Kit has an image problem. Luca is a hot commodity.

Kit is intelligent, beautiful, and successful. Luca has family money, good looks, and a new woman on his arm every week.

The public doesn't find Kit likable. The public loves Luca.

Kit has a new launch coming up. Luca has his parents' threat of getting cut off hanging over his head.

So, what better way to solve both situations than by starting a fake relationship?

Sparks fly as the two bump heads and try to make their fake love believable - but what will they do when it starts getting more real by the day?

\*\*\*

"And the kiss? Why did you just kiss me?"

Luca looked down at Kit with heated eyes again. "Why did you kiss me back?"

Kit opened her mouth and then shut it again, unable and unwilling to answer his question. Luca smiled with twinkling eyes.

"I guess any sexual feelings aren't solely on my end after all."

*The Billionaire’s Promise is created by Tiara Msiza, an eGlobal Creative Publishing signed author.*

# **Chapter 1:** It Only Takes One Match

## *“Nikita Simon Set to Expand Business Empire from your hair to your home?*

*Nikita Simon is reportedly set to expand her business empire by branching out into “Home and Lifestyle” products. “For her, it’s the next logical step when she thinks about expanding her businesses,” a source exclusively shared with Page Nine.*

*Another source tells us that the Beauty entrepreneur wants to “help people feel good in their homes and in their bodies.” This is an interesting move by the notoriously private Simon. It’s not yet clear how she intends to tie this in with her existing businesses.*

*There’s no word yet on just when she’ll make an announcement but we’re confident it’ll be sometime this Spring.*

*Can this hair guru become a homemaker?*

*Only time will tell what she has in store for us. Perhaps she’ll be announcing a lifestyle blog (à la Boop and Goosh). Perhaps this will finally give the public an insight into her mysterious personal life –”*

“Please stop,” Gemma groaned from her seat on the couch, without looking up from her tablet. Nikita turned her attention from her computer screen and pinned her with an indignant frown.

Gemma could feel the waves of displeasure that were coming from the other end of the spacious office. She looked away from her tablet and admired the New York skyline over Nikita’s shoulder.

“Who are these ‘sources’ and how do they know about my next business?” Nikita demanded angrily before running her eyes over the article again with a furrowed brow.

“Probably someone who still reads Page Nine?” Gemma suggested flippantly as she studied her nails.

“Gemma! Say something helpful.” Nikita barked in frustration before rubbing her temples. She inhaled deeply and tried to regain her composure.

Gemma sighed and turned her attention to her client. Nikita Simon was a striking woman who regularly struck fear in those around her. Today, her hair was a wavy lob cut, colored in honey hues. It was a sexy look that contrasted nicely with her dark skin.

Her piercing chocolate-brown gaze could render anyone speechless, as could her typically sharp tongue. Her plump lips were painted a glossy brown and set in a hard, displeased line.

“I didn’t tell you about that garbage so you could have a meltdown over it,” Gemma stated matter-of-factly as she strolled over to the desk. She sat in front of Nikita and gently closed her laptop lid before leaning forward. “I want to talk about something related to the article.”

Nikita blew out a breath and glared at the exasperating redhead. She could see a hint of nerves in Gemma’s green eyes as she stared back with a blank expression.

“You’re lucky you’re good at your job,” Nikita scowled but gestured for Gemma to proceed.

“The article is unimportant right now, it’s the response you should be worried about,” Gemma informed her with a slight frown.

Nikita furrowed her brow in confusion. “What do you mean? What’s more worrisome than a leak?”

“A potential threat to this new venture before we’ve even launched,” Gemma explained, “I’ll spare you the screenshots, but my team sifted through the online response to the article.”

“And?” Nikita gestured.

“The gist of it is, they love your existing products but wouldn’t be interested in buying anything home or lifestyle-related,” Gemma said with a grimace.

Nikita resisted the urge to curse out loud, dropping her head back into her headrest with a thud and closing her eyes, her mind racing. “That doesn’t make any sense! The client base is there, why wouldn’t they buy something else from us?”

Gemma sighed and flipped her hair over her shoulder. “There’s no easy way to say this but the general public perceives you as kind of…aloof.”

Nikita snorted and leaned forward to pin Gemma with an amused look. “Aloof? What does that even mean?”

“Basically, everyone thinks you’re a cold b\*tch.” Gemma deadpanned.

The room descended into silence for a beat before Nikita burst into loud laughter, causing Gemma to smirk. Considering that she couldn’t think of anyone else brave enough to call her a b\*tch - to her face - she could see Gemma’s point.

“I suppose that’s because I don’t blast my life on social media for all to see,” Nikita said with an eye roll.

Gemma shrugged and began listing off other reasons, “You haven’t formed a parasocial relationship with the public, you don’t have a fan base –”

“That’s not true!” Nikita interjected, “I have a pretty good girl boss fandom.”

Gemma rolled her eyes before continuing, “You don’t have a solid fan base, you’re rarely spotted out or with anyone, and you give one interview every three years…shall I go on?”

“Jesus,” Nikita groaned, “When did selling great products become about social media and parasocial relationships?”

“Like it or not girly, that’s just the way people do it these days,” Gemma retorted with a cheeky grin.

“Okay, Ms. Knowledgeable,” Nikita said sarcastically. “What’s the game plan?”

Gemma averted her eyes for the first time since she’d entered the room, causing Nikita’s hackles to rise.

“What’s the game plan?” she asked again.

“You’re not going to like it but it’s basically the second oldest profession in the world,” Gemma rushed out.

Nikita’s eyebrows shot up incredulously and she repeated herself, “What. Is. The. Game. Plan?”

Gemma sighed before walking back to the couch and retrieving three files from her bag. She sat in front of Nikita with a somber expression, still holding onto the files.

“We need to do a little image overhaul quickly,” she said in a serious tone. “So, we’re going with an old favorite. A PR relationship!”

Nikita looked unimpressed and felt annoyance start to build. “A fake relationship? Absolutely not.”

“It’s the quickest way to get the social traction that you need in time for the launch,” Gemma explained patiently. “If you have a public relationship with someone the public loves or can learn to love, you can literally trend every day until D-Day. It’ll help build hype and guarantee another success.”

“This is completely ridiculous,” Nikita muttered as she shook her head.

Gemma shrugged and offered a small smile. “Celebrities do it all the time.”

“But I’m not a celebrity!” Nikita huffed in exasperation, “I’m a successful businesswoman.”

“You basically have to be one to be the other these days and you know that,” Gemma retorted. “Look, I’ve thought it through. This is the quickest, easiest, and cheapest way to do this.”

Nikita grunted unimpressed before standing from her desk and walking toward the bar cart in the far corner of the office. Her long, denim-clad legs covered the distance in a few short steps.

She walked gracefully and easily despite the fact that she was wearing heeled boots. The gold bangles on her wrists clinked together softly, in time with her step and the swing of her hips.

Nikita immediately reached for a glass as she reached the cart; her ringed fingers clinking against the glass. She gestured for Gemma to keep speaking without turning around as she started mixing herself a strong gin and tonic.

Gemma took a deep breath, “Okay. So you’d have to date for a few weeks, maybe six weeks. Go out, get spotted together, go to a few events, and give the press great sound bites and quotes.”

Nikita shuddered as she returned to her seat and placed two drinks on the desk. “Sounds like a nightmare already.”

Gemma gave her an unimpressed look but continued, “A few weeks after the launch, you’ll have a mutual and amicable break-up.”

“And that’s it?” Nikita asked over the rim of her glass with a suspicious look.

“Well...” Gemma paused with a wince, “There’s one more thing.”

“There always is with you,” Nikita grumbled with an expectant look.

“We only get one shot at this, so we need to pick the perfect person. The right person,” Gemma explained, “So I went to a matchmaker, the best one on the East Coast.”

“A matchmaker?” Nikita spluttered before gulping her gin.

“She gave me three really good candidates, all in the market for the same thing for their own reasons,” Gemma continued, ignoring Nikita’s outburst.

Nikita realized the files in Gemma’s hand contained the three candidates and reached her hand out for them. Gemma remained in place, causing Nikita to questioningly arch her perfectly shaped eyebrow.

Gemma sighed, “Don’t cause a scene but I already have one in mind. You’re not going to like the idea but he’s really the best one and you’ll agree once you look at all three.”

Nikita simply put her hand out for the file without a word, accepting the one that Gemma placed in her hand with a curious tilt of her head. She flipped open the file and immediately pinned Gemma with a heated glare.

“No.”

“Hear me out!” Gemma coaxed in a calming tone.

“Absolutely not,” Nikita declared flatly before slamming the file on the desk. “He’s going to tank my brand if anything.”

“I know you hate his guts but the public loves him! He’s more popular than you are, with a broader audience,” Gemma rushed out.

“Pick one of the other two. I don’t care who,” Nikita insisted stubbornly, her shoulders tight with tension.

“Kit,” Gemma said softly, “When have I ever led you astray?”

Nikita studied Gemma’s soft and sincere expression for a minute before relaxing completely. She took another sip of her drink and offered Gemma a rueful smile.

“What about that time you said you knew how to take out braids and accidentally cut my hair?” Nikita asked dryly.

Gemma snorted with laughter. “When are you going to drop that? It was 8 years ago!”

“When you stop forcing my hand!” Nikita answered with her own snort. The two giggled for a few minutes before subsiding into a comfortable silence. Nikita sighed and picked up the file again.

“This is why you shouldn’t hire your friends,” she muttered as she actually read the file.

“Which is why you hired your BEST friend,” Gemma emphasized smugly before taking a healthy swig of her gin.

She immediately choked and spluttered, “Jesus Kit! Where’s the tonic?”

# **Chapter 2:** A Rude Awakening

Luca groaned in pain as the room filled with light, jolting him out of his sleep and into a monstrous hangover.

“Get your a\*ss up!” his mother barked from the general direction of his feet.

“What are you doing in my room, Mom?” he croaked weakly, his eyes squeezed tightly shut.

She snorted and pushed his feet aside, knocking them off his spacious couch. “If only you’d made it that far.”

He cautiously cracked his eyes open, squinting against the bright light. Though his vision was still quite blurry, he could make out the unimpressed form of his mother standing in the middle of his living room.

“You better not make me repeat myself boy!” his mother snapped in slightly lilting English.

Luca groaned in response before heaving his body upright with great effort. He knew his mother well enough to know her accent only got stronger with her emotions.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?” he asked hoarsely as he unsteadily got to his feet and shuffled in the direction of the kitchen.

Lucia watched her son stumble into the kitchen with thinly veiled disapproval. She wasn’t sure why she was disappointed to find him hungover. He seemed to spend most of his time drunk - but it was only Tuesday morning.

She watched him retrieve a bottle of water from the fridge and empty it thirstily. He caught her eye and smiled at her weakly as he made his way back to the couch. His shoulder-length chocolate hair was sleep tousled and he had bags under his green eyes. While his olive-toned skin still had a healthy glow, he was clearly tired.

And more than likely drunk.

“You don’t have better things to do on a Monday than get drunk?” she asked him tiredly as he collapsed onto the couch.

He chuckled wearily, “It’s a little early for a lecture. Can we reschedule this for later? I’ll take you to that place you like and we’ll have a nice lunch.”

Lucia smiled at her son sadly. “Your father has had enough Luca.”

Luca snorted drily, “He had enough a decade ago. That’s nothing new.”

Lucia stood and crossed the room to sit next to him. “No Luca. He wants to cut you off.”

He sat up, suddenly alert, and searched his mother's gaze with his own. “What do you mean cut me off?”

She sighed and reached for his hand, holding it between both of her own. “All the drinking, the partying, the girls…he’s had enough. He wants you to clean up your act or he’s cutting you off.”

Luca’s expression hardened and he lurched off the couch in agitation. Pacing in front of his mother.

“He can keep his money,” he spat. “I’ve made my own success. I’ve made a name for myself.”

Lucia cringed and frowned. “It’s not just the money. He wants to take everything.”

Luca froze, the muscles in his body visibly taut. “Define ‘everything’.”

Lucia sighed sadly, “Basically anything that isn’t in your name. The penthouse, any family cars, access to the family funds, positions you hold in family-owned businesses.”

“He’s going to fire me? Pull out as my main investor?” Luca growled angrily.

Lucia stood and approached her son slowly, cupping his face between her hands as she reached him. “Honestly, I don’t know what he’s willing to do my love,” she confessed softly. “I do know that he’s fed up. He wants you to stop being a liability and I can’t convince him otherwise.”

Luca stared down into his mother's eyes, his eyes alight with anger. He pulled his head out of her hands and stalked toward the couch, where he collapsed tiredly.

“What am I supposed to do?” he asked, defeat clear in the way he was carrying himself.

“You’re 34. Stop acting like you’ve just turned 21!” Lucia suggested with a gentle laugh. “No more negative press, drunken nights, or womanizing. Settle down and focus on love and work.”

Luca swallowed heavily as he felt himself suddenly fighting back nausea. He could hardly think over the sickening pounding in his head. He also had a sinking feeling that he was cornered.

His parents had expressed displeasure with his way of living, repeatedly, since he’d turned 30. However, he hadn’t imagined that it would escalate this far.

“Darling, this is a bit harsh. I know that,” Lucia spoke as she sat near him, her hand on his knee comfortingly, “but we just don’t want to see you waste your life.”

“Yo!” A voice floated down from the direction of the front door.

Lucia smiled at her son and dropped a kiss on his head, “Perfect timing! Hopefully, he’ll stop you from doing something stupid in response to the news.”

Luca scowled up at his mother as she stood and brushed imaginary lint from her dress.

“I love you dear. Make me proud,” she directed at Luca before heading toward the door. She nearly collided with James as he emerged from the hallway. He stumbled slightly, clearly caught off guard by her presence.

“Mrs. B! I didn’t know you’d actually be in the penthouse too,” he greeted her with a charming smile.

She smiled back at him and squeezed his arm fondly. “Not for much longer. Point him in the right direction!”

With her final remark, she walked around James and disappeared down the hallway. James raised his eyebrow at Luca questioningly as he fully walked into the room.

“What’s going on?” he voiced as he sat next to the still-hungover Luca.

“What are you doing here?” Luca rebutted as he shut his eyes tiredly.

“Your mom’s assistant gave me a call and asked me to be here around midday,” James explained with a shrug before throwing himself on the couch.

Luca sighed bitterly, “Of course she did. I suppose you’re here to make sure I don’t do anything my father wouldn’t approve of.”

James snorted and nudged Luca’s foot with his own, “Since when do you care about that?”

Luca finally sat up and gave James a tired look. “Apparently, the old man’s finally cutting me off. For real.”

“What!” James asked, his mouth slack with shock. “I’m sure you can talk him out of it man. Or your mom can work her usual magic.”

Luca shook his head mournfully before cradling it with both hands. “I’m sh\*t out of luck. I have one final chance to get it together or I’m out.”

James let loose a long whistle and settled into the couch heavily. “Well d\*mn. What does that mean?”

Luca groaned, “It means doing none of the sh\*t I’m doing now. They want me to settle down and stop being a problem basically.”

James shrugged but gave Luca’s knee a sympathetic pat. “You’ve gotta stand on your own at some point.”

Luca shot James a glare. “I know that! I’m nearly there, I just need my dad’s money and connections for a little longer.”

James nodded understandingly while running a hand through his blonde hair. “Yeah man, he can’t cut you off before we land this Schuster deal. What we really need to do is find a way to buy time.”

“What do you mean?” Luca questioned with a curious gleam in his eye.

“No offense man, but I don’t think you can change,” James stated bluntly. “We just need your dad to think you’ve changed while we get our house in order.”

Luca snorted in amusement. “So what’s the plan, smart guy?”

James smirked in response and pointed toward the kitchen. “Why don’t you make me a coffee sweetheart? I’ve got a few calls to make.”

He didn’t wait for a response before jumping off the couch and heading in the direction of the balcony. Luca watched after him for a minute before rolling his eyes and closing them in thought.

His mind was racing with all the different thoughts and feelings he was having. James had always been the ideas guy and voice of reason in their friendship. There was no doubt that he’d come up with a solution.

If he was being frank, Luca could admit that the money and connections were a large reason why he didn’t want to be cut off. What he was surprised to discover was that familial love was an equally big motivator.

“Hey!” James called as he walked back inside with a cheeky smile. “What happened to my coffee?”

“F\*ck off,” Luca answered back with a smile of his own. “Who did you call?”

James’ smile dropped as he became serious. “I was calling in a favor from one of Emily’s friends.”

Luca scowled. “Oh great! Now everyone on the East Coast will know my business before the end of the day.”

James rolled his eyes but smiled. “I don’t appreciate you talking about my wife that way. That aside, this friend will keep this strictly confidential.”

Luca gave him a skeptical look. “Okay, I’ll suspend reality for a minute and believe you. Who is this friend and how are they going to help me?”

James gave him a sheepish look. “Okay, just keep an open mind here! If we play our cards right, which we will, we’ll have this contract signed in the next month.”

Luca gave him an unamused look. “At least tell me the product before launching into your sales pitch.”

James chuckled, “Alright, no more partying or public benders. You need to make a total change. Show you’re taking it seriously. So no revolving door of flings and one-night stands…you need to get a girlfriend. Seemingly settle down.”

Luca frowned. “So you want me to sober up and you want to set me up? I’m not dating one of Emily’s socialite friends. You’re right but that last part isn’t an option.”

James cleared his throat nervously, “I’m not offering one of Emily’s friends. The friend is a matchmaker, a good one!”

Luca gave him a skeptical look. “A matchmaker? What century am I in? I don’t need a matchmaker. My problem is actually that I can’t stop finding women.”

“Your problem is that you’re commitment-phobic,” James corrected him. “It’ll be a fake relationship, someone your parents will have to approve of. It’s also a great chance for us to get a little positive press before we land this deal.”

Luca sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I don’t know James. This just seems a little weird to me. Who would even agree to something like this?”

James shrugged. “You’d be surprised how common this is. The other person will also benefit from the fake relationship.”

Luca laughed, “Surely, I’m more of a liability?”

James grinned. “Can’t disagree with you there buddy. Fortunately for you, you’re handsome, charming, and philanthropic. People can’t help but respond to that, it’s the only reason I do business with you.”

“Ouch!” Luca cried playfully in response. “That hurt Jay. Look, I’m willing to consider whoever this ‘matchmaker’ suggests but no promises.”

“What other choices do you have?” James asked, causing Luca to fall silent.

The sound of James’ phone trilling cut through the silence. He picked it up and smiled broadly. “The matchmaker just sent me three options for you to consider!”

His fingers swiped over his phone for a few minutes before he let out a booming laugh. “I have a feeling you’re going to stop being wary really quickly after seeing this particular file.”

Luca shot James a suspicious look and caught the phone as it was tossed toward him. He lowered his eyes to the phone and found himself stuck on the photo staring back at him.

He scowled and shot James a dark look. “Did you set this up?”

James chortled gleefully and shook his head, “This is simply fate.”

# **Chapter 3:** Fire Meet Gasoline

“How do I look?” Kit asked as she waltzed into her living room, where Gemma was patiently waiting.

“You look stunning!” she trilled excitedly while running her eyes over Kit’s body appreciatively. “Do a turn for me!”

Kit laughed and waved Gemma off as she walked across her open-plan living area, straight into her kitchen. She was secretly pleased that Gemma felt she looked good in her casual outfit - a nude bodysuit, cargo pants, and a cute pair of heeled sandals.

Gemma trailed after her and planted herself on a chair in front of the kitchen counter. “Are you looking cute to impress a certain someone?”

Kit snorted as she turned from the cupboard with two wine glasses, “The last thing I care about is being attractive to Luca Brooks. I have a heartbeat and that’s all he really cares about.”

Gemma chuckled and happily accepted a glass as Kit started filling it with Rosé. “Do you even remember why you hate the guy?”

Kit rolled her eyes in response. “I’m considering hypnotherapy to have a shot at forgetting!”

Gemma rolled her eyes in amusement and sipped her wine appreciatively. “You’re such a drama queen!”

Kit shrugged unrepentantly. “Guys like him are the reason why I don’t waste my time with dating and romance.”

“Okay, so he’s kind of a f\*ckboy,” Gemma conceded with a slight wince. “That aside, even you can’t deny that the man is drop-dead gorgeous!”

Kit shot her an amused look and handed her a paper towel. “Don’t get any drool on my marble countertops.”

“Ha-ha,” Gemma responded sarcastically as she pushed Kit's hand away, “You’re really not even going to try to enjoy this? He’s in the top five of the most eligible bachelors in this city.”

Kit sighed, “Gem, I’ve agreed to this crazy idea because I’ve invested a lot of time and money in this brand. I don’t care how hot or eligible this guy is.”

Gemma shrugged and sipped her wine again. “That doesn’t mean that you can’t enjoy it a little. With his reputation…he’s probably amazing in bed!”

Kit laughed, “I don’t mix business with pleasure, and this is very much a business deal.”

Gemma smiled wickedly. “Most of the contracts you sign with your employees have a great benefits package. Why should this be any different?”

“You are absolutely nasty!” Kit cackled as she pushed Gemma playfully. “You sure sound like you want him.”

Gemma giggled but shook her head. “I’m still as in love with Max as ever. That said, my eyes still work and that man is absolutely yummy!”

Kit snorted, “Whatever you say Gem, just make sure you keep it in your pants when they get here.”

Gemma’s response was cut off by the buzzing of Kit’s phone vibrating on the counter.

“This is Nikita,” she answered as she placed the phone to her ear. “Please send them up, thanks.” She hung up and placed the phone back on the counter before taking a deep breath. “I can’t believe I’m doing this.”

Gemma patted Kit’s hand comfortingly. “You said it yourself, this is just another business deal.”

The doorbell chimed throughout the apartment, interrupting whatever Kit wanted to say in response. She grimaced at Gemma who gave her an amused smile and walked off to open the door.

Kit focused on taking deep breaths as she heard Gemma open the door and deep voices rumbling in the entryway. She had a nervous feeling in her gut that was absolutely foreign to her. Then again, this was an area she had absolutely no expertise in.

Gemma entered the room first and shot Kit an exaggerated ‘oh my god’ look which she ignored. James was next to enter the room, he sported a beaming smile the second he spotted Kit standing awkwardly in the middle of the room.

“Nikita! It’s lovely to see you again,” he said as he walked right to her and pulled her into a hug.

Kit stiffened for a moment before accepting the hug. She smiled at him cautiously when he pulled away and stepped back; studiously ignoring the spot where she knew Luca must be standing. She could almost swear she could feel his gaze boring into the side of her face.

“Hello James, it’s nice to see you again too,” Kit responded politely.

“I didn’t know that you two were already acquainted,” Luca spoke up, capturing Kit’s attention immediately.

She turned and finally met his curious gaze. He was dressed casually in jeans and a shirt, showing off tattoos on various parts of his body. Everything fit him as if it had been tailormade.

Kit had to force herself not to scowl as she drank him in. It pained her to admit it, but Gemma was right. Luca Brooks was kind of a snack.

Kit turned to Luca and arched her brow delicately. “I assume you don’t remember our last encounter.”

Luca tensed as he watched her full lips tighten in disapproval. She was more beautiful in person. He’d already started flirting with the idea of making some aspects of their future relationship real.

He internally cursed James for not warning him that they’d apparently both met her before as he racked his brain. No memories came to mind, and he couldn’t imagine ever forgetting her piercing gaze.

He shifted uncomfortably and glared at James briefly before answering. “Well, this is embarrassing. I’m not the best with names and faces at the worst of times.”

Kit smirked at him coldly, her full lips twitching slightly. “I wonder if that’s because you’re always drunk or if it’s because you approach too many women a day to keep track.”

James barked out a laugh that he immediately tried to disguise as a cough, causing Luca to glare at him.

Luca turned his attention back to Nikita and shrugged. “I reserve my energy for remembering remarkable women. You clearly didn’t meet the requirements.”

“Okay!” Gemma interjected loudly. “We’re really getting off track. Why don’t we move to the dining room and discuss the contract.”

Kit shot Gemma a dark look before gesturing toward the direction of the dining room with her arm. She turned and wordlessly led the way.

Luca’s eyes were entranced by the way her hips moved as she sauntered away from him. Gemma’s amused laughter broke him out of his trance. She winked at him before following Kit.

He exhaled noisily and closed his eyes to collect himself.

“You’re doing great bud!” James laughed as grabbed Luca’s shoulder and started steering him toward the door.

“Go f\*ck yourself,” Luca answered in a fake cheery tone. “You’re such a jack\*ss. Why didn’t you warn me?”

James shrugged. “A little fun keeps me young. Truthfully, it didn’t even occur to me until I saw her and it was too late by then.”

Luca sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “When did we meet her? I’m drawing a total blank.”

James winced and rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. Luca groaned in response and cursed quietly.

“Yeah,” he drawled, “You were definitely the jack\*ss on that occasion.” James started snickering. “I’ve never seen you strike out so bad, but I guess you were drunker than I realized.”

“Judging from her reaction, there’s no way she’ll go through with this,” Luca sighed.

“Look, she agreed to this even though she remembers that night. It’s still salvageable,” James told him consolingly. “Go in there and apologize and we’ll go from there. Whatever her reasons are, she needs this arrangement too.”

Luca sighed before nodding his head hesitantly and allowing himself to be led to his fate. He kept reminding himself that this was necessary - and short-lived.

They could hear hushed voices as they approached the dining room. When Luca finally entered the room, Kit and Gemma immediately fell silent. Kit was sitting in a seat adjacent to the door and her expression was blank as she watched him enter the room and sit across from her.

James nudged Luca subtly in the side, jolting him into action. "Nikita, I can't remember our last encounter but I understand it was unpleasant for you. Please accept my apologies."

Kit snorted, "How much can the apology really mean when you don't even know what you're apologizing for?"

Luca scowled and met her steely gaze. "With an attitude like this, it's no wonder that you have to resort to a matchmaker!"

Kit laughed derisively, "That's rich coming from someone who can only maintain a relationship if it's fake and contractually obligated!"

The two glared at each other over the table, tension thick in the air. Luca clenched his jaw and turned to face James.

"I can't do this. I'm not going to deal with this for six weeks!"

"I agree with him, this was a bad idea," Kit spoke up, shooting Gemma a glare the entire time.

"Let's not be hasty now!" James responded in a calming tone. "Personal feelings aside, this relationship will benefit everyone in this room on several levels."

Gemma nodded along. "Neither of you will find a better match anywhere else. Besides, this chemistry is hot and real. The public is going to eat it up completely!"

Kit groaned, "You're mistaking disdain for chemistry."

"Kit," Gemma chided, causing her to glare at Gemma defiantly.

Kit had, somehow, allowed Gemma to convince her that moving forward with this deal was a good idea. Though, she still had major reservations about committing to spending that much time with Luca.

Gemma's expression changed from angry to pleading, causing Kit to sigh internally. She had promised Gemma she would put those feelings aside for the sake of moving on to the next chapter.

She exhaled and turned to meet Luca's unreadable gaze. Despite their rocky start, she was impressed that he could meet her jab for jab. Maybe they could actually forge a friendship, or maybe she'd end up in jail for murder.

Sometimes, you just had to roll the dice and hope for the best.

"Okay," Kit started in a calm tone, "Gemma's right, I may not like you but I agreed to this because you're well-known and well-loved. I'll keep my mouth shut and do what we have to do. I simply ask that you do the same."

Luca nodded stiffly in agreement but chose not to say anything, his gaze boring into Kit.

"All right then!" Gemma clapped delightedly. "So the contract will be standard, boilerplate-type stuff. Other than confidentiality, you two will have to be seen together in public at least three times a week and engage in some light PDA."

"Define light PDA," Luca spoke without moving his eyes from Nikita who was boldly meeting his gaze.

Gemma looked between the two of them with a smirk. "Enough to make it believable. Some hand-holding and kissing when the cameras are on you…what you do off camera is up to you."

"We won't be doing anything off camera," Kit stated firmly, almost daringly.

Luca smiled and chuckled quietly, his gaze turning amused. He openly ran his gaze over the visible portion of her body, finally coming to a stop on her lips.

Kit stiffened in response, feeling annoyance and an emotion she didn't want to name coursing through her.

Gemma cleared her throat, "Carrying on, this is strictly professional and there shall be no involvement of any family members or friends. This also means that no one outside of this room can know about this arrangement."

Everyone around the table nodded their head in agreement with Gemma's words.

"Okay," she continued, "Kit's assistant will forward you the final contract and details for your first date. Does anyone have anything to add?"

Luca smirked slightly, his gaze flickering from Kit's eyes to her lips. "I look forward to working with you Kit."

"Nikita," she corrected instantly in a hard tone before pushing back from the table and leaving the room.

# **Chapter 4:** Feel The Burn

Kit listened along to the radio as she tried to get her nerves under control. Today was the day she and Luca were officially going to become a couple. She suddenly started to worry that it would be obvious their relationship was fake. The media backlash would be brutal if that happened.

She watched the passing buildings and faces as the car rolled through the New York streets. The article written about her and Luca wasn't great, but she was grateful that Gemma had suggested their ‘first date’ happen at her place.

"How far away are we?" she asked Joey, her driver and bodyguard.

"We're a few blocks away," he told her with a chuckle. "You seem awfully antsy to get there today."

Kit winced, grateful that he couldn't see her face. She liked Joey, she didn't want to keep him out of the loop, but it was better this way. Less chance for there to be any media leaks.

"Gemma promised she'd make lasagna tonight," Kit offered with a nervous laugh.

"Da\*mn," Joey responded with longing, "You think she'll think of Ol' Joe too?"

Kit laughed and shook her head. "No Promises, but I'll see if there's a doggy bag with your name on it."

"You're an angel Kit!" he responded before cursing under his breath as they turned the corner. "Looks like you have a few paps waiting for you."

Kit craned her head a little to see the few paparazzi stationed a little way down the street as the car came to a stop. Seeing them cemented that the plan was truly underway, after all, Gemma had organized for them to be there.

"You know how it is Joe," she muttered as she stepped out of the car. She could hear the shutters clicking the second her feet hit the sidewalk.

She purposefully took her time closing the door and saying goodbye to Joey. Anything to make sure that the paparazzi got the best shots of her entering Gemma's building.

"Bye Joey, I'll let you know when I'm ready to go home." She smiled at him before turning on her heel and walking straight into Gemma's building.

She nodded at the doorman and receptionists in greeting as she breezed by them. She breathed a heavy sigh as the elevator doors closed, whisking her up to Gemma's very expensive apartment.

Kit hummed to herself as she walked the short distance from the elevator to Gemma's door. She'd barely raised her hand to knock when the door flew open.

"Kit!" Max exclaimed delightedly before wrapping her in a giant bear hug.

Kit laughed and allowed herself to be towed inside by Max's hulking frame. Her body relaxed as she allowed herself to enjoy the hug, all her previous nerves gone.

"Nice to see you too!" she gasped once he'd put her down and could catch her breath.

"Why haven't I seen you in a while?" Max asked in a playfully, accusing tone. His brown eyes twinkled with mischief and were slightly obscured by a few errant curls.

Kit rolled her eyes and started pulling her coat off as Max held her purse for her.

"You know I've been on back-to-back business trips," she said while pulling a face. "I'm sorry I haven't been great about keeping in touch though. We can grab a drink this week?"

"Why is it that every time I turn my back for a second, you two are making plans to run off together?" Gemma asked as she entered the room.

Kit laughed, "If I wanted your man, I'd have kept him for myself instead of introducing you to each other."

Gemma laughed and pulled Kit in for a squeeze before grabbing her hand and dragging her toward the kitchen.

"Love the dress, did we dress up for our man?" Gemma asked, amusement plain in her voice.

Kit scowled and pulled her hand out of Gemma's. "You've always got to just ruin the moment."

Gemma laughed while Kit perched herself on a stool on the opposite side of the island. Max appeared from behind Gemma and handed each of them a drink.

"So you're saying you don't care if he finds you attractive or not?" Gemma asked while sipping her drink mischievously.

"Correct, I don't care about his opinion." Kit sniffed before taking a tentative sip of her drink.

Max snorted as he returned with his own drink in hand, he dropped a kiss on Gemma's head and then pinned Kit with a disbelieving look.

"That dress says otherwise. Pretty sexy dress for drinks at a friend's, don't you think?" he asked with an overly innocent grin.

"What do you mean drinks? I was told there'd be lasagna!" Kit demanded while shooting Gemma an accusatory look.

Gemma shrugged unconcernedly. "Change of plans. We're going to have a few drinks and see if we feel up to going dancing!"

Kit groaned, "Gem, come on! Why are you making this harder than it has to be?"

Gemma rolled her eyes. "I'm making this easier actually. You need to loosen up! You're going to be around him quite a bit, might as well have fun."

A knock at the front door interrupted Kit's answer. Max shot Kit a wink before exiting the kitchen and going to open the door for Luca.

Luca gave Max a practiced smile and an outstretched hand as the man opened the door. "You must be Max. It's nice to meet you, man."

Max accepted Luca's hand and smiled warmly. "Nice to meet you too. Please come in!"

Luca hesitantly stepped past Max and examined the apartment with curious eyes. He couldn't see Gemma or Nikita but he could hear their voices floating in from the other room.

He inhaled deeply and readjusted his grip on the two bouquets he had in his hand. He'd been dreading this moment since their last meeting, but he'd also been looking forward to seeing Nikita again just as much.

Max appeared behind him and clapped his back. "Hope you're ready to enter the lion's den." He winked at Luca, causing them both to chuckle, and then led the way into the other room where the two women were waiting. Luca followed Max, his heart rate increasing with every step closer.

He heard Nikita laugh for the first time as he entered the living room. It was a husky melodic sound, happy and unrestrained. She turned her head and their eyes locked.

He felt frozen as he got an eyeful of her dress. He'd definitely seen skimpier and slu\*ttier dresses, but something about Nikita's dress was even more sinful. It was a simple red dress that seemed to cling to every curve of her body.

All her best features were on display. Luca's hand twitched by his side, curious to find out if the dress was as soft as it looked. When he dragged his eyes back to Nikita's face, she winked at him and turned away.

"Luca!" Gemma cheered, her cheeks pink with color. She left Nikita's side and offered him a hug which he returned awkwardly.

"Are those for us?" she asked as she gestured at the bouquets.

Luca looked down, momentarily confused before remembering the flowers. "Yes! These are for you two. An apology for my behavior last time."

Gemma turned to Kit with a smirk and a quick wink, causing Kit to smile slightly. It was clear that Gemma was starting to feel her margarita. She made her way to where Gemma was standing with Luca.

She hadn't expected him to show up with flowers; especially when she'd been just as bad the last time they'd met. He'd obviously already won Gemma over with the gesture but Kit wasn't so easily won over.

He offered her a bouquet as she came to a stop in front of the two. Their fingers brushed briefly as the flowers exchanged hands and their eyes met for a moment before they both pulled away.

"Thank you," Kit murmured with a bemused expression.

"I'll take those!" Max announced cheerfully as he appeared from the kitchen. He handed Luca a margarita and whisked the bouquets off into another room.

Luca sipped his drink and did his best to ignore Kit's eyes boring into him. He cleared his throat and focused on Gemma. The safer option.

"So, what are the plans for this evening?" he asked. "I've already had my picture taken downstairs."

Gemma nodded and sipped her own drink. "That's step one. Step two is to go out and have a fun night!"

Luca raised his eyebrow incredulously and turned a curious eye to Kit. He couldn't imagine that this was something she was on board with. She didn't seem the type to go clubbing.

"Who's ready for shots!" Max called cheerfully as he entered the room again with a tray covered in rows of shots.

Luca laughed, "Woah."

"Don't worry," Gemma told him with a pat on the arm. "They're tequila too."

Kit rolled her eyes and laughed, "I think he was commenting on the fact that there are a million shots on that tray."

Gemma scoffed and winked at Luca playfully. "Luca definitely isn't intimidated by a few shots."

Luca chuckled and sipped his margarita with a shrug. "I'm not intimidated by a strong drink but shots aren't really my thing. Not since my 20s anyway."

"Why not?" Kit asked him curiously.

Luca shrugged again. "In my experience, bad decisions happen after a few shots. I can't remember most of the nights where shots were involved."

They both placed their drinks on the nearest countertop as Max started handing out shots and lime wedges.

Kit arched her brow delicately and accepted a shot before lifting it in Luca's direction. "Let's hope you don't forget tonight."

Luca met Kit's gaze and smirked as he lifted his own shot. "With that dress? Unlikely."

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*"Nikita Simon and Luca Brooks Are Reportedly Dating!*

*Did anyone have this on their bingo card for this year? Sources tell Page Nine that the unlikely couple is engaged in a hot and heavy romance.*

*Luca Brooks, 34, is well known for his playboy ways. The Brooks heir is often seen with a new woman on his arm every week! On the other hand, Nikita Simon, 28, is notoriously private and has always kept her love life out of the public eye.*

*"Neither of them were looking for a relationship but they just really clicked," another source shared with Page Nine. This new romance was apparently sparked after the two were introduced by a mutual friend.*

*The pair set tongues wagging this week when they were spotted leaving celebrity publicist Gemma Adams' place early in the morning. The two arrived separately but left together in the same car.*

*In the photos, Simon can be seen wearing Brooks' jacket while he leads her with his hand on her lower back. The two were later spotted with Adams and her husband Max, entering Paradise Lounge shortly after.*

*It's unclear just when the two first got together but they've already been together for at least several weeks.*

*Will the new couple keep it private or will they share the love with the world? We're all eager to find out!"*

# **Chapter 5:** Making It Official

"Umm…Miss Simon?" a mousy voice called out from the door, snapping Kit out of her focused trance.

She looked up from the mock ups she'd been studying and gestured for Dana to come in. Dana strode towards the desk and hovered in front of it awkwardly.

Kit smiled at her assistant, vaguely amused, "You can sit down Dana. And I mean that in general."

Dana smiled at Kit bashfully before sitting down, "There's someone here to see you."

Kit frowned, "Do I have a meeting scheduled for right now? I thought I was free for the rest of the day."

Dana shifted in her seat uncomfortably, "They're not - it's not a meeting. It's someone that Mr Brooks sent."

Kit gave her a confused look, "Who's Mr Brooks?"

Dana smiled at her boss in amusement, "Luca Brooks. Your boyfriend?"

"Oh right," Kit muttered, causing Dana to chuckle softly. "He's not my boyfriend."

"So you're not dating?" Dana inquired as she leaned forward in her seat, eager to get the gossip from the horse's mouth.

Kit chuckled and spoke in a teasing tone, "You're basically frothing at the mouth right now!"

Dana shrugged abashedly but didn't deny the accusation. Mostly, she was glad that her question had amused her boss instead of annoying her. She gave her boss a pleading look, hoping she was amused enough to give her a little tidbit.

"You can go and send them in," Kit said as her chuckles settled down, causing Dana's expression to fall.

"Yes ma'am!" she chirped as she exited the office swiftly.

Kit leaned back in her chair and wondered who was about to walk into her office. She and Luca had their first official appearance scheduled for that night. At Gemma's urging, she'd invited him to a cover reveal for a model friend.

They wouldn't have a buffer this time but there were bound to be people they both knew there to socialize with.

Kit was dreading it and looking forward to it in equal measure. She'd never admit it, even to her journal, but she'd enjoyed his company on their last night together. Although, there had been a lot of tequila so she wasn't sure if that feeling could be trusted.

There was a brief knock at the door before it swung open; Kit stood and walked around her desk to welcome her mystery guest. A petite woman with bright blue hair walked in confidently and offered her a wide smile.

"Hi! I'm Birdy, nice to meet you," she spoke as she offered Kit a warm, firm handshake.

Kit smiled, unable to resist the woman's warm presence. "I'm Nikita. Apparently Luca sent you?"

Birdy nodded enthusiastically and placed her bulging tote bag on the ground. She shoved her arm inside and pulled out a bottle of tequila and an attached card.

"This is for you!" she said as she thrust the bottle towards Kit, who accepted it hesitantly. She placed the bottle on her desk and opened the envelope containing the card.

It was a simple white card with a messily scrawled "Pick anything you want. See you tonight. - Luca".

Kit looked up at the bottle from the note, with a smile. She looked up to find Birdy holding a notepad, pen and measuring tape.

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"You look absolutely stunning!" Birdy gushed as she studied Kit's look from head to toe.

Kit couldn't help but agree with that sentiment as she turned and studied herself from different angles. They'd both agreed that this wasn't an event that Kit needed to be too dressed up for.

They differed on their opinions of what kind of statement Kit should make. Birdy felt that this coming out should be a bold statement while Kit was happy to keep it minimalistic. Birdy had found a compromise in the end.

Kit was wearing a backless, black silk dress with an asymmetric neckline. The dress was held together by ornamental, gold pins; flashing the chocolate hued skin down each side of her body. Her long, box braids were the perfect accent to her outfit.

"If I'm going to wear this, I'm going to need a shot!" Kit announced as she reached for the tequila Luca had gifted her.

She pulled the cork out of the bottle and took a healthy sip; feeling the warm, smooth liquid slide down her throat - leaving behind a trail of fire.

She offered the bottle to Birdy who accepted it with a twinkle in her eye, "You seem really nervous, if you don't mind my saying so."

Kit gnawed at her lip gently before turning to study herself in the mirror again, "This is my first time going public with a relationship."

Birdy nodded thoughtfully and took her own shot before handing the bottle back to Kit, "Definitely have a few more shots then. And don't overthink it, you two make a stunning couple!"

Kit shook her head and laughed, "You haven't even seen us together yet."

Birdy laughed and started collecting her things, "I know what you're both wearing. And I read Page Nine too!"

The two women experimented with different accessories and drank the tequila as they waited for Kit's ride to arrive.

A knock rang out, interrupting the two women. Kit smiled at Birdy and made her way to the front door. She pulled it open and was surprised to find Luca standing there.

He chuckled at the surprised expression on her face and gave her a sexy grin, "Did you forget I was coming?"

He was similarly dressed in a black, short sleeved shirt was patterned with gold and slightly loose. He'd left it unbuttoned dangerously low showing tattoos on his chest and tanned, olive skin. The shirt was tucked into form fitting, black casual pants and finished off with black slipper loafers.

Kit bit her lip and shook her head slightly as she drank him in, "We were enjoying your gift and lost track of time."

Luca furrowed his brow, fighting a flash of annoyance at the thought of her drinking his gift with a date. Before he could respond, Birdy popped her head from behind Kit's back.

"Hi Luca!" she directed at him before turning to Kit. "I'm leaving now, I left the rack so you can see if you like anything else."

She stepped into the hallway and brushed some lint off of Luca's shirt, "You two crazy kids have fun!"

Luca and Kit watched as she scurried down the hall and disappeared around the corner. Luca shook his head in amusement and turned his attention back to Kit, looking down into her eyes.

"Are you ready to go?" he murmured softly, the air between them suddenly simmering with tension.

Kit broke away from his gaze and nodded her head, "I'll be right back."

Luca's breath caught in his throat as she turned and he caught sight of the thigh length slit in her dress. He watched as she disappeared into the apartment and made a note to send Birdy a thank you gift tomorrow.

Kit reappeared a few minutes later with a slight smile and a small bag. Luca stepped back as she locked her door before gesturing for her to lead the way. The two of them walked down the hallway in silence; neither sure what to say.

"Thank you for the tequila," Kit broke the silence as they came to a stop in front of the elevator.

Luca smiled graciously and shrugged before stepping aside as the elevator doors opened. Kit brushed by him, their bodies touching briefly as she entered the elevator.

Once the doors had closed again, Luca turned and looked at Kit appreciatively, "You look amazing by the way. You'll probably look better than the cover girl."

Kit chuckled good-naturedly, "I have you to thank for that as well. If I'm honest, I was really surprised by that."

Luca cringed, "We got off to a bad foot and even if I don't remember it. It's my fault, so consider this an olive branch of sorts."

Kit grinned and nodded, "Okay but only if you answer truthfully. Did you tell her to make sure we matched?"

Luca burst into laughter, "I told her to get you whatever you wanted. I just wear what she tells me to and buy what she tells me to."

Kit ran her eyes over his body and offered him a playful grin, "She's got good taste."

"Is that your way of saying I look good?" Luca asked in amusement.

"Nope. That's my way of saying that the clothes look good," she said with a smirk.

Luca chuckled softly and shook his head, "I ask at the risk of screwing up again, but one day will you tell me what happened the first time we met?"

Kit glanced at him and smirked again, "Are you sure you can handle it?"

Luca shot Kit a searing glance as the elevator came to a stop on the ground floor, "I can handle anything you throw at me."

Kit swallowed heavily and felt fire zip down her body where she brushed by Luca. He placed his hand on her lower back and guided her towards the front door.

# **Chapter 6:** An Impromptu Invitation

"Hey!" James called as he snapped his fingers a few inches away from Luca's face.

Luca flinched and reared his head backward before scowling at James. James just smiled in amusement before arching his brow questioningly. The two of them were in Luca's office and they were supposed to be discussing ideas for their brand reveal and launch.

Luca heaved a deep sigh, "I'm torn."

James frowned in concern. "You're not generally indecisive. What's up? Having second thoughts about this new proposal?"

They'd kept their business plans under wraps but the time to reveal it was coming soon. They both knew that they were taking a huge risk with their plans, especially Luca.

'High Life', their new THC and CBD company, was supposed to specialize in high-end products for medicinal and recreational use. They hadn't thought to branch into animal products, but James felt the proposal was compelling.

Luca shook his head. "I'm thinking about inviting Nikita to the gala tonight."

A surprised expression flitted across James' face before he leaned forward curiously. "You had that much fun a few nights ago?"

Luca leaned back in his seat and considered the question. He'd definitely enjoyed his evening with Nikita, but he wasn't sure that she could say the same. That said, he was starting to get the impression that she was starting to thaw toward him.

Luca nodded hesitantly. "I think so? She thanked me for my peace offering and we were actually pretty civil the whole night. And she actually gave me her personal number so we don't have to email."

"Ooh...big steps," James cooed teasingly. " Seriously, I'm all for you two getting along but isn't this a little last minute? The morning of doesn't give her much time to prepare," James pointed out.

Luca shrugged. "She's welcome to say no but at least I'll have tried to do my part."

James studied Luca's face thoughtfully. "Is that the only reason you're inviting her then?"

Luca smiled mysteriously but didn't answer. Instead, he picked up his phone and started a new message to Nikita.

'Hey. I'm hosting a charity gala tonight. I know it's last minute but will you be my date?'

He put his phone down and focused on James. "You're going to be there too, right?"

James nodded. "Yeah, inviting a few of our potential investors was a really smart move. I just know we'll be signing the Franklin contract tomorrow if tonight goes well."

Luca's phone vibrated on the desk, capturing both of the men's attention. He picked it up hesitantly and saw that Nikita had replied.

"Is it her?" James asked with interest clear in his voice.

Luca nodded wordlessly, his thumb hovering over the notification. He realized that he actually wanted her to come to his gala tonight. He wanted to show her that there was more to him than the bad impressions he'd already made.

He frowned, wondering why he cared about her opinion of him at all. Their relationship wasn't real and had no chance of becoming real on either of their part. He decided that he'd have to give this more thought later.

He opened the message and smiled in relief.

'Send me the details and I'll meet you there.'

"She agreed to come," he announced for James' benefit before putting his phone down again.

He'd have his assistant send her the relevant details but he wasn't sure what to make of her message. A part of him wondered if she was coming because she wanted to or if it was because she had to.

"So why do you look so unhappy about it?" James queried. "You wanted her to come right?"

Luca sighed, "Yes, James. I wanted her to come. Her response was just really brief, I can't tell if she's annoyed or not."

James' lips stretched into a knowing grin, "No, what you really want to know is if she's happy you asked and happy to come."

Luca rolled his eyes and looked down at the documents they'd been poring over before they'd digressed. "Let's focus, I have a lot to get done before the gala tonight."

James barked out a laugh but acquiesced and resumed their previous discussion. The two men were just wrapping up when Luca's assistant appeared at the door.

"There's a visitor for Mr. Brooks," she announced with a smile.

Luca nodded. "We were just finishing. Please send whomever it is in but no one else after that. I have to get going."

She nodded and disappeared from the room, reappearing a few moments later with Birdy by her side.

Luca's brow furrowed in confusion. "What are you doing here? Did I forget that we had an appointment?"

Birdy smiled and shook her head enigmatically before reaching into her large tote. She pulled out an envelope and handed it to him. He exchanged a curious look with James before accepting the envelope.

He opened it to reveal a vanilla-scented, pale pink card. 'Next time, don't forget the limes. - Nikita'

He looked up at Birdy, his confusion turning into amusement as she stood there with a bag of limes and a bottle of tequila. He barked in laughter and shook his head.

"So, you're here to dress me for the gala?" he asked, to be sure.

Birdy nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah! Kit said this is the only way she can be sure you'll be looking up to code."

James burst into laughter while Luca tipped his head curiously. "Kit?"

Birdy shrugged. "What do you call her?"

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Luca nodded along with whatever the guest he was talking to was currently saying. He was watching the door over their shoulder, waiting to see Nikita come in. She'd sent him a message to let him know that she'd received the details from his assistant but nothing since.

There was a small part of him that felt she'd changed her mind. That part of him was also disappointed with each second that passed.

"Oh! I see Mrs. Reynolds over there," the older woman Luca was speaking to announced in a rush. "Please tell your parents to come over sometime."

Luca smiled stiffly and nodded his head before watching the woman rush away. While his parents' absence at this event was noticeable, no one had brought it up to him yet.

"You look like you didn't enjoy my gift at all," Kit spoke from behind him.

He whipped around, caught off guard. Kit laughed lightly and offered him an apologetic smile. He smiled in return and wrapped his arm around her waist loosely. He dropped a kiss on her cheek, his lips lingering against her skin for a moment.

Kit gasped softly as their skin touched and Luca pulled away. "There are people watching, a little affectionate greeting is probably expected."

Kit nodded quickly and smiled slightly. "Very wise of you, I didn't even think of that. Thank you for inviting me. This place looks amazing."

She looked around the rooftop where the event was being held. There were lights and flowers everywhere with a few living exhibitions scattered throughout the party, where many affluent guests were milling around and socializing. The sun setting over the city skyline in the background was the perfect setting.

Luca did his best to school his expression and not look too surprised at the compliment. He smiled at her and then flagged a server down so he could grab two champagne flutes.

"Thank you," he directed at the server before turning back to Kit and handing her a drink. "You look amazing yourself," Luca told Kit with a soft smile. "Am I up to your standards?"

She tipped her head and made a show of studying him intently before meeting his gaze with a playful smile. "Birdy did a good job."

Luca chuckled, "So you're saying I look good too?"

Kit shrugged and smiled into her glass. "I'm saying Birdy is good at her job."

Luca snorted in amusement and shook his head while studying Kit. She seemed to be in a good mood and having a good time. He felt relief coursing through him as he looked at her relaxed and open expression.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," a husky, feminine voice chimed in from behind Luca. "I just had to come and congratulate the happy couple!"

Kit felt a faint stirring of recognition as he looked at the gorgeous, stereotypically blonde girl next door that had entered the conversation. Luca smiled fondly as he turned and hugged the mystery woman before pulling her closer to Kit.

"Nikita, this is Sloane," Luca said, helping Kit finally identify her. "Our families have been friends forever."

Sloane laughed, "We practically grew up together!" It's nice to meet you, Nikita. I've been a fan of yours for a while."

Kit smiled politely and shook Sloane's hand. "It's great to meet one of Luca's longtime friends."

Luca chuckled, "Stay away from Sloane. She's always gotten us in trouble."

Sloane elbowed Luca and smiled good-naturedly. "Don't make me sue you for slander!"

Luca raised his hands in surrender. Sloane smiled and turned to Kit. "He's the one you should really look out for. This is hardly the place for it, but I'd love an opportunity to talk to you about a collaboration."

"I'm sure we can arrange that," Kit answered with a short smile, undecided about whether or not she meant that.

Sloane smiled. "I'll get your details from this guy later. You two are so cute together honestly, don't let this guy push you away!" She winked at Kit conspiratorially and gave Luca a side hug before turning and disappearing into the crowd.

Kit turned and looked at Luca curiously. "What's your opinion on that? Should I take that meeting?"

Luca's eyes widened in thinly veiled surprise before he smiled. "Sloane has a heart of gold and comes from a pretty affluent family. I think it's definitely worth hearing her out.”

Kit nodded. “I’ll consider it.”

They gazed into each other’s eyes for a few moments before Kit broke the connection. “So, what’s the charity?”

Luca bit his lip to hide a smile. “Basically, the money raised here from the dinner and auction helps run a program that provides homes and resources for adult orphans and foster children.”

Kit smiled. “Wow, that’s honestly unexpected.”

Luca gave her a knowing grin and continued, “So we help give them homes and healthcare, get an education, and then jobs ultimately. Or at least that’s the goal.”

Kit smiled ruefully. “I’ve always intended to really extend my philanthropic efforts past donations but I’ve never made the leap.”

Luca squeezed her shoulder briefly and smiled understandingly. “It can be a lot to take on. I’m happy to help you get started.”

Kit looked at Luca consideringly before nodding slowly. “It’s a date.”

# **Chapter 7**: From The Top

Kit hovered outside Luca's front door with a bottle of Chardonnay in one hand and the other poised to knock. She hesitated and gnawed on her bottom lip gently. This 'date' made her feel more nervous than she was comfortable with, even if they'd be discussing charity work.

She had to begrudgingly admit that his charity gala had been amazing; the kind of event she'd want to throw one day. The cause was surprising, she never would have pegged him as someone who thought of others. Maybe she had misjudged him, but she wasn't ready to come to a final conclusion just yet.

She took a deep breath and knocked on the door firmly, her hand tightening on the bottle of wine as she heard footsteps approaching.

Luca pulled the door open and smiled at Kit warmly. "Hey, please come in."

Kit smiled back at him tentatively and stepped past him, into his home. It wasn't what she'd expected for a bachelor pad as it was tastefully furnished and had a warm, homey feeling to it.

"Please follow me," Luca instructed as he led the way into his living room.

Kit followed behind slowly, taking everything in. She noticed that there were lots of pictures of family and friends as well as art hanging on his walls. Luca was patiently waiting for her near the doorway to the lounge.

"No tequila today?" he asked while gesturing to the wine.

Kit grinned and handed him the bottle. "Even those of us in our 20s can only handle so much tequila."

Luca chuckled and nodded, "Thank god. I'll get us some glasses. You make yourself comfortable."

Kit watched him walk into the kitchen before making her way to his balcony. She opened the door and stepped outside to the cacophony of blaring car horns; the view of the city was breathtaking from her vantage point.

"It's a great view," Luca announced as he joined her on the balcony, wine glasses in hand.

Kit accepted a full glass with an appreciative smile and nodded her head. "It's definitely a view people pay millions for."

Luca shrugged easily and took a sip of wine. "It's been in my family for a very long time. It's been remodeled frequently."

"So, you inherited it?" Kit asked curiously.

"No, it's a family-owned home," Luca explained. "I'm just lucky enough to live in it right now. Anyway, why don't we come back in?"

"Eager to impart your wisdom?" Kit asked teasingly as she walked back into his living room.

Luca laughed from behind her as he entered the room. "Something like that. I actually thought we might stray from the agenda."

Kit shot him a curious look as she sat on his couch gingerly. "What does that mean?"

Luca cleared his throat nervously and sat next to Kit while leaving some distance between them. "I was actually thinking we could get to know each other better. Being more comfortable with each other can only help, especially if we have to be close for six weeks."

Kit was silent for a moment before drinking more wine. "So, this actually is a date?"

Luca smiled playfully, "It's more of a reintroduction. Maybe we'll get off on the right foot this time."

Kit mulled it over as she sipped on her wine while Luca waited patiently, his eyes trained on her.

"I think it'll be easier to fake a relationship and be around each other if we know each other a little better," he elaborated after a beat.

Kit finally met his eye and nodded slowly, with an uncertain expression on her face. "You're right. I'm open to it…where do you want to start?"

Luca grimaced and looked at her determinedly. "Let's start with the meeting I don't remember."

Kit smiled. "Okay then. We met last year in Vegas at Rachel Chu's 30th."

Luca's eyebrows shot into his hairline, causing Kit to give him a questioning look.

Luca smiled. "I don't know. You don't seem like a Vegas kind of person to me. I'm also surprised you know Rachel."

"There's lots to learn about me," Kit responded. "Back to our story, I was there with Gem and a few other friends. You were there with James. Is any of this ringing a bell yet?"

Luca smiled sheepishly, "I don't remember most of that night. I had more than too much to drink."

Kit frowned slightly, "Is that a regular occurrence?"

Luca sighed heavily and reached for the wine bottle. He spoke as he topped up his glass, "I don't know if you'll believe me at this point, but I don't usually get that drunk. That night was an exception."

Kit studied him silently before continuing, "I'm not too sure about this next part but James knows Gemma through mutual friends. So you two joined our group and we ended up sitting next to each other."

"And then I said something that offended you?" Luca guessed with a rueful smile.

Kit laughed and shook her head. "Actually, we really got along. We were flirting quite a bit. So I'm surprised you don't remember anything, you seemed coherent."

"I was fine up until the party, I think the drinks there tipped me over the edge," Luca said thoughtfully before smiling.

Kit shot him a skeptical look. "Just drinks?"

Luca winced and took a swig of his drink. "I'll admit there was a little more than just drinks at play. That's also not something I do often."

Kit's face remained blank as she spoke again, "So you do partake sometimes?"

Luca nodded. "Nothing heavy or crazy though. And sometimes is maybe thrice a year, if at all." He nodded and Kit sipped her drink before offering him a smile.

Luca's lips quirked into a slight smile before he decided to move the conversation along. "So we were flirting?"

Kit gave him a coy smile. "Yeah, we were flirting. Hard. You were telling me that you're not how you're portrayed in the media."

"Rip the band-aid off," Luca pleaded. "Please get to the part where I make an ass of myself."

Kit cocked her head and smirked, "I'm really enjoying watching you squirm though."

Luca chuckled, "While I hate to stop your fun, I do need to know."

Kit sighed, "Okay, so after a few drinks we hit the dancefloor. It was nothing explicit but we were definitely very close to each other. Anyway, I went to the bathroom and when I came back you were licking some random woman's tonsils."

Luca covered his face with his hands and groaned. "I'm such an a\*ss."

Kit nodded and smirked evilly. "You are and it doesn't end there. I left you and your new paramour to it and went back to the table. You reappeared a little later and immediately started flirting with me as if nothing had happened."

"F\*ck me," Luca cursed lowly. He looked at Kit apologetically. "I'm really sorry. I'm surprised you even agreed to do this."

"I'm surprised too honestly," Kit agreed. "This is really a last resort situation."

Luca winced playfully and chuckled, "I deserve that. No wonder you don't want to be around me."

Kit chuckled, "Look, it's water under the bridge. You were remorseful and you've been on your best behavior."

"Thank you," Luca said sincerely. "So, what are you willing to tell me?"

Kit tapped her nearly empty glass with her nail. "I'm going to need a little more wine first. And definitely some food at some point."

Luca laughed and poured what was left in the bottle into her glass. "We're probably going to need another bottle then. I'll be right back."

He sauntered to the kitchen while Kit took a fortifying sip of her wine. She was glad he was out of the room so she could have a moment to decide what she was going to tell him.

Luca was back and dropping to the floor, with his back against the couch, before Kit could come up with anything.

"Okay," Luca clapped and grinned devilishly, "Let's hear it."

Kit giggled slightly, as she felt herself relax and a giddy feeling started to rise within her. "Honestly, I have no idea what to tell you."

Luca chuckled as he watched Kit start to feel the effects of the wine. "I have something I want to know."

Kit shrugged and sipped her wine again. "Go ahead."

"If I hadn't made out with that girl, would I have had a chance?" Luca asked as he met Kit's gaze.

She laughed and gave him a saucy grin. "Would you have had a chance at a night with me? Not at all. Would I have said yes to a date? I don't know."

Luca smiled slightly and nodded before sipping his wine. "Good to know. I have another question for you, are you in the mood for Chinese?"

# **Chapter 8**: Life's Joys

## Kit lit up and smiled gratefully as Gemma walked into her office, two coffees in hand. She snatched the coffee off her desk the minute Gemma put it down, causing Gemma to shoot Kit an amused look as she sat down.

Kit ignored Gemma and slurped her coffee with a happy groan. She savored the warmth with her eyes closed for a minute before opening them and giving Gemma her attention.

"Late night?" Gemma asked with a knowing twinkle in her eye.

Kit rolled her eyes and flipped Gemma off while sipping her coffee with her other hand. "I went back to my place, alone, at a decent hour. I'm just feeling a little groggy after all the wine I had."

Gemma perked up with interest. "You were drinking wine while discussing starting a charity?"

Kit groaned internally, dreading Gemma's reaction to the news that they'd kind of had a date.

"Actually, he suggested we get to know each other better. So we hung out and talked a little," Kit explained in a nonchalant tone. Hoping that Gemma would match her energy about the situation.

Gemma giggled with glee, "Oh, so you guys had a real date night. That's cute and smart. What did you talk about?"

Kit rolled her eyes and shrugged. "Nothing too deep or personal. A little bit about work, a little bit personal stuff and I told him about the night in Vegas."

Gemma nodded thoughtfully. "Okay, good. It sounds like you guys are on the right track."

Kit sighed and sipped her coffee again. "Are the public buying it though?"

Gemma nodded eagerly. "The response is exactly what we wanted. You two have been a trending topic since the first photos dropped. The fact that Luca's been laying low really has tongues wagging."

Kit laughed incredulously, "Tongues wagging how? What does that even mean?"

Gemma rolled her eyes, "They're taking it as a sign that he's changing for you - that your relationship is serious. On top of that, we've seen a little boost in your following. It's still early days but we're off to a good start."

Kit smiled in relief. "Thank goodness I'm not doing all of this for nothing!"

Gemma looked at her curiously. "Is it really that bad being with Luca? You don't think you could at least be friends?"

Kit set her mug down and wrapped both of her hands around it in thought. She knew the answer to the first question but wasn't sure of the second one.

"Luca and I have made progress but I'm not sure about friendship just yet," Kit said finally. "Actually…he's supposed to be coming over soon."

Gemma's mouth dropped open in shock. "Why is he coming here? Breakfast date maybe?"

Kit snorted and finished the last of her coffee. "Well, he and James are set to launch their new business venture soon."

Gemma looked mildly surprised. "I wouldn't have pegged Luca as an entrepreneur but okay, continue."

Kit's lips quirked slightly in amusement. "Luca confided in me that he's not really sure what to do, so I invited him here to help him a little."

Gemma smirked and sipped her coffee causing Kit to roll her eyes. "No, no. Don't make that face. This is an exchange of information, he's going to help me with the charity and I'll help him with this."

"Whatever you say, honey," Gemma responded with a cheeky smile. "It just seems like you two are finding reasons to spend time together."

Kit narrowed her eyes at Gemma and was about to say something snarky when there was a firm knock at the door. Gemma made an excited sound that could be classified as a squeal before covering her mouth.

Kit rolled her eyes and called out, "Come in."

The door opened to reveal Luca with a bouquet and a brown bag in one hand. He smiled at both women warmly as he closed the door behind him.

"I hope I'm not interrupting," he said with an apologetic look.

"Not at all!" Gemma assured him. "What's in the bag?"

"Oh," Luca exclaimed before handing the bouquet to Kit. "These are for you and there are bagels in the bag."

Gemma turned to Kit with a wide smile. "He brought food and flowers. Anything you want to say?"

"Shut up Gemma," Kit snapped. "Get out now, we have business to attend to."

Gemma laughed and made a show of zipping her mouth shut before she picked up her bag and moved toward the door.

"You're so annoying!" Kit called out after Gemma as she scampered out of the door, leaving her alone with Luca.

"What was that about?" Luca asked curiously as he walked up to the desk and set the bag down.

Kit rolled her eyes and put the flowers down on the desk too. "Ignore her. Thank you for the flowers and the bagels."

Luca smiled graciously. "It's the least I could do. You have a great office and an even better view. Got to say I'm pretty jealous."

Kit smiled smugly. "Most people who come here are."

Luca chuckled and opened the bag, reaching inside and pulling out a bagel for Kit. She accepted it gratefully and immediately bit into it with a moan. Luca smiled with a calm he didn't feel.

"I'm guessing you really like bagels?" he asked as he worked to slow his heart. He turned his gaze away from Kit, opting to take in her office instead.

"Coffee and a bagel are my go-tos," Kit admitted with a sheepish laugh. "What do you think of my office?"

Luca looked around the office and mulled over the question. The room was decorated and painted in warm earthy tones. There were a few interesting paintings hung on the wall but no personal photos.

"It feels really warm and homey," he answered. "No family photos?"

Kit shook her head frantically. "No one needs to see those pictures. All my favorites are the really embarrassing ones."

She threw the remains of her bagel in the trash and redirected the conversation toward a folder on her desk. "Let's get into it."

Luca nodded and took a seat before flipping the folder open. He quietly sifted through the various pictures and documents it contained before looking up at Kit.

His brow was furrowed in worry. "This is a lot more than I expected to go into a launch. We might be a little out of our depth here."

Kit smiled at him sympathetically, "I know it can seem overwhelming but that's why you hire people to make it easier."

Luca nodded in obvious relief. "You're right, we can always hire people! There's a lot of stuff in here, what are you actually launching?"

Kit smiled enigmatically. "Basically everything. Do you know what I currently sell?"

Luca nodded hesitantly. "You sell hair products and makeup right?"

"Hair products for black people, and makeup and skincare for people of color," she corrected with a smile. "Now I'm wanting to branch into other things, the concept is all about self-care and things that make you feel good."

Luca nodded along as Kit continued, "So it's a mix of things; candles, scents, skincare, bath products and it goes on."

Luca let out a low whistle, "This is a really huge launch. You literally are making everything."

Kit gave him a small smile. "Well…not exactly everything."

"What do you mean?" Luca asked curiously, causing Kit to sigh and bite her lip softly. Luca's eyes were immediately drawn to her mouth before he yanked his eyes away.

"There's an idea I've been playing with - I wasn't sure about it," Kit confessed. "After talking to you yesterday, I thought f\*ck it! Why not?"

Luca barked out a surprised laugh and nodded his head in approval. "I'm liking the attitude. What's the idea?"

Kit smiled at him saucily, "It's actually the other reason I invited you here. I wanted to get a male perspective."

"Okay," Luca smiled curiously. "You have my attention. What's the idea?"

Kit winked at Luca before pulling another folder out of her desk drawer and handing it to him.

"Sex toys," she stated bluntly. Luca immediately looked up at her in shock to find her already watching him with laughing eyes and a slightly taunting smile.

"When I think of feeling good - well, a sex toy is always a good idea," Kit continued with a chuckle.

Luca fingered the folder and met Kit's gaze. "So what do you need a male perspective on?"

"Well…I have a few ideas but I'm not sure what toys men would really like," Kit explained laughingly.

Luca opened the file suspiciously and quickly snapped it shut again with a groan. Kit pulled a pen and paper toward her and looked at Luca expectantly.

"Which one made you make that sound?" she asked.

# **Chapter 9**: When The Cat's Away

*“Billionaire Romance Heating Up!*

*What’s better than one billionaire? Two billionaires in love!*

*Luca Brooks and Nikita Simon are still going strong. They’ve been spotted in public a few times since they made their first official appearance.*

*“Nikita’s had such a positive influence on Luca,” a source exclusively tells Page Nine.*

*“He wants to be the kind of guy she deserves.”*

*The notorious playboy seems to have indeed turned over a new leaf. In the last few weeks, he’s kept a low profile which is quite unlike him. Is the partying done for good?*

*“They’re in the honeymoon phase right now,” an insider shares. “They’re just enjoying each other’s company and spending time together while they can.”*

*As for whether or not this relationship has the potential to go the distance remains to be seen. There are whispers that meeting the parents is up next.*

*Maya Simon, Kit’s mom, is up first. She was spotted at the airport after a Caribbean getaway with her husband a few days ago.*

*Suffice to say, this couple has our tongues wagging and our minds racing.”*

“Huh,” Maya muttered as she finished reading the article out loud. “Funny how no one told me about this meeting.”

Kit rolled her eyes as she sipped at her coffee gingerly. “Since when do you read the tabloids?”

She was snuggled up on her mother’s couch, enjoying coffee and cookies while they caught up. Her mother was sitting across from her and reading from her phone, she’d started the second Kit had sat down.

Maya pulled her glasses off her face and set them on the table. “Since that’s the only way I learn anything about your life anymore.”

Kit groaned and put her coffee down before shooting her mother a frown. The older woman frowned right back at her, undeterred.

Her mother’s black hair fell around her head in perfectly lying coiffed curls. She was wearing a green cashmere sweater and a pair of faded jeans. Anyone meeting them for the first time could easily mistake them for sisters.

Kit had received her height, looks, and drive from her mother. Unfortunately, she’d also gotten the stubborn streak from her.

She sighed, “I don’t control what Page Nine writes Mom.”

“You don’t,” Maya agreed before swatting Kit’s hand as she reached for the cookies on the table. “What you do control is what you tell your mother.”

“All right!” Kit acquiesced. “You’re right, I should have said something. It’s still really early days. Not much to tell.”

Maya studied her daughter with a dubious look on her face. “Since when are you into rich white boys?”

Kit snorted in laughter and reached for a cookie again. “I’m not into white boys, rich or poor. I’m just getting to know Luca still.”

Maya shook her head in disapproval before sipping on her tea delicately. “I don’t really care if you want to date a rich, white boy but why did it have to be this one?”

“First of all, Mom, Luca is a grown man -"

“He sure doesn’t act like a grown man,” Maya sniffed, interrupting. “He seems immature, all money and no substance.”

Kit frowned at her mother. “You don’t even know him.”

Maya scoffed, “I know all that I need to know. Should we look him up online?” She picked up her phone and waved it back and forth before dropping it in her lap.

Kit sighed exasperatedly, “We just discussed how the tabloids print stuff that isn’t true all the time.”

Maya shrugged unrepentantly. “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire. You know how he treats women, he probably sees you as a fetish!”

Kit put her mug down. “Woah. Let’s calm down. I can admit that he’s mis-stepped in the past.”

“He’s a wh\*re dear,” Maya declared with a hard stare. “You can dress it up all you like but you can do better.”

Kit felt irritation rise within her. “No offense, but you’re the last person I’d take relationship advice from.”

Maya glared at Kit who met her gaze with equal fire. Maya broke the stare off and took a deep breath. “I know that I’ve made mistakes with men in your life,” she started evenly, “Including your father, but when you pick wrong so many times you start to get a sense for these things.”

Kit sighed tiredly, “I was there too Mom. For every one of your boyfriends. I have a fairly good sense for these things too.”

Maya frowned and leaned toward her daughter; her arm outstretched across the coffee table. Kit remained clearly displeased but leaned forward and grabbed her mother’s hand in her own.

“I f\*cked up Kit,” she stated bluntly. “I know I did. I made a lot of mistakes as a mom and an example but I’m trying to do better now.”

Kit sighed and offered her mother a small smile. Their relationship had been fairly rocky for most of her life but recently, they’d been working on it. She would be lying if she said her mother’s dating history hadn’t left a bad impression on her about love.

“I know,” Kit assured her gently. “I don’t need you to do that in this situation. I walked into this thing with Luca with my eyes wide open.”

Maya looked at her daughter for a while before sighing heavily and shaking her head. “You’ve always been so hard-headed but you do you. I just don’t get how you went from avoiding love to a relationship with the worst candidate.”

Kit shrugged guiltily and shoved more of her cookie in her mouth. She hadn’t even considered that her mother would be upset or have any concerns. She felt tempted to tell her the truth but it was risky. Maya was unlikely to approve of the truth any more than the lie.

“What can I say?” Kit murmured. “You know I’ve always loved taking risks and this is just another example of that.”

“Girl,” Maya muttered with a shake of her head. “You better know what you’re doing.”

Kit laughed a little and gave her mother a wan smile. “I hope I do.”

The two women sat in silence for a few minutes, both lost in thought. Maya was feeling uneasy about what she’d learned and Kit felt surprisingly bothered by her mother’s thoughts.

“So,” Kit said with a strained smile. “How was your vacation with Russ? I’m sure you’ve got a ton of photos.”

# **Chapter 10**: All Filled In

"Welcome to Serenity! How can I help you today?" the receptionist chirped brightly, with a wide smile. She was dressed in sage green scrubs, her blonde hair pulled back into a neat ponytail.

Kit smiled back politely. "I'm meeting up with Sloane Kincaid?"

The receptionist nodded and smiled again. "That's perfect. Would you mind having a seat? One of our therapists will be out to get you shortly."

Kit smiled wordlessly and turned to find a seat in the basically empty front room. The couches lining the room were an emerald green and the wallpaper was a plant print. There was soothing music playing very softly and the room smelled of jasmine.

To anyone else, this might have seemed like a pretty but unsuccessful spa but Kit knew this was one of the most exclusive spas in the city. She'd felt quite surprised when Sloane had reached out to her office and invited her here. In the end, she decided to come because she was curious.

"Miss Simon?" a voice called out gently, snapping Kit out of her thoughts. She turned her head to find herself face to face with another woman dressed in green scrubs. She was holding a tray that had glasses of champagne, mimosas, and water.

Kit selected the mimosa and smiled at the woman. "Thank you."

The young woman nodded wordlessly and disappeared into a back room. Kit had only started sipping on her drink when the doors opened to reveal an older woman in black scrubs. She smiled at Kit broadly and approached with a confident stride.

"Miss Simon, it's lovely to meet you!" she said as she reached Kit's side. "I'm Dr. Bonn. Please come through."

She turned and started leading the way, leaving Kit to quickly jump up and follow after her. Dr. Bonn held the door open for Kit and smiled as she walked past before leading the way again.

Kit curiously studied her surroundings as the doctor led her through the spa. The same soft music was playing in this area as well and they walked past a few doors that were closed, probably for privacy reasons.

She nearly walked straight into the doctor's back as she came to a stop at the end of the hallway. Kit walked around the doctor and found herself staring at another small waiting area where Sloane was sitting.

She was decked out in a chic but obviously designer outfit, a magazine on her lap and a glass of champagne in the other. Her hair was hanging around her head in a straight curtain. Kit had to admit that this wasn't the kind of woman she typically spent her time with.

"I'll be back in a second!" Dr. Bonn announced before disappearing down the hall again, leaving the two women alone.

Sloane smiled warmly at Kit and stood to pull her into a warm hug. Kit reciprocated the hug awkwardly, feeling uncomfortable with this affection from a stranger.

"Nikita!" Sloane beamed. "I'm excited you could make it today. Please, sit down."

"Thank you for inviting me," Kit answered as she sat next to Sloane on the couch. "I've been meaning to come here for a while."

"It's absolutely fabulous!" Sloane assured her with a tinkling laugh. "I come here with my girlfriends quite often."

Kit smiled slightly. "I have to be honest. I was really surprised to receive your invitation, I figured you were just being polite at the gala."

Sloane laughed again, "I was being polite but I'm also curious to get to know the woman who's tamed Luca Brooks!"

Kit sipped her mimosa and averted her gaze. "I'm not sure I've really tamed him. It's still fairly early."

"Don't be modest!" Sloane clucked. "I've never known Luca to go this long without getting into some kind of trouble."

Kit perked up and looked at Sloane curiously. "I'm guessing you know him pretty well?"

Sloane nodded. "We've been friends our whole lives, then more than friends, and now friends again and business associates."

Kit couldn't hide her shock at this revelation, causing Sloane to frown. "I thought you knew we dated once upon a time."

Kit shook her head. "It hasn't really come up I suppose. We haven't really had the talk about exes but I shouldn't be surprised. New York is crawling with women he's dated."

Sloane chuckled and finished her drink. She winked at Kit and her lips quirked into an odd smile. "Too true! I wouldn't worry about them, or me. He's clearly gone for something different this time. It must be serious."

Kit smiled hesitantly, wondering what Sloane meant when she classed her as different from girls he'd dated. Her musings were cut short when the doctor appeared again and gestured for them to follow her. Sloane smiled at Kit excitedly before bouncing after the doctor. Kit followed behind at a more sedate pace and was surprised to find them entering a doctor's room.

Sloane was already getting comfortable in the armchair bed with Dr. Bonn sitting nearby and arranging her instruments.

"You can sit right there for now," Sloane directed her toward a chair stationed near her head. Kit followed the direction, feeling out of place.

Pretty much everyone these days had fillers and Botox or some kind of cosmetic procedures and surgeries done. It just wasn't something she was interested in herself and it certainly wasn't what she'd expected from a spa day.

"All right ladies," the doctor announced with a grin. "What are we getting done today?"

"Not much for me today," Sloane answered. "I just want to touch up my filler a little bit. I have a very busy month socially. Nikita? It's on me!"

Kit chuckled and shook her head, "You're sweet but I think I'll just watch for today."

Sloane's eyebrow quirked in surprise. "You really are different from the usual model, aren't you."

Kit frowned as Sloane immediately turned to Dr. Bonn and started outlining the areas where she wanted filler. She was really starting to wonder what kind of woman Luca typically dated. She'd never paid attention to the stories about him, but maybe she'd have to research as her mom suggested.

"So," Kit started conversationally as the doctor started preparing the filler. "What is the usual model?"

Sloane giggled without moving her head. "I'm sure you've seen the kind of woman he usually dates. Women like me I suppose, but obviously I'm not his type."

"What makes you think you're not his type?" Kit pressed, finding it hard to believe that Luca wouldn't be into a rich, beautiful blonde.

Sloane hissed in pain as the doctor started applying the injections. "Well, just between us girls. I think Luca is threatened by successful and intelligent women. We got along as friends but once we started dating, he changed."

"Changed?" Kit echoed, clearly pressing for more information. "Changed how?"

"Oh, goodness!" Sloane exclaimed. "I don't want to be a bitter ex but when things with Luca are good, they're amazing. He can be quite charming, which I'm sure you know."

Kit nodded encouragingly and sipped her drink thoughtfully. "So what went wrong?"

Sloane shrugged. "Who knows! He just wasn't feeling it one day and that was that. I'm lucky that I've known him long enough to not get emotionally invested."

"Well," Kit murmured thoughtfully, as she processed the new information. "You seem to be good friends again now."

"We are!" Sloane affirmed as the doctor finished. She accepted the mirror she was offered and started examining her face before lowering it and smiling at Kit.

"You have nothing to worry about though," Sloane told Kit comfortingly. "What you two have is clearly more real than anything he's ever had."

# **Chapter 11**: Breach of Contract

"Hi," Luca breathed nervously as Kit opened the front door. She offered him a tired smile and stepped aside to let him in.

"I was just about to have a glass of scotch and look through the delivery apps," Kit informed him as they walked into her living room. She collapsed on the couch and looked at him expectedly as he hovered in the middle of the room awkwardly.

"Thanks for allowing me to come over on such short notice," Luca managed with a grateful smile before perching on the edge of the couch with a heavy sigh.

Kit shrugged easily and gestured towards her drink. "Would you like one too?"

Luca shook his head and rubbed his hands together. "I'm just going to jump right in and say it. I need a favor from you, I can't see a way around it."

Kit regarded him curiously. "It's a little early to be asking each other for favors, isn't it?"

Luca bit his lip and nodded, feeling his nerves rising again. "To be blunt, my parents want to meet you. They usually avoid the tabloids, but we're the talk of the town apparently."

Kit immediately shook her head, feeling alarm welling inside her. She was unable to imagine anything she wanted to do less than meet Luca's parents.

"No, no, and no," she told him firmly. "We explicitly agreed not to involve our personal lives in this. Meeting your family falls in that category."

"I know, I know!" Luca groaned before leaning across the coffee table, towards Kit. "I know that I'm asking a lot, but all of this might be for nothing if you don't meet them."

Kit shook her head again. "We've started getting along and are getting to know each other, but not that well!"

"Please listen," Luca implored softly. "The whole reason that I'm doing this is to prove to my parents that I'm starting to grow up. Obviously, they're a little suspicious so I need to sell it. I need you to help me sell it."

Kit threw back the rest of her scotch and stood. "I hear you but I'm not doing it," she replied as she made her way to the kitchen.

Luca followed after her hurriedly and stopped at the kitchen island, his hands splayed across the countertop. Kit refilled her glass and mirrored Luca's stance on her end of the island.

"Nikita," he said in a pleading tone. "My dad is willing to cut me off and he can't do that before I secure the deal with our final investor. I need his money and name behind my business - the investors expect it."

Luca's eyes were searching Kit's for any indication that what he'd just revealed made any impact. She was looking back at him with a shuttered gaze, concealing her true feelings.

Kit lifted her drink and sipped it slowly before tilting her head to the side. "Do the investors expect it because you promised it to them?"

Luca grunted in frustration and ran his hand through his hair with a dark chuckle. "I didn't have to promise them anything. Most people expect to have access to my family name and money when they have access to me."

Kit watched him for a second before sighing heavily and walking around the island and back into the living room. Luca followed after her at a slower pace, his shoulders hunched defensively.

Kit collapsed onto the couch and rubbed her temples. "What would I have to do?"

Luca smiled at Kit gratefully, his shoulders slumping in relief. "Is that drink still on offer?"

Kit chuckled lowly and pointed toward the kitchen. "Please help yourself while I sit here and wonder what I've just agreed to."

Luca's lip quirked up as he walked back to Kit's kitchen. He studied her kitchen as he made his way toward the bottle of scotch on the counter. The kitchen was very modern and clean, exactly how he would expect her kitchen to look.

"You okay in there?" Kit called from her perch on the couch, wondering if she should have poured the drink instead.

Luca appeared back in the doorway with his glass in hand. He shook it gently, ice tinkling against the glass. "I hope you don't mind that I went into your freezer."

Kit shrugged and smiled slightly. "Let's talk business then Brooks."

Luca smiled before sinking into the couch opposite Kit, he sipped his drink and let out a satisfied groan. "This is way more my speed, in case you were curious."

"I heard hard liquor is easier to handle, the older you get," Kit answered with a cheeky smile.

Luca rolled his eyes but smiled. "Okay, we're supposed to be getting our story straight. I have to admit, I don't know where to start."

Kit sighed and leaned forward. "How about with a little context?" she suggested.

Luca sighed heavily and took a hearty swig of his drink. "God, unpacking my family drama was not on my agenda tonight. All right, what you need to know is that since I hit the second half of my 20s, my dad's been pushing for me to make something of myself."

Kit nodded encouragingly and Luca continued, "The only problem is I wasn't interested in any of the things he'd prefer I get into. I've overdone it with the women and the parties - I won't deny that. Anyway, since I turned 30, Dad and I have grown further and further apart. Now that I'm finally making moves - he's ready to cut the cord."

"What about your mom?" Kit asked curiously.

Luca smiled softly. "Mom is the only reason I haven't been cut off before now. She agrees with Dad but for different reasons, she just wants to see me find love."

"Okay," Kit murmured as she took in the information she'd just received. "So, what kind of questions do you think they'll ask?"

Luca shrugged. "I've never brought someone home to meet them so we're basically flying blind."

Kit laughed and shook her head gently. "Why am I not surprised? Okay, we can just work off the usual questions. How we met, where we met, what I do, what our plans are etc."

"Okay," Luca mumbled. "That's quite a lot of ground to cover."

Kit shrugged unconcernedly. "We'll keep it simple and have a few days to prepare."

Luca smiled sheepishly and raised his hands. "Now, don't get upset but we're supposed to meet them on Saturday."

Kit shot him a flat look. "The day after tomorrow? That's really short notice, not to mention, I don't know that we physically act like a couple."

Luca gave her a disbelieving look. "We both know that we have chemistry, at the very least. We don't need to have more than that at this point."

"Now we have chemistry?" Kit questioned with an incredulous look.

Luca chuckled, "Come on Nikita. We don't have enough time to tackle that right now, let's focus on getting our story straight."

Kit rolled her eyes. "We should just tell them the real story of how we first met. I'm sure they'd believe that easily."

Luca laughed, "Okay now. Let's play nice. We can tell a sanitized version of events."

Kit shrugged. "Fine. We'll skip the end of the evening and say we planned to meet up once back in New York."

Luca nodded. "Okay, and why did we only start dating now? That was ages ago. This needs to look authentic and not because of the ultimatum."

Kit hummed as she turned the problem over in her mind. "I think the best lies have a little bit of truth. What if you play it that you got cold feet but after your mom's gentle encouragement, you reached out - you see where I'm taking this?"

"That's pretty good, I definitely think my parents would buy that." Luca nodded in growing excitement. "I haven't told them about the business yet, that'll make it more believable."

"Of course, it's pretty good." Kit preened playfully. "Can we get something to eat now? On you. Obviously."

Luca laughed and reached for his phone. "I can't argue with that. Just tell me what you're in the mood for."

Kit hummed happily as she started looking through the delivery apps on her phone. "Good thing you're rich, I'm starving."

"Nikita," Luca called out to her softly, causing Kit to look up questioningly. "Thanks."

Kit laughed lightly and waved her hand in a dismissive gesture. "Thank me when it's over."

Luca rolled his eyes and smiled at Kit warmly. She quickly lifted her drink and took a large sip, hoping the heat of the drink would distract her from the other heat that was rising within.

# **Chapter 12**: Brunch With The Brooks'

"Please tell me it'll just be your parents there today?" Kit asked, turning to face Luca with a worried frown on her face.

Luca glanced away from the road briefly and shot her a reassuring smile. "As far as I know, it'll just be my parents there today. At least that's what my mother told me."

Kit nodded warily and turned her gaze to the passing scenery as they drove further into the Hamptons. Luca's parents had invited them out here to meet Kit over brunch. Even though she and Luca had spent the last few days getting their story straight, she wasn't feeling confident that they could pull this off.

Making it look like they were a couple for well-placed photographers and meeting his parents were two different things. This would be their first real test as a 'couple'. Kit was uncomfortably aware that if Luca's parents didn't buy into it, he'd have no incentive to stay in the relationship.

"Relax Nikita," he said, as if she were broadcasting her worries out loud.

Kit scoffed, "You'd be just as stressed if you were meeting my mother."

Luca chuckled. "We can do that too if you'd like. I have to say though it seems like we're getting really serious, really quickly."

Kit rolled her eyes with an amused smile. "Shut up. How close are we to the house?"

Luca laughed and shot her a grin. "We're only a few minutes away. So get ready."

Kit nodded and took a deep breath. She'd faced bigger obstacles than a fake boyfriend's parents, but she still felt nervous.

She was distracted from her worrying as Luca pulled his car into a wide driveway. He pressed a button on a remote attached to his keys and the two gates swung open smoothly.

Kit couldn't help but feel impressed already as they slowly progressed up the driveway. The grounds and trees along the driveway leading to the house were well-kept and beautiful. She hummed in approval as she finally caught sight of the house.

It was a typical Hamptons house but it was much smaller and simpler than she'd have expected the Brooks' home to be. That said, it was still absolutely beautiful and she felt excited to get a look at the interior.

"Ready?" Luca asked, breaking Kit out of her thoughts. She looked over to find him offering her a reassuring smile.

Kit nodded at Luca with a tentative smile. She took the opportunity to check her makeup in the sun visor's mirror while Luca made his way to her side of the car. Luca opened the door and offered her his hand to grab onto. He pulled her out of the car and into his body with ease, catching her by surprise.

His hand dropped to her lower back and he pressed their bodies together lightly, his lips a breath away from her ear. Kit took a shuddering breath and placed her hand against his chest to steady herself.

"My mother's watching from behind the curtain," he murmured in an amused tone. "I guess the test starts now."

Kit's eyes immediately shot to the window, her lips quirking in amusement as she spotted Luca's mom openly standing in the window. She waved slightly at the older woman and smiled broadly as her gesture was reciprocated.

Luca pulled away and laced their fingers together before gently towing her toward the front door. "I'm afraid it only gets worse from here."

Kit chuckled lightly and felt herself start to relax a little bit. She was very aware that she was holding hands with Luca. His hand dwarfed hers, the enveloping warmth putting her at ease.

The door opened just as they approached it, Lucia Brooks unsurprisingly holding it open.

"You two look very good together!" she announced in lieu of a greeting.

Luca sighed but laughed with a slight shake of his head. "Mama, this is Nikita. Nikita, this is my mother, Lucia."

Kit smiled at Lucia. "I'm, personally, very flattered. Thank you for the compliment. It's lovely to meet you."

She offered Lucia her hand and was taken by surprise by the strong grip that pulled her into a warm, rose-scented hug. She hesitantly wrapped her own arms around the older woman and enjoyed the hug.

Lucia pulled back with a wide smile and a twinkle in her eye. "Come on in. We have lots to catch up on!"

She ushered Kit into the foyer and placed a loving kiss on her son's cheek as he walked past her.

"Wow. Your home is amazing!" Kit exclaimed as she admired her surroundings. From her position, she could see the living and dining rooms; they were both big rooms that opened out on the sun-dappled, green, and luscious backyard.

"We're having brunch in my favorite place," Lucia explained as she led the way through the living room and into the garden. There was a set table on the back porch, and beyond that, the backyard was designed in the style of a courtyard in a Tuscan villa.

The porch was lined with pillars and beyond that, it was a mixture of brick pathways and exotic, leafy plants. The pillars were wrapped in vines covered in grapes and flowers in a beautiful tapestry. There was a large pool at the bottom of the garden, completing the house.

Luca gently guided Kit toward her seat at the table, slightly amused at her open admiration of the garden. His mother spent most of her time out here, she'd designed it herself and she was often painting, reading, or entertaining out here.

Kit smiled at him and dropped into her seat gracefully. Luca pushed her seat in slightly before plopping down into the chair next to her, making sure their seats were noticeably close together.

"Thank you for inviting me into your home today," Kit told Lucia with a warmer smile than Luca had ever seen aimed in his direction.

Lucia waved her hand dismissively and smiled. "It's our pleasure! I just had to meet you for myself. My husband will be here shortly. Actually - " Lucia pulled a phone out of her pocket and tapped it a few times before pressing it to her ear. "My love," she spoke softly, "We're waiting on you."

She quickly hung up and then smiled at her son and his partner. "Please help yourselves to a drink."

Luca smiled at his mother stiffly, not sure how to feel about his father joining them any minute. "Wine?" he asked Kit and his mother, with a nod toward the bottle.

"Yes please, honey," Lucia answered with a grateful smile. "I'll be right back."

With that, she got up from the table and disappeared into the house. Kit nodded at Luca and handed him her glass with a small smile, Luca's entire demeanor had changed after his mother's brief call. They'd talked enough for her to know that he was dreading this part of the day the most.

Luca was surprised to suddenly feel the warmth of Kit’s hand on his knee as she squeezed it comfortingly. He shot her a surprised look as she pulled her hand back and gave him a warm smile.

Lucia reappeared before Luca could say anything. She had a large wooden board covered in food in her hands, and Michael Brooks was following behind her.

Kit frowned slightly as she noticed Luca bristle as his father came outside. She had to admit that the man was every bit as intimidating in person as he looked in pictures and on tv.

Aside from coming from a wealthy family, Michael Brooks had made his own money and carved his path as a successful lawyer and entrepreneur. The man was tall, broad, imposing, and frighteningly intelligent.

Luca carefully schooled his features into a blank expression as he met his father's gaze for the first time in months. The older man's expression gave nothing away before he redirected his gaze to Kit instead.

"Miss Simon," he said to Kit as he offered her his hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you. I've admired your career for a few years now."

Kit gave him an abashed smile, surprised and disarmed by the unexpected compliment. "Thank you, Mr. Brooks. I'm very flattered that I'm even on your radar."

Michael chuckled and walked around the table to pull the chair out for his wife. He smiled down at her warmly as he pushed her in once she was sitting. He waited until he was in his seat before addressing Luca.

"Son," he intoned with a curt nod.

Luca clenched his jaw slightly and nodded curtly in return, his gaze set just over his father's shoulder.

"Okay!" Lucia announced with a clap. "Everybody please tuck in, but be warned there's more to come."

The table was silent as everyone loaded their plates with a few things from the board Lucia had brought out. It was a mixture of charcuterie and finger foods, laid out decoratively.

"So," Michael started, his eyes flickering between Luca and Kit. "How long have you two been together?"

Kit and Luca exchanged a glance before Kit answered with a smile. "I feel like I've known him forever but we've been dating for maybe about a month or so. Right?"

Luca smiled at Kit and nodded in agreement. "You're right. We're still getting to know each other and just enjoying each other's company."

Lucia beamed happily, her eyes flickering between the two. "You say that but Luca is already acting very differently."

Kit chuckled and looked at Luca with a smirk. "By different, I assume you mean that he's going out less."

Luca rolled his eyes but smiled and opted to eat instead of chiming in while Michael regarded Kit curiously.

"So, what's your secret?” Michael asked. “Luca's always been the kind of person that can't be swayed."

Kit winced internally at the tone Michael used and glanced at Luca.

Luca stiffened at his father's dry and disapproving tone, internally scoffing. His father was whom he had inherited this particular trait from. He was distracted as he felt Kit's hand holding his knee reassuringly again.

"We have that in common. It's forced us to become better communicators but other than that…I think Luca's just happy spending most of his time with me,” Kit answered, shooting Luca what she hoped was a warm and loving smile.

Luca smiled back at Kit; his eyes locked solely on hers. “I won’t deny that. Nothing can hold a candle to spending time with you. It’s just time to move on from the clubbing and on to other things - unless you feel like going dancing."

"Oh my goodness!" Lucia squealed excitedly. "You two are absolutely precious. Aren't they, Michael?"

Michael didn't answer but smiled slightly at both Kit and Luca. Luca smiled back warily, his father smiling at him had become a foreign occurrence. He could see his mother's smile growing wider as she noticed too.

"So," Michael started. "What else is new with you, Son?"

# **Chapter 13**: All That Good Stuff

"Hello, hello!" Gemma chirped as she breezed into the conference room.

Kit looked up from her phone and smiled at Gemma before her expression morphed into one of surprise as Luca and James entered after her. James gave her a broad grin before sitting across from her and Luca gave her a sheepish smile before sitting next to James.

Kit turned to Gemma. "Well, now I guess I know why you wanted to meet in the conference room today."

Gemma winked at her playfully before she got serious. "Okay, everybody. We're here to talk strategy."

Kit groaned, "Strategy? What's wrong with what we've been doing up to this point?"

Gemma rolled her eyes at Kit's tone. "The plan has been working so far but we're starting to lose momentum. To keep you trending, we have to keep you in the public's minds."

James nodded in agreement and jumped in. "We need you two to do more stuff together."

Luca smirked at Kit. "We've been spending quite a lot of time together, haven't we?"

Kit rolled her eyes but smiled nonetheless. Gemma looked between the two of them suspiciously.

"I mean doing stuff together that makes this seem like a real relationship,” Gemma clarified.

Luca's smile widened. "You mean like meeting the parents?"

Gemma immediately whipped her head to look at Kit, who was glaring at Luca venomously. He just shrugged with an overly innocent smile, causing Kit's eyes to narrow even further.

James chuckled and let out a low whistle. "You definitely didn't need me here to help convince them Gem. They seem to be getting along quite well without us."

Gemma looked at Luca with suspicious eyes. "What did you do to get Kit to break the contract?"

Luca shrugged. "It's hard to believe but I just asked her for a favor."

Kit sighed loudly. "Everyone is making a big deal out of nothing. Luca and I are getting along and meeting his parents was a favor to ensure his end of the deal is still worth it for him."

Gemma gave her a disbelieving look. "Uh-huh…okay, this should be much easier for you to do then. We need you to spend more time together where other people can see you."

Kit sighed and nodded. "Okay, so you mean going out to more events?"

Gemma and James exchanged a quick look before James spoke up, "We need a little more than that, you need to be seen together quite a bit doing regular couple things too. Going on dates, running errands, and all that good stuff."

Kit immediately frowned, causing Luca to chuckle.

"You're that opposed to spending time with me? I thought we were getting somewhere,” Luca joked.

Kit rolled her eyes and smiled reluctantly. "You're fine. I'm just not used to being so public with my romances, it feels wrong to be going out of my way to get spotted."

Luca perked up and leaned forward. "Romances?"

Kit's eyebrow shot up. "I'm not a nun. I'm a little more discreet than you are, but I have dated a few people in the last few years."

Gemma snorted loudly in amusement. "Yeah, okay. 'Dated'."

Kit laughed and rolled her eyes. "Ignore her. Gemma doesn't approve of my dating habits."

Luca leaned forward, clearly interested in learning more. "What's wrong with your dating habits?"

Gemma scoffed. "The problem is that Kit doesn't date. She runs from potential relationships and settles for having friends-with-benefits arrangements."

Kit shrugged in an unconcerned manner. "If it works, it works. I'm not interested in having a relationship with anyone."

Luca leaned back in his chair in surprise. Before he could speak, James did, "Okay then. Since we're done here, I hope you guys won't mind if I leave. I have some things to take care of."

James smiled at everyone around the table before exiting the room, leaving Luca alone with Gemma and Kit. Luca looked at Kit with interest.

"So, we're actually not that different," Luca stated with a slightly amused look.

Kit rolled her eyes and laughed. "Sorry to burst your bubble buddy but we're different. We might both be commitment-phobes but I don't go through fifty men a week."

Gemma laughed while Luca just gave Kit an amused look.

"How many men do you go through then? Please enlighten me!" Luca asked.

"If you must know," Kit started with a playful smile. "I've had the same arrangements for several years now."

Luca gave her a disbelieving look. "You've been sleeping with the same people for the last few years?"

Kit nodded firmly and shrugged casually. "Yup! We see each other when it's convenient and enjoy each other's company."

"So what do they think about the fact that you're publicly dating someone now?" Luca asked curiously.

Kit tilted her head and looked at Luca with amusement. "I don't know and I don't care. I doubt they care either actually."

Luca snorted and shook his head. "Trust me, they definitely care. If you've had an arrangement for a few years, there are likely some feelings involved."

"I agree with Luca!" Gemma chimed in. "Yes, I'm still here. Thanks for including me in your conversation."

Kit rolled her eyes while Luca shot Gemma an apologetic smile.

"Sorry about that,” he said while standing, “I'm going to get going too, leave you two to work." Luca shot one last lingering look at Kit before exiting the conference room, leaving Kit alone with a very amused Gemma.

Kit sighed loudly and pinched the bridge of her nose. "Please just shut up and don't say anything."

Gemma giggled. "That's totally not happening. What was that! You met his parents?"

"Yes, Gem," Kit said dryly. "I met his parents but he's not my boyfriend. There was absolutely nothing significant about it."

Gemma gave Kit a disbelieving look. "Sure there isn't honey. And that back and forth just now, you know he likes you right?"

Kit laughed and shook her head. "He doesn't like me, Gem. We're just getting along now that we know each other a little better."

Gemma looked at her for a minute before shaking her head gently. "Whatever you say, girl. Whatever makes it easy for you to see this through. Now, let's talk business."

# **Chapter 14**: The Beach Retreat

Kit looked up from her book as she felt her phone vibrating next to her. Her eyebrows shot up in surprise as she noted that it was Luca calling her. She placed the book on the bed next to her and answered the phone.

"Do you know what time it is, Brooks?" she asked in lieu of a greeting.

Luca chuckled warmly. "Don't tell me you were asleep."

Kit rolled her eyes and smiled. "What do you want, Luca?"

He chuckled again, causing a shiver to race down Kit's spine. "I was thinking about what James and Gemma said earlier and I have a proposition for you…"

Kit perked up in interest, her mind racing as she tried to predict what he was about to suggest. "Okay, I'm curious. Keep talking."

"Okay. Let's go away for the weekend," Luca stated.

Kit laughed in surprise. "What? Why would we go away?"

"You seemed to really like being in the Hamptons when we went to see my parents. We can go there for a weekend, get spotted a few times over the course of a few days, and actually have some fun," Luca pitched, hoping that he had sold it enough for Kit to agree to his proposal. He started to panic a little as Kit remained silent on the other end.

"This will also give you a little more control over the situation. There are always paparazzi hanging around there and we get to decide when and where they see us," Luca continued nervously.

Kit was silent for a moment longer before humming thoughtfully. "That's not the worst idea I've heard today."

Luca smiled. "Is that your way of saying yes?"

Kit laughed and wondered if she could really spend a weekend alone with Luca. "I have to clarify, we won't be seeing or staying with your parents, right?"

Luca chuckled warmly and shook his head, even though Kit couldn't see him through the phone. "We'll be doing our own thing. I'll take care of everything. You just need to let me know if you need or want anything specific."

"Okay," Kit answered after a minute. "Let's do it."

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"I hate to say it, but this is not bad at all," Kit admitted as she walked around the living area of the house Luca had rented for the weekend.

Luca laughed from behind Kit as he watched her look around. "That's really high praise from you indeed."

The house was fairly small by Hampton's standard, but it was decorated in a warm and simple manner. The back part of the house opened up onto the shore, providing great views of the beach and ocean from the house itself.

Kit turned away from the view and smiled at Luca. "Don't get used to it. Let's go for a walk?"

Luca felt surprised but nodded his head in agreement. "Wait! Don't you want to take a look around? Take a look at our rooms?"

Kit shrugged nonchalantly. "There are two separate rooms, right?"

Luca chuckled and smirked. "There are but we can share a room if you'd like."

Kit laughed in disbelief and shook her head while turning back toward the beach. "Let's go for that walk now!"

Luca raised his hands in surrender and nodded agreeably. He felt his heart start to race as Kit beamed at him happily before opening the door and stepping outside. Luca followed after her hastily and found her waiting impatiently on the sand. Kit set off down the beach the second he reached her.

She led Luca to the water before changing direction and walking along the shoreline. Luca studied her quietly as they walked a few feet, seemingly lost in their thoughts.

"Don't look now," Kit broke the silence. "I see a shutterbug hanging behind a dune over there."

Luca smiled slightly. "Is that why you wanted to take a walk?"

Kit shrugged. "I love the beach, that was the main objective. This is a great by-product though. Hopefully Gemma is happy now."

"Can I ask about that?" Luca enquired in a casual tone.

Kit furrowed her brow in confusion. "Ask about what? Gemma?"

Luca nodded, causing Kit to laugh loudly. "You think we're too different to be friends? You wouldn't be the first to say that but we're not that different - I just take a while to warm up to people."

Luca snorted, causing Kit to shove him gently in a playful manner. "I may or may not have noticed that myself,” he said softly.

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever," Kit said with a laugh. "Anyway, we were randomly assigned as roommates in our first year of college and the rest is history."

"Gotcha." Luca nodded before falling silent again, leaving the two to walk to the sound of the water lapping at the shore.

"So," Kit started. "Do you have anything planned for us this weekend or are we just going to hang out indoors?"

Luca raised an eyebrow and smiled down at Kit. "It almost sounds like you don't want to hang out with me indoors. Scared?"

Kit rolled her eyes and scoffed. "What is there to be afraid of?"

"The growing sexual tension between us is the first thing that comes to mind," Luca answered casually, causing Kit to stumble in surprise.

She quickly righted herself and looked at Luca with wide eyes. "Growing sexual tension? Are you sure you're talking about you and me?"

Luca stopped walking and stepped closer to Kit with an amused expression painted on his face. "Really, Kit?"

Kit rolled her eyes. "It's Nikita to you, and there's no sexual tension between us."

Kit started walking back toward the house, leaving Luca to follow behind her with a big grin on his face. "Have I struck a chord?"

Kit looked over at Luca and raised an eyebrow. "Only people I like can call me Kit."

"Ouch!" Luca exclaimed before throwing his hand over his heart dramatically. "That hurts but I was still talking about the sexual tension."

Kit stopped in her tracks and turned to look at Luca as he stopped next to her. "Any sexual feelings are solely on your end."

Luca looked down at her in amusement before stepping closer to Kit. He wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her into the hard planes of his body. Kit lurched forward, startled, and put her hands out to brace herself against his chest. She looked up at him in surprise, her words dying on her lips as she met Luca's intense gaze.

Rather than say anything, Luca dropped his head and captured Kit's lips in a heated kiss. Kit stiffened and moaned in surprise before she melted into Luca's arms, her lips moving against his. The two kissed heatedly for a few minutes.

Luca pulled back just as Kit seemed like she was starting to enjoy the kiss and looked down at her with heated eyes. His eyes searched her for a few moments before his lips spread into a smug smile.

Luca leaned down again, bringing his face close to Kit's before turning his head at the last moment and pressing his lips to her ear. "I guess it's safe to say I'm someone you like, Kit."

Luca pulled back and winked at Kit before abruptly walking away, leaving Kit flustered and bewildered. She was still catching her breath and felt slightly annoyed that he'd kissed her, however, she was greatly annoyed by the fact that she'd enjoyed the kiss so much.

"Where are you going?" she called indignantly as she started walking after him, her thoughts still scattered.

Luca shot her a smile over his shoulder. "I'm making dinner tonight."

Kit frowned and carried on walking after him. "And the kiss? Why did you just kiss me?"

Luca stopped walking suddenly, causing Kit to nearly run into him. He looked down at Kit with heated eyes again. "Why did you kiss me back?"

Kit opened her mouth and then shut it again, unable and unwilling to answer his question. Luca smiled with twinkling eyes.

"I guess any sexual feelings aren't solely on my end after all."

# **Chapter 15**: Fair Is Fair

"Nikita!" Maya shrilled as she burst into Kit's office, startling her in the middle of a phone call.

Kit's assistant Dana followed closely behind, looking flustered and disgruntled. Kit took one look at her mother's angry expression and withered internally.

"Stu, an emergency has just popped up. Can I call you back once this is handled?" Kit spoke into the phone while keeping her eyes on her mother. Maya had unceremoniously dropped herself into the chair on the front side of the desk while Dana hovered in the background.

"I appreciate that," Kit said appreciatively before hanging up and turning to address her guests. She could already feel a headache forming around her temples, but still managed to smile apologetically at Dana. "It's okay Dana. I'll take it from here."

The younger woman nodded at Kit curtly and shot Maya a venomous look before leaving the room and shutting the door behind her.

"You better teach that girl her place!" Maya snarled as she stared after Dana. "I should be allowed to see you whenever I need to. And she can keep her dirty looks to herself."

Kit sighed internally and counted to ten slowly while making an effort to keep her expression completely blank.

"What can I help you with, Mom?" she asked carefully.

Maya glared at her with her mouth twisted before reaching down into her handbag and pulling out a magazine that she slammed onto Kit's desk.

"What is this?" Maya hissed angrily.

Kit gave her an unimpressed look and glanced at the magazine. "A tabloid rag from the looks of it. Nothing worth storming into my office over."

Maya smirked cruelly before reaching into her bag, pulling several more magazines out, and stacking them on the desk. "They all say the same thing. You're splashed all over it, looking like a trollop!"

Kit snorted in amusement and rolled her eyes as she picked up a magazine and leafed through it. "A trollop? That's a little old-fashioned."

Maya glared at her daughter heatedly. "Clearly, you're still with this man and apparently, you've met his parents."

Kit sighed heavily. "You can be upset if you want, but I'm going to keep dating him until I don't want to."

"Why haven't you brought him to meet me then?" Maya demanded with a sulky pout; her eyes locked on Kit's.

Kit met her mother's gaze, unphased and bored. "Why would I bring him to meet you? Last time I checked, you made your feelings on my relationship very clear."

Maya gave Kit a stony look and the two women engaged in a stare-down. Kit was used to her mother's many moods and wasn't going to back down, even if her relationship was fake. That aside, she didn't want her mother to meet Luca, even if he basically owed her that favor.

Maya finally broke the silence. "You've met his parents - "

"According to Page Nine," Kit interjected dryly.

"You've met his parents, yet you haven't brought him to meet me. Clearly, you have some problem with me or you're embarrassed." Maya continued as if Kit hadn't spoken.

Kit barked out a harsh laugh and pushed back from the desk, shooting her mother a bored look. "I was wondering how long it would take to get to this portion of the conversation."

Maya threw her hands up. "I can't be upset now?"

Kit sighed harshly. "You can be as upset as you like but you don't get to manipulate me to get your way. If all you came down here to do is make demands about my love life, you can see yourself out."

Maya's lips flattened into a hard line. "I deserve to meet him, I'm your mother."

Kit's eyebrows shot up in disbelief. "Deserve? You're going to make my head explode, please leave. I'm done with this conversation."

Maya sniffed angrily as she gathered her things, leaving the magazines on the desk. "One day, you're going to wish you'd been nicer to me when you had the chance."

Kit opted not to reply and instead silently watched her mother pack her things away. Maya sniffed again when she realized that Kit was done talking. She glared at her daughter one last time before making a hasty exit, slamming the door shut behind her.

Kit sighed heavily and scrubbed her hands down her face, feeling as if she'd just gone a few rounds with a pro-boxer. Although, Maya Simon had always been a professional at manipulation. She had no idea what her mother's motivations in this situation were, aside from jealousy that she'd been snubbed from the "Meet the Parents" party.

Dana knocked loudly before cracking the door open and sticking her head into the room. "Are you okay ma'am?"

Kit smiled tiredly at her assistant. "I'm okay, Dana. How loud was she this time?"

Dana gave Kit a rueful smile before fully stepping into the room. "Not too loud today, although she was more unpleasant than usual when she got here."

Kit shook her head and looked at Dana apologetically. "As always. I'm sorry about her."

Dana shrugged and smiled at Kit. "I'm sorry too. Should I go get you a drink? I notice the bar seems pretty low."

Kit smiled at Dana gratefully. "Remind me to give you a raise one of these days."

Dana chuckled and bobbed her head before exiting the room to get Kit her much needed drink. They both knew that this was far from over, her mother wouldn't quit until she had what she wanted.

Her phone buzzed on her desk and she cringed as she looked at her caller ID. She picked up her phone and answered her mother's husband.

# **Chapter 16**: Quid Pro Quo

"Kit!" Luca exclaimed in surprise as he opened his door.

Kit didn't answer immediately, distracted as her eyes were drawn to Luca's bare torso. His chest was heaving with his heavy panting, his skin glistening with a slight sheen of sweat. It was obvious that she'd caught him in the middle of a workout.

"Nikita?" Luca called out again, snapping her out of her daze. Kit's eyes snapped up to meet Luca's amused and questioning gaze. She cleared her throat, slightly embarrassed and flustered.

"I'm sorry to just show up like this but I need a favor," Kit explained. "Can I come in? Or I can come back later?"

Luca's expression turned curious as he nodded and moved aside to allow Kit to enter his apartment.

"And stop calling me Kit," she added as an afterthought. Brushing against his chest as she passed by him.

Luca laughed as he closed the door and followed behind her. "You don't think we're close enough?"

Kit stopped and shot him a dark look as they entered the living room. "Don't start."

Luca smirked, stepped forward, and pressed his body into Kit's. He brushed her cheek softly with the back of his fingers. "You mean, 'don't talk about the kiss'?"

Kit rolled her eyes with a slight smile and stepped away from Luca, plopping down onto one of his couches heavily. "Can we talk about my favor?"

Luca held a finger up. "Give me one second."

Luca hastily exited the room and returned with a muscular man following behind him. The man was dressed in workout gear and had a sports bag slung over his shoulder. He silently waved at Kit and made a quick exit.

Kit looked at Luca curiously. "Who was that?"

Luca smiled. "That was my sparring partner, we meet up a few times a week."

Kit nodded and frowned slightly. "I'm sorry for interrupting your workout. I would've waited until you were done."

Luca shrugged and smiled warmly. "Don't worry about it. Besides, I doubt you'd come asking for a favor if you didn't have to."

Kit sighed heavily and nodded. "I wouldn't ask this but I've been on the receiving end of a barrage of texts and calls. Also, this is partly your fault for asking me to meet your parents."

Luca raised an eyebrow. "Okay, what's my fault?"

Kit rubbed her knees and looked toward the kitchen. "May I have a drink first? I really need it."

Luca looked surprised but silently left the room and returned a few moments later with two glasses of cool, clear liquid. He handed one to Kit and perched himself next to her.

"You're worrying me a little bit," he told her. "What's this about?"

Kit sipped her drink and looked at Luca in surprise. "Tequila?"

He smiled and shrugged. "I'm too old for shots but it is good for sipping. Especially when it's chilled."

Kit nodded in agreement before turning to Luca with a serious expression. "It is, anyway…will you meet my mother and her husband?"

Luca looked surprised but nodded in agreement. "Of course, it'll probably be easier to be convincing this time around."

Kit sighed and murmured, "I don't know about it being easier but it's sure to be something."

Luca leaned back into the couch and looked at Kit with a contemplative expression. "That comment - the drink - I take it you don't have the best relationship with your mother."

Kit snorted in amusement before taking another sip of her drink. "That's one way to describe it. She's… not an easy woman to deal with by any stretch of the imagination."

Luca looked at Kit with interest. "Do you care to elaborate more on that?"

Kit looked back at Luca with tired eyes. "That depends, do you have any more chilled tequila back there?"

Luca snorted in amusement and sipped his own drink. "I have all the tequila you could want. Spill your guts."

Kit chuckled slightly before getting serious. "For as long as I can remember, it's always just been me and her. My dad left when I was quite young, he made an effort to keep in contact with me but she made it so hard for him, and one day - I guess he just gave up."

Luca frowned and squeezed Kit's shoulder comfortingly. Kit smiled at Luca gratefully before taking a hearty sip of her drink and shaking her now-empty glass in his direction. Luca shook his head and chuckled before downing his drink and disappearing to refill both.

Kit sank into the couch and made herself comfortable while she waited. She felt warm, cozy, and surprised that she was actually having this conversation with Luca. That said, they truly had become much closer in a short space of time and it was only fair he knew what he would be walking into.

"Okay, another tequila for Miss Kit," Luca sang playfully as he returned with their refreshed drinks. Kit accepted her drink with a happy smile and waited for Luca to sit down before jumping back into her tale.

"Thank you," she told him before taking a sip and getting serious again. "So, yeah. She's raised me alone and we've just always butted heads. One of the main things we've always fought over is the losers she's dated throughout my childhood."

Luca cocked his head to one side. "What do you mean losers?"

Kit sighed and looked angry for a second before her face went blank. "She's always dated the worst guys. Scrub types, abusive types, asshole types, the list goes on and on and on. She'd move these men in after a second and expect me to treat them like a dad and get angry when I didn't. None of them ever lasted."

Luca nodded thoughtfully and sipped his drink. "What about her current husband? Is he like the others?"

"Her only husband ever," Kit added. "This is the only man she's ever married. From what I can tell, he's a really nice guy. No idea how or why he deals with my mother but he's wealthy and seems to love her. He does enable her a lot though - I just keep my distance from both of them."

"So I guess we have that in common," Luca murmured softly with a tired smile. "A very dysfunctional home life."

Kit chuckled sadly and lifted her glass in a mock toast before having a sip. "Yeah, you could say that. So look, we're going to do it in a public place - that usually forces her to behave."

Luca grimaced. "You're really selling this to me. Is there anything else you think I need to know?"

Kit shot him a rueful smile. "We'll use our already established cover story, other than that…she doesn't like that we're 'dating'. I'm not sure why but she doesn't really need a why usually."

Luca chuckled and watched Kit as she had more of her drink. He could tell that she was tired, which worried him but he could also tell she was relaxed, which made him weirdly happy.

"You know, I don't usually do this," Luca spoke softly, his eyes still locked on Kit.

She turned and met his gaze with slightly glazed eyes and a curious smile. "You don't usually do what?"

Luca laughed softly and placed his arm on the couch behind her shoulders. "I don't usually host the women I date or hang out with them."

Kit burst into laughter and poked Luca's arm playfully. "That's because you don't date women. You f\*ck them and apparently not in your apartment."

Luca chuckled. "Guilty. Still…I'm enjoying dating you."

# **Chapter 17**: Dinner With The Devil

"Nikita!"

"Luca, Nikita!"

“Luca!”

The paparazzi outside the restaurant broke into a cacophony of voices as Luca and Kit emerged from their car. Luca immediately placed his hand on Kit’s lower back and propelled her forward, firmly but gently. He placed his other hand in front of her eyes to block the flashes going off.

"Just keep walking," he said directly into her ear as they marched past the wall of photographers and into the restaurant.

Once they were safely inside, Kit turned and offered Luca a grateful smile. "Thanks. I typically avoid hotspots like this, but I didn't pick the restaurant."

"Miss Simon, Mr. Brooks!" a chicly dressed woman addressed them confidently. "Welcome to Caprice, your party is this way. If you'll follow me?"

Luca smiled down at Kit and gestured for her to follow the hostess to their fate. He felt nerves start to build inside him now that Kit’s mother was close by. The hostess came to a stop in front of a fairly central table, which didn't make Luca feel any better.

The woman sitting at the table looked young enough to be Kit's sister but also displeased enough that she couldn't be anyone but Kit's mother, Maya. Next to her was a beaming, older black man - he looked to be about his father's age and in good shape. Obviously, the husband.

"Kit!" The man boomed jovially as they reached the table before standing and pulling her into a warm embrace. Luca watched with a small smile for a second as Kit's face lit up and she melted into his arms - he'd yet to see her this open and relaxed.

"You're Luca, right?" a cold tone addressed Luca from the table.

He turned his attention to Maya who was giving him a sour-faced look. She hadn't moved from the table and was eyeing him with a glass of wine in one hand.

He nodded hastily and offered her his hand. "Yes, Miss Simon. It's a pleasure to meet you."

She offered him a cold smile and a limp handshake. Fortunately, Kit and Maya's husband had now turned to them.

Kit gave Luca an apologetic look. "You've already met my mother and this is her husband, Matthew. Matt, this is Luca."

Matthew gave Luca a broad grin and pulled him in for a hug as well. Slapping him on the back in a friendly manner. "It's great to meet you, young man. We're both so happy you could join us tonight. Aren't we Maya?"

Maya offered a mock smile but remained otherwise silent. Kit and Matthew exchanged a brief glance before they both moved to sit down. Matthew helped Kit with her coat while Luca pulled out her chair. Maya watched the proceedings blankly.

"So, what did you do when you met your parents? I didn't see any pictures anywhere," Maya directed at Luca the second everyone had settled down.

"Maya," Matthew chided while shooting Luca an apologetic smile. "None of that. We are the ones meeting him now, let's focus on that."

Maya rolled her eyes and focused on her drink while a waitress appeared to take Luca and Kit's orders. Luca glanced at Kit surreptitiously as he felt her hand appear on his knee. She had a questioning and concerned look but Luca smiled warmly.

"Why don't we get a bottle of red?" Luca directed at Kit with a smile. She nodded in agreement and Luca ordered before giving the hand on his knee a reassuring squeeze.

"So!" Matthew clapped as he looked between the two. "How did you two kids meet, hmm?"

Kit and Luca exchanged a glance and a smile before Kit spoke, "We actually met at a mutual friend's birthday party."

"I was so dazzled, I was too scared to ask her on a date for a few months after," Luca chimed in with a charming smile. "Luckily, we're here now."

The conversation lulled as the waitress returned with the wine they'd requested. Matthew took the opportunity to order appetizers for the table while Luca poured glasses for him and Kit. Kit accepted her glass and had a healthy sip gratefully, wondering if the wine would get her through the dinner.

"Well, that's just cute. You're a very attractive pair," Matthew said with a happy smile. "I'm just happy to see Kit actually dating!"

"Mmmm…she usually has better sense than to waste her time," Maya muttered into her glass. Everyone at the table pointedly ignored her and carried on talking.

"I'm not one for dating myself but Kit is something special," Luca spoke again while giving Kit a warm and sensual look.

"Is that true? I find it hard to believe that you're done womanizing," Maya spoke to Luca directly again. "I've kept up with you in the tabloids. You're not the kind of man a mother wants their child to bring home."

"Mom," Kit snapped warningly. "You wanted to meet him and now you are, so cut it out."

Maya gazed at Kit unrepentantly. "I'm not backing down on this. He's a player, Nikita, isn't this what you've judged me for your whole life?"

Kit scoffed and leaned forward to whisper harshly. "I've judged you for putting ain't sh\*t men above your child. Don't compare me to you. Never do that."

"Okay, I appreciate you coming to my defense but it's a fair question.” Luca placed a calming hand on top of Kit's and stroked the top of her hand with his thumb before addressing Maya. “I'm absolutely done with my playboy ways. I want Kit for as long as she'll have me."

Kit turned to look at Luca, surprised at the sincerity she was sensing in his tone. He winked and smiled at her, leaving Kit to wonder if he had actually meant what he'd said or if he was just selling it.

Maya snorted and finished her wine in one gulp before speaking increasingly loudly. "Oh please. What do you really want from my daughter?"

Kit turned and glared at her mother. "What is your problem? First, he wasn't good enough for me, and now he can't want me?"

Matthew stepped in and spoke in a calming tone. "Why don't we all calm down, I don't think that's what she was trying to say, Kit."

Maya laughed cruelly. "No, that's exactly what I was saying! He's using her for some reason, mark my words. He's going to use her and throw her away when he has what he wants. That's what men like him do. Right, Kit?"

Kit was stone-faced as she looked at her mother before turning her attention to Matthew. "I came because you promised me she wouldn't pull this sh\*t. We're leaving now. I'll talk to you later this week."

Kit stood as soon as she was done and started putting her coat on. Luca hastily tried to stand after her but was yanked back into his seat. Maya was leaning over the table with a venomous look, her fingers grabbing into Luca's arm.

"No one's leaving until I'm ready!" she snapped, trying to keep Luca sitting down. Matthew immediately jumped to Luca's aid and pried Maya's fingers off his shirt.

Maya started shouting incoherently while Matthew tried to unsuccessfully calm her. Kit grabbed Luca's hand and dragged him toward the door without a look backward.

# **Chapter 18**: Damage Control

*"Dinner Date Disaster!*

*Everyone in town is buzzing about the blow-up at Caprice between Nikita Simon and her mother! Simon was spotted arriving at Caprice early on Wednesday evening with Luca Brooks glued to her side.*

*The pair were there to meet Maya Simon and her husband, entrepreneur Matthew Carlson. Sources that were in the restaurant report that the dinner went south from the second Simon and Brooks sat down.*

*Maya was reported to be angry. Apparently, Mama Simon does not approve of this hot romance. "She just doesn't believe that a man like Luca can change," a source familiar with the situation shares with Page Nine.*

*As for Nikita and Luca, the pair were spotted heading back to Nikita's apartment that night and haven't been seen since. Don't worry though! We can confirm that the couple is still happily together, despite this hiccup.*

*"Matthew is stuck in the middle, trying to play peacemaker. That's nothing new," another source tells us. Luca might just be another problem in an already contentious relationship.*

*Whatever the case, Nikita and Luca still have all our love and support! Flick through the gallery to see pictures of the explosive dinner."*

Kit groaned and threw her phone to the other end of the couch. She turned to Luca with tired eyes and an apologetic grin. "I'm sorry, again, about last night. She was in rare form and now you're back in the news for some crazy nonsense."

Luca smiled at Kit and shrugged. "Don't worry about it. I don't blame you at all, I'm sure my parents will be worried about you and not about the optics."

Kit smiled at him and then snorted. "Yeah, but Gemma's certainly going to be obsessed with the optics. She's going to be here in an hour to talk about damage control."

Luca laughed and scooted closer to Kit until their sides were pressing and he was looking down into her eyes. "I can stick around and hold your hand?"

Kit rolled her eyes and moved over ever so slightly. "Holding hands falls outside of your contractual obligations. And you already stayed over here last night, you can go and do your own damage control."

"Was it contractually obligated when you were holding my hand last night?" Luca asked with a frown.

Kit frowned at Luca, startled by the seriousness in his voice. "That was a different situation."

Luca barked out a laugh and shook his head. "Are you ever going to admit that you're attracted to me? Nothing more than that, just that there is a mutual attraction between us."

Kit opened her mouth and immediately snapped it shut. She looked into Luca's eyes as he watched her patiently. Her eyes flickered to his lips and she remembered the kiss they'd shared. She couldn't deny that just the memory made her heart race or the fact that she wanted to do it again.

Without another thought, she reached up and tugged Luca's mouth down to hers. Luca gasped in surprise, giving Kit the chance to slide her tongue into his mouth. He groaned before placing a hand on her nape and pulling her closer.

The two kissed hungrily on the couch, the air between them growing hotter and hotter. Kit moaned happily as Luca's hand found its way to her lower back and pulled her closer. She pulled back as she felt his hot hand sneak under her shirt and make contact with her bare skin.

Kit put her hands on his chest to create some distance between them. Luca looked at her hungrily as they both worked to catch their breath. He raised an eyebrow and smirked slightly causing Kit to giggle breathlessly.

"I was looking for more of a verbal confirmation but that works too," Luca joked as he fell back, sinking into the couch, his head still spinning.

Kit shrugged. "I'm a woman of action and there's no point in denying it. I am very attracted to you, you're right."

Luca threw his hands in the air. "Hallelujah! She finally admits it. I guess the question now is what we're going to do about it."

Kit laughed and shook her head. "I think we have more pressing things to worry about right now. Like that article and the photos attached."

Luca let his head fall onto Kit's shoulder and threw his arm across her torso. "There's nothing more pressing than this happening for me right now."

Kit flicked his forehead and sighed. "As sweet as that is, surprisingly. We still have to deal with this now. Gemma's still coming over."

Luca pressed a soft kiss on Kit's chin and worked his way up to her ear. "Is there any way that I can convince you to postpone that until a little later?"

Kit shivered as a tingle raced down her spine but she shook her head. She gently pushed Luca's head away and placed a soft kiss on his lips. "Sorry Casanova, I've got to take care of this first."

Luca sighed and pouted playfully before grabbing Kit's hand. "Okay, but where does this leave us? This is something more than just a contract at this point."

Kit tensed and averted her gaze from Luca's. She gnawed on her lip as she tried to decide how to answer the question.

"I don't know," she finally answered. "We don't have to figure any of that out now, or at all. Let's just finish the six or so weeks and go from there."

Luca gave her an unreadable look and then nodded in agreement after a few long moments. Kit smiled at him briefly and leaned forward to kiss him again. Luca felt himself melt into it despite himself, his arm finding its way around her again.

Before they could get too carried away, there was a knock at the door. Luca pulled away with a groan and pouted at Kit. She smiled at him and shrugged helplessly before going to answer the door.

Kit took a few deep breaths as she made the short walk to the door. She stopped and quickly checked her reflection in the mirror by the door, making sure she looked okay. Aside from looking excited, she felt like Gemma wouldn't notice a thing.

Kit pulled the door open and bit her lip to stop herself from giggling at Gemma's distressed expression. Before either of the women could speak, Kit felt Luca's warm hand wrap around her waist. He dropped a hot kiss where her neck met her shoulder and smiled at Gemma.

"Have fun ladies." With that, he breezed past a gobsmacked Gemma and a flustered Kit.

# **Chapter 19**: Surprise Visit

"Looking good Brooks!" Sloane purred.

Luca turned from his desk in surprise to find Sloane posing in his doorway. She smiled at him saucily as she sauntered into the room. She glanced around the room briefly as she made her way closer to Luca.

Luca glanced around the room too and wondered what it looked like to her. There were still boxes piled up in a few corners of the room, some of them containing furniture that Luca had opted to put together himself. Aside from the boxes, the office looked like it was occupied, which was a good start.

"The office is really coming together," Sloane carried on as she reached him and offered him a brief hug.

"Sloane, what are you doing here?" Luca asked in confusion as he watched her shrug off her trench coat. His eyes widened slightly as he took in her skintight, red, mini-dress. Her cleavage was on full display and the dress was more suited to a club or maybe a date. Sloane smirked to herself at Luca's expression and made herself comfortable on his newly delivered couch.

Sloane shrugged and crossed one slender leg over the other, catching Luca's eye briefly. "A little birdy told me that you and James are close to finally revealing your new business venture. I had to come and take a look around for myself, offer you my keen eye for interior design."

Luca chuckled and shook his head as he perched himself on his desk. He cocked his head to the side and regarded Sloane curiously for a second. From their long history together, he knew that Sloane rarely did things from the pure kindness of her heart.

"Come on," he said after a few moments of contemplation. "Why are you really here? How did you even know where the office is?"

Sloane gave Luca a slow smile. "I actually came to see how you're doing after that awful scene at Caprice."

"Since when do you read the tabloids?" Luca asked in an attempt to distract her from delving into the drama with Kit's mom.

Sloane gave a tinkling laugh and made an airy gesture with her hand. "A girl appreciates a little gossip here and there. Besides, I had a friend there that night. She said you looked quite handsome, but that's nothing new."

Luca considered her for another moment before shrugging casually. "It wasn't the best dinner I've ever been to, but it's over now."

Sloane nodded understandingly. "Of course, but things like that can really drive a wedge between a new couple. I'd hate to see you two end so soon."

Luca gave Sloane a disbelieving look. "You won't have to. I'd say that we're stronger than ever."

Sloane's face morphed into a sympathetic expression. "Are you sure? I'm always happy to lend you a shoulder to cry on."

Luca smiled at Sloane knowingly. "We're really happy together, it'll take more than a disastrous dinner to tear us apart."

Sloane smiled slightly. "I'm glad to hear that. I wasn't so sure how it was going after we had our girls' day."

Luca shot her an interested look. "What do you mean? You two talked about us?"

Sloane's hand flew to her mouth. "Oh gosh, I don't want to say anything I shouldn't. Especially since you two seem to be in a good place. The last thing I want to do is cause any trouble, forget I said anything darling!"

Luca chuckled and gestured for her to continue. "You might as well just say it now."

Sloane sighed delicately. "She seemed - unsure about you. I don't think you're really the kind of man she typically goes for."

Luca frowned slightly, feeling alarmed at this revelation. He was very curious about Kit's past partners and how he measured up, but he certainly didn't want either Kit or Sloane to know that.

"What kind of man did she say she usually goes for?" Luca asked in what he hoped was a casual tone.

Sloane shrugged. "She didn't get into details, but I gather she prefers to be more private than you are. It might be quite a lot to be in the spotlight this much - probably partly why she's unsure."

"Unsure?" Luca asked with an amused smile. "I think that's fair, don't you? We haven't been dating for very long and my reputation isn't stellar."

Sloane's eyes lit up and she smirked slightly. "So the tabloids were right? Her mother has a problem with the life you've led in the past?"

Luca sighed and rolled his shoulders. "That's surely not a surprise to you. No parents want me dating their daughter."

Sloane laughed warmly and gave Luca a knowing look. "Mommy and Daddy didn't have a problem when we were dating."

Luca shot Sloane an annoyed look. "Probably because we were never dating. We had an arrangement and they were unaware of any of that."

Sloane pouted and slinked over to the desk, gracefully dropping into the chair opposite Luca. "Don't be so mean. What we had was fun. You can't deny that."

"Sex with no strings attached is always fun," Luca stated dryly. I won't ever deny that."

"No strings attached?" Sloane questioned disbelievingly. "We've known each other since diapers, there's no way there were no strings attached for you."

Luca shook his head and sighed tiredly. This issue was the sole reason their arrangement had ended. It had become clear that Sloane was more invested than he was. Luca had always felt a little guilt about that considering how close they'd once been as children.

"That's irrelevant now," Luca said softly after a pause. "I'm with Kit now."

Sloane shrugged and leaned back in her chair. "You really are quite boring these days. When are you going to have fun again?"

Luca sighed and looked at Sloane in boredom. "You mean drinking myself to an early grave and bouncing from woman to woman? I'm having plenty of fun right now. I'm not interested in all the things I used to do."

Sloane smiled wanly. "Of course. I'm happy that you're finally growing up. Nikita's a lucky woman - here's to hoping you don't go back to your playboy ways. I quite like her."

"Well," Luca clapped suddenly, "This has been a weird visit, but if you have nothing more to discuss - I'd like to get back to what I was doing." He gestured around at the empty office.

"Hmmm," Sloane hummed as she watched Luca through half-lidded eyes. "All right then darling. I suppose I'll see you some other time."

Luca smiled through his teeth and came around the desk to give Sloane a stilted hug. Sloane pressed the lengths of their bodies together and brushed a kiss dangerously close to the corner of Luca's mouth. Luca stiffened and chose to ignore it; he didn't want her around any longer than necessary.

Sloane pulled back and shot Luca a brilliant smile with their bodies still pressed together. "Don't be a stranger." She slowly pulled away and picked her purse up from the couch on her way. She winked at him over her shoulder as she disappeared out of the door.

Luca slumped into his chair with a deep sigh and scrubbed his face with his hand. He often left encounters with Sloane feeling exhausted and off-balance. Unfortunately, their families had been friends for a very long time. The last thing he needed was for his father to be upset about a rift with old friends.

# **Chapter 20**: Go Phish

"Knock knock!" Sloane called out as she popped her head around the door to Kit's office.

Kit looked up with a smile and waved Sloane in. "Come in! It's great to see you."

Sloane beamed at Kit warmly and set the two coffees she was holding on the desk. The two women gave each other a brief hug before taking their seats.

"Thank you for the coffee!" Kit said with a warm smile before taking an appreciative sip. "How have you been? It's been a few weeks since we saw each other."

"I should be asking you that," Sloane replied with a coy smile as she took a dainty sip of her own coffee.

Kit groaned and put her cup down before giving Sloane a rueful smile. "You saw the gossip about that disastrous dinner too, huh?"

"I'm afraid so," Sloane said with a sympathetic smile. "That's why I made an appointment with you today, I had to see if you were okay after all of that."

Kit gave Sloane a grateful smile. "That's very kind of you. I'm okay, just ready for people to stop bringing it up."

Sloane giggled. "Sorry about that! I read a gossip rag now and then."

Kit snorted good-humoredly and sipped her coffee. "I feel so bad for putting Luca through that. He's been such a gentleman about it, I hope he's not secretly mad or something."

"He seemed okay when I saw him yesterday," Sloane said nonchalantly, hiding a sly smile behind her cup.

Kit's eyes snapped to Sloane’s face with interest and surprise. She knew that Sloane was Luca's friend but that revelation had slightly gotten under her skin. The closeness of their relationship hadn't been something that bothered her before now.

What she was feeling was dangerously close to possessiveness.

"You saw Luca yesterday?" Kit asked in a casual tone, her eyes watching Sloane's every move.

Sloane shrugged delicately and put her cup down. "Of course, I had to check in on him as well. Although, he's no stranger to tabloid scandals."

Kit laughed, slightly amused, and sipped her drink again, her eyes on Sloane the entire time. "That's true, this is definitely more Luca's territory than it is mine. Did he say anything to you about it?"

Sloane winced slightly and gave Kit a forced smile. "I wouldn't worry about it, I'm sure he'll say something if he needs to."

"What was that?" Kit asked suspiciously, her stomach dropping at the idea that Luca was potentially upset. "You winced a little bit, he did say something!"

"It's nothing really!" Sloane insisted with a worried smile. "He didn't say anything to me, but I got the impression that he's not a fan of scandals that aren't his fault. That's just my opinion though."

Kit frowned and slumped back in her seat slightly. "Is he the type to say something if he's upset?"

Sloane shrugged with a thoughtful expression. "Luca's always been quite hard to read but I wouldn't worry about it. It's over now!"

Kit nodded distractedly as she played with the straw in her coffee, missing Sloane's slight smirk. Sloane studied Kit surreptitiously, trying to read her and wondering how she was feeling.

"What else did he say?" Kit asked finally. She was still unsure of how close Sloane and Luca were but she was willing to take any insights that she could get.

Sloane sighed and hummed thoughtfully. "We spent quite a lot of time reminiscing - you know, we never got a chance to have a scandal when we were dating!"

Kit's brow furrowed, her heart dropping into her stomach at the thought of Sloane and Luca reliving the memories from their relationship. "What do you mean?"

Sloane leaned forward and spoke in a hushed tone, "Well, when we were dating, we kept it very private and lowkey."

Kit leaned forward too, morbidly curious to hear more about Luca and Sloane's relationship. "No offense, but you don't strike me as the type to keep it lowkey," she told Sloane with a friendly grin.

"None taken!" Sloane said with a knowing smile before sighing. "It was actually his idea - I thought that meant he was serious. I should've known better."

"Was he different from this playboy persona?" Kit asked curiously.

Sloane nodded slowly and picked up her drink. "He was definitely different - at least to start with. You said it yourself, he can be quite the gentleman."

Kit nodded with a slight smile, her heart fluttering slightly as she thought of the sweet things Luca had done for her. "He's definitely much sweeter than I thought he'd be."

Sloane gave Kit a wan smile. "He definitely is but you know how it goes with men - they're nice until they're done with you."

Kit cocked her head and looked at Sloane curiously. She felt her hackles rise, feeling that something was off with Sloane's words. "Is that a warning of some kind?"

Sloane tittered and patted Kit's hand in a friendly way. "Not a warning, you're a smart woman. You don't need warnings from me."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," Kit said with a slight smile. "I'm sorry to cut this short but I actually have to go. Maybe we'll see each other soon?"

"I completely understand!" Sloane chirped with a reassuring smile. "I'm sure we'll bump into each other at Luca's office - if you ever make it over there. I've offered my help with the decorating and furnishing."

"I guess I'll see you around then," Kit said with a brief smile as they exchanged another cursory hug before Sloane left the room.

Kit spun her chair and turned to face the view out her window as she thought about her coffee date with Sloane. She'd learned more than she thought she would in a very short space of time and she wasn't sure how to feel.

One thing had become abundantly clear as the two women had talked - Kit was really bothered by the idea that Sloane and Luca were still close in any way.

She groaned out loud as she resigned herself to the fact that she might actually like the man.

# **Chapter 21**: Risks Worth Taking

"Do you like it?" Birdy asked from behind Kit as she examined herself in her closet mirror. The dress she was modeling wasn't in her typical style but Birdy had convinced her to give it a try - a fun, little beaded number.

Kit turned around and sighed with a frown. "I'm sorry Birdy, I'm just somewhere else today. Maybe we should postpone - I'm just browsing after all."

Birdy placed a supportive hand on Kit's elbow and guided her to the nearest seat. "You do seem rather distracted. Do you want to talk about it?"

Kit looked at Birdy with uncertainty but nodded hesitantly. She didn't know if she could trust Birdy with her personal feelings but she needed to talk to someone before her head exploded.

The two women sat down on the settee in Kit's closet and Kit took a few minutes to collect her thoughts. She looked at Birdy and took a deep breath, preparing herself to get vulnerable with someone she didn't know well.

"Okay," Kit started, wondering how much she could tell Birdy without spilling the secret. "I'm not really one for relationships - I'm feeling a little confused."

Birdy furrowed her brow in confusion and answered with a little laugh. "What do you mean? Now, I'm feeling a little confused."

Kit smiled at Birdy. "Yeah, sorry. I'm also not one to really talk about my feelings. This is about Luca - I think I like him."

Birdy burst into laughter. "I should hope so sweetie, you're dating the man."

Kit laughed and bumped Birdy's shoulder playfully. "I'm being serious here!"

"So am I!" Birdy insisted with a laugh. "So you like the guy, why is that a problem? He's hot and wealthy - what is there not to like?"

Kit rolled her eyes at the slightly breathy tone in Birdy's voice as she described Luca. Birdy was looking at Kit expectantly, waiting for an answer to her question.

Kit sighed deeply. "The thing is - I don't date very often. In fact, I've been actively avoiding relationships for my entire adult life. I don't want to fall in love and liking someone is a big step in that direction."

Birdy looked at Kit sympathetically and rubbed her back in a comforting manner. "Is there a reason you're afraid to fall in love?"

"Love was a very destructive force in my childhood. I saw my mother put up with a lot and subject us to a lot because she was in love," Kit explained lowly. "I can't willingly give someone that kind of power over me."

"Oh, honey!" Birdy tsked as she pulled Kit into her side. "I understand why you're scared but love doesn't have to be like that."

Kit smiled sadly and turned to look at Birdy. "I do know that - deep inside. I just don't want to take the risk of picking the wrong person."

Birdy shrugged with a wry smile. "Unfortunately, that's a risk you have to take when it comes to love. Or you might miss out on something great."

"But it's Luca Brooks!" Kit groaned as she jumped off the settee agitatedly. "He's rich and wealthy but he's also a f\*ckboy, not a wise first pick to fall in love with."

Birdy looked at Kit with her mouth agape. "You've never been in love?"

Kit chuckled at Birdy's look of disbelief and shrugged carelessly. "I know it seems shocking but I haven't really dated. I've focused on my business and other relationships."

"But what about sex?" Birdy asked in shock. "Don't tell me you're a virgin? Not that there's anything wrong with that."

Kit chuckled again and smirked at Birdy saucily. "I have no worries in that regard at all. I have a few buddies for that.

Birdy chuckled and threw her head back in amusement. "You almost had me worried for a second there. So how do you find these guys?"

"I go on dates now and then but I never get to know them enough for anything to happen," Kit answered as she sat back down next to Birdy. "Over the years, I've formed these arrangements with the ones I liked most."

Birdy nodded and slapped her palms on her knees. "Well, back to the actual subject at hand. I agree, Luca doesn't have the most savory romantic past, but that didn't seem to bother you before?"

Kit cringed, well aware that she hadn't cared before because the relationship was never supposed to become as real as it was. Of course, she couldn't tell Birdy that even if the statement rang true in Birdy's version of the truth.

"I honestly didn't think it would matter because I didn't think there was a chance I would like him this much," Kit answered, telling the truth without revealing the rest.

Birdy snorted in amusement. "Been there and done that girl. That's how the trouble always starts. Is it worth anything that he hasn't been clubbing? And that he hasn't cheated?"

Kit's eyebrows raised in alarm. "Is he also a known cheater?"

Birdy raised her hands in a calming way and patted Kit's knee comfortingly. "Not that I know of but also, I don't think he typically sticks around long enough for that to be a risk."

Kit took a deep breath and relaxed slightly, comforted by Birdy's words and annoyed that she was scared her fake boyfriend was going to cheat on her. She looked at Birdy, desperately wishing that she could share the truth of the situation with her.

Instead, Kit smiled slightly at Birdy. "You're right, his behavior does seem to have changed and he's been a complete gentleman this whole time."

"Can I ask something personal?" Birdy asked hesitantly before snorting in amusement. "I mean, aside from the other personal questions I've already asked."

Kit beamed at Birdy, thinking not for the first time that she really liked the blue-haired sprite. "You might as well, sister."

Birdy beamed in delight. "Okay! Why did you give Luca a chance to start with?"

Kit looked at Birdy for a second, stumped on what lie she should tell. She figured that there was no harm in telling the truth with this question. "The truth is, we met a few months ago at a mutual friend's party, and - if you tell him this I will deny it - we really connected. I haven't really been able to forget him since then."

"Awwww," Birdy cooed as she pinched Kit's cheek playfully. "You really do like him! That's so cute."

Kit rolled her eyes. "I do but - I'm struggling to trust any of this. Has he really changed? Is there still something between him and his ex?"

Birdy furrowed her brow in confusion. "His ex? Which one?"

Kit gave Birdy a dry look. "Sloane…her last name is escaping me but you know her; leggy, blonde, beautiful?"

"And a bitch," Birdy sniffed and patted Kit's knee comfortingly. "Believe me. There is absolutely nothing going on with them - no matter how hard she wishes it were true. So you don't have to feel jealous."

Kit batted Birdy's hand away with a joyful laugh. "Shut up and help me out of this dress. You said you had a few more for me to try on, right?"

Birdy laughed and jumped up. "You're the boss! I have something that'll have Luca's jaw on the floor that you can try on next."

Kit giggled as Birdy helped her out of the dress. She smiled at Birdy thankfully and squeezed her hand. "Thanks Birdy."

# **Chapter 22**: Time For A Vacation

"Are you ever going to answer that?" Gemma asked in an exasperated tone, her gaze fixed on her laptop screen. The sound of Kit's phone constantly buzzing against her desk was driving her crazy. The two women had been holed up in Kit's office, working for a few hours and it had been buzzing the entire time.

Kit shook her head distractedly, her head still buried in the file on her desk. "No, it's probably Luca."

Gemma's eyes immediately snapped to Kit, she lowered her laptop lid slightly and swung her legs off the couch and onto the floor. "Are we ignoring Luca?"

Kit glanced at Gemma briefly before returning her eyes to her work. "Not ignoring him, I just don't have the time to talk right now."

Gemma snapped her laptop shut and walked over to Kit's desk. Her long ponytail swinging with her haste. "Well, if you answer him, he'll probably stop calling. That's how that works."

Kit hummed absently mindedly and otherwise ignored Gemma until her hand appeared in her peripheral vision, snatching Kit's phone off the desk. Kit snapped her head up and glared at Gemma angrily.

"Hand it over!" Kit demanded sternly; her hand outstretched for her phone. She huffed in frustration as Gemma completely ignored her and scrolled through her notifications.

"Kit!" she snapped with a frown. "He's called, texted and left you voicemails multiple times. You are ignoring him!"

Kit groaned in distress and let her head drop onto her desk heavily. "I don't know Gem! The thought of answering makes me nervous and anxious."

Gemma immediately walked around the desk and crouched down to hug Kit awkwardly. "Oh no, sweetie! What's going on? Talk to me."

Kit turned and buried her head in Gemma's chest, welcoming her comforting embrace. She sighed before pulling her head back and speaking clearly, "I think I'm starting to have feelings for Luca."

"That's great!" Gemma trilled and hugged Kit tightly. "I haven't wanted to say anything but you two more than just look good together. You genuinely look like you're happy with each other."

"It's not great," Kit groaned while looking up at Gemma. "You know that this is the last thing that I want."

Gemma frowned and pulled away from Kit before walking around the desk and dropping into the other chair. "I love you Kit but you need to let yourself fall in love at some point. Why not now?"

"Aside from the fact that his track record is horrible?" Kit asked dryly while pinning Gemma with a knowing look.

Gemma rolled her eyes in response, her fingers unconsciously twirling the red strands from her ponytail. "Yes Nikita, aside from his dating history."

Kit pouted at Gemma. "You're supposed to be on my side. What kind of best friend are you?"

Gemma laughed in genuine amusement, unsurprised that Kit was laying on the guilt rather than confronting the problem. "You've turned down men just as great without the bad rep, so yeah - try again girl."

Kit chuckled and nodded in agreement. She'd had her fair share of male suitors but none of them had ever been good enough or worth taking the risk for. Luca was different for some reason; she didn't know why and that's what really scared her.

"If I ignore the bad rep, he's the kind of guy that I could definitely fall in love with,"

Kit said softly. “That's terrifying and on top of that - I think there might be unfinished business with one of his exes, Sloane."

Gemma frowned as she took in Kit's tense form and troubled expression. "Why do you think there's unfinished business?"

Kit shrugged thoughtfully, trying to find the words to describe the feelings she'd been mulling over for the last few days. "I can't really put my finger on it but it's the way she talks about him. It's really possessive, honestly."

Gemma's frown deepened. "All that really matters is what Luca thinks. Do you think he still has feelings for her?"

"I don't know and I'm not going to ask," Kit said firmly before raking her hands through her braids.

"Okay," Gemma said in a placating tone. "You don't have to ask him about her but you can answer the man's texts at the very least. He clearly wants to talk to you and judging from the way he looks at you - you're not the only one catching feelings."

"I don't know if that's what I want, Gemma. I need to figure myself out before I talk to Luca again." Kit groaned before running her hands over the array of folders, documents, and swatches on her desk. "Plus, we're close to launch. I still have a ton to do, it's stressing me out."

"Okay, let's tackle one thing at a time," Gemma suggested helpfully. "You can start by shooting Luca a text and then we'll get to everything else."

Kit gave Gemma an unimpressed look and didn't make a move toward her phone. After staring each other down for a minute, Gemma grunted in frustration before shaking her head. She knew very well that Kit was past reasoning with.

"All right then," Gemma said finally. "If you're going to ignore him, you might as well ignore him in Miami."

Kit burst into surprised laughter, completely taken aback by Gemma's random suggestion. "Miami? What are you talking about?"

"You've been long overdue for a break anyway," Gemma responded calmly. "This is as good a time as any. You need to get your head on straight - Luca has you scrambled."

"I can admit that Luca has me a little confused but other than that, this is the absolute worst time to take a break!" Kit tried to reason with Gemma.

"The truth is that I wasn't even asking you," Gemma responded in a syrupy tone. "We're going. You're a workaholic and now you have man problems. This is the perfect time to run away from your issues."

Kit shook her head in disbelief. "You're totally nuts."

"We're going to go to Miami, spend a week in bikinis, drink cocktails, and shake our a\*sses! We can invite a few people too…" Gemma continued as if Kit hadn't spoken. "You always work so much better after a break and we'll figure your feelings out too, while we’re there."

Kit laughed incredulously before sighing in acceptance. "Okay then, I don't see how this trip will help but I could do with a break. You win but I get to choose who else is invited on this impromptu girl's trip."

Gemma clapped her hands and squealed excitedly, causing Kit to stop her with a raised hand. "And we won't be gone for longer than a week. Any longer than that and I won't be enjoying this break very much."

Gemma smirked smugly and offered Kit her hand to shake. "It's a deal!"

# **Chapter 23**: Live From The 305

"Okay! Listen up ladies, I left my man at home to come and be with you. There will be no moping on this trip," Gemma stated firmly as she looked the other three women in the eyes, one at a time.

She was standing in front of the small party on a yacht while the rest of them were sitting on the cushioning in the front, enjoying their drinks. It was wonderfully hot and humid as they sailed along, enjoying the salty sea air.

Kit had decided to invite two of her other friends to Gemma’s impromptu Miami trip - Veronica and Alexandra. She's been close with them since college and kept in touch as they started their own businesses.

Per Gemma's instructions, all the women were in fairly skimpy bikinis and ready to party. Kit had swapped out her braids for her collection of wigs; today, her hair was bone straight and brushing the top of her butt.

"B\*tch please!" Alex laughed in amusement, causing Gemma to smile and wink at her playfully.

"That was clearly directed at me. So, f\*ck you for that," Kit said with a smile on her face. "Next, this was your idea! You willingly chose to leave your man at home so don't even start."

Gemma shrugged and smirked devilishly. "Just making sure my expectations are clear." She turned to the other two women with a mischievous glint in her eyes. "Alex, Vero - did she tell you we're here because she's running from a man?"

Kit glared at Gemma heatedly and shook her head at the betrayal. She'd purposefully not told either Alex or Vero because she knew they'd be on Gemma's side.

"Ooooh," Vero crooned with a lascivious smile. "I'm dying to hear all about the infamous Luca Brooks, you've been suspiciously tight-lipped with the details. How is he in bed?"

Alex cackled and shoved Vero lightly. "Wow, girl! Not pulling any punches today, huh? Or maybe you should slow down on the margaritas."

Vero moved her glass out of Alex's reach and smiled unrepentantly. "I'm asking what we all really want to know. Don't act like you're not curious - I always wonder about playboy types like that."

Kit laughed and rolled her eyes at her friends. She would never let Gemma know, but she had been in desperate need of a break - exhausted, stressed out and slightly sexually frustrated. Having an excuse to spend a few days with her closest friends had also been amazing.

Kit noticed all her friend's eyes were pinned on her, so she took a long sip of her drink, feeling amused at their growing frustration. "Sorry to disappoint you girls, but I wouldn't know. We haven't done more than kiss."

Gemma looked at her disbelievingly while Vero looked disappointed and turned her attention back to her drink.

"You're lying," Alex accused with a bemused smile.

Kit rolled her eyes and chuckled happily. "Why is that so hard to believe?"

"Cause you're a h\*e," Vero chimed in with a smirk and deadpan tone. Kit laughed but flipped Vero off playfully. She had to pause her comeback when a steward appeared with a tray of fresh drinks and snacks.

The second the steward had disappeared back into the cabin, Kit snapped playfully, "I am not a h\*e."

Alex chuckled. "You're not a h\*e but you love s\*x. You've typically been there and done that by now, so we're just a little surprised."

"She hasn't slept with him because Luca's different," Gemma said in a sing-song tone and a broad grin.

Kit scowled at Gemma who just shrugged innocently. "I don't like how she said it but she's right. We've just been enjoying getting to know each other so far, that's all."

"Just tell them," Gemma said with a lazy wave of her hand. Vero and Alex looked at Kit with curious eyes as she looked at Gemma in confusion.

"Originally, she was dating Luca to improve her public persona and now she actually likes him so she's running away," Gemma supplied again, punctuating the sentence with a sip of her drink.

Kit stared at Gemma, her mouth wide open. They hadn't previously discussed telling the girls the whole truth - looking at the way Gemma was throwing back drinks, Kit doubted she'd planned on announcing it.

Alex and Vero turned to Kit with wide eyes and open mouths before they burst into peals of laughter. Kit covered her face with her hands and laughed along - she was a little annoyed at Gemma but she didn't mind her friends knowing the truth.

"I did not see that coming at all!" Vero said as she moved closer to Kit and wound her arm around her waist affectionately. "So you like a boy, huh?"

Kit chuckled and grimaced. "That sounds so childish but I guess it's true. Anyway, no matter what I feel - we don't know how Luca feels."

Vero snorted loudly incredulously. "Please try again, anyone with eyes can see that man is feeling you."

"And how would you know?" Kit asked in amusement before sipping her drink.

Alex glanced at Vero and they both giggled tipsily. "We may or may not have seen the pictures of you two."

Kit groaned. "Since when does everyone in my life read gossip rags?"

"Since you started featuring in them so often! You're welcome," Gemma said proudly, raising her glass with a shaky hand.

Kit shook her head and pushed herself up onto her knees. "Look! We never get to see each other, let's focus on each other and I'll deal with this stuff later. Let's get another round before we head back to the house!"

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Kit chuckled and reached out to catch Gemma as she stumbled out of the car. She had never learned to eat when she was drinking and always ended up drunker than everyone else.

Kit was feeling slightly loose and relaxed, but she hadn't had as much to drink as Gemma had. Alex and Vero appeared out of the car and helped Kit guide Gemma as they walked toward the house.

"Some things never change, right?" Kit remarked with a fond laugh as she watched Gemma weave her way to the front door.

Alex swung her arms around Kit and Vero's shoulders and squeezed slightly. "I'd really missed you girls."

The three women were startled when they heard Gemma squeal, she'd made it to the door and disappeared into the house. They hurried in after her and stopped in the doorway at the sight of Gemma hugging Luca.

He looked up when the three women entered and his eyes immediately locked in on Kit. She felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up as his heated gaze landed on her.

"Kit!" Gemma squealed as she turned around. "Look who's here! And I didn't even have to plan it."

Everyone chuckled as Vero made a beeline for Luca. She offered him her hand with a sultry smile. "I'm Vero, short for Veronica, it's nice to meet you."

Luca smiled charmingly and accepted Vero's hand. "It's lovely to meet any friend of Kit's."

Alex stepped forward and shook Luca's hand too. "I'm Alex and I'm surprised to see you here. Kit didn't mention you were coming."

Luca chuckled. "I hope you don't mind that I crashed your trip, I just need to talk to Kit. She's been quite hard to reach lately." His jaw visibly clenched as he spoke his last sentence, his eyes locked on Kit the entire time.

Alex looked between the two and cleared her throat awkwardly. "We're going to go rest up for dinner and we'll see you both later." She grabbed Vero and Gemma's arms and towed them out of the room, leaving Kit and Luca standing alone and stewing in tense silence.

Kit turned and closed the door behind her, taking the opportunity to escape Luca's intense gaze. She was squirming internally at the way he was looking at her - something close to the way he'd looked at her during their first meeting.

"I can wait here all day," Luca called out from behind her in a steely tone.

Kit's back stiffened and she turned woodenly, meeting Luca's gaze defiantly. She felt her heart rate pick up slightly as their eyes met - she realized that she'd missed him.

"How did you know where to find me?" Kit asked stiffly.

Luca shrugged coolly and slipped his hands into his pockets. "I told your assistant I wanted to surprise you with a gift, so she gave me the address and then the valet let me in."

Kit nodded. "I know you want to talk, but can we go to my room first?"

Luca nodded wordlessly and waited for Kit to lead the way. Kit walked past him and quietly led him back to her room. The tension between them was stifling and Kit felt awkward and uncomfortable. She was surprised to discover that her nerves were growing as they got closer to her room.

She took a deep breath as they reached her room before she pushed the door open and entered. Luca came in after her and closed the door before taking a second to study the room.

It was a fairly large bedroom decorated in various shades of black and white, the large four-pane windows dotted along the wall allowed a spectacular view of the sunset into the room - bathing the room in a warm glow. There was a four-poster bed in the middle of the room and a couch set against one wall as well as a glass door that led out onto a balcony and another door that he assumed was the bathroom.

Luca's eyes finally settled on Kit's fidgeting form, standing at the base of the bed and facing him.

"So," she said in a soft tone.

"So," he echoed.

# **Chapter 24**: More Than Contractual Obligations

"You've been avoiding me," Luca said as he made his way to one of the armchairs in the couch set. He sat down facing Kit and looked at her expectantly.

"Yeah, I have been avoiding you," Kit admitted with a nervous shrug. "I'm sorry."

Luca waited a moment before speaking again softly. "Do I get to know why you've been avoiding me? I thought we were getting along, or even more than that."

Kit sighed and sat across from Luca while fidgeting with the hem of her cover-up. "You're not actually my boyfriend, I don't think I owe you an explanation outside of my contractual obligations."

Luca leaned forward angrily. "Don't start with that ‘contractual obligations’ crap. We're way past that and you know it. Cut the shit."

Kit's nostrils flared in annoyance. "Don't get demanding with me. No matter what you think we have, I don't owe you anything."

Luca laughed harshly and sunk back into his chair. "Unbelievable. You're worried that I'm the player but this is how you're acting?"

"You are the player!" Kit hissed angrily, getting worked up herself now. "That's just straight facts."

Luca grunted in frustration. "That's what I used to be, haven't I shown you that I've changed?"

"What're a few weeks versus years of that playboy life?" Kit muttered heatedly, wincing with regret as soon as she saw Luca's eyes darken with hurt.

"No, Luca," Kit pleaded immediately. "I'm sorry, I know you've been trying. We have been getting along - or more than that. That's why I've been avoiding you."

Luca studied her intently for a few minutes before standing and moving to the seat next to hers.

"You're literally running from your feelings?" Luca asked with gentle amusement.

Kit smiled in relief that he seemed understanding and amused. "Yeah, something like that. I know I shouldn't have ghosted you but I just panicked, I guess."

"Can we talk about our feelings now or do I have to follow you to yet another state to have that conversation?" Luca asked wryly.

Kit laughed and covered her face briefly. "You get to take one more jab at me and then we have a problem."

Luca chuckled before sobering up. He reached for Kit's hand and engulfed it in his, his thumb rubbing the top of her hand. "I have a confession to make. You could say that I've had a crush on you for a while now - I've always admired you from afar, which probably plays into me making a fool of myself when I finally had a shot."

Kit laughed and shook her head disbelievingly. "I had no idea you had a crush, or whatever you want to call it."

Luca shrugged. "I'm letting you know now - I'm starting to develop feelings for you and I think you feel the same."

Kit looked down at their joined hands and smiled slightly. "That may, or may not be true. What should we do about it?"

Luca smiled at Kit and quirked a brow. "I have a few ideas of what I'd like to do about it - if you're agreeable." He smiled widely as Kit laughed and swatted at him playfully with her free hand.

"Seriously though, I'd like to just keep getting to know you better," Luca murmured gently.

Kit looked at Luca for a moment and nodded with a soft smile. "I would like that too."

Luca grinned widely. "Can I get a hug?"

Kit nodded and they both stood. Luca immediately pulled Kit into his arms. She tensed up in surprise before she melted into the embrace. They both pulled away slightly and gazed into each other's eyes.

Luca moved slowly, giving Kit a chance to turn her head, as he lowered his lips to hers. He groaned softly as their lips pressed together delicately before kissing her more firmly and insistently.

Kit moaned slightly as his tongue breached her lips. She wound her arms around his neck and pulled him closer. Luca suddenly pulled away, breathing raggedly, causing Kit to make a sound of disappointment.

"Are you drunk right now?" he asked huskily, studying her eyes intently.

Kit gave him a puzzled look and shook her head. "I had a few drinks but I ate quite a bit. I feel fine, why?"

Luca smiled at her salaciously before suddenly picking her up. Kit squealed in surprise and tightened her arms around his neck. "I'd like for you to be sober for this next part,” he said.

Before Kit could ask what he meant, he threw her down onto the bed and crawled on top of her. He pressed his mouth to hers heatedly again, plundering her mouth with his tongue. Kit groaned happily and reciprocated enthusiastically; her hands tangled up in his hair.

"You smell amazing by the way," Luca whispered in her ear as he peppered kisses up and down her neck.

Kit giggled and pulled his lips back to hers. "You smell pretty good too."

The two kissed heatedly for a few minutes, Kit's hands wandering up and down Luca's body. He pulled back and looked at her with glazed eyes before reaching down and pulling her mesh cover-up over her head, leaving her in her bikini.

Before Kit could question him, he had pulled one cup of her bikini to the side and taken her nipple into his mouth. Kit gasped in pleasure and surprise, her body writhing under his ministrations.

"F\*ck," Kit gasped as his teeth scraped her nipple gently. His eyes met hers heatedly before he moved onto the other breast.

Kit moved her hands to the hem of Luca's shirt, desperate to pull it off of his torso. Luca stopped his attention on her breasts and pulled her hands away, pinning them down on the bed with one hand.

Kit grinned at him mischievously as she squirmed underneath him. "That's not fair, I want to touch you too."

Luca chuckled huskily and shook his head before pressing a passionate kiss to her lips. "This isn't about me, this is all about you."

Kit looked at him with half-lidded eyes. "At least take your shirt off."

Luca chuckled before pulling back and complying. Kit's eyes raked down his body with every newly revealed inch of flesh, her teeth biting into her plump bottom lip appreciatively. She ran her hands all over his body as he dived back in and kissed her passionately.

Kit's eyes widened in surprise. She squealed in delight and shivered as he started pressing kisses down her bare stomach. Her squeal turned into a groan as he reached her bikini bottoms and ran his tongue along the edge.

"Oh God," Kit moaned as he pushed her bottoms to the side and ran his tongue over her center. Luca chuckled briefly before he resumed lapping at her softly, holding her down as she squirmed in pleasure.

Luca let Kit's hands go and she immediately latched onto his hair, pulling his head closer to her. Her head thrashed back and forth in pleasure as Luca's tongue drew circles around her nub.

Luca glanced up to see Kit's eyes roll back in pleasure. He started flocking her nub steadily as her moans grew louder and louder. Kit's legs started to tremble as she reached her peak with a happy groan.

Luca lapped at her gently until she pushed his head away with a breathless giggle. "You're right. There's something to be said for ignoring the contract."

# **Chapter 25:** Forewarned is Forearmed

Luca watched lazily from his position, lying reclined on the bed with a drink in hand, as Kit ran around and got ready for her evening. The valet had brought him a drink while she was showering after their - activities. His eyes followed her body appreciatively as she moved around the room.

Kit laughed and turned around from the mirror as she fiddled with her earrings. "Stop staring! Your eyes are drilling holes into me."

Luca smiled mischievously and ran his eyes down her body slowly before focusing on her eyes again. "I can't help it, you look different with that long, straight hair - I really like it."

Kit rolled her eyes with a smile on her face, pleased that he'd complimented her. "Thank you. I'm definitely a bit of a problem when I bust the 24-inch out."

Luca looked at her with a cute confused look on his face. Kit walked over to him and dropped a soft kiss on his lips. "You're so cute when you're lost. The 24-inch is the wig you just complimented."

Luca's face cleared up in understanding and he grinned as he watched Kit walk back to the mirror. "I see, is that how I should refer to it in the future?"

Kit met his eyes in the mirror, her eyebrow raised at his insinuation of a future together. "You can just call it my hair - or Cat. I've named this one Cat."

Luca chuckled but nodded in agreement and sipped his drink. "All right. Got that noted - you and Cat are a very sexy pair."

Kit looked over her shoulder and shot him a flirty wink before turning back to the mirror and applying her lipstick. "So, how long are you in Miami for?"

Luca shrugged easily. "My plan was to be here for as long as I needed to but we've already made up so I'll probably leave tomorrow."

"Oh," Kit answered before rummaging in her makeup bag aimlessly. She felt a pang of disappointment that he was leaving so soon, but she knew she was on a girls' trip.

"Oooh," crooned Luca teasingly as he got off the bed and walked behind Kit. He wrapped his arms around her waist and placed his chin on her shoulder, meeting her eyes in the mirror.

"If I didn't know any better," he murmured softly while dropping hot kisses on her neck. "I'd swear that you were disappointed by that."

Kit smiled slightly and turned in his arms to face him. "A little bit, this is the first time we've talked in days."

"And whose fault is that?" Luca asked in a teasing tone.

Kit punched his chest half-heartedly and chuckled in embarrassment. "Okay, it's my fault but I had a lot to figure out - actually, can I ask you something?"

Luca frowned slightly and nodded instantly. Kit took a deep breath before asking her question. "Is there still anything going on with you and Sloane?"

"What?" Luca asked in shock, his face scrunching in confusion. "God, no! Why would you even ask that?"

Kit's lips quirked, feeling slightly amused and relieved at his reaction. "She came to see me after that crazy dinner - it was just how she was talking about you. It was almost...possessive."

Luca groaned in irritation and pulled Kit closer, looking down into her face. "Please believe me when I say that there is absolutely nothing going on between the two of us. It's purely platonic."

Kit nodded hesitantly. "But she did come to your office, right?"

Luca grunted but nodded. "She did but not because I invited her. James stupidly told her where it was and she showed up."

Kit regarded him curiously, as she processed what he was saying. "You sound like you didn't want her to be there."

Luca shrugged and kissed Kit's forehead. "I didn't want her there. Sloane didn't handle it well when I broke things off with her - she was under the impression our relationship was different from my other ones. We've only started really talking again in the last few years, but I keep her at a distance as a general rule."

Kit nodded thoughtfully and pulled away from Luca as she went in search of her shoes. "Okay, thanks for explaining that to me." She gave him a distracted smile as she sat on the bed and started putting on her sneakers.

Luca smiled and dropped to his knees to help her. "I didn't realize that you two had been hanging out so often."

Kit shrugged as she watched him while he tied her shoes. She couldn't help but smile at the sweet gesture and feel a pang of guilt that she'd ignored him for the last few days. Luca looked up and poked her ankle to prod her into answering.

Kit smiled sweetly before answering, "We've only hung out several times and she seems nice enough."

Luca frowned slightly and sat next to Kit on the bed. "She is nice enough but watch yourself with her. She's always gotten anything and everything she's ever wanted - people like that can be a little crazy."

Kit laughed and nudged Luca with her shoulder. "Thanks for the warning but I can handle girls like Sloane."

Luca nudged her back gently before looking at her feet pointedly. "I thought you said you were going clubbing? Can you wear sneakers to the club?"

Kit giggled and flicked her hair over her shoulder sassily. "You can when you're on the Forbes list."

Luca laughed and looked at Kit fondly. He was debating whether or not he should kiss her again when there was a loud banging at the door.

"We gave you two enough time for at least two rounds!" Vero called out, followed by the sound of Gemma and Alex laughing loudly.

Kit rolled her eyes and rushed to open the door, where her three friends were waiting with shit-eating grins on their faces. Vero peaked around Kit and waved at Luca.

"I'm a little disappointed you're fully clothed," Vero commented while frowning at Kit. "Has it been so long that you've forgotten how to do it, girl?"

Luca laughed loudly and joined Kit at the door, as a show of moral support. "I think this is the perfect time to get back to my Airbnb. Ladies, please forgive me for crashing your trip."

"If you're sorry, you should make it up to us," Alex suggested with a devious smile.

Gemma nudged Alex and nodded firmly in agreement. "I like how you think. You should come out with us. Tonight is on you."

"Good to see you've sobered up a little," Luca commented teasingly while smiling at Gemma.

"Ooooh! Focus, I'm interested in spending a night with Mr. Infamous here. You probably know where all the best spots are anyway," Vero chimed in excitedly.

Luca chuckled and shook his head. "I'm more than happy to pay for whatever you want but I don't think I should come along. I've already imposed enough."

Alex looked at him challengingly. "What's the matter? Scared you can't keep up?"

Gemma nodded sagely. "He is older than us, you know. He was a little hesitant about shots the other night too."

Luca barked out an unwilling laugh and rolled his eyes before looking at Kit. "What is it with y'all and my age? I'm older but I'm not old - whatever. Have it your way."

The four women cheered playfully after he agreed, causing Luca to roll his eyes again. "Okay, then. Excuse me while I make a few calls and then we'll get going."

Luca gave Kit a lingering kiss, causing the other women to break into applause and wolf whistles. He pulled away and winked at his audience before leaving.

"Well," Vero announced. "One way or the other, you're going to find out if he can move those hips tonight!"

# **Chapter 26**: Unexpected Apologies

*"Girls Just Want To Have Fun!*

*Luca Brooks appears to be just one of the girls, getting along great with his current girlfriend, Nikita Simon's, friends. The couple was spotted on a night out in Miami with Simon's friends in tow.*

*"It was originally a girl's trip but Luca missed Nikita and decided to surprise her," a source in the know shares with Page Nine. Brooks flew out to Miami to spend an evening with her friends before flying out the next day. He was spotted arriving back in New York alone the following day.*

*The group hit a few of Miami's hotspots over the course of the night and didn't go home until the early hours of the morning. The pair's outing was all over social media after they took pictures with fans in the club.*

*"Thank you for the bottles!!!! @LucaB & @KitKatSimon, you guys are so cute!" reads one of the viral posts from lucky fans who scored free drinks. Other clubbers posted that the pair seemed to be in good spirits and "very touchy".*

*This is the first time Brooks has been seen in a club since he and Simon started dating. We're all waiting with bated breath to see what happens next."*

\*\*\*\*\*\*

Kit spotted Sloane the second she walked into the cafe they'd agreed to meet at. The blonde waved her over excitedly and offered Kit a kiss on the cheek.

"I'm so happy you came!" Sloane said warmly once Kit had made herself comfortable in her seat.

"This is a cute place," Kit commented as she looked around the small cafe. It was decorated to look like a quaint cafe in Paris, chic and elegant. Kit also loved the fact that no one seemed to be paying either of them any attention.

"I really wanted to apologize for the last time we met," Sloane said with an apologetic grin.

Kit was surprised but tried not to let it show on her face. She hadn't known what to expect when Sloane called and asked to meet for brunch. Her sincere tone and Kit's curiosity are what made her decide to come.

"What are you apologizing for?" Kit asked, hoping that Sloane would elaborate.

Sloane smiled in a slightly sheepish manner. "Well, it occurred to me after I'd left that maybe I'd been nosy. We've only just met, I shouldn't have been asking about such a sensitive situation."

"Oh," Kit muttered, unsure of what to say in response to Sloane's apology.

"I'm just really happy to finally see Luca settle down and I got too excited but it won't happen again!" Sloane said solemnly before giving Kit a winning smile. "You forgive me, don't you?"

Kit gave Sloane an unsure smile and nodded hesitantly. She smiled at the waiter gratefully as he brought her cappuccino.

"Of course, Sloane," Kit said after sipping her drink. "I understand getting excited for a friend. You didn't have to bring me to lunch for that though."

"Well," Sloane said coyly, fluttering her eyelashes at Kit. "I do have some ulterior motives. I was hoping we could join forces to help some young men and women in need."

"Oh,'' Kit exclaimed, once again caught off guard by Sloane. "I assume this has something to do with a charity or foundation?"

Sloane nodded and delicately sipped her coffee. "So, our foundation sponsors a handful of bright young men and women from underprivileged backgrounds. We put them through a college degree and try to make sure they have everything they need. This year, I thought I could maybe go the extra mile."

"And that's where I come in?" Kit guessed curiously.

Sloane nodded seriously. "Yes. I'm well aware that there are lots of things I don't know or understand about beauty and haircare for women of color - I was hoping you could help. Advise me, perhaps?"

"That's amazing!" Kit exclaimed, impressed. "I'd love to help you with that. If you'd let me, I'd like to supply any products from my brand that they'd want while they're at school."

Sloane beamed at Kit appreciatively. "That would be absolutely fab! I was afraid you wouldn't be open to it after my gaffe."

Kit laughed and sipped her coffee. "I'm more than happy to help some kids in need. Just have your office send me their details so I can come up with a few ideas."

Sloane clapped her hands excitedly. "That sounds perfect! So, how have you been since last week?"

Kit shrugged easily. "I'm quite busy at work right now and I managed to squeeze in a getaway with some friends. What about you?"

Sloane gave Kit a knowing look. "Oh, that's right. Luca surprised you on the trip, didn't he?"

Kit shot Sloane a confused look, causing her to titter and slap her forehead playfully. "There I go again, all up in your personal life. I'm guessing you haven't seen Page Nine today?"

Kit groaned and shook her head. "I assume my trip is on the front page. Luca came up for a night to meet my friends."

Sloane paused for a moment before smiling slightly. "Oh? That sounds pretty serious, meeting your friends and vacationing together."

Kit laughed and shook her head. "I don't know if that counts as vacationing together."

Sloane nodded and adopted a concerned look. "This may be none of my business again but weren't you worried about Luca being in the club again? He didn't stop going when we were together - probably partly why we didn't work out."

"What do you mean?" Kit asked seriously as she put her cup down and leaned forward. "What does the clubbing have to do with your relationship?"

Sloane shrugged. "I've always suspected that he uses those nights as opportunities to scout for new women. I've never really been able to prove it - but I swear we saw the girl he dated next on a night out."

Kit looked shocked while Sloane gave her a sad shrug and a small smile. "It's all totally irrelevant now of course! I wouldn't worry about one night anyway, he's basically stopped since you two got together."

Kit nodded slowly in agreement. "He has stopped going out but it's still reasonable to worry about his past a little."

Sloane nodded wholeheartedly. "I'm sure he understands that - I mean, he said as much to me himself when we were talking about you two."

Kit frowned slightly and opted to sip her drink, wondering when this conversation had taken place. Hopefully not after Luca had assured her he wasn't close with Sloane; it almost seemed like he'd relayed her qualms to Sloane.

Sloane's lips twitched slightly in amusement as she watched Kit clearly lost in thought and troubled. Her phone chirped on the table and she openly smiled at Kit apologetically.

"I have to get this, I'll be right back!" Sloane said as she stood. She paused before she walked away and looked at Kit. "I wouldn't worry about it. He's changed right?"

She winked at Kit and walked away to answer her call, leaving the seated woman feeling more insecure than when she'd arrived.

# **Chapter 27**: Date Night

"Hi," Luca greeted Kit with a beaming grin as she opened the door. She smiled back at him, kind of amused at how happy he seemed to see her.

"Hi yourself," Kit answered before stepping aside to let him in. Luca stopped and kissed her on the lips quickly as he entered her apartment. The lights in the apartment were set slightly dim, creating an air of intimacy and romance.

"What's in the shopping bag?" Kit asked curiously as she tried to peek inside to see the contents. Luca laughed and moved the bag out of her reach as he moved into the living area.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" he said with a grin as he set the bag down and waited for Kit to reach him. She pouted at him and stopped just shy of where he was standing.

"Awww," Luca laughed slyly. "You're going to sulk now? It's nothing exciting - some takeout and a few bottles of wine."

Kit laughed and finally got to peek into the bag. She pulled out a bottle of wine and shook her head. "Did we really need three bottles of wine to hang out?"

Luca shrugged and walked toward the kitchen before reappearing with wine glasses and forks. "It's a hangout and a date. Besides, I'm hoping to get some secrets out of you with a free dinner."

Kit laughed and waggled her eyebrows playfully. "Good luck with that last part."

She kneeled in front of the table and started unpacking the bag, gasping with joy. She looked up at Luca with shining eyes and a shy smile. "You got all my favorites - down to the wine."

Luca smiled abashedly and rubbed the back of his neck, his cheeks turning rosy. "Yeah, I've been paying attention. I'm not really used to this whole dating thing - but I'm trying."

"Aw," Kit cooed before walking toward him and pinching his cheeks teasingly. "You're so cute when you're trying."

Luca rolled his eyes but smiled at Kit as he opened the wine. "Would you like a glass?"

Kit nodded and collapsed onto the couch, rubbing the spot next to her invitingly. Luca joined her after he'd filled their glasses. "Here's to one of many date nights?"

Kit smiled cheesily and nodded. "Here's to one of many." They each sipped their drinks and smiled at each other sappily. "You're not too bad at this romance thing."

Luca shrugged casually and draped his arm around Kit's shoulder as he turned to look at her. "My dad and my mom have been sickeningly in love my whole life. So I guess you could say I know the basics at least."

Kit nodded interestedly as she opened the food cartons and examined the content hungrily. Once she'd picked the carton she preferred, she leaned back into Luca's arm.

Kit offered him a bite and smiled as he opened his mouth. "Can I ask you something?"

Luca nodded as he chewed his food. Kit paused as she brought the fork to her mouth and asked, "If your parents are so in love, why are you so commitment-phobic?"

Luca chewed thoughtfully and swallowed. He sighed and sipped some wine before answering, "I would say it stems more from having a very privileged life and not from experiencing dysfunctional relationships."

Kit nodded as she chewed. "Can you expand on that?" she mumbled as she chewed her food, causing Luca to make a playfully disgusted face.

Kit nudged him with her shoulder and rolled her eyes playfully. Luca poked his tongue out at her before continuing. "I learned at a very young age that people will say and do whatever to get at my family's money and connections. At some point, I think I just decided that everyone would always want something and opted out…"

Kit nodded understandingly and put her food down, swapping it for her full wine glass. "Okay, that makes sense. I can say I've never really thought about that or what it would be like. I'm sorry, that must suck."

Luca chuckled somberly and shrugged. "It's maybe the one thing I don't like about being born wealthy - can't really complain about the rest."

Kit laughed and sipped her drink. "Yeah, I definitely would have loved to be rich growing up."

Luca looked at her curiously and put his glass down before fully turning to face Kit. "Did you and your mom struggle growing up? She was a single mom, right?"

Kit nodded. "She may be batshit crazy but she's equally successful, so we didn't have to really worry about money. I'd say we were comfortably middle class and obviously now - I've done really well for myself."

Luca raised his glass in a toast. "Cheers to creating a good life for yourself. That's really incredible."

Kit accepted the toast with a flattered smile. "Thank you. You should eat too before I get to it all by the way."

Luca chuckled warmly. "I didn't want to say anything but I'm surprised there's anything left."

"Okay, you see that there?" Kit asked while pointing at him playfully. "Insinuating your date is eating too much is not romantic."

Luca laughed loudly as he reached for a carton and a fork. "I'll remember that for our next date."

Kit raised an eyebrow and sipped her wine. "Our next date? Is that your way of asking me out?"

"No," Luca said with a smirk. "That's my way of telling you I'll be better on our next date - and there will be a next one."

Kit laughed and rolled her eyes to cover the fact that her heart was racing. She was already looking forward to their next date but didn't want to admit that.

"You're talking like we're dating or something," Kit said before finishing what was left of her wine.

"I don't know how to tell you this," Luca said as he finished swallowing his food. "But we are most definitely dating for real now."

Kit laughed and poured herself another glass, before looking at Luca coyly. "I don't remember agreeing to that."

"I told you in Miami, I have feelings for you and I intend to pursue them," Luca intoned seriously as he looked deep into Kit's eyes. "Your chance to say no was then but if you remember correctly, you said yes quite a few times."

Kit snorted with laughter and slugged him in the shoulder playfully. "If I remember correctly, that wasn't what I was agreeing to so enthusiastically."

Luca laughed and smiled at Kit toothily, "Oh well, it's too late to go back now. I hope you're ready though - I intend to sweep you off your feet."

Kit smiled softly at Luca and leaned in to give him a lingering kiss on the lips. She pulled back and pressed her forehead against his. "Good luck."

# **Chapter 28**: Gemma Knows Best

"Well, you look awful," Max said in lieu of a greeting as he opened the door. Kit glared at him before pouting and falling into him.

Max chuckled as he put his arms out and caught her. He dragged her limp body inside and closed the door behind them before patting Kit on the head comfortingly.

"Gemma!" Max called into the apartment. "Kit's here and she's in despair again."

"Coming!" Gemma yelled back loudly, followed by the sound of footsteps as she scurried to the front door.

"You look pathetic," she told Kit as she entered the entryway and spotted them.

"You and your husband are completely tactless!" Kit grumbled into Max's chest before turning to look at Gemma tiredly.

Gemma shrugged with a concerned smile. "And yet you keep coming over. We'll be in my office babe, could you bring us some drinks please?"

Gemma grabbed Kit's elbow and towed her through the apartment, to her home office. The walls in Gemma's office were painted a pretty, pastel blue color with white skirting. There were two large windows framed with white curtains on either side of her desk from which light was spilling into the room.

Gemma's desk was glass and strewn with papers, books and various other things - including her computer. Right across from her desk she had a couch in a slightly darker shade of blue than her walls. The room smelled just like Gemma - something light and floral.

Gemma dropped Kit on the couch before walking over to her desk. She sat down and focused on Kit. "Okay, what's wrong now?"

"It's Luca," Kit answered as she lay on the couch.

Gemma snorted and turned to her laptop. "It's always Luca these days, what did he do now?"

"He's -" Kit stopped as she searched for the right word. "He's courting me, Gem! I didn't know that he had it in him but he's doing his best to romance me."

Gemma smirked smugly at Kit. "And it's working isn't it, honey? You should just give in - Lord knows that I would in a heartbeat."

"Gee," Max deadpanned from the door. "That's exactly what I want to hear my wife say. Here are your drinks, you can get the next round yourselves." Max handed a glass to each woman before making a hasty exit from the room.

"I love you, baby!" Gemma called out after him as she giggled and carried her drink over to the couch. She sat down and rearranged Kit's legs over her lap.

"All right girl," Gemma said as she took a hearty sip of her drink. "Spill your guts, let's hear it."

Kit sighed and sat up enough to sip her drink comfortably. "He's been very upfront about the fact that he wants us to actually pursue something real."

Gemma nodded. "What's wrong with that? There's a long list of women who wish he'd said that to them."

Kit rolled her eyes and smiled slightly. "Stop reminding me that the guy I like has such a long list of ex-conquests. I don't want to hear it!"

Gemma chuckled deviously. "Is that because you're feeling a little jealous?"

Kit ignored Gemma and carried on, "I feel bad admitting it but when he first said it, I figured he couldn't - that he's not that kind of guy. Now that he's actually pulling through…I'm panicking, he's really good at it."

Gemma squealed happily and prodded Kit's legs. "Tell me! Tell me! Tell me!"

Kit laughed at her enthusiasm. "He's sent flowers to my house and my office. He calls me thrice a day, texts me throughout the day - he's been sending cute, little gifts and arranging dates."

"Aw," Gemma cooed happily. "I'm so happy for you Kit. You deserve to finally let a man treat you right."

Kit rolled her eyes in amusement and smiled at her friend. Gemma could be a handful, but Kit never had to question whether or not she truly cared about her.

"I don't know that I want this though, Gem," Kit confided as she sipped her drink. "I don't know that I want this."

"Honey," Gemma said as she turned to face Kit. "Do you want him?"

Kit pouted and dropped her head back onto the couch, refusing to answer. Gemma cackled in amusement and poked Kit's knees until Kit swatted her hands away.

"Geez," Kit grumbled with a smile. "You make me glad that I didn't have any siblings growing up."

Gemma smiled angelically. "You got three sisters in college - you're welcome."

"Whatever b\*tch," Kit laughed as she looked at Gemma fondly. "I do want him but that doesn't make it a good idea."

Gemma rolled her eyes. "Stop being so boring girl! You want this guy, he wants you - don't complicate it."

"I'm being realistic," Kit rebutted stubbornly. "He might be too old to change his ways. I don't want to be just another name on that very long list you mentioned earlier."

Gemma sighed and gently pushed Kit's legs off of her lap. She sidled up to her and cupped her face affectionately with one hand.

"I know you're scared," Gemma murmured gently. "It is scary but I haven't seen you like this - happy in this way - ever. You might get hurt or you might find the guy for you."

Kit looked into Gemma's eyes worriedly. "I don't want to fall in love with him just for it to not work out. Or worse. I fall in love with him and he turns into an asshole overnight."

"I'm not going to lie, there's always that risk. Even when you're not dating reformed billionaire playboys," Gemma admitted before sipping her drink. "There's also the risk that you'll end up with a Max." Gemma turned her head and hollered down the hallway, "Baby!"

There was silence for a second before they heard Max's footsteps coming down the hall. Max appeared in the doorway with a bored look and a tray of fresh drinks. Gemma turned and beamed at Kit with a wink before turning back to Max.

"Thank you, my love," Gemma cooed at Max as he placed the tray on the coffee table in front of them. He smiled at Gemma adoringly and dropped a kiss on her crown before exiting wordlessly.

Gemma stared after him with a dreamy sigh. "Isn't getting a guy like that worth the risk?"

Kit smiled softly at her friend and downed her drink before reaching for her new one. "Max is one in a million but I get your point. Luca could be my Max - I just have to be brave enough to go for it."

"Hey Kit," Gemma murmured gently. "You really like him, don't you?"

Kit looked at Gemma seriously and shrugged with a half-smile. "I think I'm in danger of completely falling for him."

Gemma grinned at Kit and leaned over her to hug her awkwardly before falling back into her seat. "Cheers to that, my dear. Cheers to that!"

Kit raised her glass to the toast with a laugh. She sipped her fresh drink and hummed appreciatively. "If that doesn't work out, I'm seriously coming for Max."

# **Chapter 29**: You Scratch My Back…

Sloane sniffed disdainfully as she looked at the house in front of her, it wasn't really to her taste and she had no doubt the inside was just as tacky. It was a cookie-cutter house, the same as every other one in the neighborhood.

Sloane sighed before ringing the doorbell, then waited a few moments before ringing it again. She was about to ring the doorbell for the third time when a disgruntled Maya opened the door.

"Can I help you?" Maya asked frostily, unimpressed with the impatient stranger on her doorstep.

"I think we can help each other actually," Sloane answered with a cold smile. "May I come in?"

Maya eyed her distrustfully. "How can you possibly help me?"

Sloane tilted her head and narrowed her eyes slightly. "You don't want your daughter dating Luca Brooks. I can make that happen."

Maya looked at Sloane blankly for a minute before stepping aside and gesturing for the young woman to enter.

"Please follow me to my office," Maya said as she led Sloane down the hallway to her home office. Sloane looked at the leafy print on the wallpaper in horror as she followed after Maya.

The 'office' was a cozy room that had a desk for Maya to read or write at whenever the mood struck her. One wall was covered from floor to ceiling with shelves of books, while the other was covered in a smattering of framed photos. Maya walked directly to her seat behind the desk and watched as Sloane entered and sat in front of her.

"Who are you again?" Maya asked curiously once Sloane had settled into her seat.

"Sloane Astor. I used to date Luca and I want him back," Sloane stated boldly with a grin. "I figure that we can help each other."

Maya eyed the young woman in front of her with a blank face. She wasn't sure that she could trust this person but she was willing to at least hear out her proposition.

"How did you get my address?" Maya asked.

Sloane shrugged and smirked as she leaned back in her chair comfortably, her eyes roaming around the office - noting another print she found garish plastered across the wallpaper. "The right last name and the right amount of money can get you just about anything in this city."

Maya nodded slightly impressed and smiled begrudgingly. "Okay then, let's hear what you have in mind."

"I want to break them up and I have a fairly good idea of what might work but I need your help," Sloane explained. "I need to know which triggers to hit to get Nikita to dump him without warning."

Maya chuckled in amusement. "Not confident that your young man will break up with my daughter, huh?"

Sloane clenched her jaw and ignored the comment. "Will you help me or not?"

Maya smirked, seemingly having found a trigger herself. "What did you have in mind?"

Sloane exhaled through her nose noisily. "I've spoken to her about the relationship and she seems insecure. I want to stage a date with Luca - make it look like he's cheating. If I'm right, she'll dump him right away."

Maya raised an interested eyebrow. "Where exactly do I come in?"

"I need something that's going to hit harder than just leaking it to the press," Sloane started. "I need the pictures to come from you, say you hired a private investigator. She won't doubt you for a minute."

Maya hummed and leaned back in her chair as she thought over the proposition. "What makes you think that I'd help you hurt my daughter? In fact, how do you know I won't call her the second you leave?"

Sloane tilted her head to the side. "I don't know that, but the fact that you lost your sh\*t in a restaurant lets me know you want Luca gone. Badly."

Maya's face scrunched up in disgust, her gaze steely as she thought over her options. She sighed before finally speaking, "I'm certain that something like that would push Kit to dump him."

Sloan smirked smugly and nodded her head happily. "I thought as much, so my plan will work. Will you help me?"

Maya chuckled darkly. "How sure are you that Luca will come back to you? I don't need this coming back and biting me in the a\*ss later."

Sloane sneered at Maya. "Luca won't be able to resist me - those pictures will be damaging. I can promise you that."

"Are you sure about that dear?" Maya asked patronizingly.

Sloane scoffed. "Do you suddenly believe that Luca has actually changed? I thought you didn't like him because he's a player."

Maya shrugged carelessly. "He's going to go back to his ways at some point - I know that. That's why I want to save my daughter. That said, she's a catch - I doubt he'll let her go as easily as you think."

Sloane glared at Maya. "I'll take care of everything to do with the setup and deliver the photos. The rest is up to you."

Maya laughed darkly. "I'm going to need more details than that. You came up with a decent plan but I don't trust that you can see it through successfully."

Sloane rolled her tongue in her cheek, doing her best to clamp down on her annoyance. "A few times a week, Luca visits this little hole in the wall that he loves. He doesn't take anyone there - I'm going to ambush him and take him back."

Maya nodded. "And the photographer?"

Sloane shrugged. "I hired an off-duty paparazzo I use quite often. He's very discreet and he'll make sure I have the photos within an hour of the date. The sooner you show them to her, the better."

"All right," Maya said before leaning forward and speaking in a low tone. "Now, here's an assignment for you little girl. Make sure that Luca Brooks stays gone and far away from my daughter."

Sloane smiled smugly and offered her hand to Maya across the desk. "It's a deal."

Maya looked Sloane over blankly one more time before grasping her hand and shaking it. "Just be aware that if I go down, I'm taking you with me."

"Ditto, you old witch," Sloane said snarkily before snatching her purse up off the floor and turning to leave Maya behind.

She sniffed in disgust and turned to look at Maya. "You should really get someone in here to do something about all of this. It's really not a good look."

# **Chapter 30**: A Set Up

"Thanks, Dimitri," Luca smiled gratefully as he accepted the cup of coffee from the elderly Greek man.

The small restaurant wasn't much to look at, booths with faded, brown leather seats lined the walls with a few tables cluttered in the center. The wall was a light, tan color and adorned in framed newspaper clippings and paintings of marble statues and Greek monuments.

Dimitri smiled at Luca toothily and pulled a small notepad out of his apron pocket. "What can I get for you today, Luca? The usual?"

Luca smiled boyishly and shrugged. "You know me too well."

The older man bobbed his head and disappeared to place Luca's order. Luca picked up his coffee and brought the mug to his nose, inhaling deeply with his eyes closed. Taverna was where he came to relax and unwind away from the public eye.

Dimitri and his family didn't care about Luca's last name and had never told anyone that he frequented their little restaurant. He'd discovered this place one night in college and had been coming here alone ever since.

Luca was pulled out of his thoughts by the arrival of a young woman with a plate of dolmades.

"Dad was starting to think he'd done something to mortally offend you," she said with a smile as she placed the plate on the table.

Luca laughed heartily. "I guess I've been busy the last few weeks, Maria."

Maria grinned impishly. "According to the papers, you've been staying out of trouble too. You should bring your girl around sometime."

Luca smiled as he thought about bringing Kit here and introducing him to this family that had provided him with a safe haven. "Maybe I'll do that one of these days."

Maria winked at him and spun on her heel. "I'll hold you to that," she called over her shoulder as she walked toward the door to help a couple that had just entered.

Luca chuckled and shook his head before turning his attention to his appetizer - Dolmades. He grabbed one with his fingers and wolfed it down hungrily. He closed his eyes to savor the flavor and nearly choked when his eyes opened to find Sloane sitting across from him in his booth.

"Luca," Sloane purred slowly in greeting, as she thrust her chest out. She had a fur coat hanging off her shoulders and underneath that a bustier that was slightly too small - making her cleavage spill over.

Luca's eyes wandered over her in confusion, his mouth still full. He started chewing frantically and looked for a napkin to wipe his hands on.

"Here," Sloane purred again. "Let me help you with that."

Before Luca could react, Sloane had grabbed his wrist and sucked his fingers into her mouth. He froze in shock and yanked his hand back when he felt her tongue flick across them.

Luca swallowed hastily and glared at Sloane heatedly as she looked at him with a pout. "What the f\*ck Sloane? What was that? What are you doing here?"

Sloane smiled at him coyly and shimmied her coat the rest of the way off, revealing her bare arms and shoulders. She shrugged easily and leaned forward with her arms on the table top. "I'm here to see you, of course."

Luca frowned. "How did you even know I was here?"

Sloane pouted and placed her hand on top of the one he had on the table. "You don't seem happy to see me?"

Luca huffed in frustration and pulled his hand away. "You just showed up out of the blue and sucked my f\*cking fingers. Why would I be happy about that?"

Sloane's brow furrowed as she frowned disapprovingly. "That's no way to talk to a lady, Luca."

Luca cursed under his breath and looked around to see if he could spot the hidden cameras. He looked back at Sloane in total bewilderment. "Fine. Explain yourself."

Sloane shrugged and looked up at Luca through a half-lidded gaze. "I wanted to talk to you in private about something important."

Luca sighed tiredly. "You could have texted me or met me at my office. Ambushing me is not cool."

Sloane shrugged sulkily and leaned forward again so that Luca was looking directly at her boobs. "That's really impersonal and what I want to talk about is really personal - you might even say intimate."

Luca counted to ten in his head and spoke to Sloane through gritted teeth. "Okay then, what intimate thing do you want to discuss?"

"I want to talk about us," Soane stated as she looked Luca in the eye.

Luca shook his head. "There is no us, Sloane. I'm with Kit, as in - in a couple and a relationship."

Sloane forced out a laugh. "Aren't you bored with her by now? It's been a few weeks - we both know you don't have an attention span for anything longer. So why not cut this off before she gets really hurt and come back to me?"

Luca barked out an angry laugh. "This kind of sh\*t is exactly why we didn't even last that long. We're done, Sloane. There will never be an us again."

Sloane scoffed and slid into his side of the booth with an angry expression. "You really want me to believe that you want that girl over me? Get serious, darling. I'm the real prize here."

"You're the real delusional one here," Luca fired back as he put some space between them. "I'm done with this conversation. Leave."

Sloane's face scrunched up as she started crying. Luca's face contorted in disgust.

"Don't start,” he said sternly.

Sloane covered her face with her hands as she started to cry in loud, audible sobs. Luca looked over his shoulder in panic and noticed other patrons looking over. Maria was shooting him a confused look from the podium and he shrugged.

Luca sighed heavily and cursed under his breath as Sloane continued to sob. He awkwardly put his arm over her shoulder and patted it half-heartedly.

"Look Sloane," Luca sighed tiredly, "Maybe I was too harsh but I'm happy with Kit. You have to let this go."

Sloane buried her head in Luca's chest and continued to sob quietly. Luca looked over her shoulder at Maria for help and she simply shrugged in confusion. He looked back down at his chest and found Sloane looking up at him - before he could react, she'd latched onto the back of his neck and pulled him into a kiss.

Luca froze for a second before pulling away and pushing her from him with a disgusted expression.

"Okay, time to go," Maria spoke sternly from behind Sloane. Sloane turned and sneered at Maria who was unphased. She turned and looked back at Luca for help, but his expression was stony, his entire form tense.

"Fine!" Sloane snapped with a roll of her eyes before sliding out of the booth. She snatched her fur coat out of Maria's hand and gave her a deadly glare.

"This is far from over," Sloane hissed at Luca before sauntering away and out of the restaurant.

Luca slumped into the booth and exhaled loudly. Maria looked after Sloane in amazement for a minute before turning back to Luca.

"What the f\*ck was that?" Maria demanded in astonishment.

Luca groaned. "The start of some bullsh\*t."

# **Chapter 31**: Mom's Always Right

Kit grunted sleepily as the banging at her door continued insistently. She was shuffling toward the door with her eyes half-closed, in her PJs - wondering who was at her door before 6am.

"Someone better be dying," she muttered as she finally reached the door and pulled it open. Surprisingly, her mother was standing there, looking a combination of smug and agitated.

"Mom?" Kit asked in confusion as Maya brushed past her and headed for the living room.

"I told you!" she declared before pulling a brown envelope out of her bag and slapping it down on the table. "I told you but you never want to listen to me. Is spiting me worth getting hurt?"

'What?" Kit asked, still confused as she caught up to her mother in the living room. Maya silently gestured toward the envelope on the table and disappeared into the kitchen without a word.

Kit watched her go in annoyance, wondering what was going on and if the dramatics were strictly necessary. She picked up the fairly thin envelope and turned it over in her hands.

She looked after her mother for a second and opted to open it herself when she heard the kettle starting to boil. Kit rolled her eyes and opened the envelope, pulling out the mysterious photos within.

Kit froze, her blood freezing in her veins as she realized the subject matter of the photos. She stalked into the kitchen angrily and confronted her mother.

"What the hell is this?" Kit asked as she slapped the photos onto the kitchen counter, her eyes fixed on Maya.

Maya looked up from making herself a cup of tea and shrugged. "You're a smart girl, I'm sure you can figure it out."

Kit shook her head, confounded, before picking the pictures up and flipping through them. "Where did you get these?"

Maya remained silent as she filled her mug up with the now boiling water. Kit bit her tongue in frustration as she waited for her mother to finish.

Maya finally turned to Kit with a grave expression. "I hired a private investigator to follow Luca. Now, don't get upset - it was clearly the right thing to do."

Kit shook her head in disbelief, her eyes still latched to the pictures of Luca and Sloane. The two seemed to be on a date in a very private place, she felt her heart sink as she came across the picture of Sloane sucking Luca's fingers.

The two seemed to get closer and closer as the photos progressed until it culminated in a kiss in the final photos. She couldn't see Luca's face at this point, his back seemed to be to the camera - Sloane seemed to be enjoying it though. Kit turned and exited the kitchen unseeingly, the photos clenched tightly in her hand.

She made it to her living room and collapsed onto the couch, her mind running a million miles a minute. Kit was overwhelmed with all the things that she was feeling at that moment.

Mostly, she just felt stupid.

She felt stupid that she'd trusted him against her better judgment - that she'd allowed herself to believe the dream he'd been selling her. Kit tilted her head back as she felt her eyes start to prick with tears.

The fact that it was Sloane he was getting close and personal with only made it sting that much more. Had Sloane and Luca been together when he'd introduced them to each other? The thought of them trading stories about her and laughing in bed made her feel ill.

She couldn't believe that she'd believed Luca when he'd said nothing was going on. Or that she'd believed Sloane had good intentions. She'd been made a fool of.

"Oh sweetie," Maya tsked as she entered the room and noticed Kit's despair. She carefully set her tea down before sitting next to her daughter and wrapping an arm around her.

Kit allowed herself to be pulled into her mother's embrace, still reeling from the photos she'd brought with her.

"How long has this been going on?" Kit asked hollowly as she sat back up and placed the pictures on the table face down.

Maya shrugged and picked her tea up. "Probably from the very beginning. I've only had the investigator in my employ for a little more than a week."

Kit clenched her jaw and nodded woodenly, shame and anger rising within her at the thought of being played from the very beginning. Even if they hadn't been real from the start, it still stung.

"I guess you're happy now," Kit said as she swallowed past the lump in her throat.

Maya scoffed. "I'm not happy, sweetie. I just wish you would listen to me more. We could avoid ugly situations like this."

Kit sighed sadly and whispered to herself, "What should I do?"

Maya placed her mug down firmly. "What you do is break up with him and move on! If you're finally ready to settle down, we can find you a nice young man."

Kit's hands clenched into fists as she thought about Luca. "I need to talk to him first, confront him about this bullsh\*t!"

"No, no," Maya objected hastily. "Why hurt yourself any more than you already are right now - he's likely to deny it, but you know better. No, I think you need to just make a clean break over text or something."

"What else did the PI say?" Kit asked after a few minutes of silence. "I want to know everything he told you."

Maya frowned in irritation. "There isn't much else to know! The photos tell the whole story - he said they were there for a few hours and left very late. That's it."

Kit nodded and sat there, staring off into space as she tried to get her thoughts in order. Every part of her wanted to call Luca and yell at him for betraying her trust. The bigger part of her wanted to crawl into bed and hide for a few days.

Kit turned to her mother and placed a hand on her knee. "Thank you, Mom. You were right about Luca. I would've been a fool for months without you - don't do this again, but thank you."

Maya smiled at her daughter and opened her arms for a hug. "You know that I just want the best for you, sweetie. I'm sorry I was right about him but the next one will be better."

Kit nodded against her mother's chest and settled into her embrace for a few moments, soaking up as much comfort as she could. She was surprised her mother was being comforting but she didn't have the energy to dwell on it at that moment.

She finally pulled away and sniffled. "I'm probably not going to go back to sleep now."

Maya smiled at her daughter serenely. "Why don't you join me for some tea and we can watch some TV for a bit."

Kit smiled gratefully and dropped a kiss on her mother's head as she headed toward the kitchen to follow her advice. For now, she would gather herself, and tomorrow - she would deal with Luca.

# **Chapter 32**: Once A Heartbreaker…

Max tapped on the door lightly and smiled at Luca when he looked up. "Can I come in?"

Luca smiled happily and stood to greet Max as he entered the room. The two men hugged briefly before taking seats on opposite sides of the desk.

"This is a surprise," Luca said. "How did you know where the office was?"

Max shrugged and smiled impishly. "I know James pretty well. It looks good, man. You guys look like you're ready to get this thing off the ground."

Luca nodded as he looked around the office proudly. There were no boxes lingering in his office anymore - he'd assembled his coffee table and added a rug. He'd also made sure to install floating shelves to display some of their new products.

His new computer now took up a good portion of his desk and it was covered in mock ups, photos, contracts and Luca was sure he'd seen his planner underneath it all.

"Yeah, it's coming up fast. I'm excited though. Did you come just to look around?" Luca offered with a boyish grin.

Max thought about it for a second and nodded his head. "Yeah, I wouldn't mind taking a look around. If you don't mind."

Luca nodded and rubbed his hands together excitedly. "Come take a look around my kingdom!"

He patted Max's shoulder on the way out and led the way through the office. "I'm sure you've already seen the reception and waiting room."

Luca gestured to the desk and waved at the young man sitting behind it, busy on the phone. He gestured to Max for them to keep walking.

"This is James' office and we have several more offices scattered around here," Luca explained, sweeping his arm past a row of doors - most of them were open, their occupants visibly busy inside.

Max nodded as they walked on and came to a stop in front of a room with glass walls. "This is our conference room. We couldn't decide if we needed more than one so we might need to expand in the future."

Max nodded again. "This all looks pretty good, well decorated. I know you guys didn't do that yourselves."

Luca chuckled and put his hands up. "Yeah, I won't take credit for that. James' wife went ahead and took the reins in that regard. Now let me show you my favorite room."

Luca wiggled his eyebrows teasingly and led Max past the conference room and into another room that looked like a big office. The walls were lined with shelves and vending machines of various products - there was a table and chairs in the center of the room..

"This is the room where we keep testers for potential investors, buyers, and just in case we need a pick me up midday," Luca explained as Max looked around with wide eyes.

"I could use a pick me up," Max laughed as he walked toward a vending machine. "You have sodas! That's f\*cking crazy - this is gonna get me high?"

Luca laughed and nodded. "Yeah, that particular soda will get you high. The one to the left of it will just mellow you out, reduce pain and anxiety, etc. We're also focusing on wellness as much as we can."

Max made an impressed face and accepted the soda as Luca handed it to him. "Let's take a seat."

Max fell into his seat and took a hesitant sip of his drink before making a pleased face. "Wow, it tastes much better than I thought it would."

Luca chuckled, "That's premium stuff, I would hope it tastes good."

Max chuckled before taking a bigger sip of his drink and studying the can with an impressed look. Luca watched him for a second before speaking up, "Why do I get the feeling you didn't come here for a tour?"

Max grimaced and gave Luca a rueful smile. "I'm sorry, man. Unfortunately, I'm the bearer of bad news."

Luca frowned and leaned forward, bracing his arms on the table. "That sounds pretty serious. What's going on?"

Max sighed and ran his hand through his hair. "It's about Kit."

Luca braced his arms on the table and regarded Max seriously. "What about Kit? Is she okay? I actually haven't heard from her today."

Max groaned. "God, I wish I didn't have to be the one to do this. Uh - I'm just gonna say it. Kit is terminating the contract, they said you'd know which one, and your relationship or whatever it is at this stage."

Luca looked at Max in shock, trying to process what he'd just said. "What? That's not - why would she send you to do that?"

Max scrubbed a hand down his face and put his soda on the table. He leaned forward toward Luca. "I'm going to level with you man. I have absolutely no f\*cking clue what happened. All I know is that Kit showed up at our place really early this morning - looking really furious and distraught by the way."

Luca frowned. "What did she say when you asked her what was wrong?"

Max shrugged. "She wouldn't say a thing! Gemma comes flying out of our bedroom half-dressed and drags her away. They disappear into her office for like, an hour? They come out and they want to get the lawyer to let you know the contract is terminated! I couldn't talk them out of it or get them to tell me what was going on but I managed to convince them to let me do it."

Luca's frown deepened before he pulled his phone out of his pocket. He dialed Kit's number and swore loudly when it wouldn't go through. He tried again a few times before attempting to send a text message.

"Yeah," Max said grimly. "So, the real question is what the f\*ck did you do? I like you but if you did something to hurt Kit - we'll have a problem."

Luca shook his head, completely thrown by how his morning was going. He was raking his brain to figure out what had happened. He'd spoken to Kit last night and everything had seemed fine.

"I honestly have no idea," Luca finally breathed, confusion still painted on his face. "We were good last night but she was at your house early this morning planning this? I'm going to her office."

Max stood and blocked Luca's way. "I don't think that's a good idea. Everyone and everything are a little emotionally charged right now - give her some space to calm down from whatever this is."

Luca grunted, his face morphing into an expression of fury. "You want me to do nothing?"

"No," Max said in a calm tone. "I'm just saying don't show up today. Take the day to think things through - maybe there's something you can't think of right now. Come up with an actual plan aside from just showing up at her job."

Luca cursed and dropped back in his seat, running his hands through his hair frustratedly. "I just don't get it. I think she's just running because she's scared - f\*ck. Is there even a point in chasing her?"

Max looked at Luca sympathetically and placed a comforting hand on his shoulder. "I know this sucks right now, but trust me on this - Kit's definitely a woman worth chasing."

# **Chapter 33**: Truth Mission

Luca was staring into space when James suddenly appeared in front of him. He had a concerned look on his face as he sat down across from Luca at his desk. It was the start of the day and Luca looked like he hadn't slept in days.

"You look like sh\*t, you know? When was the last time you got some sleep?" he asked softly.

Luca shrugged and sighed tiredly. "I don't know. A few days ago? I feel like I haven't slept since Kit dropped off the face of the Earth."

James frowned sympathetically. "She still hasn't talked to you, huh?"

Luca shook his head and exhaled loudly. "I don't know what else to try. I'm blocked, basically everywhere. Her assistant won't let me past the reception and the doorman at her building has been instructed to not let me up."

James let out a long whistle. "That's rough, man. She really doesn't want to talk to you."

"She really doesn't," Luca said bleakly. "I'm driving myself crazy trying to figure out what I did wrong - if anything. It's kind of hard to do that when she won't speak to me, however, so I'm stuck right now."

"I hate to see you like this," James said as he surveyed his friend. "I wish there was something I could do to help. I also hope that you know when to cut your losses and let this go."

Luca chuckled darkly. "I do know when to cut it and run but now isn't that moment. There's something there between me and Kit - I'm not ready to give up on it just yet."

James studied Luca for a moment before sighing heavily and shaking his head. "Poor bastard. Okay, give me a few minutes."

Luca watched curiously after James as he exited the office and made a phone call. He waited impatiently, his mind running through other avenues of communicating with Kit he might not have tried.

James stepped back into the office after a minute and nodded toward the door with his head. "Let's go."

"Where are we going?" Luca asked warily. "I don't have the energy for a crazy plan, James."

James rolled his eyes. "Just come on, dude. I promise I'm helping you."

Luca glared at James suspiciously before sighing and giving in. He walked past James and hoped that whatever he was doing would work.

\*\*\*\*

"This is your big plan?" Luca asked dully as he and James stood outside Gemma and Max's apartment half an hour later.

James ignored Luca's b\*tching and knocked on the door. Max opened the door almost immediately and beamed at James before pulling him into a bear hug.

"Good to see you!" Max exclaimed before turning from James to look at Luca sympathetically. "I hope this works."

"You hope what works?" Luca asked curiously, looking between James and Max.

Before either man could answer, Gemma walked into the entryway - clearly on her way out. She froze when she noticed the three men standing there. The second her eyes landed on Luca, they widened and she bolted.

The three men stood shocked for a second before immediately following her. By the time they caught up to Gemma, she had locked herself in the main bedroom.

"Honey?" Max called out as he knocked on the door.

"Traitor!" Gemma yelled back through the door. "Get them both out of my house."

Max sighed. "You know I can't do that babe. So, why don't you come out here and just talk to the guy."

"What is there to talk about?" Gemma called back heatedly. "I have nothing to say to any of you - especially you Max! You're sleeping on the balcony tonight."

All three men winced, James and Luca shot Max a sympathetic look. He smiled ruefully and shrugged at the two men before turning back to the door.

"All right, Love," Max called back placatingly. "Could you please come out here and just talk to Luca for a few minutes? The guy's a wreck."

There was silence on the other side of the door for a few minutes before the lock clicked and Gemma cracked the door open slightly. She peeked through the crack at the three men before opening it wider and fully stepping out. She glared at her husband as she walked by him before stopping in front of Luca.

"I opened the door because I have a meeting to go to," Gemma spoke in a frosty tone. "I don't care how much of a wreck you are. You deserve it - I was rooting for you!"

Luca sighed in the face of Gemma's anger. "I don't know what you're talking about - at least tell me what I did wrong."

"You know what you did!" Gemma hissed angrily before glaring at all three men heatedly. "When I get back, two of you better not be here."

Gemma walked away from the three men, her blood still boiling at the ambush. She couldn't believe that Max had done that, knowing that neither she nor Kit wanted anything to do with Luca.

"I love you, baby!" Max called after Gemma worriedly.

"Bite me!" Gemma yelled back as she exited the apartment and slammed the door behind her.

The three men sighed collectively, looking at each other defeatedly. James spoke first, "I guess my plan wasn't as brilliant as I thought. Sorry bro, I'm sure she'll cool down before bedtime tonight."

Max snorted. "That's highly unlikely, but thanks for trying." He turned to Luca and looked at him expectantly. "You have to have some idea of what you did - these women are beyond pissed."

Luca threw his hands up in exasperation. "I swear, I have no idea why I'm suddenly public enemy number one. I don't know what the f\*ck else to try at this point short of camping outside her building and waiting for her to come out."

Max and James exchanged thoughtful glances before looking back at Luca. "Maybe that's exactly what you need to do."

Luca barked out a hard laugh. "That's even crazier than this idea, but I'll keep that in mind in case I really need it."

James exhaled loudly. "Damn, you guys are really deep in the sh\*t. Let's go get a drink, on me. Y'all need it."

# **Chapter 34**: Back To Business

*"Trouble In Paradise?*

*Rumors are swirling that our new favorite couple may be over before we've had the chance to come up with a cute couple name.*

*Sources close to Luca Brooks and Nikita Simon reveal that the two are currently on the rocks. The two haven't been spotted together in nearly a week after a very public, hot and heavy romance.*

*Has the spark fizzled out already?*

*"They're really in limbo right now," a source shares with Page Nine. "Luca still has hope they can work it out."*

*Sources are tight-lipped on what the alleged issue is between the two lovebirds but we're hoping it's nothing serious. Simon seems to have reverted to her more private ways while Brooks has been spotted out looking worse for wear.*

*We reached out to reps for both Brooks and Simon and haven't received a response. We'll keep an eye on the story and hope for the best!"*

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"Okay," Kit said distractedly as she typed on her laptop. "What else is on the to-do list?"

Dana hummed as she scrolled through her tablet. "Okay - you've picked a venue, picked the flower arrangements and caterer. Now we need to get the invites put together and sent out, but before that, I don't think we actually have a guest list."

Kit sighed and rubbed her temples. They were about a week and a half away from the launch party and everything needed to be done now. She'd completely immersed herself in work since she'd ended things with Luca - staying distracted was keeping her sane.

"Before I forget," Kit said while turning to look at Dana. "Gemma organized to give Them Magazine an exclusive to the launch. Can you call her and get the details for the photographer and reporter for the guest list?"

Dana nodded and typed away on her tablet furiously before looking up at Kit expectantly. Kit looked at the time on her laptop before smiling tiredly at Dana. "Let's take a break for now - go grab lunch. Please bring something back for me, I'm tired."

Dana gave her boss a concerned look but nodded quietly and left the room, leaving Kit alone with her thoughts. For the last few days, she'd been fielding calls and messages from just about everyone she knew - everyone was wondering what was going on with her and Luca.

She'd yet to share with anyone outside of Gemma what had happened. She felt too embarrassed to even think about what a fool she'd been. Kit sighed and shook her head to get rid of the thoughts and focused back on her work.

Her manufacturer had sent her mock-ups for the sex toys that she'd decided to add to her collection. They were waiting on her stamp of approval on each product before starting production.

She smiled slightly as she came across the sex toy Luca had been shocked by before frowning again. The number of times that she caught herself thinking about him was worrying; she couldn't seem to get him out of her mind.

Kit stopped thinking about Luca as her phone started buzzing - even though, for a moment, she'd hoped she'd see his name on her screen. For that to happen, she'd have to unblock him and she didn't want to do that. She shook her head and answered the phone.

"Hey Gem," Kit answered quietly. "What's up?"

"I'm just checking in on you," Gemma's sympathetic voice replied.

Kit rolled her eyes and sat back in her chair. "No one died babe, I'm just going through a break-up."

"Your first break-up!" Gemma rebutted sternly.

Kit chuckled. "Not my first. Remember Dougie from Freshman year?"

Gemma snorted in laughter. "You're not serious. You went on like two dates with that guy and decided he wasn't for you."

Kit shrugged in amusement. "He thought he was my boyfriend though, doesn't that make it a break-up?"

Gemma giggled as she answered. "No dear, that makes Dougie one delusional guy."

Kit laughed along with Gemma, feeling thankful that she had such a great best friend. She smiled while she listened to Gemma giggle on the other end.

"Seriously though, Kit," Gemma said gently. "Are you okay? There's no shame in feeling sad or hurt about this."

"I know," Kit murmured softly. "Just let me deal with this myself, please? I'm processing it in my own way, in my own time."

Gemma sighed heavily down the phone. "All right girl. You know I'm here if you need anything though."

Kit smiled gratefully. "Yes, Gem. I know your crazy ass is always available any time of the day."

"Good!" Gemma said firmly. "Have you managed to get any work done? We need to start getting this launch together."

Kit nodded smugly. "You should drop by later and we'll talk about it. Dana and I have been very busy girls."

"I like the sound of that!" Gemma said approvingly. "Why don't you come over for dinner? I'm a little busy today."

"Sure," Kit agreed. "Is Max going to be there or is he still banished to the balcony?"

Gemma sniffed angrily. "He's worked his way up to the guest room and he can join us if you want him there."

Kit laughed in amusement. Her heart warmed at how protective Gemma was of her - even from her own husband.

"He can come too, Gem," Kit answered with a smile. "I'm sure he's been adequately punished over the last few days."

Gemma was quiet for a moment before she spoke hesitantly. "If it's worth anything, Luca did seem really confused about this whole thing."

Kit scoffed. "Of course, he did. He doesn't expect that there's any way I would know about his little rendezvous and whatever else they did together."

Gemma hummed thoughtfully. "I don't know Kit. I don't think he'd show up at my house if there wasn't more to this story."

Kit sighed tiredly. "I don't want to know whatever else there is to the story - I know all that I need to know."

"Okay!" Gemma responded quickly. "I'll see you later, love you."

"Love you too, Gem," Kit said quietly before ending the call.

She sat there staring into space - Gemma's words nagging in the back of her mind. Luca had been to her home and office multiple times, but she'd made sure not to see him. Maybe Gemma was right and his persistence meant there was more going on.

There was a cursory knock on the door before Dana appeared with her tablet and a brown bag in hand. She smiled at Kit and offered her the bag.

"Ready to get back to it?" Dana asked as she settled back into her seat across from Kit.

Kit looked up from the cheeseburger she'd pulled out of the bag and gave Dana a grateful smile. "Definitely."

# **Chapter 35**: One More Play

Luca looked away from his computer when he heard the gentle tapping on his open door. He looked up to find Sloane standing there with a meek smile and a box of donuts.

"Oh God," he groaned loudly. "I'm not in the mood for your antics today, Sloane."

"I'm here to apologize actually," Sloane muttered. "You have every right to kick me out and I'll leave if you really want me to."

Luca sighed but gestured for Sloane to sit down across from him, against his better judgment. Sloane smiled at him gratefully before placing the box of donuts on the desk between them.

"This is a peace offering," Sloane said gently as she pushed the box toward Luca. "I know it's not much, but I figured it's a start?"

Luca looked down at the donuts before looking back up at Sloane with no expression. Sloane squirmed uncomfortably and averted her gaze. Luca watched her for a few minutes before sighing quietly.

"Okay," Luca said before turning back to his computer. "Whatever. Apology accepted."

Sloane frowned. "I want to actually make an apology before you accept it."

Luca sighed again and rolled his eyes before redirecting his attention to Sloane and gesturing for her to get on with it. With everything else happening around him, Luca had almost forgotten about his run-in with Sloane - almost. Now that she was here, he felt his anger rising all over again.

Sloane cleared her throat and clasped her hands together on the desk. "I f\*cked up. I know that - I didn't go there to embarrass myself like that. I'm sure you're aware that I still have some…lingering feelings. I had a long champagne brunch with some friends and felt bold and it's not an excuse but it's the reason. I'm really sorry."

Luca watched Sloane through narrowed eyes. "How did you know where to find me? I've never told anyone about that place, not even James."

Sloane shifted in her seat uncomfortably and gave Luca an uneasy smile. "Okay - well, when we were dating, I followed you there one night out of curiosity. You weren't at home, so I figured I'd try…"

Luca threw his head back and blew air out of his mouth in frustration. He pinned Sloane with a glare - feeling completely violated. Almost more violated than he'd felt by her throwing herself at him.

"You're literally crazy," Luca stated coolly. "If I'd known that little fact, I wouldn't have agreed to be friends again."

Sloane scowled at Luca. "That's unfair, I followed you a long time ago."

"You used that information just last week," Luca threw back at Sloane. "So yes, it's completely fair from where I'm standing."

Sloane frowned. "I'm also really sorry that I disrespected your relationship. I'll apologize to Nikita too – hopefully, we can salvage our friendship."

"Don't bother," Luca muttered tiredly. "We're broken up, so leave her alone."

"God! I messed up once. I'm not going to do anything to her," Sloane sneered angrily. "Why did you break up? I thought this was the one."

Luca considered Sloane for a second before shaking his head, not sure why he was about to answer her question. It wasn't like it mattered at this point anyway.

"She broke up with me," Luca answered finally. "That must make you happy - to see me on the other end of this for once."

Sloane frowned and reached across for Luca's hand. Luca slid his hand out of reach and shot Sloane a dry look. Sloane scowled but pulled her hand back.

"Of course, I'm not happy to see you hurt," Sloane started. "I'm sorry it didn't work out. I was hoping she could work past her insecurities."

Luca frowned at Sloane, looking at her like she was crazy. "What insecurities? She's one of the most confident women I've ever met."

Sloane shrugged innocently and looked confused. "She seemed really insecure to me. She was really fixated on your past when it's so obvious that you've changed. To be honest, it didn't seem like she was completely open to you - but that's not my place to say."

Luca shook his head. "We didn't break up because of insecurities on her part."

Sloane tilted her head curiously as she looked at Luca. "Then why did you break up? If I can ask that…"

"We broke up because -" Luca paused and looked at Sloane dejectedly. "I honestly don't know why. She's avoiding me."

Sloane hummed knowingly. "That sounds like insecurities to me. Why would someone just run from a good relationship if nothing's wrong? Nothing was wrong, right? You didn't do anything?"

Luca looked puzzled as he turned Sloane's words over in his head - wondering if they explained the situation he'd found himself in. He couldn't deny that Kit had expressed concerns about his playboy past, but he'd felt sure they'd moved past that. Maybe Sloane was right…

He finally looked at Sloane with a conflicted expression and shrugged. "I don't know - maybe you're right."

Sloane nodded knowingly. "I usually am about these things. Don't worry darling, the right woman will come along. One who can accept you for who you are completely - a woman who isn't afraid of your past."

Luca smiled at Sloane gratefully, feeling her words strangely touch him. The last week has taken a steeper toll on him than he'd thought possible. Having never been on the receiving end of a breakup, Luca was still reeling - he missed Kit and wanted to talk to her desperately.

Luca suddenly chuckled out loud, startling Sloane who shot him a confused look. He shot her a sardonic grin. "I was just thinking I suddenly understand all the women I've dated who called me for weeks afterward."

Sloane smiled at Luca sympathetically. "You'll be okay, darling. If you ever want to - you can call me for a shoulder to cry on."

Luca shot Sloane an amused look but nodded anyway. "Okay - thanks for the donuts and the apology but I've got to get back to work."

Sloane nodded understandingly and beamed at Luca with a hopeful expression. "Is it too much to ask for a hug?"

Luca looked at her thoughtfully before nodding in agreement. He stood and met her halfway around the desk. Luca hesitantly hugged Sloane while she enthusiastically threw her arms around him.

Luca found himself enjoying the hug despite himself, he supposed he needed this - a hug. He'd had such a sh\*tty week and hadn't taken a moment to breathe. He tightened his arms around Sloane and tried to absorb some comfort.

The two stood like that for a few minutes before they both pulled away slowly. Sloane smiled up at Luca fondly and he reciprocated. She waved at him briefly before exiting the office and leaving him alone.

Luca sighed and wondered if he could really trust Sloane's apology. The one thing that had come from this visit, aside from the donuts, was the realization that he needed to be seeking comfort right now.

He pulled his phone out and picked his mother's contact. Luca paced around the room as he heard the phone ringing.

"Luca! How is my baby?" Lucia answered warmly, her happiness at hearing from her son evident.

Luca smiled slightly and sank into the couch. "Mama. I've been better, how are you?"

"What's the matter Luca?" Lucia questioned, her voice dripping with concern.

Luca gnawed his lip and sighed sadly. "It's Kit - I've messed up somehow and she's dumped me. Blocked me everywhere."

"Oh no," Lucia tsked sympathetically. "What happened my angel?"

Luca smiled at her use of his childhood pet name and shrugged. "I don't know, she's made it impossible to talk to her. I have no idea what I did wrong."

"I'm confused," Lucia answered after a few moments of silence.

Luca chuckled wryly. "So am I. What should I do?"

"You shouldn't give up just yet," Lucia counseled. "I liked her and so did your father! I want us to have another double date, so just be patient. You're both very strong personalities."

Luca laughed in surprise. "Dad likes her? That's news to me."

"Well, you know how your father is," Lucia said exasperatedly. "He told me but won't pick up the phone to tell you!

Luca nodded. "We can both be stubborn but I'm glad he likes her." He was quiet for a moment before speaking again quietly, "What if she still won't talk to me?"

Lucia sighed sadly. "Then you can come home and I'll give you a hug angel. I'm always going to be here for you."

Luca smiled slightly. "Thank you, Mama."

"Of course!" Lucia responded immediately. "Come over for dinner soon, angel. Your father and I would love to have you."

# **Chapter 36**: It All Comes Tumbling Down

"Hi Luca," Sloane chirped excitedly as she opened the door to her apartment. "I'm glad you decided to come. I wasn't sure you would when I texted you."

Luca smiled at Sloane and offered her the wine he'd brought with him. Unsurprisingly, she was wearing another short, tight outfit. "You didn't have to make me an apology dinner too."

Sloane grinned at Luca as she closed the door, wine in hand. "I didn't, silly. My chef made the dinner, of course."

She led him into the open plan living area. The chef seemed to just be finishing and gave Luca a tight-lipped smile. Luca smiled slightly and looked around Sloane's place in interest. It was decorated in beige and nude tones - very chic, but bland and boring.

"This is a nice place," Luca commented as Sloane handed him a glass of wine and directed him to the couch. "What do your parents think about you moving out and getting your own place?"

"Oh, I haven't moved out just yet," Sloane answered as she sat near him and gave the apartment a cursory glance. "It's a rental for the month. I'm looking for a place in the city - maybe you know a place near you?"

Luca smiled at Sloane slightly and shook his head before sipping his wine and averting his gaze from her face. "Sorry, I haven't seen anything nearby."

Sloane frowned slightly before smiling at Luca again. She leaned toward him and murmured, "I'm sorry we don't have any privacy." She turned her head and glared at the chef as she spoke louder, "The chef was supposed to be gone by now."

"That's no problem," Luca said while shooting the chef an apologetic look. Sloane scowled but said nothing - leaving the two sitting in an awkward silence.

"Miss Astor?" the chef called out as she stood near the door, bags in hand. "I'm done now. Have a good night."

Sloane waved the chef away as she kept her eyes on Luca. She spoke the second they heard the door click shut, "Have you spoken to Kit?"

Luca frowned, caught off guard and shook his head. "No, why do you ask?"

Sloane smiled serenely and moved closer to Luca. "No reason, I was just wondering if you still need a shoulder to cry on."

Luca noticed how close she'd gotten and moved back - putting some much needed distance between them. "We're still broken up but I'm doing fine thanks. We should probably eat."

Sloane frowned, dissatisfied with his answer, but nodded in agreement. "I've set the table for us, why don't you take a seat and I'll join you shortly?"

Luca grinned awkwardly and made his way toward the dining table near the end of the room. He sighed internally as he noticed that she'd set the seats at the head of the table and the one next to it.

He inwardly cursed at himself for accepting this invitation. He should have known better but she'd guilted him when she'd asked. Sloane appeared with two plates in hand, sparing Luca from self-flagellation.

"This is a pretty small serving," Luca commented with a raised eyebrow as he inspected the deconstructed dish - maybe a salad?

Sloane trilled out a laugh as she dropped into her chair, her legs brushing against his. "This is just the first course, silly!"

Luca frowned and put the fork he'd just picked up, back down. "I appreciate the gesture and the - uh...effort, you've put into this but I have other plans tonight."

Sloane's eye twitched slightly as she cocked her head to the side. "What other plans?"

"Some friends have invited me out tonight," Luca lied. "They think I need the distraction and I agreed."

Sloane's face contorted in rage as she banged a fist on the table. "What the f\*ck Luca? Are you already going out looking for your next wh\*re?"

Luca shook his head in disbelief and chuckled shortly. "That's it. I'm gone."

He pushed his chair out roughly, the wooden legs scraping against the tile as Sloane stared at him silent in outrage.

Luca made a hasty retreat toward the door when Sloane shrieked in fury from behind him. "Stop right there you pr\*ck. I have worked way too hard to get you back to let you go now."

Luca turned and glared at Sloane. "You've seriously crossed into the territory of the unhinged. You sexually assaulted me and then bought donuts to make up for it! That's hardly working to win me."

"I saved you from yourself," Sloane snarled, as she advanced on Luca - looking for blood. "The least you can do is actually give me a chance. I didn't get rid of the last one just so you could get a new one!"

"What?" Luca asked in a deadly tone.

Sloane froze, her body tensing as she realized what had slipped out.

Luca took a few steps toward Sloane, his gaze locked on her face. "I said what did you say? You got rid of Kit? Enlighten me."

Sloane shook her head and instinctively took a step back, cowering from the waves of fury she could feel rolling off of Luca. "That's not what I meant," Sloane stuttered as she scrambled for an alternative explanation.

Luca cocked his brow curiously. "What did you mean then? And answer quickly."

Sloane flushed, feeling cornered and out of options. "Why wasn't I good enough to get serious with?" Sloane wailed angrily, tears shining in her eyes. "We've known each other our whole lives - why would you pick her over me?"

Luca felt a pang of pity as he looked at Sloane, he pushed his anger to the side for a moment and answered her question quietly. "It's not a competition - we were then and she's now. Just tell me what you did, Sloane."

Sloane glared at him with watery eyes and sniffed sadly before sighing. "I had a photographer take photos of that night when I followed you to Taverna."

Luca chuckled in disbelief and swore colorfully. "You set me up? My God, Sloane. What is wrong with you? Let me guess, you sent the photos to Kit afterward?"

Sloane bit her lip and fiddled with her hands. "No - actually, her mother did that."

"Bullsh\*t," Luca said in shock, not sure if he should believe her or not. "There is no way that's true."

Sloane smirked nastily and shrugged. "It is and I can prove it - the old witch hates one of you enough that she helped me with my plan. She convinced Kit not to talk to you - made our plan foolproof."

Luca felt his body start to tremble with rage, his hands clenched into fists and his breath hissed past clenched lips. "You're crazier than I ever thought possible. Let me make it clear, I do not want you. I will never want you. Especially after this."

Sloane flinched as if she'd been slapped, her bottom lip trembling as she did her best not to cry. Luca looked at her disgustedly and held his hand out. "Give me your phone."

Sloane looked at Luca sulkily, hurt evident in her eyes, but she walked over to the couch and picked up her phone before dropping it into Luca's open hand.

She skulked over to the couch and collapsed on it, sobbing softly while Luca found her chats with Maya and screenshot evidence before sending it to himself. Luca put her phone down on the table before turning to look at Sloane.

"I'm sorry that I broke your heart," Luca said. "The friendship thing is over. Stay away from me and stay away from Kit."

Luca shot her one last disgusted look before he exited her apartment, wondering where he could find Kit.

# **Chapter 37**: Another Day, Another Ambush

"Hi Kit," Luca said warily as she walked into one of the conference rooms from his seat at the conference table. Kit froze for a second before spinning on her heel and reaching for the door handle on the closed door.

She swore under her breath when the door didn't budge. Kit could see Gemma's figure through the frosted pane of glass that served as the wall.

"It's locked, Honey!" Gemma called out from the other side.

Kit slapped the door with her hand. "You're a traitor, just like your husband!"

"Birds of a feather babe!" Gemma shouted back, causing Kit to slap the door again and curse Gemma creatively.

"I'm sorry!" Gemma shouted again. "You're stubborn, we had to resort to drastic measures. I'll buy you food later."

"Kit," Luca interjected from behind her, where he'd been patiently waiting.

"I don't want to talk to you," Kit said dully while still facing the door, her head leaning against the cool wood.

"She's not going to open the door until you do," Luca answered calmly as he studied Kit's tense form. He wondered how stubborn she was going to be about this entire thing and whether or not she'd even believe him.

Kit was silent for a few moments before she huffed angrily and turned around - coming face to face with Luca for the first time in nearly two weeks. He gave her a small smile, which she ignored, before taking a seat across from him.

"Speak," Kit commanded flatly as she glared at Luca. He sighed sadly before lifting up an envelope Kit hadn't noticed before and sliding it to her.

Kit stopped the envelope with a single finger and sighed. "I'm really sick of people giving me envelopes."

Luca didn't say anything and just studied Kit instead - drinking in her appearance after not seeing her for so long. She looked like she was doing better than he was, but she was still noticeably tired.

Kit decided to open the envelope to give herself a reason to look away from Luca's intense gaze - all the while internally cursing her heart for reacting to his presence. She had no idea what the envelope contained but she had a sick feeling in her stomach.

Kit was surprised to find screenshots, printed out and enlarged. She looked up at Luca in confusion. "What is this?"

"Screenshots from Sloane's phone. You should take note of the number she's texting," Luca answered.

Kit's eyes immediately flitted to the top of the screenshot suspiciously - surprised to find her own mother's number there. Her confusion grew even more; she hadn't been aware that her mother even knew Sloane.

Her heart sank as she started reading the content of the chats - she almost couldn't believe what she was reading. Sloane and her mother had been coordinating the delivery of the photos she'd received. The last message Sloane had sent to Maya read, "It's in your hands now. I held up my end of the plan."

Kit looked up at Luca and shook her head in disbelief. "What is this supposed to mean?"

Luca sighed. "Apparently your mother gave you some inappropriate pictures of Sloane and I - they planned and staged the whole thing. They wanted us to break up."

Kit snorted. "That's ridiculous unless you were also part of this 'plan'. You were kissing her and letting her suck your fingers. They conspired to get the pictures but you did the rest on your own."

Luca shook his head. "No, that's absolutely not true. Sloane followed me to dinner and ambushed me - I was completely caught off guard by her advances and I can prove it. There's more in the envelope."

Kit looked at him skeptically but dug through the envelope and pulled out a sheaf of photos from the infamous night in question. There were pictures that Kit hadn't received with the others - this series of photos, added to the ones she'd already received, told a different story. A true story.

Kit shook her head again, her mind racing. "So what? You two had a fight on your date - that doesn't prove anything."

Luca sighed and chuckled tiredly. "You're really stubborn, you know. It's not very endearing. I have the conversations from Sloane to the photographer where she tells him she needs it to look like we're on a romantic date."

Kit's hand immediately reached for the envelope again where she found the promised screenshots. She spread everything out in front of her, her eyes roving over everything - her mind racing a million miles a minute.

Kit felt a lump growing in her throat as her eyes started to tear up. She took a shaky breath and finally looked at Luca again. "So my own mother worked with Sloane to break us up? That's what you're saying?"

Luca nodded with a sympathetic look on his face, aching to reach out to Kit and console her, but he didn't know if she'd appreciate it.

Kit nodded slowly and inhaled deeply. "There was never anything going on with you and Sloane?"

Luca nodded again. "I swear Kit - the only thing there's ever been between us is s\*x and that was years ago. I only want you."

Kit studied Luca's face, with an unreadable expression on her face. She looked away and started gathering all the images in front of her, stacking them neatly and putting them back in the envelope.

"Can I borrow this?" Kit asked Luca as she stood from the table.

Luca nodded with a puzzled look and stood too. "Borrow it? Where are you going? We still haven't talked."

Kit gave Luca an apologetic smile. "I know and I'm sorry."

She turned and banged on the door loudly. "Gemma, open the door. Now."

Kit turned back to Luca. "We'll talk. I promise. There's just something else I need to take care of first. I know you've been waiting for a while, but please just wait one more hour?"

The sound of a key turning in the lock rang out through the room. Gemma stuck her hand in waving a blank white sheet of paper before poking her head in. "Did you guys talk? Are you mad at me?"

Kit ignored Gemma and gave Luca a questioning look. He sighed heavily, but nodded anyway, causing a brief smile to flit across Kit's face before she pushed past Gemma and disappeared.

"You showed her the envelope?" Gemma asked as they both looked in the direction Kit had gone. Luca nodded and Gemma let loose a long whistle. "Better get the bail money ready."

# **Chapter 38**: Showdown

Kit banged loudly on the door of her mother's house with a closed fist. She'd driven here immediately after she'd left the office - she had to confront her mother and get to the bottom of all this. Although it was pretty clear what had happened, Kit wanted to hear it from her - and then tear her a new one.

She continued banging on the door incessantly when it wasn't answered. Matthew appeared at the door out of breath and confused when he noted Kit's furious expression - he'd come running from the other end of the house when he'd heard the banging.

"Kit -"

Kit pushed past him, completely ignoring him and heading for her mother's office. She could hear his footsteps on the hardwood floor, as he followed behind her quickly - but she didn't care.

She burst into Maya's office, visibly startling her as she sat in the window seat reading a book. She was comfortably propped up against some cushions, she snapped her book shut.

"Kit!" Maya exclaimed angrily. "Was that you banging on the door? You're disturbing the whole neighborhood."

Kit pulled the envelope out of her bag and tossed it onto Maya's lap wordlessly. Maya looked down at her lap with a completely blank expression. She picked the envelope off her lap and swung her legs off the seat.

"Could you give us a moment, love?" Maya addressed Matthew over Kit's shoulder. "Kit seems to be in a bad mood."

Kit snorted angrily. "Do I? Stay Matthew, I'm sure you'll find this next part interesting too." She pointed at the envelope; her gaze locked on Maya's. "Open it."

Maya sniffed disdainfully. "I'm the mother here, you don't tell me what to do."

Kit barked out an angry laugh. "Really? That's why you don't want to open it? Maybe Matthew will do the honors instead."

Maya's grip tightened on the envelope as she glared at Kit. "There's no need to cause a scene. If you have something you want to say, you should just say it."

Kit shook her head in complete disbelief, her anger growing with every moment. "How could you?" she demanded of Maya angrily.

Maya shrugged and looked at Kit with pity. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Then why won't you open the envelope?" Kit asked snarkily. "I know what you did. Open it or I'm telling Matthew the whole thing."

Matthew looked between the two women, feeling uncomfortable from all the tension and anger in the room. He felt confused but wasn't sure if he should interject - or if he even could.

Maya looked at Kit with a stony face for a minute before sneering. "What's in here, huh? Some kind of proof?" She scoffed at Kit. "You should be here thanking me, not creating drama. I was right about that boy."

"Except for the part where you weren't right and conspired with his ex-girlfriend!" Kit spat angrily, advancing toward her mother slowly.

Maya adopted a confused and hurt expression. "I don't know what you're talking about! All I did was give you proof of their relationship."

"Stop lying!" Kit snapped as she looked at Maya in disgust. "You know that's absolutely not true - Sloane told me everything."

"That little b\*tch!" Maya snarled before ripping the envelope in half and slapping it onto her desk. "So what? I did it for you! That boy is no good - he was just going to break your heart anyway."

"That is not your decision to make!" Kit snapped before shaking her head in anger. "I can't believe you would stoop so low - actually, no. I absolutely f\*cking can!"

Maya glared at Kit and smirked evilly. "It doesn't matter now. What's done is done - I'm sure he's already moved on to the next thing. We can focus on finding you a decent young man."

Kit looked at Maya and burst into shocked laughter. "You're completely out of your mind. There is no 'we'. You have done a lot of really heinous sh\*t over the course of my life but this really takes the cake."

Kit looked at Maya, her anger evaporating and being replaced by disgust, disdain, and exhaustion. She shook her head and turned to leave, brushing by a shell-shocked Matthew who was still standing in the doorway.

"You don't walk away from me!" Maya shrieked from behind Kit as she came barreling behind her. She reached for Kit's elbow as they reached the door but Kit snatched it back.

"You haven't changed at all," Kit stated coldly. "I'm done trying. Leave me alone - if you come anywhere near my work or my home, I'll call the police." She left, slamming the door in Maya's shocked face with only one thing on her mind - getting to Luca and fixing this mess.

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Kit fidgeted nervously as she stood in front of Luca's door, her hands fiddling with the strap of her purse. She gnawed on her lip as she tried to work up the courage to knock. She'd promised Luca they'd talk, but now she was terrified the talk wouldn't go the way she wanted.

If anything, Luca had every right to chew her out for the way she'd handled everything over the past two weeks. Kit sighed quietly, maybe she'd have to be the one begging him to give her a chance now.

She jumped when the door swung open.

Luca smiled at Kit's obvious surprise. "They called up and let me know you were here ten minutes ago."

"Oh," Kit said dumbly as she stared at Luca. "Uh - can I come in?"

Luca nodded and stepped aside to let her into his apartment. Kit unconsciously made her way to the living area while giving herself an internal pep talk. She was going to apologize to Luca for how she'd handled everything and then let him say what he wanted to.

"Can I get you something to drink?" Luca asked quietly, snapping Kit out of her thoughts. She turned to find him standing awkwardly on the threshold to the living area, watching her closely.

Kit shook her head and sat down. "I'd like to just get right to it, if you don't mind."

Luca nodded, his expression turned inscrutable before he took a seat across from Kit and looked at her expectantly.

Kit took a deep breath and rubbed her sweaty hands over her knees - drying them on the soft denim. "I'm sorry for not giving you a chance to explain yourself before going nuclear - I've handled this like a total b\*tch and I understand that you must be hurt and furious."

Kit paused for a second, glancing at Luca from the corner of her eye before rushing on again. "I felt hurt and stupid and embarrassed when I saw those photos and I just reacted emotionally. Not that it's an excuse or anything - I just want to explain my behavior."

She stopped talking again and looked at Luca who seemed to be absorbing what she'd said. Kit felt nervous, not knowing what he was thinking.

Kit opened her mouth to speak again and Luca held a hand up to stop her.

"Shut up, Kit."

# **Chapter 39**: Make It Up To Me

Kit's lips clamped shut in surprise, her heart racing with fear. She looked at Luca warily and was surprised when he smiled at her slightly.

"You're rambling at this stage,” he said with a chuckle.

"Oh," Kit murmured, feeling embarrassed. "Sorry about that."

"It really hurt that it was so easy for you to believe so poorly of me," Luca started with a pained expression. "Especially after I explicitly told you there was nothing going on."

Kit opened her mouth to defend herself but Luca raised his hand again, silencing her. "What hurts, even more, is that it was so easy for you to drop me."

Kit shook her head frantically. "That's not true at all! It wasn't easy for me to drop you at all - I wanted to confront you, force you to explain yourself, but my mother convinced me that it was unnecessary."

Luca nodded understandingly. "I understand that this must have been hard for you, especially with your own mother involved - it all looked very real. That said, my feelings are still hurt. I thought we were building something stronger than this."

Kit frowned, wanting to reach out and touch Luca but afraid of rejection.

Luca continued speaking, "I assume you went to see your mom when you left your office."

Kit grimaced and sighed before nodding in the affirmative. "Yeah, I had to confront her - I'm still shocked if I'm being honest, but I don't want to talk about her. I'd rather talk about us."

Luca cocked his head at Kit, his face carefully blank. "Us?"

Kit felt her heart start to race and her palms start to sweat again but she steeled her resolve and forced herself to push forward. "Is there an us? I would like to still be with you - if you can somehow look past this."

Luca was silent for a moment, just looking into Kit's soul. "What about my past? That doesn't bother you anymore?"

Kit swallowed hard and shook her head. "It doesn't - in a weird way, this has made me trust you completely. You've been who you told me you were and I've been too afraid to believe you. I won't make that mistake anymore."

Luca nodded slowly without taking his eyes off Kit. "What about your mom? You don't want to talk about her but she's clearly a threat to any relationship we might have."

Kit sighed heavily, her face a mask of sadness. "I know - she's on ice for now. I don't know when I'll talk to her again, let alone forgive her."

Luca nodded again and looked at her curiously. "What about the contract? Do you want that back too?"

Kit shook her head fervently. "No, I would just like to date you - if that's okay. No contract. Just you and I doing it on our own."

Luca studied her again for a few silent moments, causing Kit to start panicking internally. She wasn't sure she'd be able to forgive Luca if the tables were turned - maybe it was unfair to expect him to do it.

Luca sighed after a few minutes of contemplation. "You know - you're going to have to really make this up to me somehow."

Kit smiled slightly, her hopes starting to rise. "Is that your way of saying you still want to be with me?"

Luca smirked smugly with a twinkle in his eyes. "No, I'm saying that you're going to have to work hard to get back in my good graces."

Kit's smile grew and she walked across the room to Luca, hovering above him for a second before dropping into the seat next to him - their bodies close together.

Kit spoke softly. "I promise, I'll never doubt you again."

Luca smiled back at her and cupped the side of her face. "You better not."

The two sat there, staring at each other happily when Kit suddenly frowned. "Wait, what about Sloane? I completely forgot about that b\*tch for a second!"

Luca chuckled and grabbed Kit's hands in his own, he looked down at her hands for a second before meeting her gaze. "I already gave her a piece of my mind but I'm sure you want a turn too. We can sit her down together after this - make sure she knows her place."

Kit studied Luca's eyes for a second before grinning broadly and nodding happily. She threw her arms around his neck and hugged him. Luca's arms immediately wound around Kit's waist, pulling her as close as possible while in their current position.

Kit sighed happily and melted into Luca's embrace - unbelievably relieved to be back in his arms again.

Luca was thinking the exact same thing, he'd been afraid that he might never get the chance again. For a moment, he'd been worried that he wouldn't see her after she'd run out of the conference room.

Kit pulled back slightly until their faces were only a hair's breadth apart. Her eyes flickered to Luca's before she pulled his lips into hers. Luca moaned and reciprocated her sweet kiss.

Luca pulled back and dropped his forehead against Kit's gently. "I missed you."

Kit smiled and pecked Luca on the lips. "I might have missed you too."

Luca chuckled, his eyes glittering with amusement. "It warms my heart to see you haven't changed in our brief time apart."

Kit rolled her eyes and captured Luca's lips in a heated kiss. Luca groaned in approval and pulled Kit into his lap. She pulled her lips away from his and squealed in surprise and delight.

"Oh," Kit crooned with a sexy smirk. "I like this position a lot."

She swooped down and kissed Luca passionately, her fingers running through his hair and down his shoulders. Luca gave Kit as good as she was giving him - his lips moving furiously with her and his hands palming her butt.

"F\*ck," Luca panted as he ripped his lips away from hers, causing Kit to reroute and plant kisses up and down his neck. "We should stop now."

Kit pulled back and smiled slyly. "Why?"

Before Luca could answer, Kit pulled her shirt up over her head, revealing her bare breasts - leaving him wide-eyed and agape. Kit laughed wickedly before bending down to kiss him heatedly again. She slipped her hot, slick tongue into his mouth teasingly before pulling away out of breath.

"Take your shirt off," Kit commanded, her hands already pulling at the hem. Luca obligingly lifted his arms up while Kit pulled the shirt over his head. He used the opportunity to suck one of her nipples into his mouth before releasing it with a pop.

Kit sat back and looked at him heatedly before raking her nails down his chest slowly. Luca threw his head back and groaned in pleasure - giving Kit the opportunity to pepper his flesh with heated nips and kisses.

"Kit!" Luca moaned as she zeroed in on one spot and started biting and sucking. He shivered with pleasure, his hands running up and down her back.

He made a disappointed noise when Kit pulled back, looking at his neck with proud and lustful eyes. Luca's hand flew to his neck and he laughed as he felt the slightly bruised flesh.

"You gave me a hickey?" Luca asked with breathless laughter.

Kit shrugged and smiled naughtily. "It'll let others know you're taken until I can think of something better."

Luca chuckled happily, his eyes smoldering with lust as his hands slid up to cup Kit's breasts - his thumbs flicking her nipples. "Come here."

Kit smirked and bent down to run her tongue along his bottom lip before pulling it into her mouth and nipping gently. She winked at Luca before starting to climb off of his lap.

Luca frowned and anchored her with his hands firmly. Kit laughed and patted his hand comfortingly. "I'm not going anywhere."

Luca eyed her in confusion but released her so she could clamber off his lap. His eyes widened as she sank to her knees - her heated gaze locked with his.

Kit bit her lip and flicked her eyes down to his fly. "May I?"

Luca nodded wordlessly, his heart pounding in anticipation. He grabbed her hand as she grabbed his zipper. "Are you sure?"

Kit smiled at Luca wickedly. "I have some making up to do, don't I?"

# **Chapter 40**: Sweet Escape

Kit frowned sleepily and rubbed her face, trying to get rid of whatever was tickling her so she could get back to sleep. She cracked an eye open when her hand came in contact with warm skin.

Kit's frown deepened as she looked at the strange, male finger on her face. She pulled her face back quickly and relaxed when she heard Luca's familiar, warm chuckle.

"Not a morning person?" Luca asked, watching Kit fondly as she slowly woke up.

"Just not used to someone tickling my face in the morning," Kit said groggily as Luca wound an arm around her waist and pulled her into his chest. She buried her head into his chest and started drifting off again.

"Stay awake, Kit," Luca demanded gently while rocking her.

"Why?" Kit groaned sleepily. "I'm not going to work today - let me sleep!"

Luca chuckled again and cupped her face with his hand. "Can you take Friday off too?"

Kit frowned and peered at Luca through half-opened eyes. "Why? What's on Friday?"

Luca smiled down at Kit, thinking that she was so cute when she was sleepy. He dropped a gentle kiss on her forehead. "I want us to get away for a few days."

Kit perked up, feeling herself wake up a little more as she took in what Luca had just said. "Get away to where?"

Luca hummed as he smiled down at Kit. "I have a place up in Connecticut - I want to take you there."

Kit smiled back at Luca and poked his nose. "Another family home?"

Luca shook his head. "Nope, this one's all mine. Twenty-first birthday gift from my dear departed Grandpa. He had a house out there at one time that we both loved spending time in."

"Okay," Kit agreed softly. "Sounds like fun. I guess you want to leave tomorrow?"

Luca shook his head and sat up. "No, I want us to leave ASAP. I figured we'd take a shower, swing by yours for a bag, and hit the road."

Kit sat up and chuckled, her voice still husky from sleep. "All right then. I'm down for a little adventure - let me just get Dana to move some things around tomorrow and we're good to go."

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"Wow," Kit breathed as she stepped out of Luca's car a few hours later.

Quaint was the word that first sprung to mind when Kit looked at Luca's home. She'd been expecting a palatial home but the house was a pretty decent size, two-story family home on beautiful grounds - dotted with red and purple flowers.

"You like?" Luca asked as he joined her with their bags in hand. Kit turned to him and nodded with a smile.

"It's not what I was expecting," Kit said honestly as they started walking toward the home.

Luca shot her a curious look as they reached the door. "What were you expecting?"

Kit shrugged with a sheepish laugh. "I don't know - some huge monstrosity with a stable in the back?"

Luca chuckled and gave Kit an amused look before opening the door. "Well - sorry to disappoint. Welcome to my home."

Kit stepped past Luca gingerly and looked around the open plan living space she'd walked into. The interior of the house was well decorated with obviously luxury furniture and appliances. Surprisingly, the walls were dotted with photos of family and friends.

"Are there any baby pictures hung up?" Kit asked excitedly with shining eyes.

Luca laughed, happy with Kit's interest in his life. "Why don't you check it out while I take our bags upstairs?"

Kit watched Luca walk away with a small smile on her face before she put her purse on the nearest table and started examining his pictures. There were a variety of pictures from Luca's childhood - practically every age. It was a good blend of friends and family.

She walked around the entire living area - feeling smug that she hadn't spotted Sloane in any of the photos. She clearly was never as close to Luca as she'd wanted or made it out to be.

Kit looked out of the window, enjoying the beautiful natural scenery outside - the large expanse of green lawn and the lush, green forest bordering the property. and gasped when she spotted a barn-like structure.

"It's not a stable Kit," Luca laughed from behind her as he came back down the stairs. "It's actually a barn, the previous owners used it as a family event space - I'm not sure what I'd like to do with it but tearing it down seems a shame."

Kit smiled at Luca. "Have you made any changes to this place?"

Luca laughed. "I'll include the history in the tour, are you ready?" He held his arm out for Kit to take with a crooked smile, causing her to giggle but latch onto his arm anyway.

Luca cleared his throat dramatically and winked at Kit. "So, this is the open-plan living area - I knocked down a few walls to make this happen. The whole space here was renovated and fitted with modern fixtures and appliances. The exterior is untouched except for a new paint job."

He whisked her toward the stairs and helped her up the single flight. "Up here we have the bedrooms and bathrooms. There are four bedrooms - one of which I use as a home office. We'll be staying in my room, the master."

"Did you decorate it yourself?" Kit asked with skepticism as they walked from room to room.

Luca laughed at her tone, unoffended. "All the decor is courtesy of Lucia Brooks - yes, my mama decorated my house. Not that I had much of a choice but moving on!"

Kit chuckled as she allowed Luca to drag her back downstairs. He walked across the large living area and came to a stop in front of a non-descript door. Kit frowned as he dropped her arm.

"And now, for my favorite part of the house - and a part I'm sure you haven't noticed yet," Luca said excitedly before swinging the door open and encouraging Kit to walk down the staircase that had appeared.

Kit gave him a suspicious look but slowly descended into what might have been a basement - if one of the long walls hadn't been replaced exclusively by sliding doors. She turned to look at Luca questioning, laughing at his giddy expression.

"So it's actually a three-story house?" Kit checked with a laugh as she walked into the third floor and explored the space.

A large pool table dominated the center of the carpeted room with overhead hanging lights. There was a bar pushed up against one side of the room, complete with barstools and a wall of alcohol. Finally, there was a large flatscreen hung on the opposite end of the room - a large sectional couch in front of it.

Kit looked around the room appreciatively and nodded her head in approval. "Okay, this is my favorite part of the house too."

Luca pulled Kit closer and gave her a sloppy kiss. "You always say the right thing. So…anything you want to do?"

Kit looked around the room as she mulled over his question before her face brightened. "Why don't I make you a drink?"

Luca chuckled and followed after Kit - his eyes watching her a\*ss appreciatively as she sauntered over to the bar. She positioned herself behind the bar and smirked at Luca.

"I have a lot of skills you have yet to discover sweetheart," she purred teasingly before chuckling.

"All right then," Luca played along as he sat down. "What's on offer?"

Kit looked around the fully stocked bar for a few minutes before turning back to Luca. "Gin and tonic or rum and coke."

# **Chapter 41**: Just Hanging Out

"So explain it to me again," Luca asked in confusion as he put his glass on the coffee table. "Why are they called 'real housewives' if they're not actually housewives?"

Kit snorted and sipped her drink. "No one wants to watch a show called 'Some Rich Guy's Wife' - it's catchier. Besides, some of them have been housewives at some point."

Luca looked at Kit as if she'd grown two heads and shook his own before picking up his drink and reclining again. "Whatever you say."

Kit laughed and placed her feet in his lap as she made herself more comfortable on the couch. Luca shot an unimpressed look but placed his hand over her feet.

"You have to admit the drama was great though? Give the housewives that, at least!" Kit said.

Luca chortled and looked at Kit. "Okay, yes. It was entertaining - is this the next step in your career?"

Kit threw her head back and laughed raucously before kicking Luca gently. "Definitely not. I don't even have enough drama in my life to qualify."

Luca gave Kit a meaningful look, causing her to snort in laughter.

"Maybe too soon dude," she said dryly.

Luca shrugged and smiled angelically. "I'm just saying the ratings on this season would've been something else."

Kit shook her head with a slight smile. "You'd do great on reality TV but I miss having a little more privacy."

Luca squeezed Kit's feet comfortingly. "The contract is over, we don't have to make our relationship public anymore. I'm happy with that if you are."

Kit smiled at Luca gratefully. "We can meet somewhere in the middle. I'd still like to attend public events with you - at least some."

Luca winked at Kit and raised his glass. "It's a deal. Are you getting hungry?"

Kit cocked her head in thought before shrugging. "I'm easy but I guess I should eat if I'm going to keep having drinks. What did you have in mind?"

Luca gently put Kit's feet aside and stood before reaching down to help her. "I was thinking of a home-cooked meal, I don't think we've done that yet."

Kit chuckled and raised a quizzical brow. "Home cooked by who?"

Luca rolled his eyes as he pulled Kit to her feet. "I'm going to make it…smart ass."

Kit giggled and followed after Luca. "I didn't want to assume you could cook and I'm not sure I believe it actually."

Luca snorted in amusement and shot Kit a look over his shoulder as they ascended the stairs to the second level. "What happened to you believing me from now on?'

"Uh - starting tomorrow?" Kit asked with a laugh as they walked into the kitchen, taking a seat at the kitchen island.

Luca shot Kit a dark look before he started pulling pots and pans out of cupboards and drawers.

"We didn't bring any food," Kit said with a pout as she watched him.

Luca looked at her reassuringly. "I had my usual housekeeper pick some things up while we were on our way here. We should have everything we need."

"What's on the menu chef?" Kit asked teasingly. She admired Luca's confidence as he moved around his kitchen.

Luca smirked at his new title. "I'm thinking… seafood pasta."

Kit snorted and gave Luca a knowing look before taking a dramatic sip of her drink.

Luca rolled his eyes and gave her an unimpressed look. "I've had as many drinks as you have - I'm making something easy because I can't mess it up."

"I didn't say a thing," Kit said with an air of faux innocence, before blowing Luca a kiss. "You seem really comfortable in the kitchen."

Luca nodded as he worked. "I've been cooking since I was quite young - mama taught me."

Kit smiled with soft eyes. "Did she cook a lot when you were growing up?"

Luca chuckled and nodded with shining eyes. "Oh yeah, we had staff to do quite a few things, but she always insisted on cooking all of our meals. She also insisted we always eat at the table together - no phones, just us catching up."

"So you'd help make dinner sometimes?" Kit prodded with interest, eager to get a deeper glimpse into what made Luca who he was.

Luca looked up and met Kit's gaze with a warm smile. "Mostly dinner and lunch. She'd tell me about growing up in Italy and teach me old family recipes. Did I ever mention that she really likes you?"

Kit smiled shyly and shook her head softly. "It's never come up - did she tell you that after we met in The Hamptons?"

Luca looked at Kit, amused by her clear pleasure that his mother liked her. "You're really cute, you know that?"

Kit laughed and waved away the compliment. "Tell me more about how much your mom loves me!"

Luca shook his head and chuckled. "She thinks you're probably too good for me and that I shouldn't f\*ck it up - her exact words by the way."

Kit preened and sipped her drink with a cocky attitude. "She's a wise, wise woman. Those are words to live by too."

Luca rolled his eyes before pinning Kit with a sincere look. "Do you think your mom likes me too?"

Kit burst out laughing and Luca smirked playfully before shrugging unapologetically. The two fell into an easy silence as Luca continued cooking while Kit watched. Every few minutes, their eyes would meet and they'd smile at each other.

"This was a good idea," Kit said softly, breaking the silence. "The break was just what we both needed to shake some of the drama off."

Luca covered the pot he'd been stirring and walked over to the island, his legs pressed against Kit's knees. "I'm glad you're having a good time."

The two shared a tender kiss for a moment before sharing a soft smile when their eyes locked. Luca turned his attention back to his pot while Kit watched dreamily.

"So, I have something to ask - well, two things to ask," Kit started as she fiddled with her glass.

Luca looked up curiously. "Sure, what do you need?"

Kit smiled at him gratefully. "Firstly - will you be my date for my launch? It's in a week."

Luca smiled broadly. "All right and the second thing?"

Kit gave him a secretive smile. "Will you help me with one of the products? We'll need to get it done quickly - as soon as we get back."

Luca looked at Kit suspiciously. "What kind of help do you need?"

She smirked at him wickedly.

# **Chapter 42**: Back To Reality

“You didn’t have to walk me to my door,” Kit said with a smile.

Luca gave her a charming smile in return. “I couldn’t let you carry your bag up. Not the gentlemanly thing to do.”

Kit shook her head but didn’t argue, the two smiled at each other as they walked down the hall. Luca looked ahead and his face darkened. Kit noticed the change and followed his line of sight. Her smile disappearing as she spotted Maya standing in front of her door.

Kit stopped walking as she felt irritation rising within her. The fact that her mother couldn’t even give her at least a week before completely ignoring her wishes.

“We don’t have to stay,” Luca murmured as he looked at Kit in concern.

Kit smiled at Luca and squeezed his hand gratefully before shaking her head. “She’s not scaring me away from my own home.”

The two clasped hands as they walked the rest of the way to Kit’s door. Maya’s expression flickered to one of disdain when she spotted their hands intertwined. Wisely, she chose not to say anything.

“What do you want?” Kit asked stonily when they finally reached her door.

“I’d like to talk,” Maya answered while looking pointedly at Kit.

“We’ll give you five minutes and not a second more,” Kit replied before brushing by Maya and unlocking her door.

Kit walked in a few feet before turning and planting herself in the entryway. Luca followed her in, dropping their bags on the floor hastily before standing behind her, silently offering support. Maya was the last to enter with a blank expression. She closed the door behind her and then turned to look at the others in annoyance.

“You can’t expect us to have a conversation here?” Maya questioned in a bristling tone.

Kit shrugged carelessly. “Take it or leave it. Completely up to you.”

Maya sighed in a long-suffering manner and brushed imaginary lint off of her coat. “Fine. I wanted to see if you were ready to apologize for how you spoke to me.”

Luca looked at Maya with incredulity painted across his face. He planted his hand firmly on Kit’s lower back as he felt the waves of sheer hostility rolling off of her.

Kit turned and looked at Luca with a hard smile. “She’s not joking, if you can believe it.”

“Don’t talk about me as if I’m not here!” Maya demanded haughtily.

Kit turned her attention back to Maya and pinned her with a deathly glare. “You should be apologizing to me AND Luca. In fact, we have nothing more to talk about until you do.”

Maya scoffed and narrowed her eyes. “I have nothing to apologize for. It’s my job as a mother to protect my child - even from herself!”

“You’re completely delusional,” Luca commented conversationally as Maya turned her glare to him. “Kit is a grown woman. She can make her own choices.”

“You shut up!” Maya snapped. “We were perfectly fine before you showed up. You’re causing a rift between us!”

Kit scoffed loudly. “Enough! Get out. I don’t want to hear anything else you have to say.”

Kit advanced on Maya and started herding her toward the door. Maya stumbled backward and thrust her arms out to hold Kit at bay.

“What should I apologize to him for?” Maya exclaimed angrily. “I didn’t do anything to him.”

“You teamed up with his ex to ruin our relationship!” Kit snapped. “You convinced me not to talk to him and just dump him.”

Maya’s eyes flitted between Kit and Luca frantically before she started to wail loudly - covering her eyes with her hands as she sobbed.

Kit huffed in frustration and rolled her eyes. “You’re only crying to guilt and manipulate me. Stop or leave right now.”

Maya dropped her hands and sneered at Luca. “Fine! I’m sorry I revealed you for who you really are!”

“Get. Out!” Kit snapped firmly as she once again pushed Maya backward toward the door. “Out!” she yelled loudly when Maya opened her mouth to protest. Maya’s mouth snapped shut, her eyes glancing back and forth between Kit and Luca.

She glared at them one last time before she opened the door and exited the apartment.

Kit grunted in frustration and locked the door behind Maya. She started counting to ten in her head, taking deep breaths to calm herself down.

“Hey,” Luca said gently as he placed his hands on Kit’s shoulders comfortingly. “You’re okay. I’ve got you.”

Kit smiled at Luca gratefully and allowed herself to be pulled into a warm hug. She allowed Luca to hold her for a few minutes before she pulled back and gave him a tired smile.

“I’m sorry you were here to see that,” Kit apologized with a rueful smile. “It wasn’t nearly as bad as our last conversation.”

Luca smiled down at Kit and kissed her gently. “Thank you for standing up for me. I really appreciate you having my back. I doubt I’m getting an apology though.”

Kit chuckled sadly and buried her head in Luca’s chest - inhaling his comforting scent, fabric softener and something distinctly Luca. “Why can’t I just have a normal mother? One who doesn’t conspire against me and my happiness.”

Luca smiled down at Kit sadly. “I don’t have the answer for that but you have me now. I can make you lunch as a start?”

Kit chuckled into Luca’s chest and sniffled softly. “I’m supposed to be making it up to you but you’ve been doing stuff for me the entire time. I think we’re doing something wrong.”

Luca laughed and rocked Kit gently in a comforting way. “Actually, I think we’re finally doing it the right way. Let me take care of you tonight. Tomorrow you can get back to work on showing me you love me.”

Kit barked out a laugh and held Luca at arm’s length. “How much I love you? Well, how much do you love me?”

Luca laughed huskily, his eyes darkening. “Do you really want to know?”

Kit swallowed heavily as she found herself caught in Luca’s intense gaze. “Umm - I thought someone said something about lunch?”

Luca laughed and gave Kit a knowing look before picking her bag up and walking further into the apartment, leaving Kit flustered as she watched after him.

# **Chapter 43**: Facing The Music

Luca looked up from his phone when he heard the knock on his office door. “One minute!” He took his time walking to the door and then took a few moments before turning the handle.

“Sloane,” Luca deadpanned as he opened the door.

Sloane smiled at him tentatively. “Luca. I was pleasantly surprised you wanted to meet up.”

Luca nodded stoically and gestured for Sloane to enter. Sloane’s smile wavered slightly as she walked into the office before it fell off her face completely when she noticed Kit perched on Luca’s desk.

“Sloane,” Kit said with a satisfied smirk at Sloane’s put-out expression.

Sloane turned back to Luca with a frown painted on her lips. "What is she doing here?"

"She can speak for herself," Kit interjected smugly as Luca walked back to his seat behind the desk. Sloane stood in the middle of the room, staring at the two undecidedly for a second.

Kit gestured at the couch behind Sloane helpfully. "Why don't you take a seat?"

Sloane smiled at Kit nervously before obliging, her eyes locked on Luca the whole time. Luca was watching the proceedings with thinly veiled amusement. He'd already said all that he wanted to Sloane but he knew Kit had quite a few things to get off her chest.

Kit cocked her head and regarded Sloane with a steely gaze. "Do you have anything to say before I start?"

Sloane turned her gaze from Luca to Kit, her expression turning slightly fearful at the barely restrained hostility she could see in Kit's eyes. She nodded hesitantly. "Yes, I'm sorry that I made a move on Luca. That was wrong of me, especially as we've started a budding friendship."

Kit scoffed in disbelief. "That's what you want to apologize for? Not conspiring with my mother to end our relationship?"

Sloane shot a panicked glance at Luca who chuckled. "I'm sorry, did you think I actually wouldn't share that with Kit?"

Sloane looked back at Kit nervously. "It was your mother's idea! She really doesn't like Luca and I let myself get pulled in because I still have feelings for him."

Kit sighed tiredly and shook her head. "You're even more pathetic than I thought. How about you show me your true face for once?"

Sloane sneered at Kit, her eyes narrowed into slits. "You don't get to talk to me like that. You should reserve that anger for your mother - I don't owe you a thing, darling."

"Don't worry, darling," Kit responded mockingly. "I've already dealt with her. It's your turn."

Sloane swallowed hard and looked to Luca for help but he was openly enjoying what was happening. She turned her attention back to Kit who was looking at her with a vicious expression.

Sloane made a split-second decision, broadcasting it across her face for a second before she made a bolt for the door. Having seen her intention across her face, Kit moved fast and beat her there. "We're not done yet."

"What do you want?" Sloane demanded.

"First, I want the apology that you owe me," Kit responded calmly. "Then, I want you to leave us the f\*ck alone. Forever."

Sloane scoffed and turned to Luca indignantly. "Are you going to let her speak to me like that?"

Luca frowned in confusion. "You still seem to be confused after our last conversation. I'll repeat myself - I would pick Kit over you any day. I don't care about you or your feelings Sloane. Now, if you want to leave - I suggest you give her the apology she deserves."

"Or what?" Sloane taunted smugly. "I don't have to do or say anything and you can't keep me here."

"Or," Kit drawled smugly. "I expose both you and my mother to that little gossip rag you both like to read. Complete with exclusive interviews from Luca and me, talking about the awful ordeal you've put us through and how it's only brought us closer."

Sloane's face fell momentarily before she composed herself and turned back to face Kit with a dead stare. "I'm sorry that I recruited your mommy into a plan to break you two up. Can I go now?"

Kit smirked nastily. "Say it nicely."

"F\*ck you!" Sloane spat angrily, causing Kit to laugh and move out of the way.

Sloane brushed by her angrily and left Luca and Kit alone in his office. Kit clapped her hands and turned to face Luca. "I think that went well. Make sure you tell security to never let her up here again."

"Already done," Luca chuckled with a nod as he came around the desk to pull Kit into his arms. "You're hot when you're nasty."

Kit laughed in disbelief and wrapped her arms around Luca's neck as he started peppering her face with sweet kisses. "I wonder if you'll still be saying that when I turn it on you."

Luca stopped kissing her and looked down at her warily. "You won't though. Right?"

Kit laughed and smiled at Luca sweetly - speaking between brief kisses. "Not if you behave."

"I'm finding it a little less hot now," Luca said with a worried laugh. "Would you really expose your mother and Sloane for payback?"

Kit pulled back and thought about it for a few minutes before shrugging. "Yeah. I honestly would - don't f\*ck with me if you can't handle the consequences. Besides that, we suffered quite a bit. It'd only be fair that they suffer a little too."

Luca chuckled and kissed Kit's forehead. "Remind me to never get on your bad side. So - can we consider this situation handled and ride happily into the sunset together now?"

Kit laughed happily. "You're mushier than I ever thought you'd be, you know? It's kind of cute though."

Luca preened with a cute smile before checking the watch on his wrist. "We have just enough time to grab lunch before our next appointment."

Kit frowned slightly but nodded in agreement. "Okay, but you can't eat anything too heavy. That might ruin everything. I think we should just have salads and then we can really eat something afterward."

Luca frowned, following Kit as she exited his office, still talking about the various light meals she was okay with him eating. "Maybe this is why I've been avoiding relationships," he muttered to himself quietly.

# **Chapter 44**: Can I Ask You Something?

Kit opened the door to her apartment and stopped in surprise before stepping back outside and checking the number on the door. She walked back in slowly and closed the door behind her before turning and surveying the dozens of vases of blood-red roses decorating her home.

There was a trail of rose petals, lined with lit vanilla-scented pillar candles lining the way. Kit hesitantly followed the trail into her living room, where she was stunned to find dozens more vases of roses.

The rest of the trail led to the open balcony doors where Kit could see Luca's back facing her.

"Luca?" Kit called questioningly, causing him to whip around with a giant grin on his face.

"Hey," Luca greeted her softly as he walked toward her and pulled her into a hug. "How was the rest of your day?"

Kit looked at him as if he'd grown two heads. "How did you get in here? Wait - don't tell me. Gemma, right?"

Luca chuckled quietly as he pulled her into a searing kiss. "Smart and beautiful - I'm a very lucky man."

Kit smiled and looked around her living room. "What is all this?"

Luca shrugged sheepishly and looked around the room as well. "Is it too much? Or is it too little? I considered getting a violinist but it seems like overkill."

Kit giggled and kissed Luca to shut him up before pulling away with a sweet smile. "No, it's just perfect. I meant, what's the occasion?"

"Oh," Luca said in relief. "I wanted to surprise you with a date night - do something special. After dealing with Sloane earlier, I figured you could use a distraction."

"That's really sweet," Kit said appreciatively. "It's really romantic. Thank you."

Luca grinned boyishly and pulled Kit toward the balcony. "Then let's get dinner started. We're sitting out here."

Kit chuckled as they walked out to the cacophony of traffic sounds and the view of the sun setting over the city skyline. "The sounds of New York are always the best soundtrack for a date."

Luca rolled his eyes with a smile as he pulled Kit's chair out for her. He sat across from her and pulled a bottle of champagne out of an ice bucket Kit had failed to notice. Kit shot him an impressed look as he poured them two full champagne flutes.

"You thought of everything," Kit said with relish as she accepted her drink. "Cheers to us!"

"Cheers to us," Luca echoed as he pinned Kit with a smoldering gaze. She smiled at him flirtatiously as they clinked glasses. Luca watched Kit adoringly as she drank the champagne.

"Okay, okay," Kit murmured in appreciation. "You definitely did not skimp on the champagne. I should sip this nice and slow."

Luca chuckled mischievously. "Why? Scared of what you'll reveal if your tongue is a little loose?"

Kit rolled her eyes at Luca playfully. "I have no idea what you think I'm too scared to say to you."

Luca gave Kit a meaningful look and smiled cheekily causing her to burst into laughter. "Sorry buddy, there are no confessions coming from me anytime soon."

Luca shrugged and smirked at Kit. "I'm a patient man, Kit. Are you ready for the first course?"

"How many courses are there, sir?" Kit asked cheekily. "Who made these courses?"

"Chef Brooks, Baby" Luca answered teasingly before leaving the room to fetch the food. Kit sipped on her champagne and took in the view as she waited for Luca to return. She sighed happily, almost giddy with how happy she was.

"Voila!" Luca announced in an over-the-top French accent as he placed two bowls on the table.

Kit sniffed at the bowl curiously, her expression morphing into one of appreciation. "You made chicken soup? I love chicken soup!"

Luca chuckled smugly as he sat down. "Yeah, I know you do. I hope you like mine though."

Kit smiled at Luca, feeling slightly emotional at the amount of effort he'd put into his surprise date for her. "I'm sure I will. Your mom taught you well."

Luca chuckled and looked at Kit with twinkling eyes. "You can just say that I'm a good cook."

Kit shrugged and hummed happily around a spoonful of soup. Luca watched her eat happily, the two simply enjoying each other's company.

"You know, we've seen each other every day, for about 5 days now," Kit said during a pause from eating. "Are you tired of me yet?"

Luca laughed and shook his head. "I'm the very opposite of tired of you."

Luca looked deeply into Kit's eyes and put his hand on the table, palm up - silently asking for Kit to hold his hand. She smiled at him curiously and placed her hand in his.

"This isn't just a surprise date," Luca started nervously while his thumb ran back and forth across Kit's knuckles gently. "I was actually hoping to butter you up a little bit."

Kit snorted in amusement and raised a curious eyebrow. "Butter me up for what, exactly?"

Luca looked down and blew out a nervous breath before looking Kit square in the eye again. "I've never really done this before - and James told me to wait until dessert but f\*ck it. Will you be my girlfriend?"

Kit chuckled in surprise, her eyes searching Luca's for any sign that he might be joking. He smiled at her tentatively and squeezed her hand slightly.

Kit shook her head slightly and squeezed his hand in return. "You are such a dork. Of course I'll be your girlfriend."

Luca sighed in relief before leaning across the table to kiss Kit.

Kit chuckled as he collapsed back into his seat with a goofy smile. "Were you actually worried that I'd say no?"

Luca shrugged and smiled lopsidedly. "I was a little worried you might think it was too soon, but I couldn't wait."

Kit snorted and smiled at Luca fondly. "Too soon? We've probably gone through more drama than most marriages do."

"True," Luca agreed with a wry grin before gesturing at Kit's bowl. "Are you ready for the second course?"

Kit nodded and handed him her bowl. "You never told me how many courses you cooked, by the way."

"Trust me, Baby," Luca said with a laugh. "You're leaving this table full."

# **Chapter 45**: Soft Living

"Are you ready?" Luca asked Kit as their car pulled up to the launch venue. She turned and gave him a brilliant but nervous smile.

"Born ready," Kit assured him with a nod before giving him a quick kiss on the cheek.

Joey opened the door for Kit with a friendly smile. "Ready, kid?" Joey asked into the car.

Kit chuckled and grabbed his hand as he helped her out of the car. "Thanks, Joe. You look really dapper tonight - are you going to hang around and enjoy the party?"

Joey nodded as he smiled at Kit affectionately. "I wouldn't miss this for the world. You look gorgeous by the way."

Kit smiled at Joey and did a little turn playfully. Luca stepped out of the car and pulled her into his side with an admiring gaze. "I'm the luckiest man here tonight."

"Don't you forget it," Joey said sternly, punctuating the end of his sentence by closing the door. "You two kids have fun. I'll see you inside."

Luca smiled at Joey before leading Kit toward the doors to the building. The room burst into cheers as Kit and Luca entered. Kit waved at her friends, family, and industry connections as she walked toward the stage.

There were dressed-up cocktail tables scattered around the room with a few guests at each table. The room was decorated in shades of white, pale pink, and rose gold. There were large TV screens positioned around the room playing footage of New York City.

Luca helped her onto the stage and joined the crowd in cheering Kit on. She beamed at everyone in the room as she stood in front of the microphone.

"Good evening, everyone," Kit greeted. "Thank you so much for joining me in introducing my latest brand tonight. I've been specializing in skincare, beauty, and hair care for people of color - this latest move is just an expansion of that."

"So, without further ado - I'm happy to announce the launch of 'Soft Living'!" Kit announced as the screens all displayed the name and logo of the brand in sync.

"I'm going to announce a few notable products while our lovely team walks around the room with samples," Kit narrated to the crowd as a team dressed in all-black 'Soft Living' branded clothing entered the room. Each team member was pushing a cart that was piled high with products, informative signs, and pamphlets.

"We have a fragrance line with a variety of products - body fragrances and home fragrances," Kit announced. “We have a great range of bath products. Luxurious home leisure wear and my favorite product…sex toys!"

A gasp rippled through the crowd as all the screens started displaying photos of Kit and Luca promoting the sex toy line. Kit laughed into the microphone as people started cheering and whistling at the slideshow of photos.

Luca couldn't help but admire the photos as they flashed across the scene. He'd been a little hesitant when Kit had asked him to pose as a favor but they looked great together. In most of the shots, Luca was shirtless and Kit was wearing some kind of costume - it was clearly a playful, tongue-in-cheek shoot.

The crowd cheered as the final photo appeared - featuring Luca on a bed, half covered by a sheet, both of his hands bound in leather cuffs. Kit was straddling him in a dark green lingerie set with peach daiquiri lube in her hand.

"Everyone gets a goodie bag tonight," Kit laughed teasingly. "Make sure you get what you really want. Please enjoy your evening."

Luca helped Kit down from the stage with an amused expression as he spotted Gemma rushing over to them, Max trailing closely behind her.

"Nikita!" Gemma squealed as she bore down on them, throwing her arms around Kit's neck and throwing them both off balance. Luca helpfully steadied them and smiled at Max over their shoulders.

"How could you keep the sex toys a secret?" Gemma demanded with a pout.

Kit laughed and dislodged Gemma's arms from around her neck. "I knew that this is how you would react. Besides, I'm allowed to surprise you every now and then. What did you think?"

Gemma growled playfully. "Very sexy Kit. I'm not the only one who thought so - you can't even see the sex toy cart through the mob. Tell me you're going to use those photos to promote the line?"

"Yup!" Kit said with emphasis. "Luca here happily agreed to it. Didn't you?"

Luca smiled wryly. "She wouldn't even tell me what she wanted me to do until we were at the photo shoot."

Kit laughed with a shrug. "You were happy to do it though."

"Yeah," Luca answered in a dubious tone. "Completely ecstatic."

Max chuckled and nodded his head in the direction of the bar. "Let's get a drink and leave these two to talk business."

Luca nodded readily in agreement and kissed Kit on the forehead before walking off with Max. Kit and Gemma watched after the two men appreciatively.

"So," Gemma said with barely contained excitement. "You two look really happy together."

Kit smiled gleefully at Gemma and nodded before looking at Luca across the room. "He asked me to be his girlfriend last night."

Gemma squealed loudly, causing Kit to slap her hand over her mouth with an amused smile. "Calm down, girl!"

Gemma nodded frantically and peeled Kit's hand off of her mouth. "Give me a second to be excited and enjoy the fact that we can finally have double dates!"

Kit chuckled. "I sold him on the photo shoot, but I don't know if I can sell him on that."

"Sell me on what?" Luca asked as he and Max reappeared with two drinks each. Kit gratefully accepted a drink from Luca as he slid his arm around her waist and pulled her close.

"Dinner dates, couple's vacations," Gemma said with growing excitement. "Umm - quiz nights, escape rooms. Need I go on?"

Luca smiled in amusement. "Will you be there, Gemma?"

Max snorted in laughter and looked away when his wife shot him a glare. Gemma turned her attention back onto Luca. "You should be nicer to me! I helped you lock this one in a conference room, that should count for something!" she insisted with an amused smile painted on her lips.

Luca smiled and unwrapped his arm from Kit's waist to pull Gemma into a fond one-armed hug. "You're right, G," he acquiesced with a smile. "I suppose I owe you at least a year's worth of couple's activities."

Gemma beamed happily and looked at Kit. "I love him!"

Luca chuckled and gave Kit a cheeky look. "At least one of you does."

Kit rolled her eyes at Luca but didn't respond. Instead, she turned to Gemma and grabbed her free hand. "Come on, Gem. There are some candles over there that I totally designed with you in mind."

# **Chapter 46**: The Worst Kind Of Surprise

"Mr Brooks!"

Luca stopped and turned at the sound of his name as he was exiting his office building. He was stunned to find Maya waiting for him, an odd expression on her face. It looked like she'd been waiting outside for a while. For a second, he wondered if James had also told Maya where their office was.

"Maya," Luca responded in surprise as she walked over to him. "What are you doing here?"

Maya cleared her throat and adjusted her coat uncomfortably. "I was hoping that I could talk to you for a few minutes."

Luca frowned and hesitated. "I don't know if that's a wise idea. I think you've already said everything that you needed to."

Maya frowned and stepped closer to Luca. "I know that our last encounter was far from pleasant but all I need from you is a few minutes."

Luca groaned and ran his hand through his hair. "Okay, there's a coffee shop in the building. Why don't we go and talk there?"

Maya nodded and followed after Luca as he led the way back into his office building and toward the coffee shop on the ground floor. The coffee shop was quite far from the main entrance and most people had already left for the day. Luca felt confident that they wouldn't be spotted by anyone - especially if it turned out like the dinner they'd shared.

Luca entered and nodded in greeting to the barista as he led Maya to a secluded table in the corner and sat down. The coffee itself was nothing special - just another in a coffee chain. The room was full of white tables and red plastic chairs - the warm air scented with coffee and pastries baking.

"You can order a coffee or something if you'd like," Luca commented as Maya sat down across from him.

Maya shook her head and focused on Luca with a serious expression. "I'd rather just get on with it."

Luca refrained from rolling his eyes, not appreciating how Maya was making it seem as if he was the one who needed to talk to her. "All right then," Luca responded. "Speak."

Maya looked at him disapprovingly before launching into her prepared talking points. "Nikita hasn't been returning any of my texts or calls - I'm barred from her building and office. I think she has me blocked -"

"So, she's giving you the treatment you encouraged her to give to me?" Luca couldn't help the smirk on his face as he interjected.

May scowled. "I didn't encourage her to do anything. She's a grown woman - she can make her own decisions."

Luca looked at Maya with clear amusement and shrugged. "Okay. Carry on."

Maya huffed indignantly. "As I was saying, I need you to facilitate a conversation so we can move on from all of this."

Luca chortled. "Why on earth would I do that?"

Maya narrowed her eyes at Luca. "You will do it because you understand that a woman needs her mother."

Luca scoffed. "I don't think Kit needs a mother like you and I'm sure she'd agree."

"What you think or feel is irrelevant," Maya snapped. "All you have to do is bring her to meet me and I'll do the rest."

Luca chuckled and shook his head. "Sorry Maya, that's not happening. If that's all you had to say, we're done here."

"We're not done!" Maya snapped, her voice rising slightly. She leaned forward and spoke in a hiss. "You are going to help me."

"No, I'm not," Luca said coolly. "I have no reason to help you at all. You tried to sabotage my relationship."

"I didn't try to sabotage your relationship," Maya denied heatedly. "I tried to save my daughter from making my mistakes. It's not even remotely personal."

Luca shook his head as he started to lose his cool. "Whether you think it's personal or not - you had no right to try and interfere in my relationship."

The two sat in tense stony silence for a few minutes before Maya sighed dramatically. "Fine. I'm sorry that I attempted to interfere with your relationship. Now will you do as I asked?"

Luca eyed her for a minute before sighing. "I can tell Kit that you apologized and that you want to talk. That's it."

Maya sneered. "That apology sure wasn't worth much, was it?"

Luca shrugged with a wry grin. "It wasn't much of an apology, was it?" He leaned toward her, looking unmoved. "Take the deal or leave it."

Maya eyed Luca for a minute before her sneer dissolved into a pout. "I've apologized like you wanted. Now, you have to convince Kit to drop all of this."

Luca chuckled in disbelief. "You're delusional, that's not even close to what you asked me to do the first time. My offer stands, as is."

"She'll listen to you," Maya insisted. "She likes you for some reason - you can get her to see reason."

"What is it that you said earlier?" Luca asked with a smirk. "That Kit's a grown woman and she makes her own decisions."

Maya glared at Luca, her eyes narrowing. "You're driving a wedge between us. She's going to resent you for driving her mother away one day."

Luca snorted and rolled his eyes. "Wow. I'm speechless - we're officially done here. I'm sure you'll be able to find your way out."

Maya stood and blocked Luca's path angrily. "Fine! Fine, I'll accept your stupid offer. I want to talk to her tomorrow," she demanded, causing Luca to scoff at her audacity.

"She'll talk to you when she wants to - IF she wants to talk to you at all," Luca corrected her dryly.

"You have to do better than that!" Maya said indignantly. "It has to be tomorrow."

"I don't have to do anything, Maya," Luca rebutted. "You seem to have a hard time grasping that. You're at the complete mercy of my goodwill."

"Fine!" Maya agreed angrily. "Whatever."

Before Luca could respond, Maya had flounced out of the coffee shop without a backward glance. Luca exhaled tiredly and collapsed back into his chair, feeling shell-shocked.

He chuckled softly, still reeling from his run-in with Maya. He didn't feel particularly compelled to pass her message on to Kit but he wanted to let her make her own choices.

"God," Luca sighed before standing again and heading toward the counter. "I'm going to need some coffee to deal with this bullsh\*t."

# **Chapter 47**: There Was An Attempt

"You know that you don't have to do this, right?" Luca double-checked with Kit. They sat next to each other at the table he'd sat at with Maya just a few days earlier.

Kit smiled at him reassuringly as she fiddled with the handle of her teacup. "I know, but she'll probably come and pester you again. Let's just get this over with and out of the way."

Luca squeezed her hand he was holding under the table, causing Kit to smile at him gratefully.

"What is he doing here?" Maya asked, announcing her arrival to the oblivious couple.

Kit turned away from Luca and gave Maya a disapproving look. "Hello to you too."

"What is he doing here?" Maya repeated testily, her eyes narrowed on Luca. "When you called me, I told you that I didn't want him to be here."

"I don't care what you want," Kit said bluntly. "You can sit down or you can leave, your choice."

Maya looked put out and sat down reluctantly, opting to completely ignore Luca and focus entirely on Kit. She smiled brightly. "How have you been, sweetheart?"

Kit looked back at Maya with a stony stare. "Is that what you wanted to say?"

Maya scowled. "Why are you being so hostile? I don't feel comfortable saying what I want to with him here."

Kit shrugged carelessly. "You don't get to make demands. Start talking before we leave."

Maya frowned. "Why did we have to meet here? We could have met at your apartment - there's more privacy there."

Kit snorted in disbelief as she shook her head. "I'll eat a pair of jeans before I let you into my home again."

Maya glared at Kit. "You're being very rude! I'm trying to talk to you and let you know that I want us to be okay again."

"We might never be okay again," Kit retorted.

"Are you really going to let a man come between you and your mother?" Maya asked incredulously.

"There's no one to blame for this rift except you and your buddy Sloane," Luca interjected sternly.

Maya whipped her head to glare at Luca. "You were supposed to get her to let this go. You're useless after all."

"Woah!" Luca said as he looked at Kit with wide eyes. "I never agreed to anything like that. That's what she wanted me to do."

Kit shook her head as she eyed her mother with distaste before smiling at Luca slightly. "Don't worry. I know you didn't agree to anything asinine."

"I don't understand why you won't accept my apology," Maya pouted with a frown.

"Probably because you haven't offered one," Kit offered bluntly.

Maya looked upset for a minute before she scowled again. "You're being unreasonable. I was just looking out for you."

Kit stared Maya down for a second before sighing in annoyance. "You're wasting our time."

"Fine!" Maya snapped. "I'm done wasting your time and my breath. Just make sure that you tell Matthew I came and apologized to you."

Kit laughed incredulously. "Why would I do that? You didn't apologize."

Maya sighed impatiently. "That Sloane girl came by the house the other day - she told Matthew what happened and that's upset him for some reason."

Luca looked at Maya in disgust. "So your poor attempt at an apology is only because your husband is upset with you?"

"No one is talking to you," Maya sneered at Luca as he glared at her.

"Enough!" Kit snapped. "I'm not going to tell Matthew anything. You can deal with your own relationship - I'm not getting involved. If only you'd been able to return the favor."

Maya scowled at Kit. "You're being difficult. I'm not asking you for a kidney - even a text will do the trick."

"Nope," Kit said while popping the 'P'. She turned to Luca and nodded toward the door. "We're out of here."

"No! Wait!" Maya cried, her face a mask of desperation. Luca and Kit were startled by the sudden change of emotion and decided to stay in their seats.

Maya looked around self-consciously before lowering her voice again. "Matthew has moved out of our house. He says he doesn't know who he married - he's talking about separation, maybe divorce. I need you to send him that text so he'll stop thinking about that."

"So you're not sorry for hurting me?" Kit questioned quietly. "You're sorry that your husband found out and now wants to leave?"

Maya sat silently and averted her gaze from Kit's piercing stare. Kit sighed sadly and shook her head. "You're sh\*t out of luck. I'm not telling Matthew anything. As for you and me, you're still on ice until further notice. Don't bother Luca again."

Maya's eyes widened in panic and she reached across the table to grab Kit's hand. "I'm sorry, Nikita! I'm sorry, okay. Please help me or forgive me. If you don't - I'll be alone…"

Kit recoiled immediately and put her hand in her lap as she met Maya's gaze. She couldn't believe that she'd only apologized so that she wouldn't be alone - not because she was sorry or full of regret.

This behavior was typical of Maya but Kit still felt hurt despite herself. She looked away after a moment, feeling her eyes start to sting with tears. "I guess you will."

She stood and made a hasty exit from the coffee shop, leaving Maya frowning at the table and Luca scrambling after her. Luca caught up to Kit in a few steps and placed his hand on her lower back – concerned to find that she was trembling slightly.

"Let's go to my office," Luca murmured gently as he directed Kit toward the elevator bank.

Luca watched her face as they waited for the elevator to arrive. Kit was staring into space, clearly lost in thought. The ding of the arriving elevator caught Luca's attention and he looked away.

They waited in silence for the elevator to empty before walking in. Kit reached forward and pressed the button for Luca's floor and then stood staring ahead.

"Kit?" Luca asked gently, in a concerned tone. Kit turned and looked at him with distressed eyes, collapsing into his arms as the elevator doors closed.

Luca pulled her closer and rubbed her back comfortingly as she cried into his chest. He felt his chest ache as he listened to the sound of Kit's quiet sobs as the elevator climbed closer and closer to their destination.

"I'm so sorry, Kit," Luca whispered into her ear as he comforted her. "I'm so, so sorry."

# **Chapter 48**: Late Night Visitor

"Hey handsome," Kit purred when Luca opened his front door.

"Uh - hi," Luca answered dumbly, shocked to see Kit. "I wasn't expecting to see you tonight."

Kit smirked as she ran her eyes down Luca's bare torso slowly, following the v along his hips until it disappeared into his sweatpants.

"I can tell you weren't," Kit said as she playfully licked her red lips, her eyes flickering up to meet his amused gaze.

"Do you want to come in then?" Luca asked with a smile while already stepping back into the low-lit apartment. Kit smiled as she brushed past. Luca shook his head and turned to follow her; his eyes drawn to her long legs - exposed by her short skater skirt.

"Didn't know you were a sports fan," Kit commented when Luca finally caught up to her in his living room. She was watching the basketball match playing on his flat screen, as she stood behind the couch.

"Are you?" Luca countered as he walked up behind Kit and wrapped his arms around her waist.

Kit shrugged and turned in Luca's arms, wrapping her own arms around his neck and pulling him in for a soft kiss. "I can take them or leave them."

Luca pulled back and smiled at Kit teasingly. "This is the first time you've come over without a bottle of alcohol. Trying something new?"

Kit pulled back and gave Luca a mischievous grin. "Kind of - I brought a bottle but it's not alcohol."

Luca shot Kit a curious look as she leaned backward and reached over the back of the couch to pull something out of her purse. He couldn't help but chuckle when she pulled her hand back out and waved the bottle in his face.

"Lube?" Luca questioned as he pulled the bottle from Kit's hand. "Peach Daiquiri?"

"I like Peach Daiquiris and I want us to use the lube," Kit answered with a seductive smile.

Luca swallowed hard and nodded in agreement before swooping down and capturing Kit's lips in a kiss. They both groaned as his tongue breached her lips, caressing her own.

Luca pulled back and looked at Kit heatedly. "Where?"

Kit smiled and gave Luca a hard kiss before she started pulling him out of the room and down the hall. "Bedroom," she said over her shoulder, shooting him a wink.

Luca's eyes dropped to Kit's a\*ss, his blood pumping with anticipation. They had been dancing around this from the very first moment they'd sat down in Kit's apartment.

Kit dropped Luca's hand as she walked into his bedroom, coming to a stop in front of his large King bed. Luca paused in the doorway and watched her as she met his smoldering gaze.

Kit smiled cheekily before kicking her ankle boots off and smirked at Luca before pulling her polo-neck over her head - revealing a lacy, red bra. Luca's eyes were drawn to her breasts swaying softly as she threw the clothing to the side.

"Come over here," Kit demanded in a seductive purr. Luca smiled slightly and stalked toward Kit, raking his eyes over her naked upper body as he approached.

"You're not going to take the skirt off?" Luca asked as he reached Kit, pulling her into his body with one hand and fingering the hem of her skirt with the other.

Kit shook her head with a smirk as she wound her arms around his neck. "I just thought it was unfair that you were the only shirtless one."

Luca chuckled before leaning down and kissing Kit passionately. He groaned as his hand moved from her skirt and across her thigh before coming to rest on one of her a\*s cheeks.

Luca walked toward the bed, pushing Kit backward until she was sprawled across the soft mattress. He smirked at the view of Kit splayed out across his bed as he climbed on top of her, pressing her into the bed with his hot body.

"I really like this," Luca husked as he snapped the strap of her bra. "You should take it off."

Kit chuckled huskily as she slipped the straps off of her shoulder before propping herself up on one arm and reaching back to unsnap her bra with the other. She dangled it in the air teasingly before dropping it on the floor and throwing herself back on the bed.

Luca looked at Kit's bare breasts lustily, bending his head and raining soft kisses on her bare stomach. He locked eyes with Kit as he slowly ran his tongue up her torso, coming to a stop in the valley between her breasts.

Luca immediately latched onto one nipple with his mouth while his free hand tweaked the other expertly. Kit sighed in pleasure and grabbed the back of Luca's head - anchoring him to her breast as his tongue lapped at her nipple.

Kit moaned when Luca lightly sank his teeth into her stiff nipple. Luca soothed the bite with his tongue before pulling away and claiming Kit's mouth in a wet, heated kiss. Their tongues wrestled heatedly as Kit's nails raked down Luca's back.

Kit squealed into Luca's mouth, surprised to feel Luca's fingers stroking her slit. Luca was surprised too when he discovered that Kit wasn't wearing underwear.

"No underwear?" Luca whispered in her ear as he ran his finger up and down her slit, gathering moisture.

Kit's breath stuttered as she nodded. "Didn't see the point."

They both moaned as Luca's wet finger found its way to Kit's throbbing clit - moving in circles. Luca pulled away and looked Kit in the eye as he slowly eased his finger into her tight passage.

"F\*ck," Kit groaned, as her legs trembled in pleasure. "More."

Luca's hot breath fanned across Kit's lips as his thumb started rubbing her throbbing clit firmly. Luca captured Kit's lips again, overwhelming her senses with pleasurable sensations.

Kit tangled her fingers in Luca's hair and tugged gently, causing him to groan into their kiss. Luca pulled away for a moment to pull his pants off before he climbed back on top of Kit.

Luca looked deeply into her eyes as he guided his member into her throbbing core, before using his arms to brace himself against the bed. Luca hissed through his teeth as he sank into Kit while she sunk her fingers into his shoulders. He held himself still for a minute, allowing them both a second to adjust.

"Move," Kit groaned into his ear.

Luca responded by pulling his hips back slowly before snapping them forward. He repeated this motion - building up a steady rhythm, his gaze never leaving Kit's. Kit wrapped her hand around the back of his neck and pulled him down for a sensual kiss.

Luca moved one of his hands and gripped Kit's hips as he pumped into her steadily. Kit looked up at him with a breathless smile and met his every thrust. Luca pressed a heated kiss against Kit's lips before pulling back and grabbing both of her hips.

Luca started thrusting furiously as he and Kit started moaning loudly - his hand moving to play with her clit as he thrust into her.

"God," Luca groaned as started to feel the familiar tingling at the base of his spine. He stopped thrusting and pulled Kit's legs together before placing them over his shoulder.

"Yes!" Kit moaned in approval as Luca thrust frantically, both of their pleasure building steadily.

Luca grunted loudly as his hips stuttered and he buried himself deeply in Kit - triggering a thunderous orgasm in both of them. Kit's hands gripped the comforter as her body convulsed in pleasure. Luca twitched for a second before letting his sweaty body collapse on top of Kit's.

Kit instinctively wrapped her arms around Luca, her hand playing with the silken strands of his hair. They lay there in content silence, basking in their afterglow.

"Should we text Vero?" Luca asked with a mischievous smirk.

# **Chapter 49**: One Big Happy Family

"Are you two sure you know what you're doing?" Kit asked, her tone heavy with skepticism as she watched Max and Luca trying to get the grill started.

"100%," Luca answered in a confident tone as he carried on working.

"Max definitely doesn't know what he's doing," Gemma called over from where she was lounging in the sun.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, babe," Max answered dryly as he scowled at Gemma.

"Got your back, babe!" Gemma answered back before turning to Kit with a smirk.

Kit shook her head with a laugh from her sun lounger and clinked her drink together with Gemma's. "This is the life, huh?"

Gemma nodded eagerly. "Who knew Connecticut was so beautiful! I was telling Max we should definitely look for something in this neighborhood so we can be neighbors! Of course, we'll need something a lot bigger."

Kit snorted with laughter and looked at Gemma curiously. "Why would you need a bigger place than this? It's just the two of you." She gasped and looked down at Gemma's flat stomach with wide eyes. "Unless there's something you want to tell Auntie Kit?"

"God no!" Gemma exclaimed with a horrified shudder. "At least, not any time soon - actually, we'll start with a puppy and see how it goes."

Kit chuckled and lay back down, enjoying the sun beating down on her body. "Okay then. If you say so."

Gemma rolled her eyes. "So, who else is making the drive out here?"

Kit snorted. "It's not even that long of a drive! James and his wife are coming, as well as Luca's parents - and Matthew."

"Matthew?" Gemma asked, shocked. Pulling her sunglasses off to study Kit's eyes as she answered.

Kit shrugged easily. "He called me the other day after we met with my mother. She called him and told him about the meeting and he wanted to know if I was doing okay."

Gemma nodded with interest. "What about Maya?"

Kit frowned slightly and shrugged again. "I don't know. Last I checked he moved out and is deciding what he wants to do. Please don't bring any of that up - especially in front of Luca's parents."

Gemma nodded but frowned. "Don't they know what happened?"

"They know that my mother isn't coming today but not why," Kit answered. "Matthew wants to get to know Luca - of all the men my mother's ever been with, he's been the most decent guy."

"Got it," Gemma said before putting her sunglasses back on and reclining again. "So are we really trusting those two to cook or is a caterer on the way too?"

"We can literally hear you, Gemma," Luca commented dryly. "You're only a few feet away."

Gemma giggled and smiled impishly. "So you can answer me then. Caterer, yay or nay?"

"I hope not," Lucia commented as she appeared from the house with a bright smile. "I didn't teach Luca to cook just so he could keep it to himself."

Luca rolled his eyes with a warm smile as he hugged his mother. "Mama, you look beautiful."

"Thank you dear," Lucia said with a happy smile as she pinched Luca's cheek. "Now, move so I can hug Kit!"

Luca grumbled good-naturedly but moved out of his mother's way. "Where's dad?"

"Here I am," Michael announced as he appeared from the house. "Of course, your mom left me to carry a pile of food alone."

Lucia scoffed dismissively. "You're such a drama queen. It wasn't a pile of food."

"You made six dishes Lucia," Michael deadpanned as he shook his head.

Luca frowned as he looked at his mother. "You didn't have to do that, Mama."

Lucia waved away Luca's comment, making Kit giggle quietly. "You can never have too much food! You know that."

Luca sighed and shot his father a long-suffering look. Michael laughed heartily before stepping forward and pulling his son into a hug. "You know how your mother is."

Luca nodded and grinned at his father before gesturing toward Max. "This is our friend, Max. He's married to the lovely Gemma over there."

"It's an honor to meet you, Mr. Brooks," Max said as he shook Michael's hand.

"How are you dad?" Luca asked when the two men had finished greeting each other.

"Starving!" Michael declared with a roll of his eyes. "Your mother said I'd spoil my appetite if I ate anything."

Luca laughed as Michael gave Lucia a furtive glance before whispering to his son. "I swiped some food when I was bringing it in."

"What did you say, Mike?" Lucia called suspiciously, her eyes narrowed on Michael.

"I said I can't believe I haven't greeted Kit yet," Michael answered with a wink directed toward Luca.

Luca chuckled as he watched his father join the women and greet Gemma and Kit. He smiled happily as he watched his parents get along with Kit. They'd been very excited when he'd invited them to spend the afternoon at his home.

"Hello?" Luca heard a voice call distantly from within the house.

"Come down the stairs!" Luca walked into the ground floor living area and called into the upper level helpfully, waiting as he heard footsteps coming down the stairs.

Matthew's confused figure appeared at the bottom of the stairs, a smile taking over his face as he spotted Luca. He waved and made his way over.

"Luca!" Matthew exclaimed in a friendly tone before handing him a bottle of whisky. "Thank you for having me in your home. I was very happy when Kit invited me here."

Luca smiled at Matthew gratefully as he accepted the bottle. "I'm glad that you could make it. I know Kit will be happy to see you too."

Matthew smiled before frowning. "Listen Luca - I apologize for Maya's behavior at the dinner and afterward. Had I known what she was up to, I would have intervened."

Luca grabbed Matthew's shoulder gratefully. "Thank you for saying that but you have nothing to apologize for. Let's just have a great afternoon."

Matthew nodded and Luca led him back outside to the rest of the party. "Look who's here?"

"Matthew!" Kit exclaimed, calling him over to where she was standing with Lucia and Michael. Matthew gave Luca a parting smile and made his way over to the small group waiting for him.

Luca smiled as he watched his parents interact with Kit and Matthew while Gemma and Max were arguing about something over by the grill. He couldn't believe how different his life looked compared to a few weeks ago.

Luca hadn't known much about relationships - how to salvage the one with his father and how to be in a relationship for more than a few weeks. His eyes landed on Kit as he thought about why his life had changed so suddenly.

Despite their rocky start - their relationship had already resulted in massive changes in both of their lives. Luca sincerely hoped that they'd be making positive life changes together going forward, for a long time to come.

Kit's eyes met his and the two smiled at each other adoringly. She waved a hand to call him over and he put the whisky bottle he'd been holding down before obliging.

# **Chapter 50**: The Billionaire's Gift

Kit let loose a loud wolf whistle as she spotted Luca entering the closet behind her in the mirror. She let her eyes run down his body appreciatively as he paused on the threshold of the closet with a smile. Luca was clad in a black, custom-made tuxedo with his hair slicked back.

"Don't you look yummy," Kit purred as he walked over to her and placed a kiss on her bare shoulder, directly where it connected with her neck.

"You look pretty edible yourself," Luca complimented Kit with a husky voice. "We don't even have to go tonight," he continued as his eyes devoured Kit.

Kit snorted and pushed Luca away gently, walking to another part of her closet to search for earrings. "We can do that when we get back - I want to go to the Opera. You promised me we'd make it there this time."

Luca chuckled with a devilish smirk and stuffed his hand in his pockets. "I guess I'll keep my hands to myself then. I'd hate to break my promise."

"For the third time," Kit tacked on distractedly as she carried on digging for the desired earrings.

Luca laughed and smiled boyishly. "You didn't complain the first two times."

"Shut up," Kit laughed as she finally found her earrings. She slipped them in and walked back to the mirror to check her reflection again.

She nodded approvingly and then turned to Luca. "I need you to help me pick a necklace."

"Hold that thought," Luca instructed before exiting the closet and reappearing a moment later holding a flat, black velvet box.

"I wonder what's in there," Kit stated playfully as she smiled at Luca and watched him place the box on the island in the middle of the closet.

"You can tell me if you don't like it," Luca assured Kit, his hand resting atop the box. "I won't be offended or anything."

Kit smiled at Luca fondly. "I'm sure I'll love it."

Luca gave Kit a wary look as she smiled at him reassuringly before nodding and sighing nervously. He took a deep breath before lifting the lid to reveal what lay within.

"Luca!" Kit gasped in awe as he opened the velvet box to reveal a diamond choker.

Luca smiled slightly. "I know it's not as good as a hickey but I figured this could be my way of letting people know you're taken."

Kit nodded wordlessly, her eyes still locked on the glittering choker.

Luca laughed as he took in her awestruck expression. "I was afraid this might be too extravagant but you're clearly not complaining."

Kit looked at Luca with wide eyes. "Complaining? About diamonds? So many diamonds too…"

Luca laughed before carefully lifting the choker out of the box and gesturing toward the mirror with his head. "Come on."

Kit positioned herself in front of the mirror obediently, watching Luca approach with breathless anticipation. Luca stood behind Kit and pulled the choker around her neck before fastening the clasp.

Kit's hand instinctively flew to the choker, her fingers running along the diamonds as she turned her head to admire her gift. Her hair was pulled up in a messy top-knot tonight - perfectly showing off her new choker.

It was the perfect accessory for her outfit - a glittering black dress that consisted of a black, lacy bodice and delicate off-the-shoulder sleeves on top and form fitting lace covering one leg and a thigh high slit revealing the other. She'd chosen black stilettos to complete the look.

"It's stunning," Kit whispered adoringly. "It must have cost you an arm and a leg."

Luca smiled and shrugged casually. "It wasn't too expensive."

Kit met his eyes in the mirror, cocking her eyebrow disbelievingly.

Luca chuckled. "Okay, it cost quite a bit. You're more than worth every penny."

Kit frowned slightly. "This is a pretty expensive gift for only a few months of dating. Are you sure about this?"

Luca nodded fervently and stepped forward, pressing their bodies together and winding his arms around Kit's front. "I'm more than sure about you, about us - and about the choker. You can think about it as a placeholder."

Kit chuckled. "Pretty expensive placeholder - what's it in place of?"

Luca gave Kit a smoldering gaze. "A much, much more expensive gift that it's probably too early for."

Kit swallowed hard, her heart racing in her chest. She shook her head and smiled tenderly. "You're crazy."

Luca chuckled and turned Kit around so that they were standing face to face. "What about this then - it's a token of my love and a sign of my commitment to you."

"A token of your love?" Kit asked breathlessly, her eyes boring into Luca's.

He nodded and smiled at her sweetly. "I love you, Kit."

Kit beamed at Luca and pulled his head down until their lips were touching. "I love you too."

"Thank God," Luca muttered against Kit's lips before sealing them with a heated kiss.

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*"Diamonds are Forever and So Is Their Love?*

*Eagle-eyed fans have noticed that Nikita Simons has been wearing a new diamond choker in the last few weeks. She was first spotted wearing it while attending an event with her beau, Luca Brooks.*

*Since then, she's been spotted wearing it quite a few times including on one very glamorous grocery run! Sources close to the glamorous entrepreneur tell Page Nine that the choker is a gift from Brooks.*

*"Luca wanted to let Nikita know that he's committed to their relationship," a source shares, explaining that Simons is a very down-to-earth person and Brooks wanted to make a grand gesture for her.*

*Nothing quite says I love you like a handful of diamonds!*

*So how much is the choker worth? With a family net worth of over $1 Billion, Luca has quite a lot of money at his disposal. Celebrity Jewelry Expert Jade Danson estimates that the choker is made of nearly $2 million worth of diamonds.*

*A grand gesture indeed!*

*Next up? A huge diamond ring. "Luca knows that Nikita is the one he wants to be with forever," a source tells Page Nine. Despite the fact that it's early days still, both friends and family agree that the pair is well-matched.*

*While the pair has been less public with their romance than they were early on; they still attend events together and have recently given their first joint interview. There are whispers that the two are working on a business collaboration at the moment and enjoying taking it slow.*

*Time will tell if their love goes the distance."*