

Million Dollar Heartache is an uplifting tragic romance. The love triangle between Oceana, Maxwell and Gregory is one of the most unconventional, emotionally charged and heart wrenching stories you'll never want to end.

Million Dollar Heartache

By T. Renee

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MILLION DOLLAR HEARTACHE

T. RENEE



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INTRODUCTION

Thursday morning, just two days until Christmas and New York City was all aglow. There were lights, ornaments, and icicles everywhere. Decorations hung from mailboxes, public and private buildings, and nearly every street pole on every block around the city. Of all the things New York did well, they did Christmas best of all.

The brisk December air was much more inviting outside than the cold dark stillness that lay inside the apartment that had once belonged to the Wade family. In the pre-war apartment building on the two-hundred block of West 74th Street, Oceana Veritas Wade stood near the window that offered the best view of the city in the apartment that she'd grown up in, an apartment that now belonged to the bank.

The nearly bare apartment where she spent her entire adolescent life would soon be occupied by a complete stranger and she couldn't have cared less. After her father died when she was twelve, the apartment felt less like a home and more like a cage and Oceana felt a lot like a bird with clipped wings desperate to take flight. But with her mother as her jury and jailer, compassionate release was out of the question; kindness and compassion exited the apartment immediately upon her father's death. It had been twenty years since her father passed but she mourned him as if it were

yesterday, her heart hurt for him in a way it couldn't for her mother who had died just nine days earlier. But when it came to Oceana's mother, sorrow was just a fleeting thought.

Oceana's mother, Maritza Giselle Wade was a woman of low and loose morals with little to no compassion for anyone aside from herself and that included her own daughter. Maritza earned her millions by way of deceit and treachery which was the same way her own mother had earned hers. They both lied, stole, and even feigned injury to hustle people out of their money; all deplorable actions but they were nothing compared to their coup de gras which was that each woman had married a wealthy man late in his life, bore him one child and inherited his entire fortune and then squandered it solely on themselves.

Oceana's father was a pretty wealthy man. He had earned his millions in architecture. He traveled the globe for years designing grand structures and exquisite statues. It wasn't until the latter part of his life that he began to yearn for some stability and a family. Maritza was a beautiful, seductive woman with a keen sense of timing and she swooped right in and sold herself as the very thing Lloyd Wade was looking for...and he bought her.

Neither Maritza or her mother had children because of some innate female yearning. Both women hated children, which is why they both only had one, and they

only had that one child because it was a good business move. When it came to their finances the two women left nothing to chance. When a signature was illegible or lacking, the bond of blood could never be denied.

Lloyd Wade loved Oceana from the moment she took her first breath, she was the greatest love of his life. While Maritza shopped, traveled and partied, Lloyd stayed at home and doted on Oceana until his very last breath, it would have broken the man's heart to know that his darling daughter had been left to financial ruin by the pretender of a wife he'd left his fortune to. It had taken Maritza no time at all to squander away everything it took Lloyd a lifetime to earn, and not only did she spend everything he had saved but she also spent a great deal of what he never had.

Since Lloyds death, Maritza had blown through all of the sixty-three million he'd left behind for her and Oceana to live on. In addition to spending all of his money, she also stopped paying the taxes on the apartment he'd been so very fond of and had invested a great deal of time and money to restore.

Now deceased, Maritza had managed to leave behind thirteen million dollars of debt to the daughter she almost loved. The apartment had been seized by the state. The artwork it had taken Oceana's father a lifetime to collect was stripped from the walls and put up for auction along with anything and everything that would fetch a decent price.

It was barely ten o'clock that Thursday morning when Oceana left her post in front of the window and slowly walked past the few scattered boxes that lay on floor of what used to be her living room. It had been over a decade since she'd last stepped foot in that apartment. Her fondest childhood memories were the ones of her and her father at home alone in the apartment listening to music, watching the ballet on television, him reading to her, her singing to him; moments in time filled with love, all his life's work that once filled each room was now gone. A decade's worth of memories, a lifetime worth of hard work was boxed up and emptied out in less than a week.

A guitar chord pierced though the silence and commanded Oceana's attention. She quickly pulled her cellphone from her pocket and silenced the blues melody, after a brief moment of indecision about wanting to speak with the heartless soul sucking *SOB* who had so quickly taken the only evidence she had that someone had loved her, she glanced down at the phone in disgust and decided to take the call and get it over with.

"Hello?"

"Hello. Oceana?"

"Yes, this is she."

"Hi, this is—"

Annoyed by the caller before he had even begun to speak, Oceana decided to help him get to the point. “Yes, yes I know who it is. Matt Cartridge from Bowman Law, yes, I know. So, you’ve taken all my father’s stuff to pay my mother’s debt and now you’re calling to tell me what? There’s more? She still owes more?”

Matt cleared his throat and exhaled loudly. “No. No, there’s no more. Your father had a great deal of fine things, a lot of them with pretty high pre-appraised value, more than enough to pay off your mother’s debt. I was calling because there’s a small amount left over that I thought you’d like to have before the holiday. I’m really sorry things turned out the way that they did. From what I’ve heard, you and your father were really close. Must be tough on you to see all his things gone.”

A sigh of relief that came from deep inside Oceana echoed in the phone. After twenty years no one had truly expressed any real condolence towards her for the loss of her father. It wasn’t the money that relieved her, it was the remorse, it was Matt’s empathy an actual acknowledgement of her pain.

“Yeah, we were close. It was hard to watch his—never mind. What’s done is done. But thank you for respecting his things the way you did and not just tossing them around. That meant a lot to me and I just wanted you to know I appreciate it.”

“No problem at all Ms. Wade. Well, I’ll be in the office today until about noon, I’ve got a cashier’s check here for you twenty-three thousand dollars, it’s yours whenever you’re ready to come get it.”

“I’m ready. God, I’m beyond ready to get out of this place. I’ll see you soon Mr. Cartridge.”

PART ONE

SERENDIPITY

CHAPTER ONE

“Oceana.”

Gregory Edwards continued to scroll through an online file he’d been reading as he waited for Oceana’s response. After five minutes of waiting and still no reply he shoved the keyboard in front of him and mashed the intercom button on his phone again.

“Oceana!”

“Yes, Mr. Edwards?”

“Come see me in my office.”

“Be right there, Sir.”

Greg leaned back in his high-back leather chair and exhaled in frustration and waited for Oceana to come and speak with him.

Two minutes after she’d been summoned, Oceana entered Greg’s office carrying a legal pad and pen ready to take instruction.

Greg shook his head and gave a quick huff. He wholeheartedly disapproved of having Oceana as his assistant but he’d run off nine temps before her in less than five months and the agency the firm worked with let him know Oceana would be the last they sent for him, so he

tolerated her out of pure necessity. She annoyed him but she wasn't incompetent.

Oceana looked at Greg and smiled before taking her seat. She was very well aware of his dislike for her but she didn't much care because she didn't like him either. She disliked lawyers in general, she hadn't met any honest ones in the course of her lifetime but the fact that Greg disliked her without any *good* reason made her dislike him even more. He always had something negative to say to her; *her penmanship was too swirly, her clothes were too shabby, she cared too much, was way too emotional about his clients*, it was always something. Working for an attorney's office was far from her idea of a dream job but it was a job that paid well so she tolerated him.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes, Oceana, clearly. I told you to put together an expense report for the month every month and I don't see this month's report. Where is it?"

"You mean for October?"

"Yes. October."

"But it's not the end of the month yet."

"That's not what I asked you."

“But I do the monthly report at the end of the month every month and it’s only the 26th, so I haven’t done October’s yet.”

“I need the report now.”

Oceana took a breath and smiled as she got up from her seat. “I’ll start working on it as soon as I get back from lunch.”

Baffled by her reply Greg jerked forward in his chair and swiftly shook his head. “Are you hearing impaired? I said, *now*.”

Once she was halfway out the door again, Oceana took another long breath. She stood silently for a moment with her eyes closed and her hand on the doorknob, and then she turned and looked at Greg and smiled. “I heard you Mr. Edwards however, I have plans for lunch that I can’t break but I promise I will get the expense report done as soon as I come back. If it’s something you need done right this second, I’d be more than happy to bring you my files and you can start putting the report together yourself.”

Disgusted by the assumption that he would be willing to do *her* work Greg leaned forward over his desk and opened his arms wide and flipped his palms up in aggravation. “Your files? You want to bring me your files to do *your* job? You’re kidding, right? You do

understand how this works, right? I'm *your* boss, I pay you. You report to me. You do what *I* say."

"I'm very well aware of my position Mr. Edwards. Yes, I know how this works. I also know that your expectation for me to have a month end report done *before* the end of the month *without* having been asked to do it before hand is unreasonable. I also know that as far as temps go, there's none in the building that I can go and ask a favor of for *you* which just leaves me... me and you. And *I* have plans for my lunch hour which just leaves *you*. Also, I know I report to you which is why I came to you a month ago and asked you if it would be okay if I pushed my lunch back to one o'clock for today to which you said, *fine* and to *put it on the calendar* which I did... a month ago. I'm not an unintelligent person Mr. Edwards, I know you're my boss and I know I report to you and I know my job is to do what you ask me to do— within reason, I don't see this request as reasonable."

Greg sat dumbstruck, with his mouth hanging open and glared as he watched Oceana slip out the door and close it behind her. He wanted to storm after her and fire her, he wanted to give the self-righteous little hippie a piece of his mind but he didn't, instead he threw his pen across his desk and huffed and puffed until he calmed himself down. The family friendly, employee friendly firm where he worked did not tolerate public berating. Greg disliked his firm almost as much as he disliked Oceana but it was the one reputable firm that was

willing to take a chance on a guy like him; an arrogant, good looking guy from the wrong side of the tracks of Chicago. The managing partners of the firm disliked Greg as much as he disliked them but their largest account was his closest friend in life so when he applied for a position with their office, they begrudgingly gave it to him, and in so the dance of disdain between him and them ensued. Greg had the least desirable office in the building which was three stories high and ascended in level of importance and expertise.

Despite his having not lost a case since he started over five years ago, Greg's office was on the ground floor at the end of the hall not too far away from the public restrooms. The partners all treated him like shit it was only fitting that he should have to walk down the hallway and smell it too. Despite his office location and the smell that you had to sometimes walk through to get to him, Greg was in high demand, the most requested attorney in the firm despite the lack of referrals from his colleagues, and in spite of how he was treated, he never let it bother him too much. Instead of getting mad and stewing over any situation, he decided he'd just be better than everyone else there. He might have to smell shit everyday but they were the ones always appearing to be in need of an Alka-Seltzer sandwich each time he shook the hand of a new client and smiled and winked in their direction. Today, he decided to give Ocean a small dose of *screw you*.

Greg smiled to himself as he reached for the intercom button on his phone. "Oceana?"

"Yes, Mr. Edwards?"

"Oh, good you're still here." Greg knew Oceana needed to be his assistant as much as he needed to have an assistant, she was always filling in on weekends for other temps trying to make a little extra cash and while secretarial work was something Greg despised doing, he decided today it wasn't all that bad especially not if doing it helped him prove a point. "I'm waiting on your files so I can get started on the expense report, and Oceana..."

"Yes, Mr. Edwards?"

"After you're done with lunch you can head home for the day, I won't be needing you for anything else. Please clock out when you leave."

CHAPTER TWO

Since she relocated to Seattle nine months ago Oceana had yet to completely unpack the few boxes she'd brought with her from New York. Her quaint one bedroom was a shoebox compared to the breathtaking Upper West Side apartment she'd grown up in, but she liked it where she was now much better.

While she hadn't completely unpacked, she had completely settled in to her new place, her new life and her new-found happiness; but there was still one lurking item that encroached on her new-found sense of happy, and that Saturday morning that nuisance decided to wake her up at eight o'clock.

"Hello?"

"Good Morning Ms. Wade, this is Fritz with Sampson's Crematorium, I hope I'm not disturbing you?"

"Oh no Fritz, I was just sleeping is all but I'm up *now* at eight o'clock in the morning on a Saturday." Oceana sighed and curled up on her side and shut her eyes. There was a momentary silence on the line but Ocean knew he hadn't hung up... he never hung up.

"Ms. Wade, I was calling again to discuss the matter of your mother."

Oceana chuckled and sighed. “Well, she’s still dead isn’t she, Fritz?”

“Ma’am?”

Oceana rolled over onto her back and sighed again. “Don’t be so serious Fritz, it’s not like she can hear me, and even if she could there’s not much she could do about it.”

“Ms. Wade, can you please be serious for just a moment?”

Ocean sat up in her bed and fluffed the comforter around her. “Okay you want me to be serious—well, I *seriously* don’t care what you do with my mother’s ashes—toss ’em, dump ’em off a cliff, I really don’t care. Just stop calling me about them.”

Ocean quickly hung up after the last word had fallen from her mouth, intentionally preventing the frustrated but well-meaning crematorium owner from trying to rebuke anything she had said. After sliding her cell phone back on the night stand, she fell back down on the bed and groaned in frustration. “Even in death you still find a way to torment me.”

After shouting at the ceiling and petulantly kicking her feet under the comforter Ocean pulled her blankets over her head and went back to sleep.

“Okay lady, I’ve had enough of you skulking around Seattle all by your lonesome. Tonight, we’re going out for drinks and I’m gonna find you a man.”

Jentri smiled across the table at Oceana and then smugly took a sip of her lemonade. Jentri was a Seattle native, eternal optimist and Oceana’s best and only true friend she’d made since she moved... her only true friend ever in her life if she was truly being honest with herself. “Why is it that you think the whole of my future happiness hinges on me finding a man?”

Jentri chuckled and shook her head. “‘Cause it does.”

Knowing Jentri meant well Oceana gave her a teasing grin as she rolled her eyes at her. A romantic relationship was the farthest thing from her mind, she was comfortable being alone and more importantly she was used to being alone. In New York she’d grown accustomed to solitude, she was *Oceana Veritas Wade*, daughter of Maritza Giselle Wade, infamous seductress, femme fatale extraordinaire, money hungry succubus; and Oceana had lived her adolescent life feeling apologetic for her mother’s sins. But here in Seattle she was just Ocean.

When she left New York, Ocean left her old self behind, she traded her former life of privilege and the self-loathing that came with it for calm, quiet, and

carefree. Before she left the East Coast, all of her father's things had been boxed up and auctioned off to pay her mother's debts, and right as she was getting ready to bid the city adieu, she visited the law firm that had been handling the seizure so that she could pick up an unexpected but very welcomed settlement check, the very last of her father's estate. When she arrived at the law firm, she was none too pleased to find that in addition to the check, the overly presumptuous junior attorney had something else to give her. As soon as she entered his office, she was greeted by the attorney Mr. Cartridge, who in his right hand held her check, and in his left, his hard on.

She was used to men making assumptions about her virtue or lack there-of based on her mother's reputation, and in the past, she'd even been propositioned by some of her mother's old *benefactors* which really wasn't all that surprising, Maritza was beautiful but her beauty paled in comparison to Ocean's. Ocean's beauty rivaled that of a Greek Goddess, she had long, wavy, dark brown hair, big brown chestnut eyes and a smile that had this regal quality to it. And to top it all off, she had a body that women paid millions to get, and went broke trying to maintain.

While she was used to the inappropriate and uncomfortable advances of presumptuous men, that morning in Mr. Cartridges office she was officially exhausted and decided she had, had enough of all the lude and indecent proposals that continuously came her

way. As Mr. Cartridge stood there smiling at her with her cashiers check in his right hand and his sex in his left, Ocean did the only thing she could think to do in that moment and she told him to *keep the money and go and fuck himself*, and then she left. As she walked down the hallway, she screamed at the top of her lungs how much she hated lawyers which drew the attention of the entire skeleton staff that was there.

In truth the money rightly belonged to her. Whether she choose to show her gratitude in sexual favors or not. Mr. Cartridge had no right to keep the check and eventually ended up mailing it to her after she arrived in Seattle. Along with the check came a brief apology note expressing his *sincerest* regrets for any possible miscommunication on his end at their final meeting.

Men like Mr. Cartridge were a dime a dozen, and the kind of men that Ocean always seemed to meet. Even in the office where she worked now, married lawyers winked and smiled at her all day long, it disgusted her.

“Ocean you’re gorgeous. I seriously don’t understand how you’re single. I mean, if sexuality was a choice—I’d turn lesbian for you. I would, I swear. You don’t even try to look good; you just wake up and done. No makeup, no primping no—you know, I don’t think I’ve even ever seen you brush your hair. And then there’s your clothes, you dress like a bum. You get up in the morning and throw on some moo moo looking shirt dress and brush your teeth and somehow, you’re still

my sexiest friend. It's not fair. You know what I'd be doing if I had your looks? I wouldn't be paying for shit anymore first of all, I'd be some rich guy's sugar baby. I'd be swimming in diamonds and pearls and jet setting. I'm telling you, you better use it or lose it 'cause looks don't last forever."

Thankfully Jentri's rant was interrupted by the sound of a guitar chord coming from Ocean's pocket. "Hello?"

"Ocean, I need you to come in today and get a brief together for me."

"Mr. Edwards?"

Jentri looked across the table smugly at Ocean and giggled and shook her head. "And if I had your looks, I definitely wouldn't be working some temp job, especially not for that arrogant asshole."

Ocean shook her head and smiled back at Jentri before returning her attention back to her unexpected caller.

"What time can you get here?"

"Mr. Edwards, today is Saturday, I don't work for you on weekends."

Annoyed by her reply Greg growled into the phone. "I know what day it is. What time can you get here? I need this brief together before Monday." Sensing her

resistance to his request and with his ego which commanded that he not resort himself to pleading his need to her for her assistance, he decided on the next best thing. "Look, I'll pay you double for the day."

Ocean smiled, she found the precariousness of Greg's situation amusing, while she loathed being *desired* by the men in the building where she worked, she took extreme gratification in being *needed* by this particular man. As she quickly considered her options for the remainder of the day, she shrugged off her dislike of Greg, winked at Jentri and flashed her a quick smile. "Fine. I'll be there in an hour."

After contemplating how the rest of her day might go, despite her love for Jentri, she'd rather not spend the remainder of her day obsessing over men and what they could do for her. Another factor that helped her in making her final decision was the fact that she needed the money. The twenty-five thousand dollars that she'd gotten from her father's estate was nearly gone. While she didn't share her mother's lavish spending habits, she had inherited her father's exquisite taste for art and while her art purchases satisfied her soul, they didn't keep her warm and fed, so the opportunity to earn a little extra cash was a welcomed invitation.

CHAPTER THREE

With the holiday season rolling in, the legal office was starting to become quite busy. Two days earlier, after coming into work on her day off, Ocean and Greg had come to an agreement with her scheduling and she'd agreed to work one extra hour every day during the week until the New Year. The extra time was welcomed and, much to her delight, not something she had to ask for. While assisting Greg the past Saturday with one of his cases, when she was done, and on her way out of the office, from out of the corner of her eye she could see Greg cringe, so she paused; his obvious discomfort amused her because she knew that his reaction meant he needed something from her.

When he first approached her about extending her hours, she didn't respond right away. She let him twist in the wind for a moment for her own entertainment. She needed the money, so of course she'd work the extra hour but she enjoyed watching Greg twitch. So that day she dragged it out as long as she could and took pleasure in depositing the image of him in her memory bank. Despite the un-pleasantry of working extra hours with Greg, the arrangement meant she didn't need to cover for other temps in the building anymore, which she didn't mind as far as the work went, but the lawyers were another thing. They were always staring at her and flirting with her—these supposedly honest, principled, married men. In a way

Greg's dislike of her was somewhat comforting and she figured better the devil she knew.

That Monday morning Ocean had spent the entire morning fielding angry calls from clients wanting status reports on their cases as well as chatting up new clients who had walked in the office. By noon she was thankful to see Greg walking down the hallway.

"Mr. Edwards, I have several..."

Greg walked into the office straight past Ocean and her waiting area full of prospective clients and went straight into his office without saying a word.

The fact that Greg's waiting area was full which it never was should have delighted him, he should have been thrilled. As astonished as she was her appall by his behavior took front and center. Ocean gave the visitors in the waiting area her best *I'm sorry* smile then she quickly scooted from behind her desk and headed into Greg's office.

"That was rude."

Annoyed and confused Greg frowned at Ocean as he struggled to undo his tie. After flopping down in his seat, he quickly shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. "So, what's your point? I've had a hectic day, I don't have time for pleasantries. Who are they

anyway? I don't have any appointments scheduled for today."

"That's no excuse to be rude and you were very rude. They're prospective clients, they wanted to see if you'd take on their cases. I personally don't think they all need lawyers but that's just me."

Greg laughed as he folded his arms and leaned back in his seat. "*You* don't think they need a lawyer? Well thank the Lord they didn't ask you. They came here to see me, right? Tell them I'll be with them in twenty minutes."

"Are you asking me to stay and wait with them?"

"Did you have somewhere else to be?"

Annoyed Ocean took a breath and slowly approached Greg's desk. "Lunch. I'd like to eat lunch. I've been here all alone all day answering phones and talking to walk-ins, I've barely had time to use the restroom and now it's half past twelve. I'd like to take my lunch."

Flagrantly disregarding the effort she had put in all day on his behalf, Greg flipped through the pile of memos Ocean had dropped on his desk. "It's not one o'clock yet. Your lunch is at one."

"No, my lunch is at twelve, I had something scheduled last week that required me to take my lunch at one,

hence it being listed on the calendar, but my normal lunch schedule is from twelve to one. Do you not remember the hours you hired me for?"

Greg paid little to no attention to Ocean's increasing frustration as he continued to thumb through the numerous messages she'd given him. "Hey, what's this? Maxwell Prentiss called? What did he say?"

"I don't know, what does the message say he said?"

Stunned by the combativeness of her response Greg let the stack of memos in his hand fall to his desk. "Excuse me? What exactly is your problem? I know you think you've got me over a barrel and I won't fire you but let's get this straight, this is *my* office, you work for me and when I ask you a question I expect it to be answered in a professional manner and if you can't do that then you can go and tell the agency to place you somewhere else."

Gazes fixed on each other, Greg and Ocean squared off neither wanting to back down. Greg's reputation as a boss had both positives and negatives, he was an asshole but he paid really well, so...Ocean blinked.

Satisfied by her silent submission and feeling victorious Greg sat up straight and smiled at Ocean as he plucked a single memo from the pile laying on his desk. "Maxwell Prentiss...what did he say when he called?"

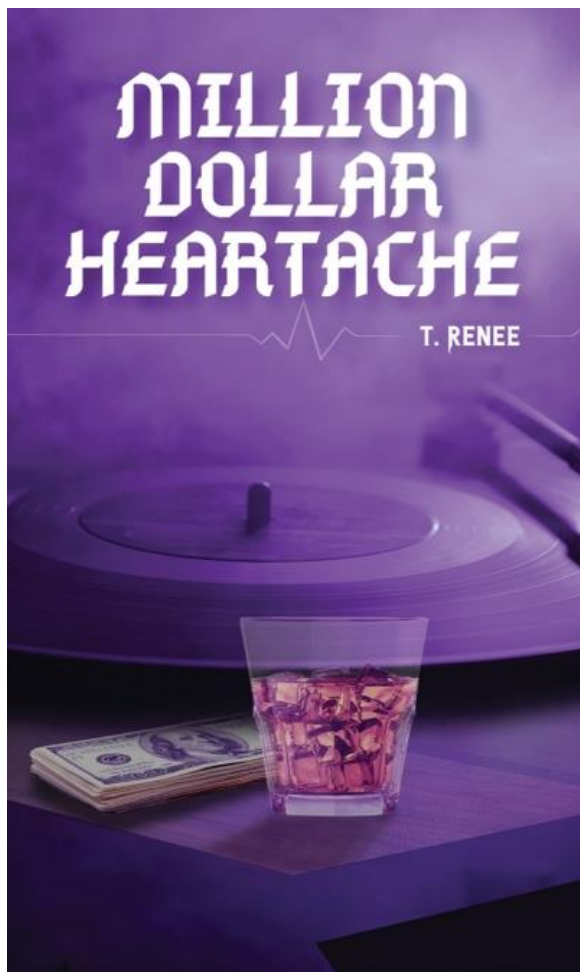
As she shut her eyes and inhaled deeply trying to calm herself, Ocean quickly replayed all the calls she had taken and tried to pinpoint the conversation in question. Once found, she slowly opened her eyes and met Greg's condescending stare.

"He asked if you were in...you weren't. He said to let you know that *Maxwell Prentiss* called and then he asked me if he and I had ever met before...we haven't."

"And?"

"And—that was it." As she turned to walk away, she was feeling much more annoyed with herself than she was with Greg. She'd overplayed her hand with Greg, she knew he needed her and she was the only one who'd been able to tolerate him beyond a week but now he knew that she needed him too. Before she could make it out of the room, she sighed at the sound of Greg's throat clearing which beckoned her to turn around. "Was there something else, Mr. Edwards?"

"Yes actually, there is. I'm going to have myself a quick snack. Please let the visitors in the waiting area know I'll be with them shortly and before you leave for lunch at one o'clock, go ahead and forward the phone to voicemail. That'll be all."



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