

Forrest

Gia Hunter

STORYPDF

Complete English text · US Letter reading edition

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About this edition

This StoryPDF reading edition contains the complete English text, with its original paragraph and section order preserved.

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Chapter 1 Nightmare

FORREST

“AHHH.” A deep groan broke from the Night Stalker Club office as I passed by.

Fucktastic!

A loud thud followed, vibrating the door. This was fucking ridiculous. Call me old-fashioned, but they could do it at home before they came over.

I quickened my pace toward the entrance of the rooftop. Sex noise didn’t surprise me, but considering my friends were the ones making those noises, it was awkward. I couldn’t listen to that. I couldn’t blame them if they wanted a quick fuck with their wives though. They had the best lives, but ignoring the stabbing pain settling in my chest was hard.

At the rooftop, the sun just sat down from the horizon. My eyes were steady as I watched the red, orange, and yellow colors before the twilight beckoning the sky. Those colors reminded me of fire, passion, danger, energy, happiness, and hope.

I leaned my elbows against the concrete parapet, flicked the ash from my cigarette, and breathed in the remaining inch I lit up while watching for the sun to set.

The lights started to scintillate around me to somehow light up the darkness surrounding the city. I stubbed the butt till it stopped smoking. Exhaust and city pollution came back to life.

I knew people said cigarette smoking was dangerous to your health, but this thing was a reminder that life wasn’t fair. People thought I was a weird shit to choose a deadly companion than a woman—that I didn’t have a beating organ in my body, that I was an ice king if that even existed. What they didn’t know was, I was a good guy, that I didn’t even like this another part of me, but it grew inside me already, and I had to embrace it for some reason.

The thing was, hard life taught me to be prepared.

The only question was, would I ever want to be that person anymore? The old version of myself—when I felt I was a better version of who I was today?

I walked down and met the nightclub manager, Kyland in the locker room. I quickly cleared my mind and pretended I didn’t hear what happened earlier.

“Bro.” He patted my back.

"Hey." I wore my black button-down shirt and rolled each sleeve above my elbows. My tattoo peeked out. It was an orange flame full of anger with black smoke swirled from my wrists up to my arms.

"How's your trip?"

"Great. Thanks for arranging my sched."

"Anytime."

"Got to go to work. Bills won't pay itself." I wore my black apron with the club logo and walked out.

The former notorious playboy, Pyke Hughes, the club owner didn't give a damn about the uniform. I was glad he preferred black.

The main bar had its dimly-lit dived with only yellow lights emblazoned from the low ceiling. Monday was not the busiest, but the customers entered in somewhat rush as soon as the club sign lit open.

The music visualizer from the 3D walls created colorful particles in balls shaped that synchronized to the beat of the 90's pop song played by the DJ from the booth towering the dance floor.

The lady in a black dress ordered a dry martini, taking a seat on the dark barstool. Her makeup was simple as if she just came from long hours of work. She tapped her colorless perfectly manicured nails against the bar counter leisurely. Based on her dress, she didn't come here to flirt and walk out with a man wrapping around her slender waist and have a wild night, but she was waiting for someone to arrive. Perhaps a friend.

I grabbed the cocktail shaker, filling it with ice, gin, and vermouth I took from the back bar. I stirred it for a few seconds. Placing down the martini glass on the counter, I strained the mix and garnished it with olives. "Here you go, ma'am."

She gave me a polite smile, muttering thank you.

After working for more than two years as a bartender, I'd learned quite a few, and not only on mixing drinks but also the different types of people; from rich kids, playboy, bad boy, flirt ladies, cheating husband, horny guys, brokenhearted, dirty business, and sex, but I also developed a good relationship with my friends despite cynical behavior.

I placed down the order for table-four.

"I got this." Dice, my barback took the tray with drinks to the couple at the dark red C shaped lounge chair with a half-moon-shaped silver table. With only a red light illuminated around the area, it was perfect for lovers and lonely hearts.

I did my job, and time passed by like a blur. Sometimes, I wanted it that way—it made me forget something I had in mind for the time being.

“Wanna stay for a while?” Kyland asked, opening a bottle of beer.

I shook my head.

Our boss didn’t leave yet either. Pyke settled in front of the bar counter, grabbing the beer that Kyland had just opened. “Thanks, Wright!”

“That’s mine, man.” Kyland groaned.

I chuckled inwardly. They were literally brothers-in-law now. Pyke married Camila, Kyland’s cousin.

“Wanna take it back? Go ahead.” Pyke raised the beer to offer back and laughed while Kyland was glaring back at him. “Then go grab another one.”

“Can’t take for your own, dude?” Kyland scowled.

“What’s gotten into you, Wright? Does your wife not good at giving you orgasms?” Pyke teased.

I had to blink back the thought of what had just happened earlier because if my memory served right, Pyke was quite clueless of them almost bringing down the door.

“Leave her alone, Hughes!”

They talked about sex quite often when they were both single and might have shared women before. I had no idea. They quitted the moment they were in their serious relationship. I guessed people did change because no one had seen it coming that Pyke and Kyland stopped their sexual escapades.

“How about you, Wood? When are you going to have sex? What I mean sex, the hardcore kind, kinky, and dirty. Have you lost your guymen yet?” Pyke smirked at me.

Kyland snorted. “Are you trying to liberate him?”

“Just trying to figure him out, Wright.”

They might have a few thought I didn’t like women or I was into dick, but who gave a shit?

I shrugged it off. “My sexual exploitation is just fine.”

“Really? Do you have a girlfriend? I know you’re not married, but I never saw you going out of the club with a woman either. Waiting for a perfect girl, huh?” Pyke faced me, piquing his interest.

I shook my head. “No girlfriend. No wife. But I can assure you I have a sex life.”

Kyland and Pyke burst into laughter, high-fiving each other.

“Then why do you ask for days off every last week of the month?” Of course, Pyke would ask.

“I have to travel to see my family.” I only had a long conversation with them when they invited me during a weekend or if it was not a work-related topic. I thought they respected my privacy and never asked personal questions, but I caught Pyke often intently staring at me as if he was studying what was behind my facade.

“Of course.” He nodded subtly, seemed not to buy my reason.

After bidding goodbye, I walked out of the employee exit to where I parked my Onyx black 2001 Chevy Camaro Z28. I checked my phone for a call from someone as soon as I got inside. Zero.

I pressed the music icon on the screen of the GPS. Instantly, Simple Man played over the Bose speakers. I pulled out into the driveway, tapping my fingers on the wheel to the beat of the old rock music.

Not less than an hour, I arrived at my pad. My pad was secured by an advanced security system that I installed myself. It had a camera on the peephole that no one would even notice. I inserted the key and pressed my thumb above the door handle with a small black square for fingerprint scanning. In less than three seconds, the door clicked unlocked.

I locked the door after double-checking to make sure things were in the right places. I chose the colors according to my preferences—black, gray, and white. The dark gray curtain was drawn to block the light from the outside of the floor to ceiling glass window.

Exhaustion took over me. I’d been awake for more than twenty-hours now. I slumped body to my authentic crocodile skin couch and kicked my shoes off and massaged my temples.

My mind went back to my phone. No call. I hit the number on my speed dial and it was picked up right away considering the timezone there. “Any update?”

Bill Lioner, my tech geek presented our proposal to the Diabetic Research Center in New York two months ago about our proposed project, the Advanced Insulin Glucose Monitoring System or AIGMS. Unfortunately, they turned it down.

As much as I didn’t want to disappoint him, I couldn’t let his hope high. But if he believed in me and this project, I should at least believe in what we did. I knew Bill and his team worked their asses hard to get this deal. I just hoped it paid their effort.

“We’re halfway through it. We could use a brain you know—”

“I am busy.” I cut off Bill. His brain was more than enough for the project, and he knew it. “That’s why everyone is paid handsomely.”

“Right.” I could feel his disappointment even from a hundred miles away. “I’ll email you for the update after two months.”

“Make it after two weeks. I’ll arrange a video conference.”

“T-That’s impossible,” he stammered.

“I am not in a patient mode right now, Lioner. Make it possible.” My voice came out sharp. Bill even gasped from the other end of the line, and he was aware that we were almost running out of time

“Absolutely, sir.” I knew how much this project meant for him. If we could make a breakthrough, he would be the first to get the benefit since he’d been diagnosed with Type II Diabetes back in college.

“Good.” Before I could hang up, something came up my mind. “Bill, I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright, sir.

“I actually have an idea. I don’t know if it’s possible.”

“I’m listening. Nothing is impossible, Forrest.”

I couldn’t help but smile when he called my name. “Let’s say you’re right. Is it possible to put the monitor and the treatment together?”

“You’re saying—”

“I know it sounds crazy—”

“Brilliant! Call me after a week.”

My brow met in confusion. “Okay?” I hung up the call. Instantly, my lids felt heavy.

“Mama! Mama!” I shouted as I ran toward our burning house.

People from our small village were already in chaos with buckets of water to cease the fire. I bit the hairy arm who tried to stop me, then ran faster as soon as I freed myself. I slammed the door with my body and ignored them yelling my name because I knew my mama was trapped inside.

“Mama!” I coughed furiously. My eyes stung, tears streaming down my flushed face. I couldn’t see anything other than the thick dark smoke coming from the kitchen.

“Mama!” I blindly walked and used my hands as my guide.

I opened my eyes slowly the moment I reached the kitchen doorjamb. It was difficult to watch the scorching of huge flame devouring Mama's cabinet filled with her Chinaware collections. It was like watching a starving animal eating its prey with an enormous appetite.

"Mama!" I shouted, running to where my mama was crawling out under our old wooden table, where we shared many meals. Her swollen eyes were pleading, filled with horror, sadness, and pain.

"G-go, m-my s-sweet boy. S-save yourself," Mama choked her words out, making me shake to cry.

There was blood everywhere—on her beautiful face, her favorite white blouse, and on her hands as she pushed me away from her.

"Mama! No, Mama!" I gripped her wrists, dragging her out under the table, but she was too heavy, and she was pulling her hands out of my grip.

I cried for help, but there were no words came out, instead, I continued coughing as the black smoke entered and burned my lungs, making me wheeze and breathe harder. I quickly crawled under the table, ignoring the unbearable heat against my skin that I felt I was melting under. I covered my mama with my body, closed my eyes, and took the fate that was written for me.

The flame reached the table quickly, to my shirt and licked my skin greedily. The pain was excruciating, and I was helpless to fight.

Chapter 2 Fired

MEGAN

Suckstastic!

IT HAD been eight days since I lost my job. Eight days of wallowing in self-pity at the four corners of my apartment—alone. And every time I closed my eyes, all I saw was the image flickering of my evil boss as he tried to violate me. He was a shameless piece of shit and thought I would just welcome his loser dick because he had one.

Since I kneed him on his balls and punched his wrinkled ugly face, I hadn't seen or heard from him again. I was immensely grateful and scared at the same time that cops would just knock on my door informing me that someone sued me for assault.

I'd never been violent in my entire life, in fact, I was always a victim. Then I saw red when he tried to do that thing that I was scared of. My instinct kicked in, and I did what I thought was right to save a little morality I had left.

It was passed six when I got out of my bed. I tried hard to ignore my urge to call Camila and Bianca because I knew they were both busy with their husbands. And at this time, Blaine was busy playing with Ben and Sammy—who wouldn't? those kids were adorable. Lucky for them, they met men who respected, loved and treasured them like true gems. But luck was not on my side though, and I doubted if I could trust my heart to any man over again.

I checked my phone, of course, no calls, no messages—no one cared. Naught.

My life sucks!

The Night Stalker Club was crowded. The noises always made me feel alive, reminding me that I still had a reason to live despite my life had been turned upside down a couple of times, reeled and grief-stricken—I still managed to pull myself together. Yay to me!

I passed through the crowd and approached the bar. Thankfully, I found an empty barstool and rested my elbows on the dark counter, tapping my blood red-colored nails as if I wasn't drowning with self-pity earlier.

My heart was speeding up in a second of anticipation as I scanned around, but I couldn't find him. Was he off work today?

“Caipirinha, please?”

Dice, a bartender with Afro head nodded. The staff knew me through Camila and Pyke. I hummed to the pop song played by the DJ at his booth.

A few moments later, Dice placed down my drink and placed another order from the man beside me who wore a strong perfume. I turned my head slightly to check him out. He was wearing a sophisticated tailored suit with shiny personalized cuff links. He was rich, probably had his own office in Manhattan business district.

He raised his Jack on the rocks to acknowledge me and sipped it, then slightly turned to face me.

I smiled timidly and sipped my Brazilian drink, and let the grassy herbaceous taste of cachaça washed over my loneliness. Wash, huh? Ridiculous!

"Hi," he prompted, smiling confidently. You're rich but not attractive. I don't feel all tingly.

I must say though, this man was tall and physically fit, but I didn't come here tonight to flirt and get laid just to get rid of this sorrow churning inside me. I still couldn't forget what that dipshit did to me. I guessed I was born jinx after all.

"I'm waiting for someone." I crossed my legs to avoid touching his knees.

"He should be here by now. Shouldn't let a beautiful woman wait." He raised an eyebrow, testing. Oh, god! Stop flirting already.

I wanted to roll my eyes, instead, I smiled. "What made you think I am waiting for a... man?"

His eyes glinted wickedly. "As gorgeous as you." He strolled his gaze from my face to my chest, to my exposed thighs. "It would be a waste."

"You're maybe right, but I am really waiting for someone."

"At least let me entertain you while you're waiting for his grand entrance." Back off, already! Your cufflinks are too shiny for my taste. He extended his hand. "Asher." Oh, come on! Aren't you a little persistent?

I reluctantly raised my hand to shake his.

"Megan."

Startled, I choked on my heart and my pulse pounded in my ears. My head snapped to the strong and deep voice behind the bar.

Forrest had his dark eyes narrowed at me so intense that made me gulp, with dark thick brows squished together. His straight nose was flaring, his jaw was locked tight that made his jawline sharper.

“Il est tellement chaud.” I thought it was my voice.

His gaze made my knees tremble. This man always carried the pain, mystery, and broody character, but he was damn beautiful with his imperfection. His powerful presence caught me hyper-aware that had my body tense and my vagina shamelessly reacted. Oops! I shouldn’t have thought of that. Too late, Megan.

“Forrest.” I coughed his name.

He took a few moments to somewhat assess me before he talked again. “You okay?”

I nodded. Suddenly, it came to my senses that I’d been staring at him for a couple of seconds and not saying anything. It was always this way.

“Yeah.” My word came unsure.

“Can I get you another drink?” He looked down at my almost empty glass.

My hand turned shaky as I pushed the glass toward him. “Yes, please.”

A man on my left side cleared his throat. I completely forgot I was about to shake his hand. “So, you’re Megan.”

I glanced at him. “He’s here.”

“Wait a sec. You’re dating that bartender?” Did I say anything about dating? He gestured his head to the magnificent back of Forrest who was wearing a black shirt, sleeves were rolled up his elbows, showing off his flames tattooed that I found it intriguing and sexy.

I preferred a clean guy, but it just looked damn good on him. Sometimes I wondered if he had a few more tattoos underneath the dark shirt he was wearing. Did his abs or deep V covered with tattoos as well or did he have a piercing on his flagpole? Bad bad girl, Meggie.

I leisurely watched his biceps bulged as he busied himself mixing. “Nope.”

“Your brother then?”

I snapped my head and stared at the man for good seconds. I opened my mouth, but before I could speak, Forrest placed the drink in front of me.

“Back off, dude. You’re not her type.” Forrest’s voice was deep and harsh, but I could feel that was intentional.

“You’re one to talk.”

“What do you think?”

My mouth slacked open and parched because Forrest didn't even open his mouth if he didn't have to. He was a man of a few words. He used to brood than to spend his time talking to someone like this pompous dumbass beside me.

Forrest always intrigued us. I just didn't have the gut to even talk to him if I didn't have a choice. He intimidated me like a predator, but something deep inside me triggered every time we locked our gazes—it was like rolling of thunder with warmth and desire, but I had to keep it to myself because he was a friend in my circles. But boy, that's a damn shame because he looks so good.

"You're a bartender, dude. Don't stick your nose where it doesn't belong. I am just asking a beautiful lady over here—"

"Just like you asked another beautiful lady yesterday?"

"What is your problem?"

"My problem? Didn't she tell you she was waiting for someone?" Oh, he heard me?

My eyes ping-ponged between them while I was trying to process that they were arguing because of me, yet, I couldn't tell them to stop.

Clearly, Forrest pissed off Asher. The dude's face was flaming red and stoned hard. "I can make a complaint against your rudeness behavior and make sure you can't find another job even sweeping dog shits in the street."

"And I am so shaking," Forrest answered confidently.

"Asshole!" Asher barked harshly.

"You're not the first time to call me that." He grabbed the empty glass on my left and a few dollar bills.

"Forrest, what are you doing?" I asked him, finally finding my voice to speak.

"I don't know," he mumbled under his breath, then pinned his gaze at me.

"You could be in trouble."

"Who gives a damn? What are you doing here? Alone."

"I'm a customer." I shrugged.

Forrest shifted his gaze to my back, and I noticed Asher left his stool.

"This is for you, asshole." He threw the bills toward the counter then walked away.

Forrest picked them up from the floor, then Asher's empty glass.

I waited until he would talk to me again, but he kept himself busy with the other customers and never came back to me as if I didn't exist anymore, and it pissed me off. He passed by me when he had to take orders. The rest of the evening remained uneventful.

Feeling insignificant, I drained my drink empty. After a few deep breaths, I pulled myself together, took a few bills from my clutch and placed it on the counter.

What happened to me? I wasn't this attention seeker. I could get attention from any man I wanted. I had a fair share, but I knew that they only wanted one thing from me, and that was what I hated myself for. Or perhaps, I wanted something more. Something else. Or more so, someone. I shook the images of my past life as they passed by in a slow blur and walked out of the club, hoping not to return.

I stayed inside my car for a while, resting my head against the headrest. I couldn't let my failures consumed me. I needed to find a job, moved on, and forgot those damages happened in my past.

I couldn't depend on my friends every time I had a problem—we weren't like before anymore. They had priorities than to listen to my sad life stories that no one could fix it other than me.

People thought I had a perfect life because what they saw in me was the flirty and funny Megan, and not the damaged woman behind these walls I built years ago.

I started my car when my eyes started to blur. So much for an emotionally unavailable bitch! A knock had my head snapped to my window.

"Megan?"

Crap!

Chapter 3 Fuck Off!

FORREST

Where the fuck is she?

SHE JUST left! I was just waiting for my break to chat with her, then I found her seat empty. There was no way she went with that jackass!

I had a few ideas about Megan's history of hook-ups, but I was the last person to judge her—she was a consenting adult. I just didn't want her to mix with that scumbag of all the people because he had a flashy card at his disposal.

"I'll be right back." I patted Dice on his shoulder and took off my apron.

My blood was already boiling, and I badly wanted to light a stick if I wasn't still working. I strode toward the exit, hoping to apologize for butting into their chin-wag earlier.

She couldn't have gone far. The smell of pees and cigarette assaulted my senses as I scanned the area where Megan could possibly park her car. I sprinted to the parking lot, thankfully, her car tail lights were still on.

A red haze gathered behind my eyelids as soon as I spotted her outside her car.

Shit!

"Megan!" I ran toward her, already quivering with rage. Pictures of her being harassed flashed in my brain when I noticed her on the ground, leaning against her car, seemingly shaking with her face buried in her hands.

As I got closer, I could hear her sobs that had me perplexed for a moment. This couldn't be from drinking. I'd been watching her drunk her ass for years, and she was only on her second shot.

"Megan, are you okay?" I knelt in front of her and held her arms.

"Get off of me!" She jerked away from my grasp, terrified.

"It's alright. It's me, Forrest. Are you okay?" I spelled out and held her tightly as I inspected her for possible injury.

"I don't need you! All of you, assholes!" She yelled between sobs.

"Just tell me if you're okay to drive home and I won't bother you again." Damn it! What am I even doing here? It was because she was a friend of my girls, and they would knee my balls if they found out I left their best friend alone. And she's Megan, dumbass!

"Just leave me alone."

I loosened her arms on my grip, and there was no way I would hurt her further. When she tried to stand up, I followed suit and took a step back. And that was when a chill of apprehension swept over me. Her nose was bleeding and had a hand imprinted on her left cheek.

I was already balling my hands into fists before I could ask her. "Who the fuck did that to you?"

"I'm fine. Just go. Why do you even suddenly care?" She wiped off the bloodstain with the back of her hand and gave me a cold stare.

She's a total mess. She wasn't like this. I wondered what happened to her for the past few days. The Megan I knew was funny and flirty who didn't filter and never cared how people would judge her. But this woman in front of me was a completely different person. She's lost.

"Is that a handprint of that motherfucker?" The urge to lifting my hand to wipe the blood from her nose had me shaking.

Her chest puffed out, ready to throw me a pit. She was still crying though. Tears were streaming down her smeared face.

"If you didn't stick your nose into and humiliate him in the first place, he wouldn't have come to do this to me!"

I had to look away and gulped down an inhale of air. "He's a jackass, Megan, but I shouldn't have done that. I apologize for my abominable behavior earlier."

"Just leave me alone. I'll live, and it's not the first time like this happen anyway."

"What do you mean? Do you know him?"

"You mean if I fucked him?" Her brow arched.

I winced at her bluntness. There was something inside me triggered, and I didn't even want to think about it right now. It just hardened and twisted my gut even though I knew her who never care to filter her words.

"I don't care about who you sleep with, Megan—"

"Then why are you here and why did you have to poke your nose in?"

"I don't know. Can I get you something for your nose?" Jesus! I was a complete idiot. "Ice maybe."

She rolled her eyes and grabbed the door handle of her car. "I don't need your help. Not now. You should've talked to me a long time ago if you wanted to."

"What do you—?"

She faced me, fury filled her eyes. "It means I don't need you, okay? Just fuck off!"

A person I ever cared about came flashing back in my mind, making me shudder. It felt like she was telling me that I was a terrible person. After all, she was right, and I felt guilty about it.

"Okay." I clenched my jaw as I tried controlling my mouth not to say any words anymore. It was my fault she was harassed, but I had the feeling that that jackass would just hurt her even more if they ended up in his bed.

Why did I even care? Of course, I knew the answer.

"Bro." Kyland tapped my shoulder after placing an order to the bearded guy.

"Yup?" I grabbed a glass and poured ice cubes for the order Whiskey on the rocks.

"See those girls?" He gestured his head to the dark corner booth.

I could barely see them, but one thing that caught my attention was the bare back of the woman in a red dress with a chin-length haircut. I forced a swallow as I strolled my gaze from her shoulder down to her spine. I felt the rush of blood surging through my veins in an instant. My skin vibrated with primal desires and insatiable hunger the longer I checked her out.

"W-Who's she?" I cleared my throat. My mouth dried. "I-I mean who are they?"

Kyland eyed me intently before he answered. "I don't have any idea they'd be here tonight. Damn it! Why here? Don't let those two manwhores get near my girls. I may need to look for a new job if Hughes and Williams touch a strand of hair of any of them. And I swear to god I will break their faces, friends or not."

Mama! No, Mama!

I jolted up, sweating, still catching my breath. Thankfully, it was just abrupt than the previous nights. I walked toward my kitchen with sweat dripping from my forehead. I grabbed a glass, filling water from the faucet and let the water run on my parched throat.

My head snapped, eyes squinted to the sunrise streaking through the window. I couldn't help but chuckle bitterly. What happened at the parking lot edged my mind fiercely.

"It means I don't need you, okay?"

“Of course, you don’t. You’re a big girl.”

After two hours, I already showered, dressed, and already standing in front of the tattoo parlor, Fluer.

“Coming?”

My head snapped to the glass door, Milo already pulled it opened for me. His body was tattooed just like mine, but he was skinnier than me. If I haven’t known Alan would beat his ass raw, I would’ve thought Milo was snorting coke.

“Yeah.” I got in. “How’s your sister?” His sister was newly diagnosed Diabetic. And I felt bad that as young as nineteen, she had to suffer from that disease.

“Still adjusting, but she’ll be fine. It runs in the family anyway. My skinny ass is just waiting for its turn.”

The reception area was painted in light gray, two shaded lamps were hanging loosely from the dark ceiling. Their masterpiece designs were framed and nailed proudly on the wall.

Milo approached again, showing me his new design on the iPad. “What do you think?”

I glanced down at the screen. It was a Hawk with fierce, blazing red eyes that screamed chaos. Its frightening black shiny wings spread widely that could soar across the sky. The striking claws were long, black, sharp, and curve pointed downward promising hideous scars and excruciating pain to its prey. Amazing!

“What do you think?” he asked again impatiently.

I shifted my gaze to his slim face, finding him showing me his signature grin and gleaming brown eyes. “That’s good.”

“Just good?” His brow arched. “Man, I did this since the shop opened this morning. You should have at least a better word to say than just good.” His shoulders drooped, walking away to the long black counter. He placed the iPad on top, collapsed himself on the black glossy sofa, and sighed heavily.

I was terrible at anything related to art, but I could appreciate a good one. And good was not the right word for his aesthetic work. I gave him that.

“That was awesome, Milo. Shut that scowl off your face. That can bring bad luck for the business.” I walked past him to the hallway. There were six small tattoo rooms. At the end of the hallway was Alan’s office. “Is he there?”

“Yeah.”

I heard the soft buzzing of the tattoo machine from one of the rooms. I could still feel the biting sting of the needle piercing my skin when I got my first tattoo, but nothing could compare to the agonizing pain on why I had to ink myself.

After knocking softly on the single panel glossy black door, Alan said to come in.

I entered and closed the door behind me.

“Don’t you have work tonight?” A grayed-hair sixty-six old man looked up at me. For his age, he was still a diet conscious and managed to stay fit. Though he had already wrinkles, and his olive skin started to sag around his neck, he was stronger as a horse.

“I do.” I slumped my back on the black chair and leaned my elbow on his wooden desk. Bartending was exhausting and tricky, but I liked this job.

“Keep your heads down. You don’t wanna attract unwanted attention. Did you understand me?”

I rubbed my clean-shaven chin, waiting for him to talk.

He stared at me for a moment, squinting his sharp whiskey-colored eyes on me. “How was your trip?”

“A waste of time.” I had to socialize with those bastards, then I still ended up going home empty-handed.

“I told you to stop opening the can of worms, Forrest. I don’t want you to get into trouble.”

“I am not.” Too late for that.

“And I was born yesterday, yeah?” he said sarcastically, taking something out from the drawer. He pushed a medium-size Manila envelope close to my elbow and tapped it.

With brows cocked, I picked it up. “What’s this?”

“His last whereabouts,” he informed. “I won’t let him get near you, Forrest.”

“As much as I like the idea of you watching my back, I can’t risk you. I got this, Alan. You know his mind is twisted, but I’m old enough to protect myself.” It was a complete lie because if I could, I shouldn’t have come here to escape.

I gulped down an inhale of air, realizing that that evil still affected me by just mentioning the word him. I took a deep breath and opened the envelope.

Christ!

“Where did you get these?” I quickly asked and shot him a penetrating gaze. This old man never lied to me, but I couldn’t put him at peril by involving him in my mess. “I appreciate the effort, but you don’t have to do this, Alan. I can manage to gather info on my own.”

“I know, son. And if my Intel is correct, he’d be here in a few weeks.” That I knew of and the reason why he would be here. “And you’re welcome.”

I inwardly rolled my eyes when the popular pop song started blaring on the speakers. DJ Kyan’s 3c hair swayed as he shook his head, enjoying his mixed-up music. The crowd roared, jumped, and embraced the song simulated to the flashing lights.

I focused back on serving. A dude left thirty bucks on the counter for his order. Before I could grab the bills, a tiny hand with french-manicured fingernails already had them. The ring caught my attention. It had a ruby stone too huge for a slender finger... like hers.

What the—?

I pulled back as my heart started to pound in my chest. It was quite dim, but I didn’t miss the wickedness glinting in her piercing caramel-colored eyes.

“Can I have that now?” I offered my hand, sounding like shit.

Her perfectly aligned white teeth flashed in a wide grin. She shoved the bills beneath her V-cut black dress. Terrific!

I lifted my gaze back and met a confident smile on her heart-shaped face. She leaned her elbows on the counter, showing more cleavage while tapping her fingers on her chin. Her perfectly groomed eyebrows arched. Clearly, she was having fun seeing my reaction as I gulped down the embarrassments of being caught staring down at her tits. Her gorgeous tits.

“What can I get for you, Megan?” I maintained a disinterested expression though it was useless.

I was used to the women flirting on this counter and I made sure to never mix my work with pleasure, but this woman was Megan, and she came back to infuriate me in a different way. More like to keep me on hard-on throughout the night. Brilliant idea!

“What can you suggest?” She was still staring at me like I was her last meal.

Megan had something in her mind, and there was in her aura shifted from the other night encounter, leaving me a big question mark in my brain.

There were probably a hundred men in this club, and I knew Megan. She had no interest in someone like me. So, what was she up to this time? Revenge?

“Are you—”

“Cosmo, broody. Double the lime wheel, please?”

“Aren’t you supposed to be with your friends?”

“Nah. They’re probably busy right now under their blankets. If they even use blankets. I mean why would they use, right?” She rolled her eyes, amused. “They’d be sweaty, panting, and slick—”

“Alright.” Jesus! “I get it.”

Chapter 4 Small World

MEGAN

THE STOIC looked was back on Forrest's face. A frown deepened even more as I tried to get his attention. I just wanted to apologize, but my chance was starting to slip off my fingers when he gave me the cold shoulder. I didn't think he would give me a chance after what I pulled out the other night. I thought I could talk to him to keep what happened just between us because I couldn't let my friends know about it.

He left right away after placing my drink and took another order from a socialite-ish woman two stools from my left. Forrest never flirted back with the customers, but this time was different, and it annoyed me. What was he trying to pursue? Fine. Have it your way.

Oh, no! No freaking way! This was unacceptable! What's so special with that woman anyway?

I could feel something shifted in me as I watched them interacted with one another, and I wanted to claw this woman's eyes out so bad, not to mention my stupid chest constricted painfully.

"Another, please?" I placed down another bill with the fifty bucks I grabbed from Forrest earlier. I dawned my drink in a single shot. Dice eyed me with curiosity.

"You might wanna slow down." Dice took the cash, still wearing the incredulous look on his face.

"The hell I will. I'm losing." I glared at him.

Customers were in and out of the bar. I was left alone with the socialite-ish and the woman in a red dress that separated us, and she was still on the same drink Forrest placed down for almost two hours now. Was she going with him after his shift? Why did I care?

If Pyke and Xandry were right, he never brought women home unless they were lying to keep his record clean. Right now something changed in his game, and I was beyond pissed that I wanted to punch his brooding face. This couldn't be happening. Gah, I can't believe he has a low taste in women! Low taste, huh? Her dress only cost a quarter year rent for my apartment.

Bartenders and waitstaff were busy. Forrest never came back to take another order from me. He was avoiding my existence to the next level. What was his problem with me? He was the one who provoked that douchebag in the first place.

"Asher, I thought you left," I said as I rolled my window down.

He leaned in and smiled apologetically. "I just wanna apologize."

I got out of my car and fixed my dress as it rode up a few inches above my knees and smiled at him. "I'm sorry about earlier."

"Yeah. About that dude. Are you two sleeping together?" Wow! That was the last thing for a man to ever ask a woman who wanted a hook-up.

I shook my head, confused. "No. He's kinda overprotective over friends."

"Just friends, huh?"

I could feel my face lit up that he kept it cool. "Yeah, and I don't sleep with friends. Ever. Forrest doesn't date, and I doubt if he even sleeps around."

"I don't see him as a saint either, but you seem to know him well."

"I've known him for almost two years. I mean we don't chitchat, but Forrest doesn't mess around with anyone. My friends kinda adore him. He's a good guy."

"And here I thought you two have a thing because he just humiliated me in the bar to send me a message." His face suddenly darkened.

"I don't think he meant it that way." I shifted uncomfortably, feeling the chill run down my spine.

"Oh, he meant just like that, babe." In a split second, he was gripping my jaw. "You both shouldn't have messed with me. You don't know me, babe. I mean you're hot and slutty but I can find a better fuck than you."

My breath caught up in my throat. I tried to loosen his grip as he tightened around my jaw, causing my teeth to chatter. My limbs shook uncontrollably, and I couldn't think of anything other than fear.

"Did you understand me?"

I nodded repeatedly, squeezing my eyes shut as my greatest fear was threatened to hit me like a tornado.

My heartbeat was racing, nearly exploding in my chest. As much as I tried to gasp and expel my breath, fear already conquered me, consuming me. And in just a snap, a smack hit my cheek. The stong impact had my head snapped to the side, stumbling me against my car. My hand flew to my left cheek with a gasp before I even realized that he just slapped me.

"I hope that's enough for him to get my message, bitch!" He quickly turned around and left me shocked, humiliated, and resentful.

Still shaky, I hesitantly tapped the liquid trickling down my nostril as I dragged myself to the ground. What had just happened? All I could think at this moment was how weak, useless, pathetic, and helpless I was.

“Megan?”

Startled, I gripped the counter as I was about to slip off the stool. I frowned to see the worry and pain plastered all over his face.

Spiral of humiliation and anger swirled in the pit of my belly when I looked at his hand. He was offering me a tissue, and I didn’t know why until I felt the tears trickling down my face.

Way to shut off my feelings for years, yet here I was, in just a little attention he gave, they shattered to pieces. What a pathetic loser I became.

“No. Thank you.” Determined, I wiped my face, slid off the stool, and eased back to walk away.

“What brings you back, Megan?”

“I don’t know.” I let my eyes roam around the entire room. It had been three years since my last visit, but this place had been the same—the same warm ambiance, shelves filled with books, white orchid at the corner. A couple of framed certificates on the wall. A new set of couch though, a coffee table with the latest magazine issues, underneath was a white rag. Her regal chair was the same.

“What is your goal of seeing a therapist again?” She kept her perfect makeup face on the therapist mode as she crossed her legs, placing the notes and pen on her lap.

“To start, I don’t know why I am here.”

“Tell me what’s bothering you right now?”

“Am I a slut?”

Her well-trimmed brow lifted. “What made you say that?”

“I was constantly violated.”

“That does not make you a slut, Megan. You’re an attractive young woman. Men get attracted to you.”

“That does give them a right to get what they want. I hated it when I was too weak to even fight back. Do I need to enroll in a self-defense class? Men are domineering dicks! They think they’re invincible that they have everyone in their grasps.”

"Perhaps, what you need is to set a limit."

"Like I should choose one man I sleep with," I added.

"Why don't you consider going out on a serious date? Invest your time knowing each other, let your feelings grow on him."

"I can't date a man. I don't date anymore. I would just end up getting hurt when he found out what I did." I blinked as my eyes started to burn.

"That's where you're wrong, Meggie. Men will be lucky to be with you. You're a wonderful person. Not most men judge women on her past relationship, her lifestyle, and her sex life. Sometimes men prefer well-experienced women and vice versa."

My gaze shifted to her. Her shrink wall went down. "That's not what I mean. You don't have to make me feel I'm a better person, Mom. I am here as your patient and I want you to be honest with me." I left my old shrink and chose her instead because I trusted her more than anyone, and it was easy for me to open up to her.

She had me when she was still in college. She was like my best friend before our lives had been torn apart.

"But I am also your mom. It breaks me to see you doing that to yourself. I know, dealing with your feelings is not your strong suit right now, but that's why I am here. You can do it. We can do this together, Meggie. It's time for you to come home."

"I don't think—"

"Baby steps, Meggie. Today is the start. And I am so glad that I..." She looked up and bit her lip. "I'm glad to see you again. How have you been?"

The last time I visited her as my mother was when I was still in college. I couldn't see her blaming herself for what happened to me, to us. I thought if I was far, she would be okay and made us forget the horrendous accident that night.

"Have dinner with me."

I shook my head. "I need to find a job."

Her face fell again, pain crossed her face. I felt terrible for making her feel this way.

"Yeah. I am fired."

"My receptionist is due in the next two weeks. I could use your help." She smiled, delighted.

"I don't wanna work for you."

"While you're still searching for a job. You can quit once you find one. At least something will make you busy, and it will pay your bills." She knew me pretty well when it came to spending my savings. "I know you never asked help from me, but I can—"

"I don't need your charity. I'll let you know if I decided to accept your job offer. Thank you though." I grabbed my bag and walked right to the door.

"Meggie?"

I stopped dead in my track and glanced at her. "Yes."

She smiled sadly, and it broke my heart not to even feel her embrace. I missed her every day, but I couldn't just run back to her because I needed her. I still stuck to my decisions that I left because I could stand on my own two feet.

"Call me when you decided to have dinner with me."

I forced to smile back. "Rain check?"

"Sure."

Once I was out of the building, I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, regretting that I called for a session. Perhaps, I wanted to talk to someone who would never judge me, to open up, or maybe I just missed my mom. I gave myself credit that I managed not to break down in front of her, but it didn't make me feel better as well.

A yelp escaped my mouth before I even realized I was yelping, and strong arms were wrapping around me securely and protectively. A smell of pine and fresh mint reached my senses, making me aware that I was in a man's arms. His addicting scent was like a warm blanket wrapped around me during winter. His quick breathing was warming the side of my head while my hands were gripping the strong and bulging arms as my quick reflexive response.

When I gathered my strength to stand on my feet, I noticed the familiar tattoo on both arms, causing my face to burn. A blazing fire. Great, Megan! Small world. My heart was already pounding, and right now, I thought it leaped to my throat when I realized it was him. Forrest freaking Wood.

Forrest loosened his arms around me. "Are you okay?"

This was the third time he asked me, and I hadn't had given him the right answer. I turned around, and I was momentarily speechless to see his face in a broad daylight. Like always, he was unbelievably real, beyond handsome, always carrying strong aura and power. His dark sharp eyes were expressive with paintbrush lashes that women would die for. His dark thick brows slanted as he looked down on me that I thought he was always carrying the world on his shoulder. He had the

straightest nose and the reddish full lips I'd ever seen, and never a time I didn't think of how they feel on my skin.

"Megan? Hey? You okay?"

I blinked, feeling my face flared more with such sinful thoughts. "Yeah?"

"You should be looking at where you're going. You almost hit by a car if I didn't pull you."

My eyes slightly widened. Oh, god, what's wrong with me? Again, I'm speechless.

"Thanks," I said shyly.

"Where are you going?"

I stole a glance at the clinic, hoping he didn't see me exiting that building. "I visited someone."

"You better take care next time."

I smiled. "Thanks again."

"Sure."

When I reached my car, I turned around only to find Forrest entering the same clinic where I'd been. Kill me now!

Chapter 5 Troubled

FORREST

“GOOD TO see you again, Forrest.” Dr. Diana Reed sat back to her chair after our handshakes.

“You too, Dr. Reed.” I took a seat on the couch across hers while she was taking her notes and pen.

She smiled. “So, what brings you here today?”

I rested my arms on my thighs and linked my fingers together. “I don’t know.”

She studied me for a while before she asked. “Have you been having trouble sleeping lately?”

“No.” I hated it when people tried to read me, but this woman helped me a lot over the years. Alan usually gave me a long speech to visit my therapist if he knew constant nightmares were keeping me awake, but this time, I came here willingly. For what reason? I didn’t know.

“Something’s bothering you.” She smiled knowingly. “Let me rephrase. Is someone keeping you awake?” She must have noticed the dark circles under my eyes.

I licked my lips and shifted on the couch. I always kept everything under wraps, but I didn’t have an excuse when it came to my therapy. I had to talk about it somehow. “What made you say that?”

“I am your therapist, Forrest. You said you don’t have trouble sleeping, then this might be something new. Tell me about it.”

“I can’t say that she’s a bother though.”

“But?”

There was definitely a but. Of course. I opened my mouth to say something, but I couldn’t put what was bothering me into words. So I shut my mouth again.

“Okay. Tell me three things you think first thing in the morning.” She scribbled on her notes, then glanced back at me.

Fuck. Me.

“There’s nothing to be ashamed of, Forrest.”

“I am not ashamed, Dr. Reed.”

"Then you knew everything we discuss here is just between you and me. It's normal to feel something toward a woman, to be sexually attracted over someone. And you're young and good-looking."

"I know. It's just. It's not about myself I am troubled about."

"It's normal to worry about someone."

"Yeah. I guess so."

"Let us think that you're not talking to your therapist right now. Think of me as someone you trust."

"I trust you, Dr. Reed."

"So you have feelings for her."

My gaze snapped at her. Her? Do I have? "I am not sure."

"But you care about her."

"Yes." Jesus! I just admitted. I wanted to run and never come back. Something kept me from not doing so, instead, I crossed my legs, resting my back against the couch.

"That's progress. Tell me about it."

"This happened about a year and a half ago. I just don't know if she knows that I'd been watching her. We don't talk, I mean we exchanged his and hellos a couple of times, but we never got a chance to have a long chit-chat and talk about ourselves."

"Why not?"

"We have nothing in common. We have different perspectives about relationships."

"Do you believe that two opposite people attract?"

Yes. "Maybe." I shrugged.

"What made you say that you two have different perspectives?"

"I've been keeping tabs on her. I know it sounds creepy, but I mean no harm."

"It's alright. Tell me about her."

God, where do I start? I cleared my throat. "She's straightforward, funny, quirky, beautiful, but what enticed me..." Enticed? Jesus. I wanted to hit myself in the head. "...is her loose-tongued sharpness. I know not most men like that quality in a woman, but I like her just the way she is." Whatever her reasons for avoiding a relationship, I wouldn't stop until I figure out. "I have

different views about sex. I want a deeper intimate connection with my sexual partner as much as possible or at least I trust her with myself, my body.”

“That’s great. Go on.”

“I had a couple of one-night stands. It’s because I couldn’t escape, but I’ve been in a serious relationship as well. I can handle the temptation, I am good at that, but I believe sex has more meaning when two persons share it with special connections, with trust at least.”

“And you believe that she doesn’t believe in relationships?”

“I think so. She’s a commitment-phobic. Her friends’ word. Not mine.”

“And it’s bothering you.”

“No. I mean, I don’t care. It’s just— the thing is—” Fuck! I sighed. Why does it hard for me to express? “These past few days she changed. That what’s bothering me.”

“How so?”

“She seemed lost, sad, and I knew something’s wrong. I’ve never seen her so down since I met her, but I can’t just tell her to open up to me, besides, she already questioned my motives on why suddenly, I am talking to her. It’s a good thing though, that she doesn’t trust someone so easily. I mean unless I am wrong about her.”

“You want to gain her trust for her to open up to you?”

I looked away, thinking of how should I answer her that I wanted more. The fact that I didn’t even know how to approach Megan or why I was so bothered, to begin with? It’d been almost two years since I’d been watching her, and I was satisfied with that arrangement. But lately, I couldn’t just watch her as she ruined her life with whatever she was trying to deal with alone. She needed someone. She needs me. Does she now, dumbass? I wanted her to need me and consider me as her friend.

Megan reminded me of someone. I thought that was it, but I was completely wrong. Something flipped inside me and told me to do something, and that I never did in a long time.

Dr. Reed was right, it was immensely bothering me.

“I wish it’s that easy.”

“You just have to trust yourself, Forrest.”

I was catching my breath after an hour on the treadmill, a hundred push-ups, crunches, and sit-ups, but I wasn't nearly satisfied, and my mind was somewhere else most of the time. The Fleur Gym was just next door from the tattoo shop, also owned by Alan. I didn't know what I was doing here, the fact that I had a mini-gym in my pad. Perhaps, I needed a little bit of advice.

It'd been a week since I planned on approaching Megan and asked her if we could talk over a coffee. I scoffed. Now, I'm weird. Over a coffee? Yeah, I kinda knew what coffee she liked. Just the word talk made me wince in embarrassments of not having guts to ask her. Every time I saw her number on my phone, my brain froze and stopped me from dialing.

After wiping my sweat off my forehead, I slumped my ass to the bench, lied down flat, and did a few bench pressing. Then, I placed the weight back, sat up, and growled out a curse.

"You're distracted, man." DJ Kyan breathed heavily after stepping out of the treadmill. Then propped his hands on his hips, looking down at me. "Try sharing. It's not bad to talk to someone and ask for help once in a while. Just don't ask me for cash."

"I'm good, dude," I denied, raking my fingers through my damped hair.

"Whatever." He fixed his 3C hair with the black headband. "Grow some balls already and just do whatever you are planning to do," he added. Yeah, maybe it was easier said than done.

"I said I'm fine." Pissed, I stood up and walked away from him.

"Whatever grow your balls, Wood!"

"Your balls need growing!"

I stepped into the shower with a hazy brain. I needed to put myself together. I couldn't let this thing mix up with my priority that I'd been investing over these years. Personal entanglement was the last thing I wanted. It would complicate things. I kept reminding myself that many times for a week now, but it didn't help. I realized it was too late. My life had been complicated for ages.

Shutting people out of my life didn't do any good, but this was me. I had to embrace what I'd become. Nothing was going to change my past. I was happy with it, until recently that I had to ask myself again.

I even made friends. They'd grown on me, and I liked the feeling that I cared about someone more than myself. Damn it, Megan!

A message popped up from my screen that had my heart leaped over my throat. Speaking of the devil. How did she get my number?

Megan: Hi. Sorry for this unusual message. I don't even know what I am doing at the diner across the tattoo shop, but here I am. Waiting... _Megan.

I swallowed hard as I reread after reread her message. It was really from her because I had her number saved for almost two years.

Forrest: What are you doing here, Megan? Wanna get a tattoo?

My thumb hung in the air, rereading my message if it was right to ask or I sounded like a stupid. Finally, I hit send.

Megan: I am at the Diner. What do you think? I don't eat ink and needles.

I could feel her rolling her eyes. I typed my reply.

Forrest: Be there in 3.

I gulped back my nervousness as I entered the Diner. Why am I so nervous? It's just her. And this is the right time to put your plan into action, don't you think, idiot?

Scanning my gaze to the booths, I found her sitting alone at the far corner beside the glass window.

"Hi." She smiled. "Beautiful morning, isn't it?"

"Hmm." I took a seat across hers, trying to be in the best manner I could muster. I placed my hands over the over-used cream table and grabbed the salt shaker like a dumb.

Jesus Christ! Can anyone blame me? She's in front of me, and my social skill is a little bit rusty.

"What are you doing here?" I asked as I continued playing with a shaker. I couldn't just shut up, could I?

"You already asked me in your text. Don't you have any better questions? Like how are you? Or say something like you look beautiful, Megan."

I lifted my gaze at her. As always, she was beautiful in the daylight and glower than the silver moon at night. Just shut the fuck up, Forrest. Poetic doesn't suit you.

Speechless, I just stared at her. Her face looked so vibrant with lesser makeup that she could fool you, but I wasn't nearly convinced. She was hiding something, but no matter how hard she tried, I could feel her walls were slowly falling apart.

I wondered what she'd been through. People did something for a reason, whatever happened to her in the past, or whoever did this to her, must have cut through deep into her. Beneath the surface of a firecracker, I knew, there was a heart in there—some sincerity, affection, and yearning. Every time I looked into her eyes, my chest ached as if I got through her—felt her pain, heard her cry, shared her grief. I liked her freckles scattered across the bridge of her nose and just above her cheekbones though, they made her more attractive.

“Done checking me out?”

I blinked. “Sorry. You’re saying?”

“Thank you, Forrest. And I owe you an apology.” She squeezed my hand and had the heat crept over my face. Her touch was like a hot liquid metal burning my skin, seeping through my flesh. My body flushed and tingled to her innocent touch, and my cock— Get a grip, dude. We’re not her type.

I pulled my hand back, breathed deeply. Before I could reply, the waitress arrived with a tray of breakfast.

“I thought you haven’t had your breakfast. I went to the Fleur Shop earlier and met Milo. He told me that you were in the gym.” Did he now? I needed a serious talk with that dude not to tell a stranger about my whereabouts.

I looked down at the two plates with stacks of blueberry pancakes, melted butter on top, and I was thinking of pouring a generous amount of maple syrup. She also ordered scrambled eggs, bacon, and two cups of black coffee.

“What’s this?”

“Breakfast,” she answered reluctantly, and I felt like an asshole.

Maybe we could be friends or I could get an answer. But I knew I would only make things complicated, and that was the last thing I wanted to happen between us because there was no way I would even try controlling myself when I was with her. Jesus, bending a few rules wasn’t so bad when you were the one who created them in the first place.

She started her breakfast, and I grabbed my plate closer.

“Thanks.” I sliced my pancakes and shoved it into my mouth. I was not a foodie but the taste of buttermilk exploded in my taste buds. I almost moaned and closed my eyes to the softest pancake I’d ever eaten.

“That good, huh? Milo said I shouldn’t leave without trying the famous pancakes.”

I stopped chewing and might have moaned a little. “Can’t remember the last time I ate here.”

“Wait a sec, I thought you’re staying above the shop like Milo?”

What the fuck! How long had she been talking with Milo?

“No.” I shook my head and sipped my coffee. I savored the delicious breakfast on my plate silently. Good thing was, she didn’t pry anymore.

Once I was done, I looked at her intently. “What are you doing here, Megan?”

“I honestly don’t know.”

Chapter 6 When it Rains, it Pours

MEGAN

I feel like a dumb.

WHAT WAS I thinking? Perhaps, I wasn't thinking at all. I knew him of being distant, cynical, and cautious, and I was thankful he even joined me for breakfast. The way he looked at me, he probably had a lot of questions he wanted to pop, but he chose to keep them all to himself.

Forrest didn't only intrigue me, but his stares, his charisma, his aura told me something that I could trust him, that we somehow understood each other, and that he could keep me safe, but safe from what? From whom? When I should be worried about myself, the way how I acted lately—these whole fiascoes I'd created in the first place.

I looked down at the left side of my abdomen again as Milo rubbed the topical anesthesia. I can do it. There was no turning back, I would get this tattoo no matter what.

I lied down and bit my lip, preparing myself for the pain. I hated needle, but this was one way of facing one of my own fears.

"Relax. This won't hurt much," Milo said.

"You're a terrible liar," I replied nervously.

He chuckled. "This won't take long. And I know you'd love it."

"Just do it." Then the soft buzzed followed. I jerked at the first hit of the needle into my skin. For a fraction of moments, I felt I just freed from my cage—I felt wild. It still hurt though, but it wasn't closer to the pain I inflicted. I closed my eyes as they stung with unshed tears.

"He's a good guy, you know."

My eyes flew open to his words. "Who are you talking about?"

"Forrest. He may not talk too much, but trust me, he has a huge heart."

"How do you know him?"

"His Uncle Alan took me in, taught me how to tattoo when he found out I know how to draw."

"I see."

"Forrest is a man of a few words. The type of person who acts than talk. He's a little rough around the edges, but the best guy I've ever known."

"I started to get that. It was my first time to share a meal with him though. We met a few times on weekends with our friends, but we never talked. You should have seen his reaction at the diner."

He laughed. "Oh, I can imagine, Megan."

"Sometimes he scared me, intimidated me, and intrigued me at the same time. For a long time, I wanted to know him better. I just don't have a gut. I feel like something is holding us back."

"He doesn't share too much. Just don't push him. Let him open up when he feels like to open-up, but believe me, I trust him with all my life."

I wished I could trust him too, but I doubted if he would trust me in return.

"Milo?" I froze at Forrest's deep voice behind the door followed by a soft knock.

"I have a customer."

"Is Megan with you?" I bit my lip harder as he mentioned my name. It was like warm honey pouring down my skin, running down my abdomen, sipping through my thighs—not now. I shook away those naughty thoughts.

"You're disturbing us, man. We're busy." I could feel the amusement in Milo's voice.

"Just fucking answer me." His angry voice wracked me. "Is she in there?"

"Oh, shit! He's pissed. That's his different variations of fuck off." Milo laughed softly. "Come in, man, but you might not gonna like what you—"

The door swung open and hit the wall, making me startled. I couldn't find a word to say. It just, my heart was in galloped. My skin tingled everywhere. I liked and hated this feeling at the same time. His presence made the room smaller for the three of us.

I never felt ashamed of myself being half-naked, but with Forrest around, my insecurities got over me, and all I wanted was to ball and cover myself.

"Relax. Believe when I say he's the ambassador of goodwill."

With my eyes closed, I could feel the burning stare Forrest was throwing to me. So I answered nonchalantly, "Maybe the anesthesia is wearing off."

"You're tense. Just give me a few minutes, and I'll be done before you even realized."

The chair screeched in front of me. And I didn't have to open my eyes to see who was in there. I could even smell him in a distance.

"I thought you left," he stated, almost a whisper.

"I thought you too." I swallowed hard.

"I was with Alan. Why do you wanna get a tattoo?"

"Why did you?" I opened an eye, and I found him staring at me, and I couldn't just look away. It felt like he was pulling me into his world the longer I stare at him. Instead of getting scared, it was weird that I liked it and wanted more. "I like the design you got on your arms."

He blinked instead of answering and looked at Milo.

"I feel like I should go over my fear. I'm scared of needle."

"Why now?"

"I thought Milo is the best."

Milo chuckled. "I did most of his tattoos, especially the one—"

Forrest cleared his throat or more likely groaned, cutting off Milo.

I rolled my eyes. "I'm good at keeping secrets."

His gaze shifted to me for good seconds, and I never broke it until he did so. He crossed his strong tattooed arms over his broad chest, throwing Milo a chilly stare. I wondered what was on his mind right now. I wished I was like my mom who could read people's behavior and emotions. I wanted to break through his outer layer on why it seemed like the world was always weighing on his shoulder.

"Shouldn't you be at work?"

His question had my gut twisted. "I was fired."

"Why?" Milo asked.

"A little privacy, Milo."

"Sorry, man," Milo muttered.

"My ex-boss was a shameless piece of an ass. He misread me and thought I wanted to bang with anyone has a dick."

Forrest groaned when Milo laughed. "Filter, Megan."

I rolled my eyes. My smile was self-deprecating. "Why? Doesn't everyone look at me like a slut?"

His head snapped at me with a glare. "For god's sake, woman. What's gotten into your head?"

"Don't pretend you don't know me, Forrest. You probably thought—"

"Thought what?" he bellowed.

"Hey, calm down, man," Milo interjected. "I need to concentrate. Her tat has tiny details, and I can't do that if you are snarling over there."

Forrest huffed before he jerked to stand up and storm out of the room, leaving only a loud bang as he slammed the door shut behind him.

"Damn, that was cold."

"Great," I muttered bitterly. "We won't talk to me again. Ever."

"He has huge respect over women, Megan. Don't be too hard on yourself. He'll get over it and apologize. Just have a little faith for him." The buzzing stopped.

"Is it done?"

"Yes. Let me put a clean bandage. You just have to keep it clean and dry. I will give you an antibacterial cream. And don't scratch it, okay?"

"Thanks."

"Can I ask you something?"

"If it's about Forrest. Don't bother." I stood up from the bed and fixed my shirt.

"Nope. It's about the date on your tat."

"Don't be nosy."

"Fine. Nice to meet you, Megan." He extended his hand for a handshake.

I shook it and smiled. "Me, too, Milo."

"Let me walk you out to your car." He led me the way outside the shop toward where I parked my car. "You have my number. If you feel to get another tat, just give me a ring."

As soon as Milo left, disappointment swept over me. I checked my phone. I still didn't have a message from anyone.

My life had turned to a complete black and white.

I woke up from the constant ringing of my doorbell. That couldn't be Camila, Bianca or Blaine. When I checked the clock, it was past eight at night and they were all busy with their family. Well, normal people could still be awake at this time, but not me. I'd nowhere to go, no one to talk to, so

I decided to sleep all day since I already sent my resumes to all the companies who posted online for job hiring.

Yawning, I dragged my sleepy ass toward the door when the doorbell rang again. "Jeez! Just a minute!"

My sleepiness was thrown out of the window the moment I saw who had the gut to be on my doorstep.

"You're not lost, are you?" I grabbed the two boxes of pizza before he could offer. I opened the top box and picked a slice. "My favorite. Thanks." I took a huge bite and walked to the couch.

I placed the boxes on the coffee table, but I was still alone. When I turned around Forrest was still on the same spot, seemingly surprised.

I shook my head and smiled. "You're not a vampire that needs an invitation before you can enter my house, are you? And I am certainly not a witch, Forrest." I gestured my hand. "Come in, please?"

"I have no idea what are you talking about." Of course, you don't, you gorgy! He sauntered inside, wandered his magnificent eyes around.

"See something that meets your taste? I am sure your apartment doesn't look like this. Have a seat. Let me get us something to drink." I strode toward the kitchen and grabbed two soda from the fridge and two bottled water.

When I came back, he was already sitting on the sofa, his jacket was already folded on the armrest. "Milo forgot to give you your cream."

"Oh, yeah." He might have done it on purpose. "I was tired to go to the pharmacy." Or most likely, I drained all my strength thinking of what did I do wrong when you just bolted out of the tattoo shop, dumb.

He fished out from his jacket pocket and offered the small box for me.

"Thanks. You don't have to do that. I am sure you don't go to your customers when they forgot to—"

"No, I don't." Oh, wow! That was fast. Good job, Forrest. Honesty is certainly the best policy.

"And certainly not bringing two boxes of pizza on their door, right?" I put on a faux innocent look.

I swore his eyes glittered, but he remained stoic as he stared at me in silence, jaw clenched as if he was trying hard not to talk.

"Do you want me to take a plate for you?"

“No.” He took a slice of pizza and ate silently.

The room turned dead silent. All I could hear were our breathing and the rustling of our movements as we ate our dinner. And I suddenly didn’t know what to say or act. The fact that Forrest was in the living room of my freaking apartment was still a shock to me.

I wasn’t ready for this sudden turn of events. It was beyond my expectation that one night he would come knocking on my door, bringing pizza, and sharing his dinner with me because we were not close. What was this? A huge question popped in my head that I wished I knew the answer.

He opened a soda and placed it in front of me, then he opened and sipped the other. He took another slice before he could eat it, he stopped and gave me a quizzical look. Of course, I was staring at him all over again. I wouldn’t get tired of it.

I gave him a terse smile. “Thanks for the pizza. Let me guess, this gesture is a peace offering.”

“We didn’t fight, did we? But I was an asshole this morning.”

“Apology accepted.”

“Thank you.”

After I cleaned up the table, Forrest remained in his seat, and I was scared that he might leave right away. Since he was already here, I wasn’t ready for him to leave.

“Can we watch a movie?” I smiled impishly. “I mean if you’re not busy.”

“I’m off today.”

“And you don’t have anywhere to go?”

“No.”

I sat back and turned the TV on. “Great. What do you wanna watch?”

“Whatever you want.”

“You don’t mind watching Rom-com or chick-flicks with me?” I raised a brow, and he just shrugged.

“Great.” I felt a little too excited and patted the empty space beside me. I knew it wasn’t a good idea, but I knew Forrest had strong self-control than mine. And I am not his type. Yeah, it was written on the stone a long time ago.

I wasn't expecting that he would sit beside me though, but again he surprised me, and he was even sitting closer next to me that our skin would touch if we moved a little bit. I chose a romantic comedy on Netflix based on the best-selling novel.

"Would you mind if I ask?"

If I have a boyfriend? I cleared my throat. Get a grip, Megan. "Shoot."

"How did you meet your friends?" Wow, that's odd!

"I met them during our sophomore in college. I was a part-time cashier in a supermarket near the campus. This douchebag walked in as if he owned the entire city. I saw Bianca flinched. Cam was with her at that time. I've known his rep on the campus because I slept with him. I found out Bianca was one of his victims. So, I stole his phone and posted his—"

"Don't continue."

"Why?" I stared at him and he seemed pissed.

"Whatever you did, he deserved it."

"That's my man."

Chapter 7 Yielding Temptation

FORREST

What the fuck?

I COULDN'T understand why she loved watching a movie so dreary. The plot was cliché. It was about a woman with a colorful sense of fashion who fell in love with a guy that she met before she knew he was the CEO of the company where she worked. I could appreciate reading than watching it because the acting was awful. I gave credit to the girl though, besides having real tits, her eyes were striking blue, but man, the guy was a fucker.

I tried hard to be a normal person beside Megan, but I couldn't just laugh with her. It was her who I was amused with. I held a groan most of the time—her excitement caused me a little discomfort—knowing that it was her hand touching my thigh and gripping my arm as she thought it was the exciting moment in the movie, and my little fucker was partying in his cage. Great! My inner goodness had been tested quite a lot lately.

When the main characters shared their passionate kiss and the intimate scene rolled, I averted my attention like a virgin. Fucktastic! My dumb brain, my stupid heart, and even my peasty cock were ecstatic to the thought that I and Megan were in that movie. It was annoying and stupid! What have I gotten myself into?

She bumped her arm against mine when the credits rolled, grinning, eyes sparkled mischievously. "I know you didn't enjoy the movie."

I shrugged. "It was okay."

"Why didn't you tell me to watch another movie instead?"

"It was your choice, and it was really okay with me."

She gripped my arm and smiled. "Most men argued about what to watch. They thought rom-com is absurd and the ending is unrealistic." Well, they're right, but I don't want to spoil your moments.

"Then you should know by now that I am not one of most men. Most action movies are unrealistic as well. Imagine punching ten villain's sidekicks, escaping from the raining bullets, jumping from rooftop to another, never get a sprain, and the hero remained unscathed other than a small cut on his forehead at the end of the movie."

She laughed. "Thanks for coming over, Forrest. I really appreciate your company."

"Don't get used to it." Fuck! Did I just say that out loud?

"Of course, I should be." She laughed even more and widened her eyes. "We're friends now, right?"

I stared at her, and she was beautiful. She always took my breath away. Her small nose was perfect for her small face. Her ruby lips were spread into a smile, and she had a cleft chin that added to the features I liked in her. For more than a year, she never changed her hairstyle, other than curling it or changing hair colors, but she still looked beautiful in my eyes even she was at her lows.

Her pupils suddenly reacted, and the satiny looked lips parted. I realized I'd been checking her out. We were alone in her apartment, our faces were merely a few inches apart, her hot breath was fanning my face, promising me a delicious taste of her succulent lips, and I could feel the adrenaline coursing through my veins, hear the thundering of my heart, and my skin crawling in anticipation.

Still burning with desire, I stood up and took a deep breath. My nerves were still buzzing. "I should go. It's late."

"Do I get to see you again?"

I looked down at her again then grabbed my jacket. "It's a small world, Megan. You know where to find me. So, Yes."

"Let me walk you out."

"Don't you girls usually meet every weekend?" I asked nonchalantly as she led the way to her door.

"They're all busy. We still meet though, but not like before."

When I reached the door, I faced her. "Would you mind me asking how did you get the nosebleed?"

She looked away. And my guilt cut in deep. I didn't know why I had to open my fucking mouth. What I did was stupid and I ended up hurting her when my only intention was to keep her away from that knucklehead.

"Megan, I am not a good friend, not even close, and I can't promise to protect you because I can't even protect myself, but I hate to see women being hurt especially when I was there and couldn't do anything."

"Is that why you never dated because you don't have the gut to rip the band-aid off and tell them that you wanna walk out of the relationship?"

My eyebrows met. "What made you think I don't date?"

She leaned against the doorjamb and crossed her arms over her chest. "First, I never saw you with any women and the boys never noticed you with anyone. Either you kept your women in your lair or you don't date. With this look, I am sure you're not a virgin anymore. So, either you have a

secret girlfriend or you're itchy about commitment. That makes the two of us, yay!" She pinched my arm playfully.

My frown deepened. "You guys talked about me?"

She grinned instead of feeling guilty. "Well, duh. Of course. We thought you're hot and sexy even though you brood most of the time."

"I prefer to keep my personal life private."

Her eyebrow lifted. "Why do I feel that you are a secret billionaire?"

I snorted. "Do I look like a billionaire? If I am, I won't be working in the nightclub, I probably own one."

"Maybe. Keeping a low profile. Or you could be a long lost son of a billionaire who wants nothing to do with his wealth, or maybe you helped a rich spinster. When she died, she left her billions to you."

I wished I could tell her who I was, but did it matter? "I hate to break it to you, Megan, but I am not."

"Don't you have any day job?"

"No."

"You're actually an interesting person, Forrest. You're mysterious, yet I can feel that I can trust you. And you're the only person who never hit on me." Oh, you definitely get that idea wrong, love.

"Don't trust me too much. You might end up disappointed."

She burst into laughter. "Oh, you're maybe a man of a few words, but I know you're a good guy. You said it yourself that you hate women get hurt."

"Goodnight, Megan."

At my loft, I was staring at the plain ceiling for a good hour, watching the car light streaked through the opened window. I chose to go home to the shop than to my apartment. I didn't know why. Perhaps, I was expecting to have breakfast at the diner again? With Megan. Jesus, I had it bad.

The image of her parted lips had my skin burning hot. Those innocent touches while we were watching a movie, her rich voice when she laughed, her curves, and her breasts as I pulled her into my arms when she almost got into an accident. How could I get rid of those images in my head?

I realized it wasn't so hard to get closer to her if I'd done something before. Now I got it why she'd been acting differently lately; she just lost her job, almost violated by her ex-boss, and harassed by that asshole. I wished she knew me and I wouldn't have any problem helping her.

I groaned in irritation. Everything was keeping me awake. I rubbed my tired eyes. Despite being drained, my brain was spinning a million times.

Frustrated, I sat on the edge of the bed and clenched my teeth to shut my mind off. This supercharged fucking sexual frustration with her was messing up my brain. She's their friend for fuck's sake.

My fixation over her had to end now.

An hour later, I was sweating like a pig after I did jumping on the rope and punching a bag—my body gave up and couldn't take it anymore. After hitting the shower, I finally felt sleepy.

The crowd was going crazy tonight and that was what I liked in this evening. I still felt agitated and unable to articulate my thoughts though. I mixed the drinks wrongly twice and I almost dropped the bottle of whiskey on my hand when Dice gripped my shoulder asking for my help to prepare orders. My mind kept coming back to my plan and to Megan. I ignored Dice shooting me a curious look. Then, I noticed Kyland walking toward us.

"Wood, go to the VIP for a while. I'll take your place. Jim cut his finger." Kyland immediately got inside the bar and took order before I could refuse. I didn't know why he was even out here tonight.

"Where?"

"Hughes." The VIP had three lounges named after Hughes, Williams, and Rexwell.

I nodded and got out. I passed by the crowd toward the iron-wrought stairs that lead to the VIP. The room was dimmer than the main bar. It had a long C shaped black leather sofa, black glass table, and two sofa lounges. The minibar had four stools and a glossy deep red wooden counter. It was filled with expensive and vintage drinks according to their preferences.

"Wood," Pyke called who was leaning on the iron banister. The music was blaring inside since the glass window that served as privacy was slid open.

"Can I get you a drink?" I asked and remained professional even we were friends.

My eyes widened and glued on the crowded dance floor. I cursed silently as a twinge of jealousy speared my chest.

"Take care of her, Wood. She's not what you think she is if you get to know her." His warning is almost a whisper that if he didn't mention my name, I would have thought he was talking to himself. "I'm serious," he added.

"What are you talking about?" I asked as I watched Megan dancing with a slim guy. With my six foot and three and a half inches height, I could still see his hands on her hips as their body pressed together. My blood boiled in my veins to the way they enjoyed and lost to the music.

"Did you sleep with her?"

"I don't think it's any of your business, but I will answer your question no matter how ridiculous it sounds. No." I rushed out of my words because the last thing I wanted was to let him suspect how I was affected by his words.

I knew I shouldn't have been silently lusting over his wife's best friend for years, but I couldn't just let it go. I couldn't resist. If I could, I'd done the first time I laid eyes on her. Sometimes, I questioned my feeling if this was just lust or it went beyond that I had not even realized.

"Good to know."

"Good to know what?" I continued watching Megan and that asshole dancing as if they own the dance floor. Damn it! This was torture.

"Now I know why no woman gets your attention because you, Wood, my friend, is apparently in deep trouble with our Meg." Pyke laughed boisterously, patting my back in amusement.

My head snapped to Pyke who was still laughing at me. "I think you're insane, Hughes."

"Am I now? I'm gonna jump over here if I am lying, man. Wanna bet?"

Guilty, I broke my gaze from Pyke and searched for Kyland instead. When he saw me, I gestured that I needed a break. Kyland nodded his head in agreement. I left Pyke without a word, exited to the narrow hallway to a small exit door that led to the rooftop.

I inhaled the air deeply and closed my eyes while fishing out the pack of cigarettes in my pocket. I remembered months ago when Megan told me that smoking was not good for me. I lit a stick and inhaled the smoke deeply to my lungs to fasten the effect.

I badly needed to calm my nerves. I wondered how did Pyke figure out? I had not told a soul. The iron door squeaked open, making me froze in my place.

"You're not used to be following advice, are you?"

"I still remember the last time you told me."

"And?"

"You seemed to enjoy dancing with your little date."

She chuckled. "Did I sense jealousy?"

"Certainly not. As long as I won't see you getting hurt again."

"Yeah, that's what I thought." She sounded disappointed. Her voice came out a little low.

"He must be waiting for you already. You should go down. It's not safe for you to be here."

"I really don't believe you are this dumb, Forrest."

"Well, sorry to break it to you, but I am."

"That's not true."

"It seems that you're okay now." I shrugged and turned to face her. "I think I'm done with playing guilty." For a moment, her beauty distracted me. She was gorgeous. Her hair had the same style, but I didn't think I would get bored looking at it.

Her lips were pressed in a frown before she spoke. "He's not my date—"

"You don't have to explain. I'm glad you're enjoying your night," I said as I walked toward the door.

Before I could reach the exit, she extended her hand to block me, making me stopped and gasped at the sudden touch of her palm on my abdomen. Her scorching touch seeped through my skin like liquid gold.

A shudder wracked me. I cursed under my breath. "Damn it, Megan. Don't do that again!"

"Tell you what, Forrest. I let this go even I'm a little embarrassed if you answer me the truth."

I couldn't say a word. My mind played something worse. All I could think was how good her hand felt on my skin as she let it slowly, painfully, torturously caress the path down below my abs. And it completely conflicted the sensations of pain and pleasure sending straight to my cock.

"Does my touch affect you like your mind forms naughty thoughts about me? Or does this make you cringe, Forrest? Tell me."

My breathing came out deep and shaky as I turned my head to warn her. "You're drunk."

"Am I?" She arched a brow as if challenging me.

I looked at her glinty eyes, and she never broke the gaze. I was worried that an ounce of self-control I had left would fail me.

"Do you like rough, kinky, or vanilla? Or do you prefer long foreplay until a woman begs you to fuck her so hard?" As her hand traveled lower to the band of my jeans, I almost panted in

anticipation and I could hardly stand the way she was teasing me. Contrasting to a little decency left in my brain, my cock already thickened, quavered, and I was afraid she would go further down. She would definitely get the answer she was looking for.

She was testing me, and she got the memo that she already got under my skin. I grabbed the back of her head, dove my fingers in her hair, and stared at her for a fraction of moments. Thinking of the pleasure of us kissing at the rooftop became unbearably painful.

Jesus Christ!

My heart went wild in anticipation that I could finally kiss her, but I knew her, she'd be ghosting me once she'd be sober in the morning.

I pressed my lips on her forehead, closed my eyes, and let her go. "Goodnight, Megan."

Chapter 8 A Real 180

MEGAN

Crash and burn. That's how I see my life today.

HIS REJECTION caused me physical pain. No one ever rejected me, in fact, men mostly wanted to stick their dick in me. That was a little bit harsh, but that was the exact truth. I mean, I never pushed myself to anyone just to get their attention, but my bravado has no effect on Forrest.

I admired his self-control, and that pissed me off at the same time. And he kissed my forehead. He. Kissed. Me. On. My. Freaking. Forehead. Did I look like his freaking grandma?

"Hey! Look at you. So fucking hot!" My gay classmate, Jonas gushed as he dragged me toward the crowd. I was surprised to see him here, but I was kinda glad he came all by himself.

"So do you. Are you single?" Adrenaline rushed through us as we danced to the new song.

"Yup but not ready to mingle." He placed his hands on my hips and I raised mine in the air and swayed along with him. "I missed college days, Meg."

"Me too. I'm kinda frustrated about this guy right now."

"You? Frustrated? How come? I can't see you in those circumstances. He should be lucky that he gets your attention."

"There's always a first for everything."

"I guess so. So what's so special about him?"

"I think I got all his bad luck. I mean if you've seen him, he looks so freaking hot. A lot of women wanted to hook-up with him, but he turned them down. Sometimes I thought he's so loyal to his wife if he's married and has a family somewhere or he prefers dick than vagina!"

He barked into laughter. "I would definitely do him because we have the same taste in men, but let's forget this mystery guy for a while, shall we? I love this song!"

I collapsed into the sofa in frustration. I might have misjudged his gesture. Of course, I did. He saved and came to me to clear out his guilt. Because of him, that suckass Asher took his revenge on poor me, and that was Forrest had been doing all this time.

I groaned to myself. I should be pulling off that big girl pants and searching for a job, and not trying to flirt with Forrest because he certainly not into me. The ship had sailed. If he ever did, he should have done that a long time ago.

I felt like a desperate bitch.

My phone vibrated. Lately, I felt excited when it did because no one had ever tried to remember calling me at this time. When I looked at the screen, it was not who I expected it to be.

FORREST: Did you get home safe?

I rolled my eyes before I type my reply.

NO. Why do you even care? I was dragged by a gargantuan spider in the alley, bit me, and imprisoned me with its gross and sticky web. Now, I'm dying. Lonely. And it's all because of you.

I erased it because it sounded bitter. I was even surprised that he wasted his precious time to check out on me. So self-righteous of him. I betted he couldn't sleep tonight if he wouldn't do that.

Finally, I sent a reply. Hopefully, he would sense my sarcasm. But Forrest was Forrest. He had thick-skinned.

ME: Are you getting softie on me now, Forrest?

FORREST: Are you home?

Jeez, he's annoying. I could even feel him groaning.

ME: Yes, dad.

FORREST: Good.

My brow arched. *That's it? Playing hard to get, I see.*

I wore my shorts and my tank top and went to bed. I tucked my blanket under my chin, feeling down after replaying his rejection all over again. This was all my fault why I was alone. I pushed all men who wanted more than just sex with me. I thought that was their way to have free sex. That was what mostly they wanted though. So I preferred just hook-ups. Now, I was left alone, still, a commitment-phobic, emotionally unavailable cold bitch and might have forgotten by friends for good.

The moment I closed my eyes, the hot brooding Forrest was like a sledgehammer to my gut. Visions of his strong arms wrapped around me, his soft and cigarette smelled lips pressed against my forehead started to assault my mind. I usually turned off by men who smoked, but with him, I didn't give a damn. I thought he was sexy smoking. Sometimes, I wondered the reason behind it. He was just mysterious that no one got into him.

I opened my eyes again and groaned. I felt pathetic. He didn't like me. He might have thought he was a pawn to my sexual exploits. Well, he was hot and sexy. I thought of him a lot of times if he looked hotter naked, if he was good with his mouth, his tongue, or if he was well-hung. Of course,

he was. He didn't have to show it off. I was sure he fucked hard because judging by the way he looked he didn't seem to go easy on women when it came to sex. Excellent judgment, Megan. You're way more pathetic right now.

I closed my eyes again and pulled the blanket above my head. This was going nowhere. I needed to sleep and forgot him for good.

Heat enveloped my body. My lust over him consumed and controlled me entirely. I shoved my hand into my shorts, rubbed my clit as I thought of the dark eyes looking down on me. I lost control. I moved my finger in a circular motion.

We were started to breathe heavily, and I could sense the sexual tension ricocheting between us filling the room.

My heart started to pound as I imagined his strong muscles pumping his erect, thick, and taut length as we moved in rhythm. He was watching me like a hawk to its prey all the time as I fingered myself.

I was instantly wet, slicked, and my clit became more sensitive. I continued rubbing my hardened nub and bit my lip to stifle my moan, but my muscles were quivering everywhere, and I was writhing with intense pleasure.

"Don't stop." Soon he groaned, and I quickened my finger. His stare glued at me, his eyes were burning with lust and desires, sending a ball of inferno racing through me.

I felt like my lungs were running out of oxygen as I continued pumping my finger in and out of my soaked pussy as if I couldn't help myself and I would lose my mind if I stopped.

"Oh god." My heart went overdrive. My hips backed. My head threw against the pillow as I was immediately consumed by my pending orgasm and his presence.

"Look at me, Megan." Forrest was pumping faster, sweat breaking across his forehead. Muscles were straining and clenching on his arms. He was breathing through his nose, but he kept his searing gaze on me as we determined to fall into the abyss of bliss together.

I inhaled sharply, violently shaking as I succumbed to the strong orgasm I had never felt before.

I woke up to the constant ringing of my phone.

Still half-asleep, I answered, "Hello."

"Ms. Simons?" I remembered her voice. The HR officer from Hitchcliff Associates.

“Yes, it’s me. Just Megan, please? Tell me it’s good news?” I was already sitting on my bed, literally grinning.

She sighed. “Megan, I’m sorry, but we found someone who fits for the position...”

I thought my body numbed. I couldn’t remember hanging up the call. When this despair would be over? I had only one choice left for the meantime. It was time to throw away my pride.

“Is the job offer still stand?” I asked my mother over the phone.

“Of course, Meggie. I am only waiting for your call,” Mom replied immediately. “You can come over this afternoon so that Beth can fill you in. She’s been having back pain for two days now.”

“I’ll be there. Thanks.”

“Meg, how about dinner?”

“Mom—”

“I understand, honey.”

I closed my eyes as I felt her disappointment. Every time I saw Mom, she only reminded me of the awful things I’d done to our family. Those were the only things I couldn’t forget, maybe because I hadn’t forgiven myself.

In the afternoon, I reported early to impress. This might not be permanent, but I had bills to pay.

“Here are the lists of patients for appointments. Dr. Reed should be free by this time. Her lunch break. VIP patients’ appointments are according to their free time as long as it won’t overlap with regular patients. You wouldn’t have problems anyway. They prefer at night.” Pregnant Beth tapped the calendar on the tablet as I rechecked the schedule on the desktop. “I used to take note, just in case.”

“I will do the same.” I smiled at her.

“Great. Here’s my number if you want to inquire something.” She showed me her landline and her personal numbers saved on the Contact.

“Thanks, but you better prepare to be a mom. Is this your first?” I rubbed her huge belly.

She propped her hands at her back and grimaced. “My third.”

My eyes widened in surprise, causing her to laugh at my reaction.

“I hope you’ll have kids someday. It feels amazing, Megan.”

Her words made me swallow. “Maybe one day.”

Once Beth was gone, I checked through the schedule of which patients had a schedule today. Terrible things happened, my views on marriage changed. I thought relationships, loving someone would just bring pain and misery.

I picked up the phone when it rang. "Dr. Diana Reed Clinic, good afternoon."

"Hi, good afternoon. Can I have an appointment at the same time?"

"Your name please?" I grabbed the pen and the note Beth gave me earlier.

"You must be new."

"Yes. I am. Wish me luck, and this is my first day."

"Is Beth okay?"

"She's okay, but took an early leave. Your name, mister?"

"Forrest Wood."

I froze and trembled. I might have gasped. My hand was gripping tightly around the phone handle as I thought of what to answer. How could I not recognize his voice instantly? I caught my lip between my teeth to prevent myself from telling him who I was.

"Hello?"

"Yes. Yes. Um." Am I gonna tell him who I am or not?

"Sorry, you're new. I used to have an eleven a.m appointment with Dr. Reed."

"Right. Tomorrow at eleven, Mr. Wood." I screwed my face. Calling him Mr. Wood didn't feel right, but I should get used to him being my mom's patient. How would he react when he saw me tomorrow morning? Oh god! He was right, our world was getting smaller for the two of us.

"Thanks. Bye."

There were two more calls for appointments I listed. Before I could turn off the desktop, my mother walked out of her room.

"Meg, just email me the list, okay?"

I met her gaze, and she looked tired. "Are you okay, Mom?"

She forced a smile, but she still looked beautiful and looked professional in her outfit. "I took a painkiller. It's just a headache. So how's your first day?"

"Fast?" I smiled. "Thanks for giving me this job."

"I'm glad you accepted it. We may not be able to talk frequently, at least I know you are just right outside this door."

"Maybe we can have lunch together sometimes?"

"I would love that, Meggie." Mom touched my face. I leaned on her hand and felt it.

Three years since the last time we had this kind of talk. Since I walked out of her home for goodbye, I never came to visit her even holidays. We exchanged gifts, but she respected my decisions about not seeing each other until I was ready.

"Looking forward." I gripped her hand, and I didn't realize how much I missed it.

"You should go now." She laughed softly.

"Yeah. For my first day, I got a little excited." I grabbed my bag. "Um, Mom?"

"Yes?" She wore her coat.

I realized I couldn't ask her. "Nothing. Just take care."

"You, too, Meggie."

I ended up eating instant noodles for my dinner, then I collapsed to my couch to watch a rerun when my phone vibrated. I startled on my seat to see the caller ID on my screen. I wanted to beam and flinch at the same time when I remembered about his call this afternoon, nevertheless, he would find out tomorrow.

"Forrest?"

"Did you find a job?"

"Good evening." I smiled.

"Sorry. Evening."

"Yes. A temporary, until I find a permanent one. Why? Are you gonna hire me to be your housemaid?"

"What is your last job?"

"What job can you offer? I can be a belly dancer. I was in a dance club in high school. I'm good at pool dancing, I can be a stripper or your personal servant. Oh, I can make an excellent omelet without burning the whole house." I laughed, and I didn't know why.

"Jesus, Megan." I could feel he was clenching his jaw on the other line.

"You hurt my ego, Forrest. Then I realized you're just trying to get rid of your guilt. So are you gonna offer me a job? Don't you think nepotism would ruin your holier-than-thou self?" There was a moment of silence between us and I couldn't open my mouth to talk anymore.

"What do you want from me, Megan?"

A violent rush of anger filled my veins. I drew a bracing breath before I answer. "Fuck you! Fuck your kindness! You are the one who messed up with that man in the bar and made him come after me. I even protected your good reputation from him. You are the one who came to the parking lot, saved me from the passing car, which I never told you to save my ass. You didn't turn me down when I invited you for breakfast, you came to my apartment with pizza and spent dinner with me. You even watched the sappiest movie and never complained. Last night you kissed me and sent me a text asking if I got home safe."

"Megan—"

"No. You fucking shut up when I'm talking. I'm done being nice with your temperamental and assholeishness attitude. Now, you tell me, Forrest, why all of a sudden you see me? Aside from my sparkling personality and my miserable life, what is it that you want from me?"

"Meg—"

"A little advice from a friend, Forrest. Stay away from me. Maybe you should stick back your head in your ass."

Chapter 9 Change of Plan

FORREST

MEGAN INHALED sharply, and I just froze in shock right there, struggling with fuzzy thoughts. We stared at each other for like a fucking eternity. Then the realization just sucker-punched me in my gut. That day I bumped into her, she came for a job interview.

I was the first to look away, still finding hard to think of anything to say and it was too late to turn back—she already saw me. She probably was the woman who answered my call yesterday. How the fuck didn't I recognize her voice? Perhaps, I was used to her twang sexy accent, while she sounded like a workaholic receptionist yesterday.

A twinge of guilt clogged in my throat when I remembered how we ended up our call last night. I didn't know what crawled up my ass, but she was right at one thing though, I should stay away from her. I was bad for her, and she was a distraction to my plan.

She picked up the phone shakily. "Your 11 a.m is here." Then she ended the call, looked at me, and smiled politely as if we had not known each other. Fucking great! "She's ready for you."

"We need to talk after my appointment," I told her before I entered the room. More like I was not giving her a chance to say no.

Once I was inside, millions of thoughts rushed through me—the fear of her finding out my issue had rolled my gut and that thought of her figuring out why I was seeing a therapist was only the tip of the iceberg. She would not look at me the same way again. She would despise me.

"Good morning, Forrest." Dr. Reed pulled me back to the present.

"I'm sorry. Good morning, doc." I released a deep long breath and sat on the couch, facing her.

Dr. Reed must have seen me uncomfortable. "Are you feeling okay?"

I looked straight at her and swallowed the ache in the back of my throat. Then I was like a fucking mute. I opened my mouth to speak, but the fucking word wouldn't come out.

"Ask anything away, Forrest. You seem to have a lot of things in your mind right now. This is the purpose of our therapy." Dr. Reed was calm and relax in her seat while I was sweating like a pig. I wanted to ask a lot about the woman behind that door.

"I think we should wrap up my visit. It's not that you didn't help me. You help me a lot, in fact, I am grateful for everything. The reason why I am still sane again and able to sleep without...nightmares, it's because of you."

She gave me a friendly smile. “Is this really what you want to do?”

“Yes,” I answered without hesitation, though that was not what I had in mind before seeing Megan at the front desk. I was about to open up my eventful meetings with Megan and about last night, then things just turned real 180—Megan could have just checked out my record and ratted out to my friends.

“We have doctor-patient privilege, Forrest. You know you can tell me anything.”

“I know.”

“And if you don’t feel talking to me here in the clinic. We can arrange a coffee meeting or at the park so you could speak freely without feeling being trapped inside this room.”

“I think I am good.” I stood up, still carrying the heavy feeling in my chest.

“You can always call whenever you need my help. You wouldn’t be coming back if you don’t trust me. I wish you good luck, Forrest.”

“Thank you so much, Dr. Reed. And I will.” I walked toward the door and paused. After taking a deep breath, I turned to her again. “Do you know her?”

Dr. Reed was already standing, smoothing her skirt when she met my gaze. “Who?”

“Your new receptionist.”

She smiled brightly. Her eyes lit up, and I was so fucking screwed. “Yes. Don’t worry this conversation is off the record, Forrest.”

I nodded, clumping my mouth shut. When I closed the door behind me, a guy was sitting on the chair, waiting for his turn while Megan was tapping on the tab when I approached her.

Her gaze lifted with slightly wide eyes. Every time our gazes locked, my world seemed to slow down. It was fucking insane. Then lately, it worsened, it didn’t just make my heart gallop, it throbbed something inside me that I didn’t want to give my attention over it.

“When is your break?”

She looked down at the tab on the desk. “In thirty minutes.”

“Meet me at the restaurant across the street.”

“Okay,” she reluctantly answered, still pissed at me.

“Watch the road.” I didn’t know why I had to remind her. It just that when it came to her, I had this instinct that I wanted to protect her.

I liked her. A lot. No doubt about that. I'd been constantly daydreaming about her for months, but I thought it was just due to my lack of sexual exploitation that had me a thing for her because she was fucking hot, but every time I saw her flirting with another man, I felt a dull ache in my chest. And these past few days, I couldn't think of anything else other than her, in pain, in hurt, and seemingly lost.

I might have known the reasons why Megan had completely changed, I should be running away from her while I still could.

"Stay away from me." Fuck that! I didn't want to stay away from her. I didn't think I can. There was nothing impossible with compartmentalizing my plan with my personal life. I just wished she would trust me enough to share her pain with me without ending up in bed, but with the tension shifting between us, I didn't think I could pull it off.

Thirty-five minutes passed. I watched the ice and mist melted on the glass, and there were no signs of Megan. I was a patient man, but I could feel in my gut that she wouldn't show up. I grabbed the glass and emptied the content to wash away the anger boiling in my chest.

She could have just said she didn't want to, but instead, she agreed on meeting me.

I signaled the waiter, and he rushed toward my table. I slipped a few bills with his tip before I stood from the table that I was supposed to spend lunch with Megan if she showed up. Her rejection and her bailing out on me had angered me to the core, but that was her decision. I thought my insanity should end here.

The sun pricked my skin when I marched to my car. I wanted to break something in annoyance that I let my hopes high. I needed to remind myself constantly. I had a monster to find, and involving myself with her was not a part of my plan. All I could think of was, I was screwing things up.

When I got inside my car, I hit the button on the screen and let Thunderstruck of AC/DC blared through the speaker before I drove off. Then my music was interrupted by a call. The automated voice announced the caller.

Fucking great!

"Yes?"

"Forrest?" She seemed to catch her breath that had me frowned.

"Yes, it's me."

"I'm so sorry. I really wanted to call you earlier, but—"

"No worries. I wasn't expecting you to show up. We're good." Who would be a fool to believe it, Forrest?

"It's just—"

"Don't bother. I have to catch up on something. Good luck with your work. Bye—"

"Forrest!" she yelled at me.

"Yes, Megan," I wanted to yell back, but it was not her fault. I was the one who told her that we needed to talk. "What?" Then the siren echoed from the other of the line. "Are you okay?" Jesus! Can't she ever stay out of trouble?

"No." I went rigid when I realized her voice was shaking—Megan was terrified. I quickly hit the brake. My car skidded to a halt. Damn it! I would be the one in trouble.

"On my way." I hung up. I was in the middle of the road, and it fucking annoyed me when I couldn't find the nearest U-turn.

I felt riddled with guilt about what I thought earlier. And I was a fucking idiot that I didn't even ask what happened to her and why there was an ambulance in the background. I just lost focus, thinking that she was hurt. My early annoyance converted into a fucking boiling rage.

I dialed her number again when I got the U-turn and it just rang. Just great! I had the urge to drive more than the speed limit, but the last thing I wanted was to get into trouble with cops when I was good at avoiding this for years. I took deep breaths in an effort to calm myself.

I clenched my jaw to the aching point when the clinic came to view. There was no ambulance around. I climbed out of the car and crossed the street. I pushed the glass door and rushed inside the clinic building to where Dr. Reed occupied the entire second floor.

When I got there, I flitted my gaze around, Megan was not there and her desk was already empty. I was wrapped with these unrecognizable dreadful emotions that shook me—the fear, conflict, and sympathy.

"Come on. Fucking answer me." I dialed her number again, and I wanted to throw the phone when she didn't pick up. I sprinted down the stairs. When I was outside, I searched the parking lot for Megan's car.

I let out a deep sigh of relief when it was still parked. The knock over her window that startled her. When I pulled the door open, what I was not expecting was her throwing herself into me with a tight hug. She was crying and shaking, which broke my heart immensely.

I struggled to speak, to find the right words. My stomach flipped and hardened at the thought of her getting hurt. Again.

Now that she was crying, all I wanted was to get rid of anything that caused her pain. I tentatively wrapped my arms around her and bowed my head to plant a kiss at the top of her head. The scent of her shampoo flooded my senses and seemed to calm me down slowly.

“What happened?” Finally, I found my voice. I ran my fingers on her soft and silky hair. The last time I had this was with my mother, and I did everything to protect her from pain, from cruelty, from getting hurt. With Megan, I wanted to do the same.

“Mom,” she murmured against my chest.

“Your mom? Is she okay?”

“No.”

I pulled her away and held her arms. “Where’s your mom?”

She was wiping her tears, still looked pretty shaken.

“Megan, where’s your mom?” I stared at her closely. “Look at me, please?”

When she lifted her gaze at me, I realized that we had actually something in common.

Chapter 10 Breaking Point

MEGAN

MOM HAD been keeping her words, and by meant keeping her words even though she was not feeling well, she didn't reach out to me.

I had my suspicions that her headache yesterday was not the first time. When her patient rushed toward my desk and said Dr. Reed collapsed, I thought my world stopped, then quaked around me, and I lost control—I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think as I was struck with the fresh fear. There was no way I'd be losing another person I loved. I knew this would be my breaking point.

I thought I might blackout when Mike did not shake me. I could feel the haze that alarmed as I was about to have a flashback. I didn't want to get through that again. I couldn't because all I knew it had been buried deep, so deep for years.

Mike helped me dialing 911 as I tried to do a deep breathing exercise because I was started to hyperventilate in front of my mother who was lying unconscious and pale as a ghost on the sofa. Regrets crawled up my skin, wishing I could tell her how sorry I was for running away from her.

Lacking some spine, I just stood there for like an eternity. I couldn't touch her. I was scared—too scared that it reminded me of something terrible happened years ago—of someone I loved.

I wanted to shake to cry, but my voice wouldn't come out. All I could feel was the chill of apprehension running down my spine while I was shaking silently.

From the window, I heard the siren echoed—the ambulance arrived. A few moments later, Mike answered some questions asked by the paramedic while I just stared at my mom in agony, voiceless, and terrified.

When they placed my mom to the stretcher, I let my gaze follow until the door closed behind me. Dread silently loomed over the room that seemed was now my prison.

So angry at myself, I collapsed to the floor, weeping my own despair. The only thing that I could hold on was the chair that was somehow giving me the strength. Drenched in sweat, I cried there alone, bearing the unspeakable pain. And just like always, no one was there to comfort me. I was alone again.

I heard the door threw opened. I lifted my gaze to the man towering me.

"Miss?" It was Mike again who had a plastic cup of water, offering me.

I lifted my trembling hand, took the cup from him, and I managed to drink the content without spilling all over me. It somehow helped me clear my mind and think.

“Can I help you with something?”

I wiped my face dry with the back of my hand. “Yes, please. M-My phone. On my desk.”

Mike went out again. Then he came back pretty quick and gave me my phone. If there was one person I could talk to who wouldn't judge me, it was Forrest. Then I remembered we were supposed to have lunch together. The time on my phone showed I was already late.

I looked at Mike again. “Thank you so much for helping me. I will tell her that you saved her life today.” I didn't know why I said that. The fact that I didn't know why she collapsed or if she would ever be okay, terrified me.

“Do you need anything?” He smiled sadly at me.

I couldn't ask Mike. I'm too scared, but there was a minuscule of hope inside me that Mom would get through it. She always did.

“Thank you, Mike.”

Gathering all I had left, I stood up and dialed Forrest. I closed my eyes and bit my lip when it started to ring. He answered. Feeling drugged, I couldn't understand what he was saying while I was rumbling some shits to myself.

Forrest was a virtual stranger. I didn't know anything other than every time I looked into his eyes, I saw the warmth and sincerity in them.

The call ended. I blinked back the glaze of tears and took a deep breath before I walked out the door.

Watch the road.

I managed to get into my car unharmed. I cried all my frustration, my pain, and anger to myself until a knock pulled me out of my deep agony. I couldn't remember how did I get the strength to launch into him. The last thing I remembered was his smell, his warm touch, and the hardness of his body was so comforting—it assured me some sense of security.

“It's okay. Everything will be okay,” he continued to coo me with words, but it wouldn't change the fact that this was happening. My mom was sick. While I was doing shits on my own, she'd been suffering alone.

I was a terrible person. A terrible daughter.

“Let’s get to my car. We have to go to the hospital. I’ll come back to take yours, okay?” He closed the door and wrapped his arm around me securely and protectively.

I had nothing to do than to nod and follow him as he helped me toward his car because I literally went in limp with exhaustion to say or to argue.

Once I was inside his car, I closed my eyes, silently praying for my mom’s health. The scents of his cologne and the air freshener calmed my senses, but the dull ache and the hollow in my chest would never dwindle.

I could feel Forrest securing my seat belt. Then seconds later, the engine purred. The car drove smoothly, and he had not said a word. The grip on my hand was supposed to catch me off guard, but instead, it was his assurance that he was with me—that I wasn’t alone anymore. I managed to grip it back and relax as his thumb started to draw circles around my thumb.

I fought to control the unwanted reactions he gave me. It just felt good that there was someone I could lean on during a moment like this.

“Your mom will be okay. You will be okay.” His words teared me up, re-established incredible feelings in my chest.

“T-thank you.” My voice cracked, and I could sense his stare on me, seeping through my emotion. I didn’t want to open my eyes and look at him. It wasn’t that I was a mess, but I wanted to pull myself together.

“No need to thank me.” His voice was so soft and sympathetic.

“I should. I never thought I would be closer to you like this. You were always distant and cynical, and I thought you hated me—”

“Why would you say that?”

My eyes fluttered open when I sensed a strong tone in his voice. “Because I’m a cold bitch.”

He snorted, almost a mock. His jaw clenched, deadly darkened sharp eyes focusing on the road.

“Ain’t I?” I let go of his hand.

“Don’t ever say that to yourself again. You’re a modern woman who never ashamed of what she wants in life. And that’s what makes you an incredible person.”

I snorted. “Do you know you sound ridiculous, don’t you.”

“I don’t think I am. Which hospital?”

"I wish I share your confidence, Forrest. At the Central." I wiped my face again. "All I know is I'm a weak cold bitch. I don't filter and I laugh to hide the pain, I'm sure you know that. Don't you think I am so pathetic?"

Forrest shook his head in disagreement. "Well, you don't know yourself at all. Someone said a strong person is not the one who doesn't cry. A strong person is the one who is quiet and sheds tears for a moment and stands up and fights again."

"Let me guess, our Founding Father?"

"Just some random quote from the Internet."

I had to look away because I knew this man of a few words beside me who had full of wisdom, and he just triggered something deep inside me, something that I couldn't and wouldn't want to ignore.

I could also sense that what he was saying was based on his experience. I could feel that he had been through a lot, but he managed to pick up the pieces and stand on his feet again.

"I care about her, you know?"

I snapped my head to him. "Who?"

"Your mom."

I blinked in disbelief and swallowed. "H-how did you know?"

He stole a glance at me. He never tried to hide the sadness in his eyes, despite that, he managed to look heart-stopping beautiful and incredible. "I guess she chose not to place a family picture in her office. It's not my business, Megan. Whatever we'd been through doesn't define who we are today. It just made us strong and taught us a lesson to be good people."

"You can actually talk," I chuckled sadly.

"When I asked your mom if she knew you, I saw the sparks in her eyes, and that confirmed to me that she cared about you, and you are more than her employee."

We arrived at the hospital. When the door slid opened, a sudden chill hit my core. I shivered, and Forrest noticed my uneasiness.

"I'm here, Megan." He held my hand, squeezing it. When I looked up, he was telling to me silently, and that gave me a strength to march forward.

Forrest was the one who asked the lady receptionist about my mom. When she told us the direction, I could barely walk with fear of what I was about to find out.

"Sit," Forrest ordered.

I sat on the bench. The scenario in the hospital, the noises, the alarm, the rushing of medical staff made my stomach twist. I had to squeeze my eyes shut to push the thought of the past.

“Who’s the relative of Dr. Diana Reed?”

I was quicker on my feet and almost had me stumble. The twist in my stomach worsened, and I felt like to throw up.

“I’m her daughter.” My voice sounded foreign to my ears.

“She’s conscious now and wants to see you.”

“Oh, thank god.” A smile slowly spread across my lips. I felt a sudden light feeling in my chest.

Chapter 11 Personal Space

FORREST

WHILE DR. REED was lying in bed with oxygen on her nose, she bounced her gaze between me and Megan before a knowing smiled curved up her lips.

“Mom, how are you feeling?” Megan rushed toward her mom and pulled her into a hug. Her voice was wrapped with worry.

“I’m feeling better, Meggie.” Dr. Reed rubbed Megan’s arms, smiling confidently at her. I could feel the affection of a mother in her voice and the way she looked at her daughter.

“What are you not telling me, mom? I may not be a doctor, but you won’t just collapse for nothing.”

I cleared my throat. “Get well soon, Dr. Reed.” I looked at Megan. “Take your time. I’ll be waiting outside.”

I left quickly and let them have some time alone. I wondered how was Megan’s relationship with her mom. They seemed close yet, she didn’t know anything about Dr. Reed’s health.

For years she had been my therapist, and I’d known Megan for nearly two years now, I was still finding it hard to believe that Megan was Dr. Reed’s daughter. For starter, she was Simons, and I couldn’t find any resemblance between them.

I waited in the waiting area for a couple of minutes, trying to figure out if her mom ever mentioned her patients to her. I knew there was a doctor-patient privilege, but this whole scenario just did a 180-degree turn on me.

Right now, I didn’t know how to act in front of them. I’d been living in two lives for years, when I thought I was good at pretending, this time, I didn’t think I could do it anymore.

I lifted my gaze when a pair of high heels stopped in front of me.

“We’re going.” She didn’t seem looked happy anymore.

“How about your mom?”

She shrugged. “She said, she’s okay. The doctor won’t release her until her lab result will be ready. She told me I shouldn’t keep you waiting.”

I nodded and stood up. “Don’t worry about me, I’ll be fine.”

"She'll call me once she gets home." Her voice seemed to have lost energy.

"She'll be okay, Megan."

"You don't know that." Her shoulders dropped as we walked toward the hallway.

"I certainly don't, but she'd been my therapist for years, and I know she's a strong woman. And that's the trait you got from her."

"I still can't believe you're seeing mom." She chuckled sadly.

"Neither do I. I guess we both are full of surprises, huh?" I slipped my hands to my pockets and shrugged. I felt naked like my entire life was ripped open wide all at once even though I could feel that she didn't know anything about me. But one thing I knew now was that I and Megan had one thing in common.

"I'm starving, but I need to take my car first," she announced once we got back on the road.

"So do I."

"You haven't eaten your lunch?"

"No."

"I thought you'd be at the restaurant when I called you."

"No." I couldn't tell her that I was waiting for her. She didn't have to know.

I could feel her rolling her eyes sitting next to me. "Are you back to the old Forrest?"

"I'm still me." I blew out a pent up breath of frustration.

"I know, but what I mean is we were having a great conversation like normal—"

"I am not who you think I am, Megan. And you know that."

"You're a good person." She squeezed my forearm that made me still. Her touch was like a lightning bolt to me—it ignited my senses, burned my blood, and it was okay if I didn't have to focus on the road. In fact, as crazy as it was, I wanted more from her.

I was not a saint. Right now, I didn't really date, and so as Megan. Frankly, finding anyone to occupy our time in our bed was not difficult for us, but it seemed that being stuck with her was more fascinating and annoying at the same time. I guessed, I just didn't want a night with her, did I?

"Don't do that when I'm driving," I groaned. Her hand was gone.

"You held my hand earlier, and I didn't mind at all," she said in dismay. I liked that she didn't feel ashamed of showing how she felt. I found it even sexy for some reason, but sometimes, it was better to keep it to herself.

"I was just trying to comfort you." It was a lie. I did that because I cared about her.

"Do you always comfort women, Forrest?"

I narrowed my eyes at her before I focused back on the road. I didn't have to answer all her questions because she should know the answers by now.

"I kinda like when you hold my hand though," she added. Jesus, I like it too.

"Just stop talking for a while. I'm thinking."

"What is your problem?" She sounded pissed, even shifted in her seat. "You were nice to me a while ago, now you're giving me cold shoulder and suddenly turn into a complete asshole."

"I am an asshole. I've been called that and far worse." My stomach started to flip. My jaw clenched as the image of her bleeding nose flashed in my head.

"Jeez, dude. Thanks for the heads up." She glared at me. "You should probably get a life, go out, and blow off some steam. That should not make you cranky all the time."

She's a handful. I knew that. I was trying to ignore the rushing of my blood in my veins running south, but it was hard when I could smell her, I could feel her, and suddenly the space between us was getting smaller, and our tension was rising higher and higher in my car. And the worse part was, I knew she felt the same.

I let my lungs to expand when she shut her mouth. Before I could take full control of my brain, my phone vibrated in my pocket. If it wasn't Kyland, Alan, or Milo, I knew she wouldn't call me.

"I think you should answer that." She looked outside the window, still spitting mad. "My car is parked right there, Forrest."

"I know. I remember."

"Then why are we not turning around?"

"It's parked, isn't it? We will come later to take it."

"What do you mean?"

I sent her a glare. "You are peckish, aren't you?"

She sagged against the seat. "Ugh. You're so moody. It's a turn on when you brood you know, but not all the time. Try to loosen up a bit."

“Silence makes me loosen up.”

“You’re weird. Anyway, there’s fast food a few blocks from here.”

“Just take a rest, Megan. I’ll take care of the food.”

“Why are you so mad at me? I shouldn’t have called you, but you were the first person who came into my mind, and I remembered we were about to talk over lunch. But I know exactly what’s in your mind right now, and that’s what you wanna talk about.”

“What?” I snapped.

“You thought I knew the reason why are you seeing a therapist. It’s not really my business. I don’t give damn on why are you seeing one. Just so you know, I am not planning to check your personal info or your files. And for the record, I am also seeing one, and you know what’s the worse part?” She stared at me, chest heaving from anger. “When your mom is your own therapist, Forrest, but I chose her because I trust her more than anyone. And she never judged me.”

I breathed through my nose and shook my head. She should have known me better. I had a lot of skeletons in my closet. And that was the last thing I wanted her to find out. I didn’t want to put her life at risk.

“Are you always this cryptic?” She couldn’t just shut her mouth, could she?

“You won’t stop talking, will you? Until you get what you want.” There was no point in lying especially when I could literally see the thousands of questions spinning in her brain. “This car is like my own personal space. I feel like this is the only place where I can be me. I am not used to having a woman sitting on my passenger seat.” That was half of the truth.

“You mean especially when people think that a whore is sitting next to you.”

Chapter 12 Unfiltered

FORREST

“JESUS! YOU don’t know how to hold back, do you? And you’ve been a little too hard on yourself lately. Never. Ever.” I heaved an exhausted sigh. “Never a moment I think of you like that, Megan. You are one of those women I respect most. Believe it or not, but that’s the truth. Your choice of not investing in a relationship doesn’t make you a...” I pursed my lips. Saying the word whore did a tiny stab in my chest. “You can’t be judged by your views, your opinion on sex. People make their own choices by the way how they see it right.”

“Perhaps you wanna consider psychology?” she asked with sarcasm.

“There’s nothing wrong to indulge with your wants, your desires, and your needs. You’re not a sex addict and neither accepts money for sex. You’re just a grownup woman who knows what she wants. I just hope you’re not using it to escape from reality. Sex can’t be your band-aid, Megan.”

“Wow. You’re one to talk.” I would say sarcasm was an ugly wit, but it was Megan, and I’d known her to be sarcastic when she wanted to be.

“I am not using sex to forget my problem.”

“Don’t tell me you’re running away from it instead.”

A few minutes passed, I kept my words to myself.

“I told you I am starving, but I didn’t mean you have to feed me. You can stop right here.” She pointed to the nearest parking area as we passed by. She groaned when I didn’t bother stopping the car. “You don’t make any sense. One time you’re nice, then in a second you’re mean,” she added.

“If I can just have a moment of silence to think, I would be grateful.”

“So where are we going exactly?”

“To a place called shut up.”

I didn’t know why I had to shut her up when all I wanted was to hear her voice and her laugh.

She remained silent throughout the ride. And I was thankful, but when her head started to fall against the window and her breathing turned even, it had me worried.

A few moments later, she was already snoring. Cute. I couldn’t see her a woman who snored. And fuck me! Megan just dozed off in my fucking car. She must have been so exhausted with what

happened earlier. I knew the feeling because I had been mentally and physically drained just like her.

I nodded at Morgan, the security guard and narrowed my eyes at him when he noticed my passenger seat was not empty.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Wood.” He tipped his head.

I slowed the car and pointed at the elevator. He ran toward there and pressed my floor number. I groaned in annoyance once I parked the car to idle, but when I looked down at sleeping Megan, I felt a warm feeling inside my heart and hardening of my stomach at the same time.

What am I doing? Why did I feel I was risking something for her? Did she worth it though? Of course, she did. The thing was, I didn’t even know anything about her, yet, the first thing came into my mind when she called was to rescue her, and I even wanted her to share her burden with me, and not only that, I brought her to my place where no one ever knew except to the two people I ever trusted.

Morgan was already opening my door before I could help myself. “Can I help you, Mr. Wood?”

“Call my usual, and make it two.” I rounded to the passenger side.

“Anything else?”

“That’s all.”

“Right away, sir.”

When Morgan left us, I took Megan from her seat, still sleeping.

“You sleep like a dead.” I couldn’t help but look down at the woman in my arms once we were inside the elevator. She looked like an angel—so innocent, but a goddess of temptation when she was awake. Her lips slightly parted, then she scrunched her nose as if ticklish. My urge to brush a few strands of her falling hair scattered on her face was taking every ounce of self-control I had left, but the urge of leaning down to capture and taste those damn sinful lips had my blood sizzling with lust.

I knew this was a bad idea, but there was no way I was turning back. After punching my security code and my fingerprint, my door unlocked. Now, I thought of how would I explain to her when she woke up.

I climbed up to the second floor to my room. I wasn’t clearly thinking straight. My brain was swimming with lust and confusion, but my heart was telling me different things, and it was pissing me off. I completely lost focus. For the first time in years, I wasn’t analyzing my action.

I placed her down my bed. Megan shifted after I tucked her carefully. There was a little voice in my head that told me to leave, but I was already brushing her hair away from her face, tracing her cheek with the back of my finger, and it didn't end there. For the second time, I planted a kiss on her forehead before I completely walked out of my room.

What did she do to me? Because I was aware that I wasn't myself, but what was bothering me more was that I wasn't bothered at all anymore.

Bill's face flashed on the screen. "Good evening there!"

"Bill, cut the pleasantries. Get to the updates you have for me." I leaned against the desk and crossed my arms over my chest as I watched Bill explained the updates on his presentation.

I rubbed my aching temples. "Is that all? Where's the latest update there? Or at least the new idea we had days ago."

"I haven't got through it. I am reluctant about—"

"I thought it was possible. What changed? I don't have time, and I told you I wanted updates. The Bill." I knew I was harsh on him, but he knew me that I didn't joke when it came to this project. Besides, he would get all the credit once it would be successful.

"My apologies. Okay. It's almost ready, but I need more time."

I looked at the time and realized maybe Megan was already awake. "How long?"

"We started it already. I need a month or six weeks top."

"You got it, but make sure you won't disappoint me." I knew he wouldn't. To be honest, I was impressed with how fast he could make through the deadline I set for the updates.

He clasped his hands together in delight. "I won't. I promise."

Chapter 13 The Loft

MEGAN

I WOKE up in the daze of darkness, tucked under the soft comforter. It took a few moments for me to realize where I was. I used to keep on the lamp on my nightstand. Considering the masculine smell seemed so... familiar, I wasn't definitely in my bed.

I rubbed my eyes and let them adjust to the dark surrounding. I blindly flicked the lamp on the nightstand on. The yellow light started to illuminate around.

Holy shit!

Freaked out, I sat up. The bedroom was sleek and simple in sophisticated gray and white color from the bed, to curtain, and the sliding door to my left. Despite the plain colors, it didn't silently cry out solitude. I dragged my feet out of the king-sized bed to the glossy wooden plank flooring.

Out of curiosity, I tiptoed toward the door, sliding it wide. My mouth slacked open. It was a walk-in closet full of fancy tailored suits and shirts arranged in color. Shoes in leather and sneakers. Casual clothes, jackets, and jeans. It didn't end there, I deliberately pulled a wide drawer full of neckties, watches, and cufflinks.

Oh. My. God.

My heart was thumping in my chest as I pushed the drawer closed and momentarily stopped. Where the hell am I? I let out a deep shaky breath, stepped out, and slid the door closed behind me. I leaned against it to calm myself before I sashayed to the curtain and gasped to the view behind the floor-to-ceiling glass window. I was in a tall building in a high-end apartment.

Skeptical, I walked out of the room only to find out I was on the second floor, towering the vast space of the polished living room. It was tasteful and elegant for a simple color. My feet dragged me down the dark wooden stairs to the main floor.

My heart started to pound louder in my chest when I realized I wasn't with Forrest. There was no way this was his apartment, was there? Where the hell was he anyway? Forrest must be working tonight. Wait, what time is it? I only remembered falling asleep in his car when his mood turned sour.

I quickened my pace and searched for the exit. When the door came to view, someone called my name behind me, making me stop dead in my track.

“Escaping already?” Relief poured through me. I closed my eyes, releasing a deep sigh when I recognized that voice. Thank God.

“You scared the living shit out of me.” I turned around, and I thought someone had stolen my brain for a moment. My eyes literally grew wide. I couldn’t form cohesive words to see the most stunning and mesmerizing Forrest I’d ever seen. He looked relaxed despite wearing the frown on his face. The simple gray shirt was hugging his wide shoulders and muscled slabs chest with sleeves stretched against his sinewy arms. Damn those tattoos. I’d never seen him wearing sweatpants and barefooted before, and this was something new to me. My jaw literally dropped.

Ignoring my unexpected reaction, he simply ordered, “Follow me.”

“Exquisite,” finally, I able to utter a word. I rolled my eyes and followed suit while I let my eyes wander around.

His apartment was topnotch, clean, and looked a million bucks. For a man who was the job was bartending in a nightclub, how could he even afford something as luxurious as this?

“Save the questions, Megan.” Of course.

I chuckled. “What made you think I have one?”

“It’s written all over your face.”

“I guess you’re right.” We stopped in front of the dining table.

“Have a seat. Let me just prepare our dinner.”

“Can I help?”

He slightly shook his head. “No.”

I sunk to the chair. Forrest was back to a man who didn’t say much. I couldn’t blame him if it wasn’t easy to trust someone like me, considering he had been keeping secrets on his own.

I looked down at my hands, frustrated. I couldn’t get him and I had no chance to get through his walls. He was the toughest nut to crack.

He came back quickly and placed down a plate of sirloin steak, asparagus, and mashed potatoes in front of me, and another plate for him with the same menu.

He left, then a few moments later, he had two glasses and a bottle of wine. Without a word, he poured red wine into our glasses after taking a seat like a goddamn god. Who is this man in front of me? I can’t recognize him anymore. Or the right question is, who is Forrest Wood?

"Thanks," I muttered, suddenly feeling shy. "I was expecting a greasy Chinese takeout for our dinner."

"Hmm. You're welcome." He picked his cutlery and sliced his steak like he used to eat it every day. I bet he was. Then I remembered something back at the diner.

The well-done was cook to perfection. He must have ordered it from a five-star restaurant. I wondered how he did he know how I liked in my steak. He must be good at guessing.

"Do you have work tonight?" I thought of how I could take my car from the parking lot and call my mother.

"I'll be working behind the stick."

"After our dinner, just give me your address so that I can call someone to pick me up."

"Let's eat and talk about it later."

I sipped my wine. "This is really good." I should be lying if this was not the best thing I'd had lately. This must be aged. I wasn't a connoisseur, but I certainly loved the taste. I could even taste the smooth and rich fruity flavor in it.

"Glad you like it."

It was hard to keep my thoughts when my brain was running a mile with millions of questions and presumptions my mind could grasp on. Instead of talking, I tried harder to shut my mouth up and focused on my meal because I apparently slept the whole afternoon and missed my lunch. I bet, Forrest was, too.

Once we were done, I volunteered to clean up.

"I'll hit the shower." That was the only thing he said before he left. His reluctance was a spear to my chest.

Smiling, I nodded and placed the plates into the sink. His kitchen was elegant, and I was even heedful not to break anything. I was like touching a precious gemstone the whole time. Everything was far than I expected, but then, this man, I knew nothing at all.

Once I was done placing them into his expensive dishwasher, I moved to the living room and shook my head in disbelief as I reluctantly settled on his crocodile skin couch.

I still couldn't find my shoes around, my phone, and my purse. I climbed up to the second floor. When I sneaked into his room, Forrest was still in the shower.

Blowing out a sigh, I sat on the edge of his bed when my things where nowhere to find. I thought of Mom, then my mind went back to Forrest. Why did he have to live in two different worlds

when he could afford to buy his own nightclub? Despite being distrustful and enigmatic, he seemed to be trustworthy enough to bring me here and show me a small part of his life.

Absentmindedly, I was combing my hair with my fingers. Insecurity was a bitch. I was probably looked like shit, and I couldn't even freshen up while Forrest was looking almighty.

A small gasp followed by a long deep groan interrupted my thoughts. I was quicker on my feet and realized I was probably a little too forward and I'd crossed the line in entering his room uninvited.

What was I thinking?

Chapter 14 Tattoos

MEGAN

TENSION THICKENED between us, it coiled up in my gut. I did a huge gulp with wide eyes in shock. Oh, boy. Trouble, here I come. Forrest only in a towel wrapped securely around his narrow hips. His presence had me utterly speechless. Lord Jesus, he was beautiful in every angle—beautiful than I ever imagined.

My heart was racing wild. My skin grew hot with searing heat rushing up my neck to my face from embarrassment and his...well, he looked like a forbidden ripe fruit. The longer you look, the stronger the desire of wanting a bite.

I opened my mouth to speak, I had to close again, afraid I might say something definitely inappropriate that I should be keeping it to myself. I'd had a fair share of men, but he was too perfect for me that made me sinfully melt inside.

I was right after all—his body was covered with beautiful different filigree tattoos, occupying both ripped arms, his chest, and on his abdomen. This guy had a hell of a piece of treasure underneath his clothes, and I was way beyond pleased. I was raw with a pure fireball of lust that I couldn't take my eyes off of him far off my brain was dictating me to.

I forced back a swallow and said nonchalantly, "I um. I was searching for my phone and maybe I could call my mom."

He hadn't moved a muscle, nor replied, and that had me worried. But damn, he had all the muscles in the right places in his stunning and mouth-watering physique—from his massive and striking chest to his six packs down to the perfect V. And my eyes paused momentarily when it ended in his towel.

I was done playing my part being an Academy Award-winning goody-two-shoes role earlier. If he could see through me that I liked what I saw, then be it.

My pulse was already vibrating across my skin. If he ever took a step closer, I'd love to pull the towel off of him in a heartbeat because that was the only thing that barely covering the last package I was so eager to see.

When I lifted my gaze, Forrest was already clenching his clean-shaven jaw, glaring at me with dark furious eyes. I swallowed, feeling my throat parched for being guilty of invading his personal space. And for leisurely checking out the perfect package.

Overwhelmed with his utter male perfection, I cleared my throat. Twice. "Um, I'm sorry. I should've waited." I pointed my thumb. "Down."

"What do you want?"

You. I'd been fantasizing this moment to be right here with you alone, eat you as if you're my last meal.

I blinked to my stupid thought. "I told you, I was searching for my phone." Was he even listening? Or we both had moments? My inner bitch celebrated, but I was probably wrong since he didn't seem affected to be alone with me in his room.

"Wait down, and let me put some clothes on." He was not wearing emotion on his face, and it bugged me. Damn, he was so cold and insensitive.

"I'm sorry." I shuffled toward the door when he spoke.

"I have a spare toothbrush in the bathroom downstairs."

I turned my head and smiled. "Thanks. I badly need one."

He barely nodded, still wearing the scowl on his face. I closed the door behind me and let out a long deep shaky breath.

Oh, god! I'm in deep deep trouble.

I was staring outside the window, and I couldn't even admire the beautiful city light from my spot. My mind went back to the broody half-naked Forrest as I tried to think of the reasons why he had his body tattooed. I was itchy to figure out if he inked his back as well.

I wanted to open him layer by layer, to figure him out, to understand him, and I knew it wasn't easy, but I would take it as a challenge.

He gave me my bag and my phone before we left his extravagant loft. We were indeed in the apartment building in the middle of the city. And he had a penthouse on his own.

"I'll send you to your apartment. Give me your key so that I can ask someone to pick your car for you." Finally, he spoke when we got in his car.

"For a smoker, I couldn't even smell a hint of smoke in your car."

"I don't smoke inside." He revved off from the parking lot.

"Yeah, it seems like it. Let me guess, the next words will come from your mouth is something like what you see in there, stays in there, right?"

He didn't reply, so it was a yes.

"Anyway, you don't have to bother to pick up my car. I'll hail a cab to the clinic once we arrive at the club."

"Just do what I say." His order had me paused for a moment. I'm past annoyed.

I shot him a glare. "Look. Thanks for saving my ass, for taking to the hospital, for letting me rest in your expensive apartment, for feeding me with your delicious steak and your world-class wine, Forrest, the bartender, but you can't freaking control me because I am sitting right next to you in your car. Haven't you noticed? I can take care of myself. Thank you very much."

"Fine. Whatever you want."

I shook my head. The city light passed in a blur. And I was on the edge of yelling at him to talk when the silence stretched between us and the tension leaped higher and higher and ready to explode into a huge flame.

He parked his car at the back of the club, then got out without a single word. I stayed for a moment, then I saw he was lighting a stick. I got out and rounded to his side as he inhaled that smoke into his poor lungs.

"I am smoking," with a growl, he warned me.

"So?"

"You don't wanna be passive, do you?"

I stared then blinked, trying to understand his fit of temper. "I guess, this is my cue to leave, isn't it?"

He showed no expression, pressing his lips tight together.

Before he could place the stick back into his lips, I snatched it from his fingers. "Thanks."

"Megan!"

"Goodnight, Forrest." I was about to storm away, when he had my arm in his grip in a blink, grunting disapprovingly at me.

Chapter 15 The Plot Thickens

FORREST

My world just turns fucking upside down.

I HAD been holding these indescribable feelings since I left her sleeping in my room. For the first time, I broke my own rules for someone, and I felt something heavy had lifted out of my chest.

I could see a million questions forming in her head though. I knew one question would lead to another, and I wasn't ready to hand her over my answers. I was grateful that somehow she understood me, and she didn't press even though she was itching to.

I just went with my gut to trust her, but it didn't mean she had to know more than what she already saw. Not yet—not until I was successful with my plan.

"Give that to me, Megan." Damn this woman was testing me. She just snatched the cigarette from my fingers. Thankfully, I was faster than her, and I had her in my grip before she could escape.

"Don't you wanna call your mom?"

She faced me. "Oops! Sorry." Instead of giving back the stick, she showed me a cheeky grin, and let it slip from her fingers.

I pressed my lips into a hard thin line as I glared at her, but her smile had me falling apart. I felt my brows had drawn back to their places, and I was amazed to see her gorgeous face. "Don't do that again."

"Or what?" Jesus, she was resilient.

Swearing under my breath, I couldn't respond anymore. My tongue suddenly thickened in my mouth.

I needed to put some distance between us or else I might do something stupid. I had to put all my strength to prevent the repercussions. My muscles were taut to stop myself from pulling her closer and kissing her to shut the smile off of her lips. She was just so beautiful, and the image of my lips smashing into hers raced my heart and tightened my groins.

She got me—she knew what she was doing affected me, and she was pushing me beyond my limit.

I wanted her, there was no denying on that, and I was going to have her, but first, I needed to tell her who I was and what I'd been up to. I also needed to make sure that I was stronger than my obsession with her before this thing between us got any deeper.

"I have to go, and I need to call my mom," she announced.

When I thought I could breathe in relief, my gut wanted me to stop her. The fact that I didn't like the idea of her taking a cab to take her car, was already bugging me, right now, I was tempted to send her home. It may sound stupid, but I wanted to spend some time with her despite her being pissed at me most of the time.

I loosened her arm until I was only holding her hand like in a fucking romance movie. "Just take care."

Her smile widened, eyes glittered as she squeezed my hand before she let it go. I wanted to hold it longer, to stay this way as if it was our moment, and for the longest time, I felt like I was a normal person again without the huge responsibility weighing on my shoulder.

It was annoying how I wasn't ready for her to go just yet, then I remembered something way more important than being a whip. I clenched my jaw hard to stop from talking and looked away when I saw her shadow slowly fading from my sight.

What the fuck was that?

"Fuck," I growled out a curse and wanted to kick something for being too carried away by the whole situation.

"That's what I thought. That plot unexpectedly thickens." I stiffened at the voice behind my back.

"How long have you been there, watching?" I didn't bother turning around. It was Pyke, but I didn't give a damn what he saw or what he heard.

"Enough to hear the" he chuckled in amusement, then his footsteps were getting closer. "I'm glad you made a move, Wood because I know it sucks to keep your feelings left unsaid. At least you didn't end up having a bruised cheek like me. And tell you what. Keeping a sexual tension as strong as yours to yourself is dangerous, man. It's like a goddamn radioactive. Then, kaboom!"

"I don't know what you're talking about." I didn't deny, I was just not ready to talk about it.

"Sure about that, man? I am not blind, you know. I was actually waiting for a moment when you realize that a girl like Megan won't wait for your dumbass-ness self to figure out that you actually falling for her. I don't know who you really are, but I watched how you looked after my girls, and I know I can also trust you with her."

"I think you're not good at judging people. You said yourself, you don't know me. And I am not making a move on Megan. I was just helping her."

“Helping? Well, that’s quite a huge denial you got there, Wood. Tell me any woman you invited to sit in your car? Or held a hand and said just take care, babe? If you can name one, I let what I just witnessed go.”

“Damn it, Hughes. First, I didn’t call her babe,” I pointed out. “Second, just shut your fucking mouth.” I walked past him toward the club with hands already balled into fists in irritation.

“I know you’re a good guy, Wood, but don’t ever hurt my wife’s best friend. And I care about Megan just like our girls.” Pyke wouldn’t shut up. He even followed me inside.

Sometimes it was better to shut up than to argue, especially when you knew you would only lose in the end.

I had two more hours left when I took a break at my usual spot. The club was not busy tonight, or I thought it wasn’t because most of the time, my mind went back to Megan. I wanted to call her if she got home safe, but something was stopping me. Perhaps, I didn’t want to raise more suspicions for Pyke and Xandry. Additionally, half of the time, I was busy glaring at them while they kept fucking smirking at me the whole night.

I lit a stick and stared at it for seconds. I clenched my eyes shut and threw the stick away. What’s going on with me? Since when I care about what people thought about me?

“I’ve been there, done that, Wood, but what I didn’t see it coming is that my wife’s best friend has you pussy-whipped to a certain degree. Couldn’t light a stick already without thinking what would she say, huh? Man, it’s not that I have a say to whom she’s gonna date, but if—”

Chapter 16 Mama Knows Best

FORREST

I GRUNTED throatily. “If I break her heart, you will what?” I faced Xandry who was grinning like a bumbling idiot. I actually admired him because he changed a lot, took responsibility for taking care of his kid Sammer, and stopped manwhoring since he met Blaine. “Punch me? Let someone castrate my balls or cut my dick off and feed it to the dog? Go ahead and tell me. And I am not a goddamn pussy-whipped!” It was pointless, and I knew exactly what he wanted to say.

“But you never denied that you’re not into her, are you?”

I leaned against the wall and crossed my arms over my chest. My chest was heaving. “Would you believe me?”

“Nope.”

“Then you got my answer. Find someone to piss off tonight, Williams. I’m done with you and Hughes.”

“Blaine would be glad to hear this. They will meet this weekend, and I can’t wait to tell her this wonderful news tonight. Pyke is probably calling Cam right now, and I am sure she will tell Bianca about their best friend is with enigmatic Wood, right, man?” He slapped my arm playfully, wagging his brows.

“Fuck off, Williams!” I escaped, and he just laughed it out loud.

“Now I get the reason why you never had any woman with you. So proud of you, man!”

Damnit!

I’d never been disturbed with something that was seemed uncomplicated, yet here I was, sighing constantly in my car. After I pulled out from the driveway, I dialed a number on my speed dial and connected it to the speaker.

“Is everything okay, darling?”

I closed my eyes to hear her sweet voice. “I am now, Mama.”

“You don’t sound okay though. Do you wanna talk about it?” Her worried voice made me a complete asshole. That was the last thing I wanted her to feel, but I didn’t even know why I was calling in the first place. I missed her, that was for sure. And at this moment, I needed her so badly that I had to reach out via phone call.

I chuckled. "You sound like my therapist, Mama. I just wanna hear your voice."

"You don't do that, darling." She was right. We met somewhere when I missed her, and she knew now that something was troubling me.

"I know. Sorry to call you at this time."

"You know it's already morning here. Let me guess, you just went out of your job. Why don't you—"

"Mama, how many times we talked about this. I love what I do."

"Okay, son. This is what we agreed with Alan, I get it. Forget that I ever mentioned. Now tell me if I have to pack and ready my dress."

I laughed out loud in my car. She'd been nagging me with questions if when I was going to bring my girlfriend home or invite her for my wedding. "You know, I'm not dating anyone at this moment and I certainly don't have a bride, Mama."

The traffic light turned red.

"Then find one." My mind shifted to the image of Megan. There was no way she thought about settling down. She seemed not a type of woman who dreamed of a picket fence, a pet dog, and taking care of kids. I had it bad.

"I will pay for someone to marry me. How about that?"

"Don't joke like that with me, young lad."

"So, You mean I'm still young to get married, huh?" I drove off the moment the traffic light turned green. Mama always made me relax. I could feel the weight had been lifted off of my chest just by talking with her.

"Forrest, don't change the subject."

"I am actually calling to tell you that I am not sure if I can travel this month. Something came up that needed my attention, and I'm gonna be busy with the project I am working on with Lioner as well. Just tell your assistant to reach out to me when you need my opinion, okay? I'll make it up to you next month, I promise." I hoped my reason was pretty convincing.

"I know you've been traveling a lot lately, Forrest. I mean it, stop chasing a storm before you get in deep trouble." The picture Alan showed me last week crossed my mind and had me tense. I couldn't let her worry about me. That was why I had to do it discreetly.

"I told you, Mama, to stop worrying about me. I can take care of myself."

“So how’s Alan?”

“You worry too much. As always, he’s stronger than a horse.”

“Now tell me about the girl that’s bothering you?”

My heart skipped a beat. “What girl?”

“I am your mother. I remember you were this troubled when you were ten, and you admitted that.” The smile on her voice was palpable. My mother had moved on and never been bothered talking about the past. I, on the other hand, was still searching for the truth behind her back.

“Fine. I did, but that was ages ago.”

“Do you like someone, darling?” Her question froze me in my seat.

“I don’t know.”

“I do know though, and I am glad you find something to make yourself busy with another woman than taking care of your old mama. I’m good, Forrest. You don’t have to check out on me every now and then. I will call you when I’m not feeling well. You have my word on that.”

“We are not talking about this again. You can’t stop me from worrying when it comes to you. You are my mother, and it’s my responsibility as a son to take care of you until I can’t anymore.”

“Responsibility my arse, lad. I am your mother. Don’t turn the table because you’ve grown up into a gigantic pain in the arse.”

“Jesus. I’m a pain in the bum?” I laughed my ass out loud. She thought she was trouble for me. It was always like this, but I didn’t think I could live a life without checking up on her knowing she was a hundred miles away from me. “I have to go, Mama. I know you still love me even I’m a gigantic pain in the bum. I love you.” I got out of my car.

“Get a life, Forrest. It’s time for you to ask this woman out before it’s too late. I love you, my baby boy.”

Then something had my gut twisted. I didn’t realize I was standing in front of Megan’s apartment building.

Chapter 17 Friends Know it All

MEGAN

I SIGHED, a long deliberately sigh and paused a moment before I stepped into the King's mansion.

After my long talk with Mom in the morning, and she seemed okay, I received a call from Camila, inviting me to come over tonight. I missed them, but I understood why we couldn't do it like we used to.

"Meg!" Camila looked stunning than ever in her white strappy dress.

"I thought you're drowned in wine with his come and magically turned into a vine in Italy." I pulled her into a hug.

"Touché. I missed your bad mouth though." She chuckled heartily.

"Really? So how was your honeymoon? Did he always blow your mind that you thought you're in a milky way and cuff you that you couldn't even text me?"

"Silly. B and Blaine are already waiting for you. Why I am not surprised anymore that you're late?"

Being early was not really my strong suit when meeting them, but they still loved me anyway.

When it came to the job though, I made sure not to be tardy.

My brow arched. "I see. So B1 and B2 left their husbands for us? Now I feel so special." I felt excited that everyone would be here today.

We reached the enormous living room and found Sammer rolling on the floor.

"Oh, my God! Are you trying to train to be a soldier, you little bug? I don't think your daddy will allow you though. Isn't it cool to be a jet fighter pilot? Badass, huh?" I tickled her tiny body. She turned red and let out a bubbly laugh.

Blaine came over. "Is it true?" she asked after kissing my cheek without beating around the bushes. She was smiling brighter than the sunshine.

"What's true?" I asked back nonchalantly and held Sammer's hand. "Where's my boy?"

"Ben is with his daddy, playing softball." We moved to the bar where Bianca and Camila were giggling.

"Of course, the daddy's boy." I was referring to Xandry. He became the best father of the year for Ben and Sammer. Ben's father may be in the picture now, but he was closer to Xandry than to his father. I didn't see that coming, and I was impressed.

"Yeah. Sammer is supposed to be with Shine, but she has exams on Monday. So I let her stay with me for a while, right, Sammy?" Blaine answered, giving a loud smack on Sammer's chubby cheek. The girl squealed cheerfully.

I believed people change. My mind went back to Forrest, thinking if he lit another stick after I snatched one from him. He just reminded me of someone dear to me. I let out a breath, ignoring the pang in my chest.

I leaned down to kiss Bianca on her cheek. "I'm surprised you didn't bring Kelly with you." Kelly was her baby girl with Kyland. I cut off Bianca before she could answer. "Let me guess, she's with Kill."

Bianca kissed me back. "Yup. They'll be here soon."

I looked away, feeling my throat parched. I realized I was jealous than I had to admit. "So, about my question, Meg?" Blaine pressed.

I rolled my eyes. "What's true? Can you be a little more specific?" I took a glass of Champagne on the counter and sipped it. "What are we celebrating?"

"I'm pregnant."

My eyes widened in surprise. I didn't know how did I place down the flute. The last thing I knew, I was lifting Camila like she weighed nothing. "Oh, my god, bitch! Look who had been busy rolling in the hay. Or should I say rolling in the vineyard? Oh god, babe. Harder!"

"Hush! There's a kid, silly." Blaine slapped my butt playfully.

I laughed boisterously. "Oops! Sorry, Sammy." I looked at Camila again who was smiling gleefully at me. "Oh, my god, bitch," I whispered the last word. "Double congratulations!" I kissed her twice. Her company just landed a huge deal with one of the biggest automobile manufacturers in the world. "I'm so proud of you."

"Thanks! I'm so excited and scared about how to be a mom at the same time."

"Silly, look at me. Do I look scared? Maybe I was when I had Ben, but I made through because of my family. We're here for you. Your mom, and of course, Pyke will take care of you," Blaine said, encouraging Camila.

"He's so happy, Cam." Bianca gripped her hand.

She released a sigh of relief. "I know. We'd been trying for over a year, and now, I am pregnant, I still can't wrap my head around it. It feels like a dream come true."

Of course, it was. Who didn't want to have a bundle of joy with a hot husband like Pyke who loved her very much? They could even hire a nanny to each child they were going to pop. Money was not a problem. Pyke was rich, and so as Camila who her father left millions worth of assets.

They all went back to the counter and sat on the stools. They watched me closely and crossed their legs simultaneously.

"What's with the fuss? Why do I feel like I am under interrogation tonight?" I crossed my arms over my chest, eyeing them one by one.

"So, what's with you and Forrest?" Camila started, literally grinning.

I could feel the foreseeable guilt began to spread over me because I had to lie to them. When my face started to burn, I threw them a glare. "What about me and Forrest?"

"I've been rooting for both of you for a while now. The sparks. Oh, my god! The sparks. It could light a fire. Everyone can sense it when you two are around, it's like everywhere. So magical."

Bianca did a hand signal. "Now, spill it, bitch," she pressed, glancing at Sammer if she could hear her.

"It doesn't suit you," I sneered. "So magical? Sparks? Where did those come from?"

"Don't lie to us, Meg."

"There's nothing to spill."

"Why don't you visit your mom. Fix your trust issues," Camila said, looking hopeful.

"You've been busy these past few weeks, Meg. And a little birdy told me that it has something to do with Broody," Blaine added.

"We all were, but I don't have trust issues. And I met Mom."

Their faces lit up.

"Great. I'm happy to hear that. And that's why you've been busy?" Bianca asked, not nearly convinced. I knew they wanted to hear some juicy detail. Sadly though, there wasn't.

"Of course, not. I was busy searching for a job because my ex-boss wanted to shove his little dick into my vagina."

"Your mouth," Camila chided. "I'm sorry, Meg. Why didn't you even tell us? You know I can offer you a job."

I screwed my face. "I told you I don't wanna work with you because you're my best friend."

"Silly, you were good with your previous job, weren't you? You will be hired because you're qualified, not because we are best friends. Can you swallow your hubris for a while and accept my offer?"

"So, you're jobless right now?" Blaine inquired.

I looked down. I couldn't tell them that I was currently working for my mom because it was way more embarrassing to work for your mother than for your best friend. "Got a receptionist job for the meantime until I find a better stable one."

"Pyke can help you if you don't wanna accept my offer," Camila said.

"I know and thanks, but I'm good. Really."

"Now let's go back to our topic. What's the score between you and Forrest?"

"Stop it, Blaine." I glared at her.

She started laughing like there was no tomorrow. Even Sammer joined her mama. "See, even my baby is laughing with me, right, Sammy? Because Aunt Meg knows now how to keep secrets from us." God, she's a pain in the ass.

"Come on, Meg. Spill it. My husband would never lie to me. You've never hide anything from us especially when it comes to your no-dating-policy-thingy. So, let me guess, this thing between you and Broody is something serious, huh? Good to know that you finally consider getting into a serious relationship, and not ghosting someone once he asks if he can see you again," Cam remarked.

"I'm going home." I scowled and turned around, ready to escape, only to freeze in place and render speechless when Forrest made his grand entrance. He stole my breath away even though he hadn't seen me yet.

Chapter 18 When A Heart Speaks

MEGAN

MY FACE burned with embarrassment to my friends who were now giggling as if they got their answers effortlessly and knowing that my reaction said it all. Forrest walked in with the guys, carrying Kelly in his huge arms. He looked delicious and magnificent in a white shirt and navy blue pants.

I was still rooted in place when my gaze locked with his, and I swore his scalding gaze buzzed right into my core, making my inner muscles clenched. God, this man is just delicious.

“Celebrating with us?” Pyke asked me, kissing Camila on the lips with eyes flashing with love and warmth. “Glad you could join us, Meg.”

I could feel that there was something more in that statement. Now I felt like I was being set-up.

“Someone wants to run away, Pyke.” She giggled.

“I’m not running away if you weren’t all ridiculous.” Guilty, I faced her.

“Don’t mess with her. She has now Broody to defend her,” Pyke whispered then glanced at me.

“Right, Meg?”

My face was burning. “I don’t know what you all are talking about.”

“I remember myself when I first met Xandry. Right, baby?”

Xandry gave Blaine a knowing grin.

Oh, god! I wanna die this instant. Why is this so hard for me to admit that I like Forrest more than I have to admit?

Forrest gave Kelly to Bianca, then sauntered silently inside the bar, ignoring our friends’ comments as if we weren’t in the hot seat. Excellent!

So how could I admit if I would only end up embarrassed?

He grabbed a bottle of whiskey. “Knock yourself up.”

“Thanks, man,” Kyland said. “And you won’t drink a thing, Cam.”

“I know. I’m drinking this fresh lime juice.” She pointed at the half-empty glass on the counter.

I felt suddenly out of place. “Okay, that’s quite enough of Oxytocin over here.” I grabbed my Champagne, ready to skip away when Forrest called my name. Again, I stuck in my place.

“Wait.” He picked at least five bottles of white spirits, poured into a glass of ice, then topped off with Coke and garnished it with a lemon wedge. He pushed to my front. “Try this one. A Long Island Iced tea.”

I stared at him for a good few seconds before I placed down the glass of Champagne and grabbed the drink he mixed. I was quite touched by his effort to make something for me.

I wished it would make me feel better, but my life lately couldn’t be fixed by a single drink. Not even sex.

“Thanks.” I raised the glass and smiled. Finally, I found a chair and sulked in there alone.

Before I could take a sip, a shadow towered me. I scowled at Kyland. “What?”

“Is it true?”

“It’s the million-dollar question for tonight, isn’t it? Why don’t you ask him?”

“Ask who?” He looked confused. “I was referring if you’re looking for a job.”

Oh, crap!

I sat straight, feeling my cheek heated even more. “Oh.” I was beyond mortified. I cleared my throat. “Yeah.”

“Pyke is thinking of transferring me to the new Night Stalker. It’s closer to my apartment. Are you interested in taking my place?” He sat on the empty chair to my left. “I know you have experience with paperwork. I think the job is perfect for you.”

“Is there anyone more qualified than me. How about Forrest?”

“I offered, but he turned it down.”

“Of course.” I tried hard not to roll my eyes because they didn’t have any idea that Forrest was probably as rich as Pyke or even richer. I didn’t even know why he was bartending when it paid way below his pay grade.

“Let me think about it.”

He sipped his whiskey. “Good.” Then stood up and smiled. “I know that, too.”

Oh, God! The news indeed travels so fast. I followed Kyland with my gaze as he sauntered to join the others. Forrest was playing with Kelly in Bianca’s arms. I knew he loved that kid. He even agreed to be Kelly’s godfather when Kyland asked him to be.

I dropped my gaze when he shifted his gaze to me because the longer I stared at him the longer I didn't want it to end. I sought to control my pounding heart, but it seemed that it was too late.

"Did you drive over here?" He'd been ignoring me like plague earlier. I was surprised to find him standing at my side, talking to me.

"Yes," I answered shortly.

"Can I drive you home?"

I looked up at him, astounded. "Where's your car?" Since Bianca and Blaine left already with their husbands, I was here stuck with Forrest alone.

"I carpooled with Kyland. I left mine at Fleur."

"Okay." I blinked. "I mean, are you sure?"

"You two, drive home safe." Cam kissed my cheek and gripped Forrest's arm with a groan as if giving him a warning.

I frowned. There was something I was missing here. That tells the fuss and questions.

"Thanks, Cam," Forrest replied.

When we get into my car, I tossed him the key. I wasn't expecting him to open the door for me, but he did. He remained silent when we hit the road. I honestly didn't know what to say when he was this silent just like he used to. Why was I even surprised? I was just trying to prevent more embarrassments than I had already tonight because I knew he would tell me to shut up again.

"I was there after my work," Finally, he started.

"Where?" I looked sharply at him.

"Down your apartment building."

I frowned. "Then why didn't you come up or let me know at least?"

"I don't know."

"You better have a more dependable answer than that because the guys kept grilling me with stupid questions about us." I huffed in frustration. "And I couldn't give them an answer because nothing's going on between us." Isn't there?

His jaw clenched, knuckles gripping white against the steering wheel. I waited and waited, but he hadn't said a word again. I wanted him to shake him to talk to me.

God, he's frustrating. The remaining ride was a blur as I ended scowling in the passenger seat until we arrived at my place.

I groaned in annoyance. Before I could open the door, a warm grip on my hand had me completely stilled and panicked. I experienced a jolt of pleasure at his innocent touch, and I ached to grasp him back. Still, he had not spoken a word, so I waited, but to my disappointment, it didn't happen.

"Gah! Why do I have to guess all the time? I can't read your mind, you know. And it's frustrating!"

He groaned at my irritated voice. "I came to see you."

Still, I didn't face him. "Is it so hard to tell?"

"I'm not ready to answer you if you will ask."

Annoyed, I turned to him. His hand remained on mine, he was wearing a frustration on his face, his gaze was outside the windshield.

"Look at me," I ordered. When he did, our eyes connected. A burning need glowed brightly in his gaze, stirring my soul and awakening something in me that had been long ignored. "Did I pry? Did you press when you found out about my mother? You know I have so many questions, and so do you. We know we're not ready for that. We both have skeletons in our closets, and I don't give a crap for as long as I know you don't kill people for a living."

He licked his lips, nervous. His eyes glittered with pain, begging for understanding. "I don't want when the time comes, and you will tell me you can't do it anymore."

My senses momentarily freeze, just staring at his pleading gaze. I pleaded my heart to remain calm, but it was beating a million a mile. If there was a sensible side in my brain was telling me to hold a sec, I already did, but my stupid heart was strong enough to speak for itself.

For a brief moment, I managed to say his name before I grabbed the back of his head, dove my fingers into his thick and soft dark hair, pulled him closer to me as I slammed my lips into his.

Chapter 19 Started With A Kiss

FORREST

I TENSED all over. My eyes shut close simultaneously with a gasp escaping my lips. My world blurred. My mind was battling with the wild beating of my heart, but there was no logic of backing out when the blazing needs consuming me. And I wouldn't. I could even feel my pulse thrusting in my ears as she pressed her lips against mine.

A familiar shudder rippled through me as I welcomed the moist and velvety softness of her lips. I captured hers firmly with an endless tangle that had me breathless. I pushed my fingers through her hair and my free hand at the back of her neck.

Megan initiated—tongue slowly seeking for an entrance as she leisurely ran across the seam of my lips. I had her into my mouth, tongue dueling as we familiarized and took our time.

Her kiss had instantly catapulted me into a frenzy. Heat enveloped my body. The pulsation broke out into hard throb on my cock threatening to rip a hole in my pants. The relentless throbbing turned into pressure when she let out a moan. I knew Megan had a fair share of experience, but it didn't bother me the slightest as I let her sensuous skilled-tongue explore in my mouth.

And she could kiss, and it was perfect.

I was fixated on her and fantasized her every damn way imaginable. Kissing her was way too much already for me like a drug spreading through my veins, yet I didn't want this to end. I'd worry about tomorrow. Right now, It was just me and Megan.

Her hands started to travel down my neck, splaying to my shoulders that had me went rigid. I broke the kiss as tension was spiraling through my core. Megan whimpered. We were both in a deep breath as she rested her forehead against mine.

"That was hot," she said breathlessly, the heat of her breath sent goosebumps all over my skin.

My body was still on fire, I said, "Fuck yeah, but as much as I want to take your right now, I can't let that happen while we are here in the parking lot." I planted a kiss on her forehead and adjusted my seat. My cock was still throbbing, begging to escape from my pants.

"Will you come up with me?" she asked reluctantly as if I was going to say no.

Half of my life, I was constantly focused, to the point that I thought women and relationships were dangerous and distractions to my plan. Tonight, for the first time in my life, I'd driven to my instinct, I didn't care about getting involved, I didn't care about risk anymore.

“Are you sure?” I looked at her, heavy-lidded eyes, flush of arousal glowing on her cheeks. Her lips were still swollen red by our previous kiss. I forced myself not to give in to the temptation by kissing her again. Even if I did so, I know with my hunger for her, kissing her wouldn’t be enough.

“Yes,” she said hoarsely.

Megan wanted me, and I wanted her as much as she did. Our attraction went both ways.

As the elevator ascended, a moan escaped my mouth the moment her lips back on mine. As if seemingly moved on their own accord, our tongues explored our mouths. Megan pushed and pressed me against the wall, shamelessly rolling her hips against me. Her breast molded against my chest perfectly.

The friction was too much that almost had me over the edge. My hands were greedily traveling back down her spine and landed on her sweet and squeezable ass. With my erection was still threatening to escape, I ground back, and I had to clench my eyes shut to control the urge of raising her dress up and take her here.

By the time we reached the floor, we were both breathless and clinging. We barely made inside her apartment. My heart was still thrumming with anticipation as I grabbed her thighs and let them wrap around my waist.

“Bedroom.” Her hands snaked around my neck as I carried her toward the nearest door. Our kiss hardened, tongues invading like we were both starved for years.

We got into her room, I put her on her feet, and she zipped down her dress hurriedly. The material fell on her ankles, leaving the black lacy bra and panties on her cream skin. I’d be fucking lying if I’d say I’d never dream of this moment to happen.

“God, you’re gorgeous.” My heart nearly stopped as I lost myself in her lush body. I could already feel it molding with mine, burning my skin with every inch as it touched mine.

I sauntered closer, skimmed my fingers on her shoulder as I draped down the strap. Impatience tickled my skin to be inside her, but I was a patient man, and I would take my time to explore every inch of her body to my own pleasure.

She squeezed her eyes shut, throwing her head back as I cupped her tit and kneaded with firm pressure against the material.

“Take my bra off.” Her voice was rasp and husky.

She didn’t have to tell me again, I was planning to do so. The thing fell down the floor, and I had to lick my dry lips to see her pink puckered nipples begging for my attention. Goosebumps broke all over her skin, and an unstoppable wave of sensation rushed through my veins.

I closed the gap between us, cupping both tits with my palm. The size was just perfect for my hand. Kneading them, I brushed over her nipples, pinched the tiny peaks with my fingers, causing her to release a whimper.

“I had enough foreplay, Forrest.” My breathing caught as she fumbled with my belt, unbuttoned, and unzipped my pants. She quickly shoved it down, leaving only my boxers. Her hands skimmed on my hips and started fiddling the bottom of my shirt, and I had them pinned there.

Her heavy lids fluttered open as she looked at me in confusion. Pain and desperation flashed in her eyes. “Are you rejecting me?”

Chapter 20 Darker Anticipation

FORREST

Is she fucking kidding me?

I shook my head, exhaling with a heavy groan. "I would never do that. Not in a million years. You have no fucking idea how much I want this more than my next breath."

She eyed me for a few seconds, darkness of lust brewing in her eyes before she smiled at me that took my breath away.

"In bed. Now," I ordered.

Megan stepped back until her feet reached the edge of the bed. She leisurely lied down, biting her bottom lip, glancing up at me with a searing gaze. Her invitation had me nearly knocked on my feet as the violent rush of lust pulsed in my blood.

Keeping my gaze on her, I kicked my shoes off, pulled my socks, and then my boxers followed.

"God, Forrest." Her breathless words zipped arousal down my spine. She leisurely raked her hungry stare on my naked body to my throbbing and hard cock as if she couldn't help herself.

Inspecting.

Admiring.

Memorizing.

If she would look at me longer like that, I might have my release before I would be inside her.

The strength of pressure was already banking in my spine. I quickly grabbed my pants on the floor and pulled my wallet to take the only condom I had. I tore it with teeth and sheathed my cock.

I crawled down to her and position myself as I wouldn't crush her. She instantly cupped my head and crashed her lips on mine. I liked it when she knew what she liked and never ashamed to show it off. We kissed for a while, slowly in a most dreamy pace, and I instantly lost myself in our passionate kiss. Everything between us felt huge, but I wasn't worried at all, in fact, I could even feel the future.

I trailed kisses on her jaw, covered her neck with gentle bites. I glided my tongue through the smooth and soft flesh of her neck all the way to her ear down to her collarbone. She gasped as I finally engulfed the swell of her firm sweet tit. If I couldn't get my mouth on her, I'd lose my fucking mind. She was sweet, and fuck, I wanted to feast on her all day and night.

“Forrest,” she murmured in pleasure as I closed my mouth around her tit again. I sucked and bit the little knob and tugged it between my teeth.

When I looked at her, her eyes were heavy in bliss. It was fucking awful to control not to ravish her, but I wanted to take my time. Then I moved to the other tit while my hand was trailing through her inner thighs. I finally found what I was looking for. I pulled the tiny sheet down her thighs, slipping my finger on her waxed mound. Uneven breath shuddered through her.

“Megan.” The musk of her arousal hit my nose, making me dizzy with darker anticipation. She was already wet, slicked, and her nub hardened against my thumb. Her throaty moan made my heart swelled that I had this effect on her. “I can’t wait to be inside you.” I plunged my finger in and out as I was sucking her tit in rhythm.

“I want to feel you so deep inside me. Please?” When she pleaded, my heart jackhammered. My pulse was already vibrating my skin with the thought of being inside her, to feel her around me. Megan rolled her hips faster in wordless demand, positioning her pussy into my cock. My cock lurched to feel her wet entrance.

I captured her, devouring her mouth as I plunged inside her. Her breath caught, fingers sunk into my scalp. I growled into our lips as I felt being inside her.

“Jesus.” My blood was boiling. We both shook uncontrollably, gripping each other for support. “Give me a minute.” Her warmth felt like home, and I didn’t want to go anywhere.

“A minute? No. I want you so bad.” She rolled her hips, and I had to clench my eyes shut to control the urge of coming before her.

“I mean a sec,” I rumbled, causing her to smile against our lips. I pulled out completely, then plunged into her again, slipping a small cry from her lips. I grabbed her legs to wrap them around my waist as I unerringly pushed deeper. Jesus! We panted through tangled breaths. This time, I rolled my hips, and she whimpered.

Megan broke the kiss, throwing her head back against the pillow with her fingers dug into the flesh on my arms. She bit her bottom lip as I quickened my thrust, grinding hard to her core.

My head was spinning. My jaw was clenching. My body burned, sweat dampening my skin. My release was banking painfully, yet I wasn’t ready to fall apart.

“Megan,” Delirious with pleasure, I called her name, wiping off her hair as the sweat moistening her face.

“I’m close. God, it feels so good.” Her eyes fluttered open, heavy with lust and pleasure. She arched her back, matching my rhythm.

"You're with me, Megan. Not with god." I let out a guttural roar. My head fell forward as I could feel I was there, almost at the exploding point.

"Touché." Megan was writhing under me, her grip tightening, her walls cruelly clamping around my cock.

"Come for me." At one brush on her clit, her eyes rolled back, arching her spine beautifully as she screamed my name with pure ecstasy.

"Megan," I called her once again as the fast building of my pending orgasm was over the top. She responded with a dreamy writhing moan.

Without warning, I fell apart and exploded into million stars, jerking off violently inside her.

I collapsed on top of her, boneless, barely able to catch my breath.

"So?" Relaxed and sated, she started to run her fingers on my dampened hair.

I lifted my head and kissed her chest before I moved away on top of her and dragged myself toward the door that probably her bathroom. My mind went sideways as an irrational surge of jealousy hit my chest, wondering how many men came to this room to throw condoms.

Ignoring the twisting emotion inside me, I pulled out the rubber, tied it, and threw it to the trash bin. I cleaned myself and washed my face.

I looked at myself in the mirror before I walked inside her room. I looked different—satisfaction flashed in my reflection.

Megan was already sitting on the bed, covering herself with the blanket. Like a coward I was, I couldn't even ask her if what was wrong because she was certainly wearing a deep frown on her face.

I picked my boxers and put them on before I looked at her.

"So, it would be awkward like this after what happened?"

I sat at the edge of the bed and looked at her, but she was still looking down the floor. "Do you want me to go?"

Her head snapped in my direction, scowling. "Was it your plan?"

"No. But we have to set some ground rules."

"Like what? That I can't touch you? Whatever you are hiding beneath that shirt, do you think it makes me run away? I've seen you half-naked, do you think it still scares me? I am not perfect physically, emotionally, and I do have fears and emotions."

I sighed in frustration. Then she suddenly barked out laughing, causing me to shoot her a glare.

“Holy shit!”

“Language.”

“I sound like a clingy girlfriend,” she said between laughs.

“I need sometimes if you can bear with me.” I moved closer to her and pulled her in my arms. I kissed the top of her head. “You’ve seen a part of me that even our friends hadn’t known. You can ask me, but don’t expect I can answer you right away. I will try my best though.”

“I can do that.”

“Good.”

“So, you never slept with someone shirtless?”

“I don’t sleep with someone leisurely.”

“What do you mean?” Megan raised her head, eyeing me.

“Not like the way we did.”

“Can you stay for the night?” Excitement clouded in her eyes, and there was no place I’d rather be.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.”

“Thank you.” I positioned myself and lied down. I wrapped my arm around her and cuddled her like I always dreamed before I slept most of the time.

Chapter 21 Game Changer

MEGAN

I NEVER had in my experience, been so consumed and exhausted, yet satisfied until tonight. The continued banging of the headboard against the wall, the squeaking of bed, his grunt, and the screams from me was like an orchestra in my entire apartment.

I woke up with his teasing fingers, drawing circles below my abdomen with each touch scorching my skin. Still yawning, I grabbed his magnificent semi-erect cock, rewarding me a satisfied groan. I took my time stroking his length even it was instantly hard as a rock in my palm.

The last thing I knew I was sucking him, and he was cursing and thrusting his hips into my mouth. I didn't go down on man, but with Forrest, it didn't seem to bother me, besides I'd been dreaming this moment with him, and this was way better than my imagination. I was instantly wet. And he didn't disappoint me—it was a huge turn-on to see him losing himself to me as I pleased him with my mouth.

Right now, I was on all four as I requested. Forrest was a generous lover and never denied me. His hand was gripping my shoulder, the other was tight on my hip, alternately rubbing my spine as he pounded me harder and faster while tugging my hair around his hand as he forced me to respond to his kiss with a fierce hunger.

He then pulled out, then surged into me so deep I gasped. He didn't stop—he was relentless to give my orgasm. The heat simmered and ignited inside with each thrust of his massive cock, bringing me closer to the edge.

“Oh god!” I was catching my breath, and my muscles were trembling, yet I wanted more. I pushed my ass toward him to meet his thrust, the tension and unbearable pleasure so intense had my heart violently pounded. “Fuck!” Erotic cry emanated from my throat. “Harder, Forrest.”

“Language, woman,” he bit out and smacked me on my butt. The pain sent a throbbing sensation to my core. Shaking, I let go of a long moan. “I plan to return the favor very soon, Megan. I want to hear you scream, make you forget how to breathe of how good it feels like when my mouth is all over your pussy as I suck and fuck you with my tongue until you come.”

“I can't wait for that, but right now...fuuuuck!” I squeezed my eyes shut.

“One more curse coming from you, I won't only whip your ass but fuck you hard in that tiny hole of yours.”

"I can't curse, but you've been cursing." I laughed desperately, trying to hold the inevitable orgasm. I was blinded with so much intensity and the blast of pleasure put together. "I never tried that before. It must be so damn good with you."

I knew my orgasm would be strong—earth-shattering that I had to ready myself for. The powerful thrust of his impressive cock and each ground of his pelvis was hitting me on the right spot, and it made me more delirious. I was throbbing, panting, drained, and our skin covered with a thin layer of sweat, but I never gave up. I wanted to lose my mind, lose my world with him, and I wanted to come so hard to forget my own self.

"You bet it is. I don't like you cursing, and you are so beautiful and incredible just to curse," he grunted in each pound that I saw stars. He leaned down to suck my exposed neck. "You just blew my mind earlier, Megan. I could still feel your mouth clamping around my cock as you sucked me harder. It feels so fucking good." His hot breathing and dirty talks caused me to shudder, then he panted soft kisses down to my shoulder. "Now come for me again."

My senses were in chaos. I was flying higher and higher. My inner walls pulsed, clamping around him. Every cell in my body was alive. My heart was like about to combust. My pulse was ringing in my ears. My blood was surging so hard with so much shock waves of pleasure chasing through my veins.

Then a loud, ear-splitting scream burst through me with only a single word I could remember—his name. The Aftershocks were so powerful like a high magnitude earthquake that I fell shaking so hard, barely able to catch my breath.

One strong pound from Forrest, he was grunting my name. I felt his cock surging, pulsing as he loaded me with his seed.

I woke up smiling, lazily stretching my sore muscles to an empty bed. My stomach did a nosedive when it came to my senses that Forrest left without even saying goodbye.

I shuffled through the bed and grabbed a shirt from my closet. I did my deed in the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror. I saw a pink flush on my cheeks. I found a small kiss mark on my right neck—one of a few reminders that last night was not only my wild imagination.

He was really gone. I felt empty after walking out of my room. I collapsed myself to the sofa and curled into a ball like a total loser. When the time came and I wanted someone to stay in my life, it wouldn't happen. Everything didn't go as I like.

I shut my eyes closed, and I saw his enigmatic face both in pleasure and in pain as we lost ourselves in own world together. After our amazing orgasms, I saw a hint of trust in his eyes, the care, the

sparkles as he told me to get some sleep before he kissed me on my lips. He then pulled me possessively into his arms and spooned me from my back, but that was it. There was nothing more to pick up. He's gone, and I'm screwed.

Chapter 22 Broken Rules

MEGAN

“YOU OKAY?” I jolted to sit, holding my hand against my chest to his worried voice.

I took a deep breath before I fluttered my eyes open. “You scare me.”

“I’m sorry. I thought you heard me coming. You’re staring off into space. Something wrong?”

“Just...thinking,” Shaking my head, I lied.

“I just went out to buy breakfast for us.” He kissed the top of my head. “God, woman, what have you been eating? You don’t even have coffee in your kitchen.” He sat down beside me, placing down a bag of probably bake goods and two cups of coffee on the table. The aroma alone had my stomach grumbled in hunger.

“Had shitty weeks,” I muttered, feeling relief that he came back. I instantly felt the fluttery feeling in my stomach.

“We all were.” He kissed me on my forehead again, then grabbed a cup and offered it to me. “Drink this.”

I took it and faced him. He looked devastatingly handsome with a five o’clock shadow. I’d never seen him so relaxed as he grabbed the bag of pastries. Sleeping with him didn’t mean I owned him, but I couldn’t push it. I had to brag that he was now mine.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” he asked as he peeped the content of the bag.

“How do you know I was looking at you?” I sipped the hot liquid and moaned. “God, how did you know what I like?”

“I can feel you. And I did a wild guess for your coffee.” I didn’t exactly believe with his wild guess because he must be a freaking fortune teller, but I was thrilled that he brought the right coffee for me.

“Thanks.” I sipped again and bit the croissant he offered. “Gonna have mini-orgasm with this.”

Forrest almost smiled, his eyes twinkled. “Don’t say something like that.”

“What? Mini-orgasm? Why not? After what we did last night, you should have gotten used to it already,” I teased, causing him to shake his head in amusement.

"I filled the tank of your car." He sipped his coffee and grabbed my hand to take a huge bite on my pastry. I thought it was sweet.

"You didn't have to do that."

"It was almost empty. You'll get into trouble tomorrow."

Suddenly, I remembered my mom. She sent me a text yesterday, and I hadn't been able to reply.

"Thanks, I guess. Do you have work tonight?"

"Yes."

"So, I won't be able to see you again?"

He snapped his head at me, wearing a frown on his face as he studied me closely. He took a few seconds staring right into my eyes, then devoted longer on my lips. I licked them in anticipation if he ever wanted to kiss me senseless again, I would gladly give in.

"I thought we sorted it out last night," he said, seemingly confused. Hell, I was confused either by sorted it out.

I shrugged, placing down the pastry on the top of my cup. "What do you mean?"

"Do you want to see me again, Megan?"

Surprised by his rhetorical question, I frowned. "Do you really have to ask me that? I allow you to stay, didn't I?"

"Then I stayed, ain't I?" His expression darkened. Great! This conversation ain't going nowhere.

"Yeah."

"Then why did you have to ask me if you won't gonna see me again?"

"Jeez, I just want to know."

He seemed to lose his mood. "I don't stay with any woman."

"I never brought someone over here."

He sighed deeply, seemingly in trouble finding his words. "Last night, I was thinking of how many men walked into your bathroom. It's not that I care about your past, but I don't like the idea of you with someone else. I broke my own rules for you, Megan, and I tend to break any rules for you again just to prove to you that what happened last night isn't a one-time thing for me."

My heart thudded in a heavy uneven rhythm. I had never, in my entire life had lost myself completely in a man that the thought of him leaving my place would twist my stomach into a hard

ball. Maybe that was the reason why I never invited anyone over, or perhaps I was waiting for the right person.

I forgot my own rule for him, and I wasn't aware I was already grinning until he deepened his frown on his face.

"What?"

"Nothing." I shrugged.

"I have to go." He stood up. "Do you need anything?"

"Yeah." I stood up, tiptoed, and grabbed the back of his head. As if on cue, he leaned down to press his lips on mine. I didn't let him go just yet, I pressed my body against him, feeling all those hard muscles of his chest and abdomen. I assaulted my tongue, seeking entrance until he groaned and gave me what I wanted. His hands were resting on my hips, and I felt instantly the hardness and bulge in his pants as I ground into him.

"Megan." He let out a groan into our mouths. He tasted coffee, but what I liked most was the softness and firmness of his lips, the battling of our tongues, the hot breath he let go in relief and satisfaction the moment I broke the kiss.

"Now you're free to go."

I heard him chuckle before pressing his lips on my forehead—I thought it was his thing.

"Walk me out." He held my hand before we sauntered toward the door. "I'll call you soon."

"Okay."

I stayed at the door as I watched him entered the elevator. Once he was gone, I got inside and closed the door behind me. I leaned against it, rewinding what had just happened between me and Forrest. Surely, we had something, but we had a lot of things we weren't ready to share. He respected me and didn't press me to open up about my life, but as much as I wanted to tell him my story, I wanted him to do the same thing as well.

I was dying to know what was behind the clothes and his broodiness? What was he hiding? What was his story? He was rich, I figured that out judging by his penthouse. Did his tattoo has something to do with his past? Did his past has something to do with him being guarded and mysterious?

A knock behind the door startled me. Did Forrest forget something? Excitement fluttered my belly. Only it wasn't him who was standing in my doorstep.

"Did I just see Forrest leaving your apartment?"

Oh, boy. I'm so screwed!

Chapter 23 Secret No More

FORREST

SOMETHING WAS off in the air as soon as I walked into Kyland's office. He was definitely wearing a knowing grin on his face. I could feel in my bones that this call had nothing to do with me turning down the manager's position.

"Why am I here?" I slumped into the couch, resting my arms on the backrest. I thought of playing cool would do the trick, just like how I dealt with them when they grilled Megan last weekend.

"I want you to convince Megan to take my position." Kyland didn't look at me, keeping himself busy stacking papers into the folder. "I'm gonna work at home. Bianca is catching a cold. I have to babysit Kelly."

"Can I help?"

"Nah. I got it covered. Just do what I ask you to do." Sure, man. As if Megan would listen to me. If they couldn't convince her, they thought I could?

"She will take it when she feels the job is right for her."

"So you two are a thing, huh?" Of course, it was only a matter of time before his turn. He'd never missed that. Pyke and Xandry were done with their threats and warnings that left him and the girls.

I drilled him with penetrating glare, instead, he smiled evilly at me. "I see, you never deny, and that's not the look I was expecting."

"Well, sorry to disappoint you, man. Are you on a deal with Pyke and Xandry? I can make you win. How much?"

Kyland scowled, stood up from his desk, and stopped right in front of my seat. "I care about Meg. She's my wife's best friend." I rolled my eyes. This is the third time I heard of my wife's best friend shit. "I don't know about your previous relationship or if you even had one, but I don't give a fuck, Forrest. Just don't hurt her. It's not a newsflash that she'd never been in a serious relationship, but whatever her reasons, it's her choice. Seeing the two of you eye-fucking and have the same looks on your faces, I know there's something serious going on, and I know you both are investing in this relationship. So, just take care of her, okay? And don't ever break her heart." The mumbo jumbo kept going on until he finally stopped.

“Are you done, dad? You’re full of shit if you call me to give me a pep talk about relationships. Here’s the real deal, Wright, you, Hughes, and Williams were experts of gallivanting, and I ain’t said a word. What I and Megan have is none of your fucking business. So, stop talking about me hurting her and what you’re gonna do to me if I did.” I stood up.

My mood soured. I wasn’t exactly thinking of the consequences before I slept with their friends. Kyland was sleeping with Bianca before they got married who happened to be Camila’s best friend. Yeah, I knew all their shits. As far as I knew, I didn’t break any rules or codes, did I?

“Look, Forrest. You are the closest to a brother to me. I also care about you, but I know you are stronger and have a huge heart regardless of whatever facade or walls you built to not let people get into your life, but Megan somehow gets into you, and it’s not a bad thing, man. I’m proud of you. I might not know anything about your personal life, but I trust you than any man for her. So, just don’t let me down.”

“Proud of me? That’s the last thing I was expecting from you. But thanks for the pep talk anyway. My shift just started five minutes ago.”

He changed the subject even though my muscles were still quivering with anger. “Do you want me to arrange your off?”

“No. Thanks.”

“So, where did you go every time you asked to arrange your offs?”

I eyed him suspiciously. “My family.” That was true. But I’d been to Maldives, Italy, France, Cuba, Hongkong, Mexico, Russia to find the ghost when I shouldn’t have been looking because I knew what I’d been doing would backfire on me.

He was convinced by my answer. “Right. Good luck.”

“I don’t need luck.” I snorted, walking out of the office.

My phone suddenly vibrated in my pocket. A small smile curved up my lips when her name popped up on the screen. All my anger fizzled out into thin air.

Meg: Coming over later?

Forrest: Miss me?

Meg: Damn right, I do.

Forrest: You might be sleeping when I’m done here.

Meg: Just tell me you don’t miss me and I’ll go to bed. Alone.

Forrest: You have no idea. I want you right now.

Meg: Don't make me wet, Forrest. I might say hi to my V.

Forrest: V?

Damn it! She was referring to her vibrator. The surge of jealousy had my chest tightened. It was irrational, but thinking of Megan pleasuring herself with that damn thing made me want to drive back to her apartment and make her come myself instead.

Forrest: I'll burn that thing, Megan.

Meg: So?

Forrest: Got to go to work. I'll call you on my break.

Meg: Bye, broody.

"Wow! Look how love changes people." Kyan grinned at me as I got in the bar counter.

"Don't you have work to do?"

"I'm off today, man. I'm here to meet a friend."

I placed down a beer for him, then I moved to serve customers. My mind went back to Megan. I had to clench my jaw to avoid groaning just thinking of her with her vibrator. I could replay over and over again how she looked so incredibly dazed when she was losing in pleasure, how she sounded like, her fingers digging into my flesh, how her creamy skin flushed pink, and how her body quivered when she was reaching her peak of ecstasy. I memorized every detail of it. She was mesmerizing to watch and so beautiful both dressed and naked, but she looked more gorgeous in my arms. Damn it! I ignored the dark possessiveness coiling in my chest and focused on the job instead.

"Stop zoning-out. That never happened to you before, but there's always a first, isn't there?" Kyan pulled me out of my stalling.

"Just have something in mind."

"That must be damn serious." He raised a brow, showing off a knowing smile.

I frowned when I realized that maybe all the staff knew what was going on between me and Megan.

I took a thirty minutes break. Before I could call Megan, I found a missed call from Alan.

Chapter 24 Couldn't Get Enough

FORREST

IT TOOK an effort to calm myself before I hit the dial button.

He picked up right away. "He will be at the Duncan Hotel this weekend. You happen not to be associated with this visit, have you?"

"I'd been waiting for this moment since I found out he'd been asking someone to dig into our past, Alan. Don't stop me now, and it's not that I will allow you to stop me if you will ever try."

"He's a twisted bastard, Forrest. You know it," he said firmly. He must be fuming right now.

My temper boiled over. "Is there something you are not telling me? I don't like surprises, Alan. You better tell me now before I face him."

"I watched you grow up, son. I know this revenge plot you've been planning for years would not do any good for you. You have money, and damn it, Forrest, I don't get it why you have to work in the nightclub when you're developing a multi-million dollar tech."

"Isn't it the idea of keeping the low profile yours?" I reminded him. "About that, it's not nearly done. I'm not even sure if we meet the deadline or get the deal. So don't be a little too excited about it. We might fail for the second time."

"You will get it if you just focus on that project."

"You know I can't do that. I have other priorities and matters that need more attention." I already spent millions on this project, and I hired qualified people for the job so that I had time to fix my shits.

"You can, but you won't, and you choose to spend your time risking your life just to satisfy your doubt of the truth."

Before my mind could travel back to Megan, I focused on what really mattered at hand

"It's only a matter of time before he finds me, Alan. I can't risk my friends, and you know what happened to the man you and Mama asked to do the job."

"Dealing with risk is a part of his job, Forrest. Get that conscience out of your system because we've been taking care of his family for years."

"It won't bring him back to life."

"Is this why you are willing to risk yours with your revenge plot?" I could sense his frustration, but my decision was final. No one could change it, even him.

"This is not a revenge plot."

"Then what do you call it? And what would your mother think of me if she will know that I was helping you to find this bastard all along?"

"She won't find out unless you open your mouth. I just need answers."

"Your mother is capable of giving you the answers you've been looking for."

I sighed deeply. I got it why he was worried. I was here because of him, and if something happened to me, he would take responsibility for my actions. "I need to do this."

"The reason why I was helping you was to find out who he was, his whereabouts, and not for you to pursue another plan." He huffed from the other line. "You're a loose cannon, Forrest."

"I'll be fine, Alan. Thanks for the info."

"I hope I won't regret this." Before he hung up, he asked sarcastically, "Do you need anything else? A gun, a woman maybe before you walk into the war zone. How about a body bag?"

I looked up at the sky, realizing I was on the spot where a man was brutally murdered by one of his men—if the Intel was correct.

I grabbed the pack of cigarettes and took a stick. My hand froze in the air, and my stomach twisted with guilt. I had to close my eyes when I threw the stick away. I shook my head in disbelief, realizing how strong Megan's impact on me, and one had ever affected me this way. I fished my phone and dialed her number instead.

"Thought you wouldn't call."

A voice at my back and the simultaneous ringing of the phone had me stilled.

I already had this strange sensation before I turned around. My heart was racing and the adrenaline was rushing through me the moment I met Megan's gaze. It seemed surreal, but I knew for a fact that she was almost within arm's reach. She was smiling at me with eyes sparkled against the yellow light from the post.

With excitement dizzying me, I was already quickening my pace before I blurted out. "What are you doing here?"

She answered me with her hands linked at the back of my neck, pulled me closer, and slammed her mouth into mine. I couldn't do anything than pressed my body against hers as my blood left my brain and rushed right into my cock. She tasted fruity, and I loved it.

"You're a good boy tonight. You deserve a reward," she said against our mouths.

"And you were naughty a while ago. I should punish you for that."

She ended the kiss with a loud smack. "Does my punishment involves tying me or shackling my ankles? I would love to be naughty all the time."

I groaned in anticipation. "I'd love to consider that. Why are you here?" I traced my thumb on her cheek, down to her red and well-kissed bottom lip. My cock throbbed when she darted her tongue out to lick my finger.

"Cam saw you going out of my apartment building this morning. She stayed with me for a while until we went out. Then I told her to send me here, and she was happy to oblige, thinking I would see you after your work."

"Hmm. I don't know that they make this and us a big deal. It seemed that everyone knew about us already." I checked my watch. My break was almost over.

"Does it bother you?" she asked hesitantly, gaze flitting away.

"No. Can you stay at the bar until I finish my shift?"

Her gaze lifted, finally meeting mine. "Will you come back with me?"

"That's the plan." Her excitement had a huge effect on my heart. I kissed her forehead, pulled her into a hug, and inhaled her sweet and seductive smell into my lungs. "You always smell good."

"So do you." She dove her fingers into my hair. "Freshly showered, sweaty, and slicked. It doesn't matter. I still like you."

I closed my eyes. Heat enveloped my body. My cock stirred, growing thick in my pants before I let her go. I used the remaining ounce of my willpower to step back because I knew Megan wouldn't hesitate if I initiated to take her on this rooftop.

I was back to work and I was lucky that I had a chance to check her a few times despite the bulk of customers coming in. I served her the usual drink she ordered, and she behaved exactly the way I liked. The dark anticipation—hot, sweaty, and wild night had my heart hammered throughout the night.

A woman in a decent red dress occupied the stool beside Megan. She was perhaps a white-collar worker. Her red lips spread into a flirty smile then gestured her well-manicured finger at me. She may be the type of woman that someone should be bringing home to meet a family. She didn't affect me the way Megan was, who was already in deep frowned.

"What can I get you, miss?" I leaned my hands against the counter.

“How about you offer me the best you’ve got?”

“Right away.” I tapped my fingers over the counter.

I was about to turn back when someone grabbed my arm. I froze in the middle. I didn’t have to give a second look, I knew right away it was Megan. I could feel the blood rushing through my veins and surged right down south. Her hand slid down to my hand so erotic that I had to hold a groan when my cock started to thicken inside my pants.

Forgetting all my restraints, I turned to face her, without warning, her hands chained around my neck and her lips crashed into mine.

Chapter 25 Unexpected Visitor(s)

MEGAN

MY POSSESSIVENESS had me immensely stunned. I'd never done this before, but this bitch made my blood boil with jealousy. Jealousy? Well, that was definitely new.

What shocked me the most was Forrest. When I thought he would groan in disapproval or push me back, I got a different response. Instead, he kissed me back, wrapped his arms around my waist, and kissed me possessively, hungrily, and fiercely not caring what would his co-workers or these customers think about him. It was a kiss that made my toes curl. It was a kiss of possession, telling everyone he was taken, and I was pleased with that.

Whistles and applause broke us apart. Still catching my breath, I met his dark gaze. It filled with lust that burned through me and twinkled with amusement as we stared in silence.

"Sorry about that," I said guiltily.

His eyes narrowed. "You're sorry about that?"

"I mean, this is not your style."

"I like how you made your point."

"Really?" I asked, surprised.

"Yeah." He let go of me, and I sat back to my stool, my skin was tingling in heat and my core was burning with needs. Feeling victorious, I glanced at that bitch, and she was not facing Forrest anymore.

I was not a jealous type, or maybe I'd never been jealous for someone, and the only thing that came to my mind was to kiss Forrest, other than to approach the bitch that this man was belong to me because I didn't know if he even belonged to me.

We slept together and I thought we were exclusive, but that was it. I was still navigating in uncharted waters. I claimed him mine, but that was only in my dream until he'd proven his point tonight.

"Your shift is almost over." I looked down at my phone to check the time. "Can I wait for you outside?"

He nodded subtly and gave me his car key. "Lock the door and call me if someone will knock on the window."

My eyes widened, stunned by his unexpected protective gesture. I thought that was the sweetest thing a man ever did for me.

Men weren't exactly trustful when it came to their property, especially their cars. Knowing Forrest never invited anyone in his passenger's seat, let alone giving me his key, my heart swelled that somehow he trusted it to me.

"I'll be fine," I assured him. "Don't flirt with her or I would be poking someone's eyes out."

His intense dark eyes sparkled and shook his head before he moved toward the other customer.

The bad thing about having too much security alarm was when things happened like this, and we were wasting our time.

We barely reached inside his apartment before he pressed me against the thick wooden door, rolling his hips, grinding his massive hard erection into me.

"Ah!" The unbearable tension was coiling inside me that I had to gasp for air as he continued kissing me savagely. I was drowning with lust. I was dripping wet, burning with desire, floating in the air, and aching for more.

I lifted my right leg to wrap around his waist, searching for more friction. His talented hand was on my ass, the other was kneading my heavy and sensitive breast while his tongue was dominating me.

I wanted more of him, to feel his stiff dick inside me. I was frantic with so much pleasure. I was in a second of throwing myself into the delicious edge of orgasm, so close until I thought I had a heart attack.

Clearing of the throat had us froze. My heart literally stopped, then pound harder in my chest. My cheek was flaming with so much embarrassment that lasted a lifetime and beyond.

Forrest went completely rigid and cursed silently in hissed before he placed me down on my feet.

"Mama," he uttered. His voice was still deep and husky as he turned around to face the woman in his living room.

Unable to lift my gaze, I fixed my dress and my hair, still feeling the ache, the flood of wetness between my thighs, and the numbness of my lips. I was sure I looked like shit and flushing.

I slept with men and had plenty of walks of shame, but this one was totally a different story. His mother was in his living room, watching us almost had sex against his door. And I never knew Forrest still had a family.

God, this is humiliating!

“Forrest, dear. Don’t be ridiculous. There’s nothing to be ashamed of. You’re a hot-blooded and lush lad.” Her accent—that was the first thing I noticed. She was wearing a white pants suit. She had curly dark shoulder-length layered hair, and she didn’t look like Forrest’s mother.

“I thought I am visiting you next month.” Forrest walked toward his mother, leaving me alone, still leaning against the thick wood. I couldn’t even stand straight. My knees were still weak and wobbling with the after-effect of how he was about to blow my mind.

“I had to come over here. I know everything, Forrest. I am so disappointed with you, and I’m not letting you do whatever this rubbish you’re planning.”

“Mama, please. Don’t do this to me.” He kissed his mother on the cheeks, her forehead, and pulled her into a hug. “Please, don’t stop me.”

“You are the only I have left. If I have to knock you down and chain you somewhere, I would do that other than allowing you to face the man who left you. I thought we were over this.” His mother sighed. “I was entirely wrong. And you’ve been doing this for years behind my back? What would you get in all of these? I will drag you back to England with me if I have no other options.”

Back to England?

Forrest placed his hands on his hips, clearly wasn’t pleased with his mother’s outburst. I could feel the anger and disapproval seeping through his veins. His breathing turned deep, chest expanding widely, jaw clenched so tight as he paced back and forth.

“Clearly, your mother can’t change your mind, can she now? And I can’t watch you kill yourself either.” A sophisticated woman walked in. She was taller than me, wearing pants and a cream blouse. Her straight long dark hair was tied above her head. She was a definition of posh with eyes so sharp and big.

I shifted my gaze to Forrest, again he froze in his place. He then blinked as if he couldn’t believe the woman was in front of him.

“Meadow.” He almost choked out that name. His face was ashen.

Something shifted in the air to the way she looked at Forrest and the way he reacted after seeing her. The woman pulled him into a hug that made him stiffen. Then the huge rock on her finger flashed that almost blinded me. And I almost knocked down to the floor when she cupped his face and kissed him even in front of his mother.

Oh, my god!

I was beyond shocked. My chest was beginning to hurt from extreme tightness. The chilling fear made me numb that I didn't realize I was already pulling the door open, ready to flee.

Forrest forgot me in an instant. He didn't even stop her. Was that his ring? Of course, it was his. They were kissing, weren't they?

The hurt intensified when I looked at them one more time, and I just melted into the background. I didn't exist in his life anymore.

"Come inside." Mom wrapped her arm around my shoulder as she led me inside her house. "Thanks for calling, Meggie."

"I'd nowhere to go other than my apartment. My friends were surely asleep at this time." I let my tired and painful eyes scan around the living room. Since I left our old home three years ago, Mom bought a new house, and I never visited this place even once. If she didn't talk to the taxi earlier, I wouldn't find this address.

I ran my fingers against the white grand piano, beside the staircase. She loved to play, unlike me, I didn't know a thing about instruments other than their names.

"Can I get you something, honey?"

I lifted my gaze to Mom. She was a therapist, and she didn't have to say anything to know something was troubling me, but she never pushed or turned herself into a doctor even my dad was still alive.

Right now, she smiled at me—a smile that didn't reach her eyes. She knew me too well, that I was hurting inside.

"Thanks, Mom. I wanna take a rest if you don't mind."

"Of course." She walked closer to me and pulled me into a motherly hug. "I am here for you, always."

"I know." My voice finally broke. "I know, Mom."

She led me upstairs, right to the hallway. "That room is always ready. I thought you might think of visiting me someday."

"Thank you. I wish the circumstances are different."

"I love you, Meggie."

I couldn't take it anymore. My tears were just pouring down my cheeks. With intense relief, I hugged her tightly and sobbed in her arms.

When I thought of shutting off the past and running away from my mother would make me forget the pain of losing someone and made me a better person, I was wrong. It never did. I should have listened to her. I should have faced my fears.

"It's alright. It's just a dark cloud. Tomorrow will be a new day."

"I hope you're right, Mom." I knew she was always right, but I didn't know this time because this was different.

I wiped my tears when Mom opened the room. It was exactly what I liked. The design, the bed, the walk-in closet, and even the colors—they were white and gold.

"My room is at the end of the hallway. The kitchen is just down, but there's a clean kitchenette at the end corner—"

"Mom, I'm good." I squeezed her hands and smiled tightly at her.

"I think it's time for us to talk."

"We'll talk in the morning, I promise." I kissed her cheek. "Good night, Mom."

I took a deep breath when the door closed behind her. My eyes started to sting again.

I was so stupid.

Regrets came at the end. This was what I didn't like. This was what I'd been avoiding. I should have stopped the madness before everything got too intense between me and Forrest. That was why I built walls for years because I couldn't afford another heartbreak.

"Heartbreak?" I snorted.

I kicked my shoes off, collapsed myself to the bed, and let my tears fall to the corner of my eye.

I ignore the continued ringing of my phone until it stopped. I picked it from my purse to mute the tone when a message popped up, only to freeze in disbelief when I read the name on the screen.

WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU?

Chapter 26 Women

FORREST

“YOU’RE NOT going to see him, Forrest,” Meadow demanded, pinning me with a pointed stare.

Knowing that my mother was around, I flexed my jaw hard as I tried not to lose my temper.

I didn’t even have any fucking idea why she was here in my penthouse with my mother when I was clear with my order the last time we spoke about Mama’s safety.

“What? Are you just gonna stare at me like that?” Unbelievable!

“No.” I squeezed my eyes shut and dug my teeth against my bottom lip as rage radiated off of me.

“Listen to me very carefully, Meadow. You don’t get to decide for me. Not anymore. It’s my life, my decisions, and not yours. We’ve been there once, and you decided to leave me instead. Where were you when I needed you? When I was had some shitty days alone. You don’t know anything about me anymore. People get to change for almost six years, Meadow. Just like you said, you can’t wait for that long.”

Her expression hardened. Determination flickered in her eyes before she blinked it off. “Then, at least listen to your mother. We didn’t travel all the way here just for nothing, did we? She couldn’t even sleep, so worried, thinking that her son is about to do something stupid. Then we just watched you while shagging that woman against the bloody door.”

A hazy red flared behind my eyelids. If I wasn’t sure she didn’t care about me anymore, I would have thought she was jealous. “Don’t!” I barked, pointing at her. “Don’t you ever say that word again.”

Meadow swallowed hard, shrinking a little when I raised my voice. I didn’t give a damn to hide my emotions anymore—I was beyond furious.

“Remember your place, Meadow! You don’t have a say to any woman I slept with. It was your decision, should I remind you about that? You chose to stay in England. And don’t you dare talk about Megan that way because she’s not just any woman to me.”

Shit! I completely forgot about her. I snapped my head toward the door where I left her, only to find it empty. Megan was gone.

“Damn it—” Where the fuck is she? I was on the verge of losing control to punch a wall when I sprinted toward the door. A wave of guilt twisted fiercely in my stomach that slowed my pace.

After I threw the door wide, I lashed her a steely stare. “This is your fault. You shouldn’t have come here. I trusted you that you wouldn’t take my mother anywhere without my permission, but you defied me. You put her life at risk. And you shouldn’t be wearing that fucking ring. I will decide what to do to you when I come back and expect that I won’t be easy on you, Meadow. I am the last person you wanna cross, and you just disrespected me and Megan.”

Fury made me say careless words sometimes, but I meant every word I said. I hoped she received the message clearly. “I wish I could say fancy seeing you.”

A surge of anger and worry crowded in my chest when I got inside the damn lift. What happened tonight was the last thing I ever expected.

I thought I could trust Alan with my plan. He did this lest of killing myself in the process and he used his last card—he knew Mama was my weakness, and the only person I would never cross and hurt.

Then Meadow appeared in the picture. Damn it! She would be the last huge mistake I ever made. I had no plan on repeating it.

I reached the ground floor and made my way towards my car, but there were no signs of Megan anywhere my sight could reach. I could hear the pounding of my heartbeat as I ran toward the security post, believing maybe she was still there, waiting for me.

Morgan approached me immediately when he noticed me in such a hurry. “Good evening, Mr. Wood. How can I help you?”

“It’s already morning. Where is she?” I cut the chase.

“I called a taxi for her, and she left about ten minutes ago.”

I ran my fingers through my hair out of frustration. I completely forgot the world when I saw Mama in my penthouse. Then she was angry and upset with me—the last thing I wanted her to feel. The fact that she flew over here, I knew she was so damn serious to stop me from pursuing my plan.

“Fuck,” I muttered through gritted teeth as I fished out my phone. There was no message from Megan telling me that she went back to her apartment. There was no to be continued or flirty message.

She was mad.

I forced myself to accept the possibility that she was safe in her apartment. So I dialed her number.

“Pick up, Megan.” She didn’t answer.

I dialed again, mentally demanding her to pick up, but it just ended.

I rubbed my face. My chest ached. My world started spinning with so many emotions wanting to burst out. I redialed and pressed the phone against my ear, hoping she was just in the shower, not ignoring me.

Jesus Christ! I shut my eyes closed, blaming myself for getting too carried away with our intense and seemingly infinite connections, for trusting myself that we had a future together.

I was aware Megan wasn't the type of person who committed to relationships, but that was before we slept together. I broke my rules for her, and she did the same, and it fucking hurt that she still left.

What if it was just a part of her game? No, no, no. Don't go there, Forrest. I believed people changed. What we had was all real. She liked me. I could feel it—I saw the truth in her eyes.

Fuck! "Megan, please?" I choked.

Deep breathe.

I typed a message, hoping she would see it later.

Megan, answer me, please? I need to know you get back to your apartment safe.

Gut-wrenching terror seeped through me. I sent another text, expecting that it gave her a message that I was worried.

I'll call you in the morning. I have to deal with something.

Call me as soon as you read this, okay?

I waited. Minutes passed by, I got no reply, and I was terrified.

WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU?

Chapter 27 Mama

FORREST

I GOT back to the penthouse. My mother and Meadow were in the living room, engaged in a serious conversation.

“Mama, can we talk?” I threw Meadow a glare, hoping she would not try to be so dumb to not get the message. “Alone, please?”

Scowling, Meadow stomped upstairs. I sat beside Mama once Meadow was out of sight. I wrapped my arm around her and pulled her into my arms.

“How are you feeling?” I asked her when my anger wore off. I missed her terribly, but I couldn’t risk her being with me. I had to sacrifice something for us when in return, she would be safe.

“I’m good. You worry too much when I should be the one worrying about your suicide mission.”

I kissed the top of her head.

From the start, I knew she was right—it was a suicide, but I wanted answers. Once this was over, I knew everything we sacrificed for would pay off.

All I needed was closure and a new life.

After what happened to the last PI Alan and my mother hired, they decided it would be better if I would be far from the people I loved, still, the bastard never gave up looking for us.

When I stayed away from my mother, I thought I would have a good life, then something terrible happened almost three years ago. I found out he was a part of it. Whatever his reasons, I knew one of them was, he wanted to tie loose ends.

“He’s not gonna kill me, Mama. It’ll be just a business meeting.”

“What if he will recognize you? You share his blood, Forrest. Don’t be so stupid.”

“I’ll be fine, Mama. I need to start a new life or get back the life I left years ago. Don’t you want it? That finally, I can come back to England with you? With this kind of arrangement, I don’t think I can even start something new if I won’t face him. The world is getting smaller between us, and you know that. One day, eventually, we’ll cross paths. I can’t spend my days looking over my shoulder, scared that he might stab me from my back. I thought you want me to have a girlfriend, get married, and have a family?”

“Tell me about your plan with your so-called business meeting? Are you going to tell him who you are? Make a deal with the devil? What made you think he will hold at the end of the bargain, Forrest? The last time we checked, he was a canny and cutthroat bastard. He’s not going to change even he finds out who you are. Our lives will be in danger. We will be in great danger.”

“Only one way to find out. It’s been years. We can’t live every day with fear, Mama. I can’t do it anymore. Now I have the chance to face him, I won’t let our fears hold me back to stop whatever the grudge he’s holding against us. It has to end one way or another, or so help me God.”

Mama’s broken sobs ripped through her that tightened my chest, and it hurt a lot knowing she was worried about me. The urge to punch Alan had my body vibrated with anger.

“I promise I will come back to you in one piece. Just one last request, Mama. Then you can ask me whatever you want. I will do it in a heartbeat even if I have to marry someone to your choosing.”

Mama lifted her hazel eyes filled with unbridled torment mixed with excitement.

I wiped her cheeks dry. “I’m so sorry. Forgive me if I have to keep this from you.” I pulled her into a hug again. I was hurting her even though I was doing this for her as well. I knew she understood why I was doing all of these, but I was her son, and I knew how much she was terrified of losing me.

“You didn’t even introduce us.” Her words sliced my heart.

A sad smile curved up my lips. “Her name is Megan. I completely forgot and got too carried away to see you in my living room.” And I was embarrassed walking in your direction with a raging hard-on “Now that she ran away from me, I don’t think she wanna see me again.”

“I’m sorry if I have to bring Meadow with me.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry for, Mama. I don’t want you to travel alone either. As much as I dislike the idea of her waving the ring into my face, she’s the only person I can trust when it comes to you.”

“I happened to mention something about your last call. She still has feelings for you, Forrest.”

“It was her decisions, Mama.”

“I know. Hear me out first, honey. I can’t also force you to love her again. You two grew up together, and you can’t just forget those memories because of one mistake. What you had for her was just the love of a best friend, or maybe you loved her dearly, but that was in the past. You were still young when you wanted to get married. Now that you know what you want in your life, I won’t hold you back. I want you to follow what your heart dictates you, Forrest. You’ve been

through hell. As your mum, and all I want is to see you happy. You deserve better. She might still love you, but one day, she will realize that you two don't belong to each other."

"Thank you."

"So, it's her then?"

I chuckled, feeling the emptiness in my chest. "I don't think there's it's her then anymore."

Mama slapped my thigh, making me hissed in pain. "What was that for?"

"I don't see you as a quitter, Forrest. Remember your drawing? How many times did you try until you were satisfied? And you've been plotting this whole bloody thing of rubbish for years, and for a woman that you love, you would just quit easily?"

My tongue thickened in my mouth. "Love? Mama, I—"

"Fine, but you care about her. You're not the kind of lad who will just bring any woman here. I know how important security and your identity to you, yet did not hesitate."

"Mama, we didn't even go out on a date."

"Then ask her out. It's not too late."

"I don't think she would say yes."

"Stop being daft." She rolled her eyes. "I didn't raise you to give up. I may not know anything about this generation, but old ways are still a smart idea. How long have you known her?"

"Almost two years. Why?"

"So, you've known her that long and you never asked her out, why? How could you forget to mention her to me?"

My brows drew together in confusion. "I don't understand."

"Oh, you understand me just right." She stood up. "Alan will be here shortly. And a little advice, young lad, you should tell her who you are before she runs away again. If she feels the same, she will accept you no matter who you are."

I sighed. "Mama."

"Listen to me, Ellery Forrest Keighley. I know, you are not living the life you want for years, I think it's about time you tell your friends who you are because living a life in a shadow is not living a life at all. And I can't wait to meet Megan."

Chapter 28 Unavailable

MEGAN

I WOKE up to an unfamiliar room with the feeling of the hangover of being roofied. I wished I could pluck the thought off of what happened last night. Ignoring the tightness in my throat, I got up from the bed.

This wasn't the first time I'd hurt anyway. I was aware that we were utterly wrong for each other. If I made through it the last time, hell, I definitely would the second time.

I had to put a stop to whatever short fling I had with Forrest before it got deeper. That was the smartest thing to do. How twisted was that? Because I knew I was lying. It still freaking hurt.

A soft knock and Mom's voice calling my name behind the door interrupted me from my deep musing.

"Come in." I was still sitting on the bed when the door swung open.

"Good morning, Meggie. I thought you might need these." Mom was done with the shower and already in her robe. She had a few clothes folded and undergarments in her hands and on the rack as well.

"Morning." I smiled. Damn, even smiling hurt. I took the clothes from her and placed them down my unmade bed. "Thanks. Where did you get these?"

"I was supposed to send those as your birthday gifts, but I guess I have to do another shopping," Mom said with a laugh.

I realized I had no other clothes than last night and definitely inappropriate working attire. "I don't wanna be late for work. So, I guess I'm gonna wear them."

She sighed, her gaze was still on me. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine. I've been through worse." I knew it was useless to lie, but I wanted to get through my mess with or without everyone's help, even if it would be a long-term plan.

"I'm here for you, Meggie."

"I know." I held her hand, giving her a reassurance squeeze.

"You better hit the shower and get down for breakfast."

"Okay. I won't take long." My eyes caught something on the nightstand.

I took a deep, painful breath as I reached the picture frame. Mom placed this on purpose. It was me and my dad's picture. It was one summer, we were on the dock for a boat ride. I was a freshman in college at that time. Our bright smiles were evident. Our eyes sparkled, and never in a million years, this would be our last picture together.

My chin started quivering. Tears swam in my eyes, clouding with remnants of pain. "I missed you so much, daddy." I ran my thumb on his face, and I wished I could return the time when our family was still complete and happy.

With sadness still tightening my chest, I went down to the kitchen after I took one last look at myself in the mirror.

I grabbed the coffee in the tumbler after I bit a toasted bread. Mom was already walking out toward the door when I grabbed my bag and snatched an apple.

"I'll drive," I suggested, realizing that I just said it out of the blue like we weren't have been estranged for years.

"No, Meggie. I will."

I nodded, averting my gaze when my chest ached.

"I don't mean it like that." Mom placed her hand on my shoulder. "I'm sorry."

"Let's not pretend everything is okay, Mom. You have the right to get angry and blamed me. And that's your car, anyway." I shrugged. "Old habits."

"I forgave myself, and things happen for a reason, Meggie. I still love your dad until now. Always will. Nothing's gonna change that. We can't live our lives with guilt or blame someone else every time something bad happens."

I held her hand, shutting my eyes closed as soon as I saw the pain and concern clouding in her eyes. "I wish it's that easy. I missed him every day, you, and us all together."

"I know, Meggie. I'm just glad you're here right now." She squeezed my hand. "Enough of the drama in the morning, okay? And I'll drive."

I moved to the passenger side. "Fine, you'll drive. So, wanna talk why did you collapse?"

"I'm pregnant."

I swiveled my gaze in her direction and stared at her in shock. "You're kidding right?"

"I'd been thinking about this since you left. It was not that I wanted to forget you. After what happened, I was so lonely. I missed you and your dad so much, Meggie. I felt that I lost you both at the same time. Having another man in my life wouldn't fix my problem either."

I swallowed hard, feeling guilty. “I’m so sorry if I wasn’t there for you, Mom.”

“It’s all right, honey. So six months ago, I decided to have an In Vitro while I still have a chance.”

“Aren’t you too risky? I mean, I’m not a doctor, but does it have an age limit or something?” A frown puckered my forehead.

“This year is my only chance.”

“Oh, my god.” I covered my mouth with my hand. “Then why did you collapse?”

“I had low blood pressure.”

“Mom, as much as I like you to have a child, but if it will cost your life in the end—”

“Everything is fine now,” she assured. “You don’t have to worry about me, and the ultrasound showed that the baby is great.”

“You shouldn’t be working. Why don’t you just stay at home until you give birth?”

“It won’t pay the bills, Meggie.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Mom.”

I sighed with a twisting pain in my chest, realizing this was all my fault. She wouldn’t be risking her life if I was there for here—if I didn’t run away with my pain. “So, do you happen to know the sperm donor?” I asked hesitantly.

She nodded and smiled, and I felt there was something more in it. That was probably what she meant by her words earlier.

“You’re dating this guy?”

“It’s not like that. He actually signed an NDA.”

“As long as your health is not at stake here, I don’t have a say to your decision, Mom. And I’m on board to be a big sister. You know what’s right for you.”

I started my work as soon as I got to my desk. I rechecked Mom’s schedule and informed her appointment at nine just arrived.

I somehow able to divert my pain into work; I replied emails, received calls, and updated the calendar.

The phone rang again. “Dr. Emery Reed’s clinic, good morning. How may I help you?”

“Megan.” My breathing caught, and I lost my ability to concentrate upon hearing his voice.

“You do not just turn off your phone, ignore my calls, and intentionally not read my message, Megan as if nothing’s going on between us. And don’t deny the fact that what we have is real.”

I found my hand on my mouth as I tried to sink in every word he was saying, and I completely forgot what I had in mind earlier.

“Dr. Reed is booked for eleven.”

“I didn’t call for an appointment,” Forrest was hissing in anger. I could feel he was lacking his jaw and narrowing his eyes at me from the other line.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Wood, but this phone cannot be used for personal calls.”

“Fine.” The call was cut off, and I was left staring at the receiver with wide eyes.

So many emotions were clogging in my throat until it was difficult for me to breathe. I squeezed my eyes shut and drew a deep breath.

Damn it, Forrest.

Chapter 29 Unyielding

MEGAN

“WHY THE fu—” I yelped in my seat with wide eyes. Forrest was already towering me over my desk and pinning me with a deadly glare. “Why did you—” he hissed. His voice was deep and strong with anger.

With my heart leaping in my throat, I blinked and gathered my posture. “You shouldn’t be here if you didn’t come for your appointment. I am working, can’t you see it?”

Thankfully, the patient for ten came early, and I had the chance to get away from angry and intimidating Forrest.

“She’s ready to see you,” I told the red-head woman, then I got myself busy rechecking the calendar, sharpening pencils, and cleaning my desk with wipes even though there was nothing to clean.

“Stop ignoring me, please?” He lowered his voice, then huffed a frustrated breath.

“Oh, spare me. And I don’t have time for your outburst.”

“I was worried about you last night.” He leaned in, his face was still tightened. Was that all? Do I look so pathetic that in need of rescuing all the time?

I lifted my chin to meet his gaze. The message was quite clear; genuine concern and sadness etched in those dark eyes. He scanned my face before he met my gaze again. So much for not staring at him because frack me, he got me there. I almost softened with sympathy. Yeah, he was a bit rough around the edges, but that was what I admired him for, besides being sexy and extremely hot.

He swallowed, perhaps he saw these unsated needs in my eyes.

My skin prickled with the urge of kissing him to erase the scowl on his face and the torment filling in those orbs.

The tension between us was still tangible. There was no denying that he still wanted me. Hell, I wanted him.

I shook that thought aside no matter how appealing it would be. What happened last night was still causing me a searing pain to my chest.

“Shouldn’t you be with your mother and your fiancéé at this time? Spending some time over a cup of tea.”

“I was worried. I left you tons of messages when you didn’t pick up my call.”

"I thought the worry part was pretty convincing, Forrest. Leave me alone, and I am working to pay my bills. Unlike you, I can't afford to lose my job again, to be kicked out of my apartment, and I certainly can't afford to buy a penthouse."

"Why did you leave just like that?"

I chuckled mockingly. "Come on, don't lay your dumb card on me now. You were lip-locking with your fiancée. What were you expecting? I would just stay there and wait for you until you were done sticking your tongue down her throat? You are engaged for God's sake. As much as I love to have steamy sex with you, don't get me wrong, it was amazing, but I don't sleep with a committed man."

"Meg—"

I raised my hand to stop him from continuing whatever crap he cooked up. I stood up and crossed my arms over my chest. "I thought you don't like to see women get hurt, especially when you were there and couldn't do anything, yet you cheated her on me. On purpose. For a guy so holier-than-thou like you, don't you think that's a little bit bizarre?"

Forrest drew a deep noisily breath through his nose and shook his head, then he stared at me for a couple of seconds. He was beyond pissed. Good to know because the feeling was mutual.

"And here I thought you don't do relationship, then I just found out you are freaking engaged. How do you call shocking in British?" I pointed my finger at him. "Gobsmocking! Oh, I must have been so presumptuous the whole time and assumed that you were not in a relationship. For some reason, I felt guilty. This is why I don't sleep twice with the same man because it only complicates every damn thing."

"Then why did we end up sleeping together?" His question caught me off guard. Forrest looked tormented—more than before. He desperately wanted an answer even though he knew it without asking me.

"Because I thought you are better than most men, but it was wrong for me to surmise. Well, you just hit a home run in getting into my pants, Forrest. Congratulations! Pop some confetti. Yay!"

"That's not why we slept together, and you of all the people should no that."

I snorted though it pained me as the reality was still showing up. I was hurting because I liked him a lot, and I wasn't ready to end what we had. "It's not that I didn't enjoy it with you, but you're a cheater."

He forced a laugh. "Did you see Meadow rushing toward us to accuse me of cheating on her?" Well, that didn't cross my mind "Look, Megan, I love Mama so much. The moment I heard her voice in

my living room, I forgot everything, especially when I saw her pain. She'd been through hell, and the last thing I wanted for her was to hurt her, yet I just did."

"Well, I am not your Mama, and she doesn't look like she'd been through a lot though. She looks perfect to me."

He sighed. "You don't wanna get my point, Megan. That's your problem."

Because you hurt me, asshole!

My eyes narrowed. I felt closer to crying. As much as I liked his idea, he didn't deny he had a fiancée, and that hurt a lot. "Then forgive me for not seeing the bigger picture here." Or more likely I chose not to. "Now that you see me I'm unscathed, can you please leave now? I'm not in a patient mood."

"Jesus, Megan. Do I have to spell it for you?" He drew a breath and swore. "I don't want her to feel that pain again, and the same thing for you. That's the last thing I want you to go through still, I've unintentionally caused it to you. That's why I am here, that's why I'm worried and damn it, you're right, I should be spending time with them because they're leaving soon, but I chose to come here to see you. I couldn't think straight, and I haven't been able to get some sleep knowing you left me without a word."

"Well, I'm fine." Stubborn as hell, I just rolled my eyes.

"Megan." I stepped back when he reached out. The desk was the only thing separated us, I knew how it felt perfect when I was with him and I didn't want to hold on by his touch and his promising words because I couldn't trust myself around him anymore.

"Megan, I am far from perfect, you know that, but I want to be a good person for you." He gave me one long pained look before he broke eye contact. He then nodded slowly before he spun away, leaving me alone shell-shocked with regrets.

Drained, I slumped my ass back to my chair, weighing what happened last night and his words today. Still, there were a lot of things to reconsider, and I would only get hurt in the process if I would listen to my stupid hormones than my brain.

When Mom's patient left, she came out of her office, staring at me, then she sighed. "I couldn't help to not eavesdrop. So, it's you then, huh?"

"What it's me then?"

"Never mind, but trust me, Meggie. Forrest is not the type of person who will cheat on someone. I can't share with you beyond this, but he's right. His mother is the only person who matters to him until you come into his life."

Again, I was left stunned with regrets.

I couldn't sleep, no matter how hard I tried. I reread all his messages, hoping I would get bored. The more I reread them, the more I felt hollow and aching. As stupid as it sounded, I missed him.

I went down to the kitchen and grabbed a box of cereals and fresh milk.

It was past twelve. Mom was sleeping, and here I was, wide awake, drowning with guilt. I shouldn't be feeling like this, and it sucked that he didn't stop her from kissing him and didn't deny the fact that they were engaged.

He made himself clear of not sharing me with someone else, yet I shared him with Meadow.

"Damn you. Why do you have to be so hot and unavailable?" I forcefully shoved the cereal in my mouth, lazily chewing with a long sigh. "Why does it have to be you?"

I'd been in a relationship once in high school. I was not a jealous type, but with him, I saw what I saw, and judging by it, they were in a long-term relationship.

I had closer to have a headache from overthinking. "Gah, I hate you, heart!"

At the corner of my eye, I caught a silhouette of a man behind the window. Goosebumps erupted all over my skin. I swallowed hard, hurriedly sliding off the stool. Trying not to create any noise, I gently pulled the drawer, grabbed a knife, and waited.

The male silhouette was moving, and I was thankful he had to break the glass before he could get in, and thanks to my Mom, there was a security system installed in this house.

Startled, my heart was officially in my throat by a knock on the window, then a faint deep voice followed, somewhat whispering my name.

Chapter 30 Wrong Safe Word

FORREST

THE MINUTE I stepped into the restaurant where Mama and I agreed to spend our lunch together, I spotted Lee and Taylor in suits at the corner table. They were quickly on their feet and marched toward my direction.

I threw them a glare before I stepped closer to where Mama and Meadow had been sitting. Lee and Taylor met me halfway.

“Mr. Kent—” I cut off Lee. He was tall, pure muscles, and always on full alert. He may be protecting my mother, but it didn’t change the fact that they took my mother here without telling me about their plan. I got it, it was Mama’s order, and that pissed me off a little further. They knew every detail about her safety, yet they didn’t inform me before considering flying over here.

“What a load of cobblers. And it’s Wood, dumbass.”

“Forrest, leave them alone. We already discussed this last night.” Mama stood up from her seat.

“Fancy seeing you here, Mr. Wood.” Taylor, a decade older than me tipped his head.

“I wish I could say the same thing, Taylor. We’ll talk about this next month, how about that?”

“Of course, sir.”

I watched them as they settle back to their table. I let the anger and relief surged inside me before I kissed Mama on her cheek.

“I thought you’re not gonna show up,” Meadow said.

“Don’t be too chuffed. You’re no excuse in my indignation.” I took a seat on the empty chair beside Mama.

Minutes later, the food arrived. We started our lunch with a light conversation about their shopping spree earlier.

Ignored Meadow’s comments most of the time. I respected my mother a lot not to snap at Meadow every time she butted in, but I hadn’t forgotten the stunt she pulled out back at my penthouse.

“So, did you two talk?” Mama’s smile was a little too hopeful. I wished I shared her confidence.

I stole a glance at Meadow whose mood suddenly turned grouchy. “Yeah.”

“And?” Meadow asked.

"On your bike, Meadow." I had not eaten good food since yesterday, and I was hoping to fill my stomach with this delicious meal if she didn't have to spoil everything.

"Forrest, I didn't—"

I put the fork down and wiped my mouth. "Just don't, okay? Tell you what, she has nothing to do with me anymore. Congratulations!"

"Give her some time, Forrest." Mama smiled with an encouraging squeeze of my hand. I didn't need any further encouragement. I already had a plan at hand.

"And if she—"

"Don't pretend as if you're concerned, Meadow. You planned to wear that bloody ring all along." Thankfully, it wasn't on her finger anymore as I might take it off from her and threw it away. I should've taken it from her, but I thought she might plan on selling it, and I didn't really give a fuck about it anymore.

"I'm sorry, okay? I thought—" Her voice was rough, affected,

"You thought what, that there's nothing serious going on between me and Megan? Like always, so pessimistic of you."

"Will you two stop bickering in front of food? She apologised, isn't she?" Mama cut me a glare.

Meadow quickly apologized.

"I'm sorry, Mama. I have a lot of things in my head right now. Let's not talk about it, shall we?"

The embarrassment I felt of being caught by my mother or my old flame making out with a woman was least a bit of my concern. It wasn't also because I left without a choice having a raging hard-on that took every damn power I had left to wear off the throbbing erection in pants before facing my mother. It was damn disturbing, but far way more painful to chase the woman who was fucking clear that she had nothing to do with you anymore.

Megan did a pretty good job of testing my temper. She took everything lightly while I was evaporating inside.

This morning, instead of throwing words at her, I wanted to grab the back of her head, kiss her so hard to prove my point, and to pick up what we left off last night.

Thanks to Dr. Reed, she understood my situation and gave me her home address, and here I was, knocking on their window like a fucking creep while Megan was still ignoring my call.

I never thought in the future, I would be doing this desperate measure to get a woman's attention, but she was not just any woman, she was Megan.

"Megan," I whispered while knocking on the window.

It was past midnight, I was hoping it was her and not her mom who would answer me.

The curtain was withdrawn, I sighed in relief that it was indeed Megan. Her eyes were wide in shock, and her mouth gaped as if I was losing my mind.

I almost chuckled when she tapped the window with a knife to give me a warning. I was thankful that she was vigilant. I must have scared her and thought I was a burglar who was trying to break in.

Sorry for not being sorry though because I was not going anywhere. I pointed at the door to let me in, instead, the response I got was her disapproval. She unapologetically pressed her lips into a tight line.

This is not gonna be good.

"I am not going anywhere until we talk, I mean it." I did a hand signal and eyed her strongly.

Again, she tapped the knife on the window and huffed a breath before she moved toward the door.

I did a fast-paced stride to the doorstep of the back door. It swung open, revealing Megan who was crossing her arms over her chest, looked pissed with a knife pointing at me.

"Hi." All of a sudden my tongue stuck to my mouth, and I lost my words to see her in front of me.

She only wearing a baby blue shirt with the tiniest shorts that looked more like panties to me. Like an idiot I was, my attention was focused solely on her nipples poking against the thin fabric.

I lost my concentration until she snapped her fingers in front of my face.

"What the hell are you doing here? And how did?" She stopped. "Don't answer that."

I moved closer, towering her. Megan stepped back as she pinned me with a cautious look. I had to stop approaching before she would change her mind and never gave me another chance. "I just wanna talk to you."

"I thought I was pretty clear that we're done talking."

"Not on my part. I haven't done saying what I want to say."

"Then say it now. It's pretty late. I'm retiring soon."

I followed her when she walked away. "I don't know they're coming."

"I heard that in your penthouse."

"Mama never came to see me."

"Then why is she here with your fiancée?"

"You're not listening," I emphasized. "Meadow is not my fiancée."

She stopped in the kitchen, grabbed the box of cereal and milk on the counter and placed them in the cupboard and the fridge. She then looked down at her unfinished meal. "Do British women kiss every man as their way of saying hello?"

"You know you sound ridiculous, right?"

"Then why did she kiss you?" Her voice was as cold as ice.

"I've known her since we were young."

"That doesn't answer my question, Forrest. How young are we talking about here?"

"I was ten, and she was nine."

"I see." She nodded dourly and placed her unfinished food inside the fridge. "She's your first love."

"And we thought we were going to get married." My temper was about to snap when she didn't even look at me. I hated it when people didn't even give their attention while I was talking. I sighed heavily. "Damn it, Megan. Can you at least look at me when we're talking? How could we solve our problem if you don't wanna even face it?"

She looked at me with disinterest. "I have nothing to say, Forrest. And it's not my problem, it's yours."

"I do have something to say though, but I want you to look at me in the eye when I am talking. At least show me a little respect. I came here to speak to you."

"I am listening."

I rounded to her side, and she quickly stilled. "I'm not gonna touch you. I just wanna be closer to you. I would never—"

"I know. It's just, I don't trust myself anymore when I'm with you." I hurt her, and I completely understood her decisive action.

Still, she had no idea that I'd been holding my emotions, fighting the urge of pulling her into my arms, and not letting her go again. "I moved here and stayed with Alan."

"But you did not break up with her."

I shook my head. “No. But I can assure you that I and Meadow were ancient history.”

Megan shook her head, looking disappointed. She stalked away and left me with a huff.

I followed her. At a time like this, I would do everything for her to understand my situation.

“When I told her to come with me, she didn’t support my decisions. I went back a year after, but she already moved on. That’s how it ended.”

She stopped abruptly. “I don’t think she gets the memo, Forrest because she’s still wearing your ring, and it shows to me that you two are never over.”

“We were over four years ago. She fucking knew it.”

“Oh, I don’t think so. It’s maybe because you two are still sleeping together, right?”

“Yes.”

“Jeez,” she scoffed, starting to sniff. “Go home. This conversation is going nowhere.” She climbed upstairs.

Jesus! She was crying again because of me. My chest ached. It was like a knife shoved into my heart.

I was second thought of not following her, but I came here to explain, and if she still didn’t want me after I told her everything, then— Then what?

“It was just sex,” I blurted out.

Chapter 31 Letter M

FORREST

“THERE’S NO such thing as just sex for you, Forrest! You know that. You don’t just screw around. You are not the type of man who sleeps around because if you are, we probably slept together a long time ago.”

I held her hand. My hope skyrocketed. “What did you just say?”

She lifted her gaze full of pain, and my heart sunk to my stomach that I was the cause of it. “I like you since— well, since. Never mind. It doesn’t matter anymore. I know I am not your type. Until now I can’t find the right answer as to why we ended up in bed. We both are two different persons, Forrest, yet it doesn’t matter to me. It’s just, what is happening between us feels right, and it feels anything less than perfect when I am with you.”

Heat radiated through my chest to hear her admission. “I know because I feel the same, Megan. Why do you think I am still here after you shoved right into my face that you had nothing to do with me anymore?” I sighed and held her hand tightly when she wanted to pull it from my grip. I wasn’t ready to let her go just yet. I tentatively raised my hand to cup her face and trace my finger on her cheek. Then a tear fell. Jesus Christ! “Please, forgive me.”

My heart hit a tailspin when her lips started to part. “I missed you. I missed us together. When I was with you, I thought that was all I wanted. I want us, Megan. God knew how much I wanted to be honest with you, but I wasn’t sure if you could or would accept me—accept who really I am.”

She wiped a single tear fell on her cheek. “I don’t care who you are for as long as you are honest with me.”

“I will do my best.” When the word best left my mouth, I cupped the back of her head and captured her lips. I took the gasp of surprise slipped from her mouth. I kissed her like I meant it and showed her how much I missed her, how much I wanted her, and how much I needed her.

Tomorrow, I wasn’t sure if I could still feel her lips on mine or if I got a chance to see this beautiful creature again. Tonight, at least, I able to show her how much she meant to me. And that would be enough for now.

“I missed you,” I said between kisses. “So much.” Kissed. “It fucking hurts that I hurt you.” Kissed. “I want you, Megan.” Kissed. “I need you.” Kissed. “Please, accept me.”

“You just missed your cock inside me.”

Fuck, she was right. "Such a dirty mouth, but I do miss the feeling of being inside you. Every damn day." I was already hard, my dick straining inside my pants. "My cock just knows what's good for him."

What I wasn't expecting was her grabbing my hand as she opened another door. "We need to talk."

"I know."

I found myself on top of her, thrusting harder as deep as I could get into her sweet and the warm of her pussy while we were both catching our breaths, our body damped with our sweat, our moans mingled, our souls merged, our body perfectly fitted as we made love like it was our last night together.

For a while, I pushed all my worries aside. I needed her to own my mind, my body, my soul, and my heart at this moment.

"I know how it feels, Megan. It feels perfect." I smashed my mouth into hers as I claimed her with another consuming kiss, and brutally plunged hard as we both were catching our impending orgasms.

She screamed my name every thrust I did. It had my heartbeat accelerated and had the fire in veins urged me to quicken my face.

"You are perfect," she said breathlessly. She nearly ripped my heart out earlier, and right now, she was making me feel I was the luckiest man on earth.

"I am not, Megan but we are perfect for each other," I whispered, my heart swelled with so many raw emotions, and the next thing I knew I was lowering down to close my mouth to hers and suck her deep.

My senses were in chaos as I watched her drowning in pleasure. My blood charged right to my balls that I nearly knocked off down when she clamped around my cock, shuddered, bucked underneath me, and dug her fingernails against my skin. Her eyes were bright wide as the force of release shot through her.

"Oh yes." A soft little purr escaped her mouth.

She was beautiful.

"You are stunning." Never a time she didn't take my breath away up to this very moment.

My muscles tensed. My heart nearly exploded in my chest as I came hard so powerful that I collapsed on top of her while losing in ecstasy.

We lax.

“When was the last time you slept with her?” Her fingers were running through my hair.

Groaning, I buried my face between the mound of her breasts. “I am still inside you, and you just spoil this moment.”

“You said it yourself that you needed me, and you wanted me to accept you, then prove it to me, Forrest.”

“Are you sure you wanna hear this?”

“When? Last night? This morning? Before you came over?”

“Three months ago, but trust me, it was just sex.”

“You kept saying that.”

“It’s me being honest.”

“So, you were like fuck buddies, huh?”

“Something like that. We’re open. She’s having sex with any man she likes, and so do I.”

“You never had sex since then?”

I lifted my head, meeting her gaze. Her eyes glittered with pain. “Yes, Megan. I never had a sex partner as well. Other than her.”

“Why?” She frowned.

“Okay, I had sex if you’d consider a couple of one-night stands. It’s because I couldn’t escape.”

“I get it, you’re just a man.” I could feel the irritation seeping through her veins, and her eyes must be rolling right now.

“I guess I trust Meadow more than those women I just met.”

“Really, you never had sex in three months?”

“Megan.” I groaned. “Actually, I like this woman, and I’ve been indulging myself with sexual fantasy with her for years, but she didn’t like me the way I did.” I lifted myself and lied down beside her. I pulled her into my arms and pressed a kiss on top of her head.

“Um, do you still like her?” Her hesitation and innocent query made me want to squeeze her and tell her about this woman.

I played along. “Who, Meadow? Nah.”

“No. This woman you like.”

“Yes. Very much.” I inwardly smiled at her reaction. Megan instantly went rigid and was probably holding her breath. I could feel her heartbeat against my skin—at least, we both had the same rhythm.

I was waiting for her to throw me out of her bed, it didn’t happen though.

“She’s the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. She has this dirty mouth, but I find her remarkably sexy. Every time I saw her, I felt like I was driving myself insane with lust, desire, and jealousy. And she just blew my mind a moment ago.”

“You seem to have a thing with letter M,” relaxed, she said with a laugh.

“You don’t wanna know my mother’s name.”

She lifted her gaze, amused. “Try me.”

“It’s Myra.”

“You’re kidding.” Her lips spread into a wide grin, and I kissed her to shut it.

“Nope.”

“She’s British, isn’t she?”

“She is.”

“Wait. I’ve been dying to ask you this. What exactly do you do for a living besides bartending?”

“I know someone back in college. His name is Bill, and we are currently working on something.”

“Is it legal?”

“Yes.”

“Did you ever go to college?”

“MIT.”

Her eyes went wide. “Whoa! Slow down. MIT? And you choose to work below your pay grade, why? Gosh, you’re the weirdest person I’ve ever met.”

“So I’ve been told. Bartending is just a hobby. I love mixing drinks.” It reminds me of Father.

“I have to admit, it’s astounding for someone who’s an MIT grad, who lives in a penthouse, yet he chooses his hobby over to work in one of the biggest technology companies in the world.”

“As I said, we’re working on something.”

"Have you done anything illegal?"

"You mean hacking? No."

"No one ever recognized you at work? I mean, from your school."

"I almost got into trouble actually. Someone recognized me even I was in a nerd getup back then with sweaters, glasses, and one side hairstyle."

She forced back a swallow, asking nonchalantly, "You're such a righteous ass. So tell me a short version of your life."

"We were in France."

"France? So you're fluent in French?"

"Oui. Il est tellement chaud. So, I am hot, huh?"

"Oh, god, you heard me?" She was absolutely lovely when she blushed. Megan never blushed, but I'd love to see this reaction more often.

"Yeah, and as silly as it sounds, but I thought you made me so damn happy that you thought I was hot."

"You are. So tell me about France."

"I was just a young boy back then when a terrible accident happened that changed my life. An aristocrat explorer helped me and my mother. He took us into his custody, ending up marrying my mother. Unfortunately, he got badly ill. He died when I was thirteen. He left all his wealth in my name. Mama managed his businesses with the help of his old business partners and trusted employees. Someone wouldn't let us live in peace though so, Mama decided that I should stay away from her for a while. That's how I ended up here." I gave her a very short and less detailed version.

"And the reason why your mother came because you are planning to meet this someone?"

"Yes. And that's why I am here with you. If things—"

She pressed a finger on my lips. Her eyes danced with worry. "Don't. I don't wanna hear that."

"Megan, he's a dangerous person and tangled with very dangerous people." I wished she didn't have to know this, but this is crucial and I promised to tell her the truth.

She didn't have any idea I was frightened right now, but this was my only chance, and I had to do this to redeem my life back.

"You don't have to meet him."

"I have to. I've been planning this for years. I need to do this for the sake of Mama, Alan, and us. I know he won't leave me alone. Maybe meeting him would clear the air."

"Why is this so important to you? Who is he anyway?"

My stomach felt rock hard, but I promised her the truth, and I hoped she would still look at me the same person again when she knew who I was. I sucked in a deep breath and took all my courage to speak.

"My father."

Chapter 32 The Billion Dollar Smile

MEGAN

Unbelievable.

FORREST STILL had a father. Estranged, dangerous, or not, he should be lucky, at least he still got one. I wondered if he ever mentioned his father to our friends, or this was one of his many secrets.

Forrest was still on top of me after another round of amazing and steamy sex—he made love with me and made me feel so special and cared.

He looked worried though, and hell, I was anxious.

He was constantly sighing and zoning-out. I wished I could help or stop him from meeting his father, but I didn't know what to do. I'd never been in his situation. The fact that his mother was worried about him, then he could be in great danger.

"This isn't our last sex, right?" I wanted to hit myself in the head.

Forrest wasn't surprised. So, I made myself believe that we wanted the same thing.

He groaned. "Uh-uh. I'm not done with you. Not even close. There could be hundreds more, thousands even." I could feel his lips curved against my chest.

"Forrest, look at me." When he lifted his head, I cupped his face, compelling him to look me in the eye. "Promise me one thing."

"What is it?" His eyebrows squished together, eyes pooled with concern.

"Look, I'm not trying to be clingy since we never talk about—Whatever, but I wanna see you again. I kinda like what we have. I like us. I don't want you to go and meet that man without telling you that you mean to me, Forrest." I bit my lip when my eyes turned watery. Oh, God! I'm getting all weepy. "Please, come back to me safe."

"I'll be fine. Don't worry about me." He traced his thumb on my cheek. His assurance had no guarantee, but I had to believe in him somehow. "I don't wanna disappoint you by promising you, then I end up breaking it, but what I can promise to you is, I'll take care of myself and make sure to come back to you in one piece."

I nodded against the pillow. "Fair enough. Another thing."

His eyes lit up with mischief. "Of course, anything."

“Whatever you have in mind, forget it.” I rolled my eyes. “Are you going to sleep with her again?”

“No.” He flinched. “Why are you asking me about this?”

“Look, this is all new to me, but I just wanna make sure where I stand.”

“I am here with you, ain’t I? I thought we’re pretty clear about this already.”

“That was before I knew you have a fuck buddy.”

“I’m sorry. I should have told you about her.” Guilt plastered on his face. “I won’t be sleeping with any woman anymore, but I want you to do the same because I don’t, and I won’t share you with anyone, Megan.” His last words were strong like a promise, and I wanted to jump on the bed.

“I won’t share you with...her either or with anyone.”

“Great.”

“You’re mine for now.” I grinned like I just received a Christmas gift. Hopefully for a long time.

“Then I am yours. Took you long enough to say it?”

I was shocked, and I thought he was shocked as well. We stared at each other for like eternity as if we were trying to sink all in and understand the only point of our conversation. We were already talking about our relationship.

We seemed to be on the same page for a lot of things, and for a commitment-phobic like me, I never thought it would be this easy to talk about us.

Astound, I sucked in a quick breath, my heart almost stopped, then pounded so hard that I could feel it in my skin.

My lips slowly parted, and I could feel a smile slowly forming on my face. I was getting misty-eyed as I stared at him in disbelief.

I just couldn’t find words. Again, this man knew how to render me speechless. For the first time since I laid an eye on him, he smiled. It was so beautiful that I felt I just released a sigh of satisfaction just by watching him.

Forrest was smiling down on me, his face lit up, and I was still overwhelmed to say a word.

The skin at the corner of his eyes crinkled, and I was like an idiot, shaking to cry. He looked so devastatingly handsome like a prince charming in a fairytale story. He showed off his perfect white teeth as his lips spread into a full-blown smile. There was no more pain clouding in those eyes other than filled with its inner glow.

Then his smile was gone, replaced with panic. "Hey, why are you crying?" He quickly wiped my tears off. "I'm not gonna die."

"Silly." I hit his hands off, feeling my face heated. In my heart, I knew this was not just my hormones or whatever triggering my emotions. I became so emotionally attached to Forrest in just a short time, and I should be scared right now. To my surprise, I wasn't.

"That's not the reason why I am crying," I said between laughs. "Gosh, I can't believe you made me cry."

"Then what is it? Why are you crying, Megan?"

"For the first time, I saw you smile. You smiled at me, you, silly."

He beamed, his brow arched. "Oh, Is that so?"

"Uh-huh, and you should do that more often. You look different. Gorgeous like almost surreal, but you still look hot though even if you look a lot more intimidating."

He leaned down to give me a soft fluttery kiss on my lips. "You are gorgeous, Megan. Remarkable. Please, stop crying. I have reasons to smile. My misery is almost over, and you are here with me to make me smile, happy, and make me feel hopeful."

I faked a satisfied breath. "If I have known I am the only reason to make you smile, I should have done what I supposed to do a long time ago. Why haven't you said the magic word?"

"Are you fishing, Megan?" He laughed. His voice was rich and contagious.

I laughed with him. "Kidding. Just, please take care."

"For you, I will." He kissed me again. This time it was low and deep, and I felt we were pouring our souls into our kiss.

Chapter 33 Never Cross A Meadow

MEGAN

I REMEMBERED Forrest fluttery kissing my forehead like a butterfly feather and whispered that he had to go. I didn't know what time he left, but I felt confident that he would keep his words.

When I went down, Mom was already ready for work. "Forrest left already."

I halted in the middle of the stairs, feeling my cheeks flared. I was mortified that Mom knew that Forrest visited me last night.

Mom smiled. "No need to feel embarrassed. I knew Forrest would come. He asked where were you staying and he didn't give me any choice not to give him the address. You know that I have a soft spot for that guy. When he told me he was waiting for you at your apartment yesterday, and you didn't go there, I felt bad."

"He could be lying," I defended myself.

"That man doesn't lie, Meggie. That's his strong suit. He chose to stop talking than to lie. And I like him."

"I'm sorry, Mom." I walked down toward her. "I should have not let him in, but I know he won't stop knocking until he got what he came for. I'm afraid he'd wake you up or worse our neighbors." My reason was not convincing. I just felt mortified that we might disrupt her sleep during our well, very eventful night.

"If things between you two have sorted out, I have no problem. You both are adults, and remember what I told you to go out on a date? I'm just glad you followed my advice."

"Yeah, but what happens between me and Forrest isn't really planned, and we are not dating."

"Baby steps, honey. Let's go. We still have to stop by the flower shop."

My heart pounded in my chest as we entered the cemetery. For the first time in five years, I was going to see him again. My world seemed to spin, and I felt the chill running down my spine while I was tightly gripping the flowers we bought earlier, but I was not taking any chances.

I felt Mom was squeezing my arm in encouragement. I blew a breath and nodded in determination. It was now or nothing. I had to face my regrets, my grief, and my fear once and for all.

"It's okay to feel terrified."

"I know." I nodded vigorously.

I still remembered the tree to my left where I ran to and broke down under after the casket had rolled down.

We were getting closer to his grave, and my heart wouldn't stop pounding, yet my stomach was twisting.

"A few more steps, Meggie. You can do it." Mom was rubbing my arm.

"This is it." My steps slowed and slowed, feeling my knees wobbled, but I put all the courage and strength together, and I kept reminding myself that I couldn't return the time to stop the inevitable.

My lungs expanded, and I smiled down in relief when I was already looking down at his name engraved on the plate.

"You did it, Meggie," Mom whispered.

"I made it, Mom!" I gushed, wiped my tears dry, and pulled Mom into a hug.

"You're stronger than you give yourself credit for, Meggie. I am so proud of you."

"I know, right?" I let out shaky laughter as I placed down the white lilies and sat down. "Hey, Dad."

Mom sat beside me and removed the withering flowers and replaced them with her pink carnation on another plate; for my mother.

My mother, Mom's only sister died in childbirth, but Mom treated me like her own. Then, when things went awry, I just left her. Just like that. That was my biggest regret. I blamed myself, and I couldn't stand my guilt. That took years for me to face her again.

"I'm sorry, Dad. If it takes a long time for me to visit you again, but never a day passed by that I didn't think of you. I missed you so much." I bit my lip when my chin started to tremble, but it wouldn't stop. I shook, pouring out all my regrets and pain to this one cry, and hopefully, this would be the last.

"What's important is you're here now, Meggie," Mom said.

"Then, yesterday, I realized that we couldn't redo the past. Someone inspired me to do this. He said that he has to do something risky for the right reason, that he has to do that to have a better life. Honestly, I'd been blaming myself for what happened, that was why I ran away, leaving Mom alone, but for these past years, nothing happened in my life away from you and Mom. I was in the dark the whole time. I couldn't move on. All I did was to hide my pain, my guilt, and it felt like I was fooling myself all along because every time I went to bed, I still felt the emptiness inside me.

I'm so sorry if it took so long for me to realize that. I hope you can still forgive me, Dad. I also have to forgive myself to start a new life."

Mom was rubbing my back as I continued telling Dad like we used to do. I felt a sudden lightness in my chest when Mom started talking to Dad and my mother about our dinner plan. We ended up laughing as if they were just right in front of us.

When we got back to work, I remembered I had not thought of Kyland's job offer.

Hours went by uneventful. Mom sent me to my apartment, but she didn't let me go if I didn't promise her dinner. Before I could enter the elevator, someone called my name behind me.

I turned around, ignoring the burning sensation inside my chest. "I would say you might be a British spy."

"Megan, right?" She still looked sophisticated.

I would be damned if I wasn't jealous of her big eyes and tanned skin. Her makeup was perfect. I couldn't blame Forrest if he was still banging this woman because she was definitely a catch.

"And you're Meadow." I did an ugly laugh. "Last night, I told Forrest that he has a thing with M. What a pretty awkward coincidence."

"So, he was with you last night and chose not to be with his mother." Her accent was posh, and it added points to her sarcasm and bitchiness. "Are all Americans like to influence abominably to everything they touch?"

My stance stiffed to her rude behavior. "Why are you exactly here, Meadow? And should I remind you that you are standing right now on American soil? Be careful with your words."

"I'm just finding it hard to believe that Forrest just turns a blind eye."

Well, I was already fuming with anger. "Turns a blind eye? Are you serious right now? Look, Meadow, I can a bitch and turn on my catty behavior, but what's the point? Forrest told me that you two were over. And if there's one thing you two have is just." I paused and jabbed in the air. "Sex? His words, by the way. Not mine."

Her eyes narrowed, obviously offended. She did a cruelly, disgustingly, and low laugh. "And do you believe him, darling? Do you trust him?"

"Yes. He has no reason to lie. He could've done that before if all he wanted was to get into my knickers because he knew very well. I would still fuck him though even if he lied right to my face."

"You're such a promiscuous woman!" Meadow cringed in disgust.

I gave her a sweet smile. "So, I've been told. Far worse too many times."

"What did he see in you?"

"What he sees is what he gets. And he got some standards that contradict your first impression on me, you know. I didn't have to hide my true nature behind another skin, besides, Forrest made me realize how important of facing your own fears, letting go of the past, and think of the future. I am not perfect, but I accepted my flaws. I think you should do that, Meadow."

She muttered something under her breath, eyeing me cold, dead, and flat.

"Just let him go. He should be with someone who can make him happy. And we both know who that person is, whether you like it or not. Anyway, you can't stop him from doing what's needed to be done. You should know that because if anyone knew him well, it would be you. As his friend, it's better that you offer him your support. That's all he needs."

Chapter 34 Ghost From the Past

FORREST

IT WAS gut-wrenching, terrifying shit to face him today—the person I feared for years, François Xavier. In a few minutes, I would be standing in front of him—face to face—eye to eye.

The thing that feared me the most was if I could walk out of here alive after this most anticipated meeting. I knew for a fact that people feared him, followed him like a goddamn god, and I was nothing, no one to him, to anyone. I was just an insignificant businessman, nothing more.

The five-star hotel lobby was busy as always. These people were not aware that a dangerous person on the planet was just staying above their heads.

I scanned around as I entered with nerves buzzing through me. This whole situation wracked every bone in my body and made me think if it worth my efforts. I hoped it is.

I kept reminding myself of why I was doing this, even though it didn't help a tiny bit. I remembered someone said that a day would come that you have to face those moments you feared, to forget what fear felt like. I prepared this moment for years, and it happened today or never.

I noticed three strong tanned-skin men in suits. The long-haired was staring at me in silence, but I knew he was a part of his entourage.

I heard my feet pounding on the floor as I marched toward the nearest elevator. The hair at the back of my neck was rising, telling me that the three goons were watching me my every move. I entered quietly, then as expected, they followed me in.

After releasing somewhat a sigh of relief which was complete bullshit, I shoved my hands inside my pants pockets, balling them into fists to stop myself from fidgeting. I started sweating, but I couldn't let them find out I was nearly peeing in my pants.

One of them punched a floor number. I clenched my jaw hard as my patience evaporated of waiting to reach the exact floor, but the elevator would still stop in the middle. I studied the floor plan carefully. And I was right, the elevator halted. The three goons walked out first, and I followed them with a confident paced.

Then they turned left toward the small hallway and stopped in front of another elevator. The long-haired guy swiped the card and punched some numbers, then the elevator door slid open.

“Right after you,” the tallest guy said in a thick French accent.

Without uttering a word, I walked in, then they followed like puppies.

A few moments later, dread had filled me when the elevator stopped. I could even hear the strong beating of my heart, the pumping of my blood in my ears. My lips went dry when the man inspected me, tapping my suit from head to toe.

“Wait right here.” The black guy knocked on the door, then it swung open as if they were aware of the exact moment of our arrival.

My heart sped up a million a mile. My tongue thickened in my mouth. I straightened my posture and sucked in a deep breath to find more strength to grasp as I walked inside the French-inspired luxury suite.

Finally, I was in the lion’s den.

I stopped in the middle, scanning the beautiful art hanging on the wall. At the corner of my eye, I saw another guy with the same height as mine, probably a decade older than me, standing like a statue, almost not blinking. I licked my lips and slipped my hand to my left jacket pocket, causing the statue guy to go rigid.

I turned to face him, lifting a brow when I pulled my Cuban cigar. I hated this shit, but I wanted to get pissed and fill my blood with rage before I faced him.

Then he marched in.

The one and only Francois Xavier or should I say, Oliver Huxley.

An eerie feeling surrounded us. My world spun, then everything blurred around us. My heartbeat went unsteady. I could feel the sweat beaded on my forehead as I stood there like I was slowly turning into a stone.

I took a deep breath and faced him. I’d been waiting for this moment to happen. Now we were face to face, as expected, my rage started to boil in my veins as the old memories came flashing back in my head.

What I first noticed, he was older than I thought he was—than in the picture Alan gave me weeks ago. How did it even possible? He even lost some weight.

Funny that he wasn’t I thought the god he was after all. His hair was graying. A frown was deep on his face as if he was stressing too much, and even his eyes were filled with so much emptiness, that surprisingly, I even felt pity for him.

He was the fucking demon in my nightmares. Right now, he was standing in front of me that I should be scared of, only, I felt nothing but boiling rage.

Then our gaze locked, and I gave him a curt nod before I lit up my cigar.

"You are too young to smoke," he stated casually, gesturing me to sit as he took a seat on the red-golden intricated chair. Am I now? Was there an age-limit I didn't know of? But one thing I remembered about him was he heated cigarettes. Maybe what I was doing was to piss him off. Who cared?

His voice hadn't changed a bit than the last time I remembered other than it aged with him.

"I actually hate cigarettes in any form." I unbuttoned my suit and took a seat as we faced each other.

"You must have reasons." He crossed his legs.

He didn't know me at all. I couldn't see any recognition in his eyes when he first saw me earlier. Was I supposed to be relieved? Hell, yeah.

So, why was he searching for us? Or he was just canny and a skillful bastard in hiding his emotions?

"It calms my nerves. It makes me think sharply."

He then gestured to the statue man. The man walked to the liquor table, grabbing an old whiskey bottle with two glasses.

"Leave us," he ordered and signaled his fingers.

The statue guy walked out without delay. Francois then poured us to our glasses and stood up to offer to me.

I took it from him. "A Double Eagle Very Rare. You have quite a taste. Thank you."

"I collect good liquor, son. In fact, I just bought a fifty-year-old Whiskey in the auction last week." Son my bloody arse. "Let's talk about why we are here today. I didn't usually come here more often. This city is too loud for my taste. I prefer a serene environment, fresh air, but your proposal caught my attention."

"In fact, I do. I'm glad my proposal got your attention even though you are a busy person."

"Tell me then."

I sipped my Whiskey. "You don't bit around the bushes, do you?"

He eyed me suspiciously, causing my heart rate to accelerate. "I believe when we have the same interests, there's no reason to beat around the bushes—"

"Forrest Wood."

"Mr. Wood. Correct me if I'm wrong, you have no experience in our line of business."

"You're right, I don't have, but I'd like to take my chances."

“So, tell me why you’re interested in a shipping company? And I’m a believer that someone who starts from scratch is the one who mostly succeeds.”

“My great-great-grandfather received a piece of land after the conflicts between Britain and France. He started from scratch by cultivating his land into a vineyard. It wasn’t easy, but he was a man who didn’t know the word give-up. He left his family for months to travel by boat just to sell a few bottles of his finest wine, but that was not the hardest part for him. He was a nobody. Aristocrats didn’t even give a damn about his wine until a down to earth businessman tasted it. It was even by accident. At that time, that man was drunk, but then, he searched for my ancestor when he found a bottle on his table.” I paused. Thankfully, he was listening. Until now he didn’t have a clue who I was. My plan seemed to work.

“You see, Mr. Xavier, it takes a lot of courage and patience to earn a place in this society. One thing I learned from my old folks is patience. You wouldn’t believe me if I tell you that I’d been waiting for years to be here in front of you today. I think I deserve a little bit of your time, don’t you think?”

“I don’t play with my associates, so you better have something for my time. Or it is in your best interest to leave now. The door is open and forget that we met.” Of course, he never changed, still the short-tempered, impatient, and horrible person I once knew.

“I see.” I bit the cigar and inhaled the smoke deeply now that I got his attention. I maintained strong eye contact with him. I took the cigar with my left hand, and his eyes slightly widened when his gaze landed on my ring.

“You are an Oirdheirc.” And again, of course, he knew the meaning of this. He knew one of the most respected brotherhoods in the United Kingdom. It was founded by an English noble in the early 14th century. At first, it was to offend Scottish during the war. Then, later on, it grew into a brotherhood. Up to this day, Oirdheirc still existed.

I knew he owed a blood debt to the Oirdheirc, and now, it was time to claim the fucking payment.

Years ago, Francois almost died from blood loss when he escaped from the feud with his last known associate. One of the Oirdheirc members gave him a place to stay and treated his wound until he was able to stand in his two feet. That time, I didn’t know he was my bastard of a father. If I had known, I would have prayed and let him die alone. That was how we found out he was still alive and had been asking about me and my mother.

“I see now,” he muttered, a little impressed glint at the corner of his eyes.

I crushed the cigar to the ashtray and stood up. “My offer still stands if you’re interested. Everyone has a price, and I only wanted two things from you in return.” I side glanced at him, and he was pressing his lips into a thin line because I just disrespected the almighty Francois Xavier.

He was still a fucking bastard in my eye.

“There’s one boy,” he stated. “Out of pity, an old miner took him in and treated him like a son. One day, he took the boy with him and trained him to be a miner like him. Then the boy learned pretty quickly than he expected. An explosion happened at the mine, they were trapped inside. The only light that made them both see each other was from the flashlight. The boy was scared, but the old miner told him not to worry, and the help would arrive soon. They both knew it was impossible. They could be dead by the time the rescuers arrived. Hours passed, they ate their food and kept the leftover with their water. Luckily for them, after being bullied by being thin and black, he brought his lunchbox with him to the coal mine. They were desperate, but the rescue had no chance of finding them. The old man offered the last piece of bread and a drop of water to his boy because he knew he had a tough call to make later. Why would he—?”

My blood pounded in my ears. I knew exactly where this story ended. He was damn cynical and rationalistic, and he would never trust me. That one day, I might betray him.

“You tell me.”

And I just hit a nerve.

Chapter 35 Papa

FORREST

“YOU ARE arrogant son of a bitch!” He spat out a furious breath. He was mad. Damn right, so did I.

“That makes the two of us. And here you thought that I am interested in being a part of your cabal and cohorts, don’t you? The only reason why I am here. And then right now, you think I will dethrone you? Am I that desperate? And you see as that boy. When desperation arises, I will leave that old man to death and save my own arse, will I?” I smirked evilly. “I know you would think something like that. And that situation might have happened once in your pathetic life, am I right?” I narrowed my eyes into slits as his face flushed with rage about to put two holes in my head with his blazing glare. “Or was it the other way around?”

“You cross the wrong man, boy. You just sign your death wish.”

“In fact, I do, since I planned on meeting you. That’s the fate that I already accepted, but I also have patience and hope that that moment will not come. Why am I not even surprised that you’re going to threaten me? As I told you, I don’t want anything to do with your business or whoever you have entangled with. I only offered your shipping company some handsome cash to lure you in. And let’s be honest here that what’s got your interest, isn’t it? I only want two things though then my business with you is over.”

“What do you want?” he spat out.

“I have a lot of money. My family owns a mining company, leading jewelry industries all over the world. I have a connection in the black market if you think I haven’t have experienced being in your awful corrupt world. I am about to launch a multi-million dollar project for the benefit of many people. You probably ask yourself now, why nobody knows a certain Forrest Wood, do you? Who Forrest Wood is? Two years ago, my company developed a security system that has facial recognition. Visual does ring any bell? If you ever stepped closer to my home, you’re dead, considering your situation.” I was already towering him, looking at him from head to toe in disgust. “Atto Tech is mine, and that’s something you are interested in. Tell me now who I shouldn’t cross or who you shouldn’t? Are your lackeys watching this conversation right now?”

“This is none of your concern.” His eyes narrowed into hostile slits. His lips pulled taut in displeasure that maybe he was thinking right now that I was richer than him. Damn right, I was.

"It certainly is." He still didn't get it, did he? "But fine by me, and they better be listening." I scanned for the possible places where they installed the camera. "I want Leandrei and Constance out of your lists."

He gasped, staring at me with wide eyes. Horror and shock were so deep in his pools. His face was ashen as he froze. He clamped his mouth shut as his chin started to tremble. What an awful sight for the almighty? Tsk tsk.

This was not the reaction I was expecting. Anyhow, I took it as a victory.

He swallowed hard as he spoke. "I-I knew the first time I looked into your eyes." Pain crossed his face as if I just triggered a switch to his past life. Fuck him!

"Well, that must be unfortunate for you right now." I snorted. "Twenty million for you to leave us alone."

"I've been looking for you and your mama for so long." A wave of defeat crossed his face. He sagged against his chair. It was priceless to watch that he seemed powerless before me.

"You should have asked someone to check the background of Kentworthry Capital before you accepted meeting me. Or maybe your health clouded your judgment, eh? Or you're too desperate to save your barely standing bloody shipping business."

He rubbed his hands over his face and paused, somewhat sorting out through the bits of what I just spilled. "I'd been asking people to search for you, but they ended up in the dead end."

"I think I should give credit to those people who gave me my new identity. Our business here is over, Francois Xavier or should I call you Oliver or Papa?"

"Forrest." His voice was low and wasn't deadly anymore, but my anger and disgust towards him were still boiling.

"And let me finish your story. The old man feeds the boy because he's the only chance they have to survive. And the love of a father is selfless. Since the boy is stronger than the old man, there's the possibility that he can save their lives." He kept telling me that story when I was a boy, and that confirmed now that I was his son. "Now, you will leave me and my mother alone. If you set foot to England, I will have a bullet right between your eyes." Without waiting for his response, I walked towards the door.

When he called my name, my feet just stuck to the floor. It was my real name that I had not heard in years.

Leandrei Edward.

Leandrei bloody Edward.

He just fucking called me by that name. How I hated it.

That boy was too weak to save his own mother.

I knew meeting him would trigger my past, and memory lane was not always fun to visit. Not even years had passed would make me forget the pain I felt in that fire, seeing my mother atoned for my father's sin just shredded my heart in ribbons.

When I turned around, he was still staring at me with eyes enormous in shock.

I tightened my eyes as I stared back at him. He was nothing to me than a dead man since he left us in that burning house. "See how fate had played you? If you only had a little patience in yourself, in us, you would probably have me and mama until now."

"Where's your mama?" Unfuckingbelievable!

I snorted. "Just do me a favor and spare me. You have the money within twenty-four hours. You won't ask someone to dig around about me, Mama, and Alan. I may be younger and know nothing about whom or what you're dealing with, but I wear this ring, and you owe a huge debt to one of the members who have like this." I raised it for him to see that I was dead serious. "I won't hesitate to call someone to shoot you in your damn head from a distance that you thought you are safe." I should have done that years ago, but I would be just like him, a cutthroat son of a bitch if I have his blood on my hands.

I grabbed the door and stopped before I forgot what was my real intention of facing this dead man I once called Papa. "Answer me one question though. Why did you burn Mama alive?"

He looked afflicted and in pain than before, but I didn't give a shit about him anymore. As far I was concerned, he was dead to me since that day he left us with nothing.

"I found out that you and your mother were going to leave me. I knew I wasn't a good husband and a good father to you, but—"

"But you couldn't accept the fact that Mama had a gut to leave you because you caught her on a pretty short leash."

"Your mother asked for help from my boss. I knew that that bastard had feelings for her. When I found out, I tried to stop her. We fought." He shifted in his chair, seemingly losing his strength. "I wasn't ready to be a husband—"

"Cut the bloody shit. Just fucking tell me the truth for fuck sake!"

"Your mother never told this story to you because there was no point. We love you the moment you were born."

“That’s quite a tough love you got there. You got Mama pregnant because you couldn’t just keep your dick in your trousers, could you?” A violent rush of rage had filled my veins that I felt dizzy, and I wanted to punch him so bad. What was stopping me? Because I wasn’t violent like him even though we shared the same blood.

“Yes. Her family was so adamant that they didn’t want their only daughter to give birth out of wedlock, so I had no choice.”

“Everyone has a choice!” I was shaking. All I wanted was to wring his neck until he let go off his last breath. “You had a choice! We always have a choice!”

“We were still young. I barely enjoyed my adulthood. Five months after our wedding, we had you. I was happy at that time, but things got tough when it was hard to find a job where I had rent a small apartment we called home.”

“Then why did you have to kill your boss and took over his business?”

“That’s not what happened, but he was a greedy bastard.”

“And so do you. You’re greedier, Papa!” Fuck! I just lost it. His eyes glittered with a tiny hope.

“I’ve been at my lowest point, and I’m not proud of what I’ve done, but you have to do something to survive. Now that I have money and power, I can’t still feel the satisfaction. Something’s still missing, that’s why I asked people to search for both of you.” Jesus, I couldn’t take his lies anymore.

“Well, your action just backfired you. Clearly, your power corrupts you completely. Maybe forgiveness from the people you hurt and from the family you killed would achieve the required result. Not having us, because we don’t need you in our lives anymore.” My eyes burned with unshed tears.

Jesus Christ, I had not seen this coming.

There was a fine line between love and hatred, and I was losing my shit. He was still my father, and I fucking hated that fact for years.

He stood up. “I want to see your mother.”

The moment he mentioned my mother, my muscles ached with so much tension to control my urge to punch him. Blood rushed towards my head that all I saw was red. Every cell in my body melted into lava with so much anger for him I kept for years.

“If I am like you, I already kill you the moment I step inside and call it a good bloody day! But thank fuck, I was raised by a wonderful and respected man I called Father. And meeting you today, for sure, would upset him, but I have to do this for the sake of his wife. Your ex-wife.”

He flinched. Good! “You’re a good man, Leandrei.” Hell, I was because he was still breathing, but maybe it would end today if he would not stop talking.

Shaking, I collared him, pushed him against his chair as I bore my piercing eyes on his. It made me madder that for some reason, I couldn’t hurt him. It fucking sucked.

“That boy died in the fire years ago. Leandrei is dead. And you won’t dare go and see her if you still value your remaining days. You won’t dare come looking for me ever again. Did you fucking understand me? For us, you are rotting six-feet under!”

My intuition was right his brainless goons were watching our entire conversation. Francois jerked and stiffened when I heard a click at my back. He looked furious but not at me.

His man just pointed a gun at my head, and I could feel the cold metal pressed against my skull. I couldn’t even remember how he quickly got inside the room without me noticing him.

I was too furious, lost my focus that I could end up with a hole on my head.

I shut my eyes closed, waiting for the moment to come. Mama, Megan, Alan, my friends—their images sprang into my mind like an instant roll of a black and white film. This was a terrifying experience before a person died. Then I remembered Father. What would he think of this moment, of what I became when he raised me to be a better version of myself before today? He would be very disappointed.

I waited for the fierce pain to hit my skull, but it didn’t happen. At least, not yet.

“Don’t!” I startled, my eyes flew open to his roar.

“Oh, go ahead. Let your man shoot me at the back of my head,” I dared him. “That must be quite a victory. It must feel good knowing you just have your own blood on your hands.”

“Put that gun down! Or I will end your miserable life together with your entire family. Tell everyone that no one touches this man. Ever! Or I have all of them slaughtered!” He was dead serious about his threat. I could see it in his eyes. As much as I shivered with fear, I slowly sighed in relief.

The man retreated his gun. I stood up and fixed my suit before I walked out of that room.

Papa was still calling my name, and I didn’t give a shit to turn around and face him again. For the first time in years, all my efforts were pretty rewarding.

Chapter 36 Still A Stranger

MEGAN

I OPENED the door to a huge man standing in front of me. He looked like he just came from a war in the desert with strong eye contact, tanned skin, and a well-trained straight posture.

“Good evening, Miss Simons. My name is Jack Davis. You can call me Davis, and I am here to take you to Mr. Wood’s penthouse.”

I gaped as if he was talking in a foreign language.

Warily, I already was gripping the door handle tightly as I angled myself away from him. “And he can’t come, why?” I asked when he mentioned Forrest.

“Mr. Wood is caught up with something, Miss Simons.”

Although Forrest didn’t warn me to take extra precautions, I was not stupid enough to go with this man because he mentioned Mr. Wood. That bitch could have hired someone to kidnap me and torture me in the warehouse.

“And what is that something he’s been catching up with, that he can’t even grab his phone to call me?”

The man fixed his posture, hands remained locked in front of him. “I am afraid I can’t disclose that information to you, Miss Simons.”

I huffed mockingly. “So, all of a sudden, Forrest is now some kind of your boss, asking people around to come and take me to his penthouse?” Arching a brow, I crossed my arms over my chest.

“Something like that.”

“That’s all you can say? Wow! From a bartender to an instant, what? A millionaire? A billionaire? You better go back to whoever asked you to come and tell him or her, I refused to come with you. Goodnight!” I held the doorknob and shut the door closed on his face.

Surprisingly, the man named Davis was still standing behind the door, assessing by the shadow of his feet. I felt skeptical all of a sudden. I tiptoed inside my room and picked up my phone.

I was pacing back and forth, thinking twice if I should call Forrest or 911 instead. That man could have just easily kicked the door if he wanted to kidnap me. So I waited, and it didn’t happen. Perhaps he was telling the truth.

I didn't have any clue who Forrest's father was but judging by how worried his mother, I knew Forrest could be in great danger.

Since he left last night, I couldn't get my mind out of the possible danger he was facing right now. He might be meeting his estranged father, but the possibility of his old man hurting him was endless.

I felt dizzy from pacing and exhausted from constant sighing. I had to sit down on my bed. My stomach twisted. I stood up again and started pacing until I felt there was nothing I could do.

"God!" I sat back and scrolled down my Phonebook and about to dial Forrest's number when his name appeared on my screen.

"Oh, thank God, you're okay. Who the hell is that man outside my door?"

"Megan, I am still busy right now, but I want you to go with him and stay at my apartment until I get back." I could hear noises from the background, and he was even yelling from the other line.

"You mean penthouse? Where are you? And I've been waiting for your call for hours now, Forrest. I am worried hell." I knew myself. I couldn't work properly when I was anxious about something.

Mom even noticed and asked me, but I couldn't tell her about Forrest's plan. I was sure she would also be worried about me. The last thing I was going to do was to add more migraine to her. Her Cryotherapy seemed pointless on her. If I didn't know she was good at her job, I would love to tell her that she was wasting her money on that shit. Yoga and meditation were way better for a pregnant woman than that crap.

"That's good to know. I'm flattered," he answered right away with an amusement tone in his voice.

"Do you think I am kidding?"

"Of course not. Just do what I say, okay? And take some clothes with you."

Unbelievable. "Seriously?" I huffed. "You suddenly become so bossy and a domineering prick. Just so you know, I am not fond of someone who bosses around. Your dictatorial manner is a turned off, Forrest. I'll stay here until you come back, and tell that man in your payroll to back off."

"Megan, please? I need to go somewhere to meet someone."

"Going somewhere to meet someone? Can't you be a little more cryptic than that? Where's the honesty we talked about last night?"

He sighed. "Davis will give you the key of the penthouse, and a card. Once you get there, just punch in these numbers 285631. I already programmed the security system for you."

I kept those numbers in my mind, and I didn't even know why I was listening to his annoying orders.

"What's that supposed to mean? Never mind, don't answer that. God, you're a pain in the ass. If something bad will happen to me, I will raise from my grave, haunt you, and throw you across the Mediterranean, get me?" I pursed my lips together.

"It won't get to that. Thank you."

"You're not welcome."

"I got to go. Send me a message when you get to the penthouse."

"Forrest?"

"Yes, Megan?" He sounded in a hurry.

"Where exactly are you going?"

"Sean Rexwell is in Boston."

My brows furrowed. "Why are you meeting him? Don't keep me in the dark here, Forrest or I swear to God I'm gonna knee your junk." I knew Sean Rexwell was dating Saph, but how Forrest was connected with him?

"I know your mind is running a mile right now—"

"Goddamn right, it is. You're frustrating."

"They're waiting for me, Megan. I promise when I get home, I'll fill you in, and I promise to make it up to you."

"I'm looking forward to the latter." As stupid as I was, I was already smiling. "You better come back to me sooner because you've got a lot of mansplaining to do."

"I promise. I won't stay long."

When the call ended, I frowned. Suddenly, my life turned complicated, and I didn't know anything about Forrest at all. He wasn't who they said he was. He became more mysteriously-silent and a complete stranger to me.

Davis didn't answer any questions I threw to him, but I could feel him checking me through the rearview mirror as I kept my mouth shut at the backseat.

It was frustrating. I turned completely silent when I couldn't get the answers I wanted.

The black sedan parked right beside where Forrest parked his car, but his black Camaro wasn't there.

Once Davis opened the car door for me, I got out and grabbed my duffel even Davis offered his help.

"I can handle just right. I'm not your boss, so you don't have to treat me like I am the one who's writing your paycheck."

"Just doing my job, ma'am." He retreated his hand.

"Don't ma'am me. I'm too young for that." I strode toward the private elevator, and I knew he was following me. So I spun around and cut him an incredulous stare.

"Just following security protocol, Miss Simons."

I stared at him intently. "Am I in danger?"

"No, Miss Simons. Just like I said—"

"Just following protocol, I get it. But why would Forrest hire you if nothing's going on? How dangerous his father is exactly?"

Davis went rigid, clearly surprised to my question or the word father. "Just a precaution."

"Yeah. You kinda make it pretty clear. Can I have the key and the card now?" I held out my hand.

Davis fished out from his black jacket and gave them to me. When I turned around, I was surprised to see the security system installed in the elevator. After I swiped the card, and the door slid open.

"Let me guess, another precaution?" I arched a brow at him.

Davis nodded. I didn't want to deal or I wasn't ready with this sudden turn of event in my life. I couldn't punish Davis as well, to make whatever he signed for far more difficult for him. I got in silently, and he followed suit.

After I punched the numbers, the penthouse door didn't unlock like I was expecting. I looked at Davis, asking for help because I was sure I entered the number correctly.

"I think you should press your thumb for fingerprinting."

"What?" I asked in disbelief. "Who the hell is Forrest, Davis?"

"A man who is rich enough to have a lot of precautions."

I rolled my eyes. "Does he have a retinal scanner, too?"

"No, Miss Simons."

“Just call me Megan, Davis.”

“I don’t think it would please Ms. Wood, Miss Simons.”

Whatever Forrest was doing in the club bartending, I was sure he had reasons. As soon as I pressed my thumb against the scanner, I heard a click.

Once Davis was done checking the place, he walked outside the penthouse after saying a few things if there’s an emergency blah blah blah, and so on.

I sent a message to Forrest, then I showered, ate my dinner alone, and went to his room. I wanted to check out or more likely to investigate what was inside this mysterious penthouse, but I held on to his promise to tell me everything once he got home.

I knew something was off when I first met him. Who would bartend with an expensive sports car, wearing a jacket that worth my one-month’ paycheck? He smoked, yet I couldn’t smell it in his car. But I thought he was just some kind of neat-freak and a man who saved and bought some quality stuff.

I put on his black shirt and tucked myself inside his blanket. His smell wrapped around me like a warm thick blanket. I loved his smell. I missed him. I missed his smile. Despite Forrest being so mysterious, I already missed everything about him.

“Who the hell are you, Forrest?” My lids felt heavy. Before I closed my eyes, I wished he would be here before I woke up.

I woke up in the middle of the night to a full bladder, and there were still no signs of Forrest. The whole penthouse was dead silent. I sent him another message when my last message left unseen. My worry worsened, twisting my stomach into a fierce knot.

Is he okay? Is his mother back to England?

I sat back on his bed as impatience tickled my skin. I felt the urge to check out what was on his drawer. I was sure he probably had a stock of condoms inside. The thought alone excited me. To my dismay, it was locked.

I lied back in bed, but I was still worried. I couldn’t help myself not to over-analyze everything. I slipped my hand under his pillow and pressed my face to smell his scent. This time, I was hoping I could get a good sleep.

To my shock, I patted something cold and hard under his pillow that had me gasped.

Chapter 37 Sin of A Father

FORREST

My plans worked.

AFTER SENDING an email to my mother that I made myself out alive from my father, I kept my end of the bargain, and I hoped he wouldn't cross me now he knew my relationship to him. I changed a quarter from the amount I promise to Francois from one of my offshore accounts to Bitcoin and transferred to him. Then I wired him the rest from my two Cayman accounts.

I replied to an email to the company account in London to hire a new assistant for my mother so that Meadow would be out of the picture. I hadn't checked my phone yet, and I knew Alan and Megan were worried shit.

As soon as the chartered jet landed, I asked the driver to head to Rexwell Tower where Sean was staying at his penthouse. I didn't know why I had to settle with him when the only thing that tied me with my bastard father was blood.

I was a little bit antsy to just drop the bomb to Sean, but I had to clean up my name. I was just a little bit optimistic that one day, people would find out my connection to Francois Xavier.

Now my relationship with Megan was great, it was harder for me to keep my friends in the dark about my true identity. I couldn't lie anymore to the people who cared about me, and I was already struggling to be someone who wasn't me. Living in a lie was messing my head. I wanted my life back, the real person I left in London.

One of Sean Rexwell's security allowed us to enter his building. My driver parked the car in the private parking area. One of the CCTV angled toward me as soon as I was outside the car. I must admit Sean was pretty tight when it came to his safety. The elevator slid open, one of his guys gestured us to enter.

"I'm good," I told my driver.

He stopped and looked at me that I knew what to do when something went south. I nodded at him in understanding before I entered the elevator.

After a few ticks, the penthouse door swung open, revealing Sean Rexwell in a white crisp shirt and navy blue suit pants. The surprised look on his face was priceless when he saw me I was more dressy than he was.

He smiled, holding his hand out. "Good to see you, Wood."

I shook his hand firmly. "Good to see you, too, Rexwell. I'm sorry for dropping by in such short notice."

"I'm glad you came by. Please, come in."

I followed him inside his well-polished living room.

"This is far from home, Wood. Is everything okay back there?"

Before I could answer, Saphoera walked in, smiling gleefully at me. "Look who's here. So, it's true then, huh? You and Meg?"

"Williams, leave Forrest alone," Rexwell said, amused, kissing his girlfriend on the cheek.

"Fine. When I get back to New York, I won't let that go." She pointed her finger at me. "We have unfinished business. Anyway, nice to see you, and you clean up pretty well."

"Good to see you, too, Saph. Thanks."

Saph climbed upstairs. Then I faced Rexwell. "Can we talk a little bit more private?"

He eyed me warily for a few seconds before he spoke. "What's this all about?"

"It's important."

"That must be. Follow me." He marched toward the hallway, leading to probably his office. His penthouse was somehow had the same similar structure as mine. "When I received a call from the reception, I knew this is crucial, and you wouldn't come all the way here to meet me. You could have just called me if this meeting doesn't need to be discussed in person."

"Thanks for understanding." I drew a deep breath as he unlocked his office.

"But you're making me worried, man." His office had dark red oak wood from floor to ceiling and walled with shelves filled with hardbound books.

"Nothing to worry about."

He went to the table with bottles of liquor and glasses. "Have a seat. I'm kind of surprised to see you in a fancy suit. I guess I know nothing about you after all."

He came back with two glasses of whiskey and offered me a glass.

"Thanks." I was sure that he wouldn't see me the same Forrest again once I was done telling him the reason why I was here. He could've beat me into a bloody pulp in this very room without someone noticing us.

He sat on his desk after sipping the amber liquid. I sipped mine just to calm my nerves down.

He studied me when I was about to speak. "I am sure this has nothing to do with Megan, is it?" He laughed. "Because I don't know if I can help. I can agree to be your kid's godfather though. I won't say no to that."

"No. It has nothing to do with her. It's about Francois Xavier."

"I beg your pardon?" His body tensed, eyes widened as he stared at me in shock.

"I met him this afternoon," I added.

Sean was still shocked to answer. He became pale, but he managed to close his mouth and blink.

"I'm sorry, Rexwell."

"How do you know him? I thought he's dead."

I shook my head and stood up. "He's alive. He's dying, but he's still breathing when I left him."

"You didn't answer me. How did you know that bastard."

I looked away. My stomach clenched that I had a strong connection with the person who killed Sean's real father. "He's my father."

Sean caught me off guard that landed me back to the chair. My heart jumped up to my throat as he pushed me hard and grabbed me by my shirt. He was furious, I got it, and he was shocked to figure out that after all this time, he had the son of his father's murderer in their lair.

"Tell me you are joking, Wood or I swear to God," he said in a scathing tone, grinding his teeth. He was shaking with rage.

I let him do whatever he wanted if that took at least a dot of the pain of what my father had inflicted him.

"I wish I am." I met his hard and flinty stare.

"Do you want me to kill you? Is that why you are here? After all this time. Goddamn it! Was this all a part of a fucking game to you and your murderer of a father?"

"No. I don't want to put my life on your hands, Sean. That's the reason why I am here. I could have hurt you if I wanted to because no one had ever suspected me that I am the son of a murderer. I realized someone would eventually connect the dots, and I didn't want that day to come."

He let me go, stepping back, but the anger and disgust were still gleaming in his eyes. "Why are you telling me this? Why now?"

"Because I was also running away from him. That's how I ended up in New York."

"Yet, you met him this afternoon. How can I believe that you are telling the truth? That you didn't come here to cut some loose ends?" He looked skeptical. That was totally understandable considering now he knew who I was. I was a stranger who knocked on his door, and I just blew off the bomb on his face.

I sipped the remaining drink. "Because I am nothing like him. Contrary to the fucking belief that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, but I am not my father. I loathed him for years. We were hiding from him for years. The moment I faced him this afternoon, the urge of ending his life was surging inside me, but if I did that for my satisfaction, then I ended up being just like him." I hadn't realized I was slowly revealing myself to Sean, and he did not miss a bit of it.

"What did he do to you?"

"He hurt my mother."

"You still have a mother?" He seemed surprised.

I lifted my gaze even though I felt ashamed that now he knew I was the son of a murderer. "Yes. I kept away from her to protect her. Do you know how hard it is? For years, I missed my Mama and I have to meet her far from home. We'd been receiving info that someone was asking about me, that's why I had to leave her."

"Go on."

"I didn't want you to find out that I had a connection with him. For me, he was dead for years."

"You do not seem to be the type of person who lies, but I don't know what to believe anymore, Forrest Wood. If that is even your real name."

"He's staying in New York's Duncan Hotel until tomorrow morning. You can do whatever you want to him. Besides, he's not gonna live long. He just got out from chemo before he traveled."

Sean paused and looked away as if thinking through the tidbits I spilled to him.

"I don't want any involvement when the time comes. I want my life back. I want peace of mind. If he was involved or somehow he was the one who ordered to shoot your father, I am terribly sorry for that, but he and I are nothing alike. If he gets killed, I can assure you, I will be at peace. I may sound like a selfish bastard, but I would be glad that someone could cut the head of the snake, and my mother can finally live the life she deserves."

"I don't know how did you find out about my real father, but whatever he did before was awful, and you're right, we are nothing like them."

"I don't know how to fix this, Rexwell." I stood up, shoving my hands into my pockets. I wanted to breathe, but it seemed harder to do when I might have lost a good friend at this moment.

"I'm glad you came to tell me about this, but I care more about my family now. I won't take revenge for him when until now I don't even know the real reason behind his death. I don't wanna get involved with his mess, but thanks for telling me. I appreciate it."

"Thank you, Sean." I let out a shaky sigh and sagged back against the chair. I rubbed my face, and my hands were still trembling.

Minutes ticked by. Sean hadn't said another word. When I lifted my gaze, he was studying me.

"What?"

"You didn't do this just for your mother alone. Don't fool me."

"Yes. For me and my mother."

"And for Megan."

My mouth slacked open.

"That's what love does. It changes a person."

"You're wrong. A person changed because he'd been through hell, learned a lot, and probably tired of being the person who wasn't he in the first place."

"Whatever floats your boat, man." He laughed, shaking his head in amusement. Not so long ago, he was collaring me, and now, it seemed like nothing happened between us. "But I am serious, Wood. Who the fuck are you?"

I shrugged. "I am no one."

"I doubt that. You just said that you're tired of being the person who is not you. And I can see through your eyes, that suit you're wearing, your pose, the way you talk. It's all started to peel off layer by layer. And that ring on your finger doesn't tell nothing." He was right.

The ring on my finger was an emblem used by the person who raised me to be the better version of me.

"Trust me, this is just a ring."

"If my memory serves right, I met a few aristocrats in England, mostly Lords, and they call themselves as Oirdheirc Society. The owner of that ring is one of the members, am I right, Forrest fucking Wood?"

"Yeah." I swallowed.

"Why did you have to handle it alone? You could've just asked for help. They don't turn away from their brothers."

"It was my fight, my battle with Francois, and certainly not Father's. I couldn't drag his name down with me. That's was one of the many reasons I had to come and change my identity."

"I'm glad you didn't take his life into your hands."

"Trust me, that's the plan. I could've just hired a mercenary to end his miserable life, but I wanted to see his reaction once he knew I am still alive. But things changed lately."

"Revenge won't fill the void, Wood. It's not gonna bring back the past. It will just drag you to the darkest part of yourself until you don't recognize yourself anymore. That's one thing my adopted father told me."

"He seems a good man."

"Yeah. He is."

My phone suddenly rang. It was one of my employees at Atto Tech. "Excuse me. I have to take this."

"Sir, there's a little a little bit of hiccup."

"What do you mean?"

"Bill is admitted to the hospital." The call ended.

I was already pursing my lips as the anger and disappointment spiraled inside me. He fell off the wagon again.

Then my phone rang again. Great. I answered the call because I knew he wouldn't call me when it was not an emergency. "Davis."

"Ms. Simons is gone."

Chapter 38 James Freaking Bond

MEGAN

Oh. My. God!

FORREST HAD a gun under his pillow. He. Has. Gun. A freaking gun.

He was sleeping with a gun under his pillow like James fucking Bond! Was he a spy? Or was his life in danger that he had to keep a gun with him? My body was still trembling to that thought that I didn't know him at all.

I cared about him, but I couldn't be with a man who spied or killed people. He was dangerous or his life could be in constant danger. That was probably the reason why he was using an alias—Oh god! Was he an undercover agent and messed up with dangerous people such as his father? He probably sold drugs or guns for a living. The gun under his pillow, his secret identity, the penthouse as his secret lair, his job as a bartender. Oh, my God!

His father wouldn't hunt him down in the first place if he didn't do something wrong. Whatever he told me, perhaps he was just making it all up.

"Meg?" Camila drilled me a scrutinizing stare as she stood in front of the door.

"Don't ask, please? Can I sleep here tonight?" I actually didn't have much time to sleep because it was already morning, and I had to go to work.

"Are you in trouble? I can slap Forrest with my new purse. The buckle is a lot bigger than what I used to hit Pyke." She laughed, then stopped, looking guilty when her joke didn't affect me. "Oh, god. I'm sorry, Meg. Are you okay?"

"I'll be fine. Thanks."

"You can go to your old room."

We climbed upstairs to the second floor. I used to stay here during the weekend before she got busy with her company that designed automobiles. "I'm glad you called. I feel like a terrible best friend lately. I'm so busy, and could hardly find my free time to spend with you."

"I understand, Cam. You're busy with your job, as a wife, a sister, a daughter, and now that you're pregnant, you can't stress out. I am happy for you, you know." I squeezed her hand and smiled tightly.

Now, I felt I was a terrible best friend for barging out in the middle of the night when she needed rest.

“You can always call me anytime, Meg. Nothing’s gonna change between us even though I have a lot of responsibilities. I have also a responsibility for you as your best friend, which is to be by your side when you need me.” Of course, she would say that because she was Camila—a woman who had a heart as a gold.

“Thank you. You can go back to sleep now.” I felt selfish for waking her up, but I needed to run away from that penthouse as far as possible before I got caught up in Forrest’s mess—before I broke my heart. Why I had not thought about that before? Because being with Forrest was clouding my judgment.

Good thing Davis didn’t insist when I warned him that I would yell that he was trying to violate me if he came closer to me—he then let me go.

I leaned against the door as I tried to remember what we shared. I couldn’t get him. How did he mess up his life? For me, he was a good person. He respected me, and I could even feel he sincerely cared about me.

Since we slept together, he had nothing but thoughtful and sincere, but he was dealing with dangerous people—of course, he used to lie and manipulate people. Unfortunately, I became his victim.

My chest ached. I felt alone in this massive room, and no one could help me. When I thought I started to trust someone, he wasn’t real.

Forrest was a chameleon.

I called sick, and I felt bad for Mom. She said she understood, and as always, she didn’t pry. I knew her, and a perk of being a psychologist, she could read my mind.

I stayed awake all night in agony. Now, I had a terrible headache, heartache, and I felt exhausted. If I had a chance, I wanted to sleep for days and build my own world because I couldn’t face reality right now.

“Ms. Megan, here’s your breakfast.” Anita, Camila’s servant walked in, carrying a tray of breakfast. “Mr. Pyke and Ms. Camila left for work, and she told me to care of you while she’s gone.”

“Thank you, but I’m fine. Just having a terrible headache.”

“Let me take aspirin for you.”

"You can do whatever you wanna do, Anita." I was bitch, but I couldn't deal with anyone right now. I had to figure out how to get out of the mess I walked in.

"I know, Ms. Megan, but I only follow Mr. Pyke and Ms. Camila's order. So I'll take care of you." She smiled evilly.

I glared at her. I probably looked like an evil witch with all messy face and hair. "I can take care of myself."

"I know, but how about you soak yourself in a bathtub after your breakfast?"

"I could use that, but no thank you. Just bring me an aspirin, and I want to sleep again. I haven't slept all night. So if you don't mind?" I raised a brow. "I can be bitchier if I don't get enough sleep."

"Ms. Camila did warn me." She grinned. "I'll have your aspirin then."

"Thanks."

Once Anita left, I tried to eat breakfast. The last meal I had was last night. I was hungry, but I couldn't eat the food than a few bites. It still didn't appeal to my appetite. The wanting for caffeine had my stomach churned, but I could still feel the ache inside my chest to even fill my stomach.

I realized that Forrest had a huge impact on my life. I felt how difficult it was for him to open up for me about his mama and his father, about his first name, his plan, his secret under his shirt, and even his relationship with Meadow. I knew they were the truth, but it didn't change the fact that he had to sleep with a gun under his pillow.

Whatever! I had everything messed up in my head, and I couldn't even think straight anymore.

I grabbed my phone. My eyes widened with so many notifications; missed calls and messages from Forrest, also from Mom, Kyland, Bianca, Blaine, two unknown numbers, and even from Xandry.

Dread chilled me.

I dialed Mom and let out a sigh of relief when she quickly picked up as if she was expecting my call.

"Meggie, you need to come." Her voice was laced with worry.

My heartbeat raced. Fear seeped through me. A lot of different dreadful scenarios popped up on my head that made me wanted to throw up. Now, I was terrified.

"A-are you okay, Mom?"

"Yes, honey, but I can't work alone. You know you can't stay there all day and mope at the corner of your room. We can talk about this, Meggie."

I swallowed hard as my chest constricted tightly. "I'll be there tomorrow."

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm good, Mom. I'll be all right."

"You two need to talk."

I looked up at the ceiling as tears gathered behind my eyelids. "There's nothing to talk about. We were just having fun and things between us need to end before both of us would go any further and get hurt in the end."

"You care about him, Meggie." And he lied to me.

I curled into a ball in bed as I couldn't anymore bear the pain. "I do. In just a short time I spent with him, and for the first time since Dad died, I felt whole, I felt special. I felt being respected and cared for by a man and never been judged, but certain things between us won't be good for us. We are still two different people, Mom. He has a lot of deepest secrets. When I thought I knew him, I was wrong. He was right, we both have a lot of skeleton in our closets, and I don't think he is willing to tell me everything or give up his previous life for us. And I don't think I am ready to hear them all or if I can look at him the same person all over again."

"Meggie, if anyone who knows Forrest, it's me. He's been my patient for years—"

"What if that's his way of manipulating people? What if he's trained to lie, Mom? What if he's living in two different lives?"

"I can't discuss you with this, Meggie, but trust me, he'd never come to see me for almost two years. Then he came back because of you. I know when someone lies to me, and Forrest is a lot of things, lying is certainly not one of them."

"I hope you are right, Mom."

"Honey, after your dad died, your whole life, you've been trying to avoid getting hurt. I get it you are afraid of getting hurt, it's okay. That's part of human nature, but you can't allow fear to dictate or take over your life, your feelings. One day, eventually, you will get hurt because we live in a world full of flaws, and that's the beauty of it. I know this world is an ugly place, Meggie. But it's full of love and hope as well."

"But I can't be with him. He's dangerous, mom." The word dangerous chilled me. I couldn't believe I slept with him. No matter how strong our chemistry was, this had to end. I couldn't risk my heart, my life. I lost the man I loved once, and I couldn't afford to feel of losing another man in life again.

Love? I almost chuckled. I realized why now it hurt so much. Why I was so affected? Why I risked my feelings and broke my rules to sleep with the same man again.

It wasn't about how good the sex was. It wasn't about how attractive he was. It wasn't about how he cared for me or respected me, how he made me feel, or something about the chemical reaction between us. All along, for almost two years, it was all about my deep crush had turned into something more special, and the reason why I didn't choose to be with someone else because I was waiting for the right one.

"Meggie, are you there? What do you mean?"

"I found a gun under his pillow."

Chapter 39 Screwed Up

FORREST

Goddamn it!

I WANTED to punch Davis for not being able to do his only job. And so did as Bill, but I could handle Bill later.

“For an uncomplicated and simple order, you did a bang-up job!” My chest was heaving with anger the moment I saw his guilty-ass face. I hired him because he was recommended by Alan, and he could be trusted, but then he failed me.

“I couldn’t force her, Mr. Wood. You warned me not to touch or lay a hand on her. And I would be arrested for kidnapping if I forced her to come with me.”

“I don’t give a bloody fuck about your reasons, Davis! I only gave you one job, and it’s to keep her in your sight all the time because I want you to protect her and not to let her wander around the city alone!” I walked past him toward the car and stopped him when was about to open the door for me. “Don’t! I will drive alone. Go search the penthouse and find something on why she ran away. And don’t show your fucking face until you have something to support your reason, otherwise, you’re fired!”

I took the driver seat and drove off. The tires screeched against the pavement, but I didn’t give a fuck even I would violate traffic laws.

I’d been a good citizen and hid myself from reality. Now, I was ready to embrace my true identity and ready to reveal to her, then she fucking left me. No matter how many times I called and sent her a bunch of messages, she didn’t even care. I wondered what made her runaway like her arse was on fire. I couldn’t find a single reason.

Most women would only leave when they found you cheating. Megan was aware of Meadow, and she was long gone in the picture. Everything was driving me insane. When I could grasp my future, it just vanished into the fucking thin air.

Dr. Reed didn’t know where Megan was and said she didn’t report to her work. I’d been calling her friends, and they were all telling me the same. Now, I had this theory that one of them was hiding Megan away from me.

I dialed her number again. This time it went to her voicemail. She turned her phone off. Great. Fury filled my veins. My skin vibrated that I couldn’t do anything.

I dialed Dr. Reed again, this time, she picked up almost immediately.

“Dr. Reed, if you are hiding her from me, just tell me the truth before I will let my men search for her.”

“Why? And who are those men, Forrest?” Her questions had me paused that I felt she knew something.

“You know why, Dr. Reed.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t.”

I did a guttural roar. “She could be in danger.”

“How so?” Her reaction had me thinking. I knew she loved her daughter so much. She should be panicking right now, but I couldn’t hear that reaction.

“I met my father yesterday, and please don’t tell me you didn’t get why I’d been seeing you for years.” I choked out my words. My eyes stung to the thought that Megan would be in danger, and if my father wouldn’t uphold at the end of the bargain, so help me God.

“So, it’s true then?”

“What’s true?”

“I think I misread you, Forrest. I think I am not good at my job anymore.”

“You doubt yourself? And what do you mean by that?” I was totally confused.

“That you are not who I think you are.”

“I never lied to you. You are the expert who can read human behavior and emotions. Tell me if I ever lied to you, Dr. Reed. And if you can prove it, I will leave Megan alone, because the last thing I would do to her was hurt her or put her life in danger. I’d rather see her safe from distant than she’s with me living in fear. Because I’ve been there, and a life like that is like living in hell.”

“I like you, Forrest, and Megan has changed these past few weeks. She faced her fears, accepted things that she left for years, and she even learned to forgive herself. I haven’t seen her for years because no matter how hard and painful it was for me I had to let her go, respect her decisions, and let her choose the life she wants to be a part of it. I always have hope that one day she will realize and come back to fix what she left behind. Then she came back, and I’d never seen her happy in years since her dad died.” Her dad died. I could feel the fresh emotions through Dr. Reed’s voice, making an unsettled feeling in my stomach.

How did he die? Was that why Megan didn’t want to be tangled in a relationship? Scared of losing someone again?

"I'm sorry to hear about your husband."

"We were never been married, Forrest, but thank you. You see how you affect Megan. You changed her. Right now I am afraid I will lose her again." Right now. Jesus! She knows where Megan is.

"I won't let that happen again, Dr. Reed. She changed me as well. I'd been planning to meet my father for years, but I didn't know where to start. I risked something, everything. I sacrificed something just to settle and find answers to what happened to me and my mother. And one thing that pushed me to do the risk for the right reason was Megan. She made me realize how life was so short. If it wasn't for her over the past few weeks, I would have listened to my mother, but I kept thinking of Megan that what life could I give her behind the shadow. I know it's too early to think about it, but I like the feeling of being with your daughter. I've never felt more alive in years. But with her, I want to live. I want to have a normal life. So please, just tell if me she's safe and okay? Because I am going insane right now thinking that she's in danger. I won't ask you where she is. All I want is for you to tell me yes if you know she's safe. If something bad happens to her, I feel like it's on me, Dr. Reed." I closed my eyes for a moment, silently begging to hear her answer. "Please?" I never begged to anyone, but I would do it in a heartbeat for as long as I knew Megan was safe somewhere.

"She's safe. She didn't report because she asked for a day off."

My chest felt hollow. Was I the reason? Or was she just not feeling well? "I-is she okay?"

"She'll live."

"What happened, Dr. Reed?" My stomach twisted with guilt. I felt terrible for causing them trouble.

"You tell me, Forrest."

I took a deep breath because no matter how I wanted to crack my skull to find answers, I couldn't think of anything to make her run away from me like that. She was in my penthouse, patiently waiting for me, and I was so thrilled to tell her that I was getting my life back. Something happened there she figured out that scared her. What was it?

"I wish I know." I drew a deep breath. "The last time I saw her, she made me promise to come back to her. Then Davis, the man who drove her to my apartment said, she ran away."

"I'm sorry to hear that. If you care for Megan, you should stay away from her. It's better this way while her feelings for you aren't too deep. She'd been hurt, broken, and lost her way. As much as I like you for her, I love her so much, and all I want is for her to be happy and safe. And if you can't

give her that, then you're not good enough for my daughter." The line went dead. Her words sliced deeply into my heart.

I am not good enough for her. Those words swirled in my brain. It hurt like hell. So excruciating that it felt like I was shredded alive. I wasn't totally prepared to hear that. I couldn't see straight. Everything around me blurred in a haze, and my world suddenly spun around me.

I couldn't breathe. It was fucking hard to breathe. I squeezed my eyes shut, hoping I had something to hold on to, not to breakdown in the middle of the road. I felt so abandoned, lost in the middle of darkness, in vain, in sorrow. A wave of defeat twisted inside me, just thinking that I was going to lose her. I am losing her. I can't let that happen.

Jesus!

The honking startled me and brought me back to where I was. I blinked and wiped my eyes. I wasn't aware I was already shedding tears. The last time I cried was when I had to be separated from Mama. And it felt exactly the same. Then it hit hard that had my stomach somersaulted. I love Megan. I fucking love her. And I screwed everything up.

It may sound pathetic, but I was not going to giving up just like that, and Dr. Reed couldn't dictate me. No, one. I took a deep breath and grabbed all the strength I had and I dialed Dr. Reed again.

"Forrest."

"I mean no disrespect, Dr. Reed. I know how you feel towards your daughter. You don't trust me now. You thought I couldn't make your daughter happy, and I was not capable of keeping her safe. I'd been hiding behind the shadow for years, and it was not for nothing. It was to protect the person I love. It was to prepare myself to face the cruelty of the world I was living in. Right now, I am ready for those obligations, and one of them is to take back my woman. To tell her who I was and who I am now. To prove to her that I can protect her with my life, to show her how much she means to me, and how much I can show her my love for her for eighteen months. Call me a relentless asshole, but I have also patience and perseverance, and I am willing to do everything just to have Megan back. And if you will block my way, consider yourself warned. I will have her back whether you like it or not, and I will make sure to prove you wrong. I will also make sure that I am good enough for Megan to make her proud of me. I will make sure that I will have her trust and heart back. I will find her, and if I find her, I won't let her out of my sight, and I won't ever let her go. I wouldn't be Ellery Forrest Keighley Kentworthry for nothing."

Chapter 40 Nothing But The Truth

MEGAN

"I'M SORRY but you don't have an appointment today," I said without meeting his gaze. I didn't have to look at him to know it was him. His presence alone shifted something in the air. It filled with tension and unsaid emotions. And I couldn't look at him because I knew myself, and I'd be tempted to forget what I found out and jumped into his arms again. It was silly, but I didn't trust myself around him anymore.

These past two days were like living in a world that didn't exist. I needed to forget what happened between us—scratch that. I didn't exactly want to forget—that was the best thing that happened in my life before he became unreal. He wasn't the Forrest that I used to know—or if I even knew a little about him at all.

"I know. I just called Dr. Reed a few minutes ago. I'll settle the payment later. And she's free and agreed for an urgent appointment with me," he said in a calm and low voice. It wasn't even recognizable if he hadn't whispered to me before. He sounded as if he was begging.

"Yeah, and my work won't be needing anymore," I muttered under my breath. I knew he heard me. He responded to me with a sigh. "She's ready for you, I guess." I pursed my lips and sat down.

His shadow didn't move, and I couldn't take it anymore. I had to look at him. It was a mistake, and too late the moment our gazes met—my silly heart just somersaulted. My skin tingled that he looked so magnificent in a white crisp shirt and pants. He was still wearing the broody signature looked, but his five o'clock shadow oozed power, drool-worthy, and panty-dropper of hot and sexiness. Jesus, Forrest! A little warning would be nice.

"Megan—"

I raised my hand because I couldn't form a word. Thankfully, Mom appeared and saved me from impending embarrassment.

"Forrest, come in." Mom smiled at him, keeping in a professional mode.

I knew she had so many questions, but I told her I was not ready to talk about it. And I hadn't been back to her house or my apartment.

She visited me at the mansion, and Camila was happy with the arrangements. The dinner I promised to Mom ended up watching a sappy chick-flick. I ended up crying in her arms before the movie credits rolled.

When he walked toward Mom, I closed my eyes and sighed only to be interrupted by my mom calling my name.

“Yes?” My voice came up a pitch cry.

“Come join us.”

“W-what? Why?” I stared at her in disbelief, and she only looked at me as if it was not a big deal—for her, maybe not, but for me, it would be the death of me.

“I need you here.”

I got in a tentative pace. Forrest was already sitting on the couch while Mom was still waiting for me.

“How can I help?” I asked politely.

“Sit beside Forrest,” Mom answered.

“Again, why?”

“You both are my patients. So I want to catch birds in one stone since you two have the same issues.”

“I am not doing this,” I protested. “This is not couples counseling, Mom.”

“Just sit down, and be pretty, Meggie.” When Mom called me Meggie I knew it meant a lot to her. I still didn’t get it why I had to be sitting next to Forrest when she knew the fact that he was not who she thought he was.

“Fine.” I stomped to the couch and sat at the end. This would be a long awkward reunion for us.

Mom finally settled to her chair, crossed her legs, and rested her hands on her lap, while my heart was beating so fast.

“Do the honor.” She looked directly at Forrest and gestured her hand.

Forrest cleared his throat, rubbing his hands down his pants. “I was born Leandrei Edward Huxley to British parents in Yorkshire, England on July 2—”

I tipped my head to his side and scoffed. “You’re full of crap! What’s this? Another lies you cooked before you walked in? Why not try a little more convincing this time?”

“Megan, let him talk,” Mom interjected.

Forrest looked down. “When I was six, my parents decided to move to France to work in a vineyard and winery owned by my father’s French friend. After two years, life didn’t go as they

plan. My father got into debt, gambling, and drowned in alcohol. When my father got home, he found out my mother and I was planning on leaving him. They fought, ended up accidentally burning the entire house while my mother was trapped inside.”

I found myself breathless as my gaze slowly wiped away any levity. It was compelling, terrifying, heartbreaking, and tragic. His thick British accent didn’t go unnoticed. I must admit it was sexy, but that was not what caught my attention—it was his emotions, so raw that even my heart was bleeding for him. But was he telling the truth this time?

“My father fled. When I got home from school, the entire village was there helping out to stop the fire, but it was too late. What an eight-year-old boy could do?” He paused when his voice broke, and then he drew a deep breath.

“Why don’t you take a minute?” Mom asked softly.

“I ran towards the burning house—”

My hands flew to my mouth as I gasped. Dread and fear of chill spread all over my entire body.

“Mama was crawling on the floor. I could barely see her. The dark smoke inside the kitchen was horribly thick. It was awful, dreadful, and it was searing hot that I could feel my skin melting in my body as I tried to run to save my mother. That was the only thing came to my mind at that time. To save my mother” His voice rasped, but it didn’t stop him. “She was pushing me away with her injured hands. She was hurt, trying to hide under our table. She begged for me to get out, but I was determined to pull her out of that fire because that day, either I die inside or die trying to save her.”

Did he have scars on his back? Is that the reason why he doesn’t take off his shirt in front of me? Worried that I might be disgusted?

“I woke up in the hospital bed. I couldn’t remember how did I end up there. I might have lost my consciousness when I inhaled too much smoke. Mama was lying next to me with all the bandages all over her body. She was unrecognizable. I cried beside her.” Forrest blinked, and it broke me to see the tears rolling down his face. I knew it was still painful for him, but he tried to continue, and I admired him for being strong to face his fears.

“We lost everything. I was so scared that I had nowhere to go if she died. Until a British explorer who burned his arm came to visit my mother. He didn’t feel pity for me, for my mother. I didn’t know he was rich until I saw the big house that I had never seen in my life. The Kentworthry Manor. He gave us new lives in a new home, changed our identities. Mama underwent several reconstructive surgeries. When I thought our lives ended in that house, I was wrong. Someone had the heart to give back our lives.”

He chuckled sadly. “He fell in love with my mother despite her flaws. They get married. He let me call him father. He transferred all his assets, worth billions into my name—my new name. Ellery Forrest Keighley Kentworthry. That was how I met Meadow. She’s the daughter of father’s friend, and that was how we got engaged.”

Chapter 41 Too Good at Goodbye

MEGAN

I COULDN'T hear this anymore without feeling the surge of jealousy inside my chest. I looked away and blinked when I got all weepy.

"At fifteen, Meadow became my girlfriend, and I thought we would get married. When I turned sixteen, I found out someone was looking for us. And the man that was once my father came back from the dead. He faked his death. That was why I fled to this country to protect my mother and myself."

"I left my Mama. I knew she was safe because no one would recognize her anymore, but I was not. That's how I ended up here. Alan is not my uncle by blood."

"Why did you have to leave?" My head tipped to mom.

"Because of Oliver. My real father. Now Francois Xavier. He figured that I didn't die, and perhaps, wanted to cut some loose ends."

"By killing his son?" I asked, confused, terrified.

"Maybe. He's a monster after all."

"Why are you telling us about this? Why now?"

Suddenly, he faced me. "Because you thought I am dangerous when you found a gun under my pillow."

I looked away, feeling my throat thickened. I was still horrified as I raised the gun I found. I'd never held a real gun in my entire life, and I couldn't believe my first experience would be in his bed.

"It wasn't mine. I don't own a gun. I know to hold and shoot as precautions because I have to protect myself. I asked someone to run a fingerprint, and to whom it is registered."

"And who is that someone? Davis? Morgan, the security guard? One of your underlings?"

"No. Alan knows someone in NYPD."

"Of course. You probably get them on your payroll. And who's Alan, really? Your errand boy?" My reply came out with sarcasm.

"Alan is our butler, but he had sworn an oath to my mother to protect me before he came with me to U.S. Father trusted him with our lives."

I rolled my eyes. "Yeah, yeah. I get it. What I don't get is why are you telling us now? And who owns the gun?"

"Unregistered. Meadow admitted that she placed it there. For what purpose? I don't know. Since she and Mama were back in England, I didn't talk to her anymore."

"So, before that, you had contact with her, huh?"

He groaned and shut his eyes closed. "No. Even if I—"

"You what?"

"She works for me."

My brow quickly raised. "Wow. Why am I not so surprised?"

"Megan, trust me. We were over before you and I become a thing."

"A thing? That's how you call it? A freaking thing!"

"My apology for my poor choice of words." Wow! Who is this man?

"That's not my issue. She planted a gun under your pillow for what? To frame me if something will happen to you? Or to get me arrested of possession of an unregistered firearm? Because I told her to say away from you, and that I would do everything to have you."

"She'll pay for this, trust me. I don't want people disrespecting me and putting the people I care in danger. Especially if she's my employer."

"What exactly her job with you? A fuck buddy?"

"Megan," Mom warned me. "Your sarcasm doesn't go anywhere, young lady."

I raised my hand. "You know what? Don't answer my question. You already answered it."

"That was before you. I already cleared that I don't have a plan on sleeping with her again. After the stunt she pulled out, she will be fired. Right now, my company is hiring Mom's new assistant, and I won't be sorry for her arse."

"Wow! A company, huh? Great speech! And you sound like a complete stranger to me right now."

"Megan, can you stop being sarcastic! Arguing doesn't gonna reboot the past." Mom looked angry, and I had to clamp my mouth shut.

"I'm here because you didn't give me a chance to explain. And your friends made a point that they won't let me get near you because I hurt their best friend. I don't have the intention of doing that to

you. You should know me by now, but I promised you that I will come back, and that's why I am here. I will always do my promise even if it takes years in the process."

"What happened to your knuckles, Forrest?" Mom asked.

His hands were bruised. I had not noticed it until Mom did.

"I punched someone." He absentmindedly rubbed his knuckles as the guilt plastered all over his face.

Great! "And then you just told me you're not dangerous, yet you just punched someone." I scoffed.

"I told you I am a patient man, Megan. I only did that because he hurt you. That—" He pursed his lips and blinked. His face turned red in anger. "He deserved more than just a broken nose."

"If you think punching someone is badassery, then you're out of your mind. I know what he did is wrong, but it's been weeks, Forrest."

"Okay, I'm tired of you two whining and arguing, but Megan is right, Forrest. Why can't you just forget about it? Instead of dwelling on what went wrong, why can't you just focus on the positive side."

I was already standing, crossing my arms over my chest as I stared at him in shock. "You can't just leave it behind, can you?"

"No."

"Then you are wasting your time, sitting here explaining yourself because I can't be with you if you can't even control your anger. I was nearly raped and slapped by a stranger." Mom gasped in front of us. "And then, what will you do if you lost control? You have this strong resentment inside you that keeps you on holding grudges, Forrest. You are like a radioactive, a short fuse, a walking freaking ticking time bomb!"

"I don't have an anger issue, Megan. Trust me." He looked frustrated, trying to convince me. Unfortunately, I wasn't convinced at all. "You can ask your mom."

"Keep telling yourself that."

The silence stretched between us. Even Mom was speechless. I realized I was too ahead of myself. What if he was just trying to explain and not to get back where we left? The fact that hurt me more was that I couldn't be with him if I ended up hurting myself in the end. We were complete opposites, and most relationships like this didn't last long.

"Sometimes people have to do the wrong things for the right reason, even if it places their lives at risk. I did that because I was the one who put your life in danger in the first place. I provoked him.

And seeing you so hurt, I could not bear the pain. It took more than my strength that night. Facing my father isn't easy as well, but love forces us to choose, and I choose to risk my life because I can't live a life with the fear of losing someone I love. I don't regret making those tough decisions. I have to end it or at least I die trying."

I was immensely astonished, but I was still mad at him. "Don't play that card on me!"

"I know I am not good enough for you, but I will try my best to be honest to the best of my ability, and to do my best to prove to you that I am sincere."

"I can't—" I didn't know exactly what I was trying to say. My head had trouble wrapping around it until I remembered something.

I don't want the time will come and you will tell me you can't do it anymore. I just did.

"Very well then. Then, it's best that I go."

Chapter 42 Legally Rich

FORREST

“SO YOU are a guy who inherited billions worth of assets, but you chose to work at the nightclub?” Xandry spelled out as we sat down in one of the VIP lounges in Night Stalker.

I wasn’t really in a mood to talk about wealth. All I wanted was to get drunk and numb the pain inside my chest. My mind went back to Megan. She was furious. After pouring out all my strength and effort of telling her who I was and how I felt, it still ended up pretty fucking badly.

“I know there’s something off about him when he came to apply for a job. For a first time bartender, he knew different types of liquors, spirits, wines, even the age, smell, and flavor just by smelling them, but I like him, so I hired Forrest without a second thought,” Pyke seconded. “You a good looking guy is good for business.”

“Father thought me at a young age. He had a winery and he was also a sommelier.”

“Your real father?”

“No. I called him Papa. Father was the Lord who raised me.”

“I never suspected Forrest though. All I know is he had a protective nature over women. I thought he just missed his mother,” Kyland said, stealing a glance at me. “So, we can’t stop you from leaving us?”

“I’m not leaving anyone. I have to see my mother and sort something out.” I had to check the pending problem with the project updates and to figure things out since I already had this ring—meaning I accepted the permanent seat in the company and the role in the Oirdheirc Society.

“When you are ready, my son. You can build your own name and your life. Help your mama with our family business.” In his deathbed, he placed something in my hand and had me forcibly grasped it. “You have my name. People will respect you the way they respect me. But be fair to everyone around you. That’s how you gain everyone’s respect on your own. Promise me to wear this when you are ready, son.”

“You mean to embrace who you are? Did you inherit his title? How does it feel?” Pyke asked.

“The status is not a big of a deal. Adopted sons can’t inherit titles.”

“That’s cold. I have to admit, it sounds good to have a title in your name,” Sean reacted. “Lord Kentworthry.”

"We are in the 21st Century where you can buy titles and be one of them." I sipped my beer. "I'm good with Forrest Wood."

"Why Wood?" Bash Hughes asked.

"Keighley is an Old English name. Something like woodland. I am not sure."

"Do they drink beer or ale?" Xandry laughed. "I agree to disagree though, but it sounds like a big deal to me, because they have this title crest on their arms. I'm still trying to wrap my head around the fact that you are an adopted son of an English lord."

I shook my head. "Father was. I'm a bloody nobody."

"It's good to finally get out behind the shadow, is it?" My gaze snapped to Sean, sitting in the barstool with Bash Hughes.

I nodded. "Yeah. After I left my life in England, I needed a channeling, I found it MIT."

They whistled, eyes flashing in awe.

"For years, it felt like I was acting going through my emotions all the time. It was tough being in a new environment, new identity, new school, and keeping out of personal entanglements. It was culture-shocked, really. I felt like I was from the other planet. I was grateful for Alan who had been there for me, my anchor. When I started working here, somehow I wanted to be the person I created. I realized I wasn't faking it even though I had to keep my old life under wraps. I learned to trust, to feel something, and I like who I am when I am with all of you. I don't feel like being trapped anymore."

"Yet, she dumped you."

"Ouchy," Sean reacted.

I narrowed my eyes at him. "You all happen to know now better than me, eh?"

"Which part?" Bash asked humorously.

Pyke burst out laughing. "Manchester! True colors just revealed."

"You bloody bloke!" Xandry joined him in an English accent. "Now I know that he drinks, earl grey tea. Forrest, mate. Don't you get in trouble using a fake name?"

"People fake everything nowadays. It's not that he committed a crime that they could connect them to Forrest," Pyke answered.

"I didn't commit any crimes. I didn't fake anything. My accent maybe, but my citizenship is still British. You just imposed that I am American."

They went silent and looked at each other.

“Have anyone checked my IDs?”

When they didn’t reply, I answered, “That’s what I thought.” The document I passed on my application was forged, but no one suspected me. I couldn’t use my MIT diploma and my actual name because it would be suspicious. I actually committed fraud.

“You did a bang-up job, man.” Xandry raised glass.

When everyone went back to drinking and laughing, I couldn’t help but think of how I left Megan. I couldn’t change her mind. I thought I meant something to her, and I let my hopes up. It would be hard to let go, but she made her mind pretty clear. She didn’t need me anymore. I just hoped she would be happy when I was not around here anymore.

That was all I wanted.

Preposterous! I chuckled bitterly. I deserved this pain. Every time I remembered her pain that night, I couldn’t forgive myself. I couldn’t just turn a blind eye and let her go with that douchebag. Or perhaps, my feelings for her were a little out of control.

“I don’t wanna go on Dr. Phil on you, but you know we’ve been in your situation. Done that. We can help you, man. You don’t have to shoulder this alone on your own. I knew since that night I asked you to look after my girl, something glinted in your eyes. I ignored it though, I thought you were just protective toward our girls, and I’m so grateful for that,” Kyland said.

“So, I didn’t notice it alone, huh?” Xandry raised a brow, smiling impishly.

“Tonight is not about me,” I snorted.

“The fuck not. You’re going back to England, and we’re not sure if you ever want to come back. Tonight is your night, man.” Sean raised his glass. “Just say a word.”

“Just look after her while I am gone.”

They roared to laughter, whistled, and rose their glasses. “Hell yeah!”

“But don’t be away for too long. She might not have patience as yours to keep waiting. Eventually, you have to come back, pull your shit together, and take her back. Right, bro?” It was Kyland who made me think that there was always hope.

“To Lord Kentworthy!”

I excused myself when my phone vibrated in my pocket. My hopes rose higher, but to my disappointment, it was my engineer.

“Yeah?”

“Sorry for calling you this late, but we had to set aside the project since Bill is still unconscious.”

My world suddenly spun around me. “W-what? I thought—”

“He’s OD with an energy drink, sir.”

The Thirty-five rooms Kentworthry Manor stood on the ground for over a century, still looked prestigious with its Shakespearean architectural design from granite blocks.

“Welcome back! How’s your flight?” Mama met me at the door.

“Terribly long, but it’s worth it now that I am here. I missed you, Mama.” I pulled her into a hug.

The butler carried my luggage inside. I told Mama not to change anything in my room—it may have bad memories, but I had good ones as well.

“I bet it didn’t end well.” I could feel the dismay in her voice because she was expecting to meet Megan.

“Let’s not talk about it, shall we?” The wound was still fresh. As much as I wanted comfort right now, it wouldn’t just heal in a few days. “I like the new landscape.”

“I’m glad you like it. All invitations are ready to send, any names you want to add?”

I couldn’t think of anyone other than my friends. As we sat on the baroque, my mind went back constantly to the last moment I laid my eyes on Megan. The pain, the hurt, the mistrust, and disgust flooded in her eyes, and I couldn’t get rid of them.

“No. I think you got it all covered.”

“The wine will arrive next week.” We had problems with the machinery two months ago. I had to travel to France to check it myself since the operators and workers there were mostly farmers and preferred a non-automated one. Everything was done manually. That was why our wines were top-notch.

“So they didn’t have any more trouble with the processing?”

“After your workshop and the manual you provided, I think they just did all right.” Mama rubbed my back. “You’re a great employer, Forrest. Your father would be so proud of you.”

“Is she gone?”

“Yes. She handed me a resignation two days ago.”

“Good. I’ll wire transfer to her account for her to start a new life.”

“Meadow still loves you. She did that for you. It wasn’t to scare Megan. You two were like the dynamic duo, were inseparable. She may not tell you she’s hurt that you left to States, but I saw how she suffered without you being here for her as well.”

“That doesn’t give her the right to place a gun under my pillow. I’m a grown man who can certainly take care of my own safety. She went beyond jealousy. We ended up years ago, Mama, and she knew we didn’t have a chance to get back together.”

“You are not listening, Forrest. Remember what your father told you? To be fair and just to everyone. That’s how you will gain someone’s respect. Emotions always cloud everyone’s judgment. You have the right to be angry, but she apologized. Move on. People will do everything for love. This time, you have a choice to do something if Megan means so much to you.”

“If she even has a tiny love for me.”

“What I mean is you.” Mama held my hand, squeezing them when I looked into her eyes. I knew she felt my sorrow. “I’ve never seen you desperate like this. She’s worth a wait, Forrest. Don’t give up just yet.”

“I wish you’re right, Mama. If she will wait for me though. As far as I know, she already gave up on us.”

“Oh, boy. My son is finally in love.” Mama wrapped her arms around me. Her embrace was like a warm blanket. When she visited me, I was so damn worried that I was holding my breath all the time. Right now, it paid off everything I sacrificed for us. We were back with nothing to worry about what to come next. Finally, I could live a life, but there was still something missing in my heart. It was sad that the missing piece was impossible for me to have.

“Anyway, I need to see Bill.”

Chapter 43 A Cup of Tea

FORREST

BILL WAS still in the hospital. I found out he drowned himself with work to prove that the project was viable. I felt like an asshole for pushing him too hard. He wanted to show his self-worth to me, just like he promised when he agreed to see a therapist after I took him in. Thankfully, he woke up because I couldn't forgive myself, and I had a lot of guilt that could last a lifetime.

"Don't do that again. You can always say no to me. You don't have to prove anything to me. You've already proven your worth to the company."

"I know." He looked down. "It wasn't your fault. I have to admit, I forgot the world outside the lab for a few days after our conference call."

"That was weeks ago. You haven't been to your flat, haven't been showered, and changed clothes. Then you ate take out food and injected yourself with insulin. That's not healthy, Bill."

His face lit up. "Is that your way of telling me that I look like shit?"

I chuckled. "Exactly. I'm so sorry. I wasn't able to come right away."

"Because you thought became a junkie again? It's alright, and I know you're a busy person."

"Still, I'm so sorry. It's not an excuse on my part. I promised to take care of you, not as your employer, but as a friend." Guilt twisted my gut because he was right on that part. "And I have a few issues left in States."

"I've been there. It was hell on earth, but I love this job. And as I told you before, I wanna do something, man. If I ever break your trust, no one will accept me and give me the same opportunity you handed to me in a silver platter. I owe you a great outcome."

"But you don't have to kill yourself with work. It wasn't exactly handed to you in a silver platter. You worked hard for it, and I'm glad you're okay. Take a few days rest before you go back to work. Go and visit some places, get laid, and do whatever you want, as long as it doesn't involve you ending in this bed again."

He shook his head and grinned. "You know I can't do that until I finish what I started. We're already behind the schedule."

"That's not a request. That's an order. Just stay out of trouble, okay? I mean it, Bill."

A few minutes later, we were laughing.

I loved his new idea. I'd never been excited about the new updates and he promised to be ready in a few months. The Advanced Implant Glucose Monitor System with Insulin Automated Delivery System for Diabetic Type II.

Using a Nanotechnology, once the patient was diagnosed, it would be implanted in his arm or his abdomen. One of our developers was currently creating a phone app and Atto Tech watch of AIGMS-IADS to monitor the glucose level in one click.

"The patient can monitor his sugar level without pricking himself every now and then. If the patient develops low sugar, the sensor will send the result to the mainframe. It would be lesser work for the medical and clinical staff as well. I hope the Endocrinology and Diabetes Center will give this a chance," Bill said proudly. "You can ask doc, just don't tell him you already knew the details."

"I know you all won't let this company down, Bill."

"Thanks for the trust, man."

I took him in with me after I graduated from MIT. He fell off the wagon and dropped out of college when he was diagnosed with Type II Diabetes, but I knew he had a brilliant mind, and I believed someone could change with proper encouragement and moral support.

I slept like a baby, and probably the longest slept I had in years, without interrupted by nightmares. I still ended up waking empty though, and that was depressing.

In the afternoon, I spent with Mama with a cup of tea at the back of the manor. For over the century, this had been with Kentworthy's.

"Father would be proud of what you did to this place."

The landscape was spectacular, and I knew the old man loved this part of the thousands of acres, other than his other assets. I still remembered how we practiced fencing in this very space. I missed him so much, even if he wasn't my real father. For me, he was the perfect father I never had.

"I swore to him to maintain and not to touch everything unless it's necessary. This land meant so much to your father, Forrest. I wish I can do something more about this place. This is where he treated me like a woman. He respected me and loved me despite my shortcomings. And if Megan can't see that and cannot accept you of who you are, then she's not good enough for you."

I smiled at her and ignored the pain in my chest. "You sound like her mother."

Mama looked at me with interest. "Your therapist, right? Yet you've never known she's Megan's mother."

"No." I shook my head. My mind went back to how disgusted she looked at me after I admitted that I punched that asshole Asher who slapped her. "Megan had been through a lot, and I figured out why she doesn't trust her heart so easily to someone. Especially to someone like me, who she thinks she doesn't know anything about me. I don't know how she lost her father, but I think that's the reason why she doesn't invest in relationships. Because she thinks if she loves someone, she ends up losing them."

"I saw the pain in her eyes when Meadow kissed you. That day, I knew you unintentionally hurt her."

"Jeez, Mama. Thank you." I sipped my tea. My chest constricted. When I confessed, she accepted me and made me promise to come back to her, yet she was the one who left first.

"I was just telling you that she was hurt. Why do people get hurt, Forrest?"

"Yet she threw me out of her life without hesitation." I sighed deeply, looking at the large greenery space surround us. I was visualizing us playing hide and seek in this yard, then we were going to have a picnic, drunk wine, and after that, we would be making love.

"I know you came back because of me. You can always do your obligations in our businesses without being here. That ring is not a symbol of nobility anyway. There are Oirdheirc members all over the world. Even in States. You don't have to settle here, Forrest. Go back and win her back."

"I know, Mama. This is Father's, and by wearing this, it means I promised him to keep his legacy and the fortune he entrusted in us."

"You're doing great keeping his businesses running in States."

"You don't like me being here, do you? Am I a burden?"

"You sound ridiculous." Mama was about to sip her tea when she looked at me sadly. She placed down her teacup and squeezed my hand. "I love you so much that never a day I didn't think of you, but you are old enough that I can't see myself babysitting you. I know one day, you eventually have to look for your own life, and I'd been preparing myself for that moment to come. I'm good and healthy if that's what you're worried about. I want you to be happy, Ellery Forrest. Since you arrived yesterday, I could feel the sadness in your chest, in your eyes, it's deep in your veins. I want to take that off from you, but sadly, I can't help you with that. It's you only. You're the only one who can make yourself happy. And you know how to remedy that."

"I think love moves in mysterious ways, huh?" I mumbled.

Mama shifted her gaze behind me and smiled.

Chapter 44 A Sinner Shall Pay

FORREST

WHEN I turned around, It was Alan, and I wanted to roll my eyes.

“It’s a beautiful day, isn’t it? Milady, young master.”

“Young master my arse. How old am I?”

“Good to know that you got your humor back. When I was at your age, I was still fighting bandits in the middle of the wilderness.” He walked back inside the ballroom hall.

“I don’t know what to do if it wasn’t for Alan, Mama. I wasn’t that affected when Papa left after what he did to us, but I thought I lost half of my soul when Father died. You are the only person left to keep me from living, then Alan came to my life. He became so important to me. He’d been there for me for the past years. I lived a life as normal as possible knowing that you were safe and sound, and Alan was there to guide me. I owe him my life, Mama.” I stood up from my seat and moved to kiss her on her forehead. “I love you so much.”

Moments later, the grand piano from the ballroom hall, echoed. I knew it was Alan. He loved to play the piano just like Father. I sauntered towards him when he started singing that had me slowed my pace until I stopped.

I knew the song he was singing. Back in the States, he used to hum it to me when I couldn’t sleep.

...I stepped into an avalanche. It covered up my soul.

And I knew exactly what he was doing—to send me a message, to haunt me, to taunt me that I had to pull my shits together. He knew my feelings about Megan. He’d seen how vulnerable I was when he sent my mother and Meadow to the airport, and he knew the reasons why I couldn’t be the one to send them back.

“Can you please stop the bloody up?”

He stopped, turning to face me. “I missed playing. What crawled up your arse, lad?”

“I know exactly what you’re doing.”

“Of course, you do, young master.” He gracefully tapped his fingers on the keys.

“I am not young anymore. Forrest is perfectly fine. Or is this your way of pissing me off?” Because you’re quite smashing of reminding me of my epic failure of getting my relationship back.

"You can't stay here for long and have a peace of mind when your soul is somewhere," he sang to the tune, and I couldn't help but roll my eyes.

"I think you're wrong. The last time I checked, I just redeemed my soul back. And I am perfectly fine."

"You can't say something that makes you feel better here, son. Figure something out, like you always did. You shouldn't be staying here, feeling sorry for your arse when you have more important things to do. You may have more patience than anyone I know, but does she?"

My heart pounded. He was right, but again, Megan made it clear that we were over. I was a ticking time bomb, and I was not good for her.

"She doesn't like me the way—"

We were interrupted by the commotion of manor's employees. Alan was back on his feet with a gun pointing to the main door.

Fuck! "You broke our agreement!" I was already hurrying towards Francois who had his hands up.

"Forrest!" Mama's voice stopped me, just a few steps away from punching Francois. As if to protect her from my father, I stepped back and wrapped my arms around her.

"I came alone and unarmed," he stated. "And I am impressed. You have quite pretty tight security around here."

"That's the point of developing your own security system." I snarled.

"Calm down, Forrest. I invited him. He is our guest," Mama informed.

"Into our house?" With anger surged through me, I looked down at Mama as if I was being tricked.

"Yes. Because this is the safest place on earth for us even if he planned on bringing his cavalry with him." Mama soothed my back in a rub.

"Why I wasn't informed about any of these?" I stared at her, stealing a glance at Alan.

"You know the answer to that," Alan interjected.

"No. I bloody don't. Mind telling me now?" I eyed our despicable guest.

"Don't be ridiculous, Forrest." Mama left me and walked towards the sitting area as if this man she invited in was not the person who burned her to death. "Come in. Forgive our son's aggressive behavior. Have a seat, please?"

"Aggressive?" I stayed glued in my place, boiling in anger alone. I stared at Alan, who already placed the gun back under the piano. "You okay with this?"

He shrugged. "Lady Kentworthry has spoken."

"You both are unbelievable." I walked briskly to join them, to protect my mother against this man that now I never feared.

Francois was sitting across my mother. The tension still thick in the air between me, him, and Alan, who stood behind Mama.

Refreshment was served. They lightly shared conversations about business, while I couldn't take my eyes off from this bastard. I couldn't get my mind off from the possibility of the threat he had with him. If I knew, this was part of his wicked plan. I was paranoid all the time, scared that he might be carrying a bomb inside his stomach, and let us all explode with him in our house.

"Why are you exactly here, Francois?"

He looked at me. "I'm sending back the money you wire-transferred."

"Isn't it what you want? The reason why you choose to be alone than with your family?"

"I deserve that." He looked down.

"Of course, you deserve a lot worse. The pain from your ailment, of dying alone that no one cares, that no one will remember you once you will be six feet under. You deserve everything! The pain, the sorrow of those family you hurt and those people you put their blood in your hands."

"Forrest," Mama warned me. "He came here to ask for forgiveness. Whether you will give it to him or not, it's all up to you. You suffered beyond any child could have. We all suffered, but he made amends to all his mistakes. He was looking for us to ask for our forgiveness, and not to harm us."

"And you honestly believe what he said right now? Come on, Mama. He's a monster. Have you forgotten what he did to you?"

Mama lifted her gaze, pain crossed her face, and I wished I could take my words back. "I would never forget that, Forrest. But it'd been years. I moved on because I forgave him. I had a beautiful life with your Father. I have a great life that I have you. One thing I owed this man is giving me you, instead of agreeing with my decision that I was not ready to have a child."

"W-what?" I swallowed hard. My body numbed with the disclosure I just found. This would stain in my memory forever. So it was because of me after all—the reason why their lives turned upside down. I was the one to be blamed. Their only mistake was the choices they made.

"My parents didn't want me to give birth without getting married to your father. He chose to marry me because he loved me."

"You're not serious, Mama." I stared at her for a moment before I shook my head. "This is not true."

"I made mistakes, so as your father. You're keeping anger and grudge towards him, but it wasn't all his fault."

"I can't believe you are saying this to me now." I shook my head repeatedly. "Why don't you just surrender yourself to the authority, old man?"

The more he looked at my mother, the more I got pissed because I could see something in there that I wouldn't like to admit.

"I'm making their jobs easy, son. My chemo didn't improve as I expected. I made peace with my fate. That's the reason why I am here." He smiled at me that I wanted to punch it off his face. "At least, before I'd be pushing up daisies, I will be able to see that you two are happy in a better place, having a great life. Everything happens for a reason, Lean— Forrest. Think about it. This is maybe the reason why things happened for us—for you both to have a better life, that a husband and a father always wishes for his family that he can't give."

Chapter 45 Resistance and Tricks

MEGAN

“SO HOW’S the new manager?” I asked Camila since Kyland was going to manage the soon-to-open Night Stalker.

“You’ll gonna love her. Her name is Winter.”

“Why do I feel like she’s gonna find the love of her life in the nightclub?”

Camila giggled, showing me the guilty-looked in her eyes. “She has a sense of style, has a side-shave fiery redhead, and not to mention, she’s funny. Pyke likes her immediately.”

I knew exactly what would come next. So I readied myself.

“You know, you don’t have to do this alone,” as expected, she started as she sat on the couch, rubbing her belly.

“To do what alone?” I looked at three pairs of eyes, finding hard to believe that they all had the same sympathy-looked on their faces.

“Moping alone, wallowing in self-pity, any of those ring a bell?” Blaine answered reluctantly.

“Peachy, ain’t I?” I rolled my eyes, wrapping my arms around my knees.

“Keep telling yourself that,” Camila sang.

“That’s some serious denial, Meg. When someone says she’s fine, that’s exactly the opposite,” Bianca said. “I actually missed that guy, and Kelly missed him, too. I heard he’s not in the best place if that makes you feel better.”

“You heard, huh? Aren’t you a little bit nosy?” I pinned her a flinty stare.

“You will come with us. Whether you like it or not,” Blaine said as she sat on the armrest of Camila’s chair.

“I can’t go with you. I have work and bills to pay because unlike you all, I don’t have a husband to save my ass.”

“But you have—”

I raised my hand to stop Camila from saying what she was about to say because I knew how his name still affected me. His name was like Voldemort’s—the Dark Lord.

It had been three weeks since he left without even saying goodbye, and it didn't only break my heart, he also beat my ego into a pulp. Didn't I really mean something for him? Of course, he didn't.

One night, I found myself curling up in bed alone where we first slept together. I cried to sleep. When I woke up, I cried all over again. I realized I loved that asshole, and I made a terrible mistake for pushing him hard and pushing him out of my life.

He meant to leave anyway. He didn't belong here. He had a freaking castle and probably a bunch of women to warm his bed. That truth sucked!

"You're stalling." Blaine squeezed my hand. "And you're hurting. He wouldn't send us invitations if he didn't care."

I had not opened the invitation I received two weeks ago because I was afraid that it could be his engagement party to that bitch, but Bianca said it was a black-tie party, and Lady Kentworthry would be hosting.

"I'm still not going," I resisted even more.

They were all throwing glares like I would be in one of their luggage if I'd still say no.

"If you are okay like what you're saying, then there's no reason for your resistance. Water under the bridge, right? Prove it to us, and besides, you haven't been to England." Camila's charmed seemed to affect me., and I was thinking twice of considering it.

"I don't have—"

"I got it covered." She was already grinning.

"You're a bitch." I dropped my head to my knees.

Camila just laughed. "We're gonna have a great time, baby."

"Said who's pregnant who can't drink alcohol."

"She can't, but we can." Bianca laughed, playfully slapping my arm.

"God! I hate you all. I'm gonna regret this. Trust me."

"No, Meg. You will thank us later. And you're welcome." Blaine squeezed me into a hug. "I love you. We love you."

"I need urgent lobotomy!"

I threw myself into the huge king-sized European inspired bed of the five-star hotel in the city of Manchester, England. Tonight would be the party at Kentworthry Manor, and everyone was excited. Well, except me, but I already had a plan B. Just in case.

I wasn't near ready toward recovering post-Forrest. I still missed him, besides, I didn't do anything to move on. I didn't think I would be ever going to move on, but I got passed through my lows in life, I would be able to get through this, for as long as he was happy. Oh, god! I am such a terrible liar.

My life was a mess. I screwed up big time, and I was still wallowing my self-pity. That was to sum it up.

I got up from the bed and drew the massive wall to ceiling curtain, revealing the great historical view of the city. Images of Forrest wearing a black-tie flashed through my mind, and my eyes watered again.

It was hard to imagine him with a woman in his arms as he smiled and walked downstairs. I couldn't do it because I knew he would have a date, and I was sure, he was over me. How could he not? He didn't even freaking call me for almost a month, and it hurt me a lot.

After an hour soaking in the tub, I still didn't want to get up—this was the only thing I could enjoy right now—until they left for the party.

"You lied to us!"

I opened an eye to Camila's angry voice. She was already glaring down on me with hands propped on her hips with full makeup on.

"Sup, bomb? I'm on Forrest-detox mode right now. Be back in an hour."

"You tricked me!"

"I came, didn't I?"

"You let me buy you a dress, and you're not gonna wear it?"

I raised and rubbed my leg. "I love this tub, and the smell, the fresh flowers, the scented candle, and the finest wine to get these to waste."

"I am serious, Megan! I am mad at you right now."

"Jeez, calm down, preggy. I can see that, and I can feel your anger, too. Just don't look down to the tub, it might turn into freaking lava."

"Don't say another word."

“Pyke will hang me upside down if he finds out I made you angry. I came with you, but I can’t remember signing up to attend a freaking party. If I remember correctly, you insisted on buying a dress for me, didn’t you?”

“Don’t get smart-ass on me now. You’re still coming with us. Get out of that freaking tub, and get ready! Chop-chop!”

“Oops! I did not bring the dress you bought.” I flashed a faux guilty grin.

“You left the gown in the States?” She was now ready to wring my neck in anger.

“Of course, I did. I’m not feeling up to socializing, besides, I am not a rich kid, and I don’t have a date as you all have. What will I do there, huh? Stand at the corner while watching him enjoying his party and flirting with his date? Just sucktastic!” I shook my head, imagining as our gazes met.

“Give me a break, Camila. He hurt me. He left me. Put yourself in my shoe for once, are you gonna attend a party hosted by Pyke after you two broke up when you knew there would be another woman in his arms?”

Her face fell. And I knew her answer. “But you don’t know if he has—”

“Have you forgotten the saying ‘never trust a Brit’? He’s gonna have, trust me. He’s a freaking Billionaire while I am a jobless loser! Who wants a loser like me? ” So much for the self-worth and my stupid ego.

Chapter 46 Friends in The City

MEGAN

"I'M SORRY, Meg. I didn't think of that. I thought there's something left for both of you to catch up."

I wiped my face. "Well, newsflash, he left me because there's nothing left to continue, and I have nothing left to fight for. I was expecting every day, for twenty-seven days since he left that he might call or send me a message, but it never happened. We barely even started, and I was just stupid to hold onto something that doesn't anymore. It hurts, and I still have self-worth left, you know. It's over. We are over."

"Oh, Meg. But one day, you have to open your eyes and take another look for the possibility that there's still something to catch up or something out there." I could feel the sincerity in her voice seeping through me. She shouldn't be doing this to me because it was my fault in the first place, and I slept with one of our friends.

"Just enjoy the party, and I'll be right here when you all come back."

Camila leaned in, kissing me on my cheek. "We'll get through this, Meg. I will see the smile on your face again. That's a promise."

I looked down at the water in the tub when Camila went back inside the room. I could hear them murmuring, and Camila telling them to leave me alone.

Watching them leaving with their husbands twinged a pang in my chest. I was always jealous of how their husbands cared and loved them like they were the only people ever existed on earth.

Sometimes, I wished I found a man who would treat me the way they were treated, but I thought that man was no longer exist.

"You must be Alan." I sat on the bench beside the old man who had Forrest trusted his life for years. He was wearing a dark gray beret, staring at the kids playing laser guns.

I was reluctant when he called me earlier if we could meet in person, but I had no reason to turn him down. Perhaps, he could tell me about Forrest's whereabouts or more likely if he'd been good at following steps of moving on. So here I was.

The weather seemed turned icy in the park. It was not because it was winter, but I was antsy of what he was about to say. It had been two weeks since Forrest left. And I had not heard anything from him since then.

"I've never met someone as focus, patient, and determined as Forrest. He reminded me of his father Milord. Then you came to the picture. I couldn't say he became reckless. It was quite the opposite. Fascinating, I must say. In fact, I was happy that he found some time to himself."

"Is this the moment when you say I should stay away from him?" I faced him. He had almost the same sharp eyes as Forrest. I looked toward the horizon when my chest fierce painfully.

"Forrest is over-particular when it comes to his security. He, his mother, and I are the only people have access to the main door. And him and his mother for his office and his room."

"So?"

"Miss Hudson. Meadow can't access to his room. His mother was inside his room, terrified about her son that she might not see him again. That's why Meadow was there."

"She paid me a little visit, and I might have prompted her."

"I don't think so. The gun was not meant to scare you or set you up. Meadow called me to help Forrest, but I trusted him that he would take extra precaution. And I promised not to intervene him, meeting his father. I couldn't interfere with his plan even if it's his mother's wish. The least I could do was to inform Lady Myra Kentworthry."

"So, the gun was for?"

"For precaution. But Forrest might have been with you at that time. Meadow was expecting Forrest would find the gun before he went to see his father."

"I see." I linked my fingers on my lap.

"Believe it or not. I was scared for him, for his mother, for myself, but I knew he wouldn't stop until he met the person who had been haunting him since he was still a Young Forrest. He cares about you, Megan. Your ordeal has been causing him great pain. He never cares about anyone the way he does for you. That's what I can assure you. He might have loved Meadow, but she is not the love of his life."

I put on my decent dress and curled my new blonde-hair. I looked at my reflection in the mirror once again before I grabbed my purse. I should have been staying in the room, but it made me crazier, knowing they were having a great time at the party, and I was in this city, yet I was caging myself inside the four corners of this room.

I walked into the bar in the hotel lobby, and they call it a pub. The music was the Beatles' classic. Emotion clogged in my throat, remembering Dad how he used to love this song.

"Hiya, what can I get for you, miss?" the cute bartender asked. His accent was attractive. What gave me the nosedive was he reminded me of Forrest.

"Whatever you have there. Thank you." The noise from the corner had my gaze tipped to their direction. They were a bunch of guys around my age, all fit and looking rich.

"Those are our pride."

"Who are they?" I asked the bartender. I noticed the guy wearing a white shirt tipped his glass. I turned to my left, and I was alone. I had to raise my drink to him in return.

"Ah, American, aye?"

"And you're a Scot, aye?"

The bartender laughed. "That sounds terrible."

"Sorry, it didn't sound right to imitate your accent, but that's pretty calling."

"Aye. They're our football players. Soccer."

"I see. So they're kinda a big deal around here."

"Aye. Pretty big like Stephen Curry for basketball or Aaron Donald in your NFL. And I just got their autographs and a selfie."

"Wow! So, they're really a big deal."

"Aye. So, what brings you to this beautiful city?" He placed down my Pimms.

"I'm with friends. They're attending a party of our friend."

"And you did not attend a party of your friend, why? You are supposed to be invited, as well." He must have caught the reaction on my face. His lips curled up into a smirk, and his blue eyes twinkled.

"You're nosy, you know."

"My apology, miss."

"It's Megan."

"Are all Americans fancied a name Megan, Megan?"

I gave him an incredulous look.

He laughed. "I did it again, did I? I am not this nosy, Megan. Just a pretty and intriguing woman just made me, I guess. I'm Henry, pleased to meet you." He offered his hand for handshakes. I already knew his name. I read it on his nameplate a while ago.

“And Brits and Scots loved Henry, aye?” I shook his hand. “Am I wearing that neon light on my forehead?”

“You got me there.” He nodded with a full-blown smile. “And kind of.”

“Hi.” I stiffened to the voice behind me. When I turned around, his looks had my jaw dropped.

Chapter 47 Eliah, in The Flesh

FORREST

IT WAS harder to accept when you were expecting too much. I was looking forward to this night, then I just ended up disappointed.

My heart was speared as I headed down the wide staircase to join the guests after the short introduction from my mother.

I pasted a smile, a few handshakes, and pleasantries to the first group of gentlemen from the Oirdheirc Society. Something inside me twisted when I passed by with several couples chatted intimately in the corner.

My lips curved into a knowing sad smile to greet my friends. Unfortunately, Megan wasn't with them. That was why there had no RSVP for my invitation. She moved on, I guessed. I meant nothing but a history to her at all.

"Great party," Pyke said as we did a brotherly hug.

"I'm glad you all came." Sorrow laced my voice, and I didn't even bother to hide it from them.

When Camila called me that Megan would come, I was so thrilled. Never a day passed by I didn't anticipate this night, then she suddenly changed her mind.

"You look ravishingly handsome tonight, Forrest, or should I call you now, milord." Bianca's lips spread into a full-blown smile. I guessed the milord part was definitely sticking for a long time.

"Forrest sounds better." I grabbed a glass of Champagne from the waitstaff and drained it in two gulps. "Besides, 98% of these people I just met tonight. How's my goddaughter?"

"Whoa! Take it easy, party boy. And you should come back to States to her second birthday."

"I won't miss it. I already missed my girl." And my other girl.

"Sure as hell she misses you, too, bro," Kyland said. I knew who he meant, but I pretended he was still referring to Kelly.

"She's in the hotel. She tricked us and left her dress back home." Blaine squeezed my hand, looking hopeful.

I wished I could feel the same, but right now, it was all slipping off my fingers. "She doesn't want to see me."

"You know I went to Blaine's hometown, punched Ben's father, and I ended locked up in the cell. Then my father threatened me because he thought I was playing with my wife's feelings. But, man, it didn't stop me, because deep inside, I couldn't find another Blaine in this lifetime. And if she means to you, even if it's a tiny bit, then do something. You've wasted a month waiting for what? For the right time? The right time is when you think it is now. She's a woman, and you're a man should be groveling and telling her how much you love her. If it works for me and Blaine, it will work for both of you. One of you should sacrifice if it's worth the risk. There's only one Megan in this world, Forrest," Xandry just gave his mind-opening speech, and I just closed my gaping mouth and stared at him in disbelief.

Love did change him a lot. At first, I doubted he would ever settle down, let alone in his twenties.

"Wow! That's the best pep-talk you ever said, Xandry," Pyke agreed and grinned, slapping his cousin on his back. "Proud of you, bro."

"What can I say, I have the best life." He looked at Pyke, then to me. "And I will never doubt you will have the best in life as I am if you would just swallow your hubris. Besides, look at you right now, you have almost everything a man can ask for, except the most important missing piece to complete you, that can't be bought by money. Come on, milord, just get off your high horse already."

"You must be my son's friends from the States." Mama walked in to welcome my only guests.

"Thank you for inviting us, Lady Myra Kentworthry." Pyke bowed politely.

I was not used my friends would do such thing, but they were born with a golden spoon and certainly aware of the etiquette.

"Just Myra, dear. Anything for my boy."

After the short introduction, Mama excused herself to entertain her guests. "Enjoy the party."

"Look who finally showed up. If it's not Ellery Forrest Keighley Kentworthry, himself." A slow clap had us turned to our right.

I was already smiling and pulling this lad into a brotherly hug. "Well, well, well, look at you. Eliah Storm Aberworth Huxley Raybourne, in the flesh. Jesus, mate. How did you get these muscles?" He was always lean, but as tall as I was. He had his golden curly hair tied back neatly with his bright blue eyes gleaming at me. "You look like you just come from a Viking show."

He laughed. "I could ask the same thing, cousin. It's been five years, yeah? What made you come back to England? And don't tell me shites, like duty calls." He was my third cousin from my real father, but his family was way different from mine.

"I guess, I just missed you. And it's my party, so where am I supposed to be, Eliah?"

"Fine. Apology accepted." He laughed out loud and looked at my friends.

"I am not apologizing."

"Great. Welcome back, then." He gestured to my friends. "They must be the reason why you never came to visit me, even once."

"Sort of."

He scanned all my girls, and I wanted to punch him right away. "Beautiful ladies, my apologies—"

"They belong to them." I tipped my head to my friends who all looked amused. "If you wanna get out of here alive in one piece. Then you have to keep your hands to yourself and your tongue in your mouth. All the time."

"I'm a good bloke. Ask my mum over there. So, where's yours?" When I didn't reply, he held out his hand to Pyke. "My apologies for my ill-manners, gentlemen. Eliah, call me Storm when we're in States."

I couldn't help but rolled my eyes and chuckled. My friends seemed to like him despite how he eyed my girls with interest. Eliah was just trying to mess with me. I knew he was a good lad who lived with dignity and always respected the values his family had thought him.

"Excuse me, sir. An emergency call for you," Our butler, Usworth interrupted us.

"What kind of emergency?"

"You should take this call, sir," he insisted.

I grabbed the phone with wary as I eyed him. When I looked down at the screen, it was a call from Alan. My heart just leaped up to my throat.

"I have to take this," I excused myself from my friends. My stomach turned stone hard as I reached the driveway. The call already ended, and I had to redial Alan.

"You should come over," he answered right away. I could hear the loud music and the yelling in the background.

"What is it all about?"

"Can't you hear this?" he said sarcastically.

"My eardrum is near damaged. Cut the shit, Alan. My friends are waiting for me."

"I know, and your girlfriend is having too much fun with the ballers."

“Megan?”

Chapter 48 Saving Her Arse

FORREST

“WHO ELSE is there that I don’t know about?”

“Just tell me what’s going on?” I grunted. I meant no disrespect towards him, but he kept on throwing me sarcasm.

“She’s wasted, lad. You better come here and save her arse before someone will take her to the hotel room.”

“I’m coming.” I pinched the bridge of my nose as I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. “And don’t let anyone touch her or I swear to God.”

“You wanna mess up with them? These wankers are football players.”

“I don’t give a bloody fuck! You know what to do. Be there in ten.” I hung up the phone and signaled the butler.

“Sir?” He rushed toward me.

“Bring me my car. Now!”

“Yes, sir.” He nodded and bowed politely before he left.

My friends came rushing towards me, wearing a confused look on their faces.

“What’s wrong?” Camila asked.

“Your friend is what’s wrong. Apparently, she has her own way of hosting a party.”

“What? Oh, no. She promised me to say in the hotel until we get back.”

“Well, she’s probably in the hotel, but at the pub with a bunch of bollocks.” I sighed heavily as I propped my hands on my waist. My blood rushed toward my head as I thought of everyone touching her. She was a gorgeous woman, and those arseholes had a thing with an American girl like Megan.

“I love it when you get jealous.” Bianca giggled, hugging Kyland’s arm.

I couldn’t think of anything other than her drunk image with hands of those dafts all over her that kept popping in my head. “I need to go and save her arse before she will regret waking up in the morning in those bollocks’ bed.”

"Oh, my god. It's kinda hot when you have that accent, you know." Blaine giggled with Camila. Their husbands just shook their heads at their wives.

The butler parked the car in front of us. The guys whistled in a chorus, especially Camila.

"Shut the front door, Forrest," Camila gushed. She was an automobile designer after all, and sports cars were her toys.

"I still love my Camry." Xandry chuckled.

"Wew, what a total badass you have here," Kyland whistled.

I jumped to the driver seat. "I have to go. Go back to the party. I'll call as soon as I have her with me."

"Go ahead, man. And save your girl's ass. And this is where I say, you're her knight and shining armor." Pyke placed his hand on his back and bowed, causing his wife to laugh.

"It's time for you to put your shit together, bro. And go and get your girl." Kyland gripped my shoulder with a short nod.

The car purred as I pulled out of the driveway, rounding around the fountain towards the gate. I was already fuming with anger and of jealousy that I had to loosen my tie to breathe well. I was going the spank her arse when I got to see her. That was a promise.

Despite my rage, I was a little bit nervous to face her or how would she react upon seeing me. Was she that wasted? She would not probably remember all of these when she woke up tomorrow. At least I could take a glimpse of her tonight.

A few minutes later, I already parked my car in front of the hotel where they checked in. I threw my keys to the concierge.

I was welcomed with noises, laughter, and yells inside the pub. My blood boiled while my hands were balled into fists to see her laughing her arse out with those bollocks until a strong hand gripped my arm before I could make another towards those arseholes.

"You won't create a scene, Forrest. I'd been watching them, and their groupies are not around. They were just drinking and having fun. I could say, she's a witty lass."

"And it makes me feel better? Can't you see? Does she look like a groupie? What a barmy! And she's pissed." I spat out. I was already marching toward the footballers' table before Alan could see another word.

"Excuse me, mate. Got to get my lady to our room. She had enough drinks for tonight."

The blokes stopped laughing and looked at me as if I was some kind of a sick joke.

I showed no interest and stared back at them blankly.

“Do you know her?”

I looked down, and Megan’s sleepy eyes were staring at me in shock. My heart just leaped through my throat.

Fuck yeah! “Yes.” With every curve, with every touch, with every inch, and with all my heart. “Now, love, let me take you back to our room before you will do something you will regret later. I just left in a few hours, look what you’ve been doing.” Such a naughty girl.

“I still want to drink,” she protested and slapped my hand when I scooped her out of these bloody bollocks.

“Mate,” the blond, one of the players protested. You won’t dare to stop me, mate.

“Just toss off!” I roared, making them stop. At the corner of the room, two beefy men stood up. They were probably these wankers’ security details. Who gives a fuck? I needed to take Megan out of this place. “You don’t wanna make a scene over my woman because I will make sure that this will be in every news, every gossip site, and every bloody newspaper tomorrow.” It was not a warning—it was a threat because I would break one of their noses if they laid a hand on her while I was in front of them.

He shrugged and raised his hands. “We’re just drinking and having fun with her, mate.” A player named McConner. Now I remembered his face. He had a handful of women linked to him, and I didn’t want Megan would see her drunk face all over social media tomorrow.

“You are one of a hell of an archaic, handsome.”

“And you are a bloody drunk, Megan.” I hissed in anger that she chose to drink than to see me. Jealousy was still coiling in my stomach. I had to set it aside despite how much I wanted to punch these suckers.

I revisited what mistake I did when she walked away from me. I couldn’t let that happen again by letting my jealousy and anger take charge of me.

Those arseholes couldn’t do anything anymore when they realized Megan didn’t protest again. I carried her out of the pub, bridal style.

Alan was already in the reception, then he gave me a key card. “Call me if you need anything.”

“I get it from here. Go back to the manor and tell my friends Megan is safe with me.”

“Don’t do something stupid.” His warning had me paused.

I threw him one last annoying look before I entered the elevator and punched the floor number. “I can’t promise you that. And what the fuck are you even doing here?” Until now, it didn’t come to my senses what was he doing in this hotel when the party was at the manor.

“Just doing my job.” What’s that supposed to mean?

When I looked down at Megan in my arms, she was eyeing me, inspecting me with interest.

“You look familiar,” she slurred. “Have we met before?”

Chapter 49 Intensity

FORREST

“MAYBE IN our dreams, love.” I wanted to hug her so tight and kissed her hard until my anger wore off, but she would not remember it tomorrow. It was useless to take advantage of a poor drunk woman. What I wanted to do was to spank her pretty arse. She may be drunk, but I could still see the pain, the sadness, and the hunger in her eyes, and I was sure she could see the same thing in me as well.

“Are you some kind of a hot white knight?” She slowly raised her hand, running her finger on my chin.

“If you think so, then I am.” I missed you, woman. So bloody much that I can’t see straight right now, but I still have my self under control, and my respect for you was still intact even though you’re already in my arms. And it’s insane how much I value my feelings for you.

She swallowed. “I know someone. He’s kind of my hot white broody knight. After he saved me, he left me without saying goodbye.” Her eyes watered, she blinked it off. “It hurts so much, you know.”

And my heart ached that she felt that way. “He’s kinda an arse, yeah?”

“Something like that. I guess I mean nothing to him after those kisses and wild nights we shared.”

“Maybe he’s giving you some space for you to rethink if he means something to you, beautiful. He’s gonna reach out soon, trust me.”

“He doesn’t care because if he does, he’s not gonna break my heart.” Her words cut deep into my chest and left me stunned and puzzled.

I wanted to apologize for making her feel that way—that I broke her heart, but so did I.

As I slid the key card to our room, Megan kept staring at me. The only thing that I knew she was drunk because she didn’t throw me a pit.

I laid her down the bed, placed down her purse on top of the nightstand, and took off her shoes. “You’ll be feeling better when you wake up.” I kissed the top of her head and wiped off her blonde hair from her face. “You look good in blonde, Megan.”

Not less than five minutes, she was already snoring. And I watched her like a creep for hours until I couldn’t keep up. I took off my clothes and so as hers before I tucked myself beside her. I stared at her one more time before I moved to my side and I closed my eyes.

"I love you, Forrest." Her voice made me still and stop my heart. I was a hundred percent sure I heard her right. When I turned, she hadn't moved a muscle since I put her on the bed.

I must be dreaming.

"Oh my god!"

My eyes fluttered open. My body stilled when everything registered. The blanket was taken off from me, leaving me nothing but my boxers, and my stupid cock in half-mast.

"Oh god," she muttered again.

I turned to face her. Her eyes were wide, her hair was messy, and her makeup smeared on her face.

"Morning, drunkhead." I smiled despite my dozy state. She still looked shocked to even respond though. Her brow squished together as she glared at me, then peeked under the blanket.

"I was tempted, trust me, but I've known myself when it comes to self-control. I didn't do anything, I promise. It's gonna be amazing if we both sober and feel every inch of me inside you." Oh, fuck! I clenched my jaw tight until it ached. I was an asshole. I shouldn't have said that. Right now, she was about to punch me in the face.

Great. I'm screwing this up again.

"Oh god, you're an assho—" Then she gagged and rushed towards the bathroom. She was right. I let my stupid cock's demands got into my brain. Now she wasn't going to talk to me ever again.

I sat on the bed and sighed deeply before I joined her in the loo. I grabbed a glass, filled it with water, and offered it to throwing-up Megan. She took it from me but never muttered a word, and I started to get worried. I squeezed toothpaste to the two toothbrushes like a fool that I was.

When she finally pulled herself together, and I was already brushing my teeth. I offered a toothbrush to her.

"What are you doing here, Forrest?" She was still angry when I glanced at her through the mirror.

When I was done brushing my teeth, I walked out and sat back to bed. "Welcome to England, Megan."

"Why are you here?" She spelled out. She came back, furious, already crossing her arms over her chest.

"And you chose to get drunk with a bunch of bollocks than to see me at the party."

"You're ignoring my question."

“You want a painkiller?”

“Answer my fucking question!”

“Language! Haven’t you noticed anything around you? This is my room.”

She scanned the room and realized I was telling the truth, but that didn’t stop her from glaring at me. “We slept in the same bed.”

“And again. I have known to have self-control. Would you rather wake up with men all over you and having a hangover?”

Pain and guilt crossed her face. “I didn’t attend your party because I had reasons. They forced me to come. So, I agreed since I never traveled outside the States.”

“I see. Do you plan to get drunk every night—”

“And fuck any man?” She cut me off.

It pained and angered me that she still thought about herself that way. I was already gripping her arms and throwing her back to bed. My blood boiled in my veins. After what we shared, she still thought that she meant nothing to me.

“Get off of me.” Her eyes filled with shock as I hovered my body on top of her. She tried to get loose, but I was already pinning her hands above her head with determination to prove my point. Honestly, I didn’t know what point I was trying to prove—my cock or brain?

“Or what? You will shout for help?” I pressed my aching and desperate cock to her tiny laced panties. Since I saw her, every cell in my body woke up, my blood simmered, and ripples of flames ignited across my skin to feel her again, but I couldn’t take advantage of her no matter how much I wanted her. My love for her mattered the most, and I respected her more than anyone or anything.

“Let go of me, Forrest. I mean it!” Her eyes started to water, but I could still see the reaction when she felt my raging hard-on pressed against her core. I knew she was also turned on—her eyes darkened, and I didn’t have to slip my finger into her to confirm that she was soaking wet.

“Tell me you don’t miss me, and I will let you go.” My voice came out a little bit of desperation. I intentionally moved my hips to grind into her, and we both gasped as the ferocious pleasure rippled through me. My muscles clenched everywhere as my cock became tight enough to hurt inside my boxers.

“Get off of me.” She groaned in disapproval, but I knew her resistance that her body was betraying her.

I leaned down when her lips parted, her pupils dilated, and she even bent her spine to search for pressure to relieve the ache she felt inside her. “You miss me. You still want me and need me, Megan. And I waited for almost a month for you to realize that, but maybe you moved on, haven’t you?”

“You left me, you, domineering asshole.”

“Mouth!”

“Or—”

I smashed my mouth on hers in a punishing kiss while she was twisting and writhing underneath me in protest. No matter how much she struggled to get loose, I knew she would never win.

I missed her taste, her lips, her body, and everything about her. I moaned into our mouths as the sensation blasted through me. My control evaporated as my inner ache throbbed. My lust on her and my love for her soared high that I forgot I was not in the right mind. Perhaps, there was no blood left in my brain to think that I was already forcing her.

I let her go and stood up. “Fuck! What had gotten into me?”

To see her getting hurt with tears rolling down her face while wrapping herself protectively made me feel like a worthless prick.

I tossed my hands in the air after seeing her so helpless. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking straight. I wanted to punch those arseholes when I saw you were laughing with them. I was so damn jealous that they could make you laugh while nothing worked for me.”

“Just leave me alone,” she said in a stronger tone, her chin trembled. When I moved down to hold her, she stopped me. I thought I die. “Just go.”

“Megan, please? You keep pushing me away.”

“I can’t do this.”

I ignored her subtle warning. “Don’t do this to me, please?” I held and lifted her chin. “Look at me, please? Stop pushing me away.”

“Please, just go. Don’t make this hard for both of us.”

I couldn’t say a word. I just stared at her while I was bleeding, shredding, and mourning deep inside. I couldn’t breathe and think rationally. My heart was telling me to stay, but she didn’t want me anymore. At that moment, I was epically hopeless and helpless because I knew nothing could save our relationship anymore. Or I wasn’t trying so hard enough.

It might be less pain if I did everything I could before I left, but I let her decide instead. Maybe the pain I felt right now was because I had regrets. I grabbed my trousers and put them on in silence. I closed my eyes for a few moments.

I forced a swallow and found my strength back. "I'm going, for now, but it doesn't mean I give up on us. I hope you remember what you said to me last night. Or at least I should make myself believe that that's how you feel for me." I put my white shirt on, grabbed my shoes from the floor, and walked towards the door.

Chapter 50 Just A Handful of Names

MEGAN

I WASN'T thinking straight. I was still trying to wrap my head around everything. How the hell did I wake up lying next to Forrest? He's naked, and his tattoo. God, his tattoo. And it was so sad that I couldn't remember what happened aside from drinking with soccer players last night.

Right now, I was overly aroused and completely forget my hangover. My brain was hazy with lust, and I wanted him to do me and make me forget how angry I was at him.

His smell and his presence alone were overwhelming, and the fact that his massive hard as rock cock was thrusting against my wet core was already intoxicating my brain. And as fast as how he made me arouse, that was how quick he was of walking out of my life. Not again!

Terrified, I quickly dragged myself out of bed, propped my hands on my waist, and ready to pull off my big girl's pants. I was not wearing anything other than my black bra and panties, and who cared about having clothes right now? It was a matter of life and death—my heart and my relationship were at stake.

I rolled my eyes at the knock on the door. Camila just left, and I was sure Bianca and Blaine wouldn't be the one knocking. They had plans and wouldn't waste time not to take advantage of the five-star accommodation not to put into good use.

I drew a bracing breath. This would be another pep-talk. And let me guess, it was the boys turned since their wives couldn't change my mind of going to the party with them. Gah, it was official, I hate men!

I opened the door. "I'm great. I've moved on. And by the way, he's a dickbag and a suckass with a tiny dick. There's a lot of hot Brits around the city to blow my brains out. He doesn't care anyway. And didn't fuck me hard enough to forget my goddamn middle name."

"I was told that you are a very fascinating woman with a fiery spirit, wisecrack, and very opinionated," said the woman with a fancy coat, gloves, and a hat. Oh, god! I'd been dreaming to wear a tiny hat like hers.

My eyes flared. My cheeks were flaming. I swallowed hard and tucked my hair behind my ear, suddenly feeling mortified. And I just said awful things to her son.

I cleared my throat. "More like has the dirtiest mouth. I'm sure you don't believe what I said, right?" I flashed a guilty grin.

Her moves had me stilled and held my breath. Then she kissed me on my cheeks. "I hope you don't mind if I come in."

"Oh, god. Sorry, where are my manners? Please, come in." I eased aside, allowing her to get in.

My heart was still in full throttle, and I didn't know how to act or behave or what to say in front of her. The fact that her son and I were over, I didn't know what to expect or the reason for her visit. How did she find me, anyway? Of course, She was a Kentworthry.

"When I heard you came with your friends, I was thrilled." She stopped in front of the wide window.

"Can I offer you a cup of tea, Lady Kentworthry?"

"Don't bother, dear. Thank you. I won't stay long, but I'd love if you will just call me Myra." She smiled. I could see that it was sincere, yet it didn't reach her hazel eyes.

"Myra, would you mind if I ask why are you talking to me? I mean why are you here? Your son and I were over. And I wouldn't be coming to your party."

"That's the reason why I am here. I couldn't find your RSVP, yet you flew from States all the way here. If you won't be attending the party, my son will be devastated. He's expecting you, Megan."

"I made up my mind."

"I love Forrest more than anything, and it pains me to see his reaction when your friends arrive, and you won't be there." It hurt to hear it, but if he would be devastated like his mother said, why he didn't even reach out if he had still feelings for me.

"I'm sorry, but I have made my final decision. I haven't traveled outside the States. That's why I agreed to fly with my friends," I admitted, a half-truth.

"You were already aware of Meadow. I hope you will give him another chance. I know you still have feelings for him, and I want to see you both happy, Megan."

"You, arrogant, controlling, narcissistic, condescending prick! You, jerk, dickbag! How could you just show up here after you left me for your assholandia?"

Forrest stilled, dropped his hand from grabbing the doorknob.

"You're so dumb, you bastard!"

He turned around, wearing a confused look on his face, but his eyes gleamed and mesmerized with amusement. "Arrogant, controlling, narcissistic, condescending prick, jerk, dickbag, dumb, and bastard? Wow, woman! That was quite a handful of names. I never heard any woman who swore a lot like you, and your propensity of directness and swearing fascinate me even more. Anything else

in your vocabulary I should know about, Megan?” He sauntered toward my direction that had me stilled. “For the record, I was the one who received a call last night and left my own party to save your pretty arse. And by the way, I can’t wait to see my handprint on that pretty little arse til raw. Now say another word, but don’t blame me for your little predicament and repercussion.”

I blinked after he spoke, wiping my tears off my face. There was something in the way he talked that was very different from the Forrest back in New York. Not to mention he looked so hot with his jawline glittered with five o’clock shadow.

My shoulders sagged in defeat as the avalanche of emotion smacked me in the center.

“Please?”

Chapter 51 Touch Now or Never

MEGAN

Please?

I DIDN'T know why I had to beg, but I loved him. If I was being honest and set aside my hubris, I came because I was still hoping that we still had something to put back what we left, but my heart was scared that I let my hopes up for nothing. I couldn't just handle another heartbreak.

Before I met him, I was commitment-phobic. I wasn't looking for something more. I was just a woman who was looking for a short time pleasure and wanted nothing but sex and nothing to do with a man after we blew off some steam.

When Forrest came to my life, something shifted in me. I was done fooling around. I wanted more. I wanted a committed relationship—an intimate connection, a deep, meaningful, and a real relationship. And I found it in him.

"Please? What are you begging for?" He also looked in pain. I guessed we were both hurting with this whole situation.

My hand hung in the air, and my mouth gaped, but I couldn't say a word.

"Do you still care for me, Megan?"

"Yes."

"Do you miss what we had?"

"I do. Every damn day."

"Do you think about me every bloody time?"

I wanted to walk closer to him, but my legs felt like they weighed tons. "Hell, yes."

"Then why are you pushing me out of your life? You pushed me away once, and I was so damn stupid to walk out, but I thought to give you some time. You let me leave, and you didn't even stop me."

"You didn't resist either. I waited for your call for the whole month, but I ended up disappointed and frustrated every damn time."

"You let me leave, sounds familiar? How would I even call you when you technically threw me out of your life?"

We looked at each other. We realized that we were both doing the same for the whole month. We both let our egos ruined our relationship, that was why we were hurting.

I looked down. Admittedly, I was wrong. I realized that now.

“After I poured out my feelings and spilled the story of my whole life that nobody knew, and all I heard from you was, I can’t do this. I can’t fucking do this. I told you once, of what I am afraid of when the right time comes, and you will tell me that you can’t do this anymore. It happened, and I was hurt. Until now.”

“I know. I was just hurt.”

“And do you think I wasn’t?”

“I don’t know, Forrest. It’s just that, I had difficulty wrapping my head around everything, of who you really are.”

“You don’t know how hurt I was. I could barely bear the pain.”

I couldn’t find another word to say how sorry I was. All I could feel was regret and pain from deep down.

“Do you still care for me?”

I nodded and couldn’t look at him.

“Do you still want me?”

I nodded again. “Yes.”

The last thing I knew, Forrest was squeezing me into a tight embrace. I sagged in his arms and sighed in relief as I shook to cry.

I missed him so much that for the last month of my life I thought I was lost in the middle of the world that I couldn’t find my way back. I lost hope that happiness didn’t exist in my life anymore.

“Megan.” The throatiness in his voice as he called my name was a beckon to my heart. He kissed the top of my head. “I missed you like crazy, you know that? And I thought I was going insane every fucking day passed by without hearing anything from you.”

“Me, too.”

He inhaled sharply as if he was in pain. “Remember how I first met you?”

“How could I not? I flirted with you, and you didn’t flirt back. How could I forget when all the time, I thought I wasn’t your type.”

He chuckled. "I hated myself that I couldn't punch all the men who hit on you."

"I hated myself that I couldn't get your attention."

"You had me from the first night we met, Megan."

I rubbed his arms. "I don't know how this works, but we can do this, right?"

"Yes. We're in this together. You're not alone anymore, Megan. You have me now."

I closed my eyes. This is real. He's with me. I could feel his heartbeat against my skin. "Don't go."

"I'm not going anywhere."

"Don't leave me. Again."

"Then start by touching me. I promise I'm not infected with the virus."

"Even if you are, it's too late for the precautions, don't you think?"

"Then touch me like no one ever has."

"Are you sure?" I stiffened. This was the first time that he initiated for me to do this, and I was still shocked to see the tattoo on his back. He never slept with me shirtless, and I thought he forgot that he wasn't alone sleeping in bed.

I slowly wrapped my arms around him, placing my hands on his back.

"Yes. Do you wanna ask what does it mean?"

I pulled away and looked at him in his eyes. Forrest sat down on the bed and patted his lap. I straddled him instead. His hard-on nudged me just in the right spot. I bit lip to savor the feelings with a soft moan as I slowly rocked on him.

"Are you going to kill me?" His face was still flushed, jaw locked, and his eyes were dark and heavy with desires. I could feel his raging cock that I missed—how we made love, fucked hard to oblivion, yet he still managed to make me feel special.

I ground into him, rewarding me with a groan. "I think the feeling is mutual. Tell me about your tattoo."

"And you got another tattoo."

I cupped his face and pressed my lips into his, and he kissed me, grazing his tongue on my lower lip. I darted my tongue out to meet his and rocked myself on his lap. My hands were already busy unbuttoning his pants, grabbing his thick cock, and letting it free from his boxers.

His hands were gripping my ass, then alternately kneading my breast and pinching my nipples through my bra. I was almost breathless, my inner walls clenched and began to throb. Languid honey of excitement rolled in my blood as I felt the warmth of his tongue sucking my skin.

“We’ll talk later. I have another idea about how to make you talk.”

Chapter 52 Bare

MEGAN

“GOOD IDEA.” Then I stiffened to the sound of my ripped panties, and one shoved of his tongue into my mouth and his cock was deep inside me. I was shocked and felt full to move. His head fell down to my shoulder.

Our breathing held.

Our heartbeat somersaulted.

Our skin burned.

“Fuck, Megan. How much I missed this.” His rigid cock went deeper as I started to move my hips, feeling the fullness and the pulsing of my nerves as he hit my sensitive spot.

“Oh god! I love it when you take hard and rough on me.” My blood sizzled. My skin melted to the sensation of our melded body and his cock stretched me, and I felt so damn full.

He carried me, turned around and placed me down the bed without tearing apart. I wrapped my legs around his waist, my fingers dug into his back as he entered into me with slow and inexorably torturous push.

“Fuuuuck!” His face was in pain. His veins bulged on his forehead. His muscles strained.

“Forrest.” My voice was a breathy whisper. I was barely catching my breath as he quickened the pace relentlessly.

Tingles started to travel from my back down to my spine, and I could feel the tidal wave of my orgasm banking up. I whimpered when he kissed me back. He let out a long moan into our mouths when my inner walls pulsed around him. I relished those feelings, sighed in pleasure, and closed as my eyes as he plunged into me, held still there and buried his face in my neck, and said how much he missed me.

“I love you.” Feeling overwhelmed with my impending orgasm, and the intense feeling he made me feel, I stilled to my words. That was how a love so beautiful, powerful, and unpredictable.

He froze.

I felt he lifted his head, and I could feel the searing gaze on me.

“So you mean it?” he whispered. The relief was palpable in his voice.

I opened my eyes to meet the most beautiful smile I'd ever seen.

"You said you love me in your sleep, Megan. You're not gonna take it back, are you?"

My mind filled with jumbled thoughts, but one thing I was sure of was that my heart spoke for me. Even in my sleep.

As we stared at each other, we let our hearts and souls spoke to each other. I finally planted a light kiss on his lips.

"I won't take it back. Let me be a part of you." I shivered at my own words. It was pure; from my heart. "In fact, I am planning on showing you how I feel and telling you I love you every day until your ears give up."

"I love you more than how much I think of you." He encircled his hips, withdrew, and pushed into me so deep that I swore he nudged my womb. "You are already a part of me since I first laid an eye on you. And I am going to give everything to you even though you know that I am already yours since I first saw you. I want to show you how much you mean to me, how special you are, Megan." With his lips kissing me that had my thought scattered, his hips were thrusting into me. I cried and stunned as waves of pleasure rippled through me. Again.

Our breathing rushed and frantic.

Our senses attuned.

Our hearts beat wildly as our words penetrated and succumbed our spiral of intense pleasure reaching its climax in a blazing explosion.

"Oh, fuck! That was...I can't find the right word."

A slap on my ass cheek winced me in pain. Then he rubbed it with his palm and pulled me tightly into his arm. "I mean what I said."

"And you just spanked me."

"Then watch your language, woman."

"Yes, milord." I rolled my eyes. "We did not use a condom."

"I know. I love the feeling of being bare with you. I am clean, and I saw your pills in your bathroom."

"What if I am not clean, or I stopped using it?"

"I know you're a responsible woman, Megan."

"So, tell me."

He lied down on his abdomen. "It's my drawing since my adopted father took us into his home. I wasn't good at art, but I did that every day for over a year. I keep the copy when I finally able to make it looked like our old house burning."

"Your house?" I leisurely ran my fingers on his back, tracing the tattoos of flames and smoke. I couldn't feel his muscles tensing against my fingertips anymore.

"Hmm. I like the feeling of your fingers against my skin."

"Wait. Your burning house?"

"Yeah. When I met Milo, I asked him to tattoo the same drawing I did years ago. My first tattoo, ever. I suggested to keep it on my back. He added a few details, colors, and made it more realistic in 3D graphics."

"It's beautiful. I love it."

"Thank you. I never allowed anyone to touch my back."

"Anyone?" I lied back down.

"Yes." Forrest pulled me into his arms again. "Even Meadow." I felt the smile on his lips against the back of my neck.

"Hmm." My chest constricted.

"Relax. I'm all yours, remember? Besides, I never saw her again after she left the States. I fired her. Well, she handed Mama her resignation after that, and she's in Paris as we speak. I sent her money though. To let her start a new life."

"Why did you not allow anyone to touch your back?"

"Not my back, Megan. My tattoo. It's my roadmap towards my plan. It's a reminder, my motivation, and not just shagging random women." He chuckled.

"I see."

"I heard you didn't accept the offer at the nightclub."

"I was thinking."

"And?"

"I don't know." I turned to face him. "Maybe I was having a hard time accepting that we were over. So, I had this stupid plan in my head that I wanted to move here and make a move."

"It wasn't a stupid plan at all, but is it okay with your mom?"

“As long as I’m gonna be there when my sister is born.”

“You will do that for me?”

“There’s only one Forrest in this lifetime, is there?”

“God, I love you more.” He pressed his lips against mine, but I felt it that there was something more he wanted to say.

“What is it?” I ran my thumb on his beautiful face, down to his swollen bottom lip.

“Your tattoos. What are they?”

“Hmm.” I smiled mischievously, causing him to frown. “It troubles you, isn’t it? Karma is a bitch, Mr. Kentworthry.”

His frown deepened, staring at me with sharp eyes. “You don’t have to tell me.”

“But deep inside you’re itching to know.”

“Very much. Yeah.”

“The first one I got was my first heartbreak.”

His nose flared. “Why the fuck did you tattoo your—”

“Hey! What’s with the deal of you cursing on my face, and I can’t?” I quickly sat on the bed, and his eyes landed on my naked chest—they instantly darkened in anticipation. “Don’t look at my breasts, Forrest.” I pointed my fingers to my face. “Eyes up here.”

“I don’t like you cursing a lot. I’m sorry. And I’ve never been jealous but with you, it fucking hurts like someone is ripping my heart out of my chest. How many times I wanted to break every man’s face when I saw them flirting with you? You have no bloody idea.”

“Then you do know how I felt when I saw Meadow kissing you. It hurt like a bitch!”

He sat on the bed, leaned his back against the headboard, and nodded. “Now that we clear the air, I’m sorry about that.”

“Do you realize that lately, you apologized a lot?”

“I’m not a good person, Megan. I’ve known that for a long time. But you’re the only good thing I’ve ever done. You deserve an apology, a groveling. Fuck, I don’t even deserve you.” He tentatively raised his hand, running his fingers on my exposed shoulder.

Emotion knotted in my throat. “The first tattoo is the date of the last time I saw my dad alive.”

I watched how he froze, lifting his gaze to meet mine. Pain crossed his face and shook his head. "I-I'm so sorry." He shut his eyes closed. "Damn it. I'm screwing it up, aren't I?"

"It was my birthday. I was drunk with friends, and I wasn't even twenty-one. We were supposed to celebrate at home in the morning. So, I called my dad to come and pick me. After an hour, he called me that he was on his way. The second call I received was the EMT telling me that..." It still hurt that I was the reason he was gone, but I already accepted the fact that I couldn't have him back.

"Jesus! I feel terrible. I'm such a bloody idiot. I hope you can forgive me."

"It still haunts me. I lost a lot of people I cared about, Forrest. I lost my mother when she gave birth to me. Mom, my mother's sister took care of me while my dad was dealing with his loss. They eventually fell in love in the process and moved in together, but Mom didn't believe in marriage. Then when I thought of losing you, I couldn't bear the pain alone anymore."

"Losing me, huh? That makes sense." He lightly nodded, rubbed his lips as if he did the math.

I chuckled, amused. "You know that you don't sound like the man I fell in love with weeks ago."

His eyes flutter opened wide. "What does it suppose to mean?"

"You sound like a British Lord Kentworthry right now, and not the down-to-earth, but broody American bartender Forrest Wood I knew." I took his hand and kissed his knuckles. "Don't worry, my heart still beats for one person. British or American, I know deep in my heart, I only love the same person, and the same man right in front of me."

"I do love you even you curse a lot and doesn't filter. It's you who I fell in love with—all in one package. And I will still love you no matter how dirty your mouth can be."

"Thank you. That's the sincerest thing I ever heard from a man."

"Get used to it, my love. So, the second tattoo is?"

"You really inspect my body last night, huh?"

"I couldn't help it. I missed you so much, so I watched you like a creep while you were sleeping for a couple of hours until my eyes gave up."

"It's the um—"

"Um?" His brow arched.

I opened my mouth only to close it back.

"Megan?" He raised my arm to check the tattoo just on the left side of my breast. "This is recent."

"Yeah."

“This is not the date when we first slept together.”

“You remember that date?”

“Of course.”

“Wow.” I stared at him. He was full of surprises. “Do you have a photographic memory?”

“No, my love. I just don’t wanna forget something special.”

“It’s the day that I realized that I am in love with you.”

Chapter 53 Success Comes With A Price

FORREST

FRUSTRATION AND determination were what pushed Bill too hard. They were written all over his face every bloody day. And thanked fuck, it paid off.

Without my knowledge, he implanted the device and turned himself into a lab rat to prove to our new client that it was safe to use. For 110 days, he was on a closed watch, and it worked pretty well.

“What did you do? What the fuck have you done?”

He ignored me as he continued typing like a lunatic. I grabbed the wireless keyboard and smashed it to the floor. Bill jumped and looked frightened as he pushed his glasses up his nose.

Everyone was already standing with horror filling their eyes while my nerves were buzzing with so much anger to what he'd done without consulting me.

I was reckless and depended on everything. I was lenient because I trusted them, and that placed Bill in this position. This was all my fault.

“Is everyone around here has no tongue? Or shall I destroy everything I can see and grasp on?”

Finally, Bill cleared his throat. “It wasn't the prototype.”

I glared. “Do you think I give a fuck if it's the prototype that is in your system right now if you're already dead? Is that supposed to make me feel better? And everyone shut their fucking mouth for days?”

“I-I'm sorry, man. I just want—” I cut him off. I didn't want to hear his bullshit anymore. I couldn't. I wouldn't.

“I don't fucking care what you want! Feel sorry for your arse, for their arses, because this project is off. I'm shutting this down at this very moment!”

Shock flashed all over their faces as they gasped.

“You can't do this, man.” Pain and regrets crossed Bill's face, but I didn't give a damn. He put his life in jeopardy for this stupid project when we were not sure if this would work or not.

“Well, I just did, didn't I?”

“Give me two weeks top.”

“The answer is still no. You crossed the line and broke the protocol.”

"Do we have a protocol?" He seemed surprised by his own question.

"Do you think this is your high school science project? Did you not sign a contract? How about the million-dollar Atto Tech property in your body?"

"Oh." He pushed his glasses again, fidgeting.

I could hear my footsteps as I marched out of the lab. I felt guilty that I just ruined their careers, their dreams, their future because of one mistake. One huge terrible mistake. I heard my name being called with rushes of footsteps following me.

"Boss! Boss! Just hear me out, please?" It was Dr. Wren, our pharmaceutical scientist.

"So, you're his spokesperson now?"

"Just give me a minute."

"Nothing can change my mind, Dr. Wren."

"I know. At least allow me to place Bill under close observation. The device is already implanted."

"Then take it off."

"I can't."

"You can't or you won't?" I spun around, rage surged through my veins. I dislike insubordination, and he just did. One more word from him, I was going to burn this lab. "You are part of this stupidity. You will be summoned into my office on Monday for questioning. Every one of you."

"Sometimes we do things that may appear selfish and stupid in the eyes of other people, but in the larger context, they're actually brave and prudent."

"Brave? Prudent? How about you call it stupidity and recklessness."

"You know Diabetes is hereditary, right? Bill did that because he's tired of pricking himself, watching his diet when he had more important things to do. That guy needs to live. We need a brain like his. He is brilliant." His words made me rethink, felt guilty, and if I was being honest I would do the same, and I might have done it already.

"For a brilliant guy, he's insane."

"Damn right he is, but he has dreams, you know. He wants to be remembered before his body is consumed by complications. Give him a chance. He wants to be loved, get married, to have family, and it won't ever come true if you will stop him. He'd rather die alone than watched his children suffer the same illness he had."

"You got everything you want?"

“Yes, dad.” Bill rolled his eyes before he stepped out of the SUV.

“Don’t be hard on yourself if—”

“Thanks for boosting my confidence, dude.” He picked up the briefcase, carrying the device that could help millions of lives. “You didn’t just spend millions on it, right? So if I failed you today, I don’t know what to do next, man. Any suggestions? Like hanging myself with the rope or jumping off from your building?”

“That will be a pretty nasty fall. You won’t look good inside the casket,” I joked to ease everyone’s tension—it was pretty thick in the air. “For future purposes, why not try preserving your huge brain for another hundred years.” I chuckled. I was confident we would get this deal. “By the end of the day, trust me on this one, Bill. We are popping Champagne, and I get to see my girlfriend.” I was relieved and finally, I could breathe when the implant didn’t show any complication.

“Pretty confident, aren’t we?”

“I’m confident because I know you, man.” He believed in me and this project, and I almost ruined everything because of my selfishness and anger. Right now, I didn’t want to let them down, so I promised them to fund their next project once they would be successful with this one.

I could see he was nervous than his last presentation, but he never turned me down. “Good luck to all of you.”

“Thanks,” Engr. James said.

“We need one,” Dr. Wren agreed.

“I’ll be right here.”

Bill was presenting our project to the European Diabetes Research Center representatives from London at this moment. Atto Tech’s ideas were brilliant, whether they would take this or not, I was sure other private companies would love to have AIGMS-IADS. Just some scientists and doctors didn’t believe this Nanotech would be possible in this generation.

I checked the time on my car, it was only less than twenty minutes, but I was excited to hear the news.

My mind went back to Megan. I didn’t know if she made her decision to accept my job offer. No matter how she’d love to work with me, I knew she had ego and self-respect and wanted to get hired because she was qualified and best at what she did.

These past three months since we were back together, our relationship was great. Our long-distance relationship was harder than I thought though, but that was the essence of it. We’d been better at sharing our thoughts and feelings through call and text. I learned how to open up

because of her, and so did she. She was still an annoying, blunt, stubborn woman, and a pain in the arse, but that was what I loved about her.

My phone rang, but it wasn't Bill. "I miss you." My heart thrummed. I knew she was smiling from the other line.

"I can still feel your kiss less than an hour ago, Forrest."

"Liar."

She burst into laughter. "You ruined my moment."

"I'll be with you soon, I promise." My flight would be moved to close the deal once this project was accepted. Megan knew it.

"I know. I know you will get this deal. The AIGMS-IADS was highly advanced technology. Thank God you changed from AIDS to IADS." She laughed. "You and Billionaire are brilliant geeks."

"It's Bill Lioner."

"Whatever. I can't believe you're smarter than I thought and not to mention rich."

"I thought we passed through this thing."

"No. Never, Forrest. I don't think I can. You're a frigging billionaire with a brilliant mind. Not to mention, you're great in bed. I mean—"

"Megan."

She laughed some more. "What? Am I not allowed to give my own opinion?"

"I know you are opinionated, and it's rather refreshing."

"You sound like a British aristocrat."

"And it doesn't please you?" I smiled deviously even though she couldn't see me. When it came to sex, we ended up breathless and sweaty in our bed. And I knew right now, she got what I meant.

"You are changing the subject on purpose."

"I am just a man. A simple man who loves a woman who is incredible and gorgeous—"

"See? You can say something, but I can't."

"Have you thought about my offer?"

"Still thinking about it. I want to be with you, but I don't have to work for you."

"I know, but I want us to work together."

"You're being archaic again."

"I am not."

"You are. I may not be reporting directly to you, but you are still the boss of my boss, and technically, I am still under your command. I don't want to get my ass spanked for insubordination."

I laughed at ass spanking. "You are still making excuses."

"Okay, maybe."

"You are being stubborn. I just wanna be with you. That's all." I sighed. "Look, woman, I love you. That's what matters."

"Mansplaining. It's unfair. Anyway, how are you holding up?"

I closed my eyes in relief, but it wasn't just it. I still felt the grief of losing my real father. I thought I'd be glad that he was finally gone, but it didn't feel that way. I felt relieved though because he didn't have to suffer longer.

"Forrest, are you okay?"

"I'm fine, my love."

"It's okay to mourn. It's just been a few days. You know it took years for me to see my father's grave again? I get the gut to do that because of you. You said something that opened my heart and my mind. That's how I forgive myself. I'd been running away for so long, hiding my pain, building walls, shutting my feelings off, but when I met you, everything didn't just fall apart, it also put the broken pieces back together."

"God, Megan." My heart just melted, and I was already wiping my face and sniffing.

"Your father may be a nasty piece of work, but you're his son, Forrest, and you're just human who is capable of loving someone even how broken or how crooked the person is." She was the broken, and my father was the crooked.

"I know, but—"

"No more buts. Give yourself some time to grieve and accept things. I've been there, and I know how it feels. You may not grow up with him, but you have childhood memories with him, and I bet it was worth a memory."

"Yeah. I remembered running through the vast vineyard. It was a fun time because everyone would be there. Everyone was anticipating the time of harvest. Papa, Mama, and what I loved about was the fest. The night was lovely. I lied down on the blanket and watched the stars."

"See? You might as well try to think of forgiving him, Forrest. He asked for it. He needed that so he could rest in peace."

I chuckled sadly. "You're so amazing, you know?"

"Of course, I do know."

"I love you so much, Megan. I don't think I can live without you."

"You can, but it won't be amazing as I am with you."

I laughed out loud. "Christ, woman."

"I love you, too."

My phone beeped. "I got to go. Bill is calling."

"Okay. Call you later."

I rejected Bill's call and walked to the elevator. I took a deep breath once I was inside. If they rejected the project, maybe I could talk to one of their representatives to give it another chance.

Bill was already pacing back and forth outside the conference room of our office. Dr. Stevenson decided to see where our company operated.

"Thank God, you're here." He pushed his glasses up his nose. His curly hair was disheveled, and I felt like my world just stopped.

My gut twisted that I knew this was not great news. We'd been working our asses for two years now, and I just turned them down. "It didn't go well, did it?"

He shoved his hands on his jeans pocket and shrugged. "They're still inside... waiting. For you."

I nodded. Bill went in first, and I followed him.

"You must be Forrest Kentworthy!" I almost stumbled back when a small body launched into me with a huge hug.

"Dr. Hillary Stevenson?"

"It's an honor to meet you." She jumped to plant a kiss on my cheek. She looked tiny than I thought, but her hair was all white. She reminded me of Linda Hunt.

Everything was still fuzzy with me. It seemed that she wasn't surprised by everything. And what I wasn't expecting before I entered the room was her enthusiasm.

"The pleasure is all mine."

“Why didn’t you want to take credit, Mr. Kentworthry?”

“It’s mostly my team’s ideas. I didn’t help much other than funding the project.”

“See? He’s humble. For an English man who cares about people and never thinks of a higher offer, that’s why I love him,” she said to Bill, Dr. Wren, and James.

“Pardon?”

“We already have a few chats with your team. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Not at all.”

“For the record, whether you are a part of it or not, we’d love to partner EDRC with your company.” She held her hand out. “Let’s close the deal, shall we?”

Chapter 54 Decisions. Decisions

MEGAN

IT'D BEEN two weeks since our trip to England. After the approval of their project, I officially met his mother. I stayed for two days at their manor. Still, I found it hard to believe how rich Forrest was, how he managed his businesses during the day and worked as the lowkey bartender at night.

When I got home, I stayed with Mom for the whole two weeks, taking care of her even though she had a servant at home. I even went with her to her prenatal appointment. It was a relief that they were both healthy.

I quitted the part-time receptionist job when Beth came back to work. Last month, Forrest offered me the most attractive job that it was hard to say no to. It took two days for us to give each other the cold shoulder when I chose to turn it down.

"Can you just consider it already. It's just a job, Megan. Stop being stubborn. I bloody want this relationship to work as much as you want it. I want you to be here with me. Just say yes, please?"

"If I say no, then it is no. Stop pushing that job on me, and stop using that offer over our relationship. We can get through this. Consider my feelings, as well. What if that's not the right one for me? And this is for the long haul, Forrest. At least let me think."

"Four bloody weeks are not enough? I've been waiting for the whole damn month, and your answer is still no? Some waiting applicants are fit for the job, but I want you to have it."

"Is that so? Because I don't have bright credentials, and I'm not holding a diploma from MIT or Harvard, and I shouldn't be picky about choosing the right job for me, right?"

"That's not I meant, love."

"That's exactly what you mean. Maybe I should update my resume on why I got fired. That my boss wanted to fuck me. Well, screw you and your job offer."

After I hung up the phone, I called and apologized to him. Of course, he was Forrest, and it still made me teary on how I got so lucky to have a man like him.

I just didn't want to work with him because he was my boyfriend, but I had also to consider searching for a decent job if I had to stay in the foreign land and far from home. So, I decided to pass some resumes and did a lot of research because I knew it needed huge adjustments from culture shock and some sort, but this time I had to sacrifice something for the sake of our relationship to work.

“Why don’t you take a leave until you give birth, Mom?”

“I’m gonna be more bored at home, Meggie.” She grabbed her bag and kissed me on the cheek.

“Just take care, okay?”

“I can’t believe you’re saying this to me. I feel so old right now. I can still remember your first day at preschool. I don’t wanna let your hand go at that time.” Mom became teary-eyed.

“Let’s not make ourselves cry, okay? Take care. And I love you, Mom.”

Mom left to work, and I also had a plan to meet Camila, Bianca, and Blaine.

My last text to Forrest last night was still unseen until now. I trusted him not to do something stupid. He traveled to Africa this week, and I was worried that he might not be feeling well.

His issue with his real father was finally over. He visited his father’s grave again to offer his forgiveness. He and Myra had been able to meet without always looking over their shoulders. They’d been spending a lot of time together in London where the HQ of Kentworthry Capital was based, and then last week, they went to Paris. The word Paris had me paused. Forrest knew how I responded, and he told me not to be ridiculous.

Although I trusted him with all my heart, I couldn’t deny the fact that I was a little bit insecure with Meadow. Okay, I was insecure. She was a perfect match for Forrest, but on the other hand, Forrest chose me and he loved me. That was what made me sleep at night.

I sent another text. On my way to Bianca’s apartment, I called his number, but it went directly to his voicemail. I started to worry because this never happened before.

Before I could knock, the door swung open, revealing Bianca and Kelly on her feet. “Meg, come in.”

“Thanks.” I kissed her cheek and pulled up Kelly. “Aren’t you too cute? Missed your godfather already?” I kissed her chubby cheek, and she giggled.

“You’re late,” Camila said. Her baby bump was getting more evident every day, and now that she was wearing a navy blue dress.

“Fashionably, yes. For only twenty minutes.” I rolled my eyes.

“They had steamy video sex before she came over.” Blaine wrinkled her nose at me.

“So you never did that when Xandry was on a business trip, or when you were still friends?”

“No.” Her answer was a little bit of a defensive tone.

“Oh, come on. No need to feel shy. You married that guy anyway.”

Her cheeks turned red.

“Oh, my god!” I laughed out loud. Kelly still in my arms joined me.

“No, we hadn’t had video sex,” Blaine said defensively.

“Phone sex then?”

“He initiated, but I told him I wouldn’t do that.”

I rolled my eyes, joining them on the couch. “You’re no fun.”

She shrugged. “I find it awkward.”

“Awkward? Why would it be?”

“I don’t know. I want to touch Xandry, feel him than watching him do it over the screen.”

“You’re right, but I had phone sex with Pyke,” Camila said.

Bianca laughed out loud. “I did too.”

We burst out laughing. “Look at her, our man-hater who wishes men die in priapism. It turns out she’s dirtier and kinkier than me.”

“So, how about you?” Camila raised a brow at me.

“We’re good, and I missed him.”

Their eyes focused on me with pure awe.

“You really are leaving us, aren’t you?” Blaine asked, sadder.

“You’re all have been my anchor for years, and I couldn’t ask for more. I love you guys, but you also told me to follow my heart. I love Forrest. He’d been far from his mother and his life, and I can’t let him do that because of me. Mom is okay with this arrangement.”

Camila squeezed my hand. “I’m happy for you. I never thought you would fall for Forrest.”

“Why not? Is that a bad thing?”

“Of course not.” She rolled her eyes. “I love that man. He is thoughtful and loving. I know you will be in good hands. I couldn’t wish any man for you, Meg. He loves and cares about you so much. I could see it in his eyes since you two started sleeping behind our backs.”

“What? We didn’t—” My eyes widened as I stared at them one by one.

They'd known it all along. Of course. I could feel my face burned that they knew we were sleeping together before I ran to Camila that night. I'd never been ashamed of my sexual exploration, but they'd known Forrest, and he was one of our friends.

"No need to feel embarrassed. He's a catch. But do you think we didn't know how you two eye-fucked each other?"

"Language," I chided Bianca. "When I first saw him that night at Night stalker, his eyes literally lit up."

"When was that?" Camila asked Bianca.

"When you and Pyke first met. Remember how you hit him?"

"Wow! That was two years ago," Camila said in surprise, then looked at me. "Why just now?"

"I don't know. I think good things come to those who wait," I said proudly.

Blaine laughed. "I know right?"

I sighed, sinking myself into the couch. "But he's been ignoring me since last night."

Camila's brows furrowed. "What do you mean?"

"He's not replying to my message. It's not typical of him. I can't just call Alan or his mother and ask them where the hell is Forrest, why is her son suddenly ignores me, can I?"

"And I can't believe the owner of the gym and tattoo shop where Kyland worked before is actually Forrest's butler," Bianca replied. "But don't worry, it's less than a day."

"Then what? We'll inform the British cops from the States that Forrest is missing? Inform his security detail? I'm sure they will inform you if he's kidnapped by his dead father." Blaine chuckled.

"That's not even funny." I scowled at her.

"You are not helping," Bianca chided her sister. "He must be busy. He'll call you. Just have patience. Remember what you just said good things come to those who wait."

"I'm an impatient person."

"Jeez, Meg. You just missed little Forrest. Bring her a martini, B," Camila ordered.

Bianca stood up. "He's head over heels with you. Don't tell me you're thinking about their Paris trip that he and that bitch get back together?"

"I thought of that," I admitted.

"I thought you love and trust that hot lord?" Camila pointed out.

“Of course, I do.” I rolled my eyes. “And he’s not a lord.”

“To us, he is. That must be them.” Camila stood up when the door swung open.

“Ugh!” I shut my eyes closed. I didn’t have to look at the door since my man would be impossible to be around. And they would be lip-locking with their husbands at this very moment.

I missed him so much. I would be flying the same day to England once I got my job. I guarantee that.

“God, I can’t do this.”

A kissed on my forehead by soft and firm lips had me froze in my seat. The familiar smell reached my nostrils. The tingles quickly spread all over my skin.

Oh, my god.

Chapter 55 Make Up Date

MEGAN

MY HEART stopped, then jackhammered. It instantly followed with a fluttery feeling scattered in my stomach. This was impossible. I must be dreaming.

“Miss me?” A soft deep voice and warm breathing confirmed my doubt. Then he pressed his lips against mine.

I slowly opened my eyes, and I met the most mesmerizing eyes, smiling down at me.

“Hi.” My voice came out a breathless whisper.

“Hey, my love,” he whispered. “I missed you.” He pressed his lips longer. When we parted, he drew me into a hug, and I was still shocked to respond. I tried to process everything when he sat beside me, pulling me into his arms. “Say something.”

I turned my head to look at him. “Say something? Really? Can’t you even at least call me or leave a text before you fly over hundreds of miles over here? I was worried sick, Forrest! If you happen not to be here, or I won’t hear anything from you in twelve hours, I will be calling or head of security and the police that you are missing. And I thought—”

“I’m sorry.” He kissed me again to stop me. “I just wanna surprise you, but I think it’s a mistake because you seem not fancied of surprises.” His expression suddenly changed, hurt glinting in his eyes.

I realized my friends were still around, narrowing their eyes at me as if I just committed one of the seven deadliest sins.

I sighed. “I’m sorry, I overreacted. I guess this is how I feel and deal with missing you. And I am worried because it’s not like you who will ignore my message.” I wrapped my arms around his neck and dragged myself to sit on his lap. I closed my eyes to appreciate this moment. “It doesn’t matter. You’re here now.”

I missed him terribly, and being in his arms again felt perfect. I didn’t think I could take any moment without him by my side. I needed him. I wanted him. And since he was mine, there was no way I would ever let him go back alone.

“It won’t happen again.” He kissed me again. This time, it was slow with pure passion, taking his time to show me how he missed me.

“No. It’s okay. I love surprises, especially coming from you.”

"I know how it's nostalgic to see your best friends with their husbands. I thought coming here unannounced was the best idea."

"Yeah, it is. I have to tell you something."

His brows met together. "What is it, Megan?"

"I sent resumes. Then when I Googled, I figured that I don't need a visa to be with you for six months. So maybe, you can help me with something though."

"Anything, my love." He was now smiling.

"Like searching for an apartment close to my future job. And I also think that it's time for me to swallow my pride. So I'm willing to work with you if, in return, I get to be with you every damn day."

Forrest's eyes glittered with amazement. "You think, huh? Why overthink it? You could have just told me about your plan. You're hired then. And just for the record, I'm willing to do the same for us."

"I think I was supposed to surprise you, too." I grinned sheepishly.

"Very well then. I have to send a few emails to change my plans."

"Your man cave. Why are we here?" I was surprised when he opened another door. The cold rush of air blew my face. Then I realized we were at the roof terrace. It had a small dining and lounge area with an outdoor fireplace and covered TV.

"Remember when you ran away?" Forrest pulled me closer, kissing the top of my head. "I was worried, and I couldn't think straight. I thought Papa's men took you to teach me lessons."

I cupped his face and looked at the most handsome mouth-watering man I'd ever met. My heart fluttered. I glimpsed in his eyes the pure love, honesty, and vulnerability. And he made me fall in love with him all over again.

"I'm sorry about that. I was just terrified."

"It's all right. I thought I wanted to take you out on a date or have dinner with you here when I came back from Boston, but things didn't go as I planned. So, let me make it up to you tonight."

"This is a lovely place, Forrest." I looked around one more time. "Where did get those vintage oil lamps? I did not notice them earlier." I stared at them everywhere in awe.

“Because the lights were on when we arrived. Now that they’re off, those lamps give the glow to the entire place.”

“Wow. It’s amazing.” There was a bottle of wine in the bucket, glasses, a tray of strawberry with bowls of dark and white chocolates, and a large bucket of popcorn on the table. I couldn’t help but laugh. “Really? Popcorn?”

He shrugged. “Because we’re gonna watch your favorite movie.”

“And what’s my favorite movie?” I arched a brow.

“One of many is *Pretty Woman*.” He held my hand and guided me to the lounge, facing the huge TV screen. Once I settled, he served us wine and sat beside me with a bucket of popcorn. “Save the best for last.”

“Which is?”

“Us.” We tossed and took a sip of our wine. “Making out, then later make love.”

“Oh. That’s a good plan.” The movie started rolling. He moved closer to me and covered us with a blanket. I leaned my head on his shoulder and his chin above my head. Forrest was in his perfect-boyfriend mode—he never missed making me feel special every damn day.

Barely months ago, I thought the kind of man like Forrest never existed anymore, I was wrong. I may be bold, but I was glad I made a move because I felt that we had something to share—our passion, interests, trust, love, and respect.

“I’m so lucky to have you, Megan.”

I lifted my head and kissed him on the lips. “The feeling is mutual. I think you just found your pretty woman, Forrest.”

He smiled down at me and kissed me softly on my lips down to my jaw, to my neck. It was barely a brush, almost chaste, but my toes curled. I closed my eyes and bit my bottom lip to hold the moan, but I shivered anyway. I purred when he licked the soft skin on my neck.

I could feel the corner of his lips twitching as he was aware of the effect he had on me.

“You’re gorgeous when you did that. And I’d love to watch more romantic movies with you every night before we sleep, but I’d love to peel you out of this dress, and be my dessert right now.”

Unable to keep my greedy hand to myself, I slid between his thighs and found him hard and eager. “Screw the *Pretty Woman*. Kiss me.”

Chapter 56 About Babies

MEGAN

FORREST WAS the sole heir of his father's fortune. He donated every penny to the Cancer Research Center in Manchester. Last month, I was thankful that we would be able to adjust Forrest's schedule for the groundbreaking of his old house into a clinic. Yes, my man was a damn philanthropist.

Myra had a successful charity event on behalf of the battered women in the city. Alan was back in town to continue his businesses.

And I, on the other hand, had no more escape but to accept the job offer in his Atto Tech Company. That was three months ago. At first, it was awkward when I was welcomed into the office. Everyone raised a brow, but when they found out that I was dating their boss, they backed off and treated me with respect as the new financial manager to the most eligible bachelor CEO in the city.

Two days ago, we were back in New York, and hopefully, we would be there when Camila and Pyke welcomed their first son. Kelly was still closed to Forrest. Blaine and Xandry, well, they were very happy with their kids.

Then, Baby Agnes was born healthy at seven pounds. And as a big sister, I was so thrilled that Mom made it through despite her age. After a day of her recovery in the hospital, she and my sister were released.

Mom and the sperm donor, Trevor had great chemistry, and they were officially dating because I could feel the sexual tension between them even from a distance. And the adoration in Trevor's eyes every time he looked at Mom and Agnes was off the chart.

"You shouldn't be carrying, Mom." I stood from the couch when Mom walked into the living room with Baby Agnes in her arms. "Let me take her and have a seat, please?"

"You worried too much. I have to eventually ambulate for fast recovery, Meggie." She gave me Agnes, who slightly opened and squinted her blue eyes.

"Aw. She's so pretty."

Mom glanced at the guys, and I looked at the love of my life. He must have felt me staring at him. Forrest smiled and winked at me, then his gaze fell to the baby in my arms, taking a few seconds.

"That man is madly in love with you, Meggie. And he wants to have children with you."

"You're being ridiculous." I rolled my eyes. "You read it wrong. The effect of painkillers must have not worn off yet, mother."

"I am drugs-free, Meggie. Haven't you noticed his gesture? Of course, you didn't." Mom literally rolled her eyes at me.

"Well, mother, we've only been dating for less than a year. That topic didn't cross our minds yet. We didn't even talk about our future, and I am still on birth control, duh."

"Trust me, he wants to. He just wanna make it slow because of you, honey. Before you two were together, it didn't even occur to you to date, what more raising your own kid." Mom's words made me think.

Forrest and I talked a lot about many things, especially when we were in France. We made love in the cellar. It was funny when he mentioned about building his own house in that vineyard.

"He doesn't want to scare you. And you two are still having fun, exploring, and in the stage of getting to know each other. But he always wanted to have a family."

"I love him, Mom. So much that I don't think I can live without him. I can't even believe I'm saying this. If he wants to have children, I will give him. All he has to do is ask. He may be a jealous, overprotective, and annoying hot CEO, but I know he will be a good father. People say that an apple doesn't fall far from the tree, but that tree might be the man who treated him as his own blood."

"I can see that. He adores Kelly, and so as Agnes."

"And so as Ben and Sammer."

"Your friends have kids now, and I'm sure he wants a kid on his own soon, but I want you to walk down the aisle before getting pregnant, Meggie."

I laughed, and I might have surprised Baby Agnes. "Oops. Sorry, baby Agnes."

Since I spent a lot of time with Forrest, my view of relationships had changed. All I wanted was to give him the love and happiness I could ever give. When people said to keep a little love to yourself, I would say, I'd rather be selfless. Forrest was the best thing that ever happened to me. We may fight over something, but that was part of nurturing what we had. I still loved every second of it, and we still ended in the same bed, cuddling each other.

"Hey, you should not do that," Forrest whispered. "Can I take her so that you two can laugh however you want."

I gave him Agnes, and Mom raised a brow at me as if telling me she was right.

“Fine.” I mouthed and smiled at her in delight.

“You’re so good with kids, Forrest,” Mom commented. I knew she wanted to say more, but I gripped her knee to stop her blurting out what we talked about earlier.

Forrest might have noticed my discomfort. He smiled at us. “Kids are like little angels. And they’re adorable no matter how naughty there are.”

“What were you and your mom talking about earlier?” Forrest took off his shirt, and I was shrugging off my dress.

“Nothing. Just some motherhood stuff, and you’re not interested in that sort of thing, Forrest.”

He wrapped his arms around my waist and pressed his hard body against mine. His lips twitched at the corner as if he meant something else. “I’m always interested in everything you talk about.”

He leaned down, and I chuckled and claimed his lips before he could talk further that might freak me out if Mom was right. Flame scorched my heated skin as his hands traveled down my ass, giving them an equal measure of a squeeze, while I was busy zipping down his pants. He gasped into our mouths as I let his already hard length free, giving it slow strokes.

Heat pooled low in my stomach. My abdominal muscles contracted against his touch as his hand went lower where I ached the most. He gave me a long satisfying groan when he found me wet and ready for him.

All of a sudden, my mind went to mom’s words—what if I stopped taking my pills? How did it feel to have a growing baby inside me? Absolutely, as long as he would be with me.

He broke the kiss, exhaling deeply. At the sound of his deep frustrated voice, I opened my eyes, meeting his dark eyes, studying me intensely. “Megan, what is it? Your mind is somewhere in the alternate universe.” It definitely went there.

“I just love you, and after my conversation with Mom, I realize I haven’t given you enough.”

“Wrong, love. I love you. Your love is enough. You’ve given me almost everything. You are my everything, Megan.”

Epilogue

MEGAN

Four months later...

OUR DAYS in New York were over. After attending two fundraising events, meeting with investors, and a dinner date with Forrest, I didn't think I could still stand straight. I was exhausted. I just wanted to throw myself in the bed and sleep for a day. Not that I was complaining, in fact, I was beyond grateful for everything.

But I invited my friends to come over to the private jet we chartered before we headed back to England. I popped a Champagne.

Since Forrest traveled a lot, he planned on purchasing a jet. He let me look over the reports, investments, and insurance of the new Atto Tech project last month.

"What are we celebrating? Don't tell me Lord Kentworthry is buying this jet?" Pyke joked.

"Not this one. But it's more than that." I bit my lip.

The girls awwed at me.

"You're definitely not pregnant because you've been drinking wine," Camila clarified.

"I am not, silly."

"You're not engaged either." Blaine looked at my fingers.

"Can't she celebrate for finally having a man? I've been waiting for this moment, you know," Bianca said. "Forrest is hot, and his accent is getting sexier, and—"

"Okay, okay, wife. Enough complimenting Forrest." Kyland gave his wife a flute. "But I'm happy for you, Meg. Wait, where's Forrest?" He looked around.

"He'll be here in a minute. He went to meet Alan and Milo before we head back." I sipped my Champagne. "I just wanna thank you for never giving up on me even I was bitchier most of the time. I love you guys and all your babies. I may be far from all of you, but you will always be in my heart. In our hearts."

"You should." Bianca squeezed me. "I love you, Meg."

"Love you, too, B."

"You can forget us for a while while you and Forrest are, you know." Camila giggled.

“Babe,” Pyke warned.

“Don’t tell me they never had sweaty—”

“Okay, not another word. They are our friends, and we shouldn’t be thinking something like that.” Pyke wrapped Camila into a warm hug.

“Something like what?” Camila asked her husband innocently.

“Babe...”

“Fine, Killjoy.”

I took a deep breath when I heard footsteps approaching. And then there he was, still mouth-watering and jaw-dropping of a man. He was wearing a white shirt, showing off the tattoos on his arms that I always loved. He still managed to give me the same effect—even way better after all these amazing months.

“Hey.” He found me gawking at him, causing his lips to curve up into a smile that had my heart hammered.

“Why are you so nervous, Meg?” Blaine whispered, but I kept my gaze to the man I wanted to be a part of my life forever. I know, I’m way over my head.

“My love.” He sauntered closer, held my hands, and kissed me on my lips.

“Hi,” I said breathlessly.

His brows squished together. “You okay? You look flushed.”

“I’m fine. It’s the Champagne or maybe I’m just turned on.” I blinked it off. So much for rehearsal, Megan.

“I can aid that once we take off,” he whispered his promise, and my body quickly responded with anticipation.

“I know.” I nodded like a fool as I stared at him, determined with my plan. “But there’s something I want to tell you. Or ask you...”

“Can’t it wait?”

“No.”

“Okay. Can we at least sit down?”

“No.”

Forrest stilled, looking nervous, but so was I. “What is it, Megan?” He swallowed hard. “You’re scaring me.”

“I am not breaking up with you.”

He sighed in relief. “Good good. You better not.”

I cleared my throat. “I know this is unusual, but I can’t wait any longer. These past few days, I imagined how my life would be without you. I’d been on that path once, and the feeling was awful. I don’t wanna visit that road again. I wanna be happy, and it would be impossible without you in it. I love you so much, Forrest Wood. Forrest Kentworthry. I want you to be mine forever. Mine only.”

“I love you so much, Megan. And I am yours, you know that. Since from the very beginning.” His words seeped through my heart, through my blood, my skin, my bones, and my souls.

Despite my blurry eyes and my voice started cracking, I drew a deep breath and took all my heart even if maybe he would reject me, and my effort would be gone to waste. “Then marry me.”

Everyone gasped around us. Even Forrest. He was even stunned to respond to me.

The jet went dead silence. All I could hear was my heartbeat like a drum to my ears.

My skin started to tingle, and my heart was about to burst out of my chest in anticipation and worry when seconds passed by, and Forrest hadn’t uttered a word. I seized my last hope.

I was about to be on one knee, but Forrest, my man who was so gentleman like he always was, he pulled me up.

“Megan.” Then it was the scariest thing I’d ever felt in my whole life.

My breathing held with his sudden gesture. My heart nearly stopped. Is he gonna say no? But then, he took my place. He was on his knee in front of me, surrounded by my friends.

Someone said oh, my god. I thought it was Blaine. Then my friends started giggling.

“You always wanted to change things, Megan. You changed me into a better person. Despite our differences, you learned to love me, and that’s what makes me love you, even more, each day.” He smiled, affection filled his eyes. “You just ruined my plan, my love, but that’s what makes us perfect together because we certainly have been thinking the same thing. Since I met you, I knew something shifted in me, in my heart, in my soul, in the air. I could go on for hours to say a lot of beautiful things about you and how lucky I am to have you. One thing for sure since I laid an eye on you, your back actually. You were wearing a red dress at that time, I knew that I would never stop doing something, just for you to be mine. Permanently. It just took a while, but I’m a patient man, and you know that. I want you to be mine, only mine, for the rest of my life. To be with me

until we grow old together. Megan Denise Simons, will you give me the honor of becoming your husband?" Then he pulled something from his pocket, flipping the black velvet box open.

The engagement ring.

Oh, my god! He'd been planning all this time.

"Yes!" My tears fell. I nodded, bursting into tears as I threw myself down on him. We ended up both on the floor, and our friends were applauding as we kissed and laughed with so much happiness.

I may be far from my friends and family, but I found my home in him.

"I love you."

"I love you, Megan. My love."

The End