, to what?" She asks, her eyes telling me that she's wet already.

"Moving in with me."

"Spending my days working with the smartest, most gorgeous, sexiest man alive and spending my nights tangled with him? How could I possibly say no?"

"You mean you're not going to do the girly thing and say that it's too fast?"

"Jagger, if you were someone I just met, sure it would be too fast. But we've known each other since high school. And we're not fifteen anymore. We also have so much more at stake, so we're not going to fuck around with our relationship. We're on a level playing field here."

"And it doesn't scare you at all?"

"You should know by now that I'm fearless."

I smile. "Yes, you are."

We pull into Jinny's place, and I park in the back, close to the door, under the small

portico she has.

After I turn off the engine, I undo my seatbelt just as Bowie does the same.

Jinny's house is a fucking fortress. It might as well be a goddamn airport it's so big.

There are two wings to the place; one for her and one for guests.

The portico was built for the landscapers, and for her goddamn golf carts she uses to get to her back garden when she's too lazy to walk, but it makes for great privacy, too.

The woman thinks like me and I'm grateful.

My hand slides up her dress, pulling her panties down.

Her hand is on first the button and then the fly of my pants, when I glide my tongue into her mouth, tasting her, pushing my hand up her dress, feeling her perfect breasts.

Through a pant she says. "I want to fuck you, Jagger."

"I want to fuck you, too." I push the seat all the way back and pull her on me, so she's straddling me.

I push her dress up over her head and stretch her panties, breaking one side of the waistband for access.

My cock sits upright, hungry for her, thankful to feel her welcoming insides as I fill her to the hilt.

Tits pressed up against my chest, she rides me, while my hands are all over her body,

squeezing her ass, skating up and down her thighs, and finally back at her breasts again.

Her nipples bead at my touch, and she leans up higher, giving me access.

As I suck them, I can feel her tightening, and I fuck her harder, wanting to make her come fast and hard, so I can then fuck her gentler.

Our skin slaps together in time with our panting in the silence, and one more suck of the nipple brings her over the edge.

Bowie comes on my cock, sucking me in, as I suck her nipples with vigor, making her feel her orgasm more, making me feel it more, too.

She growls, feeling her release, and I slow for a moment, kissing her on the mouth voraciously.

As I fuck her slower, catching my breath a little, I ask. “Care to help me fulfill a little fantasy I’ve had since high school?”

We’re still moving, talking between kisses. “Was I part of the fantasy?”

“Baby, you’ve been in all my fantasies.”

“Then, yes.”

“Okay, then follow me.” I say, giving her one last kiss, helping her off me. My dick is like a rock as we walk outside of the car, to the hood.

She takes one look at me and knows exactly what I have in mind. “On the hood?”

“Oh....yeah.” I nod, pulling her to me, in all her nakedness.

Like the trooper that she is, she plays along, allowing me to carefully place her on the hood, and as she parts her legs, I thrust inside her, being careful of the angle so I don't hurt her.

“You okay?” I check, feeling my rhythm meet hers.

“Your hard dick is inside me, Jagger. I'm more than fucking okay.”

This woman always has the right things to say at the right time.

Watching her lying, spread eagle on the hood of the car does things to me.

She is the sexiest, most courageous woman I know.

And evidently she's mine. All mine. Tits bobbing with our rhythm, and the sheer visual of her, nearly brings me to the edge alone.

“Oh, fuck, Bowie. I'm gonna fucking come any second. ”

And that does it. Those words throw her over the edge and we come together, her back arched and me fucking her so hard the car is actually moving with us. I pull her up gently after pulling out of her. We're both a panting mess. “You are a goddess.” I tell her, kissing her hair.

She chuckles. “God, I hope that Jinny's camera didn't pick up anything.”

“If it did, she'll have another story to tell at parties. Come on. Let's get you dressed and get your stuff.”

“Is this all the shit you have?” I ask, as I bring in the last bag from Jinny’s house. Surprisingly, it all fit in the car.

“I have more at my mom and dad’s place. Just the essentials were at Jinny’s.” She wraps her arms around my neck. “We’ll take a trip over there tomorrow. I’m sure that my parents will be thrilled to learn that we’re moving in together.”

“Your mom still likes me?”

“She was rooting for you this whole fucking time.”

“What about your dad?”

“He was always your biggest fan. I swear to God sometimes he was secretly hoping that you would kick Boston’s ass some day.”

I grin warmly. “You tired?”

“A little. But not enough to sleep yet.”

“How about I get a fire started and make us some tea? We’ll get you settled in the morning.”

“That sounds great. I’ll go get freshened up.”

I kiss her lips and we part ways briefly. When she comes back to the living room, there are two mugs of tea on the coffee table and the fire is roaring. She’s wearing a long nightshirt without a bra. “Aren’t you going to freshen up?” She asks teasingly.

My eyes are on her erect nipples. “The only way that I’m leaving this room is if you’re coming with me.”

She sits down on the opposite end of the couch and turns to grab her tea.

I catch a glimpse between her legs. No panties.

After letting her take a sip, I part her knees and lay between them, tasting her arousal.

She's taken a shower and her folds are still warm and damp.

Her legs immediately start to lock up as I suck her clit, sliding a finger inside her.

"God...dammit...Jagger..." She breathes, voice soft, almost a whisper. "You'll be the death of me at this rate."

It takes surprisingly little effort to bring her to the edge, as my cock hardens, listening to her moaning.

Her moans turn to growls as her legs lock up and then she bellows, begging me not to stop.

What a fucking rush. As her body relaxes, she lifts, opens my pants, exposing my fully hardened cock, and she straddles me, so wet and ready.

"I can't get enough of you, baby." I tell her as she fucks me on the couch. Her breasts are too much to resist and why would I.

"I'll never get enough of you, Jagger." She pants, speeding, hungry to make me come, as I've learned she likes. Her hands go to my chest as she rubs my nipples, seemingly recalling a weakness of mine.

"Oh, you don't play fair, baby." I reach down and start circling her clit with my finger. It's still wet and firm from my tongue moments ago.

“I see you’re upping the ante, are you.” She grunts, and I can feel her tightening inside.

“We are dangerous together.”

“God, say it again.”

“Mmmmmm...we’re dangerous.” I breathe, and her back arches as her body quivers, and she cries out loud, sucking my dick from the inside as she comes, taking me with her.

I let go, grunting, moaning, feeling every inch of her.

I kiss her erotically as we come down together.

Soft kisses, brushing her tongue with mine, still slowly fucking her as her pulses turn to ebbs, and I empty myself into her once again.

Our lips smacking, fire crackling and hitched breathing is all we hear, as I rest my hands on her ass, feeling her relax against my thighs. Her arms are draped over my shoulders, breasts on my chest, lips on mine. “God, I love you so much.” She says through kisses.

“I love you, too, baby. You are the best thing that ever happened to me.”

She brushes her fingers through my hair, eyes on mine. “You keep saying that and I’ll start to believe it.”

“Believe it. You are it, Bowie.” She leans her forehead on mine, closing her eyes. I close mine, too, drinking her in. “Are you tired now?”

With a soft chuckle, she nods, head still pressed on mine. “Yes. You’ve done it.”

I slap her ass gently. “Okay. Let me douse this fire and we should get some sleep. We’ve got a long day ahead of us tomorrow.”

“Yes, we do.”

As I cradle her body in front of me in bed, I feel like this is so right. Like this is the way it should have been all along. But whatever we had to go through to get here, was all worth it.

“Well, that didn’t take you long.” Jinny comments as she comes into my office like she owns the place.

“What didn’t take long?” I ask as she sits in the guest chair.

“You convincing Bowie to leave me for you.” Her eyes are dancing.

I snort a laugh. “Jealous?”

“No.” She says unconvincingly.

“You’re a shitty liar. But that’s also why you’re a fucking awesome HR manager.”

She changes the subject. “What’s the story with Axl?”

“What do you want to know about him?” I steeple my fingers together and rest them at my chin.

“Is he an alcoholic?”

“Let me guess. You like him but you’re worried that if you dip your toe in that ocean something might come back and bite you.”

“Yeah. You know that I’m a recovered alcoholic, and that’s one of the reasons why I’m not down with that. It’s cool if a guy enjoys a drink every now and again, but I can’t handle the falling down drunk all the time type, you know?”

“I get it. Look, Axl is a wild card, and I think you know that already. He’s not for you.

He’s not for anyone, frankly, until he calms the fuck down.

That’s why I won’t go into business with him and that’s why I tell every woman that I care about to stay the fuck away from him.

Until he’s over the whores and the drink, he’s a wrecking ball for anything solid.

” I lick my lips. “Unless you’ve already fucked him, and then, dude, you’re on your own. ”

“Why am I on my own?”

“Because he likes to chew women up and spit them out. But I don’t think that will be too much of a problem for you. You and him are like fucking male and female versions of each other, minus the drinking on his part.”

She levels with me. “Well, I didn’t sleep with him, but I know that he wants to fuck my brains out.”

“So, why don’t you? Isn’t that what you’re into to? Or are you finally coming down a peg and wanting something stable?” I ask, only partly condescending.

“Look at you. All grown up.” She teases. “You’ve come a long way from fucking your assistant.”

I smile. “Fuck you.”

She rises, knowing that I only had a minute to spare, as our production meeting is in five minutes. “I’m glad you’re happy.”

“Like I said. You’re a shitty liar.”

She smiles. “Fuck you.” With a friendly wink, she walks out of my office.

My phone rings and I take a couple of quick calls from staff before leaving for the meeting.

Normally, we have it in the boardroom, but today we have to get down and dirty with details of this European deal, so it’s in the shop.

Bowie is in there, in her coveralls, and I slide a clean pair on, too.

We go through some preliminary plans from the results of some meetings with Drummond Motors and discuss workflow.

That’s when a ‘v’ forms between Bowie’s brows.

She points out a flaw in the model that nobody noticed.

We spend the next two hours on a workaround for it, and then we move forward with a plan that my team and I had come up with before her arrival.

As the sun starts to set, while Bowie and I, and a few team members pound out

details, it eventually is just her and I, nearly in the middle of the night, still working but loving it.

I look at her and see that she's nowhere near done, just like me.

"Damn, I need to put your name in our company name, somehow." I blurt, feeling so goddamn happy for where we are.

She chuckles. "Jagger, I told you, that will just be a pain in the ass, and it isn't necessary at all.

You are letting me get my hands dirty and trusting me all the way there, and that's all that I can ask for.

" She kicks at a piece of lint on the floor and changes tack, turning slightly growly.

"It's more than I can say for fucking Boston, who I now know was just taking my ideas and the credit for them.

At least you let me be a part of everything, and I can't tell you how much that means to me.

I am a part of this company, and you don't let me forget it, and I don't need my name to be in it for that to be true.

" She puts a fist to her chest. "I feel it here and that's all that matters. "

I change the subject, even though a lightbulb goes off inside my head, but I don't want her to know about it yet.

"What do you say we throw this party in a month. We'll talk to Wesley and his crew

and invite them to come.

You can gauge if he wants the media to show or not.

I'll get Stevie on it. She can do all that shit and I know that she's itching for it ever since I told her about the deal.

That's half the reason why she threw that goddamn birthday party, and don't be fooled, otherwise. ”

“Sounds good.” Bowie agrees. “I think to keep our morale around here up, we need to celebrate.”

“Exactly. And we'll invite everyone. The team, family, friends, Wesley's team, we'll make it all about being a family. If you ask me, that's why Wesley took us on, because we have a very familial culture here.”

“Yeah, something that Kruger doesn't have. They're all about greed. There's no heart there.”

“I agree. And Wesley saw that. All kidding aside, he may like you more than the average Joe Blow business associate, but he invited us out there to get to know us. He doesn't want to just do business with some paycheck or a plan, he wants to have a real camaraderie.”

“I'll make some calls.” Bowie says.

“Yeah, me, too.”

But I end up doing more than just making calls.

...I make a call that changes my whole life forever.

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Bowie

My laptop is spread across my thighs as I sit up in bed, going through notes from Drummond Motors, trying to organize our production model a little more efficiently.

We had a mess of a production schedule at Kruger a dozen times, and I was the only one that could make sense of it and make it into something attainable.

Jagger is at his brother Rush's, going through some things, so that Halen knows what direction to go with resources.

Jinny is over there, too, since she's the HR manager, and she's dying to bring in new blood.

A news bulletin comes across my screen, and I realize that it's out in the open now.

The world knows that Lawson and Drummond have made an agreement. That's when my phone rings.

Heart pounding, I consider not answering it, but this is the first call that he's made since I left him. "Boston. What do you want." I open with. My voice is even, maybe cold, but unwavering.

"I see you hopped in the sack with both Jagger and Wesley Hopkins, huh." He clucks his tongue.

"That's not an answer. What do you want."

“I just wonder how many other men you plan to fuck to get what you want. Or to get Jagger what he wants, that is.”

“Fuck you, Boston. I haven’t done anything other than do my job, which is more than I can say for you, you son of a bitch.

It’s called loyalty. You could use a lesson on it.

” I’m about to hang up, but he stops me, just as I hear Jagger walk into the house.

I decide to put him on speakerphone, so that Jagger can overhear the bullshit.

“If you knew what loyalty was, I would never have fucked around on you, and you know it.”

“I was never anything other than loyal to you. You’re delusional, Boston.”

Jagger walks into the bedroom, hearing me speak my ex’s name, and his face goes from content to ‘what the fuck does that asshole want?’

“If you were loyal, you would never have left me and gone to that weasel Jagger.”

I guess I should have known that this call would come some day.

It should never have been expected for Boston to take this whole ordeal sitting down.

Not only did I leave him, but I left him and went to his archrival, and then we were awarded a life-altering deal that he wanted, too.

So, Boston got bitch slapped twice. Not saying that he didn’t deserve it, just pointing out the facts, and the karma.

That's when Jagger interjects. "That weasel Jagger is who gave Bowie what she deserved, jackass. All you did was make her work and take all the fucking credit. This girl is so fucking intelligent and hardworking, and all you ever did was fuck around on her in return. You got what was coming to you, Boston. So go to hell."

Jagger kisses me on the lips.

"Oh, isn't that sweet. You two lovebirds make me sick. I hope your friend Axl fucks you over like you've been fucking him over for years. You know, I should ask him if he wants to make a deal with me, since you're too much of a pussy to do it yourself." His tone is snide. He's all but spitting.

"You go right ahead, man. I wish you luck." Jagger scoffs, unscathed.

"Fuck you, asshole. I hope Bowie is a better fuck for you."

Jagger loosens his tie and removes it. "That's none of your fucking business, shithead. I'm sure your work has piled up to the fucking ceiling without her there to clean up after you. I hope you find someone else to change your fucking papers."

I interject. "I'm blocking your number now, Boston. Don't try to call me again."

"Fuck the two of you." He says and hangs up.

I sigh. "Well, I guess I had that coming."

Jagger undoes his shirt and tosses it in the laundry hamper. "You didn't have anything coming, Bowie. He was smarter keeping his distance. He tries that shit again and I'll file a fucking restraining order."

"That's unnecessary. Boston is a lot of talk and no action. Plus, he wasn't stupid

enough to threaten me. And with what? We already got the deal he wanted fair and square. Nobody knew about it until the article was released just now.”

“I told Stevie to keep it as concise as possible.”

“She did. And she had to include the part about me joining your team, too. There was no choice in the matter since Wesley wanted it that way.”

“Well, if that’s the worst-case scenario, I’ll take it. A little trash talk from Boston is nothing compared to what shit I thought would hit the fan.”

He undoes his pants and removes them, effectively giving me a little strip show that he’s not aware of.

I try to keep focused on the subject at hand, but I can feel myself pulsing in all the right places.

I can’t help it. Jagger is so fucking hot I can’t think.

And being in the office with him all day and half the night, without kissing him, without touching him, does things to me.

I decide to play this game and see if he picks up on anything.

As he takes off his pants, I pull my pajama shirt over my head, rendering myself naked.

My nipples bead instantly as he removes his underwear and places it in the hamper.

He’s naked. His dick is flaccid but perfect.

His muscles bulge as he walks to the ensuite bathroom to brush his teeth.

I watch him standing there, ample cock hanging down, biceps bulging as he works his teeth.

It takes everything in me not to rise and go suck his cock right in the bathroom.

The only thing that covers me on the bed right now is my laptop.

I try to look busy on my computer as he stands there, looking at his phone.

He peers over at me for a second, and that's when I see his cock twitch.

"You're looking awfully sexy there in your nakedness, batgirl."

I chuckle. "Batgirl?"

"A girl with a hidden mission."

"I see it's working." I comment, as his cock lengthens. After I close the lid on my laptop and set it on the nightstand, I part my legs fully, opening myself to him. He's about to walk to me, and I stop him. "No. I want to watch you."

"Watch me what?" He asks, lifting a brow.

"Get hard as a rock."

"Baby, I'll get hard as a rock the second I touch you."

I skate my hands down my breasts, to my clit. "I want to see if I can do it without you touching me."

“Bowie, you have all the magic powers.” He says, as his dick twitches again, rising.
“But I’ll play your game.”

“Will you?” I ask, my voice sultry, as I shove a finger inside myself.

He bites his lip as his dick hardens instantly. “Holy....fuuuuck.”

My finger goes in and out, getting wetter and wetter.

“You are not seriously going to make me stand here, with my dick pointing north, while you do that, are you?”

I go for playful. “I was just going to say what the fuck are you doing over there!”

He tilts his head and speaks warningly, with a playful snort.

“Why you...” He dives on the bed, hands first, face right into my wetness.

He sucks the clit, pulling it upward, opening me fully, as I writhe, desperate for him.

“Oh, baby, I’m going to make you come so hard for that. ” He speaks between sucks.

“You make me come hard, anyway. I want you to make me come and then fuck me hard.”

“Your wish is my command.” He answers, pushing his hands under my ass and licking my clit in the perfect spot, with the perfect amount of pressure.

I come in seconds, giving him absolutely no challenge at all, which I know is sort of a love slash hate thing for him.

He loves the challenge, but he also loves it when I come fast, too.

And all he has to say are a few words to drive me over the edge.

As I writhe and cry out, he sucks my clit, making the pleasure more intense, I could faint.

He kisses his way up my thigh as my climax ebbs, but he cleverly leaves a finger on my clit, rubbing it deliciously, keeping a rhythm as he makes his way up my body. “Turn on your side, baby.”

I do as he instructs, and he enters my wetness from behind, leaving the finger there, kissing my neck, making my eyeballs roll into the sockets. “God...Jagger!” I growl, feeling myself climb so fast this way. His cock is hitting me at a perfect angle inside, while his finger works the clit.

His thrusts are deep as I keep my leg lifted, giving him access, and his other hand reaches under me and squeezes my nipples. “Fuck! I’m gonna come, Jagger!” I hiss and groan, feeling my second orgasm come with ease.

He speeds, as I feel his cock engorge fully, riding on the coattails of my orgasm, and I reach back, squeezing his nipple, forcing him to come with me, for my third time.

His grunts and broken panting are so satisfying, as he empties inside me.

He kisses my neck as he slows, and our bodies relax.

When he pulls out of me, he slides his hand up my body, caressing me.

“Sleep, baby.” He whispers, kissing me behind the ear.

“You, too.”

I hear him swallow and then breathe deeply. On exhale, he says. “I love you, baby.”

“I love you, too.”

I lean over and turn out the light and we sleep like lambs.

...until morning...

Jagger

I think I’m dreaming until I look over and see that Bowie’s head is not on the pillow.

When I look down, I see her head bobbing up and down, sucking my rock-hard dick like it’s the last thing she’ll ever do.

“Jesus fucking Christ.” I breathe, feeling the come approaching the tip already.

She must have started fucking me with her mouth while I was in a deep sleep.

I wake up with morning wood almost every day, so she must have been.

..enticed. My cock is so hard it feels like it’ll explode, and her mouth on it looks so fucking hot I almost can’t bear to look.

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She turns so she's sideline, and I pull her ass towards me, hungry to taste her.

Her clit is upright, all hard from fucking me with her mouth, and I suck it, tasting her arousal, reaching for her tits, squeezing her nipples, feeling her sucking harder from the encouragement.

And it's on. Tongue battering her faster, I feel her ass moving, signaling how close she is, but that doesn't stop her from sucking harder and faster, too.

It's like I'm spurring her on. That's when I feel her stomach contracting, and then I feel her clit quiver, and she moans, coming on my face, creating such a fucking sexy vibration on my cock that I come, too.

I come all in her mouth as she comes at my face, and it's the sexiest fucking thing I've ever done before in my life.

I've sixty-nined before but never ending that way.

My cock explodes in her mouth, and she takes it like a champ, while she comes on my tongue.

She rolls over onto her back and we're both spent.

"Fuck, that was...fucking amazing." I pant.

"It was. I can't believe I pulled that off."

“You’re a goddess, Bowie. Don’t you forget it.” I roll over and kiss her thigh.

She chuckles warmly. “Well, that’s a great way to start the day.”

“Agreed.” I grunt, getting up as I hear my alarm clock going off. “You care to share a shower with me, baby?”

“I’ve got an email I need to take care of while it’s still fresh in my head.”

I lift a brow. “You were thinking about that while you were doing that?”

She smiles, lifting onto her elbows. “I have notes in my phone. I’ve got to compile the email before I forget.”

“You have an assistant, Bowie. Why don’t you get her to do that.”

“It’s for Wesley.” She winks. “You know...my boyfriend?”

She loves to tease me. I chuckle. “You are a vixen. Play that man like a fiddle and I’ll fuck you like an animal again.”

“I’ll fuck you like an animal.” She quips, walking away from me, gloriously naked. I can’t not watch her walk away.

“Hey. Where are you going?” I call after her, missing her already.

“To get my phone. I’ll be right back.”

For those twenty seconds, I have an epiphany.

More like a giant light bulb turns on in my head, reminding me of something that I’ve

always thought about, that I've always dreamed of, and it's something that now would eliminate a huge issue that I've had since the beginning of the new beginning.

When she comes back into the bedroom, eyes on her phone, so beautifully naked, that I feel like I fall in love with her all over again.

"I figured out how to make it so your name is part of Lawson Enterprises."

She lifts her head from her phone for a second. "Jagger, I told you, it doesn't matter." I wait, letting her finish writing the email. "There. That should eliminate the problem."

"What problem?"

"I just gave him an update on Boston. Evidently my ex wasn't stupid enough to threaten me or you, but he was stupid enough to threaten Wesley.

He told him that he was making a huge mistake doing business with us.

I set him straight and told him that Boston had made a call to you and I last night, too.
"

"Boston will fry for that."

"Exactly."

My eyes search hers.

"What's the matter, Jagger?"

"I just..." I trail off, wanting to come out and say this without making it sound like a

hidden agenda, without making it sound like I haven't given my heart and soul to this woman, just for one thing.

"You just what?" She's concerned.

I take her hand in mine, but instead of just holding my hand, she holds me to her.

"Jagger, I love you. There isn't anything that you can tell me that can change that.

" She pulls back so her eyes search mine and mine search hers.

"Now, I know that it bothers you, that you feel like you have something to prove to me, and you think that by putting my name on the business, that that proves it, but I've told you more than once now that it doesn't matter. "

My hands cup her face. "There is one way that this business can also be your name....marry me. Take my name."

Her eyes widen for a moment. "You...you want to get married?"

"I want to marry you ." I clarify. "I never thought I would really want to, but now I do. You and I...we were meant to be together forever...since high school. You are the one. You are the only woman for me, Bowie. I've never loved another woman.

And I never will. And this way, you can also be a Lawson, and then you'll be part of this company just like I am. "

She blinks, but she isn't frozen, she isn't pulling back, she isn't recoiling. She's shocked. I've completely taken her by surprise.

"I...I don't have a ring or anything, and we're both naked, so you don't have to say

yes right now.

I mean, this isn't exactly the proposal you were probably hoping for, but I just felt it.

It hit me as soon as you left the room. It hit me that I want to be your husband, and I want you to be my wife, and I don't want to go anywhere else or be with anyone else unless you're with me.

I don't ever want to lose you again, and that fucker Boston was insane to never marry you.

I want to. I want to be the guy that watches you grow old and loves you every day for the rest of your life and mine, and I don't want it to be my life anymore.

I want it to be our life, and...will you marry me?

"I chuckle, knowing that I'm rambling like a fucking idiot.

She gasps a chuckle at me.

"Okay, so I fucking suck at proposing, okay?" I admit with another chuckle.

She smiles, as tears form in her eyes. "No." She swallows, grinning, as I watch a tear fall down her cheek. "You nailed it."

I grin, prompting her with a hand gesture. "Will you...?"

With a nod, she cups her face, and I envelop her with my arms, kissing her head. "God, I love you."

"I love you."

“Jesus Christ, Jagger. Are you crazy?” Halen chortles, as I pull up to the party venue in my Bel-Air.

“Why would driving my car here be crazy?”

“Because...where the fuck are you going to park the goddamn thing?”

“In the underground parking. It’s secure.”

“Fine.”

“Besides, it goes with my suit, and it makes for a great getaway car if this thing goes to shit.”

“Why the fuck you had to invite the whole fucking world to this I’ll never understand. Egotistical much? I mean, the whole fucking world already knows now that you got the biggest fucking automotive deal of the century.”

“So, if everyone already knows, why does it make such a big fucking difference?”

“Because you’re rubbing it in everyone’s faces, that’s why.”

“So? It’s call PR, man. Go talk to Stevie. Have this same conversation with her. She’ll set you straight.” I pat him on the shoulder, and he leans up, off the car door, letting me drive to the underground parking.

Once I get inside, I see that my sister has outdone herself.

The place looks even better than the circus we’ll call our birthday party.

It looks well put together, with linen-covered tables, place cards, a dance floor, a DJ

that doesn't suck, since me and Bowie hired him personally, for his knack for discretion.

I see Bowie standing by her mother and my mother, and I approach her.

She's dressed in a beautiful cream silk gown with scalloped edges that exposes her legs just below her knees.

"God, you look beautiful, baby." I tell her, giving her a kiss on the mouth.

I still haven't gotten her an engagement ring yet, and we haven't told a soul yet that we're engaged, for our own reasons.

The look on her mom's face is telling. She adores me as much as I adore her, so I go over and give her a big hug, and then I hug my own mother as well.

"Congratulations on convincing Mister Hopkins to work with you, Jagger." Bowie's mom says.

"Oh, don't just congratulate me. Congratulate Bowie, and, in fact, this whole room. That's why we're throwing this shindig." I wink at Bowie.

Sure, the guest count is overkill. There are over two hundred and fifty people here, but this is a once in a lifetime deal, and therefore, it deserves a once in a lifetime treatment.

Hell, even my father and a couple of my uncles are here.

It took a month to plan it, but Stevie is a miracle worker, and it shows.

"Hey, little brother." Stevie says, giving me a hug.

It's funny how she calls me her little brother.

We were born only two minutes apart. "We're all set. " She winks at me. "You ready?"

I look at Bowie. "I was born ready."

She smiles at me.

"Good. Then, you better get to it, because Axl's already into the sauce." Stevie informs.

"Greeeeat. Where's Jinny? She seems to be able to distract him lately." I comment, looking around.

The venue has the tables arranged in a horseshoe shape around the dance floor, then the bar is off to the left side, the DJ is to the right, and the podium is next to the DJ. Wesley and his crew have their own tables on the same side as our crew. "I'll go see if he's ready to do our thing."

Wesley sees me approaching and he smiles. "Shall we flip to see who gets to go first?"

"That's your call, sir. I'm happy to do it though."

"No, my boy, I'll do it. Just let me make my way up there to the podium."

"Bowie and I will be right behind you, sir."

I gesture to her, but she's already approaching. "You ready?"

“Let’s do it.” She nods.

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Wesley approaches the podium and the music stops.

He clears his throat. “Welcome, all of you. I’m so glad to be here in North Carolina, to celebrate this opportunity.

A fine opportunity to do business with a company that is all heart.

That’s what I take pride in because that’s what’s important.

My team and I share the same values, and I wanted to do business with like-minded individuals, which is what we are lucky enough to have with Lawson Enterprises.

And that’s why we’re here tonight. To celebrate.

Because what is life without celebration? ”

Clapping, hooting.

“It also doesn’t hurt that there’s an open bar, right?” Wesley jokes. Then he looks over at Bowie.

“Oh, great. Here it comes.” I murmur to her and she elbows me.

“When I was growing up, my father told me to never trust a woman. They’re emotional, they only want to bear children, spend your money, or sleep with your best friend.

It's obvious that I learned how untrue that is, since I have a lovely wife that supports me in all my endeavors, but I've recently learned that not only are women supportive, but there are plenty that are so hardworking, they put some men to shame.

" He says with a chuckle, which receives some chuckles in the room.

"What I'm trying to say, since I've gone off script here, is that Bowie Ritter is a marvel.

This woman is the backbone of Lawson Enterprises, and one of the main reasons why I chose to partner with them.

Do not underestimate the power of a woman.

Mark my words. We're going to build incredible cars that will change the world.

" He raises his glass and we can hear people say, 'hear hear!'

Once the clapping ends, Wesley steps out of the way, so that Bowie and I can make our short speeches.

She goes first. "I'm very humbled by your remarks, Mister Hopkins, but I assure you that our success is built from all the people in this room, make no mistake.

I'm happy to have joined Lawson Enterprises, and I have so many ideas, some that have already come to fruition, and others that are just in their infancy.

But you're right about one thing, sir, and that is that we're going to build vehicles that will be lifechanging.

So, let's all mark this new beginning with a celebration!

” She raises her glass and gets the same response as Wesley did.

When the clapping ends for her, I step up to the podium.

I clear my throat first before speaking.

“When I started this business, I had so many dreams, and I was happy if even half of them came true. But this has turned into a lifetime of dreams coming true.” I look over at Stevie, who is at the ready.

“But recently, it’s been about new beginnings, like the one that we’re celebrating here tonight.

” I give Stevie the cue. “But since you’re all here tonight, Bowie and I wanted to celebrate something else together. ”

I look over at my brothers and my parents, who are sitting at their tables.

They’re confused, which is to be expected.

But once they see the venue crew bringing out a floral altar, and they see the pastor walk in from the door behind the DJ, the first thing I see is my mother’s hands go on her face.

Once mine and Bowie’s family has caught on, they’re standing up, whistling, hooting, and making so much noise, you’d think we were at Times Square on goddamn New Year’s Eve. Jinny being the loudest.

The whole room is clapping as the venue crew lay down a silk runner that leads to the altar, and Bowie signals to her father to come walk her down the aisle.

He practically runs to her, giving her a big hug, and I look at my mom, who is wiping

her eyes with her fingertips, beaming with pride.

I signal to my brothers to join me at that altar, and they just about fall all over themselves, probably because they've already been into the sauce, but whatever.

Axl runs over, too, and I let him, since he's about as close as you can get to being an honorary brother.

Bowie points Jinny to the other side of the altar, and she barrels her way there, practically dancing.

Gotta say, this is the funnest wedding I've ever been to.

Everyone is making it what it is: a good time.

The DJ gives the pastor a microphone and he speaks into it.

The first thing he says is. "This is my first spontaneous wedding, and I have to say, they're highly underrated. "

Fist pumping, animated growls, shouts of encouragement, similar to what you'd get if this was some sort of Olympic event. The DJ takes over for a second. "Are we ready?"

The entire room shouts a resounding, "Yes!", and the pastor gives Bowie and her dad a nod, indicating that they can start walking down the makeshift aisle.

I watch my bride take steps towards me, smiling from ear to ear, and I'm mirroring her.

Halen playfully punches me in the arm. "Way to go, man."

I grin at him. “Thanks. Now shut the fuck up so that I can get married.”

He chuckles. “Be my guest.”

Bowie arrives at the altar, and her dad kisses her on the cheek.

As soon as the pastor tells us to take each other’s hands so that we can say our vows, it all becomes a blur to me.

All I can think about is how beautiful she is and how fucking lucky I am.

Her eyes are on me the whole time, as we recite our vows, until the moment that I place the ring on her finger.

When we finally kiss as a newlywed couple, my heart skips a beat.

It’s real. She’s now my wife. I’m her husband.

We get to spend the rest of our lives together.

I’m so happy when he says. “You may now kiss your bride.” That I lift her up in the air and swing her around once, kissing her as I go.

She squeals with glee, and then when her feet are planted back on the floor, I give her a New York style kiss, and dip her, supporting her back with my hand.

Stevie hired a fucking fantastic photographer, who’s like a goddamn ninja, and he gets in there to snap a shot of us kissing like that.

After we sign the official documents, I walk up to the podium and say. “Now we’ve got two reasons to party!”

And it's the best fucking party. The party of the century.

Guess who ends up in the goddamn tabloids the next day, dancing on a table with Jinny?

...Axl, of course.

I offer to buy my new wife an engagement ring the next day, too.

You know what she said?

She'd rather have a fucking cock ring.

...yeah, I married the right girl.