

I looked up and all of the composure I'd worked so hard to regain melted away. A few yards behind me, staring at me in the reflective glass, was a man who made my heart stop. My breath hitched and I was paralyzed as my mind raced for the appropriate response to Gregory Michaels' unexpected appearance. Whatever mutiny my body staged against my mind wasn't the response I was hoping for. By some miracle, the door opened in front of me, breaking the spell.

An average-looking man in a nondescript business suit held the door, waiting politely for me to pass through. In a daze, I shuffled in and spun around to find Mr. Michaels standing in the same spot, still looking at me. I knew he couldn't see me through the dark glass, but that didn't lessen the impact of his gaze. He walked toward the door, his expression intent, purposeful. I struggled to take a step back, as if some invisible force pulled me toward him. I'd never felt anything like it before, so I did the only reasonable thing I could think of.

I ran.

The ladies restroom was just a few yards away so I ducked inside.

What. The. Fuck? I leaned against the door of the woman's bathroom. That wasn't me out there. Men didn't have that effect on me; I had it on them. I was always in control. Every step I'd taken regarding men for as long as I could remember was part of a well laid out plan. Until that moment.

I pulled the door just enough to peer through the crack. My pulse thudded in my ears. Looking at him, completely uninhibited by the risk of discovery, it was impossible to deny my attraction to him. The flush of my skin and the fluttering in my stomach gave it away all too well.

Gregory Michaels scanned the lobby, looking for something, or someone. Knowing in my bones what he was looking for was me pleased me far more than it should have. Ignoring the temptation to exit and let him find me, I kept watching. He approached the desk manned by two security officers.

"Oh! Excuse me!" the woman entering the bathroom nearly shouted.

I jumped back, my hand over my chest. The surprise flooded me with an extra dose of adrenaline as if my senses weren't already on high alert. Still holding the door open, she studied me for a moment before looking over her shoulder back into the lobby. Turning back to me, she giggled with a knowing expression and stepped through the doorway.

"He has that effect," she said, moving past me as the door closed.

Thank God the door blocked me from view. I smiled at her unashamed. Under different circumstances I would have openly appreciated Gregory Michaels with any

nearby woman, or man for that matter, who had the use of their eyes. Blindness was surely the only defense against that kind of appeal.

“Is that Mr. Michaels?” I played dumb. There was no doubt who he was. I’d spent more time than was necessary looking at pictures of him for my *research*. None of that research prepared me for my body’s reaction to him

She raised her eyebrows.

“Oh, this is your first time seeing him in person. I would tell you it gets easier, but I’ve worked here for over a year and still get nervous around him.”

I could understand why.

I shrugged, smiling at her in the mirror.

“Thanks for the heads-up. I’m interviewing to replace his administrative assistant.”

“Lucky you! I thought they were looking to fill that position internally.” She extended her hand. “I’m Stacy, accounting department. You better watch out. More than one of your new coworkers will be pissed if you get the job.”

It sounded like a joke, but the look in her eyes told me she was serious.

“Claudia, *Claudia Winston*,” I replied as we shook hands. The last name from my childhood felt strange on my lips.

I’d decided to use my real first name for the job, considering I was working at home and there was always the possibility of running into someone who knew me. People don’t typically shout out last names when they bump into acquaintances on the street, and even if they did, a new last name was much easier to explain away.

Winston was my father’s last name. I legally changed my last name to my mother’s maiden name after she died. It was another way to cut my father, Robert, out of my life.

Apart from my name, the rest of my identity was entirely fake. Bridget created a false work history, school transcripts, and credit report under a recycled social security number, which I then used to rent a small one-bedroom apartment a few blocks from my real one. Bridget ensured everything was in place for me to pass the intense background check G&G’s human resources department would run if I was considered for the position.

“Unfortunately, the yummy Mr. Michaels is only for looking at. He’s happily married to a gorgeous saint of a woman,” Stacy said before reapplying her lipstick in the mirror.

I contained my sarcastic laugh. Forget that his wife hired me to seduce him and was considering divorce, the way he’d looked at me told me in no uncertain terms his

marriage was far from happy. Poor Elsa. Guilt tugged at the corners of my mind. Another odd feeling for me. Clearly meeting my mark's wife had more of an impact than I'd anticipated.

"Good to know."

I glanced at the door, wondering if the coast was clear. Of course the goal was for me to meet him, and his initial reaction to me was far better than I could have hoped for. The problem was *my* initial reaction to him. I needed to be in control. It had to be on my terms. After all, he was just another job. He was just another job. It didn't hurt to remind myself a second time.

"Well, I guess I'll see you around." Stacy headed for the door.

I held my breath, waiting for a glimpse into the lobby from my safe vantage point.

With no sign of Mr. Michaels, I moved closer to the exit to get a better look before the door closed. He was gone as far as I could tell. I only had a few minutes before my meeting with Janet, so it was now or never. Inhaling deeply, I slung my bag over my shoulder and stood tall.

I strode over to the security desk, using every ounce of the acting skills I possessed to maintain a facade of self-assurance.

"Hi." I smiled at the Mack truck of a security guard. "I'm Claudia Winston here to see Mrs. Janet Peterson."

He flashed a cocky grin, reminding me of Mr. Fantastic from Florida.

"Go on through, um, *Ms. Winston*," he said, taking an obvious peek at my left hand.

Stepping through the gate, I consciously told my feet to take each step toward the elevator. How the hell was I supposed to sit through an interview, knowing a man who'd evoked such a tempest of emotion in me was somewhere close by? I whispered prayers as I walked, unsure if they were to keep him away or bring him to me.

When the elevator doors parted, it seemed they must have been the latter.

"Going up?" Mr. Michaels said, a half smile smug on his face as he leaned against the wall. His head tilted forward and his warm honey-colored eyes glinted through long lashes.

Fuck. Me.