

Patrick and Maggie

By Kate Simon

Patrick Hammond couldn't believe he'd lost another secretary. This one, Elaine, or was it Eleanor, dissolved in tears when he demanded an explanation as to why his flight to Tokyo had not been confirmed. She proclaimed him a bully and tossed the file she was carrying at him before she grabbed her purse and bolted. She'd seemed to have such promise when he hired her. She was pretty, early twenties and presented herself well. The clients smiled at her and winked at him, assuming he was sleeping with her, which of course he wasn't. This made four secretaries in the last five months. Why was it so hard to find a competent secretary?

Patrick had created one of the largest computer companies in the country. His designs were cutting edge and his programs were genius. That's what all the magazines and his very contented investors said. He didn't disagree. He didn't believe in false modesty.

He looked at his watch and cursed. If he didn't hurry he'd be late for his lunch. Richard Elia was a good friend, maybe one of the few real friends he had. They'd encountered each other when they were both young upstarts and now they were two of the most successful businessmen in the country. Still, it was never good form to keep a billionaire waiting.

Patrick saw Richard on the phone at their usual table and waved. Richard disconnected his call and put his phone down. "You're late. You're never late."

"It's been a rough morning." He nodded to the waitress as she brought him his ice tea. They'd been coming here long enough that menus were redundant.

"Oh, Patrick, not another one."

"I don't know why it's so hard to find someone who can do the job. I need a secretary who can handle the demands of my schedule."

"Well, there's your first problem. A secretary is a girl who takes dictation and types letters on an IBM selectric, if this were 1975. What you need is an executive assistant. Someone who can understand the work you do and coordinate your life. That is not some

twenty something girl with her primary asset being a great pair of legs."

"That's not true. I hired women I thought could do the job."

"You thought part of the job was to look good."

"We have an image to maintain."

"Your company's image does not depend on whether or not your clients think your banging your secretary. Your reputation is built on cutting edge technology. I should know. I've used enough of it in my projects." Richard thanked the waitress for bringing his club sandwich. Patrick nodded at the waitress when she placed his Caesar salad in front of him.

"I may know someone for you. Her name is Maggie Lawson. She was the executive assistant to Edward Thomas."

"Thomas Technology? He's one of my biggest competitors."

"Was. Thomas died last week. His son, Merrick, is the new CEO." "That ass? I've run into him a few times. He knows nothing about computers. From what I could see all he cared about was his Lamborghini."

"Exactly. Maggie was Thomas's right arm. She knows as much about the business as he did. I can't imagine she will want to work for Merrick."

"It's worth a shot. What's she like?"

"Mid forties, no nonsense, ex military, Army I think."

"Mid forties?" asked Patrick.

Richard drilled him with a look. "You need someone with experience."

"Fine," said Patrick.

"If you make this woman an offer it needs to be six figures with a butt load of perks or I'm not going to recommend you to her. Anything less would be an insult."

Patrick choked on his ice tea. "Six figures? for a secretary?"

"Executive assistant and she's worth every penny. Now, do you want me to set it up?"

Patrick sighed. "Fine, set it up."

Richard pulled out his phone and hit a contact number. "Hello, Richard Elia for Maggie Lawson." He waited for the call to connect.

"Maggie Lawson."

"Maggie, it's Richard Elia. How are you?"

"Fine, Mr. Elia. I'm sorry, Mr. Thomas isn't available today. Can help you?"

"So where's Merrick? Vail or Miami?"

She laughed. "South of France. He said he needed time to mourn his father."

"Yeah, I bet. Actually Maggie I wasn't calling for Merrick. I wanted to talk to you. I can't imagine a professional of your caliber is going to enjoy working for someone like Merrick Thomas."

"Mr. Elia, I appreciate your concern, but I'm sure you understand why I can't discuss this."

"Of course. If I had an opening for someone like you I'd snap you up in a heartbeat. I don't but Patrick Hammond does."

"Hah. Lose another assistant did he?"

Richard smiled and looked at Patrick. "You know about his problem with keeping assistants?"

"Of course. Why would I want to work for Hammond?"

"Because he needs you and you love a challenge."

Maggie sighed. "Tomorrow at noon. I'll meet him at Danfield's for lunch. He's buying."

Richard laughed. "He'll be there." He disconnected the call and smiled. "You have twenty four hours to come up with an incentive package good enough to convince one of the best in the business to work for you."

Maggie hung up the phone and smiled. That phone call could be the answer to her prayers. Working for Edward Thomas over the last ten years had been a challenging and satisfying experience. Working with Merrick Thomas for only a week had been a nightmare. He was more concerned with his bank balance than where that money came from. He expected Maggie to make decisions that should have been made by the CEO. She had no desire to cover Merrick Thomas's ass.

Patrick sat at a table in Danfield's waiting for this ex-Army matron. He couldn't believe he'd let Richard talk him into this but he was desperate. He'd put together a package that anyone in their right mind should jump at. He looked at his watch and it was precisely noon. He believed in punctuality. Apparently so did she.

He was stunned at who was walking toward him. Maggie Lawson was five foot seven with long chocolate brown hair pulled into a clip at the base of her neck. She was perfectly dressed in a fitted blue suit. Nicely fitted over what appeared to be some very nice curves. He quickly chastised himself. Patrick was never inappropriate with employees. Then he saw crystal blue eyes.

Maggie extended her hand. "Mr. Hammond, it's nice to meet you. Mr. Elia speaks highly of you."

"Richard and I are old friends. He spoke equally well of you. In fact he said you were exactly what I needed in my organization."

"You get right to it, I see. Excellent. I've worked for Thomas Technology for ten years. It goes without saying that any proprietary information will stay confidential."

"Of course," he replied finding himself wondering what perfume she wore.

"I've managed Mr. Thomas's office, schedule and meetings for the last ten years. We were an efficient team. I prefer to work that way. My input needs to be welcomed and valued. If I accept your offer your office will be run in a manner that will free you to do the work you want to do. You will never have to give it a second thought. No one does this work better than I do."

"You're very confident."

"I don't believe in false modesty."

"Is there anything you can't do?"

Maggie smiled, "I can't sing worth a damn." She extend her hand. "I assume that file is your offer?"

He had a gnawing feeling he shouldn't give it to her. This woman was going to be difficult, challenging and worst of all, distracting. He handed her the file. "Yes it is," he smiled.

Maggie reviewed the file, hoping like hell she was hiding the tremble in her hands. She knew Patrick Hammond's reputation. Cold, calculated, driven. She'd seen his picture in the news and trade magazines but they didn't do him justice. In person he radiated power. She tried to focus on the documents in her hand. The salary offer was twenty thousand more than she was making now. She smiled knowing this was Elia's doing. Probably his way of goosing his friend. The stock options were nice, use of corporate cars and jet. She closed the file and smiled. She'd make him stew a little. She'd never met a man yet who didn't want what he thought he couldn't have. She really was the best at what she did. If he wanted her that badly, she'd make him earn it. "Let's have lunch."

Patrick ordered a grilled salmon dish while Maggie ordered a Greek salad with roasted vegetables.

"Danfield's is known for their grilled salmon and salsa dish. You should try it."

"No thanks, I'm vegetarian."

He looked her up and down.

"What?"

"You don't look like, well I find it surprising."

Maggie laughed. "What exactly do you think a vegetarian looks like?"

He smiled. "Oh, you know. Flowers in your hair, homespun clothes, bare feet."

"Sorry, I never wear my love beads to the office."

Maggie Lawson was nothing like what Patrick expected. She was charming and confident. He could see her handling even his most problematic clients with ease. He couldn't imagine she wouldn't accept his offer. He wanted her in his office, he needed her. She was going to make a difference.

"Richard told me you were in the Army. What was your specialty?"

"Signal Corp. I was a communication specialist."

"What did you do as a communication specialist?"

"My work was classified."

"Classified? It was twenty years ago."

"It's still classified and it's need to know. You don't."

"Don't what?"

"Need to know," she smiled.

Patrick smiled. He felt like he was in a fencing match. "Fine. Do you have any questions about my offer?"

"Just one. Why should I work for you?"

He laughed. "That's one question I've never had to answer in a job interview. You do realize you'd be working for me, not the other way around."

Maggie smiled and sat back in her chair. "Mr. Elia was correct. I can't possibly work for Merrick Thomas. I was waiting for his return from France to resign. Mr. Hammond let me be blunt. Thanks to some healthy stock options and smart investments I don't need to work. However, retiring at my age seems ridiculous. So give me a good reason why I should pick up my phone now and tell Merrick he's on his own?"

Patrick leaned back in his chair and smiled. He had some of the brightest and the best working for him but no one like Maggie. "Ms. Lawson, I think you had me pegged the moment you walked in here. You see a computer geek with limited interpersonal skills. Someone who is in desperate need of your particular skill set. You can't wait to see what you can make of me."

Maggie smiled and picked up her phone. She hit a contact button and waited for the connection. "Mr. Thomas, it's Maggie." She held the phone away from her ear and Patrick could hear the music in the background. "Mr. Thomas can you move to a quieter location? This is important." Patrick tried not to laugh when Maggie rolled her eyes. "Yes, much better. Mr. Thomas I'm tendering my resignation. I'm giving you two weeks notice."

"What?" asked Patrick. He couldn't wait two weeks. He needed her now.

Maggie held her hand over the microphone. "Anything less is unprofessional." She uncovered the microphone and winced. Patrick could hear the screaming on the other end.

Merrick slurred his words in a transcontinental hissy fit. "If that's how you feel, just get out you ungrateful bitch."

Patrick shook his head and wondered how long it would be before Merrick Thomas ran his father's company into the ground.

Maggie smiled and shook her head. "Mr. Thomas you realize that terminating me activates the separation clause in my contract."

"I don't care, clear out your things. I want you gone," he screamed.

"Very well, Mr. Thomas. I suggest you text Rachel in HR so we can facilitate this quickly. She's on your contact list. R-A-C-H-E-L. Yes that's her." Maggie hung up the phone and smiled. "I needed him to do that before he sobered up."

"Do you think he will?"

Maggie's phone beeped and she smiled. She held up a text message from Rachel.

*Merrick fired you??????*

"Looks like I'll see you tomorrow, Mr. Hammond."

Maggie arrived at the Hammond International offices just before eight a.m. She knew she wasn't due to report until nine, but she wanted to get a jump start on her day. She was surprised to see a receptionist instead of a security guard so early in the morning.

"Good morning, I'm Maggie Lawson, Mr. Hammond's new assistant."

The woman, no older than twenty five, looked her up and down. "Huh," she said.

"Is there a problem?"

"No, of course not," she said. "It's just, you're not what I expected." She handed Maggie a packet of information and a key card. "This key will get you on to the executive level. Slip it into the slot in the private elevator at the end of the hall. It's already coded to take you to the correct floor. Mr. Hammond is in his office."

"Already?"

The girl laughed. "More like always. I'm the first shift receptionist. I come in at seven and I've never gotten here before him."

"First shift?"

"Yes, I work until three and Tammy comes in for three to eleven for our overseas clients."

Maggie noticed the picture on her desk with a pretty little girl that looked just like her mother. "It must give you more time to spend with your daughter."

The woman looked at the picture and smiled. "That's my Alexis. She just started first grade. My husband gets her off to school and I pick her up. This schedule is a godsend."

Maggie extended her hand, "Thank you?"

"Diane."

"Thank you, Diane."

"You're welcome, Ms. Lawson."

"Please, call me Maggie."

The girl gave her a bright smile. "It's nice to meet you, Maggie. If you need anything please feel free to call me."

"Thank you, Diane. I'll do that."

Maggie slipped her keycard in the slot and the elevator doors opened. She turned to see Diane shoot her a little wave as she sat back at her desk. Maggie learned long ago it was much better to have friends in low places than high ones. Those in corporately low places are often ignored but they generally know a hell of a lot more than the higher ups give them credit for.

The door open on the twentieth floor and Maggie took a breath. "Here we go," she said softly. She walked toward the door at the end of the hall. It read simply '*Patrick Hammond*'. Apparently he assumed everyone knew who he was. He was probably right. She knocked on the door and waited until she heard him tell her to enter.

"Good morning, Mr. Hammond. She was taken back at the simplicity of his office. A nice oak desk, but not top of the line. A few paintings but nothing that required extra security. A comfortable couch, dark fabric, not leather. The computer he was engrossed in was the only top of the line item in the office, other than Patrick Hammond himself.

"Good morning. Is it nine already?"

"No sir, just about eight." When he looked up from the screen and smiled her heart skipped. She'd gotten the impression he didn't smile a lot but when he did, oh boy.

"Let me get you set up," he said. He opened an internal door leading to another large office. "I really haven't had a chance to go through this since Elaine left. There are a few things I need taken care of right away. I've sent you an email. He picked up a cell phone from her and handed it to her. "This is your corporate phone, please keep it on at all times. I'm sure HR has sent you all the forms they need from you so get to that sooner rather than later. I'll have your name put on your external door. Margaret or Maggie?"

"Maggie, please. Margaret was a rather unpleasant great aunt of my mother's."

"Maggie it is. I'll leave you to it." He turned to her as he walked back to his office. "I usually keep this door open, but you may close it if you prefer."

"No, sir. It's fine the way it is." Maggie watched Patrick return to his office and tried to steady herself. She would tell herself it was first day nerves, but she knew that wasn't the case. It was Patrick Hammond. "Get a grip," she whispered as she sat at her new desk. She booted up the computer on her desk and hit her first roadblock. Apparently the previous occupant of the office added her own password to the system. She was good with computers but she was no hacker. Five minutes in and she was already asking her

boss for help. Damn.

"Excuse me, Mr. Hammond. It appears the previous assistant added her own password to this system. Would you know what that would be?"

Patrick looked up from his monitor. "Ah, crap." He stood and walked back into her office. He sat at her desk and stared at the screen. He made a few failed attempts at a password. "Shit," he said. He looked up at Maggie. "Sorry."

Maggie smiled. "No worries, sir. I'm ex-Army, I've heard a lot worse. When properly inspired, I've said a lot worse."

Patrick smiled and turned to the keyboard. "A lot worse," he repeated. He typed a few keys and the Hammond Industries logo appeared. He looked up at Maggie who was obviously trying not to laugh.

"Bully?" she asked.

"It's what she called me as she tossed a file in my face." He stood and faced her. "I take it from you're barely repressed giggle that it doesn't bother you."

"That she threw a file at you or that she claimed you're a bully?"

"Either."

Maggie couldn't hold in her laugh. "No, not at all."

"Doesn't it worry you that I'm difficult enough to warrant your predecessors throwing things at me?"

"More than the last one?"

"There was a cell phone, a water bottle, and a cup of coffee that required replacing the carpet in the conference room."

She broke into a full on belly laugh. When she finally stopped laughing at his expense she smiled. "I think I can handle you."

Patrick smiled and said quietly, "Yes, I think you can."

Maggie had to take an extra breath to hide her gasp. She prayed he didn't notice.

"Can you enter a new password or would you like me to do it? I'd prefer if you not type 'bully' every time you boot up."

"I can change it myself, sir."

He nodded and walked back to his office.

Maggie sat down and called up the screen to enter a new password. 'smile.'

Patrick sat back at his desk and looked at Maggie typing at her station and thought "This is going to be interesting."

Patrick's growling stomach forced him to look at his watch. It was three p.m. and he'd been sitting at his desk for nine hours. He glanced up to see Maggie sitting at her desk on the phone. He didn't remember her leaving her desk at all. He got up and stood in the doorway until she got off the phone.

"Maggie, I didn't see you go out for lunch."

She took a look at her watch. "Look at the time. No, I didn't."

"Neither did I. Let's go."

"I do have a few things to review with you and might as well eat while we're doing it. But first, do you have your passport here?"

"Yes, why?"

"I'd like to see it." He reached into his drawer, found the passport and handed it to her. "Okay. Your passport expires in three weeks. That puts it right in the middle of your Tokyo trip." She took it from him and put it in her desk drawer. "I'll renew it for you when we get back from lunch."

Patrick watched as she put his passport in her desk and grabbed her purse and tablet. "Ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"Patrick," he said. "Maggie, please call me Patrick."

"Oh, I don't know, sir. Did your other assistants call you Patrick?"

"No, but they were all young enough to be my daughters. When you do it I feel like Methuselah."

Maggie smiled. "Very well, Patrick. I wouldn't want you to feel uncomfortable around me, given your extreme age and all."

Patrick laughed. Yeah, working with Maggie Lawson was going to be very interesting.

They got a table at the Chinese restaurant near the office. Patrick could have sent out but he found getting out of the office helped clear his head. He ordered beef with vegetables. Maggie ordered Szechuan bean curd.

"Bean curd? Really?" he asked.

"It's delicious. How about we review things before the food?"

"Sounds good."

"I have your Tokyo reservations set. The conference room is booked for the meetings. I've set reservations for dinners at your preferred restaurants. I'll send you the itinerary."

"You confirmed all this today?"

"Yes. I booked your reservations based on your previous trips. If you'd like to make any changes there is still plenty of time."

"I thought you'd spend the day get used to the computer." She gave him an indulgent look that made him squirm.

"I've worked on advanced systems like yours before. It didn't take long to figure it out. I reviewed your current calendar and the pending emails. And it was Eleanor."

"Excuse me?" he said as the waiter set his order in front of him.

"Your previous assistant's name was Eleanor." Maggie laughed. "Should I be wearing a name tag?"

Patrick paused and looked at her smile and her crystal blue eyes. "No," he said quietly. "I won't have any trouble remembering you." He realized what he'd said when he saw her blush. What the hell was wrong with him? He never spoke to an employee like this before, but then, he'd never met anyone like her. He tried to push past the awkward silence. "How's your bean curd?"

"Delicious," she said. "Try some." She grabbed what looked like a deep fried triangle with her chopsticks and held it out for him.

"I'll pass," he said as he wrinkled his nose.

Maggie smiled. "Oh, come on. Take a chance. You'll never know if you don't try."

He stared at her for a moment before he leaned in and took what she offered. He smiled as he leaned back. It was a creamy smooth center covered with a spicy deep fried coating. "Not bad," he said grudgingly.

She laughed. "Male translation: Damn that was good but I'll never tell her."

Patrick smiled. She had him pegged alright. He felt dangerously close to crossing a line with her. He knew his next sentence was going to leave him teetering on the edge of that line. "Do you have a passport?"

"What? Yes, of course."

"I assume yours is not endanger of expiring."

"Of course not."

"Good. Book yourself reservations for Tokyo. I think you'll be invaluable on this trip." He smiled when she appeared shocked. "Maggie, you've accomplished more in six hours than the last assistant did in six weeks. I want you with me on this."

Maggie nodded. "Very well, sir. Sorry, very well, Patrick."

Patrick smiled. "When we get back to the office I want you to send Richard Elia a big fruit basket."

She grabbed her tablet and made a note. "What would you like on the card?"

"You were right."

Maggie looked at him, understanding what he meant. When she smiled he knew that line was getting thinner.

Patrick was ready for his Tokyo meetings. He would make presentations to showcase the latest in security and workplace software. Most of these type of meetings were with American ex-pats working in the international divisions of their various companies. This meeting was to preview and hopefully sell a massive upgrade to the security to Fujimoto Industries. Patrick had sold them their original system ten years ago but their company had grown quickly and they were looking to upgrade the entire system.

There had been none of the usual travel hiccups. Maggie's arrangements were perfect. That had been the theme of the last few weeks. She'd been right when she said he would no longer have to think twice about his office. He simply told her what needed to be done and she made it happen with very little input from him. The only downside was enduring a few 'I told you so's' from Richard.

Patrick was zipping the case on his laptop when there was a knock at the door. He looked at his watch and smiled, precisely eight thirty a.m. Maggie was always on time. "Good morning," he said as he let her in his suite. She was dressed in a dark navy suit and white blouse. Her hair was pulled back and she wore very little makeup. He had a feeling she'd dressed like this on purpose, possible as to not be a distraction. "Yeah, well, that's not working," he thought. All she had to do was look at him with those bright blue eyes and he was distracted. "Did you sleep well?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you. Is everything okay with your suite?"

"Excellent," he smiled. "But you know that. You only do excellent."

Maggie laughed. "Thank you, Patrick. I've checked on the conference room. Everything is in place."

"I never had a doubt. Okay, let's do this."

Maggie double checked the Wi-Fi connections and the link from Patrick's computer to the large wall monitor. "We're all set."

"Have you eaten?" he asked.

"I'm fine," she said as she opened a note screen on her laptop.

"That was not the question, Ms. Lawson. I asked you if you've eaten."

Maggie glanced up at his smile and was instantly thrown. Patrick had a reputation

for being cold. She could see how he was around other employees, professional but not friendly. Around her he was different. At first she thought he might be overcompensating for his behavior with his previous assistants. As the weeks went on she'd realized that wasn't the case. She really didn't know what to make of him.

"Earth to Maggie." he said.

"Oh, sorry."

"Breakfast?"

"Ah, no actually. I thought I'd get something later."

"Nonsense." He poured her a cup of coffee and added a cream and two sugars. He put a Danish on a plate and handed it to her. "Here. We have time. Can't have your growling stomach interrupting my brilliant presentation."

"Thank you," she said as she took a sip of her coffee.

"So what had you so lost in thought?" he asked.

"I was thinking you should smile more."

"Excuse me?"

"You have a reputation for being cold but you have a great smile. It might help people connect with you if they saw that side of you."

Patrick took a sip of his coffee and gave her a long, disconcerting look. "Is that right?"

Maggie smiled. "Yes. Once people get to know you they'll see you're not so scary."

"Maybe scary is what I'm going for."

"You can be professional and friendly," she smiled. Patrick just stared at her, smiling. She needed to do something to break this spell he was having on her or she might say something she couldn't take back. "Tell me about the men we're meeting. You've worked with them before?"

"Brad Marshall is their director of development. He's been with Fujimoto for years. I worked with him on the original install ten years ago. He's not my favorite human but he gets the job done. Hiroshi Mitsuo is their head of security. Good guy but reserved. Kenji Fujimoto is an IT specialist. I haven't met him yet."

"Any relation?"

"Grandson. Learning the business from the ground up."

Maggie had just put her dish on the back counter when the conference door opened. Brad Marshall entered first, as Maggie thought, would have been his habit. He appeared to be blonde in his earlier days but was now white haired and balding. His pasty complexion and pronounced belly spoke to a life of excess. Hiroshi Mitsuo was a handsome, well dressed man in his mid forties. He looked very fit under his well tailored suit. Kenji Fujimoto was a young man, no older than twenty five. He seemed shy and a bit awkward. Maggie wondered if this was his first business meeting.

"Pat, buddy," said Brad. "How are you?"

Maggie smiled as she saw Patrick cringe as he shook the man's hand. No one called him Pat.

"I'm fine Brad. Good to see you." He turned to the other men. "Hiroshi, good to see you."

"Thank you, Mr. Hammond. It's good to see you again. I'd like to introduce Kenji Fujimoto, the new head of our IT department.

"It's very nice to meet you, Mr. Hammond. I've studied many of your developments and found them to be quite fascinating. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss them."

Patrick graced him with a broad smile. "I'd enjoy that." He turned to Maggie who was standing back. "Gentleman, I'd like you to meet my assistant, Maggie Lawson."

"Hello," she said quietly, waiting for the men to approach her.

Kenji extended his hand first, then Hiroshi. Finally Brad extended his hand. "Lovely to meet you, Maggie."

Maggie fought the urge to grab a napkin and wipe her hand. She indicated to the breakfast cart. "Can I get you gentlemen anything?"

Hiroshi said, "No thank you."

Kenji smiled. "I will help myself, thank you."

"Coffee black with two sugars, sweetheart," said Brad.

Maggie was impressed with her self restraint when she didn't spill it on him. She hit the lights and sat at the end of the table, ready to take notes. Brad, much to her chagrin, chose to sit right next to her while the other men sat closer to Patrick.

"Wouldn't you like to sit up here, Brad?" asked Patrick.

"Oh, I'm fine," he smiled.

Maggie tried to focus on her notes while Patrick launched his presentation, detailing how the system upgrade would secure their locations as well as their research. Patrick was about twenty minutes in when she felt Brad's clammy hand on her knee. She pushed it off and tried to refocus. A few minutes later the hand was back and pushing its way up her thigh. Maggie gasped and pushed her chair back from the table.

"Maggie, what is it?" asked Patrick.

"Nothing sir,"

"Like hell it was nothing," he stood and hit the lights. "What happened. Maggie blushed fire red and shook her head. "Brad, what the hell did you do?"

"Nothing Pat, buddy. I was just being friendly. Nothing wrong with mixing a little business with pleasure."

Maggie had never seen him like this and wondered for a moment if he was going to hit him.

"We're done here," he said as he turned to Maggie. "Are you okay?"

"What about the meeting?" asked Brad.

"Hammond Industries will no longer be doing business with Fujimoto. Good luck finding another company to upgrade your systems."

Maggie watched in horror as Hiroshi and Kenji left looking mortified and Brad, red faced and furious, slamming the door behind him. "You just blew off a multi million dollar contract because that jerk got handsy? What the hell was that about?" she yelled.

Patrick walk towards her forcing her up against the door. He was close enough to kiss her when he whispered, "You know exactly what this is about." He stepped back and began collecting his things. "Call the pilot. Tell him to get the plane ready. We're leaving."

Patrick didn't trust himself to speak. It had been three hours since he'd blown up at the meeting and he was still furious. Right now he didn't trust anything he did. He fastened his seatbelt as he waited for his pilot to take off. He'd wanted to deck that bastard for putting his hand on her. Instead he gave up a multi million dollar contract. She was more important.

He looked over at Maggie in the seat facing him, tucking her computer away for the takeoff. She'd pretended she was fine but she was pale and he could see her hand shaking. She looked up and caught him staring. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

"Why are you sorry?"

"I just cost you millions of dollars. I'll pack my things when we get back or I'll stay and train my replacement if you wish."

He unhooked his seatbelt and leaned close. He put his hand under her chin, forcing her to look him in the eye. "You listen to me, Maggie Lawson. Nothing that happened was your fault. Brad is a prick and I ended the meeting rather than deck him."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I couldn't tolerate such disrespect to someone like you?"

"I don't understand."

"Maggie, you are a remarkable woman. You are a skilled professional. You're smart and witty and strong enough to put up with my crap on a daily basis." He was glad when she smiled. "Maggie, I don't want you going anywhere." He brushed his hand over her cheek as it flushed red. "I need you."

The pilot's voice came over the com. "Mr. Hammond we've received clearance and will be taking off in five minutes."

Patrick smiled and sat back refastening his seatbelt. He did need Maggie, but he was only now realizing just how much.

Once they'd reached cruising altitude they both opened their computers and started working. Patrick opened his email and laughed. "Well, it looks like you're going to have to transmit the Fujimoto contracts after all."

"What? What happened?"

"It's from Mr. Fujimoto, Senior. Apparently when he asked his grandson how his

first business meeting went, he told him. Everything. Mr. Fujimoto says to transmit the contracts and he will sign. He asks that I extend his deepest apologies to you and assured us both that kind of behavior is not tolerated in his company." He read further. "Huh. How about that."

"What."

"Brad got canned." Maggie sat back in her seat, not looking happy about that particular news. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing really. It's just lately I seem to be the cause of men losing their jobs. Rachel from Thomas Tech called me last week. The board had asked her to reach out to me. Merrick did such a spectacularly bad job as president the board removed him after only a few weeks. They wanted me to come back."

"What did you tell them?"

Maggie looked shocked at his question and then smiled. "I told them no, of course."

"Good," he said softly. "Ah, I better get back to him, tell him we'll get the contracts to him when we get back."

"You should tell him how impressed you were with Kenji and disappointed you didn't get to talk tech with him. Invite him to visit so you two can geek out together. It will show senior we aren't holding a grudge."

"That's an excellent idea. Thank you, Ms. Lawson," he smiled.

"You're very welcome, Mr. Hammond."

Maggie got back to her office and found an enormous bouquet of lilies waiting for her. She leaned in to enjoy their lovely fragrance.

"Do you have a secret admirer?"

She looked up to see Patrick standing in the doorway between their offices. She caught a look in his eyes she couldn't believe, jealousy mixed with desire. The last twenty four hours were hard to believe. She was still off kilter thinking of how it felt when he had her pinned against the door and when he touched her cheek.

"They're from Mr. Fujimoto."

"Oh, that was nice of him," he said, sounding relieved.

"Yes it was." She moved the bouquet to the cabinet and sat down at her desk. "I'll get the contracts transmitted as is, unless you want any changes made."

"No, they're fine as is."

"I'll let you know when we get them back."

"Fine. When you're finished with that I'd like you to take a look at my Fourth of July party. It's a fundraiser and I want to make sure everything is ready. You should be able to find the information from last year on file."

"The Reynolds Foundation?"

Patrick smiled. "You've done your homework. It sponsors computer programs and scholarships for kids who need help."

"Why didn't you call it the Hammond Foundation? After all, you started it."

"Wow, you're good." he smiled. "When I was a kid, we didn't have a lot and my neighborhood, well, there weren't a lot of opportunities. One of my teachers in high school saw I had an aptitude for computers. He gave me his old system and tutored me. He changed the course of my life. Martin Reynolds."

"I bet he's very proud of you."

Patrick got quiet. "I went to see him after I started my company, you know, to thank him. He had died the year before. No wife, no kids. He never knew what a difference he made."

Maggie rested her hand on his arm and smiled. "I bet he did."

He looked like he was trying to collect himself. "Well, I'll let you get to it. I have

dozens of emails to go through." He walked back into his office and sat at his desk. Maggie ached for the pain she'd made him relive.

She opened the previous files on the Fourth of July party. It was held at his home in Malibu, a black tie event. She found the guest lists, references for caterers, florist, security firms. He also found a reference she didn't expect. Fireworks.

Everything was set for the party. The caterer, the flowers, the entertainment were all confirmed. Maggie had arranged for the fireworks barge to be anchored thirty yards off shore in front of Patrick's beach house. The guest list was two hundred of the who's who of Los Angeles society.

Maggie braced herself and walked into Patrick's office. "Have a minute?"

Patrick looked up from his monitor and smiled. "What's up?"

"I've finalized the arrangements for the fundraiser." She handed him a file with the details and he flipped through it."

"Looks good but crowded. It will probably require a lot of coordination during the event." He closed the file and smiled. "I'm sure you're up to the task."

"Oh, I hadn't included myself on the guest list."

"Do you have other plans?"

Maggie was never any good at lying. "No."

"Do you need time to get a gown?"

She shook her head. "No."

"Maggie, I need you there."

"Of course," she said quietly. She stood and smiled. "I guess I'll dust off my dancing shoes."

Patrick looked around his home and marveled at what Maggie had put together. The pool had been covered over with a dance floor. Flowers and lights were spread out over the house and grounds. The band was playing a slow tune, while the early arrivals mingled.

"Hey, the place looks good."

Patrick looked over to see Richard Elia walking towards him with his wife, Connie. He leaned in and gave Connie a kiss on the cheek and shook Richard's hand. "Thanks for coming."

"You know we wouldn't have missed it," said Richard.

"Where is this wonder woman I've been hearing about, Maggie, right?" asked Connie. "She's actually put up with you for more than a couple of weeks."

"I don't know. I haven't seen her yet. I think she's been busy with the caterer."

"There she is," said Richard.

Patrick looked over to the far corner of the room to see Maggie speaking with one of the musicians. She looked amazing. Her hair was piled up with a few loose curls around her face. She was wearing a long sleeved, black gown that was beaded with crystals from the waist to her neck. She sparkled in the light. The musician walked back toward his band and she turned to give him a final instruction. That's when Patrick's heart stopped. The back of the dress had a deep open v that stretched from her shoulders to her waist.

Maggie turned back and saw them all watching her. She smiled and walked towards them. "Hello Mr. Elia. It's nice to see you again."

"It's good to see you. This is my wife, Connie."

Connie extended her hand and smiled. "So you're the saint who's been putting up with this guy for the last few months."

Maggie smiled at Patrick. "Oh, he's not so bad."

"Everything looks wonderful, Maggie," said Patrick.

"Thank you," she said with a slight blush. She touched her ear and said, "No, canapés with the champagne." She looked up and shrugged. She touched her ear again. "Wireless com. I better see to this."

Patrick stood stock still and watch her retreat to the kitchen. He might have stayed frozen in his spot until Richard slapped him on the shoulder.

"Breathe, buddy."

"What? I'm fine." He looked at his friend who was now shaking his head and smiling.

"It's about time."

"What are you talking about?"

Connie kissed him on the cheek. "You're clever. You'll figure it out."

Patrick barely saw Maggie all night. She busied herself with the staff and the donations. He was beginning to get the feeling she was avoiding him. He was finally able to corner her near where they were registering the donations. "How are we doing?"

"Very well. Mr. Elia was very generous. We're well over two million."

"That's fantastic." He took the tablet from her and scrolled through the list of donors. Everyone had been very generous. He scrolled down the list and saw a very familiar name.

*M. Lawson \$5000*

"Maggie, I didn't expect you to make a donation, let alone something so generous."

"I read the materials, did my research. It's a very worthy cause. Extremely low adm costs, ninety five percent of all donations go toward helping kids." She smiled. "You should be very proud of what you've built."

"Thank you." He took the tablet from her and took her by the hand. "May I have this dance."

"Of course," she whispered.

Patrick led her to the dance floor and took her in his arms. His heart sped up as his hand touch the bare skin of her back. "You look beautiful," he whispered.

A loud bang came from off shore and Maggie jumped. "It's okay, it's time for the fireworks." She nodded and smiled but he knew something was wrong. A rocket exploded gold sparkles overhead. Patrick reached for her hand and realized she was shaking. "Maggie, what's wrong?" Another rocket exploded red and Maggie bolted in to the house. He ran after her as she ran up the stairs to the back of the house.

"Maggie," he yelled but she didn't seem to hear him. He found her in the farthest bedroom of the house sitting on the floor with her hands over her ears. Every time another rocket went off she jumped. Tears were pouring down her face. Sat on the floor next to her. "Maggie, what is it?" She looked up at him and he saw pure terror on her face.

"Oh Christ, Maggie. I didn't think. I'm so sorry." He pulled her close and held her tight, letting her weep into his chest. He'd forgotten. She was a veteran. He knew she'd served in a war zone but she never talked about it. How could he have been so stupid? There was no point in getting her out of the house. It was the fourth of July and there was no telling how many displays they would pass before he got her home.

"It's okay, sweetheart. I'm here. It's going to be okay. It will be over soon." He held her and rocked her and kissed her forehead.

"Patrick what's going on, we saw Maggie..." Richard saw them sitting on the floor. "Oh God," he whispered.

Patrick nodded. "Close the door. Tell everyone I took Maggie home."

"Of course," he said and left them alone.

He whispered to her all through the display. "I'm here, sweetheart. I'm here. You're not alone." The last display was multiple rockets shot at once. Maggie whimpered and Patrick's heart broke. He caressed her cheek. "It's all over, sweetheart. It's all over."

Maggie looked up at him and he saw the moment when she came back, when she was Maggie again.

"Oh God, I'm so sorry. I've ruined your party." She tried to stand but he held her tight.

"You didn't ruin anything. I'm the one who's sorry. I should have realized this would be difficult for you." He brushed the tears off her cheek. "It's all okay, sweetheart. Really it is."

She looked down at his makeup stained shirt. "Well that's definitely ruined."

He looked at the shirt and smiled. "I have more."

"I must look awful."

"You're beautiful." He brushed her cheek and gave her a tender kiss. "Can you forgive me for making you go through this?"

"I should have said something. When I came back twenty years ago, you didn't talk

about these things." She rubbed her cheeks and saw the mascara come off on her hand. "Ugh, I need to wipe this off."

Patrick stood and helped her to her feet. He opened the door to the bathroom and handed her a wash cloth. She gasped when she saw her face.

"Oh God. I look like hell." She soaped her hands and scrubbed her face so fast she got soap in her eyes. "Ow, Ow."

He grabbed the cloth and dabbed her eyes. "Better?"

"Yes, much" she said softly. "Is it okay if I stay here until everyone leaves? I don't want anyone to see me like this."

"Of course, but I rather you stay the night. I don't want you driving when your so upset."

"I'll be fine."

He forced her to stop looking at herself and look at him. "Please, for me. So I won't worry."

"Ok," she whispered. "Thank you."

"I'll go get you something to sleep in. Those beads look like they might be uncomfortable."

Maggie chuckled. She looked around what was obviously a guest bathroom. It had a multi head shower and stacks of fluffy towels and toiletries. "That shower looks good. Maybe I'll jump in there while you find me something to wear. Looks like everything I need is here. I'd kill for a shower like this."

"I like my guests to be comfortable."

"Huh," she smiled. "Rich people."

Patrick laughed as he went down the hall toward his bedroom. Richard spotted him and came up the stairs.

"Is she okay?"

"Better. She's going to stay here. I'm getting her something to sleep in."

"It was the fireworks?" asked Richard.

Patrick nodded. "Something happened when she was in the Army. She hasn't said what it was."

"I'm glad she's feeling better. Connie and I are getting the last stragglers out now."

"Thanks, buddy. I appreciate it."

Richard returned downstairs and Patrick went into his bedroom. He stripped out of his tux and threw his ruined shirt in the trash. He pulled on a t-shirt and a pair of gym shorts and got a set for Maggie.

He listened at the bedroom door and heard the shower running he slipped in and knocked on the bathroom door. "I'm going to leave these in here for you."

"Thank you," she said as he caught a steamy glance of her through the shower door. He closed the door and sat down on the bed. He looked around to make sure she had everything she might need tonight. He had an overwhelming desire to make things better for her, even though he knew it was impossible. He heard the shower turn off and a few minutes later Maggie came out of the steamy bathroom. Her hair was still wet, but combed straight. She had on one of his old Caltech t-shirts and a pair of shorts that were way too big for her. She looked just as beautiful now as she had in her gown.

"That shower felt great. You certainly have all the amenities here. If you ever decide to quit computers you would have a great future in the hotel business."

Patrick took her hand and she sat down next to him. "I'm glad you're feeling better." He brushed a damp curl behind her ear. "Do you want to tell me about it?"

Maggie sighed and nodded. "My squad and I were on a mission. I was trying to reestablish communications between and outpost and headquarters. It was supposed to be a quick in and out. Intelligence said the hostiles had been cleared from the area. They were wrong. I had just gotten the communications restored when we got pinned down. The attack didn't go on that long but it seemed like forever. I was never supposed to need my weapon. I was a tech geek. But there I was with the rest of my squad firing and praying for reinforcements."

"What happened?"

"The reinforcements got there and cleared out the insurgents. But not before the rest of my squad was killed." She looked at him and sighed. "I walked away without a scratch."

Patrick brushed his hand over her cheek. "I wouldn't say that."

"I've never told anyone about it before."

"I'm glad you told me."

"Thank you for taking care of me," she whispered as she gave him a tender kiss.

"Maggie," he whispered as he pulled her close and deepened the kiss. He pulled back and smiled. "Tell me to stop and I will. You just have to say it."

Maggie smiled and whispered, "Don't stop."

He kissed her deeply and she responded with fire. She laid back on the bed and pulled him with her. He tasted her, nipped at her skin, determined to give her anything she wanted. Anything she needed. He slipped his hands under her shirt, stroking her warm skin. He raised himself above her and waited. She moved toward the headboard and pulled down the covers. She looked at him and smiled as she pulled the t-shirt over her head. Patrick grinned and copied her action. He climbed up on the bed and covered her with his body. He kissed her deeply as he cupped her breast with his palm. He slipped down tasting and nipping. He listened to her breathing, her gasps that told him what she wanted. He kissed her breasts, tasted, sucked, nipped. He slid down further pulling her shorts off as he went. He tasted her, nipped at her thighs, reveled in her heat. He struggle to remind himself this was for her. Was it really? He licked and stroked her as her led her to the edge. She held on to his head as she broke apart under his mouth.

He pulled off his shorts and rose above her. He kissed and whispered, "I need you, Maggie. I'm being a selfish bastard, but God, I need you." He felt her legs wrap around his waist as he plunged into her. He thrust hard as she matched his movements. He stared in her eyes as he moved faster and faster until he called her name, collapsing on her shoulder.

Maggie felt disoriented when she opened her eyes. The light in the room as all wrong. Then she remembered she wasn't in her own room. She glanced over her shoulder and saw Patrick sleeping peacefully. She thought what he must have looked like as an adorable boy. When she thought of last night she smiled. Patrick Hammond was definitely no boy. She warmed as she thought of his touch, his lips on her skin. He'd tried to take her pain away. It was one more reason to love him. God help her. She sighed as she closed her eyes and laid back on her pillow. A warm hand slipped around her waist. She opened her eyes to find Patrick smiling at her.

"Mmmmm. Good morning," he whispered as he stroked her skin.

"Good morning. I'm sorry I woke you,"

"I'm not," he whispered as he gave her a sweet kiss. "Stay put. I'll be right back."

He jumped out of bed and headed to the bathroom, giving Maggie an excellent view of his tightly toned ass. Every tabloid in the country had called him handsome but they didn't really know. Not the way she knew. His face, his body were amazing but it was his spirit that was truly remarkable. She closed her eyes and remembered the sound of his voice coaxing her back from the past. Anchoring her. She tried to push thoughts of what would happen Monday morning. "My God, what have I done?"

Patrick looked at himself in the mirror. "My God, what have I done?" He'd slept with his assistant. He'd never had a relationship with an employee. It was a cardinal rule. But Maggie wasn't just any employee. He'd wanted her since that first day in the restaurant. Those blue eyes that challenged him, the laugh that delighted him. She was never intimidated by him and put him in his place when he needed it. Last night, when he found her on the floor, all he wanted to do was help, to make it better. "Did I make things worse?"

He opened the door and smiled at Maggie curled up under the covers. He climbed back into bed and gave her another soft kiss. She pushed the covers over and smiled.

"My turn." She looked around the floor for where they tossed their clothes. She started to pick up a t-shirt when he reached for her hand.

"Don't bother," he whispered. Maggie chuckled and dropped it back to the floor. He stared at the ceiling as he waited for her to come back to bed. He prided himself on being

focused and level headed. Last night he was impulsive. Possible repercussions flew around his brain. Maggie walked back into the room and climbed into bed. He pulled her close and kissed her. It was gentle, tender, tasting of toothpaste and a new day.

"Maggie, I have to ask you. Do you think I took advantage last night? You were so upset."

She brushed her hand over his rough cheek. "Last night I knew exactly what I was doing. It was what we both wanted."

Relief washed over him. If she'd had any doubts it would have killed him. "What about this morning?" He kissed her softly.

"Are you asking to take advantage of me?" she smiled.

"You're welcome to take advantage of me, if you'd like."

Maggie got a wicked grin that startled him. "Is that right?" He smiled and nodded. She pushed on his shoulder, shoving him on his back. She straddled his waist and pulled him into a punishing kiss. She nipped at his ear. "You may be sorry," she said in a sing song tone.

He pulled her up and looked into her eyes. "No, I won't," he whispered.

Maggie lost any control she might have had left. She nipped at his ear, his neck. She worked her way down his body first with kisses, then with her tongue. She worked her way down to his waist. Listening to him hiss through clenched teeth, she wrapped her hand around him. She stroked the velvet steel, then tasted. She took him in her mouth and he gasped.

"Oh God, Maggie," he groaned.

She was as close to the edge as he was, losing herself in his responses. Knowing what she was doing to him. The power she was having over this very powerful man. Maggie pulled herself up over him, watching for a moment as he waited. She slipped him inside her and groaned. He felt so damn good. Hot steel pulsing inside her. She leaned on his shoulders, pushing her self up and down. She quicken her pace until they both blew apart. Patrick threw his arms around her and held her tight as the last spasms rocked his body.

"My God," he whispered. He pulled her face to his. "You're incredible." He kissed

her as he rolled on top of her, never breaking their connection. "Maggie," he whispered as he kissed her. "Sweet, Sweet Maggie."

Patrick's growling stomach woke him. From the light in the room he guessed it to be nearly noon. He slipped his hand over Maggie's waist while he placed a kiss on her neck.

"Mmmm. You're relentless, Hammond," she murmured.

"Always, but right now I'm thinking we should get something to eat."

She turned on her back and smiled. "That's a good idea."

He moved his hand up, covering her breast with his palm. "This is also an excellent idea," he said as he tasted her neck.

Maggie laughed. "Food, now. Playtime, later."

Patrick smiled. "I'll hold you to that."

They pulled on t-shirts and shorts and went downstairs. No one would know there had been a party for two hundred guests just twelve hours before. Even the pool deck was back to normal, dance floor gone and deck chairs were back in their proper place.

"Wow," said Patrick. They really cleared the place out."

"I made sure they took care of clean up before they left. I thought you wouldn't want crews all over this morning." Maggie smiled and slipped her hands around his neck. "Turns out I was right."

Patrick smiled. "You certainly were." He gave her a kiss while he grabbed her ass.

"Later, grabby. Let's see what the caterers left behind."

Deciding canapés and champagne were not a good breakfast Patrick was making them omelets. "I think there's some peppers and cheese in the fridge." Maggie chopped while Patrick scrambled. He poured everything into a hot skillet, folding the mix in half at the right time.

"I'm impressed, Hammond. You've got some skills."

He gave her a sly grin. "You mean besides my more obvious charms?"

She laughed and slapped his ass. "You do not need your ego pumped up any more than it already is. You finish the food. I'll get us some juice."

Patrick smiled as Maggie demolished her omelet. He sipped his juice and thought about how comfortable this all felt. He'd had the occasional overnight guest but it was never like this. He spent so much time between work and the foundation he had little time for a personal life. He never thought he'd have a reason to change. Maybe it was time to think again.

"I'll wash, you dry," said Maggie as she took her dishes to the sink.

"You don't have to do that."

She rolled her eyes and tossed a dish towel in his direction. Standing side by side, they did the dishes like they did it all the time. He hung up the towel as Maggie finished wiping down the sink. He came up from behind her, slipped his hands around her waist and kissed her neck. Patrick had a notion he could get used to this.

"Let's go take a walk on the beach. It looks like a nice day," he said.

She tugged at her oversized shirt. "I'm not exactly fit to be seen in public."

He tucked a wild curl behind her ear and smiled. "You're beautiful." He took her hand. "Come on." They walked down to the beach and stood with their bare feet in the water. He reached down and pick up a sand dollar. "I almost never find one of these intact."

"You collect shells?"

He put his finger to his lips. "Shush. Nobody needs to know that."

Maggie laughed. "Your secret is safe with me." She ran forward and picked up a small conch shell and held it out to him. It was a pretty variety, colors graduating from a light beige to a deep peach.

"Nice," he smiled. "First we have to check it doesn't have any residents."

"What?" she squealed as she dropped in his open hand.

Patrick laughed as he inspected the shell. "All clear." He tucked the shell in the pocket of his t-shirt with the sand dollar. He stood still, watching the wind play with Maggie's hair. He touched her cheek and gave her a light kiss. "Your hair is so curly today."

"Ugh, yes. I'm sure it's all over the place. It's what happens when I don't straighten it."

He took a handful of her hair and smiled. "I think your curls are beautiful." He pulled her close and kissed her. She slipped her hands around his neck and deepened the kiss. "Umm, sweetheart, we should go back to the house or I'm going to embarrass us both."

"Or..." she said as she dragged him into the waves.

They got waist deep when she put her arms around his neck and her legs around his waist. He smiled as he put his hands on her ass, holding her close. "Well, this is getting interesting," he said.

Maggie smiled and kissed him. He held on to her and floated out into deeper waters. Bobbing up and down in the waves, holding Maggie in his arms, he couldn't remember the last time he felt this good. She placed her hand over his shirt pocket.

"We don't want to lose our finds," she smiled. "Maybe we should go back to the house."

"Maybe we should," he whispered.

With their shells finally safe in the kitchen, he led her upstairs. Maggie tried to go back to the guest bedroom but Patrick led her in the opposite direction. "Not this time, sweetheart." He wanted her in his bed.

"We should get out of these wet clothes," she smiled.

"Excellent idea." He led her to a master bath three times the size of the guest bath. The shower had multiple heads set at every angle. A large Jacuzzi tub.

"Wait, is that?" She walked over to a cabinet and opened the door. "A mini fridge? In the bathroom?"

"Sometimes I want a bottle of water at night and I don't want to walk downstairs."

"Why not in the bedroom?"

"Compressor noise."

Maggie laughed and shook her head. "Rich people."

"I believe you were the one who said we should get out of these wet clothes." He reached under her shirt and slid his hands up her body, taking her shirt with it. He yanked down her shorts and wet panties. He moved his hands over her naked body. "Your turn," he whispered. Maggie tugged his shirt up and over his head. She quickly relieved him of his shorts and underwear. He led her to the shower stall and closed the door behind them.

Turning on the water, the jets hit them from all directions.

Patrick poured some body wash on a large natural sponge and ran it across Maggie's chest. He carefully soaped and rinsed her body, then worked shampoo into her hair. She closed her eyes and purred with pleasure. He rinsed her clean and handed her the sponge. She soaped the sponge and started with his chest, running the sponge and down his body. She soaped his back moving the sponge down and over his ass. He was too tall for her to reach his hair without heels so he quickly washed it himself. She smiled as she handed him the sponge enjoying the effect she'd had on him. He tossed it down and pushed her against the wall.

"Maggie," he whispered in near desperation. He crushed her lips with a kiss and he pulled her up, wrapping her legs around him. He groaned when he thrust into her. She held on tight as he thrust hard. He heard her whispers over the sound of the water.

"God yes. That's it," she gasped. She looked in the eyes and whispered, "More."

Patrick groaned as he drove hard, giving up all semblance of control.

Patrick had been staring at the same schematic on his monitor for the last twenty minutes. He had the interior door opened between his office and Maggie's. The florist had delivered the flowers and he wanted to see the look on her face. He'd wanted her to stay at his place but she'd insisted on going home last night. He smiled when she claimed they weren't kids anymore and needed some sleep before Monday morning. Then he proved to her they weren't quite as old as she claimed. He didn't know how things were going to work for them. One thing was certain, at least for him, everything had changed.

He heard her door open and he tried to appear interested in his monitor. He looked up when he heard her gasp at the bouquet of roses on her desk. She pulled the card out of the envelope. He hoped it would make her smile.

*From your not so secret admirer*

- P

Maggie giggled and turned toward his office. She was wearing a light beige suit and pale blouse. Her hair was pulled back as always, but for the first time she'd kept her natural curls, with a few untamed curls framing her face. "Thank you," she mouthed. He waved her over to his office. She walked over and he closed the interior door behind her.

"Patrick, the roses are ..."

He stopped her with a deep kiss. "I missed you this morning."

"I missed you too, but we can't do this here. People will know."

"Maggie, we can do this here. It's my office, my company, hell, it's my building." He was interrupted by his desk phone buzzing. He punched the button. "What!" he demanded.

"Sorry sir," said the man's voice. "You asked me to remind you about the meeting in R&D this morning."

"Yes, of course. I'll be right there." He looked at Maggie who was still standing by the door. "I have a meeting I need to be at." He walked over to her and kissed her again. "We'll talk about this when I get back." She reached for the door. "And Maggie, your hair looks lovely." She gave him a small smile as she walked back to her office.

Maggie inhaled the beautiful scent of the flowers. They reminded her of the side of Patrick it seemed he only showed her. Tender, loving, smiling. She sat at her desk and booted up her computer, wondering how she was going to concentrate. Her thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Come in."

Marie was an efficient young woman who acted as an assistant to several executives, including Maggie. "Ms. Lawson, I have the research you asked for on the Titan project."

"Thank you, Marie," said Maggie as she held out her hand for the file.

"Oh wow, these are beautiful," she said.

Maggie couldn't help but smile. "Yes, they are."

"So who's the lucky guy?" she asked.

"No one you know."

"Well, whoever he is, he has great taste."

"Thanks, Marie." Maggie watched as Marie closed the door behind her. She didn't feel like she'd lied to Marie. No one knew the Patrick she knew. She opened the file and looked at the research but all you could think about was half the company would know she'd gotten flowers by lunch. She become a cliché. She'd fallen in love with her boss.

Her phone buzz and she saw it was coming from the receptionist. "Yes, Diane."

"I've got a call for Mr. Hammond."

"He's in an R&D meeting, just take a message."

"I tried that but she's insisting. Says his cell phone is going to voice mail."

"He turns it off when he's in meetings. Just tell her to leave a message or call back."

"I tried that but...it's Marina Sokolov."

Maggie's heart raced. "The actress?"

"The freaking movie star. What do I do?"

"Put her through to me." Maggie steeled herself and waited for her phone to buzz.  
"Mr. Hammond's office."

"Where is he?" demanded the voice.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hammond is in a meeting."

"Of course he is. Tell him Marina called. I'm only going to be in town a couple of

days. My brother is expecting me in Carmel by Friday. I've made dinner reservations for seven at the St. Regis. And tell him if he's late he won't get dessert."

"I'll give him the message," she said through a quaking voice. Maggie hung up the phone and stared at the roses, letting her tears fall.

The meeting had run long and Patrick was starving. He hoped Maggie had waited so they could have lunch together. He got back to his office and stuck his head in Maggie's office. "Have you had lunch?"

"I've got a lot of work to do on the Titan project."

He saw a look on Maggie's face he didn't like. "You have to eat."

She gave him a forced smile. "I'm fine, really. You got a call while you were out. Marina Sokolov."

"Oh, crap," thought Patrick. "That explains it."

"She said to tell you she's made reservations at the St. Regis for seven. She also said if you're late you won't get dessert."

"Maggie, Marina and I," he started.

Maggie held up her hand. "It's fine Patrick. You don't owe me any explanations."

"Come in here so we can talk."

"It's fine," she repeated.

"You still work for me Ms. Lawson and I've asked you to come into my office." She looked shaken but rose from her desk and followed him. He closed the door behind her. "I want you to listen to me, Maggie. Marina and I are friends. I saw her when she was in town, no more than once or twice a year. I haven't seen or heard from her in six months."

"I've seen her on talk shows. She seems lovely," Maggie said quietly.

"You really aren't hearing me, are you?" Patrick had a sudden, horrible thought. "Do you want me to go?"

Maggie looked at him and sighed. "You're going to make me say it, aren't you?" She shook her head. "I don't want you to go," she whispered.

Patrick pulled his cell phone out of his jacket and flipped to Marina's contact button. "Marina, I got your message." Maggie tried to retreat and he drilled her with a look and pointed. "Don't you move." He turned his attention back to the phone. "No, I wasn't talking

to you. Marina, I won't make dinner tonight." He paused and listened to Marina's disappointment. "No I can't reschedule. Marina, the truth is I've met someone, someone very important to me." He smiled when he heard Maggie gasp. "Yes, Marina. I'm in love with her. Very much." He paused again listening to Marina while he watched Maggie begin to smile. "Thanks, You take care." He disconnected the call and set down the phone. "She's happy for me."

"She's happy for you?" Maggie asked.

"We were never more than friends. It was never serious between us." He brushed his hand over her cheek and gave her a light kiss.

Maggie smiled. "You realize you told a movie star you love me before you told me?"

Patrick grinned. "My apologies. Allow me to correct my grievous error." He kissed her softly. "Maggie Lawson, I am in love with you."

"I love you too," she whispered.

He pulled her into a deep kiss. "Richard was right. You were exactly who I needed in my life." He stroked a stray curl behind her ear. "You've become a great partner. I've never had a better working relationship with anyone. Do you think you could work as well with your husband?"

Maggie gasped and then broke into a broad smile. "I think I can handle you."

"I have no doubts," he smiled before he pulled her into a deep kiss.

### *Epilogue*

"Great," said Marina as she tossed her phone down on the bed and swore in fluent Russian. Patrick was a good friend and they had fun together but both of them knew that's all it was. She really was happy for him. He was a good guy and deserved to be happy. She wondered if she would ever be. Now she was stuck in LA for three days with nothing and no one to do. "Maybe I'll surprise Jake," she said to no one in particular.