

I was sleeping peacefully after what felt like a very long time. My nights alone in hotel rooms might be good, but nothing beat sleeping next to Scarlett after an intense night of lovemaking.

I reached out, expecting to feel her beside me, but all I found was an empty bed. She must've gotten up early to play with the kids. She'd arrived home a full day after me, so I'd had quite a bit of time alone with the twins.

With that thought in mind, I didn't pay it much attention and went back to doing something I hadn't done much of recently: getting some quality sleep. Sleeping with Scarlett was definitely more relaxing, but any sleep in my own bed was far superior to sleeping in a hotel room. It didn't take long for me to drift back off to dreamland... until I was woken rather harshly.

My comfy duvet was yanked right off me, and the female voice I'd grown to love began speaking as if she were addressing an audience.

"This is how I wake up my fiancé in the morning."

"You are an evil monster," I groaned, turning over and burying my face in the pillow. "What have I done to deserve this? Can't a man get a good night's sleep for one day?"

"Ooh, nice undies." She smacked my ass through my boxer briefs. "Want me to take them off instead?"

"Get off my ass, woman," I called out. "I just want to sleep."

She gasped before walking away. I thought I'd finally driven her off and settled back into my comfortable position. She still hadn't returned my duvet, but I didn't care that much. The room temperature was comfortable enough that I didn't need it right away. It also helped that my mattress was one of the best and most expensive in the world, made from materials I didn't know or care much about. Scarlett had picked it out, and while I thought spending a million dollars on a mattress was a bit excessive, I hadn't said anything.

What was the point of having so much money if I wasn't going to spend it on myself and basic luxuries like this? No hotel bed was more comfortable than mine.

Unfortunately, Scarlett didn't care much about my comfort because, the very next moment, cold water was splashed all over my face.

"What the...?" I shot upright in alarm, only to find Scarlett cackling madly, her phone recording the entire incident as though it were a fun little experiment.

I won't lie. I was mad as fuck. But I also knew I couldn't take my anger out on her. Not after we'd been apart for so long. That didn't mean I wouldn't get my revenge sooner or later.

“The fuck was that for? Can't you let me sleep in for one day?” I asked before adding, “And why are you recording this? Do you want it ending up on the internet as well, thanks to some lowlife hacker?”

She shrugged, her infuriating smirk still plastered across her face. “I wanted you to spend some time with me and the kids. Was that too much to ask?”

I narrowed my eyes and got out of bed, wearing nothing but a pair of designer gray boxer briefs that the team at Crocs had acquired for me. The brand had previously been called ‘Saxx’, but after buying the company, they'd renamed it ‘Troy’. The official launch hadn't happened yet, but the pair I was wearing was already from the latest batch, with my name printed on the waistband.

Usually, I liked to sleep in the nude, but I wanted to test these boxer briefs in every situation, including while sleeping, so I could give an honest review. I wouldn't advertise something I didn't or couldn't personally use.

I stepped toward Scarlett, and she took a matching step back.

“You won't hurt me, will you?” she asked in a mock-terrified voice. “I'll be a good girl. I promise.”

“Your promise can go to hell for all I care,” I said with a grin of my own. “Let me show you how it feels to get soaked first thing in the morning.”

I took off after her just as Scarlett dashed toward the door. She was fast, but I was faster. Within moments, I'd scooped up a struggling Scarlett bridal style and was carrying her to our balcony, which opened onto a pool overlooking the backyard.

“I'm sorry!” she cried. “I didn't mean to soak you.”

“But I do.” With that, I dropped her into the pool, making her yelp.

She'd dropped her phone by the poolside, which I picked up. I turned it around so that a soaking-wet Scarlett was in frame.

“Are you freaking kidding me!” she yelled.

I ignored her and said to the camera, “And that, kids, is called payback. Which is a bitch.”

I ended the recording, set the phone down, and turned back to see my beautiful fiancée in the pool. I didn't even have to think before diving in after her. Within moments, we were making out like a pair of horny teenagers.

Scarlett put her hand inside my underwear and grabbed my junk.

“Was that good enough for you?” she asked after breaking the kiss.

"I didn't ask to fucking drown first thing in the morning. When I said you could pull a prank on me while I was in my underwear and record it, I didn't mean anything that extreme."

She rolled her eyes. "Didn't you want the video to look authentic? When else would you be wearing just your underwear? I made sure to focus on your ass. If you post that video, you're sure to get a lot of views, and people will get curious about your underwear because that's the only thing you're wearing."

Having said her piece, she focused on pleasuring me, and I decided to think about it later. I just closed my eyes and sat on the edge of the pool as she took me in her mouth.

Indirect celebrity marketing wasn't a big thing yet because social media wasn't as mature as it would become a few years later. So I had this idea of starring in an indirect advertisement for my underwear line instead of shooting a regular TV commercial. Mostly because I found those commercials to be very cheap, especially for someone in my position.

Scarlett might've recorded the video, but I'd still have to see whether it was usable or not. That could wait, though, because right then, I was about to have some good poolside breakfast sex.

(Break)

"Dada!" Ace and Ian said in unison as they saw me walk into the nursery.

Mum and Dad, who were playing with the duo, got to their feet when they saw me.

I still found it hard to believe sometimes that the twins were calling me Dada when they hadn't yet called Scarlett Mama.

"How are my cute little babies?" I asked as I picked them both up at the same time. "Dada missed you guys a lot."

"You saw them just last night," Scarlett grumbled as she walked in behind me. "Hand them over here so I can get them to call me Mama too. It's so unfair."

I gave her a sympathetic smile. "I may have cheated a bit. I used to call their nanny whenever I had time and talk to them on Skype. They just got used to seeing me every day. That's why they call me Dada."

"Ugh," Scarlett groaned. "I knew something was off. I was starting to feel like such a terrible mother because my kids don't recognize me."

"They recognize you," I assured her. "Any day now, they'll call you Mama too."

"Gla-ma!" Ian said with a cute little grin, pointing at Mum.

All four of us adults went deathly silent.

Mum had already told me that Ian had started calling her 'Gla-ma', but I'd chosen not to tell Scar to spare her feelings. So, of course, he had to pick that exact moment to say it.

"Oh my God!" I exclaimed as I handed Ace to Scarlett first. "Is that the first time he's called you that, Mum? He's so intelligent. Both our kids are. Don't you think that, Scar?"

"Of course they are," she said, bitterness creeping into her voice even after I'd handed her both of them.

I knew that, for everyone's emotional well-being, it was better if I left the twins alone with Scarlett for a few hours, or maybe even the whole day.

"Mum, Dad," I said, "I have a few business things to discuss with you. Would you mind coming with me while Scarlett spends some time with the kids?"

Then I turned to her. "You don't mind that, babe, do you?"

She seemed to realize what I was trying to do, but thankfully, she didn't call me out. She just gave me a grateful nod as I led Mum and Dad out of the nursery.

"She doesn't seem very happy to be back with the kids," Mum noted once we were out of earshot.

"Give her a break, Kathy," Dad piped in. "She has a hectic schedule, and then she comes home only to hear her kids call everyone by their relationship except hers. It'd drive anyone a little crazy."

Mum pursed her lips thoughtfully before nodding. "You're right. I never got to experience that as a mother. When Troy came along, he was already old enough to speak." She turned to me and gently cupped my cheek. "Thank you for letting me enjoy this part of life too, especially at this age."

I smiled back at her. "If you really want to enjoy this part again, you can always adopt a baby and give me some siblings."

The only reason they hadn't adopted more kids was that money had been an issue at first. By the time it stopped being one, I'd become far too high-profile for another child to have a normal childhood beside me without feeling jealous or neglected. Evan didn't count because he understood the circumstances of his adoption well enough.

Mum and Dad exchanged a look at the suggestion before shaking their heads in unison.

"We don't want any more kids of our own," Mum replied for both of them. "As much as I like taking care of my grandchildren, I just want to spoil them rotten. You can handle the heavy parenting."

"Okay," I agreed easily. "So, can we move on to business now?"

Dad blinked in confusion. "You actually wanted to talk business? I thought it was just an excuse to get out of there."

"A bit of both," I confessed. "But yeah, mostly to get out of there. Scarlett needs some alone time with the kids."

Mum chuckled. "That she does. Alright, anything specific you need to talk about?"

"Nah. Let's just talk about how things are going with TV and movies. Nothing specific."

Dad seemed to remember something important. "By the way, when the fuck were you gonna tell me you were doing that in [Game of Thrones]?"

I resisted the urge to laugh and put on a completely innocent expression. "Do what? Commit cruelty against women? That was the character, Dad. I couldn't help it."

"Not that." He shook his head. "The full monty. You didn't so much as give me a warning about it. And neither did your mother." Here, he shot Mum a dirty look, while she barely resisted the urge to laugh herself.

We shared a glance, and that was too much for us. We both burst out laughing at Dad's expense. It had been Mum's idea to keep my nudity a secret from Dad until after the premiere. From what Mum had told me, he'd been beyond embarrassed.

"Ha, ha, ha," Dad mimicked. "Go on. Laugh at poor Steve's expense."

Mum leaned over and hugged Dad. "That was exactly why we didn't tell you. We know how uptight you are about nudity, especially when it concerns Troy, so we decided not to tell you until much later. That way, we wouldn't have to listen to you trying to change our minds for months."

Dad muttered something unintelligible under his breath before turning to me. "Fine. Can you at least give me a heads-up the next time you plan to do something like that? I really don't want to be surprised by a film or show like that."

I thought about it for a few seconds before saying, "Well, if you really want to know, I'm in talks to do this film with Channing Tatum and Matthew McConaughey where my character would be a male stripper."

That was news to both Mum and Dad, and they both blinked in surprise.

Mum finally broke the silence. "Really? And you absolutely have to do it?"

“Of course I don't absolutely have to do anything anymore,” I said dramatically. “I just want to. The idea is good, and it's a challenging role that I want to try. The script needed a lot of changes before I'd agree to do it, and they agreed to revise it.”

Dad wore a devious grin this time as he asked Mum, “Why do you suddenly have a problem with him playing a stripper?”

“Because I love male stripper movies,” Mum said without missing a beat. “I just don't want to watch my son doing that. Now, Channing Tatum, that's a guy I can watch do it. Remember our fifth anniversary? When we hired those two strippers...”

“Eww.” I put my fingers in my ears. “I don't want to hear that.”

Dad pointed at me dramatically. “That was my exact reaction when I saw you walking out of that bathtub in the [Game of Thrones] pilot. I know you're an adult who has sex. I just don't want to know about it or see it.”

“Alright,” I said firmly. “I promise I'll give you both fair warning whenever I do a film that requires nudity or sex scenes. But please don't ask me not to do it. It's my job, and I'll do what's necessary for it.”

“Deal.” Dad nodded and offered me a handshake to seal it, which I accepted.

“Now,” Mum said after a moment, “let's talk business.”

Why did I have a feeling today's business discussion was going to be very dry and boring?

(Break)

My intuition was bang on when it came to business. My parents were handling everything perfectly, and they didn't need any more of my input to do better. Since Benji and Tobias had already filled me in on most of the films' performances, that mostly left the operational side, which was, of course, boring.

The only interesting part was the performance of the two Marvel movies released that summer: [Captain America] and [Thor].

[Captain America] did modest business, earning \$370 million on a budget of \$150 million, which wasn't enough to break even. It would eventually become profitable through home distribution, but that was a matter for the future.

[Thor] was the real surprise. Made on a similar budget of \$150 million, the film earned a staggering \$554 million, very close to what [Iron Man] had earned a few years earlier. Not only

did it break even, but it also turned out to be highly profitable, and given how directly it tied into [The Avengers] with Loki as the main villain, it was a very fortunate outcome for us.

Ryan Gosling played the hell out of Thor and made him effortlessly funny and likable. He really deserved the bonus I'd recommended Dad give him.

I hummed a tune to myself as I walked back to the nursery, where Scarlett had settled the twins back into their cribs. Seeing the contented look on her face as she watched our kids, I knew in that moment that I wanted this relationship to last a lifetime.

I walked over and wrapped my arms around her waist. "Hey," I whispered.

"Hey," she whispered back. "Done with business?"

"Yup," I said before leaning down to capture her lips in a kiss.

She kissed me back tenderly before pulling away. "What was that for?"

"You've inspired me to write a song for you," I said without missing a beat. "Come on. Let them sleep. I want to sing it for you."

She gave the nanny a pointed look, and the woman quickly took over as I led Scarlett to our room and started playing the song.

To say she was touched after hearing it would be an understatement.