

[Insider] Executive Privilege Ch. 16

The door to Michael's office was open a fraction of an inch, just enough to let a sliver of light cut across the hallway carpet. Wendy pushed it open and stepped inside, letting it click shut behind her. She held her lips in a tight smile as her heels tapped across the floor. The physical soreness radiating through her thighs from the conference table the night before was still there, a dull, pulsing ache, but she buried it beneath a veneer of absolute triumph.

She'd barely spoken to Michael since yesterday. He'd left her presentation with Jack in a huff, and she knew he was still mad. She wore a grey dress that showed way too much cleavage. He wouldn't be able to stay mad at her for long.

When she walked in, Michael was seated behind his desk, reviewing something on his laptop. He didn't look up immediately. Usually, when they were alone behind a closed door, the atmosphere shifted.

"You wanted to see me?" She took a seat in the chair across from him, crossing her legs. The dress rode up on her thigh, just enough. She didn't bother adjusting it.

Michael finished whatever he was reading, and grumbled to himself. Wendy couldn't help but notice the crumbs on the front of his shirt. She glanced toward the waste basket and saw a package of Little Debbie Doughnuts.

"Jack called me on his way to the airport." He finally looked up. His gaze was dark, and never left her eyes.

She shifted in her chair, adjusting her dress again.

"He said the dinner went well." He let out a breath, licking his lips. "In fact, he couldn't stop raving about you at all. Said it was the best presentation he'd ever seen."

Wendy sat up a little straighter, allowing a smile to grow on her lips. "You sound surprised."

She watched him for the flicker of warmth that usually came after a win like this. The half-smile. A double-innuendo about celebrating. She felt an odd pang of disappointment when none of that came.

Michael just looked at her. His eyes went to the hem of the dress for a second, the way they always did, then came back to her face. But there was none of the heat there usually was. No pull.

He leaned back in his chair and the leather creaked under his weight.

"Walk me through the dinner."

She tilted her head. "Walk you through it how?"

His eyes were cold. She felt a vulnerability that she didn't normally associate with him. She brushed it off. He was playing coy.

"I want to hear exactly what happened with Jack."

She looked up at Michael through her lashes, smiling seductively. "Are you feeling a little left out?" She let her fingers drift to the neckline of her dress, adjusting it just enough so Michael could clearly see the white lace underneath.

Except, he didn't bother looking. He didn't even so much as smirk.

"Wendy, I've done this long enough to know that executives don't give praise like 'best ever' over fun conversation and cocktails."

Her fingers dug so hard into her palm it hurt. She'd expected to be doing this over scotch, not like she was being interrogated. She uncrossed her legs and recrossed them the other way, but his gaze stayed on her face.

"Are you asking if I fucked him?"

The words spilled out before she could stop them. She was being blindsided. She'd come in here ready to hear him singing her praises, not sitting across from her acting like her father.

"Did you?"

The flicker of irritation that had been sitting in her chest since she walked in sharpened into rage. She'd done everything right. She'd pitched like he'd taught her. Used her mind and her body to even the playing field. She'd held her ground. She'd worn a dress he'd picked out, and he was sitting there like she was a junior rep who'd missed a deadline.

She took a breath.

"No." Let him hear what that question cost him. "We had dinner. He got a little handsy. After a couple glasses of wine he invited me back to his room and I declined. I..."

She stopped.

She hadn't told him about the national rollout. She knew the second that she did he would want his fingerprints on it, and she was determined to prove she didn't need that.

"I..."

"You what?"

His breathing had gone a touch shallow. He was watching her face with an intensity she usually only got in bed, and for the first time that morning her pulse kicked up in a way she didn't like. A flush crept up her neck that had nothing to do with the dress.

His gaze cut to his monitor.

She watched him read. Watched his jaw set. Watched his lips pull back into something that wasn't a smile.

"Perhaps the words you're looking for have something to do with this."

He turned the monitor toward her and her stomach dropped through the floor. It was an email from Jack. The board meeting this morning had gone well and a national rollout had been approved.

"Michael, I was going to tell you. I wanted it to be a surprise. I..."

"Did you fuck him?" It came out like a growl.

"I already said, I didn't." Her hand drifted to her ring as her voice rose. She couldn't believe how childish he was being.

She leaned forward in the chair, her hands open on her thighs. "I was going to tell you about the pitch. I... I wanted to surprise you with it was all. Make you see how much I was learning from you."

The lie came so quickly she nearly believed it herself. She kept her eyes locked on his, wanting him to see how unflinching she was to help sell it.

He studied her for a long time, neither of them looking away or speaking. He sat back in his chair, letting a heavy breath out of his nose.

"We're supposed to be in this together."

"We are."

"All the times I've gone to bat for you. I hand picked you for the Fireball account. I got you the promotion to director."

"I know I just—"

"When the Corsetti brothers wanted to cut you out I was the one who held the line."

Tears welled in Wendy's eyes. Her shoulders began to sag and her head fell forward.

"All I've asked for in return is your loyalty. Instead, you tried to cut me out of this deal. You fucked Ja—"

"I didn't fuck him!" She slammed her hands on his desk, starting abruptly. Tears stained her cheeks that she didn't remember spilling.

Michael's eyes went wide and he glanced at the wall he shared with Brian. He closed his eyes and ran his fingers through his thinning hair. "Then what happened? How'd you really get this deal?"

Wendy bit the inside of her cheek as she studied him. That's when she saw it. When she walked in here she saw the line between his brows, the way his jaw was set. She'd thought it was anger, that he was jealous of the time she'd spent with Jack, or excluding him to prove she could do it on her own. But it wasn't anger, it was hurt. He wasn't pouting or being petty. She'd wounded him.

She sat back down in her chair.

"Tell me what happened."

She nodded. "Like I said, he wanted to take things back to his hotel." She was whispering now. "But I knew what would happen if we went back there. I... I knew he wanted to fuck me, so I did what you always said to do. I used it to my advantage."

She watched as his pupils dilated. "I told him I had the slide deck back at the office. When we got there things... escalated."

"Escalated how?" Michael struggled to keep his voice calm.

"We started to kiss. He knew I was aroused. Before I realized it, he had my panties off and he was fingering me."

Michael's hands curled into fists on the desk.

"But I stopped him after that. I told him that we need to save something to properly celebrate the board signing off on the expansion."

Michael didn't speak for a long moment. He pressed his thumb against his lower lip and stared at something past her left shoulder. She could hear the clock on his bookshelf ticking and she wondered if it had always done that.

"Okay."

It came out quiet. His expression was hard, and he still wasn't looking at her.

"Michael—"

"You kept him on the hook." He let out a slow breath through his nose. "That part I don't have a problem with."

She waited for the rest.

"What I have a problem with is you closing a deal that big without me in the room." His jaw worked. "You should have told me you were going for the national rollout. I have history with Jack."

"I know."

He ignored her. "Instead, you thought you could handle it by yourself and look where that got us. If this is going to work you can't go behind my back and make deals."

She nodded.

"I'm not going to belabor it."

She waited for the rest. For him to say next time come to me, or some version of it that she'd heard over the years. Instead, he turned his monitor back toward him and exhaled through his nose.

"You got the rollout. It's done."

Her shoulders loosened a fraction. She'd survived it. It had cost her a little dignity, but she was otherwise unscathed.

"Thank you. I—"

"We'll discuss it more later." He said it without looking at her, his hand pushing the mouse around his desk.

"What does that mean?"

He finally looked up. A small, tight smile touched the corner of his mouth. His gaze dipping to her cleavage. "Like I said. We'll discuss it later." His gaze met hers. "Is there anything else?"

When she walked in here this morning she'd expected praise, recognition for a job well done. Now she felt foolish and small. She should have let it end there, but she hadn't even told him the worst part.

"Actually... yes."

Michael didn't move. She watched his face go perfectly still and she almost swallowed it back.

She told him everything. About Trevor finding her panties, about her agreeing to give him head and everything that happened next.

He didn't say anything at first. His hand closed into a fist on the desk and a muscle in his jaw twitched.

"Why didn't you tell me immediately?"

"Because I handled it, Michael. There's nothing left—"

"You didn't handle anything. You left us exposed." The energy between them was electric. The hair on the back of Wendy's neck stood up as he spoke. "He came in there fishing, Wendy. He didn't have anything. A pair of panties on the floor could've been anyone's. You gave him the rest."

"You didn't see him. He thought—"

"Now he knows. Now he's got something real." He shook his head. "You think a guy like Trevor walks away from that? He's going to come back. Next week, next month, whenever he wants something. And every time he does he'll know exactly what works."

Her mouth was dry. "I shut it down. I told him it was a one-time thing—"

"And he agreed. Of course he agreed." Michael almost laughed. "Was that before or after he was inside you?"

She flinched.

"Michael."

"I'll handle it."

"What does that—"

"I said I'll handle it."

She opened her mouth and closed it again. Whatever he meant by handle it, he wasn't going to tell her, and she wasn't sure she wanted him to.

She stood and rushed out of the office without another word.

In the hallway she pulled the door shut behind her and stood there with her hand on the wood for a second longer than she needed to. Her thighs ached. She could still feel the edge of the conference table pressed into her hips from the night before, and somehow the ache was worse now than it had been an hour ago.

She'd walked in expecting to collect a win. She couldn't quite remember, now, what the win was supposed to have been.

Jon sat in his office staring blankly at the monitor. The sun was still coming up and from the angle it was at, it was hitting his monitor dead center. He needed to get up and adjust the blinds or turn the monitor. He did neither.

Instead, he thought about last night. Wendy had gotten home late, which wasn't a surprise, he knew she had dinner plans with Jack. She'd said Michael wasn't going to be there, she was

excited about the prospect of handling a client alone. His stomach twisted and he adjusted his glasses. Approximately twenty-five percent of married couples experienced infidelity in their marriage. But would Wendy really sleep with a client?

He closed his eyes, fighting back the nausea that was building in his chest. He didn't think she would. There were plenty of clues to suggest she'd been unfaithful with Michael, but Jack Peterson? He shifted in his seat as he thought about how she acted when she came home. She'd gone straight to the shower, which wasn't anything new these days for Wendy. It was what happened when she got into bed that had his mind racing.

He could still feel her pressed into his back. The way she'd kissed his neck and asked how his day had been. His pants grew tighter just thinking about it. Then her hand had wrapped around his cock. The lace of her panties against his skin. He'd groaned before he could stop himself, and she'd just kept stroking.

He hated how much he enjoyed it. He hated even more that she only did it on nights when she'd disappear for hours on end with Michael. Except, now she'd done it when she was out with Jack.

Before he could analyze it anymore, he was broken from his thoughts as Jenny tapped on the office door.

"I brought coffee," she said, smiling. She wore a black blouse with the top two buttons undone. "Don't worry, yours is boring and black."

"It's not boring. It's practical. You don't need all that extra sugar to—"

"Yeah, yeah, I know. Sugar gives a false sense of energy and some percentage of people crash harder than not having anything at all."

"Sixty-seven percent." He smiled. She seemed to be the only one who could get him to do that lately and he wasn't sure how to process that.

"Whatever you say." She dropped into the chair and rolled next to him, tucking one leg under her body. "Alright. Where are we at?"

Jon turned his monitor away from the glare of the sun. He was thankful for the company. He was also happy that having Jenny there would allow him to focus on work and not let himself get caught up in last night.

"I cleaned up the seasonal overlay." He pulled up the Reinhart account.

She leaned in to read, and a strand of hair fell across her cheek. She tucked it behind her ear without looking up.

"Oh, that's better," she said. "You stripped the farmers' market bump all the way out?"

"Exactly. Their weekday numbers are worse than we thought, but—"

"Any lift we deliver will stand out more."

"Exactly." He nudged her. "See, you're getting it."

"I had a good teacher." She smiled at him, her brown eyes twinkling in the sunlight. She leaned back in the chair, wrapping both hands around her coffee. "Seriously. I think I've learned more in the last couple weeks than in the months I was chasing Michael around."

The sound of his name made Jon's pulse tick up. He grabbed his coffee, letting the warmth of it burn away the anger. "Thanks. Having a mentor who is good at training really can make all the difference in the world."

"Marcus, right?" She shifted in her chair like she was suddenly nervous about something.

"That's right."

"What was he like? Working for him, I mean. I never really got a chance to interact with him."

Jon leaned back in his chair. The question shouldn't have caught him off guard. Marcus had been the most important person in his career, and talking about him should have been easy, but after everything that happened, it wasn't.

"He was..." Jon stopped, choosing his words carefully. "He was the guy who taught me this job in a way that actually made sense. People like Michael, they like to talk about how it's all dazzling people with presentations. Marcus was the first one to tie it back to numbers for me. I owe him..." Tears stung the back of his eyes. "everything."

Jenny watched him, her gaze softening. For a minute he thought she might actually reach out and embrace him. Her gaze went to her purse, then back to Jon.

"Can I ask you something kind of personal?"

His stomach did a flip. "Sure."

"It's just... I know you and Marcus were close." Her thumb moved along the edge of the coffee cup. "The stuff about him and Ava. Do you really think it happened?"

Jon didn't answer right away.

The strip of sun had moved across the desk and was now cutting over the top of Jenny's hair. She wasn't quite looking at him. She was looking at the monitor, but her shoulders had turned toward him and the coffee cup had stopped moving. He considered how much he should tell her.

"I didn't want to believe it... at first." Jon closed his eyes, remembering that day. "Wendy had gotten off late. She said..." His jaw clenched. He didn't want to believe she was involved. "She was so upset and she said she saw them together." He shook his head. "Actually, that isn't what happened. I... I assumed that's what she was trying to tell me. The email came at the same time and I just assumed..."

Jenny didn't interrupt. She just kept watching him, her thumb still on the edge of the cup.

"She didn't actually say it. I... I filled it in." His mouth was dry. "Marcus and Ava were both gone by the end of that week."

"You haven't talked to him since?"

Jon shook his head. "After the announcement I didn't think... I'm a horrible friend."

Jenny reached out her hand, finding his. "You're not. But, if your entire world got turned upside down wouldn't you want a friend?"

Jon squeezed her hand. She was right. He was so caught up in his own life, in Wendy, that he hadn't even thought about reaching out to Marcus. Even if it wasn't to talk about the allegations, he needed a friend.

Jenny pulled her hand away and they went back to the data on screen without another word. By ten, the office was buzzing with the usual hustle and bustle of the day. Jenny collected her things and stood up.

"I have a couple of meetings this morning. Want to finish this up at lunch?"

Jon hadn't heard from Wendy yet this morning. But it'd been ages since they had lunch together, and he didn't expect today to be any different.

"Yeah. I'd like that."

Before she turned to leave, a knock landed against the open doorframe. Jon looked up to see Trevor was leaning in, a cup of coffee in his hand.

"Hey bud," he said, with a smile wider than Jon had ever seen him wear.

"Morning, Trevor."

"Either of you seen Wendy around this morning? I've got something that needs her attention." He took a sip from his mug, his eyes dancing with excitement.

Jenny glanced at Jon, her brows pinching together, then back at her laptop.

"I think she had a meeting with Michael this morning." Jon caught the pained look in Jenny's eyes.

"Of course she does. Early bird and all that, I guess." Trevor raised the mug in a mock toast.

Jon's hand tightened on his pen. "Is there a message you want me to get to her?"

"Nah." He held Jon's gaze. "I'm sure I'll find her later."

He tapped the doorframe twice with the bottom of the mug and disappeared down the hall.

Jon stared at the empty doorway. He could hear Trevor whistling something as he walked away, the sound fading toward the kitchen.

"That was weird," Jenny said.

"Yeah."

Jenny stood back up. "Anyway, I'll come find you at lunch."

She smiled softly at him, then disappeared back to her desk.

Wendy sat in her office staring at the monitor. She'd pulled the blinds halfway to cut the glare off the river, but in truth she wasn't that focused on the screen. She was still thinking about Michael, about the way he looked at her. Not the angry glare when she first walked in, the hurt in his eyes when she'd told him about the rollout. The only other time she'd seen that amount of vulnerability in his eyes was when she was looking at pictures of his nephews. A slow fire smoldered under her skin as she tried to piece together what that meant.

On screen, Jack's email sat open in front of her.

Board approved. \$50M. National rollout. Congratulations, Wendy.

Her mouth pulled into a smile every time she read it. Then her eyes drifted up to the cc line and the smile slipped.

She'd been staring at that line for twenty minutes, trying to decide if Jack had done it out of professional courtesy or if Michael had somehow gotten to him first. It didn't really matter. The result was the same. She'd walked into Michael's office this morning thinking she had Jack eating out of the palm of her hand. That her success in this role was a foregone conclusion. She left once again feeling like Michael was the reason for her success.

She reached for her phone.

Thank you for moving on this so quickly. I'm glad the board saw what we saw. Looking forward to New Orleans and celebrating.

She paused and reread the message. After her meeting with Michael the message suddenly felt wrong. She started over.

Congrats on the board approval. Can't wait to celebrate in New Orleans. I need to find a new dress.

It was better. Still flirty, but not as straightforward as the previous one. She shook her head. This was stupid. Why was she second-guessing something as meaningless as a text? And why wasn't she saying the thing she really wanted to say?

Why'd you cc Michael on the email?

She typed it, deleted it, then typed it again. Every version sounded either paranoid or petty. A door slammed from down the hall and she startled in her chair. Raised voices followed, but they were too muffled to make out who they belonged to. She considered walking into the hallway and seeing what was going on. That was part of her job now as a director, wasn't it?

Before she could decide if that was the right move or not, the voices faded and another door slammed. She strained forward, listening to see if anything would come next, but the hallway stayed quiet.

She picked the text back up. *Noticed Michael got looped in—*

Her office door swung open without a knock.

Michael stepped inside and pushed the door shut behind him with the flat of his hand. He didn't cross to the chair across from her desk. He didn't sit. He stood just inside the doorway with one hand still on the door and looked at her with rage in his eyes and smoke coming from his nose.

She flipped her phone face-down. "Michael, what—"

"Trevor's going to be out for a few weeks." He was trying to control his breathing, but Wendy could tell something had him worked up. "He had some... personal things come up."

The air went out of her in one long pull. The slammed doors, the raised voices.

"How—" Her heart rate spiked. "What did you—"

"We're going to lunch in an hour."

She blinked. Whatever she'd been about to ask dissolved against the look on his face. The hurt she'd spent the last hour mulling over was gone. Or it had never been there at all. She couldn't tell which was worse. What had replaced it was a hunger that caused her to press her thighs together.

"Michael, I can't. I have to put together a rollout strategy. Jack needs projections by end of week and I haven't even started them."

He didn't move. He looked at her like he was contemplating throwing her across the desk and taking her on the spot. The worst part was that she wasn't sure she would stop him.

"Seriously," she said with a little less fight. "I don't have time to drive all the way back to your apartment today."

"We're not going to my apartment."

Her stomach tightened.

"Meet me by the SUV at noon. We are going back to the Sunridge motel." He wet his lips. "I think you need a reminder on who's really calling the shots here."

She opened her mouth to protest, but he was already gone. The door pulled shut behind him and she was alone once again. Then, once her breathing had evened out, she picked back up her phone.

Congrats on the board approval. Michael and I are already putting together a strategy that will be even more impressive than the last.

She pressed send and tossed the phone back onto her desk.

Trevor was going to be out for a few weeks. She didn't even know what that meant. She had been too stunned to ask any follow-up questions. Had Michael threatened him? Bought him out? She thought back to Marcus and Ava. The lengths Michael went to in order to ensure they were safe. That *she* was safe.

Her teeth slid across her bottom lip. Was that what he was doing? Protecting her? And if he got Ava and Marcus fired just because Ava saw them together, what would he do to Trevor? Her nipples stiffened against the fabric of her dress.

She glanced at the clock. There was still an hour left before she was supposed to meet with Michael. She wasn't going to get any work done this morning.

Jenny was halfway through logging the Reinhart numbers when her phone buzzed against her thigh. She danced in her chair, lip-syncing "The Life of a Showgirl" as she glanced at the text. Her heart lurched in her chest when she read the message. She tapped her ear-buds to pause the track so she could read it again. When it didn't pause, she ripped them from her ear and tossed them onto her desk staring at the text on the screen.

They are meeting at Sunridge motel at noon. I don't know what you have going on, but you need to get there. This is our chance.

The usual sounds of the bullpen seemed to drown out as she took in what she was reading. Steve's annoying laugh suddenly sounded distant. The noisy HVAC unit that seemed to sit right on top of her desk barely hummed. Everyone was going about their day, paying her no mind.

The phone felt heavy in her hand, and she realized her palms were sweaty. She looked over her shoulder. Brenda her cubicle buddy, had taken an early lunch. She hunched over her desk, found Ava's contact info and pressed call.

She answered on the first ring.

"Why are you calling?"

"Because we need to talk."

"We agreed on text."

"I know. Listen—"

"Jenny." Ava's voice was flat. "You're going to blow this. Whatever it is, text it."

"I'm telling Jon." She said it so quickly, she surprised herself. She looked over her shoulder again. Nobody was listening.

The silence on the other end seemed endless. Jenny could hear Ava breathing, but otherwise she would have thought she hung up. She held her breath. She knew how Ava would react, that's why she called.

"No." It was dismissive. A single word that actually caught Jenny by surprise.

"Ava—"

"No. Absolutely not. He worships the ground she walks on."

"He's not that person anymore." Jenny's voice lowered as someone walked by her desk. She turned in her chair, facing the wall. "He knows deep down that it's happening. He just needs proof. He—"

"He'll fold." Ava cut her off. "He'll get there and he'll convince himself he's not actually seeing what's right in front of him."

"That's not true. I've gotten to know him."

Ava laughed on the other end of the line. "Really, in a few months you've gotten to know him."

"I didn't mean—"

"You know who else thought they knew him? Marcus. Want to guess how that turned out?" She clucked her tongue into the phone. "Jon hasn't even so much as reached out to see if he was okay."

Jenny pressed her forehead against the cool wood of her desk. Steve laughed at something in the distance.

"He deserves to know, Ava."

"No, what he deserves is to rot. Just like the rest of them."

Jenny closed her eyes. They were wasting time.

"You don't see him every day, Ava. I do. He's torturing himself with this."

"That's his cross to bear." The words came out higher, as if she found it amusing.

"And how does that make us any better than Michael?" Her voice was louder than she meant. She brought it back down. "If we let him keep believing his wife isn't... then we are the same as—"

"Don't you dare put me in a sentence with them. Not after everything."

"I'm not—"

"You don't get to stand on some moral high ground right now. Not you."

"I'm telling him, Ava. That's the end of it."

"Don't you—"

She ended the call.

She sat there for a minute, taking deep breaths and holding back tears. It was then that Lisa came up, just like she always did, uninvited and in fragments. She thought about the last time she heard from her step-sister. Lisa had called late one night after work, ranting about how she was in over her head and didn't know what to do. Jenny ignored the call. She didn't want to have another argument about how she was being paranoid and reading into things.

That was two years ago. Jenny had been twenty-two and too worried about partying with her friends than making sure her sister was okay.

She wiped a tear from her cheek. Her hand was shaking. She put her phone into her bag, her gaze floating to Wendy's office. It was dark. She vaguely remembered seeing her leave fifteen minutes ago. She needed to act fast.

Jon was still sitting at his desk in almost the exact spot she left him when she looked in the door. Her stomach twisted in knots as she watched him adjust his glasses as he focused on something on screen. She tried to tell herself she was doing the right thing. That Jon was strong, he'd be able to handle it. She hoped she was right.

"You're early," Jon said with a smile. He glanced at the clock. "I've still got twenty minutes on this before I can —"

"Jon." She stepped inside, closing the door behind her. "Do you trust me?"

He tilted his head. "Is this about lunch? Because I can—"

"Just..." She swallowed, her lower lip beginning to quiver. "Do you trust me?"

He stared at her, closing down his workstation without breaking eye contact. His hand went to his glasses, then his cheek. "Yeah, of course, but what's—"

She was already at his desk, pulling the pad of sticky notes toward her. She wrote the address in careful block letters.

"Go to this address. Park near the front and... just wait."

"Wait for what?"

"You'll know."

He picked up the post-it and read it. She watched his eyes go from the words to the blank desk in front of him and then, slowly, up to her.

"Jenny, what is this—"

"Please."

He stared at her.

"I don't understand."

"I know." She felt tears begin to prick her eyes and she pushed them back. "Just go. Please, Jon."

He stood up slowly. He didn't look away from her while he did it. He reached for his jacket on the back of the chair and his hand missed the first time.

"Okay," he said.

He was at the door when she made herself speak.

"Jon."

He paused at the door and turned around.

"I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"Everything."

He looked at her for another second. He seemed confused, scared, not that she could blame him. She heard his footsteps disappear down the hall and allowed the tears she'd been holding back to fall freely.

The Sunridge motel was exactly how she remembered it. The siding was warped, trash covered the parking lot, and letters were missing on the sign. Michael hadn't even looked at her during the ride. She'd tried asking him about Trevor, about the argument she heard outside her door, but he didn't say a word.

She watched his face as he drove. His jaw clenched, and she was pretty sure he was grinding his teeth. The anger she saw in his eyes earlier was still there, mixed with a desire she could only assume was fueled by jealousy. She wasn't naive. They were coming here to have sex. He felt disrespected because of the deal she'd tried to make behind his back, because of Trevor. It shouldn't have turned her on as much as it did.

The room was at the end of the hall. She followed him across the parking lot, noting that he didn't bother getting her door like before. Her heels caught on the gravel as she rushed to catch up. When he pushed the door open the smell of stale cigarettes made her eyes water. Her stomach coiled at the thought of what happened last time they were here.

She'd barely cleared the doorway when Michael's hands seized her shoulders, spinning her toward the wall.

"Michael, wait—"

Her shoulders hit the wall with a thud and his body pressed into her. His gut held her in place, and his fingers threaded through her hair.

"I don't like other people playing with my things," he growled, pulling her hair with enough force that her knees bent.

"I'm married, Michael. I'm not yours or anyone else's for that matter. I'm—"

His grip tightened and he pulled her to her knees. Her palms rested on the front of his pants, the outline of his cock already straining against the fabric.

"I told you." He released his grip and she gave a sigh of relief. His fingers quickly worked his belt. "You need a reminder of who's calling the shots."

She sucked her lip between her teeth, her hand sliding across his lap. He was iron beneath the fabric. "Tell me what happened with Trevor."

He chuckled as he slid his pants down his thighs, letting his cock spring free. No matter how many times she'd seen it, Wendy still felt a jolt run through her at the sight of it so close. She wrapped her fingers around the base, straining to make them meet. She wished he would shave, or at least trim. Dark, matted hair curled thickly around the root, trailing down his thigh in a patch of shadow. She licked her lips in anticipation.

"I pulled Trevor's expense reports going back eighteen months." He let out a long breath as Wendy's tongue slowly slid up the underside of his shaft. "The Skyline numbers you already knew about. But I also found six client dinners billed to the company that never happened. Two hotel stays in Cincinnati he never left Columbus for."

She moaned softly as her tongue reached the tip, allowing it to circle his crown. It was already flushed, a dab of precum leaking from the slit that she quickly lapped up. Something about his story wasn't adding up. After Wendy confronted him about Skyline he would have cleaned up his act. He was dumb, but no one was that reckless.

She swallowed him, her lips sealing around his girth. A groan rumbled from his chest as his hips surged forward, feeding himself deeper. She braced one palm against his thigh, her other hand stroking the base of his shaft. The carpet dug into her knees, burning slightly. She'd gone through Trevor's books herself when she took Skyline. She hadn't seen any of that.

"I walked into his office this morning and laid every receipt on his desk." His breath was getting shorter now, but his voice stayed controlled. "He denied it of course, but I made him understand what was at stake." His grip tightened in her hair. "You should have seen him. He was shaking."

The words made her whimper, vibrating around his cock. She took him deeper, her jaw stretching. The image of Trevor's face draining of color as Michael systematically dismantled his career across the desk sent a current between her legs so strong she pressed her thighs together.

She pulled back, gasping, her hand still working him. "Michael." She looked up at him through wet lashes. "Did Trevor actually file those expenses?"

His eyes turned to slits and he pushed her head forward. His hips tilted forward as she took him back into her mouth. "What kind of question is that?"

Wendy tried to pull up, to explain herself, but Michael's grip was firm. He shoved deeper without warning, forcing more of himself into her throat before she could adjust. "I did what was needed." His hips snapped forward again, using her mouth like it belonged to him. "I cleaned up your mess."

His cock hit the back of her throat and she gagged. Spit spilled down her chin, stringing from her lips as the room filled with the wet, desperate sounds of choking. She hollowed her cheeks and pushed uselessly against the hand fisted in her hair. Tears streamed hot down her face as Michael's breathing turned rougher, hungrier. Black specks burst across her vision, and her lungs burned. Then, Michael finally released her head and allowed her to pull off his cock with a loud pop.

She coughed and gasped for air. "Jesus, Michael. What the fuck?"

She stared at him, her dress wet and sticking to her chest. His breathing was rapid and his nostrils flared. Had he really manufactured an entire paper trail for her? Ava's face flickered in her mind, followed closely by Marcus. But this was different. The fact that Trevor might have been innocent of the specific charges didn't bother her. He was a prick. He tried to take advantage of Wendy. She thought she'd neutralized him, but maybe she was wrong. Did Michael really save her?

She wiped her chin without taking her eyes off of him. Her jaw was sore, her throat raw, and her mascara was streaking her cheeks.

"He asked me if you put me up to it." She saw his hand close into a fist. "Told me all about what happened last night. How you... offered yourself to him."

She leaned forward pressing her lips to the thick crown. Planting kisses around his shaft as her free hand gripped his sack. Shame burned in her chest as Michael replayed his conversation with Trevor. She couldn't believe she allowed a weasel like Trevor to touch her.

"I told him if he so much as looked at you again I'd ensure he spent the next five years explaining fraudulent expenses to a federal auditor."

She took him back into her mouth, deeper this time. Her lips stretched around his girth as she worked him to the root, just like he'd taught her. His hair tickled her nose and her throat seized around him, swallowing reflexively. She could feel herself clenching around nothing, could feel how wet she was, soaking through her panties while in a dirty motel room as Michael explained how he ruined another man's career.

His hand wrenched her head back. She gasped, spit coating her chin, her eyes blurry with tears.

"Get up."

She reached for him again, but he caught her wrist.

"I said get up."

He hauled her to her feet by the back of her neck. She was still panting, her lips swollen and slick, when his hands found the neckline of her grey dress.

"Wait," she said in a panic, grabbing his hand. "I have to go back to work after this." Her eyes pleaded with him as she reached behind her back for the zipper. "You can't rip it."

His eyes narrowed, but he waited until she had the zipper pulled down before yanking the dress down her body. It caught on her hips, and she shimmied out of it.

She hadn't worn a bra. She watched as his eyes raked over her body, traveling from her chest to her stomach, and hips. The heat between her thighs grew as she waited for him to grab her and shove her toward the bed.

One hand came up and grabbed her breast, squeezing hard enough that she hissed. His thumb dragged across her nipple, already stiff, and the sting shot straight between her legs. He squeezed again, rougher, twisting slightly, and she bit down on her lip to keep from crying out.

"You let him touch these." It wasn't a question and his voice grew dark. He pulled her forward, taking her nipple into his mouth, causing her to sigh. "These are mine." His mouth was pressed against her skin and goosebumps shot along her chest. She reached for his head, but he pushed her hand away, spinning her toward the bed.

His hand hooked her panties and he ripped them down her thighs. She stepped out of them and he pressed her forward until her hands caught the mattress.

"Were you this wet for him?" The air conditioner rattled against the window and she stared at the floral comforter, at the same cigarette burn she'd noticed last time. She was drenched, her thighs slick and trembling.

"No." It wasn't a lie, and yet saying it out loud made her knees weak.

His palm connected with her ass, the crack sharp in the stale air. Heat flared across her skin, radiating outward.

"Uhhhh." Her nails dug into the floral comforter, her pussy clenching around nothing, a hollow ache between her thighs.

"But you let him fuck you. Let him have what is mine." His hand smoothed over the spot he'd just hit, the gentleness after the sting making her squirm.

"I'm... I'm sorry." She wasn't sure why she was apologizing, but the words came easy.

"Are you? Because Trevor made it sound like you loved it."

"Ahhhh." Those were the only words she could form as he pressed his fingers into her without warning. Her hips drove backward, taking him deeper, her hands clawing at the comforter.

"He told me how hard you came." His fingers worked faster, and her head fell to the comforter. "How you were begging him to fuck you. How he didn't even use a condom."

The orgasm came out of nowhere. It ripped through her so suddenly that she cried out into the sheets, every muscle tightening at once. Her body shook, clenching and unclenching on his digits. Wave after wave rolled over her as the sound of her arousal filled the air.

His digits left her core and she whimpered, her hips rolling in search of his touch. "Last time we were here you had all kinds of rules." She heard movement behind her but couldn't bring herself to look. "Asking me to use a condom. Telling me I had to pull out." She felt the heat of his cock press against her entrance. She whimpered, trying to pull it inside her. "Where are those rules

now?" He laughed and swatted her ass again making her buck forward and cry out. "You let Trevor fuck you. You probably would have let Jack fuck you. And me..."

He buried himself in one stroke.

"Ohhh fuck." Her back arched, her arms pushing off the bed. The stretch of him was immediate, and overwhelming. She could feel every inch, her body opening around him, pulling him deeper. He bottomed out and gripped the base of her neck.

"I'm not just going to fuck you am I?" He fucked her hard and fast. Each stroke drove her hips into the edge of the mattress, the bedframe knocking against the wall in a rhythm she knew anyone in the next room could hear.

"No." Wendy's entire body was ablaze. Despite the orgasm she just had, Michael's words combined with his relentless fucking was having an effect. The events of last night rolled through her head as Michael buried himself to the hilt inside of her.

"What am I going to do, Wendy?"

"Annngh." Her fingers clawed at the comforter, her mouth hanging open, sounds falling out of her that weren't words. "You're... fuck you feel so good." She pushed her hips back, matching his thrusts. "You're going to cum inside me."

He wrapped her hair around his hand, craning her neck back as he slammed forward, his lips pressed against her ear. "I'm going to breed you."

Wendy clenched around him, her body writhing against his as she fought for air. Beads of sweat dripped onto her back with each thrust. She could hear him huffing behind her, the wet slap of his gut against her ass. It should have disgusted her. "You feel so fucking good."

"Better than Trevor?"

The question cut through the haze. She pressed her cheek against the comforter, trying to breathe. "Yes. Ohhhh fuck."

He pulled back and slammed forward. Her cry bounced off the thin walls.

"Better than Jon?"

"Ugggh, God. So much better." She could feel another orgasm building. She opened her mouth, sucking in air, her tongue pressing into the dirty quilt.

"Who got you in front of Jack? Onto the Fireball project?" He drove the air from her lungs. "Who's the one who taught you how to play his game?"

"Yo... oh fuck... you did." The words escaped before she could process them.

His pace slowed as he struggled to find his breath. His cock dragged out of her slowly and nudged against her clit. The friction was agonizing. "Who got you the promotion? The director position?" He pressed the tip of his cock into her and her mouth opened in a silent scream. She tried to throw her hips back, but he denied her.

The orgasm was so close. She whimpered beneath him, rolling and dropping her hips. "You did, baby."

Michael's hand closed around the back of her neck. His hips slammed forward and stars filled her vision. He fucked her with a fury that hadn't been there before. Each thrust punishing, possessive, the wet sound of their bodies filling the room.

"And still you let Jack put his fingers inside you." His hand left her neck and cracked against her ass again. Hard enough that her vision went white. "You let Trevor fuck you."

"Ohhh God." She was pushing back to meet him now, her hips slamming against his, her body contradicting every rational thought she'd ever had. "It didn't mean anything. I... I'm sorry."

"I made you. Everything you have is because of me." He grabbed a fistful of her hair and pulled her head back. Her neck strained, her back arching into a bow. "Not because of your ideas. Not because of Jon. Because... you... belong... to me."

She should have argued. She'd pitched the Fireball rebrand. Got Trevor to hand over the Skyline account. She'd gotten the national rollout without his knowledge.

But every time his cock bottomed out inside her, the orgasm drew closer and those accomplishments felt smaller. Her body clenched around him, an involuntary spasm that sent a shock of pleasure radiating through her core. She'd never felt anything like it. Her vision had gone white as she urged the sensation closer.

"Say it, Wendy." He began to pull out and she reached back in protest.

"Michael—"

He drove deeper. His hand reached around her body and grabbed her throat. A flash of panic settled in, her toes beginning to curl.

"Say It!"

"I'm... Ohhh... I'm yours." Her nails dug into his wrist. Not to pull his hand away but because the pleasure was so intense. "I'm yours, Michael."

He released her throat and her head sagged onto the mattress. His hand came down on her ass and the sting fused with the fullness of him and the pressure that was just at her throat until she couldn't separate pain from pleasure from surrender. Her back arched, her body trying to take him even deeper.

"You don't make deals behind my back." He pinned her hips to the mattress, grinding deep, his forehead pressed against her shoulder. "You don't fuck other people without my permission."

"Yes."

"I get all of you." His breath was ragged, his cock pulsing inside her. "Every inch. Every deal. Every decision. It's mine."

"Yes. Yes. Fuck— Fuck— yes."

She could feel the orgasm surging now, enormous, fed by his words and his weight and the cigarette-burned comforter. She was close. So close the edges of her vision were going dark.

"Even this."

She sucked in air, her eyes going wide as his thumb pressed against the tight bud of her ass.

"Oh—fuck—God—Mmmpph" Her body convulsed. The orgasm didn't build, it detonated, erupting at the base of her spine before tearing outward like a live wire. Her vision whited out, her mouth gaping in a scream she couldn't hear over the roar in her skull. Every muscle locked, her pussy clamping around his cock in waves so violent her legs trembled.

And then, just as her sight struggled to return, his thumb breached her, sending her spiraling into another dimension. The dual sensation unleashed a chain of tremors, each one crashing into the next until she lost all sense of herself.

"Fuuuuck." Michael slammed forward, the entire weight of him crashed down onto Wendy. Her pussy spasmed around him as his cock swelled and pulse after pulse of his seed flooded her. He groaned against her neck, his breathing short and clipped until every last drop was buried inside her.

For a long time neither of them moved. The air conditioner rattled as sweat continued to pour from their bodies. Eventually Wendy reached behind her, tapping his arm.

Michael rolled off her and she let out a long breath, staring at the ceiling. A water stain spread across the corner above the bed. She could feel him leaking out of her, warm against her thighs, soaking into the comforter beneath her. She didn't move to clean it up. She just lay there, and let the last twenty-four hours crash over her.

She sat up slowly. Without saying a word she found her dress on the floor and stepped into it. Pulled her panties on, the fabric immediately damp against her skin. She smoothed her hair in the dark reflection of the television. It would be good enough until she got into the car.

Michael was still on the bed, shirtless, watching her. "I want you to be ready to present the rollout strategy by end of week."

"I'll have them to you by Thursday." She adjusted the neckline of her dress. "Maybe you can help me with the tier-three markets before I send them to Jack. I need your expertise." The words came out of her mouth before she heard them. She stopped, one hand on the zipper at her hip. She'd spent eighteen hours proving she could do this without him. She'd gotten the national rollout on her own, pitched it on her own, closed it on her own. And now, ten minutes after telling him she was his, she was asking for his help like it was the most natural thing in the world.

"I'm happy to help." He buttoned his shirt, smiling.

She grabbed her clutch and walked to the door with him right behind her.

The parking lot baked under the noon sun. Jon sat in the driver's seat with the engine off and the windows down, sweat collecting at his collar. He'd been here fifteen minutes. Maybe twenty. He'd stopped checking the clock after the second time.

A stray dog moved along the far edge of the lot. Some kind of mix, brown and rangy, ribs showing. It nosed at a fast food bag near the dumpster, then gave up and kept walking. Jon watched it cross between two parked cars and disappear around the side of the building.

He looked down at the post-it on the passenger seat. Jenny's careful block letters. The address underneath. He'd parked exactly where she'd told him to park.

You'll know.

The hair on the back of his neck stood up as he thought about the way she said it. There was only one reason why she would send him to a motel, but he didn't want to believe it was true.

His hand reached for the ignition. This was insane. After twenty-five minutes he was ready to leave and tell Jenny she was mistaken. He had a meeting at two. He had work to do. He had—

A door opened at the end of the building and the sweat on his collar turned cold.

Wendy stepped out. Her hair was pushed to one side, flat against her scalp, while the other side seemed to be standing in every direction. Her dress hung awkwardly on her body, and he watched as she tugged to try to adjust it. She tilted her face up to the sunlight and he saw the dark streaks under her eyes where her makeup had run.

The world tilted.

He grabbed the steering wheel with both hands. There had to be— she could have been crying. She could have been sick. He thought about the work he'd done with Dr. Carson. There was another explanation he was sure. She was meeting a vendor here, a client. Maybe—

Michael walked out behind her.

He pulled the door shut, his shirt untucked on one side. He said something Jon couldn't hear and Wendy nodded. Michael opened the passenger door of his SUV. As Wendy climbed inside he grabbed a handful of her ass and she made no attempt to push his hand away.

Jon's knuckles went white against the wheel. After everything with Oliva, all the insecurities he'd shared with Wendy, this was how it was going to end? He didn't want to believe it. He couldn't believe it. But as Michael's SUV rolled out of the parking lot he knew it was the only explanation that made sense.

Jon didn't move. He sat in the silence, unable to figure out how to proceed.

The dog wandered back into view from behind the building. It was still looking for something to eat.