

AND IT'S STILL YOUR FAULT

Sebastian held two cups of coffee in his hands - the first was his own, the second for the man he approached, sat upon a bench in the Festival Gardens of St Paul's Cathedral. George Morland-Heath Snr. glanced up from his copy of the Independent with just enough time to close and fold it, and place it on the leather brief-case between his feet. Seb chuckled - briefcase wanker.

"Something amusing, Sebastian?" asked George as Seb held out his coffee.

"Always, George. Always," said Seb. He sat back for a moment and looked up at St Paul's. "You know, I take for granted that I live in London. People travel the world looking at buildings like that, and we have dozens in the city. And yet, I'm more excited by the prospect of flying to bum-fuck, Arkansas and walking into an arena full of people who probably wouldn't piss on me if I was on fire."

"Then why do you do it?" asked George.

"Because when I'm in that ring, they chant my name, and there's nothing quite like it," said Seb with a smile.

"Except for crippling your father's business empire and handing it cloak and dagger to an enemy of your family," said George.

"Well, yes, except that," said Seb holding up his cup for a cheers. George rolled his eyes and took a sip from his cup, before recoiling.

"This isn't what I ordered," said George.

"Oh I didn't listen to what you ordered and I just asked the the Barrister to give me one of those bullshit drinks City people drink," said Seb. George bristled.

"I'm starting to see why your father is so irked by you," said Seb.

"Maybe its because I keep getting one over on him," said Seb smiling. "You should remember that, George."

"I'll keep it in mind," said Kinsey's former father-in-law. "Is everything in place?"

"The board have been informed of my father's dastardly plans to have them all fired once he's back in control. That was enough to get them to agree to merge with GMH. The process will take around two months to complete - after, you know, red tape and bureaucracy. Your kind of thing," said Seb with a smirk. "So the plan is that I'll speak to my father, I'll tell him what's happening and then you ride in on your black horse and cut off his head."

George turned in his seat to look at Seb, really look at him, as if it was for the first time.

"I've been waiting, since our first meeting, for you to get cold feet. What exactly did your father do to you to deserve such abject disdain?" asked George. Seb merely smiled. "As a man whose family means everything to him, I don't mind admitting, if my son planned something like this against me, I don't think I'd be able to survive it."

"Yes, well, you're not my father, and I'm not your son," said Seb with a smirk. "I'm not sure you're truly much better, but at least you act as though you would be. My father has never hidden his shame and disappointment in me."

"Then perhaps you should be less shameful and disappointing," said George, the jibe stinging.

"Quite," said Seb as he climbed to his feet. "Though, I suspect the reason your son has no will to turn his back on you as I have with mine likely comes from the fact that he's just a tiny, pathetic clone without an original idea in his fucking head."

"Careful what you say about my family..." said George.

"Careful how you talk to me," said Seb. "The only reason you're here, even involved with this, is for Kinsey. So... When this is done, you'll have what you like. Kinsey will maintain her rights to Benjamin, yes?"

"Agreed," said George. "The lengths you'll go to for a girl you barely know."


"I know her better than her husband ever did," said Seb.

"So the rumours say," George added with a smirk. "I'll be at the office at nine thirty sharp. Have your people meet me at the front - I expect to walk in freely."

"Whatever you say Georgey-boy," Seb said. "Displeasure doing business with you."

"Likewise," said George. "Hell has truly frozen over when Everett-Bryce's and the Morland-Heath's find a common ground. A common enemy."

"I wouldn't enjoy that feeling too much - it's fleeting," said Seb, amusement in his eyes as he turned on the spot and promptly walked away.



"I'm still really uncomfortable with this, Seb," said Anabel, ringing her hands. Seb had never seen her look so nervous, but then... This was his father. He knew what kind of an effect that man had on his friends. He reached out and placed a hand on her shoulder.

"I know... But it'll be okay," Seb said, trying his best to give them confidence in his smile.

"There's a lot that needs to go our way, Seb," said Grant. "And if this goes wrong, this could cause some really big problems that you won't be able to make go away."

"The plan is solid," said Seb calmly. "I spoke to George this morning and he's all in - and even if he backs out? It just means we have to hold fire and adjust."

"I just have this feeling..." said Anabel, her eyes not focused on anything in particular. Seb knew what she meant - from the moment he'd woken up there had been a twisting serpent in his gut, doing its best to slither its way out through his mouth, and it was all he could do to keep it down.

"Trust me," Seb lied. Because it was a lie - because they were right. One wrong move and everything would change, everything would be in chaos. And whilst he usually liked that state of play, in this world? Chaos would get him hurt.

Anabel nodded, and something inside Seb broke that she would trust him so completely with no good reason. Grant followed suit.

"My father will be here just after nine - he's never late. George will arrive around 9.30 - as soon as he's here, you text me to let me know, and you send him up, okay?" said Seb. Grant nodded. He turned to Anabel.

"I want you out there, on the desk," said Seb. She moved to argue, but he held her. "I want him off his game - and seeing you out there will do that. Say nothing - do not engage with him other than to send him in, okay?"

Anabel nodded, and fiddled with the locket around her throat.

"An hour, that's all. One hour and it will be over, okay?" Seb said calmly. "Thank you both... For everything."

He held out his hand to Grant who looked down at it, rolled his eyes, and bat it out of the way. He pulled Seb into a hug that felt like it was going to crack his ribs. Seb smiled slapped him on the shoulder.

"Hug me like that again, and I might try and get you drunk Smitty," said Seb, and for the first time since he'd known Grant, he smiled at the nickname that had once been used to jibe at his upbringing - a nod to the days when his father wasn't rich and important. The days before Grantham Delaney-Smyth had been little Greame Smith from Peckham. "You belong here more than I do."

"Shut up, Everett-Bryce," said Grant. "Don't get sentimental on me now,"

"Quite right," said Seb, turning to Anabel. "Can't make any promises to you though,"

"I'd expect no less than fawning and awe," said Anabel as she too hugged Seb tightly, and then she whispered into his ear. "Please be careful."

"Everything is going to be okay," said Seb. And his friends turned to leave the office.

Seb looked out over London - the city he'd hated for so long. It had taken a couple of months to realise that it had never been the city at all, but the man it represented. Not his father, but Sebastian himself shackled to a desk and destined to live a life of boredom.

And yet these past months, he'd had it all. And tiring as it had been he'd understood his father's love for the game of chess that was running a company like this. Sure, it had come because he'd been trying to make sure his father lost everything, but was that any different to what his sire had been doing for all those years. All those meetings and deals.

Seb himself had become accustomed to the cloak and dagger of trying to outthink a skilled opponent. A farcry from the Nando's-loving fuck-boi he'd been when he left for America almost five years ago. So much of him had changed, personally and professionally. And whilst he knew deep down that he'd never quite find the same level of happiness he'd once had before, there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Perhaps not the same, but different wasn't always bad.

The city truly was beautiful from up here.

The door opened, and Seb turned to see his father step inside. The slight smile that hung upon his face unnerved him for some reason - it was... Victorious. And yet, as he looked upon Seb, the expression changed. Hard. Ready for a fight.

"You look good behind that desk," said his father. And despite everything he'd just been thinking, he couldn't help but rebel.

"I look better covered in blood holding up a Championship, but I'll take your compliment in the spirit in which it was intended," said Seb. He held out a hand offering his father a seat across the desk from him.

"Ahh yes, congratulations on your recent victories. You're quite adept at holding onto that which you've collected, aren't you?" said

his father as he unbuttoned his jacket and took a seat. Seb matched the gesture.

"Let's not pretend you care, father - I'm sure mother cued you before you left the house," he said. But he felt his expression soften. "Is she well?"

"Thriving in her charity work and social events - the Spring Ball was a resounding success," said his father. Seb bristled, remembering how Anabel shook, terrified to her core after they left that house. His father seemed to read it upon his face and smiled oilily. "Is Anabel manning your desk for my benefit?"

"She insisted," Seb lied, now regretting the choice. Forcing her to face the monster that sat across from him. It suddenly felt cruel. He'd be happy once this fucking bloodline was dead and gone. His father didn't respond, just looked at him for a while. Finally, the question that was eating at him.

"Why did you ask me to meet you here, Sebastian?" he asked.

"Four and a half months ago, you were removed as Chairman and CEO of Everett-Bryce Holdings - and I have it on good authority, that despite your contrary appearances, you have been looking to build support for a coup." said Seb calmly. "You've been speaking to the board, laying down your threats and your convincers to try and get them to buy into bringing you back and ousting me."

"And why do you care?" asked his father. "You don't want to be here anymore than I want you here, so why do you fight it?"

"Because I don't want you here either - I don't want you to be able to continue with the power you have, because you're dangerous, and you're evil and the less you have the smaller and less significant you become," said Seb.

His father smiled.

"Guilty as charged," he said, silkily. "On all accounts - but I'll admit, you've done a fantastic job of finding me out. You are more resourceful than I give you credit for, son."

"Don't call me that," Seb said, feeling the fury build in him. Fuck, he couldn't wait to see this prick crumble into nothing.

"Fine, I shall stand down my attempts to oust you," his father said, holding up his hands. "But I urge you to reconsider my initial proposal - the two of us working together side by side. My experience and your resourcefulness, we would be an unstoppable team," his father said.

"I don't think so," said Seb. He felt a vibration, and turned over his phone - a message from Grant - 'He's on his way.'.

"Don't say I didn't try, hmm?" his father said. "Is that all?"

"No," said Seb, smugly. "It won't be, you see, I knew what you were planning but I couldn't just hope the board would see it my way. So I had Anabel record your little meeting - the board of directors were more than happy to agree to my plan."

"And what, pray-tell, is your plan, Sebastian?" asked his father.

"My plan to merge Everett-Bryce Holdings with GMH and sign full control over to George... Morland-Heath..." said Seb with a smirk. And he waited for it - the explosion of fury. The bitter anger that his own son would sell him out to a man he'd despised for thirty years. A man who's grudge with their family had started with Seb's own grandfather.

But the explosion never came, his father merely stared at him in the eyes and tilted his head.

"I've been doing this for a long, long time, Sebastian," said his father. "You think you'd be able to make a move like this without my knowledge?"

"What?" asked Seb.

"You think I didn't know about your little honey-trap with Anabel? You think I didn't feed her exactly what I wanted you to know, hmm?" his father asked.

"That... You can't have known..." replied Seb, weakly.

"I have a mole in your farm, Sebastian," said his father with sickening victory. "One. Two. God knows how many have turned their backs on you these past months and fed me everything I needed to know."

"Fuck..." said Seb, with a low hum. "Fuck."

"You too, hmm?" came a second voice. Seb looked up and found George stood in the door, that fucking briefcase in hand. "Though, I'll admit, mine were very much less reliable than yours."

Seb's father climbed to his feet and held out a hand, and George shook it.

"What the fuck?" Seb asked, with wide eyes.

"Once I found out about your plans, there was only one thing I could do. Beat your offer - so I contacted George and offered him a fifty-fifty share in the merger. We'd both manage our own sides of the business, but the growth potential is magnificent." said his father.

"But, why?" Seb asked George.

"Because you wanted to use my family as a term to be negotiated," said George, sneering at Seb. "And now I get everything I've always wanted, and I still get to take my grandson away from that worthless whore."

"Shut your fucking mouth," spat Seb climbing to his feet. But his father cast him a look that said, 'you wouldn't make it out in one piece, stand down.'. He wasn't sure why he didn't throw caution to the wind, he had no idea why he did what his father wordlessly advised.

"She's not worth your wrath, boy," said George, sneering. He assessed Seb, as if weighing up something. "I've known that girl for almost ten years, and do you know what I've learned about her? She's for sale."

"I swear..." Seb began, but George waved him down.

"She never wanted to marry my son. I think she wanted to marry you, but you were still in the midst of frivolous youth. And so George showed her the help she could offer her family if she agreed to marry him. And so she did. And when I told her about the big house and the endless possibilities of the future, she opened her legs and gave me a grandchild." said George.

"What's your fucking point?" Seb snapped, his fingers curled into a fist.

"My point, Sebastian, is that when I told her that I would force George to forgo his custody rights to Benjamin if she got close to you and fed me information about what you were doing and what you were planning? If she could find a way to convince you to make a deal with me so that I could take your father's business? She jumped at the chance." said George, smugly.

And Seb wanted to believe it was a lie, and yet... She had found him, in the middle of London, in the midst of millions of people. And she'd picked up with him as if they'd never lost contact. It had been so easy, and she had forgiven his silence so readily...

"It's not true," Seb said. But his voice was so weak, even his father knew the defeat that sounded within it. And that man, that fucking monster that had once impregnated his mother, chose this exact moment to strike.

"The merger will go ahead as planned, with one tiny amendment," he said calmly. "As per the documents signed between yourself and George yesterday, Sebastian - this will not just be a Merger of Everett-Bryce Holdings and GMH. But a third company will be involved - Veneras International."

Seb's eyes snapped up in fury.

"No," he said flatly. "No fucking way, that's not happening."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said his father mockingly, "Did you not read your own contract before signing it? You see, it's mistakes like that which prove just how out of your depth you are,"

"You can't..." said Seb.

"We can," said George.

"And if you need someone to let your business partner know about our deal then..." his father began. Seb's stomach clenched.

"There's no need - I don't have a business partner anymore," said Seb, trying his best to keep his face calm and measured. Trying not to betray the panic he'd started to feel. "I own it all. 100%... So... You don't have to worry about anyone else."

"I'm sure," said his father, looking at him knowingly.

"You'll be staying on in your capacity as CEO until the merger is complete - once its done, we'll reinstall your father. And you can go back to... bum-fuck Arkansas, was it?" laughed George. His father joined in. "Oh and Sebastian, in case you were wondering, I'll be making sure my son has full custody of Benjamin before the year is out."

Everything swam in front of Seb's eyes - this wasn't how it was supposed to be. Kinsey. Veneras. They were never meant to... They couldn't...

Seb tried to zone out the sound of popping corks and pouring champagne, before he pushed to his feet and stormed towards the doors.

"Oh Sebastian - I think I'll take this office after the merger, so make sure you clear up after yourself, alright? Good lad." said George, lifting up his glass.

Seb shouldered his way through the door and past Anabel before she had a chance to ask him a question.

He couldn't - not right now. He just needed to think, needed time.

He'd thought he'd had all bases covered and now... Things were worse than he'd ever thought they could be.

And it's still your fault...

And try as he might, Sebastian Everett-Bryce couldn't disagree.

THE END