



Finding the One

Pierce has always considered himself very lucky. He has great friends who have been with him through all of adolescence as well as the beginning of adulthood. He has seen most of them find their happily ever after and he is looking for that too. The death of a loved one and the secrets of another have Pierce in a tailspin. Getting through this will require a lot of finesse and even more support.



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Pierce Webster is a simple man with one simple desire; he wants to find a special woman to make his life complete. Up until yesterday he had one unattached friend left, but after Bo's wedding, he is now the last one single.

From afar, he watched all of his siblings find their mates, then one by one he watched his friends hook up with their forever partners. The only one he ever worried about after marriage, is Regina. The man she picked to marry is not as upstanding as she assumed. Pierce has caught him flirting with other women and the not so innocent kind of flirting either. One night, when they all met up at a bar, he practically picked up another woman's phone number except Pierce walked over to tell him his wife was looking for him. After that night Regina told Pierce that she can no longer talk to him on the phone, when her husband is around anyway. Pierce remembers responding with the comment 'what does that tell you Gina?' to which she said, 'that I have a jealous husband but that doesn't mean I won't speak to you. Only we can't do it on the phone where he will hear or see our texting.' This made Pierce very sad. Regina and he have known each other the longest out of all the people in their friendship circle.

Regina's husband is the only one of the newer friends who ever had a bad word to say to or about Pierce. In their first meeting he kept taunting Pierce with weird questions about what different words meant. When Pierce didn't know the answer he would say, 'you're pretty stupid for someone with the last name of Webster.' Regina had laughed with the first one, but when he didn't stop Regina had to step in and stop him. His only comment then was, 'all in good fun'. He didn't stop, he simply waited until Regina wasn't around to continue his game. Pierce knew that this man wasn't for her but he could not stop her, this was the first time she ever pushed him away.

His comments to Pierce weren't the first ones in Pierce's life that were connected to the famous Webster's Dictionary. His siblings have been made fun of for this as well. Especially his youngest sister who would always be the first one to get out in a spelling bee. Pierce never talked about his grades to anyone after things like that started. He made decent grades on his own and kept them to himself, this made life easier.

Today, the morning after his last single friend married, Pierce is feeling rather sad again. He shouldn't be, the wedding was beautiful, the venue very much showcased both Bo and Libby. You could feel the love the moment you walked into the place. Bo's mom danced with Pierce at least three times, each time saying how wonderful it is that Bo had a brother in his life like Pierce. Bo and Pierce became friends during eighth grade and have stayed that way all these years. Now, turning 28 this year, they appreciate each other even more.

They watched as many of their old classmates didn't exactly make their debut into adulthood well. A couple ended up behind bars. One or two have died since high school and then there were the plethora of people who were so unmotivated to do something with themselves that they have ended up in very mediocre jobs and spend their evenings on social media complaining about life being unfair. Pierce has run into a few here and there, they say hi and move on. He has nothing in common with any of them, except Bo and Regina. The original trio is still tight.

But not Regina's husband. He doesn't seem to like anyone but himself. More so now that he had recently received a promotion, or so he says. The boys don't believe he has. Talks about his own self-importance constantly when they get together, which is once a week at the Brewery restaurant. Pierce is not sure Regina and her husband will show up this week since Bo and Libby are on their honeymoon. But he will go in two days, as it is their standing date. If they don't show up, he will drink a beer, grab some dinner and go home.

Right now, though, he is lost in thought. He gets himself dressed and heads out to his sister's place to babysit for her. After ringing the doorbell, he hears, "Uncle Pierce is here!!" from the whole lot of them.

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He opens the door and looks down. Two laughing children are hugging his legs within seconds of him stepping in. “Hey, not so tight I need to walk you know.” Then he begins to walk with them holding on to his legs, the giggling doesn’t stop.

He walks in to the kitchen to kiss his sister’s cheek. “Where is the baby?” he asks.

“Sleeping with his father in their favorite chair. I swear when he gets older he and his father will be fighting for that chair. Yesterday he cried and cried, I couldn’t figure out what to do but when I went to the den he began to calm down. So, I put him on Neal’s chair and he curled up and went to sleep. How was the wedding last night? I’m sorry we left early, our babysitter called because she herself was getting sick and needed to get home.” Yvette says.

“Maybe you should find a male babysitter, they don’t get sick as much.” He laughs.

“I did, I called you. Neal really has to do well at this dinner meeting tonight. He is so nervous.” She says.

“Yvette, he will do fine. But you have to look like a wife not a mother, so go change please, you’re not wearing that tonight.” He points to the stain right on her sleeve and her chest.

“Oh, damn. Finish making the chicken please.” She walks away from the stove.

Neal and Yvette come out to the living room together. Pierce has the kids sitting and eating dinner already. They sneak out before the kids notice.

“Something is bothering my brother Neal.” She tells her husband

“Yeah, I believe you’re right. Hard to be the last single one in the group.” He says

“No, I think something inside him. Deeper.” She looks at him as he pulls the car out of the driveway.

“Did you see Regina at the wedding?” Neal asks his wife.

“Yeah for a few minutes, why?” she asks.

“Vettie, I think he is abusing her, physically. There, I said it. She tried to wear a winter dress, long sleeves, higher collar, but I saw the bruising. I’m a trained professional, I see these things but I can’t say a thing. She isn’t my patient. Now I know why she won’t come to see me as a physician.” Neal says slowly so she can process what he is telling her.

“Oh Neal. No. Do you think Pierce knows? Bo?” she is watching out the window now. The car becomes silent.

As they pull into the parking lot of the restaurant Yvette’s phone chimes with a text, she looks down and sees the message is from Pierce. Immediately her hand goes to her mouth so she doesn’t lose herself in the moment, she shows her phone to Neal.

‘A messenger came to the door and handed me this:

Dear Pierce,

You are the only man alive I still trust. Ok, maybe Bo and Neal, but that’s it, tops.

I know you’re babysitting for them tonight. I’m going to be at the North Chester Hotel on Maple tonight.

Please come.....

Alone.

Gina

I’m going to kill him Yvette, with my bare hands I will. That’s a promise!’

Neal looks at the phone and back at his wife. Damn, he didn’t want to be right. “Ok, here is what we are going to do. We will go meet these investors. I will speak with them oozing my special charm. I will then tell my boss that I only came tonight because he asked me to but now I have to leave because we have a family emergency to deal with.

That takes care of us, now send back this message, word for word.” He watches as his wife takes her phone back and readies to type whatever he says.

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‘Neal told me he thinks she is being abused only moments ago. Do what you must. We will cover your back. Even if that means you have to drive her far away. We’ve got your back and hers. That’s a promise you can take to the bank. Ps. Remember Wilma.’

“What does that mean?” she asks her husband.

“He will understand.” Neal says, “Ok, let’s get in there so we can leave and he can get out before the scum finds her.”

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This is not what she thought married life would be like, not what she saw in her friends’ lives, nothing like this. Bo’s wedding was so hard for her, all those hugs. All that pain from each one of them. She couldn’t ruin their day with her drama, so she sucked in her pain and convinced herself the day would be over in a couple of hours. It wasn’t, there was more pain waiting for her at home. Her husband was more than jealous this time, he was enraged. When he finally finished with her, he went to his office and closed the door, completely passed out. Regina had gone quietly to her room, grabbed only two days’ worth of clothes, shoved them in an old college backpack. She left her phone at home in a drawer, snuck out the back door, walked through the back neighbor’s yard to their front yard. She had purchased a disposable phone three days ago, thinking that if she ever needed to leave she would still have communication with her old friends. She already put in all her important phone numbers and before she left, she deleted all their contacts in her other phone.

She walked and walked and walked. She found herself sitting at a bus stop at 3:00 in the morning. She realized this was not so safe because if he was looking for her, he would see her sitting here. As she was going to get up and leave a police car pulled up next to her and one of the policemen got out.

“Can I take you somewhere safe? The next bus isn’t for another four hours.” He looks at her with sympathy.

“A hotel?” she said softly.

They drive her an hour out of their way and walk her into the hotel where the policeman hands the clerk his own credit card and says to charge a room for three days. He then walks her to her room and once she steps into the room he gives her his card. “If you need help. We know what to do. No one will find you here. You’re checked in under my name. Stay put. Lay low a couple of days. If you are asking anyone to meet you here, please tell the clerk his or her name, a picture would be great too. Or they won’t let them know where you are. It’s understood here. Do you need some cash?” he asks.

“I had been squirreling some away in this backpack. I’ll be good for a day or two here. How did you know?” she asks.

“No one else shows up at bus stops at this hour, especially alone. It’s our job to be observant. You take care Ms. Stay strong, you’re doing the right thing. Are there children we need to worry about?” he asks.

Regina looks down, not yet, but she won’t say that out loud. “Here, take this card too. He is a lawyer that specializes in these cases. Tell him I sent you. And again, stay strong, you *can* do this. You’re safe here, that’s a promise. Please, all I ask is that you don’t go back. You’re worth more than he gives you credit for, I’m sure you are but now you have to start believing that too.” He says.

“Thank you.” She looks down at the card, “Officer Mitch”

The officer leaves and Regina looks down at the card for the lawyer, she can’t call now. That would be crazy. She walks over to the bed and allows herself to sleep, for the first time in months, not having to sleep with one eye open or her ears open to make sure he wasn’t coming for her.



The only thing that saved her last night was his being drunk. He might be strong as a drunk but he is also the kind of drunk where sleep wins out. He loses his stamina when he is drunk and has fallen asleep right next to her in the middle of ‘teaching her a lesson’, as he rationalizes.

But this last one, she knew was coming. She also knew it was going to be the last one. Four days ago, she had been to his office to bring his lunch when a woman showed up and handed the secretary some papers and demanded that she get Regina’s husband out of his office at that moment.

The secretary, knowing better, told her to wait and that he was coming out soon. Regina had already left his lunch with him and she knows, as well as the secretary, that he hates to be interrupted when eating. Regina couldn’t help herself, she had looked at the woman and said, ‘Maybe he will call you when he has a free moment.’

That is when the woman said, “Oh he will have more than a moment for me. Those papers prove his paternity, for both my son and the one inside me. You think I’m not going to get money out of him today? You’re crazy bitch!”

Regina had looked at the secretary, the secretary knows who Regina is, then Regina looked back at the woman and simply said, “Congratulations.” And she walked out, knowing full well that somehow this was going to be her fault.

That night he came home and asked her how come she left so soon after dropping off his lunch, she didn’t want him to know that she knew what was up so she told him she had needed to get to the store quickly so she could come home and make the roast he had asked for the other day.

He seemed to be relieved to hear what she said. However, the roast ended up not being finished on time and then his lawyer called to say her husband was stuck and nothing can be done, paternity is paternity. He had been screaming on the phone and she made herself scarce. She finished up in the kitchen, went to take a shower and clean up the bedroom.

He came in storming and screaming ‘What is wrong with you?! I thought all women wanted a baby!!! Don’t you? We’ve been married almost two years, but nothing from you. Nothing at all!!! Stupid woman, even if you did get pregnant, I’d make you got rid of it. You’re not worthy of being a mother. Especially not to my children. Why do I keep you around?!’

Then he began to beat her until he passed out. He would get tremendous surges of anger and energy but he petered out quickly. Thankfully. But they had Bo and Libby’s wedding to go to and she needed to be presentable. She had gone to so many stores to find the best dress to wear. The one that would cover up most of her. She had told the salesclerk she was in an accident and needed to shine at a friend’s wedding.

Having sympathy for her, the woman ran around until she found the perfect dress. Her husband actually liked the dress and told her she looked wonderful as they walked out the door. But she made the mistake of dancing with Bo and Neal, both of them. She knew better than to dance with Pierce, that would have been the death of her, possibly literally. Her husband had pulled her away from the dance floor and pulled her to a hallway where there were no people, he then slammed the heel of his foot into her foot, “No more dancing.” He said through clenched teeth and did the same thing again for emphasis.

She walked back in holding on to his arm, not out of love but because she could barely walk. She is still having a hard time. He quite possibly broke something but she can’t go to a hospital here. He will find her.

The part that sealed her fate at the wedding though was his own doing. Another woman came up to him at their table and asked him why he was at this wedding with a perfect stranger when he said he was too busy to go with her tonight. Someone Libby knew from work, clearly her husband had more than one liaison. Regina sat there quietly, letting him talk to the woman, pretending not to hear the conversation. But

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she did hear him tell her, what he does in his free time is his to decide and whom he does it with is his to decide as well. He then told her he will see her at his regularly scheduled time and not a minute before. She left in a huff.

The morning after arriving at the hotel, now thinking clearer, she writes a note to Pierce, she can’t leave without telling him. Too many years between them. She has to tell him goodbye in person. He will relay the information to Bo and Libby when they get back, then probably to Neal and Yvette. Regina’s own family lives far away now. Her parents retired and left the area to a warmer climate. But the idea of leaving a husband would never go over well with them. Her two brothers may or may not accept her decision to leave so she can’t go there either. Maybe Pierce will help her figure that part out. He is good like that.

Regina writes a note for Pierce and goes down to the desk clerk after showering again, asking how she can get something delivered in person. The manager made her swear she was not sending the note to the person who caused the damage. She smiled at him appreciatively and told him it was going to her best friend and the person who would most likely help her out of this mess.

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Pierce heads over to the hotel seconds after his sister gets home, but he checks his rearview mirror a few times and takes the long way to get there in case her husband is watching him. Then he finally remembers, that her husband has no idea where his sister lives. He drives the rest of the way in quiet contemplation.

When he gets there, he was told to hand the note to the desk clerk. He does this. The man looks at him cautiously, checks some paper behind the desk and looks at Pierce again. Pierce is not a small person and many people get intimidated by him. He is not particularly tall; however, he happens to be quite muscular.

The same manager walks him to her room and stands in front of him when she opens the door. As soon as he sees relief on her face, he steps to the side and lets him in. Regina closes the door, she looks at Pierce and without saying any words, she lifts her shirt for him to see, and she turns around also. As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words.

She had called the lawyer earlier today and he is taking on her case. He says he will do what he can to make this as painless as possible but she should be prepared to get no alimony from him and certainly no child support. She had told him she wants a divorce, the rest she will figure out on her own. Now that Pierce is here, he will help her do that figuring.

Pierce lowers himself down to his knees on the floor and gently kisses her stomach. When he stands, she drops her shirt and tells him what has happened this week. She also says how she came to this hotel, he is now all caught up.

“I have to meet him in a couple days at our usual place and time otherwise I’d run away with you. But you don’t need that do you? No, you don’t need me around to remind you of him. Gina, you need a fresh start with someone who will cherish the ground you walk on, who worships the air you breathe and you know who I’m talking about. The same one who has loved you for years.” He looks at her thinking of his cousin who has been dying on the inside ever since she got married to the wrong guy. He confessed his love a month before the wedding. According to what he told Pierce, she almost left with him. It would have saved her, Pierce thinks now.

Regina begins to cry. She never let her husband see her cry, she held in her pain. At first there were small things but as things escalated, she refused to let him think he had her completely beat. Of course, leave it to Pierce to know the exact thing for her to do. She did love his cousin, only she was not in love with him as strongly as she was to her husband. Or was she? She begins to remember all that she and Pierce’s

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cousin did together. Always laughter, always sincere. How she screwed up, he had begged her the month before to run away with him. Now she thinks maybe he is the one that got away.

“He won’t want me now.” She rubs her belly.

“Gina, he did what he said he was going to do. He literally bought a ranch and has been working with horses ever since. He makes money by working on his internet businesses as well, one of them he started with you, remember? But he told you as well as me, that if he can’t have his first love, he’ll settle for his second, horses. He is not married, nor does he intend to be. You’re it for him. You know this is true. I’m going to call him.” he takes out his phone and Regina finds she can’t stop him. She sits down on the bed nearby.

“Hey Pierce, I’m so glad you called. I have to tell you the weirdest thing ever. I’m not going to lie and you’re going to think I’m crazier than usual. But I had the worst dream the other day, about Regina. She is in trouble Pierce, I swear to you she is. My dreams don’t lie. Should I come out and visit you? Check up on her? Grab her away like I should have done before? What? Tell me what to do, please, I’ve been dying inside all over again.” his cousin exhales after his ramble.

Pierce had put his phone on speaker, now there is crying. “Gina?” his cousin asks quietly.

“Yes Willard.” She says.

“Oh God, Gina darling. I’ll be on the next plane, say the word.” He says choking back his own tears.

“Willard, I’ll send her to you. She needs to leave with no trace. She has a disposable phone and I’m sending her with one of my credit cards. I love you but you’re stilling digging out your credit problems from being hacked. Let her use mine, you can pay my bills if you want. I’ll send you one with her name on it so she won’t be asked about the name for too long. But until then, order online, she needs clothes, some that will expand with her.” Pierce looks to Gina. His Gina, his longest and dearest friend. His cousin will guard her the rest of her life, he has always told him he would. When he kissed her stomach, he could feel a bump was sticking out a bit.

“I’ll be at the airport Gina, only me. You’ll be safe here I promise you that. I’ll even let you name the new babies that were born yesterday. We have a new baby horse and four puppies. Text me the flight number and time. I’ll be there Pierce, you can count on me.” Willard says, his voice still shaky.

“I know. I’ll send you his picture too so you can show his ugly face around. She can’t be found Willard. *Can’t*, you hear me?” Pierce says looking at Gina who is now shaking her head in agreement. How did her life become this? How did she pass on Willard? What had her husband told her about getting married to him?

“You have my word.” Willard hangs up and let’s himself cry. The girl of his dreams is coming to him finally, a bit broken, but coming. He will spend the rest of his life making her feel loved and special. He will be honest with this child and tell him/her that their father beat their mother and he took her in to love her as she should be. He never wants them to look for their father. Ever.

Pierce looks at Gina, she hasn’t moved. He moves closer to her on the bed to give her support. “You have to go to him. Willard is the best of the best and you know I’m telling you the truth. I wouldn’t send you to anyone else. I’d have gone myself, but I can’t now, you know that too. I will visit. I know where he is. This is not goodbye Gina, only have a nice trip. I’m taking you straight to the airport and putting you on a plane. You want to shower?”

“Pierce, I’m such a simpleton, aren’t I? You can say so.” Regina says.

“We were all fooled, but you are strong, we made sure you were. Me and Bo, we wouldn’t tolerate any wimpy girls. Then Neal came along and he made you take courses in self-defense.” He smiles at her for reassurance.

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Regina takes her bag and goes to take a shower again, she can't wash off these feeling of being worthless but she keeps trying. She is grateful things have only been this bad a few months and that Pierce is right, they made sure the women around them were strong, physically and emotionally. The thought of Willard actually puts a smile on her face.

While she is showering, Pierce does what he said he would never do to anyone, he calls Bo on his honeymoon. "Listen pal, I know this must be urgent so don't wait, give it to me straight." Bo says.

Pierce quickly explains what is going on so Bo and Libby don't come back and get blindsided by the husband, hopefully soon to be ex-husband. "Aw crap. Ok, you're right, Willard is the man who will be the best for her, always thought so. I'm going back to the beach, enjoy your rainy weather." He teases.

Pierce smiles as he gets off the phone. He turns to see Regina standing there looking as if she came straight from an accident.

"Walk over here, I'll brush through those curls for you and we are going to buy you a better outfit for the flight. I pulled in a favor. You're going first class my dear." Pierce smiles.

"Oh Pierce, I can't fly first class. Look at me." She says.

"Gina honey, you aren't flying a commercial plane, he might check logs or try to anyway, but I don't think he is so smart. I'm taking you to the small airstrip in Suffolk County, an old army buddy of my dad's is taking you in his private jet. I always told you I'd do right by you. Gina, you're my girl." He says smiling.

"Pierce...." She begins

"No, there is no payback. Live a complete life with Willard, be happy the rest of your life, that is payback enough. You chose the wrong guy. No harm, no foul. Ok a little harm, but thankfully you're getting out right away. I'm proud of you and you've shown your true strength. You ready?" Pierce puts the hairbrush into her backpack and leads her out the door.

At the front desk he tries to pay and is told the room is taken care of. "Thank you sir, from the bottom of my heart. This here is one of the best ladies in the region. I should know, I grew up with her. Thank you for your service." He takes Regina out to a bright yellow car.

"Thank you for your service?" she asks as they walk out to the car.

"I have a feeling you aren't the first battered woman they've had here. Most likely a group of ex-military guys trained to see what most don't. I rented a car to come here, didn't want him following me." They drive in silence. Regina has a lot to think about and Pierce is contemplating how to say goodbye, he knows he won't be able to talk to her for a while.

At the airstrip a very handsome older man comes towards them. "This my precious cargo?" the man asks.

"Yes sir, and here is a picture of the man who is picking her up. Anyone else says anything you don't let her out of the aircraft." Pierce says.

"Understood. Young lady, please follow me. Your chariot awaits." He smiles and bows to her.

Regina looks at Pierce, she hugs him one last time. "Go in peace." He whispers to the top of her head. Regina can only nod her head. She turns quickly to walk with the older man.

When he gets back to his own place, he calls Yvette. "I'm spent."

"Did she get there yet?" she asks.

"No, not for another hour or so at least. Willard was so broken when I called him. I hope I'm doing the right thing." He sighs.

"Pierce? Neal here. Listen, you did what you had to do. She is a lucky one, smart enough to get out quickly. Strong too. Regina will bounce back. We need to stay strong with her. My brother is coming to babysit for us on your diner usual meeting day. We've met you guys there once or twice before so this

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should not come as a surprise or shock to him if we are there. We're going mostly to make sure you don't end up in jail yourself." Neal says strongly.

"Thank you Neal, really. I mean that." Pierce hangs up the phone. He calls the number that Regina gave him of the officer who brought her to the hotel to tell him she is being taken care of. He asked no questions, only said that he was glad he could help. Next, Pierce sits down and writes out a check to send to that hotel - as a thank you for doing the work they do, maybe his check will be used for another woman one day who needs a free night or two.

Since he went to see Regina earlier than expected, thanks to Neal, he was able to get her out on a plane tonight. He should hear from Willard soon enough. Pierce goes into the bathroom to take a long hot shower, when he comes out, he sees that his phone has a couple of messages. Only one of which is important. *'package delivered. I owe you my life'*

'no, family doesn't owe family. Send my best. We'll be in touch'

'simply seeing him has already healed my heart. Sigh, made many mistakes, time for change'

'we all make mistakes - Neal and Yvette send their love - go, heal, love, live'

Pierce sends the thread to Neal and Yvette, his phone rings shortly afterwards. "Hey" he says quietly.

"Pierce, you did the right thing. Willard is going to cherish her for the rest of her life as he intended to do years ago. Healing will be tough, she may not realize when things will bother her and when not, but she is in the safest place we could find. His place is fortified, I assure you. Even Willard himself shows his ID when he goes in or out. My bigger question is, how are *you*?" Yvette asks. "I remember how hard her wedding was and she was still living here. Now you've sent her away."

"I don't think that I sent her away, I feel I sent her to something. Something greater. But then again, yes, I will miss seeing her weekly. When the storm clears, maybe we will video chat and all drink together. I want her to know we support her still and we don't care about her mistakes." Pierce sighs.

"In time, she will figure that part out. Neal says Willard has three therapists that work on the ranch now because he makes good money when they bring group sessions in. Apparently, his calmer place is better than an office or conference room. The therapists see greater results when their clients are calm he tells me. She may not realize she needs help either, they will help quietly. His love will help too." Yvette is sitting on her couch holding Neal's hand. They stayed up to wait for this information. Now they can both go to sleep. "Get some sleep. We'll see you in two days."

~ ~ ~

Pierce is the first to arrive at their usual restaurant. He asks to be seated and the hostess walks him to their usual booth. Neal and Yvette show up next. She scoots in to sit near her brother and Neal slides in to sit on the other bench. "Now, we wait. How about a pre-dinner drink?" Neal calls the waitress over, "Three wine glasses please, merlot."

"Sure, right away sir." She steps away to get them their glasses.

Five minutes, ten minutes, now fifteen minutes late, Yvette looks at Neal, "Do you think he will show?"

"I don't know." Neal answers.

"He's here, he has been sitting in his car, I saw him pull in. We're going to wait five more minutes, drink our wine and order dinner. As soon as he comes in we will call the waitress over. We've always done things this way. We wait 20 minutes figuring that would be traffic issues. Beyond that we owe each other a call, we established that long ago." Pierce says in a stoic voice. Part of him was hoping he would not show up and part of him is glad Yvette sat down next to Pierce so he can't strangle the guy. Earlier today Willard sent

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him a message that Gina’s foot does indeed have a break. She will be walking with a boot on for a while. Pierce punched a hole in the closet door he was standing next to at the time.

Regina’s husband walks in as the waitress is there taking everyone’s orders. “I’ll have a steak, medium rare no greens, extra potatoes please.” He sits down.

“Anything to drink?” she asks.

“I’ll have one of those.” He points to everyone’s wine glass.

“Been a crazy week at work, Pierce, have you spoken to Regina in the past few days?” her husband asks.

“No, as a matter of fact. I had three presentations to work on myself.” He says.

“You’re a doctor what kind of presentations do you have to do?” he asks annoyed at Pierce as usual.

“I present budget and staffing needs to the board. I also have to make a presentation to the research department to let them know our findings on what my research team is doing. We work together when there is something in the trial phase. What has kept you so busy? New promotion, new responsibilities?” Pierce asks still avoiding the fact that Regina didn’t come in with him.

Yvette is barely breathing, she wants to confront him in the worst way. Pierce feels her tension rise and squeezes her thigh a moment to get her back to the present. “Neal, honey. I’m getting one of my headaches. Do you mind getting a ride home with Pierce?” she can’t be here. It is too hard for her. Especially knowing what Pierce told her earlier about Regina’s foot. How on earth hadn’t Regina screamed when that happened? She is stronger than Yvette, that is for sure, she thinks to herself.

The waitress brings the food and Yvette stands with her plate, “Can we pack this one to go? I’m not feeling well. The men are staying though.” She says.

“Oh, sure maám, right this way.” She follows the waitress to the counter and waits for her food to be packed. She looks over her shoulder at the men before she leaves.

“You’re going to let her simply walk out on you like that? In public no less.” Regina’s husband says.

“She didn’t walk out on anyone, she is not feeling well. She gets migraines, hard to concentrate on much when one of those hits. Besides, I don’t have to *let* her, she is an adult and can take care of herself when necessary. Not much I can do for her except to stay quiet, and not being home helps with that. The babysitter will watch the kids so she can rest.” Neal looks at the man in next to him. He can tell he is scheming something, but what?

The three men begin to eat. Finally, Pierce says, “I guess Regina had too much work today? Or is she sick too?” he asks innocently.

“I have no idea why she isn’t here. I haven’t seen her in three days. But I came tonight hoping she would show up. No wait, I saw her at the wedding, so two days ago?” He says trying to play things down. He received the notice from a lawyer, a top lawyer in town too. That he is to sign divorce papers uncontested. That they have documented proof of his emotional as well as physical abuse, then he was told he could be charged with attempted murder based on the fingerprint bruising around her neck if he did not sign peacefully.

To top it off, the lawyer also showed documented proof that they know of three other children born to him during his marriage to Regina and that infidelity is also a valid reason for divorce. He didn’t sign them when he first received them.

Then the lawyer showed up at his work and presented the same papers to him again, this time in person and told him he was going to stand there until he signed all of them. He also said that if he makes a scene the whole office will know why a lawyer is there with papers. He was backed into a corner. He called a lawyer friend of his while the man stood there and explained quietly what was going on. The man he

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called said sign and move on. That he should be happy she doesn’t want to press charges or take any money from him. It won’t be so easy with the other women he fathered a child with. They will want child support for the next 18 years and they will win.

He signed, reluctantly. But he wants to know where she is. He needs to confront her and put her in her place. No one walks away from him and embarrasses him like that! No one! Especially a lowly woman. He thought for sure she would show up tonight to prove to her friends that she was in charge, but she isn’t here. They know where she is, he is sure and one way or another someone is going to talk tonight.

He begins to slide something out of his pocket and then someone grabs his arm with a vice grip. “Don’t even think about taking that all the way out.” Neal says as he squeezes the arm tighter.

“Let go of me, I can’t eat with only one hand.” He says.

“Drop it on the floor, right now and no one gets hurt.” Neal says under his breath not wanting anyone else in the place to see what he sees.

“Put the damn gun away, you fool. I don’t know where she is and even if I did, there is no way I’d betray her trust and tell you. Clearly, she left because she wanted to. Unless you do know where she is and you’re hiding her from us.” Pierce looks at him glaring into his eyes, daring him to come up with some excuse.

“You don’t scare me Pierce, you either Neal. You wouldn’t hurt anyone, you took a stupid doctor oath. Now let go of my arm.” He looks at Neal very menacingly.

Pierce looks at his phone and sends a quick text. *‘booth six, gun’*

The three men are simply sitting there staring at each other. Daring the next one to move. “You had better let go of my hand Neal, I’ll charge you with harassment and anything else I can think of. Get off of me.” He growls.

“Didn’t think I was smart enough to see that? Are you really that stupid? I’m not the one carrying an unlicensed gun into a public place.” He says.

“How do you know its unlicensed?” he growls back.

“Because no one in their right mind would give you a license. You have a criminal record jackass. We all knew you did and still let Regina marry you, she gave us her everyone deserves a second chance speech. If she left you, good for her, you never deserved her anyway.” Pierce says as he begins to slide out of the booth.

One man, then another slide into the booth. Another stands behind Regina’s husband and bends down to whisper, “A gun in a public place to a non-licensed person can get you jail time all by itself.” He slides his hand down and forcibly takes the gun from his hands. That is when Neal finally lets go.

Officer Mitchell drops the gun into a bag, they pull the man out of the booth. “Say goodbye to steak dinners for a while.” One of them says.

“I’m not done with you Pierce!” he yells.

“Oh, threats now? In front of witnesses yet, yeah, real smart.” One of the policemen says as he pushes him out the door.

Pierce sits back down. The police came and went with very little disturbance to the rest of the crowd. The waitress comes over to the table. “Manager says the dinner is on us.” She says softly.

“No need for that honey, we were kind of expecting him to do something stupid. So much so we even had a police officer’s number with us, he has been waiting for us to contact him, sitting right outside across the street.” Neal says, hoping that Pierce had planned this ahead of time.

“But he is your friend, you are always here with a different woman in fact.” She tries to smile.

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“His wife was smart enough to leave him, he told us tonight. He thought we knew where she was. We don’t, so he had tried to pull out a gun under the table. I don’t think he will be coming back in here any time soon. We’re fine with the bill. I promise.” Pierce says.

“Ok, if you’re sure. I’ll let the manager know what you said.” She walks away shaking her head. Wife? She thinks to herself, he has a wife? He said they were all a group of friends, meeting in a mutual place once a week to keep each other posted on their lives. She had thought it was a beautiful thing. Oh no, oh no, no, no, she was going to tell him. Oh double no. The waitress screams and falls to the floor.

Neal and Pierce had been watching her walk away slowly, they could tell she was deep in thought.

“If he wasn’t already in jail, I’d kill the bastard.” Neal says as the two of them run to her. “Don’t worry, we’re doctors.” He calls to the patrons. “Still, someone call for a medic, I mean the ambulance.” Neal says, he sometimes forgets he is no longer in service when he is in public.

~ ~ ~

Pierce sits down on his couch and stares out of the window. What a crazy week this has been. First, he had the whole Regina thing, then it turns out the waitress is another one of his mistresses, she had been told they were all simply a group of good friends. He is hoping she is not pregnant too but that is really not his to worry about, it is hers.

Bo and Libby came back and have already called to find out what is going on, Libby is not very happy about what happened at the restaurant, neither was Yvette for that matter. But tonight, tonight Pierce is right back to where he had been at the beginning of the week. Wondering. Wondering when it will be his turn to find that person who turns your world upside down in all good ways. The person that will make him never want to date again. His doorbell rings and Pierce walks slowly to see who it is, there is a man in a suit.

Cautiously he opens the door. “Pierce Webster?”

“Yes.” He says.

“I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but it seems your Uncle Clark has died. I am here to give you a copy of his last requests. For better or for worse, you were listed in his Will as the sole beneficiary of his fortune. Sounds weird to say congratulations but I don’t know what else to say. I’m sorry for your loss. Oh, the funeral was two days ago, he wanted to be buried privately with no one around. That was in his Will also. As his attorney, I was there to see everything was done right by him and the clergy of course. No one else. My card is in there, should you need to find me at any time. Again, I’m sorry.” He walks away and Pierce stands there looking down at the envelope.

His uncle was always known as the eccentric one. The one no one wanted to talk to, but Pierce did, all the time. He loved him. The man saw the world from a different perspective but he found his uncle quite entertaining. He wonders if his own father knows of his brother’s death. Before he calls him, his gut tells him to call his own lawyer.

“I’ll be right over, let’s look at this together. You don’t want the whole family hating you for something you knew nothing about.” He hangs up.

“Oh those eccentric ones, they can be quite crafty. I hope there are no clauses about Pierce having to get married right away or have a certain amount of children in order to get said fortune. Ok, I have to stop talking to myself here.” He puts his jacket on and heads over to Pierce’s place.

The knock startles Pierce, “Hey.”

“Did you look at it yet?” the lawyer asks.

“Yep, he wasn’t kidding, he left me a crazy fortune, but you know what? It’s all mine. I gave him \$1000 upon graduating medical school. He asked me for it, said he was going to invest my money for me

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and make sure I'd retire much earlier than he did. That I would have time to enjoy my youth and my life with no worries.

Each page that is in here is mine. He bought stocks, invested in companies, all of this under the radar of my taxes at least it seems that way, but that part doesn't matter, all I'd have to do is sell some of it to pay any back taxes right away. Hell Murray, we can both retire on this." He jokes.

"Murray the man was a financial genius. All those times he talked to me about certain companies he had interest in was to find out if I agreed if they were worthy of investing in. Or when he asked about certain technologies, did I think they would take off or not.

He pumped me for information all the while making me a multi-millionaire. I swear, according to what I read all the money is mine. Nothing is in his name. How can anyone contest that? The only personal item left to me was his pocket watch, the lawyer gave that to me before he left; he had left it in the car and came running back to hand me that but that's not important. I looked up the watch's value, this watch is worth a pretty penny all by itself. I suppose my father might want it, but then I looked on the inscription." Pierce flops down on the couch as his long-time friend and lawyer looks over this Will and all the papers included.

"I think you're right, he didn't leave any of his own money to you. He gave you access to yours. You are right about one other thing we could both retire on this but Pierce you're not my type. Sorry, I prefer blondes." Murray laughs and so does Pierce.

"Murray, we could take that vacation we've always wanted to do. I can give some to Yvette and Neal so they will establish a retirement fund. And Bo and Libby, I can set them up too. And you Murray, I want to set you up too. I know I'm not your type, I thought that at some point in our past I was, but turns out I appreciate the female body too much. But Murray, you are the best thing that ever happened to me in many ways, if I haven't said it enough, I'll say it now. I really do love you man. As deeply as I've loved Bo and Neal all these years.

Let's look at this in the morning and make sense of how much I can liquefy, how much has to stay secured and all of that. If my uncle didn't want his own siblings to get any of this, I am not obligated to share with them. Here's an extra blanket, take the guest room, I'm going to bed." Pierce walks out of the room and Murray stares after him. His heart is not sure how he can handle the pure honesty of what Pierce told him this moment. Pierce is the only straight guy who will hug him and think nothing of it. The only one who will laugh with him at all his jokes. They have been the closest he has ever been to another human. Murray leaves the papers on the table and goes to sleep.

~ ~ ~

In the light of day, the two men pour over the papers again. For every dollar that Pierce put in to an investment his uncle told him about, his uncle put in two. In the end, all of this is very much his uncle's money but all in Pierce's name. At the bottom of the papers, they finally find an envelope addressed to Pierce.

My Dearest Pierce,

You are a man among fools. I watched you your whole life grow into the kind of man I would have wanted to have as a son. But alas, my kind didn't have children in those days. We stayed hidden.

But you knew me, you always knew me and you accepted me as your uncle and nothing less. The others, well they shunned me often, unless they needed money. I gave them some because I had no one else to spend it on. Then you came along and went to medical school. My heart soared at your graduation. I was there, you didn't see me because my brother asked me not to come. He thought we had some weird connection. Ewww, you're my nephew. No offense. Besides, like Murray, I prefer blondes.

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Anyway, here is how it is. Up until my death, any earnings on these investments were in both of our names. But my accountant said since I was the primary person, I paid the taxes. I hope he is right but never you mind, if you have to pay, you’ll have what to pay it with.

I want you to know, when the Will is read, your father is getting nothing. Your aunt is getting a small amount but you are getting my first-born son’s share my dear nephew.

I have a feeling I know what you will do first, take Murray on that vacation you always wanted to do. Take your sister Yvette too and Neal, he is a cutie. Sorry. Bo and Libby can go too. You grew up with some amazing friends. If you can get Regina to go without her husband, take her too. He is an ass and we were all too stupid to not stop that wedding. Sorry again, I should have enforced that. I should have pushed harder to help her to the right man. We all know who that was supposed to be.

Calling me eccentric never bothered me, it was all the other words that did. Thank your father for being the king of the insults. I didn’t want a mockery of my death so I did it like I did so many other parts of my life, by myself, in private. Don’t be sad for me Pierce, be happy. I got the last laugh.

One piece of advice, give your father NOTHING, he never pays a cent back even though he makes huge promises, I have the dated promissory notes to prove this too. I’m sure this will cause a rift between you two so before you announce you have any money. Secure everything even more than I already have.

There is a key among my stuff, to a bank deposit box. In there, you will find my other pocket watches, one for each of my favorite men, you, of course, Neal, Bo and Murray, if Regina finds a new husband, preferably Willard, give him the last one. Or give it to him anyway and tell him I’ve always loved him too. Yeah, he needs to know that, give it to him.

I could spend pages and pages telling you how proud I am of you. But don’t worry. I won’t. Simply know that I am always going to continue to watch you. No pun intended.

Love you always and forever

Uncle Clark

Ps. Let Murray take over all your accounts no matter what my lawyer may say to you. No, I don’t want you using him. I paid him a fortune to keep quiet about this Will. He has had enough of my money, he doesn’t need yours too.

Xoxoxo

Pierce reads the letter a second, then a third time. He finally hands the papers over to Murray and says, “Get a tissue first.” As he wipes his own eyes.

His uncle loved all of his friends, he always told him that. Always. Everything he and Murray said before looking at this letter, he said and more. But now he is gone. He picks up his phone and calls Yvette, “Hey, I know you are at work but can you walk out and call me back please?” he asks.

“I’m out right now, sitting in my car having lunch. I can’t deal with the amount of people who smoke in the cafeteria these days. What’s up?” she asks.

Not knowing what to say he recites what he remembers of the letter to her, each time he mentions the part about his friends he becomes more and more choked up. “Oh my, oh my, my, my. Pierce. I loved that man. I knew he preferred men, but who cares, that only made him special not weird. How did he know about Regina? Don’t answer that, he always knew what we were up to. Tell me what you want to do now, I’ll do whatever you ask. And before you ask, I won’t say a word to our parents. The fact that they were willing to receive money from him but not his love. Makes me want to spit.” She yells into her car.

“Yeah, Murray said the same thing. We’ve had a lot thrown at us in the past couple of weeks. I believe we need a moment or two to process this. Then I think at his one-month memorial, I want us all to meet at the cemetery and give him a proper send off. After that, we will deal with the money stuff. Unless our father approaches me before that, in which case I will do as I was told; and tell him that according to the paperwork I received, he has already received his share.” He says quietly.

“Ok if I tell Neal? I’m not sure I can keep this in. The fact that he thought of him and all.” she says in an equally choked voice.

“Yeah, I’m going to tell Bo and send a message to Willard as well.” He hangs up and looks over at Murray.

“You going to be good with this?” Pierce asks.

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“Good? You ask me if I’m going to be good?! The best man I ever knew is dead, he left me something in his Will, and even if he didn’t, he remembered me enough to include me in the letter and you ask me if I’m going to be ok?!!!” Murray yells.

The two friends sit back down on the couch and allow themselves to mourn properly upon hearing the news of a lost loved one.

~ ~ ~

So far Pierce has not heard from any other family members. In fact, after two weeks he had called his parents to say hello, they mentioned nothing. Either they are waiting for him to say something or they received a letter themselves explaining why they are getting nothing.

Either way, today is the day everyone is meeting at the cemetery. Pierce had called his father’s friend to meet them at the airport this afternoon again, he is going to fly them all out to see Regina and Willard he will distribute the watches then and some envelopes with the women’s names on them that were in the vault as well. They will all be surprised.

He explains the whole thing to the pilot. His father’s friend has enough money to buy and sell whole cities; that is how he talks about himself. So when Pierce made an appointment with him to discuss finances, he knew why. The conversation was pretty simple.

“Pierce, I knew you uncle very well. We were, well, we were lovers for many years. I was married once, she left me for someone she deemed would be more successful than me. Who has the last laugh on that one? Anyway, I met Clark at an investment conference and then boom. 20 years later, here we are. No, I was not at the funeral either, but I would like to go to the memorial.”

“Of course, sir. I had no idea. Neither of you ever mentioned this to me, ever.” Pierce had said.

“I know and yet we loved you all the same. I knew all about you because of him, not because your father and I were in the army together. Had your father known about me, he wouldn’t talk to me either. But all he knew is I had money and he didn’t, so he never hesitated to ask for some.

Listen, I don’t want to become a hater now, but I think I’m done with your father. I will set up an appointment for you to meet with my accountant. I never liked Clark’s. My accountant? She is the smartest thing you’ll ever meet. And cute too, for a woman.

I’ll fly you guys out right after the memorial. Leave your cars at the airstrip parking, my guys will watch the cars for you. You taking the kids too? I need to know which plane to take.” He asks.

“We were going to try to, yes.” Pierce answers “They miss Regina.”

“Great, they will get a kick out of my plane. See you in two days.” He smiles and walks Pierce to the door, then hugs him.

Now, Pierce waits for everyone at the cemetery. He and Murray came together, the others are driving their own cars. Once everyone shows up, Clark’s lover takes one look at the currently unmarked grave and breaks down. Then the rest follow. No one speaks for a long time. Then one of the kids starts to cry and all heads turned towards him. “I have to pee-pee.”

With that, Neal runs to take him back to the main building to do what he has to do. Murray begins talking about the first time he met Clark, then the next person does and the next. They are sitting in a circle around the grave talking about all that made Clark special. An hour goes by and Clark’s lover announces, “We’d best be getting to the airstrip. Ok if I take care of the headstone?” he looks around

“We know you will do the best.” Pierce says. They all get to their cars and then to the airstrip. Once they are about to board this private jet they notice that this time Clark’s lover is not flying the plane.

“I’m too tired today. This was way harder than I thought it would be. You’re in good hands with Benjamin. Go, send my best to Regina.” He says.

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“Oh no you don’t. You don’t get to be like a surrogate uncle all these years to crap out on us now. No way. Get your ass in this plane right now. You know we’re coming back in the morning. You don’t need a change of clothing.” Then Yvette softens her look and walks over to him with her hands open, she pulls him in to a big hug and whispers to him. “Please.”

He looks down at her then at the group standing ready to board the plane, they all nod together. “Ok. Besides, someone has to teach these kids to train you guys to be more fun.” He laughs and everyone boards the plane laughing.

The flight is smooth as silk, the landing equally as smooth. “Damn nice flying there Benjamin.” Murray says on his way out.

“Damn nice passengering there Murray.” He smirks. Murray had been watching him most of the trip. “I’ll see you later on the way back?” Benjamin asks.

“Yes.” Murray smiles then runs to catch up the others. “Pinch me, did any of you get a look at that guy?” he asks.

“We all did but I think you devoured him with your eyes more than once. Nice pick Murray.” The new uncle says with a smile. ‘Hot damn’ Murray says in his own head.

Regina and Willard are waiting for everyone to arrive, she has been pacing all morning. “I should have been there with them. Uncle Clark was a great man.” She says with tears.

“Yeah, too bad my mom didn’t like him. We barely saw him at our house. Pierce’s yeah, but never ours. I believe you may have known him far better than me Regina and I’m actual blood.” Willard admits.

“Oh darling I didn’t know. Really? Oh that poor man, I wished we all paid more attention to him. Gave him something more.” She sighs.

“I think we did, that is what this meeting is all about. I believe so anyway.” Willard gets up to walk around. Regina has been good so far but he sees that some things still bother her. She won’t go down to the stables without him holding on to her. She will sit with him on the couch but not next to him.

The therapist told him all of this is natural but that she is doing better than most. Many won’t even look at men let alone live with one so soon. They told him it may take some time to get used to the idea that this was not her fault.

The honking of the horns has them both running to the front door. Regina opens it wide and the first one she sees is the man they now know as Uncle Clark’s lover. He is a rather large man, but somehow, she does not remember seeing him before, she looks back to Willard. “He is the one who flew the plane for you. He brought you to me. He is a gentle giant, I promise you.”

“Good afternoon Regina, you are looking well. Willard, may I have a word with you to the side here?” He knew Regina didn’t remember him because she was in a state of shock when he picked her up and all the way here. He also knows he is over six feet tall and broad as a barn, that can be intimidating to anyone.

Willard meets him on the side porch. “I’m a scary person for a person not having trauma. I’ll stay on the side I promise, Yvette made me get on the plane. Told me I couldn’t be an uncle all these years and quit now. So, here I am.”

“And very welcomed in my house. She will come around. Took her only a day to get used to some of the ranch hands, pretty large men here too.” Willard says and walks back to the front to see his friends and cousins.

Willard had decided that Regina is not ready for everyone to be in her living room, so he had set up a large campfire by his fire pit and has the food brought out to everyone, buffet style, so each person grabs a plate, fills it up and sits down with parents taking care of kids.



“I’m going to do this before I lose my nerve.” Pierce stands and reads the original letter to everyone. Willard calls over one of the ranch hands to take the kids over to the barn so they don’t watch their parents in this emotional time. Then without any further ado, Pierce passes out the appropriate watches to each person. The women are crying and the men are trying not to.

Then he turns to their new uncle and says, “Biggy, this is for you.” He hands him a box with a key in it.

“Damn, that son of a bitch did it anyway.” Biggy says.

“Did what?” Neal asks.

“He bought me the apartment we were looking at when he was first diagnosed. We had finally decided that after all these years we were going to live together as couples should.” He looks to Regina and Willard.

Willard is holding on to his watch in sheer shock. He looks around the fire pit and sees the same look on all of the men sitting here. Pierce hands out envelopes to each of the women. Each one has a letter of love in it. Short and sweet.

Regina

Last time we spoke I told you what I think you should do. Pierce is instructed to only give this to you if you have done that. I’m so proud of you darling. One day you will wake up and look in the mirror and see the beautiful woman I’ve always seen. Xoxo

Uncle Clark

Ps, enjoy this

Regina sees a small velvet pouch and opens the strings to see what is there. Inside is a diamond necklace with a small charm, a letter R, hanging in rose gold from the center. Willard decides now is a good time to hold her, and she lets him. He looks up to the sky to thank Uncle Clark.

Yvette opens hers next;

Ah my Vettie,

You are the sunshine that never fades. Your eyes always have a glow in them and that is from all the love you have to give the people around you. You will have boys, that I promise, and you will teach all of your children, I think six in the end, they will all be as wonderful as you two are. Together you make magic. I’ll be watching you.

Xoxoxox

Uncle Clark.

Inside they see paperwork that states there is already a college fund established for her four kids, and for two to be named later. She turns to Neal who hugs her tightly.

Dear Libby,

You always used to tell me that you are not family, that Bo is more family than you but you don’t get to decide that, we who love you do. What you brought to Bo’s life is immeasurable. And so is this token of my love.

Xoxo

Uncle Clark

Libby is left speechless. She has not gotten over the gift to Bo yet. She is standing there looking at the necklace in her hands. Rubies of all shades of red surrounded by yellow gold. She is shaking her head no, she doesn’t know how to accept this. Bo takes the letter from her hand and reads it. “I agree, immeasurable. That describes my love for you too.” He whispers.

Pierce watches as everyone is lost in their own thoughts, he decides to walk away and head towards the stables. He looks back, no one has moved. The kids are with the ranch hands having fun petting the new puppies. The adults probably won’t be moving for a while. He finds a bale of hay and sits down and opens his own letter.

Pierce,

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I knew you'd find a way to keep everyone together. I knew you will Watch out for Biggy, I love that man. He has a heart of gold. He will be your new protector, everyone's really, because I am sure they will all love him as much as I did.

I gave him the apartment we were going to buy because I knew I'd never live in it and he simply loved that place, location, size, everything. But really Pierce it is because you have the key to my heart as well as my home. The one you visited all the time. The one I taught you to play card games in. The one I taught you how to cook in and let you crash when you didn't want to deal with your parents. Not that I blamed you. ☺

It is yours and all that is in it. My grounds keeper only has keys to the outside. The lawyer thinks he has keys but he doesn't. I changed the locks the day before I knew I wasn't waking up anymore. He knows this, it was in his letter. I told him he has enough from me, nothing in the house is his. I'm sure he is pissed. If you want, you can give him that hideous piece of art your mom bought me one year.

Trust me though, I took care of him, he shouldn't be wanting. Biggy always hated him. Especially towards the end.

Not your problem. Take good care of yourself Pierce, you're not so old, you can still marry and have a dozen children. Give or take. You'll love them. Open your heart Pierce, let someone in. I know you love your friends a lot and think you have no more love. But this is a different kind of love. I promise you.

Find her, love her, let yourself be loved. My house can hold many people. Use it, fill it up. Move in right away and piss off your dad, plleeeeeeease ☺ And Murray, invite him, he has a special place in my heart - never let him be lonely Pierce. Not like Biggy and me. Help him live an open, lovely life.

You have it all, my heart, and soul, and now my fortune. Oh, and my Biggy, you have him too.

Tell him I love him in another time, he will understand

All my best

Uncle Clark.

Pierce allows himself one more moment to cry over his lost uncle. His first thought is yes, he will move right in. That house has always been his favorite place to be, his whole life. Every day he walked into that house, he felt peace. With a deep breath, he heads back to the group, he sees they have now moved into the house, the lights are all on.

Before he steps inside Biggy speaks to him, “Damn fool wouldn’t let me stay the night, he knew he was going that day. I could kill him. He changed the locks you know. Asked me to call a guy to do it that day. I did. Specialty locks. I’m assuming he gave you the key and the deed and all that is involved in getting that magnificent place.” He pauses. “Hey, no. I’m not looking to move in, don’t worry. I’m going to take our place, from the moment we saw this building we called it our place. I’m going to move in. Maybe Yvette and Neal can take my old place, not as well decorated as Clark’s but the same size. Then you’ll only be two blocks from each other. Yeah. I’m going to do that. Why the long face.” He says standing up.

“I want the house but I’d have moved in with him if he’d ever have asked me to. I would have.” He says.

“He knows that, but he wanted you to be married. His house needs life and love. Lots of it. Come on, we’ve only got another few hours left to be with Regina and Willard. You’re going to be ok. I promise.” Before they step in Pierce tells Biggy what Clark said to him in his letter. “Damn fool.” He snuffles as they walk in.

~ ~ ~

Biggy makes good on his promise, a week after they were back from the ranch, he invited Yvette and the family over to his place for dinner. When they get there, he tells them the house is theirs, hands them keys and papers in their name and then says, “Hey, let’s celebrate with dinner. Ok?” And he walks happily into the kitchen leaving them standing there still getting the kids settled.

Pierce decides he wants to meet Uncle Biggy’s accountant at his new home. His uncle was right about one more thing. Once he moved in, his father has called him three times asking for the real reading of the Will. Saying he is going to challenge the whole thing. Pierce quickly said, “I dare you. Who do you think will win? The lawyer I can afford or the one you can?” and he hung up. Then he called Murray and

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had him take care of matters. Double and triple checking that his father had no claims on anything he received from his uncle, or anything his uncle owned.

The doorbell rings and Pierce answers the door to see one hell of a lady standing in front of him. “Wow, don’t take this the wrong way but you sure don’t look like you sound.” He says. Her voice on the phone is very low, almost man-like.

“I know. I get that a lot. Can we get to the heart of the matter? I’ve looked over all you sent me and there are some tax things we need to take care of right away and other papers.” She says staring at him already aggravated.

“How about we start over.” He reaches out to shake her hand. “I’m Pierce, welcome to the home of happiness and peace. Won’t you join me in my office?” he smiles.

She laughs. “Happiness and peace huh? Are you breeding unicorns in the backyard? If you are that is a whole lot of other paperwork we have to do.” The two of them laugh as he takes her to the front office. She stops and gasps. “Oh my. You weren’t kidding.”

The office was always one of Pierce’s favorite places in the whole home. The wall color, the bookshelves, the large window that lets the sun hit the lighthouse painting in a way that makes you hear the water not only see it.

She walks to a chair and sits down. “How about we do business first, then I’ll give you a tour of the place. If you like this room, wait till you see the others, but I’m holding them hostage until we work. I’m only off today. I have to be on call for the next couple of shifts. So where do we start?” he asks.

“Candida, by the way. Didi for short.” Then she begins talking, and talking They work through all of his assets. Which ones he has to deal with right now, which can wait. They go through almost 50 pages worth of finances he didn’t know he had. Some are about art pieces in the house. They decide together which to sell, which to donate and which to keep.

On to taxes and more. By the time they are finished, Pierce is starving. His stomach grumbles loudly. “Sorry about that, how about we stop for lunch?” he looks over at her.

“Pierce, we worked right through lunch, look at the time.” She says.

“5:00!! How did we do that? Oh Didi, I’m so sorry. You must have a million other people to deal with. I’m so selfish, I needed to get this all done today but probably not. Ugh, I’m sorry. Let me pay you for your overtime please. My first guest and I’ve blown the whole hospitality thing already. Tell me what I owe you.” He begs.

“Pierce, I took one look at these papers and knew I was going to be here all day, no way to get through all of this in one day if I didn’t. But you did promise a tour. Do you cook or do we have to order in?” she asks.

“I cook very well thank you. Uncle Clark taught me how to fend for myself. If you help make the side dishes, I can cook up some quick chicken.” He looks at her.

“That sounds like fun.” And fun they had, the two of them did not stop laughing during the cooking as well as eating time.

Pierce’s phone rings, “Hello?”

“Pierce, Murray here. Listen. I’m dying seriously dying and going to heaven, I hope anyway. Benjamin and I are going out again tonight and I have nothing to wear. Can I come over and grab something of yours? Sometimes your stuff feels new to me.” He takes a breath.

“Sure, come on over.” He says.

“Who’s coming? Biggy? Is he coming to check on me because if he does I’m going to kick his sorry ass. He called me two times yesterday to make sure I was going to do right by you. If he wasn’t so damn sincere I’d really kill him. You know he and your uncle were quite the pair.” She says.

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“Yeah, my uncle was quite the pair all by himself. No, that was my best friend Murray, he is coming over to borrow clothes. Don’t ask.” He says.

“Oh, my goodness, I’m surrounded by good looking men and none of them will look at me. Wonderful!” she says half to herself and annoyed at the world.

Instantly Pierce figures out that she thinks he prefers men as well. “Didi? Would it bother you terribly if I tell you I’ve had the best day with you since I don’t remember when? Can we do this again? Spend the day together I mean. Not go through all those papers.” He looks at her with what he hopes is a genuine smile.

“Really? You’re not one of them?” she asks.

“No, but I do love them. Murray and I go back a long way. The man who flew us out to my cousin has the hots for Murray almost as much as he does for him. Even if I have the same black pants, wearing mine makes Murray feel better. We call this a Murray thing.” He smiles again.

“I didn’t mean to yell at you. But my voice seems to attract the wrong type of people all the time. Then they see me and I become their best friend. I’m not going to lie to you Pierce, I’m not looking for any more guy friends. If you’re serious, then yes. I’d love to spend the day with you but you said you’re going to be on call a lot this week.” She raises her eyebrows at him to make sure he remembers saying that.

“I know my timing sucks but you have a lot to do for my accounts alone and who knows how many other clients you need to deal with this week. The tax part alone will keep you busy and if I’m not seeing a patient you can text me with any questions you have. Even ones about the illegal unicorns in the backyard.” He whispers the last part.

“She knows about the unicorns?” Murray says walking into the kitchen. The three of them laugh. “Murray.” He says lifting his hand to her.

“Didi, accountant for Biggy and now Pierce.” She says glancing back at him.

“Good a second opinion. I’ll be right back.” He runs upstairs to find Pierce’s closet.

“Well, I don’t know what to say.” Didi says.

“You’d best give him your honest opinion, anything less than honest he can smell and will call you on it. I’ve done it, it’s not pretty.” He says.

~ ~ ~

Murray comes back a few minutes later, “So, what do you think?” he asks. Didi smiles and says, “Well, considering Pierce is taller than you, it shows in those pants that they aren’t yours.” She says.

“What? I always wear his pants. Besides my butt looks better in them than his.” He smirks.

“Murray, your clothes are in the bedroom to the right, not the left. I told you that before. You might as well move in, you know you want to.” Pierce smiles at his old friend.

“Pierce? You, I mean I, I mean..I...” Murray stumbles on his own words.

“Need to get ready for your date with Benjamin. Now go.” He shoos him off with a hand gesture. Murray walks away with a full heart. Pierce always told him that the pants he borrowed were made for him afterwards, Murray had no idea that Pierce actually did make them to fit him, he always thought it was in jest. Now he sees what his friend has always done, been honest. His friend, his best friend and long-time pal, loves him, actually loves him. Murray gets dressed smiling for two reasons. One, he has an actual brother and two, he can tell that Didi and Pierce will become a couple sooner than later. He is thrilled. “Thank you Uncle Clark.” He says out loud while touching the wall of ‘his’ room.

Pierce stands there looking at Murray running up the stairs, he smiles. “He really is the best thing that ever happened to me.” He says to no one.

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Didi watches Pierce’s eyes, no one but a brother could be happier for someone about their having a date than he is right now. “Pierce? I guess I should go.” She says and starts to walk away only to be pulled back by a hand on her shoulder. Gently he turns her around, bends down and kisses her on the lips ever so slightly. “I’d like to finish what we started today but I really don’t have any other time this week.”

“Yeah.” She says, her voice raspy from that kiss. By the time they get back to the office, Didi is back in control. She looks through the papers in front of her and says, “Ok, the way I see this, I’ll spend the next few days reviewing things to make sure you owe no back taxes. There may be some slight adjustments we have to make for you on this coming year’s taxes though but we have a few months for that. I mean you did inherit a lot of assets. The house being the least of them. All these other stock accounts are secured, in fact most of them you can’t touch yet for another 5-10 years depending on when he started them up.” Didi begins to gather up all the papers and return them into the folders she brought them in.

“And when do we meet up again?” Pierce asks

“I don’t know if there is much for us to do right now. I’ve shown you all the new stock accounts, we’ve agreed on how you want to handle those, we chose which things to liquify now and what to wait on. I suppose all we do now is watch the stock accounts grow and make sure you don’t lose your shirt on any of them.”

“I don’t know how I can lose. I mean, even if two or three of them tanked, what I already have access to is more than I thought I’d ever have. Plus, I’m still working as a doctor, I mean who gives that up? I love my work. Now I can work with no stress. How many people can actually say that?”

Murray runs into the office, “Ok, how’s this?” he says to them both.

Didi turns to him and says, “You’re going to knock him dead.”

Pierce looks to Murray and says, “When you’re done playing around, I need you to look into the Will one more time. Make sure my dad can’t get to any of this. Take the night off but tomorrow your ass is mine.” He grins.

“Deal, wish me luck!!” he calls to them as he runs out the front door.

Didi has all of the papers gathered and she has put them in her briefcase. Case in hand she stares at Pierce, he is quite a specimen. That kiss was probably only a thank you. No man looking like him is going to be coming after her. “Well, I suppose I’ll call you later in the week. I’ll see myself out.” She walks out of the room, now convinced she is right, he is letting her walk out.

However, as she reaches the front door, so does Pierce. He turns her around and this time his kiss is not so tender as it is passionate. “Till then.” He says looking into her eyes. “Stay beautiful.” He whispers as he opens the door for her.

~ ~ ~

Since she had spent the whole day with Pierce yesterday, she brought all her files home. She showered, ate a small snack and put herself to bed early. Her dreams last night were most definitely good ones, and they kept her asleep. Almost too good, she jumps up in the morning, having slept through her alarm.

Didi quickly showers, forgetting she did so last night until she sees her towel is still wet and gets ready for work. Her phone buzzes with a text message, *‘hope you slept as well as I did. It was a pleasure meeting you Didi. Next time no files, ok?’*

‘ok’ she responds.

Didi finds her heart palpitating strongly. He did like her yesterday then. She goes to her car and heads off to work.

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Pierce has always been a good sleeper, but last night his head was full of Didi, she occupied all of his dreams in one way or another. But in the light of day, he finds he is not tired from all that dreaming, he is actually quite rested. Murray came back to this house last night after his date, they sat up and talked about all that has taken place and what actions need to be taken now.

Murray is moving in at the end of the week. Uncle Clark’s mansion is more than one man needs and Murray grew up in it as much as Pierce did. He is going to take the right side of the house and Pierce is living in the left. If they don’t want to see each other, they won’t have to.

Pierce’s phone rings. “Pierce?”

“Yes, Vettie what’s up? Why are you calling so early? Kids ok?” he asks.

“Um, Aunt Rhoda is outside my house. I don’t know how she learned that I moved into Biggy’s place but she has been out on the porch now for almost an hour. Yelling about how ‘its your fault’ and that I need to give her what is hers.” She says shaken.

“She may know it is Biggy’s place, but not that you’re there. Have the kids left for school yet?” he asks.

“No, but I’ll have to leave in about 15 minutes or so. What do I do? Not walk out the front door? I suppose we can go out the side door to the car but I parked in the front of the house last night.” She takes a breath. “Neal left a long time ago, he had a surgical call.”

“Ah, ok. I’ll be over in five minutes, give me a minute to finish getting dressed.” He says.

“Thanks.” Yvette hangs up now and walks into her kitchen to finish getting the kid’s ready for daycare. She has to work today. They may have been given the large house but they don’t have the income to go with the lifestyle this house projects, so they will both continue to work. With no mortgage to pay however, they do have some money freed up to take care of this house and they will put away some for the taxes they will have to pay each year.

“Morning Biggy, sorry to wake you, we have a situation at Yvette’s place.” Pierce explains about her call.

“Oh, damn. I’ll be there in five minutes. I’m already headed that way anyway. I wanted to talk to you about something this morning, I was hoping you were still home. I’ll meet you there.” Biggy says.

The two men meet outside Biggy’s place, now Yvette’s.

They approach the front door slowly “Rhonda, I don’t live here anymore. You’re disturbing the home owners.” Biggy says as they get close enough.

She turns around to see Biggy with Pierce. She looks from one to the other and back again.

“Morning Aunt Rhonda.” Pierce says flatly.

Realization hits her, the only way he could be here so fast is he is in her brother’s house. “The house should be mine. What do you need something so big, you’re single.” She says with venom in her voice.

“Aunt Rhonda your house is empty of children as well; and to be honest, you couldn’t afford to pay the taxes on your brother’s house, let alone the upkeep. I saw the Will, both you and my father received your money for the past 10 or so years. Always asking for money for one situation or another. There is nothing else coming to you. I’m not as generous as my uncle, I won’t be sharing. But right now, you need to leave here. Screaming as you’ve been will only get a neighbor to call the police.” He says as calmly as he can. Biggy standing there is giving him support to say what he wants.

“Biggy, this is your doing, you ruined my brother. You and your devilish ways. You turned him into a freak!” she screams back at him

“If he was such a freak, why did you ask him for favors and money? Why did you guilt him into giving his money to his sister who somehow felt he owed you that much? Four words Rhonda, say them.

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Four words, my brother was gay. Not eccentric, not schizoid, no he was a financial genius who happened to be gay, nothing else was wrong until the cancer got him and swooped through his body like a demon. You hated the man but loved his money. Not a good combination. Now he is gone, did you even cry over his death? Or the loss of your gravy train? Leave Rhonda. Now.” Biggy’s voice becoming increasingly aggravated as he speaks.

Rhonda begins to walk down the porch steps she stops in front of Pierce, “You know that house is supposed to be mine. I’ll get my money back too.” She says

“No Rhonda, you won’t. He would never have left his house to someone who hates others as much as you do. That house is full of love. Maybe you should have paid more attention to how you loved your children, certainly since they all ran as far away as possible the moment they could, it had to be the environment. Uncle Clark’s home was always welcoming. To everyone. Always.” He steps aside for her to pass.

She stops and turns before getting into her car, “It’s your fault Pierce, you and that tramp Regina, you drove my Willard away. How does that make you feel? You’re a homewrecker!” She screams.

“Proud, to tell you the truth. Very proud, as a matter of fact.” He grins at her and crosses his arms in front of his chest to show how he is unfazed by her words. They watch as she turns her car around and speeds away so fast she actually leaves tire marks.

They knock at the door. “Morning. She is gone.” Pierce says and walks away, holding his head down a bit. Did he really convince Willard to leave his family home? Did he ever say anything to his other cousins? No, Willard is the only one who spoke to Pierce. Rhonda’s other children thought he was not good enough for them. It will be interesting to see if they call him now after she calls them to tell them they were cheated out of their uncle’s money.

This being only a couple blocks away from Yvette and Neal is really nice though. He loves to make this walk back and forth for her. Any time. Biggy catches up to him. “You going to be ok with all this hatred?” he asks.

“Biggy, I always knew Uncle Clark was different, same as I knew Murray is, but it never stopped me from loving either of them. Murray is moving in at the end of the week. The house is too much for only me and he loves it nearly as much as I do. I love Murray too, not in love with him, not attracted to him, but love him like a brother, a close one. I used to sneak over to Uncle Clark on nights I needed to be away from my home. I knew my father hated his brother, I never knew why though.

There has to be something else. When did he learn you were gay?” Pierce asks

“Who? Your father? I’m not sure he knows yet. Rhonda knows because she had seen me over at Clarks when she would come asking for money. Unlike your father, she would come personally and ask. He would call him, berate him for his lifestyle first then tell him how much he owes him simply because Clark didn’t deserve what he had earned. Somehow this made sense to your father.

He thought Clark had this deep dark secret and he held it over him, always, and for any reason he could think of. When I came back from service with your father I took one look at Clark and knew we would be together. I believe he did too. But we didn’t officially meet until the conference a year later. Love at first sight happens to a lot of people, all cultures, all kinds of people.” Biggy says. “It’s a human thing.”

“I met with Didi, oh, um Candida. Talk about a wonder of the world. Wow, she charged up my world from head to toe and that is only with her smile. How am I supposed to keep myself together the next time I see her?” he asks.

“Did you talk about your finances at all?” he asks.

“We spent nearly the whole day doing that, had a bite for dinner, critiqued Murray’s outfit for his date with Benjamin, recapped and called it a day.” He looks at Biggy who is smiling now.

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“You knew?” Pierce asks.

“I thought maybe she would be good for you, yes. But she is also a dozen times better than Clark’s accountant, I promise you that.” Biggy smiles again.

“Is that why you came over today? To talk about her?” Pierce asks.

“No, I came because another of our army buddies called me. He is in touch every so often with your dad and he told me the man is livid and on the warpath. Said he may do anything he can to get you to turn over what he is claiming to be his. These were his exact words he told me.” Biggy tells Pierce, not happy to tell him.

“Biggy? Murray is a guard dog when it comes to me. Nothing is going to happen. He said he already did some extra paperwork to make an ironclad Will even more so. He also filed with the courts that my father would be and should be the first person to look at should anything happen to me physically or otherwise. He is the executor of my own Will, which I had to make the second I received this inheritance.” Pierce steps onto his porch. “Cup of coffee?” he asks.

“Love one.” Biggy follows him into the home.

~ ~ ~

Didi walks into the building where she works, the guard stops her. “Candida?”

“Yes, Good morning Ira, how is your wife? Has she recovered from her back surgery yet?” she asks.

“Oh, yes, thank you for asking. The physical therapist you sent over has been the best. She is already able to take her own shower. But that’s not why I called to you. Something is going on in your office, I’m not sure you want to go there right now.” He says

“What do you mean?” she asks.

“Everyone has to sign in here with me, right?” he looks at her

“Yes, who signed in Ira.” Her voice shaky with nerves.

He turns the sign-in book around for her to see for herself. Didi looks down, Pierce’s dad is at her office. “Did he say why he was coming to our offices? He is not a client as far as I know.”

“He said he needed to straighten some things out, that he knows his son is using someone in that office and that they should know the truth about his financial practices. Word for word,” he looks at her with concern.

“Oh, damn. How would he find that out?” It is at this moment though that she realizes she does not have the paperwork with her. Pierce’s text this morning threw her so off she ran out of her apartment without grabbing her briefcase. Well that is a good thing.

“Should I come with you to your office? I can call someone to the front here.” Ira looks at this young woman, she has been working here a couple of years now, she works hard and all the clients that come in an out to see her always leave smiling. She must be really good at what she does.

“That would be really nice. Thank you.” If Pierce’s dad is anywhere near the size of Pierce he is probably a very intimidating individual. She steps aside to call Biggy while they wait for Ira’s replacement.

“Aw crap. Busy day with those siblings.” He says and explains what already happened at Yvette’s place this morning.

“Wow, well Ira called up a different guard to come to the front desk so he can personally walk me into my office, he is a pretty large specimen himself. Guard is here, I’ll call you later, I wanted to let you know what was going on. Oh, and Biggy, Pierce? Wow.” She hangs up on that note and walks with Ira to her office.

As they walk in he whispers to her, “I’m staying until I am comfortable with the situation.” She looks to him and smiles. Nice to feel protected.

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She walks straight into her office and begins to settle in for the day. Ira stands at the front of her office, he doesn’t move. Didi’s boss walks over, glances at Ira and walks into her office,

“Candida, we have a problem.” He says to her sternly.

“With what sir?” she asks.

“Do you make a habit of working on a fraudulent accounts? We need to settle this matter immediately. I won’t have my people working on things that are questionably legal.” He says.

“I have no idea what you might be referring to sir.” She stares at him daring him to question her integrity.

“I understand you are in charge of the Webster account.” He tells her.

“Webster? I assure you I have no such account here in this office.” She says with conviction. “I have introduced you to all of the clients I have brought in to the office, I haven’t and won’t introduce you to the clients I have on the side. According to my contract I am allowed to have as many clients as I want outside of the office as long as I don’t work on any of them during office hours. In five years, I have never faltered on that and you know that is the truth. Tell me again how the information on this account *happen* to come to you?” she asks.

“Don’t get sassy with me young lady. I know all of your extra accounts. I make it my business to know everyone’s accounts to make sure they aren’t keeping the big ones for themselves and not the company.” He crosses his arms in front of him.

“No, you like to think you know, but you have no idea how many or whom I work with outside of office hours because I’ve never told you any names and if you look in my files here you will only find the accounts I work with during business hours. I don’t keep any other names or files in my file cabinets here. There is no point to that, so try again, how did you find out about this so-called account of mine. Still not saying that I have one with that name, just wanting to know how you think I have it.” She crosses her hands as well.

Her boss, looking flustered by what she has said to him, regains his composure and tells her, “I have Mr. Webster senior in my office right now. Waiting to settle this matter. He says your accounts are fraudulent and misappropriated. That the money is his not his sons and that this matter needs to be taken care of immediately. I’m inclined to agree.” He says with more authority.

“If my son ever did that to me, I’d have him in court so fast he wouldn’t know what end is up.” The boss continues.

“That’s a nice sentiment, I’ll let your son know how much you actually trust him. I’m sure he will take himself and his clients right out of this office.” She stares at him again, “Tell this Mr. Webster that he has to stop collecting on what is not his. The Will is ironclad. His brother left him nothing. Past that, there is nothing I’m legally allowed to say to you.” She turns to her desk and begins to take out today’s files.

“Don’t take that tone with me young lady. If you know anything about this account you are obliged to deal with it and deal with it today! Obviously, the Will is wrong, he has proof. Now go get the papers and bring them to me. I’ll handle this since you can’t.”

“You will do no such thing! There is nothing to *handle* as you say! You will not walk in here and think you can overturn my work to suit your latest fantasy of landing a big account. Is he promising that he will use you from now on? He has nothing. He will get nothing, end of story. Now get out of my office!” She screams that last sentence with all she has in her.

“You had better learn your place here.” He takes a step towards her and Ira is instantly in front of him. “Is there a problem here maám? He asks

“Yes, Ira, this man is threatening me.” She says.

“Sir, I believe now would be a good time for you to exit this office.” He says with authority.

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“She works for me! Don’t you tell me what I can and can’t do in my own office.!”

“If I have to ask you a second time I will call in security to remove you from the building. You don’t own this building, you rent the space. Besides, you shouldn’t be relying on the work of others for your salary. Make your own clients, but right now, walk out of this particular office.” Ira says as he physically pushes Didi’s boss out of her office.

Moments later, Pierce’s father comes rushing in screaming all kinds of obscenities to her. Ira is still there heading him off. Biggy walks in to see this. “Oh, for crying out loud. First your sister now you?!! Get over this, Clark left you nothing. Over the years you pilfered over 100 grand from him. We’re done here, over, he is dead and so is your cashflow. Grow up man!

I see a guard here which only means one thing, you’re running at the mouth again and making threats to people. You’re no longer a soldier, no longer in charge of a group of soldiers who will follow your every word because they have to. No one in civilian life needs to listen to you. Not one person. Ira, have this man escorted out please. Out of the office, out of the building and put his picture on the board as a ‘do not let in’ face.

“Yes sir, my pleasure.” He grabs hold of the man’s arm and gets him out the door rather quickly.

“I’m sorry Didi that he has become like this. My guess is his years of living beyond his own means has ended and he is desperate to try and recover some of what he feels is his right as a brother. What is Pierce’s take?” Biggy asks.

“Same as yours.” Didi is still shaking, more from her boss than from Pierce’s dad. She looks up at Biggy, “I think I need to leave here.” She explains what happened with her boss, the accusations, the words. All of them bad. How can she stay here?

“Ok, but you’re taking me with you. I owe your boss nothing, and now I owe him even less. I’ll set you up in your own office. Where would you like to work?” he asks smiling.

“Biggy, you don’t have to do that. I mean I want you to come on as a client but I’ll find my own place.” No sooner does she finish talking and her boss storms back in.

“You think you’re so cute, don’t you? Bringing in the guard with you? Very nice. But he isn’t here now, no one is, so hand over that account. I need to look through your work!”

“Actually, I’m here and I heard every word you said to her just now. So, now I have a few words of my own to say. I’m out of here.” Biggy looks at her boss, the look of shock on his face that Biggy would be leaving is worth it all.

“Follow me dear.” He says to Didi, “Let’s pack you up. Take my account with you and any other you brought in and are entitled to bring out as per your contract. You sir, need to leave this room immediately or I will call the cops not just the building security.” Biggy stands at attention, he too has a full height that can be intimidating. “Now!” he bellows, her boss finally leaves.

~ ~ ~

Pierce has been working crazy amounts of hours this week. They had two doctors get sick with the flu and four of their nurses, plus he has had to deal with his father and his antics. Finally, he had Murray file for a restraining order to keep him away for a while. He hopes something legal works. If he needs money he can go ask his other children. The children who also shunned their uncle.

Pierce’s other siblings have called him this week too. He flat out said to them he won’t share the money from their dead uncle to people who would never recognize him in life. He realizes he has lost a lot more than he has gained, family wise. Murray keeps assuring him that they can’t get anything. One judge even told him that if Pierce felt the need to pay these people anything they would always come back, best to never start.

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After he gets home tonight, he decides to walk to Yvette instead of going inside his own home. He knocks on the door and hears yelling. A familiar voice. He lets himself in, actually storms over to where he hears them. “Get out!!!!” he bellows to his father. “Get the hell out of here!!! I’m done with you, Yvette is done with you!!! We don’t need you in our lives, don’t want you! You’re getting nothing. Go to your own financial planner and get out of your own debt!!! You hear me? Enough!! What do I have to do to get through to you?!!!!” At this point Pierce’s face is red with anger.

“You’re the same as your sister, you never loved your brother, only his money. He wasn’t good enough to introduce to your friends but he sure as hell was good enough for you to con out of money. You make me sick!!!” he spits on the ground at his father’s feet, “You have one minute to get off the property before I call the authorities.” Pierce’s face is hot with anger, his breathing is erratic. Yvette runs to him and holds him tightly in her arms. She whispers, “Deep breaths, calm down, deep breaths.” She turns to her father, “Why are you still here?” this time with venom in her own voice.

“Aw Crap!!!! Again!!!!? Get out!! Leave them be! How many restraining orders do you need to convince you that you’re not getting anything??! Not one dime more. You stole enough, get out, you make me sick.” Biggy says with disgust in his voice.

He was coming by to tell Pierce what happened the other day because Didi has been too embarrassed to tell him so he said he would. He passed his old house first and heard the yelling from the street.

“You!!! Why are you always around?!! You’re after the same thing!! Don’t judge me. I always saw you with Clark. You must have access to his accounts too. Partners in finance I believe. Share the wealth with an old army buddy.” He retorts.

“Army comrade, yes, we fought at the same time in the same place. Buddy? Never. Your all-or-me attitude was never something I wanted to be a part of. And no, Clark and I weren’t financial partners you ass-wipe, we were partners in life. As strong as any marriage around. Your brother was gay, not sick in the head. Nothing was wrong with him except he was related to you. Now leave, I have no more strength for you or your crap. Just go.” Biggy’s last two sentences were said softly, he is done. He is too tired to always be fighting and if Clark never got sick, the two of them would have been married and living an open life, which you can do now as a gay couple.

Biggy walks over to Pierce and gives him a hug. “I’m sorry.” He whispers to him. Surprisingly this is the two words that make Pierce finally calm down. He hugs Biggy back and shakes his head into him.

“Get off of my son!!! You’re going to corrupt him!!!” Pierce’s father screams.

Pierce, finally finding his voice again, speaks up to his father, “Corrupt me? If anyone is sick in the head in this family it is you and Rhonda. Your brother’s money was good enough for you but his lifestyle wasn’t. I’m tired of repeating myself. I want no part of you in my life and neither does Yvette. Maybe your other offspring will take care of you now. Your brother is not here anymore. I won’t give you a dime and neither will Yvette, even if she had any, which she doesn’t. How many times are we going to go through this? These outbursts are now borderline harassment and I intend to press charges to the fullest extent of the law that I can. If you don’t leave by the time I count to three, I’m calling the police. Again.” Pierce says this in a calm voice, the kind of calm that is so filled with anger you simply can’t speak louder or it will rip you apart.

“1” Yvette hands him the phone.

“2” Pierce begins to dial

“2 and a half” he dials some more. Pierce’s father looks at Biggy and then his son, he still hasn’t moved.

“2 and three quarters.” Pierce is hoping that this game of wills will end and he doesn’t have to call.

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“3” he finishes dialing. “Hello, I’d like to report a break in and add to that charges of harassment and breaking a restraining order.” Pierce gives them the address and watches as his father still is standing there with his arms crossed as a challenge.

When he is done with the call, he takes Yvette’s hands and they walk over to pick up the baby, then they walk over to Biggy and Yvette takes his hand, the three of them walk out to the porch and wait for the police.

With sirens blaring, not one but three police cars show up. They had left his father standing in the living room with his arms crossed in defiance. The officers run to them on the porch and Yvette tells them where the perpetrator is. They sit and wait until they see their own father being dragged out in cuffs behind his back.

One policeman walks over to the three of them, “We’d like to take your statements separately please.” They nod and Yvette walks into the house with this officer. Another one takes Biggy over to the cars and the third one sits with Pierce. Each one giving their input on the whole situation from beginning up to today.

“So, there you have it, the whole sordid mess that I call my life. Probably more than you wanted to hear but without the background the rest doesn’t make much sense. Charge him with as much as you’d like or as little as you’d like but at least keep him a few days, maybe reality will hit him and he won’t be out on the streets harassing me. Maybe his wife will wake up and leave him too, or not, I don’t care one way or the other.” Pierce says.

“I’m glad I recorded this and didn’t write it down. For what it is worth, I knew your uncle Clark very well. We worked on some civic projects together. We were all saddened with his loss. Did you know that he bought the new fire engine for this district? With his own money, he told us all that only one won’t do much in a real fire and bought one, simple as that. I’m sorry for your loss. If you have a lawyer, you should call him around now.” The officer leaves Pierce and heads back to his car.

Pierce walks after him and continues his way back to his house. Yvette comes out in time to see her brother walk away. Biggy comes to her. “I’ll get this one. You ok?” he asks.

“I’ve called Neal, he is not on call now and he is almost done with scheduled appointments if I remember his schedule right today. He says he may leave early for me. I told him to stay. I think I need a minute or two to process this all on my own. I’ll call if I need anyone. I promise I will.” She puts her hand out to hold Biggy’s for a moment, she squeezes his hand then turns to take the baby back into the house.

Pierce sits down on his own front steps, Biggy is there shortly thereafter. “Want to talk or want me to leave?” he asks.

“I don’t know what I want. I wish Uncle Clark would have told me the truth about himself. I would have tried to stop my father from being such an ass. But then again, his hatred seems to run so deep who knows if it would have helped at all and then I wouldn’t have grown up with my uncle like Willard, he barely knew him at all. I’m grateful for having Uncle Clark in my life. I’m happy he had another half and I’m happy to know him as well.” Pierce smiles at Biggy.

“Thanks, that means a lot. Oh no, why is Didi here?” Biggy asks as he sees her pull in to the driveway.

Pierce looks up and sees how she is getting out of the car gently. He looks to Biggy, “She told me by the way. Is that why you were coming over?”

“Yes, she said she was too embarrassed. That’s why I was coming, to ease the pain.”

“Yeah, this pain will never ease, at least not for a long time to come. She called me last night, I think she had a few drinks and was less intimidated but I don’t think she remembers, or she does and is coming to apologize.” Pierce is still staring at her coming towards him.

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Biggy hears his words but is also watching his face, the man is completely smitten with her. He is so happy to see this. This will help Pierce get passed his parents.

“Morning Biggy, you don’t look so good. Pierce.” She nods to him.

“Whatever was left, hit the fan this morning with my dad, we just watched him being hauled away by the police. Maybe you want to go check on Yvette before you come in. She might need some female company.” Pierce says to her looking her straight in the eye.

“After I apologize to you.” She says.

“No need. I’ll be here when you get back and we can talk all day. I called in sick today. No way I can deal with patients today. I can barely deal with myself.” Pierce says.

“Ok, Biggy please stay with him. I’ll go to Yvette. Then maybe we should call Bo and Libby as well.” She says to Biggy, having learned about this close-knit group, she knows this is a case of all hands on deck.

“Yeah, I’ve got this one.”

~ ~ ~

By midday, everyone has converged on Pierce’s home. They are sitting around the living room trying to figure out how to get passed all of this. Biggy has been answering Pierce’s phone all morning so that he didn’t have to deal with the aftermath from his other siblings as well as his mother. All of which have blamed him for the drama they now have to deal with, the embarrassment and legal battle that will follow. With the last call from their youngest brother Biggy gave him the full story, all of the details about his father he probably didn’t really want to hear, at the end of the call he tells him, “I’ll let you explain that to your family. I’m done talking to you all.” Biggy hangs up and walks back into the living room.

What he sees is beautiful, this is what Clark wanted, love in his home. Didi is sitting with Libby and Yvette and they are each leaning into the other on the couch by the window. Pierce, Bo and Neal are doing the same on the other one. “I think we’re done. Your baby brother finally called and I gave him the whole story. By the end of the explanation he was silent. We’ll see how much he relates to everyone.” The knock on the door has everyone still. Biggy walks to answer the door.

Murray is standing at the door looking very serious. He steps in and looks to the right into the house. “Ok, I get it, the lawyer is the last to know, but now I do.”

“You live here, why did you knock on the door?” Pierce asks.

“This is official and I came from my office. If you are serious about the charges I need to file papers. If you say yes, I’m doing this but I was told that apparently Uncle Clark was a big fan of the precinct and they may press all the charges with or without you. What do you want to do?” he asks.

“I want to press them.” Pierce says seriously.

“Me too.” Yvette says. “I never knew the extent of my father’s hatred until this morning. I couldn’t decide if I was angry or sad for him. But Uncle Clark did not deserve to be treated that way. Things like this are biased crimes not simply sibling fights. Go ahead Murray, I’m behind Pierce 100%”

“Me too.” Neal and Bo say together

“Me too” Libby and Didi say as well

Biggy watches on with pride.

~ ~ ~

The whirlwind of activity that follows the arrest of his father has kept Pierce and Yvette very busy fighting off their siblings and their mother. First comes the initial arrest at Yvette’s house, then came the charges that went beyond the items involving his uncle. His constant search for money from his brother is because he had owed many people large amounts of money and is now being brought up on charges of fraud and embezzlement. His wife, claiming she knew nothing of his activities, has also turned out to be a

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liar. Which was easily proven by her husband's emails and text messages to her telling her what to do and to whom to do it with or to

Then there was the day when one of his brothers came to the hospital to accuse Pierce of a variety of things, made such a big scene with all of his screaming and antics that they had to call security and then the police again.

Tonight, Didi is coming over to discuss some of the particulars of his tax situation. He is hoping they can discuss some personal issues as well. Pierce changes his clothes three times to make sure that she sees him at his best. When the doorbell rings he runs downstairs. Murray is already answering the door.

"Ah Didi, you look fabulous as always. Come on in, Benjamin made us all dinner and the smells are as divine as you look." He smiles.

"Well, Murray, that is one heck of a welcoming. I'd love to join you guys for dinner." She smiles as she walks in. Pierce sees her as she walks in. "Evening." He says to her.

"Hey yourself. We've been invited to dinner." She smiles.

"So, I heard. Let's go." Pierce says as he takes her hand and follows Murray into the kitchen.

In the kitchen they see the table set with the finer china and cloth napkins. "Some spread here Benjamin." Pierce says.

"It occurred to me that the people in this house needed a little love. Too much nonsense going on, too much stress. This is my no-stress dinner. Open the bottle of wine in the refrigerator please Pierce and we can get this dinner started." He smiles.

"Happy to." Pierce walks to the refrigerator and opens it, a few balloons come flying out of it. He steps back and looks at them. One of them says 'happy birthday' on it. He totally forgot today is his own birthday.

He turns to see the three of them smiling. "Well. I hope there is cake too." He laughs.

During the meal Benjamin opens his computer and puts it on the counter, shortly thereafter a video call is coming in from Regina and Willard. "Happy Birthday!!!" they scream together.

"Thank you Gina, how are you feeling these days?" Pierce asks smiling. He always smiles with her.

"I'm doing great, sorry to hear you guys have been going through all this fun without us. But I wanted to give you a special birthday present in hopes to cheer you up. Ready?" she asks.

"Sure." Pierce smiles. Seconds later the doorbell rings. Pierce looks around the room and runs to the door. He swings the door open and there she is, smiling at him big and bright. Willard is right behind her smiling as well.

Pierce picks up Regina and walks backwards into the house holding her tightly. When he puts her down he looks at her more closely. "You're starting to show. Oh, my goodness. Murray look at our girl now!" he calls to him.

Murray runs over to hug her as well. He introduces everyone to Benjamin. Then Pierce looks over at Didi and introduces her in person as his girlfriend. Willard is the first to hug Pierce after that. Gina is stuck in place smiling, she couldn't be happier. She sees the look of shock turn into happiness on Didi's face. Good for you Pierce, she thinks to herself.

"We haven't been separated for a birthday in almost 20 years, I didn't want to ruin a perfect record." Regina says to Pierce.

"Best birthday present, ever. We should call Bo and Libby to come over." He says.

"They'll be here for dessert." Benjamin smiles. "Let's finish dinner." Everyone walks into the kitchen and sees he has already set the other two plates on the table. Dinner is full of laughter, wine and jokes.



When Bo and Libby show up, so does Biggy and the cakes and ice cream are served. The house is full of love, the people are finally full of happiness after so much strife recently. Pierce looks around and decides this is what he has been looking for all along. Having Didi in his life is the real bonus.

Everyone leaves about an hour after dessert is served. Including Murray and Benjamin, leaving Didi and Pierce alone for the first time today. “That was the best birthday present ever. Thank you Didi.” He says.

“I didn’t give you anything. I was only told moments before I came.” She says a bit embarrassed.

“Ah, but that is where you are wrong, I introduced you as my girlfriend and you smiled, I’m assuming in approval. It is all I’ve ever wanted. Great friends, a beautiful home and a wonderful woman in my life. I am officially complete.” He says to her.

“Well then, glad to have been of service to you. How about a birthday kiss?” she asks. Pierce smiles and pulls her in.

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