



**LOVE IN
QUARANTINE**

A SHORT STORY BY

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Forced to isolate after a colleague test positive for COVID-19, Bria Collymore is stuck inside and reliant on her ex-husband. Riley's got 14 days to convince her they should work things out. But how's he to accomplish that when he can't do any of the things, he's always thought a man had to do to woo a woman?

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Chapter 1

Bria Collymore opened her umbrella before stepping out of the car and into the morning rain. Shivering in the moist air, she pulled her jacket close before locking her car and heading towards the office. She was early but she liked it that way. By the time the rest of the office straggled in after eight, she would have already knocked out two hours of work without distractions.

Her friend Mya accused her of having no life. She was not wrong, but Bria intended to change that.

With pride, she trailed her finger across the sign on the door. Director of Projects. She was the youngest one in the island's history and the first woman to head the department which managed more than one hundred million dollars in grants and donor funding for national development projects. Her alma mater, the University of the West Indies had honored her in their latest forty under forty list. She'd received a performance bonus that rivaled her annual salary. In the last three months, she had received another thirty million dollars in donor funding for the downtown redevelopment plan.

She worked hard for those successes, and it would make no sense to anyone why she was about to hand in her resignation. She sat at the glass top desk she'd procured only three months before. Her office looked like something out of a New York real estate magazine than a small government agency. But she understood the importance of looking the part. The leaders she needed to finesse to negotiate partnerships appreciate quality and they wanted to see that they could manage the investments they were making.

She fingered the envelope she pulled out of her favorite bag by a Saint Michaels designer and sighed.

Bria hadn't wasted words in the one-page letter. She had thanked the chairman for his confidence in entrusting her with the post and that she was honored to have delivered on this trust but now she needed to move on. He was going to be stunned and baffled. Richard had been grooming

her to move into the CEO post for the past year. It was the natural progression for her, he had said.

What was she doing? Why walk away from all of that?

She replaced the letter and glanced at the reason. He was staring back at her from the postcard-sized framed photo on her desk. The only one she had put there to give the office a personal touch. Riley Collymore, her husband of five years and her ex for one, was wrapped around her as if he didn't want to be anywhere else.

She scoffed. The day the photo was taken was probably the last time they were wrapped around each other. His surprise birthday trip to the Bahamas for her thirtieth birthday had ended with her flying home alone and he jetting off to New York for a custom car show. He had returned home brimming with confidence, sporting a new wardrobe and camera filled with party photos of men and women looking at him as if he were the second coming.

Bria figured her colleagues thought she was a glutton for punishment keeping the photo on her desk. Maybe she was. But it helped her stay focused, angry, determined to keep the promise she'd made to herself. Get your name on the door then get up out of here. She had achieved that plan, three months short of the target. Now it was time to do the next. Resign and leave Saint Michaels for good.

Everyone would be mad if they thought she was leaving because of him but she could not do otherwise. It was her greatest failing. She hadn't been able to make him happy and his philandering ways were famous on island and off.

You are exaggerating Bria.

He had sworn it was just one time, but she was not about to let him make it a second. She had called a divorce lawyer with quickness. Now it was time to move on. They were still too close for her liking and she needed some distance if she was really going to have a life that did not include him.

That thought made a place close to Bria's heart ache. Her ex-husband's dishonesty still hurt.

A chill raced up her spine and she checked to see where the air vent was pointing. It wasn't even on. Getting up to make herself a cup of tea, she looked out the third-floor window that overlooked the port development. Maybe today she should take the day off. Go to the beach and put her feet in the water. Better yet, she could book a spa day. That was more appealing than sitting in the office. She checked her calendar. A major meeting had been postponed until the following week. There was no reason not to take the day off. Nothing pressing was on her agenda.

She debated whether she should leave the letter or wait until she saw her boss face to face. No. She would do it today and then go to see him when she returned tomorrow. She knew he would try to talk her out of it, but her mind was made up. It was time to move on in every way.

Resolving to make the most of her day, she poured her tea into a go-cup, cleaned up the kitchen, grabbed her bag and headed out the door.

Riley Collymore slammed the door on his truck. He shook his head at the empty parking spot where his wife's BMW should be. He couldn't get used to referring to Bria as his ex-wife. In his heart, she would always be the woman he promised forever. He had no intentions of changing that, no matter how many times she said otherwise.

He looked up at the complex of townhouses they owned together. It symbolized one of the many reasons he loved Bria. Before she would even agree to go out with him, she had asked him what were his plans for increasing his income? The question had stunned him. His only plan had been to continue supping up cars and having the sexiest and smartest woman in all of Saint Michael and the Eastern Caribbean on his arm. She had laced him with a look and told him come back when he had plan, she could get behind.

What a woman. Sticking his hands in his pockets he leaned on his truck and looked at the complex. It sported eight family homes, all of

them filled. Granted, they had lost one income when Bria had moved out and claimed the townhouse on the end, but it was still more than he expected. The way she looked relieved when she got the divorce papers in her hand, he swore she was planning to get on the ferry the next minute, never to return.

He checked the time and headed to his place, which was next to hers. She had been annoyed when he had moved next door once the tenant left but he loved it. During their marriage, they had spread out in one of the central units in the U-shaped complex. Those units were almost twice the size of the units on the longer sides. Back then, the vision was to fill it with young Collymores. As much as he had hope they would get back together, the place was too big for him alone and he detested the empty rooms, which were a daily reminder of how badly he had screwed things up.

Riley poured himself a cup of coffee as the machine released its last drop of the heavenly juice. He couldn't start his day without two cups. Bria needed her cup of tea to get going. He missed that about them. The contrasts. She, with her dark chocolate skin and him looking like the cream he poured into his coffee. She was methodical in how she planned and organized every aspect of life. He only knew one way to do things, quickly and without lots of time to overthink.

He walked out onto the balcony, which overlooked a cliffside.

Once he'd come back to her with the idea that they invest in real estate to secure their future, she had promptly suggested the track of land which at the time had been in the middle of nowhere. They had spent a significant amount of money to cut a road to the cliff, but it had been worth it. The land had been caught up in a family dispute and the parties had released the entire ten acres for far below the value it was now. No one had wanted to invest in surveying and developing it or paying the years of land taxes owed. Bria had leveraged their combined incomes and potential earnings to sell the bank on the property's potential. The bank had given them the loan, including the cost of the back taxes and construction costs.

He could hear the waves breaking over the sand bar, which kept much of the cove below a calm place to swim. That had been another of Bria's ideas. It had been one of the projects she had been able to attract investor funding for through her job. Young entrepreneurs benefited from the growing popularity of the beach because the waters were calm.

Riley clenched the metal bar of the balcony and groaned. He could feel the sun on his face, as they had stood at the edge of the cliff and said I do. They had promised on the very piece of land below him that they had not even built on yet that they would be together forever.

He had to get his wife back but how? He really screwed things up both literally and figuratively. He could not make her forget what he had done. He probably never would. But he needed her to forgive him. None of what they had acquired was worth anything without her in his life.

Chapter 2

Bria sat in the car staring at the sign outside the community health center. One call had derailed her plans to book a spa day.

“Mrs. Collymore you have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, we need you to come in for a test.”

The warm and friendly tone of the nurse had not worked to calm her nerves.

Bria freaked out. Suddenly the chills in the office made sense. She had caught something. She was sure she felt warm to the touch and she felt as if she could not breath. She had never hyperventilated in her life. Her hands shook, as panic set in. Suppose she had it.

COVID-19. Everyone was talking about it. The island had cases. How would she get it anyway? She spent most of her time locked away in the office. The radio ad announcing the possible symptoms was playing again.

“Don’t get ahead of yourself Bria.” She was delirious. Now she was talking to herself out loud.

She turned off the engine. Flipping down the mirror to check her makeup, she was stunned at the woman staring back at her. Her eyes were red, and her skin looked dull under the makeup. The minute the nurse had identified herself, her head had begun to hurt, and the hairpins felt like spikes jabbing her from all directions. She didn’t remember undoing the bun she favored for work, the minute she left the office. Now it felt in waves around her terrified face.

She picked up her bag and exited the car. She felt shaky. This was not good.

The brightly colored health center waiting room was empty. She could hear the radio playing in the distance. She pressed the tiny bell and took a seat.

Riley stretched in his office chair. He had reviewed all the pending car projects and ordered the necessary parts to complete them. He loved taking someone's vague ideas and creating magic. He had built a reputation as an engineer that not only built fast cars that fans raved about, but the bodywork was its own show. He still found it crazy that people would fly him to their island so he could work on their cars. He did not advertise. His goal was to overwhelm every client that they could not help but recommend him.

He stared at his mobile resting on the desk calendar. He should call her.

Checking the time on his laptop, he discarded the idea. Bria was probably in another meeting.

Just then, his phone vibrated. It was her.

“Hey babe. What's up?”

He tried for nonchalant and to keep the nerves out of his voice. He had never been nervous around Bria until the day the divorce papers were signed. She used to say she loved that he was not intimidated by her. All the other men in her world seemed to be. But he had been too enthralled by her to be nervous. All he had ever wanted to do was please her. The divorce papers had been a clear sign he had failed.

“Bria are you there?”

He thought he heard sniffles and his heart raced.

“Riley. I need you to come pick me up please. I'm at the health center.”

“What's wrong?”

“I ...”

“I'll be right there, sweetheart.”

Riley's heart had not slowed down by the time he drove into the clinic's parking lot. A few people were milling about wearing face masks. He scoffed. What was the point? The island had no cases of corona for a few

months. Maybe that had changed. He should listen to the local station to find out.

He spotted Bria standing off in a far corner staring over the fence at the mountains. She was wearing a mask.

His heart thumped louder. Something was very wrong. Bria looked frail. In all the years he had known her, she had never called to ask him for help. He had loved how capable she was, but he had come to see that left little of anything he could do for her. Maybe this was his shot. He would not fail at this.

“Mr. Collymore,” a nurse approached him as he exited his vehicle.

“Yes?” He recognized the woman. The biggest mistake of his life. This was so not the time or the place. He tried to keep walking towards his wife, but she stopped him with a touch on his arm.

“Riley, wait. You need to get tested.”

He stood stunned. “For what?”

“Your ex-wife has been exposed to the corona virus and we need to check everyone she’s been around in the past few weeks.”

Bria was now looking in their direction. He could see the tension in her face, and it was not because she was feeling unwell. She would recognize the nurse. He stepped out of touching distance and waved at her before turning back to the nurse.

“What do you need me to do?”

They had given him a rapid antigen test and it had come back negative. He had wanted to tell them the likelihood of him catching anything from his ex-wife was unlikely. They had not seen each other for weeks now although they were neighbors and ran a business together. Shame washed over him. He really had screwed up. If anyone should have been in quarantine, it should have been him. He was Mr. Social. The life of every party. Mr. In Your Face. How had Bria gotten caught up in this?

He looked over at her stiff frame next to him in the car, the bottom half of her face hidden behind a mask.

“Do you want to stop and get anything from the grocery store?”

She shook her head. She had not spoken more than a thank you since getting in the car. “I need to do some research first on what is best to take.”

“You don’t know that you have it so don’t act like you do. If the tests are positive, then I say treat it as if it were a bad flu. The symptoms are similar.”

She eyed him but did not respond. He wished she would at least lose the stiff upper lip. It was as if she regretted calling him. She was back to being Superwoman.

Riley pulled the car into their driveway. “I’ll get one of the fellas to collect your car a little later.”

She nodded and got out.

He closed his eyes and sighed.

He was sorry she had to go into quarantine, but he was not about to look a gift horse in the mouth. He had at least two weeks to convince her to give him another chance. He would have his work cut out to do so. She was going to be stuck inside for a while. Did his charm work through wooden doors? Now was the time to find out.

Chapter 3

Bria was going to go mad before this quarantine was over. How was she going to spend two weeks locked in her house with nothing but the walls to stare at? She was already bored with watching the television and she did not even have a lengthy project dossier to power through.

“You alright in there?”

Riley’s voice followed the gentle knock at the door.

“Yes, thank you.” She was polite to a fault, even when irritated and that had always frustrated Riley.

She could not be mad at him. He had tolerated her numerous requests the night before for snacks and bottled water. She had planned to go shopping after work yesterday and look how her day had turned out.

To say she had been upset when he had sold their large townhouse to move next to her after the divorce would be an understatement. Now, she was relieved to know he was close by. No matter what had not worked between them, she had never ever called him for help, and he had not responded swiftly.

Last night, he had even offered to move in, declaring he was not afraid of the virus, but she had torpedoed that idea. No way would she put anyone else at risk. All her colleagues had been notified and were being tested.

Bria shuddered. She prayed no one else tested positive. She had been surprised when they told her assistant had the virus. They had worked closely together daily and so the risk was high.

“They are announcing another lockdown. So, I need to run out and pick up some groceries. Anything you need me to get for you?”

She groaned out loud. Walking to the door, she placed her hand on it. She could imagine Riley standing with his palm on the door, head bent, waiting to hear her response.

“More fruit and vegetables, I guess. I’d really love to indulge in some wine, but I don’t think that’s a good idea now.”

“No worries. Soon enough, we’ll break out that bottle we’d been saving for the groundbreaking.”

Bria stepped back as if she had been hit. He could not see her face, but she could imagine he was waiting to hear her response. They had been about to break ground on a new plot of land for their home. Instead, she had hit him with her decision to end their five-year marriage.

“You still have it?”

“I do. I’m not going to drink it without you Bri. We had a deal.”

“I didn’t keep our end of it.”

“Because I didn’t keep mine. Baby, I am sorry and forever will be,” she could hear his voice break. “Don’t concern yourself with that now. I’ll go get the groceries. Even grab some non-alcoholic wines for you. Figure out what movie you want us to watch later.”

“You can’t come in here Riley.”

“I’m not coming in. Doesn’t mean we can’t watch a movie together. We’ve both got a ton of devices. There’s got to be a way to do this.”

Bria opened the door to peek at the man who still managed to make her heart skip a beat. “You gonna get the microwave popcorn?”

“No. I’ll get the old-fashioned kind you always burn.”

She grinned.

“Keep your phone nearby. Will call when I get to the shop.”

He winked at her and left. She watched his loose-limbed walk to his jeep. He turned and waved before getting in his truck. An unfamiliar feeling of longing and loneliness took over. Giving herself a mental shake, she watched Riley’s truck disappear around the bend and closed the door.

Bria stared at her reflection in the floor-length mirror. She was not beautiful by current standards. Her nose was a bit too broad she thought,

and she had those thick lips that other people paid to have. Riley used to say it was his favorite feature on her face. There was a time it seemed like he spent hours feasting on her lips.

She shook her head. Wasted memories. She had to come up with a plan for surviving being in quarantine for two weeks. She could feel a headache coming on. The tension behind her forehead was increasing and she had been feeling as if she needed to sneeze for the past hour.

The worse thing she could have done was read the list of symptoms and then spend hours online watching videos of people who said they had survived the virus. Now every ache and pain had her wondering if it was a sign.

Bria pulled out her laptop and opened a spreadsheet to design a food menu. Conferring with the list of fruits and vegetables the nurses had recommended she came up with a schedule of meals she hoped would strengthen her immune system. She then searched the internet to find recipes for meals. It would have been nice if she could cook for them both, she supposed, but probably not a good idea now. Riley could fend for himself. His mother had made sure of it. She was at his mercy now for food and everything else, it seemed.

Her phone vibrated with an incoming message.

Standing in the sun outside the supermarket. It will be a while.

Bria looked at the text and wondered what to say. It was because of her he was out there. Before she could answer another one popped up.

Forgot to tell you lunch is on my kitchen counter. Pop it in the microwave for two minutes. Don't eat all the mac and cheese.

She smiled at that. He knew she had a fondness for the pie. When had he baked? She didn't remember smelling anything cooking. She slid off the bed, found a mask and headed for his apartment next door.

The food was laid out on the tray. There were even tiny sprigs of bougainvillea tied together near the bottle of water. She smiled and

brought the flowers to her nose and sucked her teeth in frustration when the scent was blocked by the mask. Careful not to touch anything but the tray, she returned to her place and warmed up her lunch.

She wolfed down the meal and sent him a picture of the empty plate.

Saved you a sliver.

His reply was quick and filled with crying eyes.

You're a generous soul. Almost to the door. I may be done by nightfall.

Bria was sorry he had to go through all this trouble for her, yet she was not mad that he was the one that was stuck in the line. She hated waiting. She would have had to find a way to call in her order and pick it up later.

For the hour it took for Riley to finally get in the store, they texted back and forth. She had laughed out loud a time or two. She had forgotten how witty and charming he could be. Two things she missed from being with him.

She dozed off when he said he was on his way home but woke up sneezing her head off. Bria panicked.

Suppose she died from this thing? What if she never got a chance to do all the things she wanted to do?

Her new five-year plan was on track. She was saving to set up her own consultancy. She wanted to go to Ghana. She should have done it last year but they had been in the middle of a major government project and it had not been the right time to take a vacation.

Regret washed over her, even as she sneezed.

“Bri you okay in there? I’m leaving some medicine by the door for you. Come take it please.”

Briana checked herself in the mirror. She looked a mess. Her eyes were red, and her nose looked inflamed.

“Move away from the door please.”

“Bri, I want to see you. I’m not afraid of this thing.”

“You can’t get sick. One of us must stay well. If something happens to me you’ve got to take care of the business and...”

“And nothing. We’re doing this together, remember? That’s not changing. You’re going to fight this thing and I’m going to help you. Now open the door please.”

She put on a mask and opened the door a crack. He was there. Concern on his face. He reached out his hand to touch her but stopped. She wished he would. It would be nice if he could touch her. It had been too long.

“Hey. Take the medicine. I’ve got to go out to take care of some stuff for a bit, but I’ll be back before curfew.”

Bria stiffened. How could she forget? Was it really that easy for her to ignore what had been between them for so long? Another woman. Numerous women? Why did she think being ill with a life-threatening virus would change that?

“Whatever.”

“Hold up woman! I’m going to get some greens and more eggs for us. The store was also out of flour. I just didn’t want to leave you at home all this time without checking on you. It’s just vitamin C tablets.”

She was not convinced but the sincerity in his eyes made her yearn to believe him. She nodded and reached for the paper bag with the medicine in his hand.

“Thank you.” She closed the door and went to the bathroom to read the instructions.

Riley deserved that. The mistrust in her eyes and her tone were justified. He had broken her trust and had been trying in every way to show he was sorry and had changed but that didn’t mean she believed him, or he had earned for forgiveness.

Riley wiped his hand across his forehead and headed to the jeep. He needed to get to the seaside market and back in an hour when the curfew began. Fingers crossed, everyone would be where they said they would be, and he could get the vegetables and some tea bushes he wanted to try.

When he was not trading snarky comments with Bria, he had been researching the virus and natural medicines to help. He wished his mother were still alive. She knew what tea bushes were good for different ailments. He should have paid more attention when she was trying to teach him. He had no interest back then. If it was not a bike, or an engine, he did not want to know about it.

He had Bria to thank for broadening his horizons. When they met, she had insisted he take classes at the local community college. Back then, he said yes to anything that would make her smile or he could use to win points. She had already obtained her first degree and was working on her masters. She would not even give him the courtesy of a date until he had earned his Associates. After that, he went after his bachelor's in business. What a shocker to find out he had a knack for more than tinkering with engines. Now, he owned a custom car shop and a property management business.

He would not let her down now. The test would be negative. and all would be well.

He texted her when he was on his way back, but he got no response. Her house was in darkness by the time pulled into the driveway. If she were asleep, he did not want to wake her. She had looked unwell earlier and he ached to hold her.

What a mess. When he had had all the chances in the world, he had thrown them away. Now he had to fight for the one thing that had been his all along. How stupid could he be?

He texted her that he was back and to call if she needed him. He was intentional in his words. She did not like needing anyone and right now he was her lifeline. Riley did not want to be anywhere else.

Chapter 4

Bria checked the time on the clock radio near the bed. Almost time for their virtual tennis match. Riley had insisted she needed physical activity.

She had to admit quarantine had not been the pain she thought it would be and that was because of Riley. He had come up with the most entertaining ways to keep her from climbing the walls. For the past five days, every morning began with virtual tennis. He had beat her soundly each time, but she was improving. It had taken her time to get used to the virtual game that made them appear to be in the same place and facing off across the tennis court. The workout was as fierce as if they had been outside running around on a real court.

Lunch was shared on the balcony with the wall between them. They had to speak a bit louder than usual, but Riley loved being able to peek around the side to look at her. He always complimented her hair and her outfit. She had taken to making sure she no longer looked like death warmed over. The test results had been negative and that had been of only slight relief as they said they would need to check her again the following week.

By far, her favorite time with Riley was the evening movie. Once it hit seven, she would get a knock on the door with a freshly popped bag of popcorn, a bottle of orange or apple juice and instructions on what movie they would be watching.

She liked this take-charge Riley. He used to always say whatever you want and let her choose but she found she loved depending on him for even a little thing like arranging their movie watching experience. All she had to do was show up and be prepared to text during the show.

Riley's witty comments often had her laughing more than the actors on the screen. He always mixed it up, one romantic comedy and one action. Tonight, Bria was going to suggest they watch the new thriller with Denzel Washington. He would probably protest because he knew she loved her some Denzel, but she would have her way.

A heavy pounding on her door broke through her musings.

“Hold your horses. I’m coming,” Bria shouted, rushing to the door. “What is so urgent?”

The largest bouquet of red roses Bria had ever seen were being pushed towards her.

“What in the ...” She took the bouquet, mouth agape and stared at the man who was on his knees before the door.

“Riley, what’s going on?”

He started to respond but she stopped him. “Let me get my mask. Hold on.”

What was he up to now?

Riley had made it a habit to buy her roses on their anniversary and her birthday. She had not paid them any mind once his infidelity had come to light. What was the point? He had other women.

She put the vase of roses on the bar which separated the kitchen from the living area then grabbed her mask. Checking her eyes and hair in the mirror, she went back to the door.

He was still on his knees.

“Get up from there please.”

“Not until I say this Bri.” His voice was serious, and his eyes locked with hers. “I am sorry Bria Collymore. For not being true to my vows. I promised you that I would be faithful, and I did not keep my word. I will not give excuses as to why. I take full and sole responsibility for my actions. I want you to know that I have ended all my relationships and associations with men and women who condoned my actions. I did not want to come and talk to you until I knew that there were no loose ends. I am so sorry you are in quarantine as I had every intention of wooing you and asking you to give me another chance. That is very much my intention. And I am declaring to you now, that for the remainder of this

quarantine and every day thereafter, I will endeavor to tell you and show you that I want to be your man forever and ever.”

Bri could feel her eyes tear up at his words. She was not sure he had even blinked the entire time and she could feel his sincerity.

What was she to say?

She had longed for him to say just this but why now? She could be dying for God’s sake. Granted since their divorce, Riley had never stopped doing any of the things save for kissing and sleeping in her bed that he had done while they were married or even before. She could still count on him to take care of her car, fix anything broken, help her friends if she asked. But was this enough?

It had not been. That is why she had asked for the divorce. She could not overlook his infidelities. It had not stopped her from loving him fiercely and feeling broken every time she could tell he had been with someone else. Was that her fault? Maybe she was not as appealing or sexual as she thought. They had had a great sex life or so she thought.

She knew she was standing there with her mouth moving like a fish, but she had no words.

“Does this mean no virtual tennis this morning?” She regretted the words as soon as they left her mouth. Riley’s eyes shuttered and he let out a breath.

“No. We’re still on and I’m still going to beat you.” He stood, smiled, and turned to return to his apartment.

Bria closed the door and slid down to the floor. She had really screwed that up. He was remorseful. She had seen that since the day she asked for a divorce. She had also known that he had ended several of his liaisons. The word had gotten around. But she would be a fool to take him back. Wouldn’t she?

Days like this she wished her mother were still alive or she had a sister to confide in. What would they tell her?

Her mother would probably tell her “men cheat and that’s just the way it is. Move on and go live your dreams without a man.” Her mother had never been married and had held out hope for a long time that Bria’s dad would have left his wife for her. That was never going to happen. Bria’s dad had loved the easy life and his wife was well off. It had broken her mother and she had died angry.

Her imaginary sister, she hoped would be the sensitive one and ask her to consider how she felt, what she feared.

If she were to be honest, she feared feeling rejected. That was how she felt every time she knew Riley was going out to be with another woman. Like if he was rejecting her in the same way her father had rejected her mother. His wife had not been happy to hear he had a child with an outside woman. He chose his wife over Bria every day.

Riley had said he took full responsibility for his actions. Rightly so, but she was not blameless. She knew that. She had not made it easy for him to get close. Finding every opportunity to usurp her independence.

Her phone beeped with a text message.

She didn’t have to check it to know it was Riley telling her it was time for their match. She got her gear and headed for the living room.

“I’m here,” she said into the headset.

“You okay?”

She nodded as if he could see her. What was she to say? She was not okay. She had no idea what would make it okay ever again.

“I’ll serve first,” was her only reply.

Riley sighed. This woman had him knots. He forced himself to respond to her serve and made a half-hearted effort to offer a decent volley.

He really should not have been surprised that she had ignored his confession and apology. Bria always hated those moments. It was not

that she was unforgiving. She just looked at you as if she expected you to disappoint her. He had.

“Riley, your turn to serve,” her voice whispered in his head set. He really ached to hold her. He wanted badly to kiss her and stroke that spot on the back of her neck that always made her whimper.

Another week and two days. He could make it. Who was he kidding? If could not change her mind now he would lose her for good.

His serve smashed into the next. This was not going well. Maybe he should call it quits or just let her win. Bri would hate that. She hated anyone showing her pity. He needed to focus on the game. No more confessions and declarations. Just keep doing what he was doing the past few days and show her that he was committed.

How could he? She was leaving the island. He had run into her boss at the store the day before. He'd told him that Bri had resigned and was accepting an offer with an international agency. She had always wanted to do that. He remembered it was the path she had been on when they had fallen in love and gotten married. Somehow, he had forgotten that.

“Riley pay attention!”

He gave another half-hearted serve and groaned when Bria's squeal announced she had won the set.

Chapter 5

The game did not get better. No matter how he tried to focus, her laughter when she crippled his serves and groans when she lost a game made him ache. He had to get it together, but he could not muster the energy to care.

What would he do if she decided not to give him another chance? He had never considered the possibility. He always thought he had the time to get it together.

Once the game was done, Riley excused himself to take a shower. Their virtual games always made him work up a sweat. He knew it did the same for Bria. She needed to keep busy as she was no longer able to go running. She had insisted that he not make her breakfast as he handled lunch and dinner daily. He planned to make a large quiche which they could share. He did not want to share it with a balcony between them.

He texted her that he would be going out to handle some repairs at one of the apartments but promised to be back for lunch. All the ingredients were prepped, and he had only to combine them and bake once he returned.

Having to focus on repairing the plumbing in a townhouse was a welcome reprieve. He always enjoyed working with his hands. Since the island was in lockdown, the garage was closed, and he had run out of things to fix in his house.

“I don’t see that lovely wife of yours driving her car lately,” the shaky voice of Mr. Anderson interrupted the silence. He and his wife were retired teachers who had been the first to purchase a townhouse when they had gone on the market.

“She is in quarantine, so can’t go anywhere,” Riley replied looking at the man who had come to stand next to the sink which had been clogged with fat.

“Oh, she caught that dreaded virus then,” he said, shaking his head in pity.

“No, she tested negative, but she has to wait fourteen days to see if any symptoms develop.” Riley watched the water flow easily down the drain for several minutes before turning off the tap. “All done, sir.”

“Thank you, son. You know, this gives you time to woo her again.” The old man walked over and sat in the breakfast nook, tapping the table inviting Riley to join him.

“I think it’s too late now,” he replied coming to sit opposite Mr. Anderson.

“No, it is not. That girl loves you. I see the way she looks at you when you are driving off. You, young people give up too easily.”

“I messed up badly sir. She doesn’t forgive easily.” Riley cracked his fingers one by one. “She is taking a job overseas when this is all over.”

“Do you want your wife back?”

Riley nodded. “Without a doubt.”

“What are you willing to give up so you can?”

Riley thought for a moment. “I’ve ended things with the two women I was seeing. It cost me a pretty penny, but I did it. I’ve even cut off a few of the guys that used to cover for me. I figure I didn’t need anyone who wouldn’t keep me accountable. I told her this. Just this morning, in fact.”

“I guess she wasn’t impressed.”

“Nope. It was as if I hadn’t said anything. I’ve been taking care of her since this quarantine began. I try to show her I care. Not much I can do when I can’t even kiss her, hug her, touch her even. What’s a man to do?”

The old man laughed. “You can do plenty. Sounds like you are off to a good start, but you are fooling yourself if you think you can fix this in two weeks. You will have to spend a lifetime making it up to her and she needs to know this.”

“I told her the same thing and that I was willing. What else is there?”

The man thought for a moment and then he said, “you’ve got to make her miss you.”

“Sir, this is what got me in trouble in the first place. I wasn’t there for my wife.”

“I don’t believe that for a second. You worship the ground she walks on. Always have. Your problem with women had nothing to do with her and everything to do with bad habits you picked up too early. She expected you to cheat, she’s just using it as a reason to do what she’s always done.”

Riley looked at the man as if he had lost his mind.

Mr. Anderson laughed loudly and with gusto.

“I remember the first day you saw the future Mrs. Collymore. You were tuning my car and she walked in asking for help with a dead battery. You couldn’t string two words together to save your life.”

Riley laughed at the memory. He felt he had won the lottery when she decided to give him a chance. How had he screwed up so badly?

“She knows you will always be regretful, and she expects you will always be hanging around waiting for the scraps she throws at you. She needs to see what life would really be like without you in it.”

“I can’t do that now. She is depending on me to take care of food and stuff.”

“Does she or did you give yourself that job? Call the delivery service and have them do her groceries. She can make her own meals, can’t she?”

“Yes, but. I promised I would...”

Riley could not believe what he was hearing. The old man had lost it.

“Joan,” he called out to his wife. “Come a minute please.”

Riley could hear the sprightly woman before he saw her. She wore brightly colored bangles which clinked as she moved.

“Yes dear. Oh, hello Riley. I did not know you were here.”

“He’s been here the better part of an hour, but you have been too busy watching your soaps.” He teased her even as he made room on the bench next to him.

“Whatever, old man.” She flipped her bangles in his face and turned her smile on Riley. “Why do you look as if you’ve lost your best friend?”

Riley looked at the couple and sighed.

What would it be like to be with Bria at their age?

“That’s the problem. He thinks he has. Tell him about the time I broke up with you dear,” Mr. Anderson elbowed his wife and nodded in Riley’s direction.

“The worse three days of my life,” was the elderly woman’s response.

Riley looked at her quizzically.

“This man and I just could not see eye to eye. No matter what, he did, I wasn’t having it. We had been married a couple of years by then. He brought me flowers, he took care of the car and the house. All my girlfriends envied me because he was so attentive. I hated it. He was everywhere.”

Joan laughed and continued.

“One day, I came home to tell him my good news. Our good news, actually. I was pregnant. We had been trying since day one but no luck. I walk in and he is not there. There is a note however, and it says simply. I’ve had enough. Seems like you will be happier without me in your life. The house is paid up for the next three months. Bye.

“I swear to you my heart was in my stomach and my head, I thought it would explode. Here I was ready to share that we were finally a pregnant and he ups and leaves me. I didn’t know where he went, and I was too embarrassed to ask anyone if they knew where he was. I figured he would be back before nightfall. He wasn’t. First night we had slept

apart in two plus years. I got up in the morning and had to make my own tea. Who does that?"

They all laughed.

"I went to work thinking I would see him there as our classes were not far from each other. He had taken a week off. I was devastated. By that second night, I was in tears and I had to figure out what to do to get my husband back. I reread his letter and it struck me when he said, 'seems like you will be happier without me'. Why did he think that? What did I do to make him think I wasn't happy with him? I had to have a come to Jesus moment with myself, a journal, and the mirror. I had made my husband miserable and the evidence I'd used to crucify him was his loyalty and care."

"But this is different. I was unfaithful to her," protested Riley.

"Yes, but you have rectified that haven't you?"

"Yes. I spent the last year showing her I've cleaned up my act. If she leaves, she won't see that I have changed."

"You changing won't change her mind. She must make up her own mind. We women don't like to admit it and yes, you are at fault for cheating, but we provide enough ammunition to make it easier for you to do so."

"I can't say that is true. She is an amazing woman."

"Smart man. Defending her until your death," chimed in Mr. Anderson.

"Now, she needs to be willing to fight for you until your death, no matter what your flaws and faults. She has no reason to fight because you are always there, and she knows this."

Riley looked at the couple. "What happened? How did you get Mr. Anderson to come home?"

"I reflected on every moment when he did something loving or kind for me. What did he do and what was my response? By the time I was

done with my list that night, I felt ashamed. This man had been consistently showing me kindness and I gave him ingratitude. I was never satisfied, and he kept going over and above what we would even afford at the time to make me happy, but it was never enough. I realized that if I lost him, not only was I losing out on a man that cared for me wholeheartedly, but I would be completely to blame. I made no effort to be appreciative or kind or loving. I went to sleep that night asking God for another chance to show him that he mattered to me. Not for what he gave me but for who he was. The next day, on my lunch break and then after work, I drove around to see if I could spot his car anywhere. I eventually found it at a bed and breakfast and then I saw him speaking to a woman. To say, I was upset was an understatement. Instead of confronting them I drove home.”

“Silly woman, I’d seen your car already,” her husband quipped.

“This is my story please,” she teased.

“I wasn’t looking my best and you know how women get morning sickness, well I got it in the evening. So, I went home and took a shower. I told myself I would lie down for a minute and promptly slept for the rest of the night. The next morning, I baked a banana bread, which he loves and went back to that B and B. Knocked and handed him the bread as soon as he opened the door. I said there is more where that came from. Just come home. He gives me attitude and said he can bake his own bread. I didn’t have a comeback. He just stood there and stared at me. What was I supposed to do? Pour out my heart to him? Not gonna happen, I was saying inside. But then I remembered the note.

“I am not happier without you. I feel like the best part of me is missing, I confessed. I told him that I loved him and apologized for my lack of care about his feelings. I never did make it to school that day and that banana bread on hand made sure we did not get out of bed for hours to come.”

“TMI Mrs. A,” Riley groaned with embarrassment.

“Even with all the ways you have messed up. She must come to a decision on her own that she wants a life with you. Otherwise, she will

spend the entire time keeping you on a string, waiting for the next shoe to drop, expecting you to break her heart. This quarantine is a good time for her to see what life is like without you in it at all. You two may have signed the paperwork but in every way that matters your lives are still intertwined. Give her a minute to miss you, son.”

Riley looked at the couple and took a deep breath. He couldn't think of anything else to say so he nodded and stood.

Mrs. Anderson gave him a tight squeeze and her husband shook his hand.

Chapter 6

As Riley prepared the quiche for lunch, he rehashed the conversation with the Andersons. Were they right? Did he need to give Bria some space? It made sense on a cerebral level, but he was fearful that giving her space would have the opposite effect and she would really be fine without him. He had always given her what she wanted, even doing the things that would make him more appealing as a future husband to her. He had come to see that cheating was something that gave him power. He got to have some control and the women needed him more than he needed them. With Bria, he felt as if he was at her mercy. Happy if she doled out crumbs of attention. Gutted because it never seemed to be enough.

He wanted his wife and yes, he wanted her to want him just as much too. Maybe it was time for him to find out if he was worth it.

He had spent some time searching online for rules on social distancing. He figured if they both kept their masks on and some distance, they could eat together outside. She had to be climbing the walls spending so much time inside for fear of encountering other residents on the compound.

Riley sent her a text and asked her to meet him at the cliff side for lunch.

He looked around at the blanket he had spread out with the meal. The wine was chilled and the platter of fruits and cheeses, with the slices of the quiche was covered and waiting to be opened. He looked nervously up the path from which she would come. It was the same path she had walked to marry him in the spot where they would picnic. Would she come? If he left, would she miss him? He prayed the Andersons were right because he was out of options. She had to want him too. He saw that now.

His heart skipped a beat as she walked unto the path and headed towards him. She had worn a veil on their wedding day, now she wore a

mask. At least he could see her eyes. They looked a bit wary. She was probably wondering what he was up to now.

“Don’t worry, I won’t be making anymore declarations today. Come and eat.” Riley stood and reached for her hand before remembering he couldn’t touch her.

“This looks amazing. You are a man of many talents Mr. Collymore.” Her smiling eyes warmed him.

“Here, try this.” Riley took a fork and spared a piece of cheese.

They broke into laughter when she tried to open her mouth without removing the mask.

“Take the cheese, now have a sip,” handing her a glass of wine.

“Oh, this tastes amazing. The flavors are waking up my taste buds.”

Riley laughed. “Good. Well take a plate and have as much as you like.”

They both filled their plates with the food and toasted to a swift end to quarantine and lockdown. He switched conversation to talking about the property and the need for maintenance checks on all the homes. While the townhomes were all sold, the tenants paid fees to ensure that they were maintained and secured. This has been a recurring stream of income that allowed he and Bria to live comfortably.

“Lunch was wonderful, Riley. Thank you. You have made the last week survivable.”

“You’re welcome. You would have done fine without me. I have never known anyone more capable of taking care of themselves than you, Bri.”

Riley swirled the wine in his glass. It was a perfect image of what his insides felt like.

“Bri. I’ve got to go away for a few days.”

“What?”

“Hold on a minute, let me explain. The property we bought down by the bay was broken into. I’ve known about it for a couple of days but didn’t want to leave you. I understand some people have taken to squatting in it and have also damaged the windows. I need to go down there and spend a few days securing it.”

“But what about me?”

“Like I said, you are more than capable. I’m going to order the groceries in a few. You will have enough for the rest of quarantine. There’s no internet in the building so I will have to miss our tennis and movie night. We invested a lot of money in that place, and it isn’t a good idea to leave it unsecured another day.”

Bria chewed her lip but said nothing. He wished she would, but she was doing what she always did. He could feel her emotional pull back in his belly. Now more than ever, he wanted to reach for her and hold her close. He was losing her when they were only now making headway. What had he done?

“I guess you are tired of me already.”

“Do not do this Bri.”

“So, what was all that talk about wanting to be with me?”

“I didn’t think you heard me. You acted as if I get down on my knees like that on a daily basis. Then again, maybe I do. I have been bending over backwards this past year to show you that I am sorry and that I have changed. I have not been with any woman since you signed those papers. What I did in the past few weeks was just make sure they know friendship isn’t even an option. I have loved you since the moment I met you. I will forever regret the way I hurt you, but I think I have been paying a penance for crimes I have not committed since the moment we met. I am not your father. You are not your mother. I want to make a life with you, but I cannot do that if you don’t want me as strongly and as deeply as I do you.”

Riley began to put the items into the basket with shaking hands. He closed his eyes and looked out at the waves crashing into a cave at the

far end of the beach. He had not meant to say much. If she did not hear his heart, then he truly had lost her for good. He would need to get used to that idea. It was never something he had considered before. Now he had no choice.

Bria watched Riley's truck drive away. She had done it. Finally, driven him away for good. Rationally, she knew where he was going and why but that last conversation had seemed final. He was over it. Over begging for another chance.

Isn't that what she had wanted...for him to leave her alone so she could move on with her life? Now, she had received what she had asked for and the resulting feeling was less than relief or sweet. It hurt. It hurt deeply in a part of her soul that she had not felt an ache in decades.

Three decades to be exact. She could remember the day. It was her fifth birthday, and her mom was throwing her a party in their little backyard. Five friends were there, and they had been running around playing hide-and-seek and superheroes. She had run into the kitchen to ask if it was time for cake and found her parents kissing. Her mother had been crying and as her father released her, Bria heard him say "don't call me again. I'm not leaving her for you." Her mother had begged him not to cut them off that she would not ask him to leave his wife, but it had not mattered. That had been the last time he had ever visited the house and any future sightings had been in a public place.

Her mother's cries that night had haunted her. She had hated birthdays since then. She hated tears and needing anyone so badly that they would make you cry.

Riley's infidelity had not made her cry. She had felt relieved when he confessed. Life was working just as it should. Men cheat. They were not dependable. He did what she expected he would do. Now, him leaving to secure a property should not feel as if a hole had opened in her soul. But it had.

A knock sounded at the door a few hours later and she jumped up to answer it. Had he changed his mind?

It wasn't Riley.

The delivery company had brought all manner of foods and snacks. This made the pain even worse. He made sure that if her quarantine were extended, she would not need to call on him for anything.

When night came, she tried to watch a movie as normal, but it was not the same. She was tempted to call him to see how he was getting through but didn't. She had to get through this without him. He had told her she was capable.

But was this what she wanted? To be capable and alone?

Well, she had been alone for a year, right? Maybe even before with all his socializing. But she always knew he would come home. Even when she moved into the smaller townhouse, she had always known where he was. She left for work every morning knowing his truck was in the driveway. That had given her a sense of peace. Now, his parking spot was empty and would be for as long as he chose to stay away.

She gave up trying to watch a movie and went to bed. Sleep eluded her for hours and eventually she got up to browse social media. She had never been one to post her business online and she was not about to start. However, she loved seeing what her friends were up to. Some were living their best lives in countries that no longer had cases.

Upon refreshing her page, a new post from Riley popped up.

Never doubt that I love you. Sweet dreams.

She was tempted to like the post. But what would their friends say?

Did it matter? Her friends weren't the ones who had been checking to make sure she was alive and not going crazy. Riley aka Mr. Social, who she expected to have found a way to have thrown a quarantine bash by now had been playing it safe. Taking care of her, making sure she had everything she needed to stay well and talking to her in the wee hours of the night when she was worried about getting ill.

She liked the post then closed the laptop and promptly fell asleep.

Chapter 7

Bria stared at the containers of food piled in her refrigerator. Another day, and another stack of uneaten food. Her portions were off. She always cooked too much food. If she were honest it was no accident. She hoped Riley would stop by, but he had not done so in the week that had passed since he left.

Her groceries were delivered every three days like clockwork.

That first day, she kept waiting but he did not call or text. She was trying to be capable as he said, so she had tossed the phone up on a shelf to make it difficult to call him and that had lasted all of ten minutes.

She had given in and called his number, but he did not answer.

Who was she kidding?

She missed him.

Her longing for him had only increased in their time apart. She had kept busy wrapping up paperwork on completed projects. Her boss had called to say that while he was disappointed, she was leaving, he knew it was a good move for her to take the job with the international body. He also let it slip that he had mentioned it to Riley. Bria wondered if that was what had sparked his decision to put distance between them. Now, it was left to her to remove it if she wanted their relationship to change.

He was her business partner, her best friend, and the man she could count on. He had messed up and so had she. She had failed to tell him, he mattered, and that he was loved. He was right. She had spent all their time before marriage, during and after making demands. He had done his best to meet every one of them.

Each day, she had struggled with wanting to tell him to come home but that sounded selfish. The property still needed to be handled. She had no idea how much work was involved but she figured he also needed the space from her.

But what would she say, if he answered? What was it she wanted from him?

Riley wanted marriage. What did she want?

He said he wanted to be needed too. Hadn't the past weeks showed how dependent on him she was? Even before the quarantine, there was not a day when they had not communicated in some way. It had been that day since the first time they met.

But was dependency and need the same thing?

Her phone rang with the ID for the man who had interviewed her for the diplomatic post. She was loath to answer it. They were waiting on her response.

"Hello Mr. St. Clair. How are you today?"

"Hello Mrs. Collymore. I note that we haven't received your acceptance note. Is there anything I can do to help you decide? We ideally would want you on the team at the start of the next quarter in three weeks." The voice was confident and jovial.

Bria got an instant headache.

"Thank you for following up Mr. St. Clair. I've been in quarantine and a bit worried about my health. It seemed wrong to make a commitment when I didn't know the outcome."

"I am so sorry to hear that. I hope you come through this unscathed. My team will be happy to welcome you once you receive the all-clear. However, I have another option I would like you to consider. I sense you love your home, and it is understandable you have ties there."

"I do sir. I have a business with my husband, I mean my ex... never mind. Continue sir."

If Bria were of a lighter tone, she knew she would be beet red. What was the matter her?

“We are about to expand the team to add regional directors. We realize our programs need to be closer to the people we serve. Pre-Covid, the plan was to have everyone stationed in Barbados or Jamaica and work from there. However, given the situation, we want to give the directors the option to work from anywhere they choose. But Bria, I don’t just want you to be a regional director. I want you to run the regional directors program. Everyone will answer to you.”

“Thank you for the opportunity. This option feels more suitable to my life now. Please send me your offer and I will give it consideration.”

They spoke for a few more minutes about the program and Bria agreed to give him an answer by the end of the week.

Before she could talk herself out of it, she dialed Riley’s number.

“Bri. Is everything okay?”

He sounded anxious.

“I am okay. I. I just got some good news and wanted to share it.” Bria walked out to the balcony and sat on the lounge.

“I should have said something before but then... quarantine. I got an offer to work for that international agency I’m always talking about.”

There was a pause before Riley responded. Riley had always been encouraging her to pursue her dreams, just as she did the same for him.

“That was the path you were on before I interrupted your plans. It would only be right for you to take it.”

Bria’s chest hurt. What was he saying? Was he really giving up on them getting back together?

“It’s a really good offer and...”

“Bri. I would never stand in your way. My life is better because you challenged me to ask more of myself and I would still be fixing cars under a tree and paying rent if you hadn’t set me straight. They are going to be

lucky to have you. Saint Michaels was always too small for you. I should never have tried to keep you with me. Time for you to fly.”

“No. No. Riley there is no flying without you. I miss you. I miss my best friend. I miss my husband. I miss my lover. I miss you. I am sorry that I pushed you away. You were right. I’ve been doing that since day one. I’d set up a challenge and you would just beat every one of them. I kept giving you reasons to leave, and you kept finding another reason why you wanted to stay.

“What are you saying Bri?

“I want my husband back. Please forgive me for being obtuse, unforgiving, and not fully committing to our marriage. I expected you to disappoint me because I honestly believed that is what men do. But you have shown me that I can have so much more than disappointment. I have been waiting for you to abandon me like my father did to my mom and I, but you never have.

“Isn’t that what I did when I left you to fend for yourself?”

“No. You took some much-needed space to let me see that what I’ve been looking for all along, I’ve always had with you. I love you Riley. Please come home.”

A knock sounded at the door and Bria rose to answer it.

Her heart skipped a beat when she looked through the peep hole.

Riley stood with his left hand braced on the door frame and the phone to his ear.

“What are you doing here?” She said into the phone while staring at him.

“I was about to find some random reason to come and see you. I missed you so much.”

Riley disconnected the call and stuck the phone in his pocket.

“Are you experiencing any fever, headache, chills, sneezing? What are the other symptoms of this things?”

Bria laughed and shook her head. “No. No symptoms doc.”

“Do I still have to wait the final three hours of this quarantine before I can kiss you?”

“You probably should.

Riley groaned. “I’ll come back in three hours then.”

“No come in. You got your mask on and we can talk from a distance.”

Riley rolled his eyes and walked in.

He looked around Bria’s home. It was the first time he was seeing beyond the hallway. Since moving in, he had forced himself to respect her space and kept their conversations at the door or over the balcony.

“This is beautiful. Very earthy. Why didn’t you do this with our home?”

“Sit. Let me get you a drink first.”

Bria handed him a glass of passion fruit juice and he drained it. He gently placed the glass on the coffee table. His hands were shaking. He took a deep breath to calm himself before turning to look at her, as she joined him on the sofa.

She looked around at the room, as if she were only seeing it for the first time.

“This is me. I guess. It feels earthy and I suppose with you I wanted to make it seem more polished. Like something out of a fancy magazine. You know. I really tried to hard with all the wrong things.”

Riley shook his head and extended his hand, waiting for her to put hers in his.

“I don’t think so. It reflected a different side of you. That classy, can’t touch me without my permission side.”

Bria laughed.

“That’s not good look for a place where you raise a family.”

“I won’t let you beat yourself up. That townhouse sold for twice as much as we expected because of how you designed and furnished it. That couple wanted every pot and pan and picture frame. You bring such value to everything you touch Bri. That’s why I love you. Why I think this agency will be so happy to have you. I don’t want to stand in the way of you getting this dream fulfilled. Sometimes we don’t get to have it all and this time is yours. You should go for it sweetheart.”

“That’s just it. I don’t have to go anywhere.”

“You don’t? I thought you had to move to Brussels or something.”

“Wait. Let’s back up. The job isn’t important. Did you hear me say that I want my husband back? That I love you and want to make a life with you? At one point we were planning for a family. I still want that Riley. With you.”

Riley looked down at her hands which were now clasping his. Social distancing be damned. He really wanted this woman.

“But the job Bri. This was top of your vision board. I don’t know. Maybe I can move with you.”

“Ri. Focus. I want to be your wife. Is that offer still available?”

“In my book, you never stopped being my wife. I was just waiting for you to get the memo.”

“Stop being a goof. Be serious nuh.”

“Briana Taylor Collymore. I love you with all my heart and soul. I am your husband until life leaves my body. I want to be with you, and I want nothing more than to spend my time making your dreams come true.”

“You could have just said yes!”

Riley poked her in the forehead, and she fell back dramatically on the sofa.

“I am so not falling for this. Get up please. I got two hours and fifty-two minutes to go before your quarantine is over.”

Bria laughed and sat up.

“Where were we? So, it’s a yes to me being your wife. What about children, still want them?”

“We can start working on that in two hours and fifty minutes.”

Bria folded her arms and pouted.

“Your honor, instruct the witness to respond with Yes or no, only.”

“Yes. I want children with you. I think we agreed on three. We can negotiate that number if you’re now planning to be a diplomat and stuff. Guess I need to work on being a house husband. A kept man. A soccer dad.”

“Riley!”

“Woman. I am trying my best to sit here and not move. At least let my mouth do the moving.”

They both laughed at the ridiculousness of the moment.

“Maybe we should play virtual tennis or something to pass the time.”

“No. I need to save my energy. I’m going to need all of it in two hours and forty-three minutes. Why is the time moving so slowly?”

Bria giggled.

“Well, let’s leave the three on the table. I do like the idea of you being a kept man. You’ve taken such good care of me. However, you will have to manage all the properties and we are going to need a bigger home.”

Riley looked around at the house and towards the wall which separated their homes.

“We could take out the wall and make it one big townhouse.”

“Absolutely not. We need to build our own home, on that piece of land we purchased. Keep these two for rental income. The kids can have them to start out when they are of age.”

“You turn me on when you talk money.”

He pulled her towards him and gave her an Eskimo kiss.

“This is not a good idea Ri.”

He groaned. “I love you and I can’t wait to be your husband in every sense of the word.”

THE END

