

Hot off the Press

CATHERINE JEROME

Published by Catherine Jerome.
That's All She Wrote
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For my sister, just because.

*“The difference between literature and journalism is that
journalism is unreadable and literature is not read.”*
Oscar Wilde

CATHERINE JEROME

I: THE LETTER

December 13

Bishop Holdings Corporation
C/O: Judy Ross for Elliot Bishop
25 South Wacker Drive, Suite 8
Chicago, IL 60606

Dear Ms. Ross:

The *Chicago Press and Standard* is one of the most respected news periodicals in the city and at one point in its storied history, rivaled the circulation of another well-known but unmentioned area newspaper. Not unlike other publications today, the *CPS* has been weathered by the wane in demand for print journalism; however the *Press and Standard* prides itself on remaining true to its founding principles of printing fact over fiction and upholding the values set forth by its founding partners.

The *CPS* would appreciate your cooperation and collaboration in honoring Mr. Elliot Bishop for his continued contributions to the Chicago community. The newspaper wishes to publish a series dedicated to the philanthropic efforts of Mr. Bishop, but would also like to highlight his business accomplishments as well.

It is the paper's hope that Mr. Bishop will consider our proposal and work with us on a factual account of his prosperous endeavors thus far. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Juliana Price

II: THE PAPER

I smoothed out the wrinkles in my skirt and breathed deeply. I could do this. I knew why I wanted the internship at the *Chicago Press and Standard* and now all I needed to do was explain that to Ms. Geist.

“Juliana,” She called from her office. I stood, turned and walked lightly inside the room. “Please, sit down,” She said, gesturing to an open wingback chair across from her desk. My file was open and my entire academic record spilled out all over the table. She peered at me thoughtfully from behind her black-rimmed glasses and smiled.

I smiled back and sat carefully in the chair, making sure that my posture was straight and confident, even though that was nowhere near how I felt.

“Are you excited? This is your final term!” She exclaimed sweetly. She clicked a few buttons on her keyboard and wiggled her mouse. “You’re only a semester away from claiming your English degree. I’m sure your parents are proud.”

I nodded meekly and looked from her to the stack of papers and back again.

“Well, I see that you would like an internship approved for the *CPS* newspaper—it’s a dying breed, isn’t it?”

I laughed. That was true. I wasn’t sure why print journalism still fascinated me, especially in a world consumed with the next big technological creation that moved us further away from it. “No one gets their news from the paper anymore, but maybe there will be a tide of restoration?” That was a futile hope. If that tide ever washed up, it would be on the shores a hundred years after I was dead and buried.

“You’ve got all of the qualifications I see to meet the criteria to enroll in the internship class. A very impressive GPA,” She smiled wide. Sure, I was proud of my 3.9, but that was only accomplished because I had absolutely no life outside of class. This internship could change that. “I am happy to grant you the okay, but I’ll need your direct supervisor at the paper to fill out an evaluation at the end of the semester.”

“Okay, yes,” I replied happily. My supervisor would most likely be too tired to do that and instead would have me complete it and just sign. This was perfect. I stood and Ms. Geist did as well.

“Congratulations, again,” She said, sticking out her hand for me to shake. “I hope to read one of your articles someday.”

“Thank you,” I said, before turning around and bounding briskly out of her office. It was a chilly Friday afternoon. Classes would begin the following week and I was lucky enough to start at the *CPS* on Monday. I wished I would actually be on the beat, digging through garbage, sitting on stoops and chasing stories; instead, I’d be grabbing coffee and sorting thumbtacks.

The *CPS* was next to last in circulation in Chicago. The only other paper people read less was the *Chicago Post* and that came after they falsely accused the favored son of the city (this time not basketball’s Michael Jordan or Derek Rose), Quarterback Max Bishop, of cheating on his wife Erin.

The *CPS* was trying to increase their readership by chipping away at their human interest stories and instead relying on gimmicks. So far, this worked to their advantage. They ran special articles on the Chicago elite—the movers and shakers of the city. They managed to secure interviews with some of the

metropolitan's most favored men and women, but were still coming up short when it came to the most favored family: the Bishops.

While Max was leading his team to the playoffs for his first time in blue and orange and his wife was running her high powered public relations/crisis management firm, which was an offshoot of her position as agent for Hollywood's UIP talent agency, his mother Belinda, or "Bunny" as she was affectionately labeled, was a retired lawyer (she founded the esteemed Bishop, Montgomery and Wade) and his late father Foster was the former State's Attorney. Following his death, the family pledged funding to the University of Chicago Cancer Research Center and were bestowed with a wing named in their honor. The daughter, Charlotte, owned and operated a small luxury jewelry boutique in the heart of the most popular downtown shopping district and was married to Nathan Merrick, a property developer. Charlotte, Max, Erin and Mrs. Bishop fiendishly avoided the press, but their efforts were dwarfed in comparison to his reclusive brother, entrepreneur and tech wiz investor Elliot Bishop.

Elliot was my ticket to a byline, to a desk, to a career. He'd successfully avoided the press for years by dodging events, maintaining homes in some of the most secluded areas and guarded buildings and for shunning notoriety in general. The paper angled for an article on him for weeks, but Bishop rebuffed them at every turn. A peek inside his world would generate more than enough readers and give the *CPS* a shove in the right direction. I was to be that push and my letter to his company was the ticket. At least I hoped it was—it hadn't been returned to sender yet and I'd sent it

weeks ago, even before I knew the university would okay my internship.

I rushed back to my small studio apartment, ready to devour the last blueberry muffin in the carton in celebration of my first real step up the career ladder.

THE *CPS* OFFICES were nowhere near as decadent as television shows and movies depicted a newsroom to seem. It was one large space dedicated to several desks, a few cubicles and even less offices. I was given a table with a dated computer and a chair that was covered in stains and would have been branded new in 1976.

“I’m just going to tell you, this isn’t the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*,” Valerie Hayes, my supervisor and the editor of the paper said to me once we were cocooned in her office. Earlier, she’d given me a tour of the workplace that consisted of pointing at things and people before spouting: “*This is [the water cooler] [office plant] [bathroom] [Charlie].*” “We’re not breaking stories about corruption or insider trading. The twenty-four hour news cycle has fucked us over. We basically take what we can get and hope it gets us another issue.”

I nodded, focused on everything she was saying while also attempting to not appear doe eyed and eager; two things I very much was at the moment.

“You get my coffee, my dry cleaning, anything you can do to make my life easier,” She spouted dryly. “That desk is yours; do with it as you please. There’s a backorder on cubicles—we just don’t have the funding, but you can get in line.”

I nodded again and she looked at me oddly.

“Okay,” She said dismissively and I stood to leave.

I headed for the door, then turned to ask her one last thing. “I’ll need you to fill out a form about my progress...” I trailed off after looking at the expression on her face. “If you don’t mind, I can just fill it out for you now and you can sign it.”

Valerie gave me a look that indicated that was to be expected and I quickly turned and walked out of the office.

THE FIRST FEW WEEKS of the internship were comprised of me running around and filling any request Valerie dictated at the drop of a hat. I would check my messages in the morning and they would consist of random tidbits like: *“Thinking parachute pants; remind in office”* or *we would have a conversation similar to the one regarding apple pies:*

“Juliana, okay, I need you to find me.... There is this lady, she makes the best pies.”

“Okay, what is the name of her store? I’ll go by there today during lunch.”

“If I knew that, we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

The closest I came to being featured on a story was my work finding photos of dogs defecating on lawns in front of homes for a piece the paper was running about a community implementing stricter leash laws. Valerie was a wreck because corporate—or whomever it was that owned the *CPS*—was breathing down her neck about ad sales and coverage. The newspaper’s readership was still dipping and although the small fluff pieces on different movers and shakers in the city bumped up certain issues from day to day, the paper was still floundering.

I continued to tend to my school requirements. There would be a random paper here or assignment

there. As it was my final semester, I wasn't as bogged down as I'd been throughout my previous school terms and I was fortunate enough to take the extra time to work on the job hunt or research graduate schools.

I was on scholarship at the university and the excess money after my tuition and fees were paid went to my rent. I worked part time at the campus bookstore to have money for groceries and other odds and ends. I'd been living on my own since I was sixteen. My home life wasn't enchanting—my parents argued more than they agreed—and after growing increasingly frustrated by the situation I graduated high school early and started college. I hadn't spoken to them since. Once for Christmas, I'd asked Santa to grant my parents a divorce. That didn't go over well and for the next few days they argued over whose fault it was. My sister and I also weren't on good terms. I hadn't heard from Vivienne after our final fight before I left for school. She was two years older and also fled our household by joining the air force.

I felt extremely isolated at times. I moved off campus into the tiny apartment I presently inhabited after freshman year. My roommate and I didn't get along—she was extremely messy—and I didn't relate to any of the other girls on our hall. My classes were a similar situation and after a while I realized that I wasn't destined to meet my best friends or make lasting relationships at that juncture in my life. I focused more intently on school and achieving my English degree. I kept up surface friendships with the people at the bookstore, often attending small get-togethers or events with them and I even visited some co-workers' families during the holidays, but that was the extent of my off duty activities.

The internship—which was for credit, but also provided a small stipend because I was low-income—alleviated that issue. No one at the *CPS* was interested in anything to do with me. I was Valerie’s assistant, which meant I was feared and avoided. I didn’t too much dislike Valerie, but I didn’t too much like her either. She never paid any more attention to me than she did the walls, but I was never on the end of one of her tirades and for that I loved my non-existence.

It was late February and I was stationed at the water cooler, waiting for Valerie to exit the conference room after the updates meeting to place her customary water in hand. She’d screamed more than usual. The last time it was that bad someone parked in her space—no one in the office, but that didn’t matter—and she went on a rant for the first fifteen minutes of the meeting.

She trudged out of the conference room, snatching the water cup out of my hand without acknowledgement and slammed her office door shut. I started to re-fill my own cup and listened to the murmurs of my co-workers who all padded out of the room quietly.

“JULIANA!” She roared from her office not even five minutes later. I looked towards her closed door with bubbling exhaustion. She never tired of hollering.

Tim, one of the head writers, looked at me with empathy and I turned and walked headfirst into the storm.

“Yes, Valerie,” I said, peeking into her office from behind the door.

“Well don’t just stand there,” She said, not looking away from her computer screen. “Come in and shut the door.”

I did as I was told and sat down in one of the chairs across from her desk. Everything in the *CPS* was dated, Valerie's office was no exception; however, unlike everywhere else in the office, which was stuck in a 1970s time warp, Valerie's furniture was of the still not up-to-date 90s decade.

"Do you know who Elliot Bishop is?"

I nodded. I never gave a verbal response unless there was no other way to reply.

"Well, *obviously*," She snipped acerbically. I remained pokerfaced. I didn't know what I was supposed to glean from that statement. It could all be fine or we could be headed for hell. It was never a sure thing with Valerie. "I got a call from his office this morning."

I continued nodding to show I understood. I wondered if she knew about my letter, but in any case, she would be the first to say so.

"His assistant said you wrote a letter to his office requesting an interview. Is this true?"

I shook my head to indicate that it was true. I sent that letter over two months ago, but it was true.

"They've agreed to do the interview," She said evenly. I wasn't sure if she was pleased or not. I was shocked, but bit my lip to keep from showing my excitement. I hoped this indicated that I would move on from taking her car to get washed and instead would be shadowing some of the other seasoned reporters; even if that just meant taking notes on various real estate dealings.

"Are you proud of yourself?" She asked and I shrugged and smiled. "You shouldn't be. They won't agree to the interview unless you conduct it."

"What?" I spat, breaking my code of silence. "I-I-I don't know what to say to that."

“Well obviously, I said yes.” Valerie said, matter-of-factly, “Even though this is a fucking disaster in the making.”

“Well, can’t I just do it with one of the other journalists,” I cut in, “Maybe Tim or one of the more seasoned writers?”

“Don’t you think I already tried that?” She asked, annoyed. “They will only agree to it if you’re alone; fucking ridiculous! We get the hugest scoop in *CPS* history and they want me to send a fucking college co-ed. Corporate is going to have my ass.”

“I won’t screw up, I promise,” I said quickly, regretting it as soon as I saw her facial expression.

“Well of course you’re not going to screw up!” She roared. “That’s not an option! Everyone in the office is already on this story. You’ll have a list of questions to ask and so help me if you deviate you will be reporting on the end of your career in journalism.”

OH SHIT, OH SHIT, OH SHIT. I paced back and forth across my living room floor and ran my fingers through my hair in panic. When I wrote that letter, I hadn’t expected that *I* would be the one conducting the interview. If anything, I hoped they would call the office intrigued that someone would take the time to explain why the article was necessary and how important it would be to the Chicago community. Ever since Valerie informed me of the impending interview she’d been on a rampage. The Bishop article was the only thing that mattered and it mattered a lot. Everyone was tasked on gathering information on Elliot: what he liked, what he didn’t, who he dated, where he lived, where he ate. The office appeared to be in preparation for the second coming and I was at the center of the chaos. The interview was

my doing, but I was the least involved in the intricacies leading up to the very delicate moment.

Valerie grilled me on decorum, on how a reporter should look and act and even had a hand in my outfit for the meeting. I was fiendishly regretting my tenacity.

III: THE INTERVIEW

“Are you nervous?” Leslie Waterman asked when she appeared behind me at the water cooler. Leslie had been with the paper for five years and assisted in ushering the *CPS* into the new decade. She created her own lifestyle blog that took off on the internet and caught the eye of the paper’s top brass. They acquired her website and kept her as a consultant. She oversaw both the print and the online copies of the *Leslie’s Lifestyle* section.

“That’s an understatement,” I said, taking a sip from my cup to give me more time to process my thoughts. I wanted to be careful of what I said. I knew most of the other staff was pissed that I’d managed to scoop probably the biggest story in the paper’s current history. Valerie was already on edge and had been since early yesterday. “I just want to make sure I have every question answered.”

The *CPS* planned on dividing up parts of Elliot’s interview to run as a series in all divisions of the paper. Leslie would have a few snippets for her lifestyles section, there would be a comment or two under real estate and business dealings, and etc., but Elliot’s article was mostly geared towards the front page. His family was a hit with all of the Chicago community: they were well respected in the legal field thanks to his mother, politics thanks to his father, sports thanks to his brother and business thanks to him. His sister Charlotte was a popular socialite—her jewelry line was only worn by the elite and scores of celebrities—and his sister-in-law Erin’s firm was the go-to for crisis management. On top of this, the Bishops were philanthropically generous and donated

not only their wealth, but their time to multiple national and international charities.

“I’m sure you’ll do fine,” She said, bending over to refill her water bottle. “I will tell you that if you can, find out more about *him*. They say he’s still dating that model girl, Amelia Lerner, but no one knows if they’re on or off since he’s such a recluse.”

“I’ll try my best,” I replied and moved to step away as quickly as possible. Valerie already pushed the personal life issue as much as she possibly could. She told me to ask for personal photos “but make sure it appears that you’re doing so strictly due to time and budget constraints in place of a photo shoot.” If Elliot Bishop was as smart and private as everyone credited him as being, then the only photo I would probably get that had anyone else in it would be the one of him and the Bishop Holdings Corporation team—if that.

“We’re thinking of doing a bachelor auction to tie in,” Elaine Cho said when she appeared in the kitchen as well, further stalling my efforts at a quick retreat. She was in charge of the social scene at the paper and was always invited to events around the city that had extra press passes left over after all of the bigger and more renowned publications had their picks. “If we can get Bishop, we can get anyone. We’ll say the proceeds will benefit one of his favorite charities. Women will be out the door and around the block. The men will want to follow his example.”

I nodded and turned to Leslie, waiting for her to respond and for the two of them to lose themselves in conversation, allowing me to leave. Leslie did what I expected. Even though it was known that she and Elaine were not on the best of terms—after all, women in the workplace always hated each other and vied for whatever straight men were available—they still loved

to get together and make the rest of us feel unworthy. They started chatting about Elaine's idea, treating me like the fading break room wallpaper, and I made my exit.

I READ OVER all of my questions again and again, attempting to commit them to memory. I could still recall Valerie's shrill voice in my ear: "*DO NOT DEVIATE! Not even from the word 'a'!*"

That evening I changed multiple times. I scrubbed my skin and spritzed my entire body over with perfume. I tried to look and appear professional, instead of like the 20-year-old inexperienced girl-child that I was. I looked at my watch again: it was 6:15pm—15 minutes before the interview—and I was sitting alone at Charlie Trotter's, Elliot's favorite restaurant, and the only place he would allow the interview to be conducted to ensure that he was in a controlled and neutral environment. I looked around at the other patrons who were all sharply dressed and made my rent cost in an hour. *He isn't going to show.* I looked at my watch again: 6:17pm. Valerie said to play off his demeanor "lest we offend him and he purchases the paper and destroys it." She was fearful of sending me alone, but as his office insisted this was the only way he would agree to the interview, I was here unaccompanied. I thought Valerie sent in reinforcements to at least report on how the interview was going or whether or not Elliot walked out in the middle, but I didn't recognize anyone from the paper hiding behind a potted plant or menu.

"Miss Price," I turned and stood to greet Elliot. He was taller than I expected and lean, but still domineering. He stuck out his hand for me and I reciprocated.

“Juliana, please.”

“Alright, Juliana,” He replied, “Call me Elliot,” He walked over to his seat, unbuttoned his blazer and sat.

“Please excuse the pad and pens,” I said, gesturing to my oversized legal notebook and pile of ink pens. His office stipulated “*no video, audio or stenographic recording of the interview is permitted.*”

He grinned slightly and nodded. It was a fixed price menu and we had no issues or time wasted deciding what to eat as it was already decided for us. Our waitress appeared with suggested wines for the menu, but I declined in favor of my ice water and underage avoidance.

“Our paper does specials on Chicago entrepreneurs and businessmen and your name has been at the top of the list for a while...” I trailed off, but he silently urged me to continue. “I’m aware you do not appreciate press intrusion—especially with the profession of your brother—but I thought that maybe you would appreciate knowing it is a serious piece, nothing trivial or gossipy.”

“I would hope so.”

“So, this is your favorite restaurant?” I posed, after the waitress left us. My pen was ready, but my hand was twitching from nerves.

“I enjoy it, yes.”

“It is a favorite restaurant of many in Chicago.”

“Is that so?” He said, looking me directly in the eyes.

“Yes, but I presume you knew this,” I continued and cleared my throat. I hadn’t meant for my question to incite a game of who can read between the lines fastest. “It says something without saying anything.”

“What exactly does it say?”

“That you enjoy good food that everyone enjoys without making your selection personal.”

He looked away from me and nodded thoughtfully. “You like to observe?”

“Umm... I guess, maybe...” *Professional, journalistic vocabulary Juliana! What are you, fifteen?* I laughed quietly to offset my response. “I think that is what journalism is: heightened observation.”

“And to what are you observing now, Juliana?”

“One of Chicago’s most gifted business minds—”

“You do flattery in addition to writing articles?”

“I do everything.”

He smiled again and relaxed back in his chair. “So what questions does the next in last circulation *Chicago Press and Standard* request that I answer?”

“We’re third to last, now.”

“My mistake.”

“My correction,” I uttered before I meant to. I was scribbling on my notepad to keep from opening my mouth and inserting my foot, but instead I just made it worse. I looked from the paper to Elliot and then back to the paper again. “Umm...” I breathed deeply. “What made you first decide to go into business for yourself?”

“Privilege.”

I sat and waited for him to elaborate, but realized soon afterward that his one word response was his full worded answer to the question. “Growing up in a privileged household made you decide to become an entrepreneur?”

“Yes.”

“Nothing else.”

“There are always additional factors to consider, but I do not have the full list.”

“Do you have the half-list?”

Our discussion was interrupted by the appearance of our first course. “Does your sharp tongue assist you with most of your interviews?” He asked as soon as our waiter disappeared.

That depends since this is my first interview. Is it working? I continued jotting down what I could from our conversation. “With interviewees that are this short, yes,” I lied. I couldn’t tell if he was amused or not.

“Why do you think I went into business for myself?”

I paused and thought carefully before answering. Spouting off the first thing that came to mind could be extremely detrimental and I was pretty sure I was already pushing my luck.

“I can’t be frivolous,” I replied. “It doesn’t matter what I think,” I shook my head to dismiss the conversation. “I apologize for moving off topic. Forgive me, please.”

I thought back to the list of questions I’d memorized. Most could be answered by simply visiting the Bishop Holdings Corporation website or a quick search on Wikipedia. He was born Elliot James Bishop, 32-years-ago and started Bishop Holdings Corporation when he was 26 after spending his previous years as a nomad in various countries—mostly Africa (*“Glorious people and place,” He’d said in one of the few interviews he granted, “That’s shaped many of my views on life.”*). He held a degree in chemical engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and lived with his model fiancée Amelia Lerner in a three million dollar brownstone a few streets up from his company’s headquarters. Outside of his penchant for linguistics, work as an advocate for the environment and clean water in Africa, golf and

basketball, and his close friendships with The Duke of Exeter and Tom Mercer, Elliot rarely—albeit purposefully—generated news. His business dealings graced the proper channels (CNBC, *Wall Street Journal*, etc.), but never his personal connections. There were only a few photos of him with Amelia, and those were generally taken at fashion or charitable events when he couldn't duck the camera. It was obvious to anyone that viewed the pictures that the photographer caught him off guard.

"You're forgiven," He said with a nod. Our second course was headed for the table. I was so worried about my ineptness that I barely registered that I was being served gourmet food in a quite pleasant setting.

"Why are you so worrisome when it comes to public perception of your personal life?" I asked, trying to word the question better than what I was provided by Valerie. After dining with him the little time that I had, I gathered that he would view her inquiry, "*Why are you so protective of your relationship with public figure, model Amelia Lerner?*" as too intrusive. In this case, he'd be right.

"I don't view myself as worrisome," He answered evenly. "The majority of public figures are granted what you refer to as a 'personal life', but I accept my 'private life'. I don't feel I owe the media or anyone else access to all parts of me."

"Are you afraid of what may be said?"

"No."

"Everyone already knows of your relationship with Ms. Lerner. Why do you feel the need to go to great lengths to hide it?"

"I don't go to great lengths to hide anything," He said. "I do, however, protect what is mine."

I nodded. It made sense. “Has it been difficult for you, growing up with an equally, if not, arguably, more famous sibling?”

“No.”

“Would you care to elaborate?”

“Not particularly.”

I unintentionally shot him a look and quickly regretted it.

“My response is not pleasing, I gather,” He said, taking a sip of his drink. His eyes didn’t leave mine. It was near like a challenge, but I wasn’t sure of what was being nonverbally construed.

“I’m just unsure of why you granted permission...” I said finally. “Why allow the interview if you were going to avoid answering or give non-answers?”

“I haven’t avoided answering any of your questions Miss Price,” He responded dryly. “I’m unsure of what you mean with the non-answer bit.”

“I think you’re aware of exactly what I mean.” Earlier I was willing to step down, but not anymore. The interview was already shot to hell thanks to my mouth overloading my ass. I might as well finish what I started and wait for the gavel to smash and indicate my impending unemployment.

He sat back in his chair and relaxed, “Very well.”

I sighed and collected my pens. “Thank you, for your time,” I uttered, avoiding eye contact as I rearranged my things for departure. Valerie was going to blow a gasket.

“Juliana,” He said, his voice indicating that he wanted me to look to him. I resolved my internal frustration and turned to him. “I read your letter.”

I gave a small smile and waited for him to continue.

“I found it interesting that a woman who doesn’t work for a paper would advocate so strongly for that paper to receive an interview.”

I nodded, “Well, I’m sure you see now, that I do work for that paper. And that the third-to-last in readership paper is appreciative of your time and effort.”

I stood to leave prompting him to stand with me. “Thank you, Mr. Bishop. It was... an experience.” I stuck out my hand for him to shake and he reciprocated.

“The pleasure is mine, Juliana.”

IV: THE ARTICLE

“This is good stuff, Juliana,” Valerie said, peering over the mass of my handwritten transcripts. Her response was more welcome than anything I could have anticipated. I smiled wanly, not wanting to disregard her comment, but also not wanting to draw any extra attention to the situation. Most of Elliot’s answers came after I did recon on the internet for other articles and biographies on him and his company. Granted, I knew Valerie was pleased because his comments regarding Amelia were the most that he’d given to any publication.

“Thank you,” I said finally, when I realized that a verbal response was expected.

“His office called this morning,” She added, a huge grin plastered on her lips. “They’ll cooperate in us running a series! Can you believe it? My hard work is finally paying off!”

I swallowed. I wasn’t sure if I did so in fear or gratitude. Tim or one of the other veterans could salvage the massacre I’d created. He would be able to pull information from even a five minute conversation.

“You’ll be meeting with him at his office tomorrow at nine,” She said, scooping up the papers into a neat pile and sitting behind her desk. She adjusted her glasses and turned to her computer monitor. “You have the address, correct?”

“I’m sorry, what?” I said, confused and frazzled. This couldn’t be happening. She couldn’t send me back. I so desperately wanted to return to my desk and research more dogs and community issues with their shit.

Valerie sighed deeply; a sign of her bubbling frustration with me. I braced myself for the blowback.

“I don’t understand: you speak English and I didn’t stutter.”

“Right,” I replied with a nod. “I just... I know I’m not seasoned yet. I figured you would prefer another—”

“Of course *I* would *prefer!*” She snapped and threw her hands in the air. “But they want *you* again *alone*. I’m not going to argue over it and I don’t need your thoughts on the issue.”

“Right.”

“*Okay,*” She said dismissively and I turned to leave her office.

I sat down at my desk and powered on my computer. In addition to providing Valerie with my handwritten notes from the interview, I’d been required to type them up and email them to her. I pulled up the document and scanned it to find any indication that I wasn’t a complete buffoon. He must have wanted me to return for further embarrassment. I must have been good entertainment.

There wasn’t anything remotely good about the interview. I was journalism at its finest.

“I saw you got intel on Elliot,” Leslie said, stopping by my desk for the first time since I started work. I don’t know how she could be pleased with his vague one sentence answer regarding his fiancée. They’d been engaged for an awful long time—nearly 5-years to be exact—to not be married yet. According to most of the gossips, Elliot was a serial monogamist and had a hard time recuperating from the death of his fiancée Alice. They’d had a fight; she left their shared high rise apartment and was killed by a drunk driver after their vehicle collided with hers. Since then, he’s promoted harsher penalties for those caught driving under the influence.

“Not really, you think so?” I said, only turning from my computer screen to her momentarily. I didn’t know what she was fishing for, but I hoped she would get to the point so that I could have my solitary space again.

“*Yes,*” She emphasized. “I mean, really, Juliana? Well, I guess you *are* young.” She shrugged and leaned further onto my desk. “You have years before you start thinking about settling down and meeting ‘The One’, but for the majority of us that time is here. And having someone like him say he protects what’s his, well, the ovaries get excited.”

I nodded awkwardly. I couldn’t remember when the conversation took a nosedive, but I was hoping that was all I would be subjected to for the day.

“Valerie told us you were headed to his headquarters,” She swooned. “Put in a good word, please. I’ll make it worth your while.”

She stood and pranced off back to her storage closet masquerading as an office. Since when would my word mean anything? I turned back to minimize the transcript when Elaine approached. Great, it must be feeding time and my desk was the watering hole.

“Valerie is pleased with you,” She said, propping herself on my desk at the spot that was previously occupied by Leslie. “That rarely happens.”

I gave a small smile and waited. I knew she didn’t care for a response. This was her opening. She must have wanted a good word placed with Elliot as well. Where did anyone get that I had that sort of pull with anything?

“Is he as hot in person?”

“I’m not sure,” I shrugged. “You know that’s all relative.” She gave me a look and I added that his

features were the exact same as those in photos, “for what it’s worth.”

“Hmm...” She pondered to herself, then turned to me quickly. “You’ll put in a good word right? I’m sure I could score you tickets to some big city events—especially if you can get him on board for the auction. Tell him it will benefit his clear water initiative or whatever it is in Africa.”

I gestured that I would, even though I’m sure she knew I wouldn’t. I wished we could trade places. She could go and sink her claws into him. I had no interest in looking anymore foolish that I already did.

“You could put a word in for me, right?” She added again and I just smiled, hoping this would fulfill her response request. “Let him know that I’m a huge environmentalist as well! I only print front and back.”

She stood to leave and shot me a wink. “This can just be between us.”

When it was finally time for me to pack up for the day, I came across Charlie, or rather, Charlie came across me as I was headed to the elevators, lunging for my freedom from the now constricting office.

“You need me to put in a word as well?” I asked, pressing the down button. “Elliot didn’t strike me as your type.”

He smirked, “But he’s so dreamy.”

Charlie, as I learned, previously held my post as intern, although he was labeled an “Editorial Assistant” because he wasn’t a student and couldn’t be paid pennies to do my same job. The paper was wallowing and Charlie was only one person so they looked to hire someone else to pick up his slack. Enter me as a student worker with a small stipend and my ability to get dry cleaning, make copies and fix coffee were put to work.

“Is he *ever*?” I asked wryly. “I’ll make sure to tell him you’re an environmentalist.”

“Oh, *pretty please*?” Charlie said and we both laughed. “In all seriousness,” He added when the elevator came to a stop on our floor. “If you need any help with anything, just ask. No strings attached.”

I smiled. “Thanks, Charlie; it’s nice to know that someone at the office wants to help.”

PROFILED: ELLIOT BISHOP

An Introduction into the Private World of a Public Figure

Part One in an Exclusive Multipart Series

By: Valerie Hayes, Editor-in-Chief

Elliot Bishop is one of Chicago’s brightest investment minds. The son of the late and great former State’s Attorney, Foster Bishop, and Belinda “Bunny” Bishop, co-founder of esteemed law firm Bishop, Montgomery and Wade, he has garnered attention for his no holds barred business tactics and his philanthropic pursuits for clean water in third world countries; but it is the man behind the suit that is shrouded in secrecy and ever increasing public interest. Mr. Bishop, 32, is known to shy away from the press and the public eye in general. He is rarely spotted at society events and is mostly known for ducking the jumbo-tron at Bears football games, where his older brother Max Bishop, 34, is the star quarterback. The Bishop Holdings Corporation (BHC) founder, chairman,

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president and CEO has a veil of privacy that he surrounds himself in, as well as those closest to him. "Elliot is a great leader and an even better person," Judy Ross, Mr. Bishop's longtime assistant and close confidant told Suzy Morris during one of her segments on her eponymous *Interviews* show in the spring of last year, "But he appreciates his privacy and he is fierce about guarding himself and his loved ones." Mr. Bishop is known to hide behind an impenetrable fortress of business partners and allies. Most public inquiries are directed to his publicist and sister-in-law Erin Bishop and her high powered crisis management and public relations firm Banks-Bishop and Associates. It is only in varied occasional moments that the public is granted entry into the man behind the multimillion dollar conglomerate he has created.

It was only 8-years ago that Mr. Bishop began his formal retreat from public life. Following the death of his fiancée Alice Forsythe-Crane in a vehicle collision with a drunk driver, a then 24-year-old Elliot, a graduate of Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a degree in chemical engineering, began backpacking across Europe and Asia. He settled in Kenya, where he discovered his advocacy for clean water and an even cleaner environment. At 25, he founded the Pure Water Initiative and only a year later returned to Chicago to jumpstart

CATHERINE JEROME

BHC. He cited his trip to Africa as “shap[ing] many of [...his] views on life.” It was later that year that he met model and current fiancée of five years Amelia Lerner, daughter of cosmetics giants Norman and Christine Lerner. The two are rarely spotted together, though they are known to make annual appearances at the Costume Institute Gala and were photographed vacationing with close friends The Duke and Duchess of Exeter this past summer. Mr. Bishop, known never to confirm nor deny his relationship with Ms. Lerner, 29, and their heavily guarded life together, tells me, “I protect what is mine.”

In a multipart series, Mr. Bishop has granted the *Chicago Press and Standard* unprecedented access to his closely protected world where we will uncover the very private man behind the public Fortune 500 Company he built.

Contributor(s): Tim Rosenbaum, Juliana Price

ELLIOT'S OFFICE wasn't stuffy. It was in one of South Wacker Drive's skyscrapers with views in every direction of the Chicago Skyline, but it wasn't minimalistic and sterile. I dared to say it was *warm*.

“Welcome Miss Price,” Judy Ross greeted when I entered. She had her own large office and assistant stationed in front. She walked over to shake my hand. Security must have informed her of my arrival when they provided me with my guest pass. She was older—I guessed her early-to-mid 50s—but graceful and warm.

“It’s a pleasure to have you join us. Elliot has said great things, so I’m happy to place a face with a description... and a name of course!”

“Thank you for the warm welcome,” I said with a smile. She introduced me to her assistant Wendy and led me towards Elliot’s office. I caught a glimpse of her spacious accommodations and saw that she preferred shabby chic to cold, hard lines or dark wood and aristocratic hues.

“We read the first installment of the series,” She turned to tell me as I followed her down the short hall. “I can’t say I was pleased, though.” She stopped in front of what I believed to be Elliot’s office. “I’m very protective of Elliot. He’s like a son to me and I’m extremely close with Bunny. I would hope that you understand that he does not grant interviews, *ever* and that in saying that, you will heed that your words mean things.”

I nodded. “I’ll talk with my boss,” I replied, feeling more and more squished in the middle. Damn it, why couldn’t she send Tim and tell them I was ill? “We at the paper appreciate the access Mr. Bishop has granted us and only hope that we accurately represent his business and personal affairs.”

She smiled, seemingly satisfied with my off the cuff remark. I don’t know where the gall came for me to answer her in that manner. I supposed it was my genuine concern for journalistic integrity. I never wanted to be attributed to the demise of an already struggling industry.

“No worries,” She added. “I’ll be sure to speak with your supervisor. Elliot and I would prefer that you write the article. After all, you’re conducting the interview.”

“Right,” I said, already fearful of Valerie’s reaction when she was given her orders. It would help contribute to her daily outrage quota. I swallowed, a mixture of nerves and exhaustion. I should have never written that stupid letter.

She opened Elliot’s office door and gestured for me to follow. “Elliot, Miss Price from the *Press and Standard* is here to see you.”

He looked up from his computer screen and smiled. His eyes looked tired, but he was still incredibly handsome. I internally laughed when I thought about today’s reaction and Leslie and Elaine’s blurbs yesterday.

“Juliana,” He said, standing with his hands in his pockets. “It’s a pleasure seeing you again.”

I nodded, my hands crossed in front of me at my waist. “Likewise,” I answered. The room suddenly felt small.

“Is there anything I can get either of you, or have Wendy bring?” Judy asked, looking between Elliot and me. I shook my head no, but Elliot requested a tray of sparkling and still waters with ice. Judy nodded and quickly left the room.

“Please, sit,” Elliot said, his hand open and motioning towards the empty chair across from his desk.

I noted my surroundings. In my “Known Unknowns and Other Details” writing class, I learned the best information on a subject was the information they failed to verbalize. His office was as inviting as Judy’s, minus the décor. His had a mixture of linen, leather and brown. There was a buffet table with photos of his family members, friends and associates. I noticed one photo of him and Amelia at the annual Lerner Cosmetic’s Charity Ball.

“I suppose the office will make it into the profile,” Elliot commented, pulling me from my analysis.

“Do you moonlight as a journalist?” I asked, looking towards him. I heard his office door open and turned to see Wendy shuffling in swiftly with a tray of waters and what looked like an assortment of fruits. She placed the tray on his desk and Elliot thanked her. I followed suit and watched as she departed just as quietly and hastily as she arrived.

“What was the giveaway?” He asked when we were alone again.

I pulled out my notebook and pens, my hands were twitching again.

“Why the decision to allow a series?” I posed, opening the notebook before looking to him for his answer.

He regarded me intently. His eyes narrowed, but not in anger, more in mischief. It felt like a rotating game of cat and mouse. I wasn’t sure of my role at the moment.

“I find your utter disregard for decorum intriguing.”

I was taken aback. My facial expression conveyed my disbelief. What did he mean I disregarded decorum? “I’m sorry, I don’t follow.”

He sat back in his chair and rested his head in his hand. “*I think you’re aware of exactly what I mean,*” He replied, mimicking my statement from our previous meeting.

I gave a short laugh. “I guess I deserve that.”

He shrugged and it seemed our unspoken duel started again.

“Your family is important to you, yes?” I commented, trying to restart the interview process. I

noticed the multitude of family photos on his side table. It seemed like a harmless enough question.

“Isn’t family important to everyone?”

“Not necessarily,” I blurted, thinking of my own ancestral dysfunction. “I will tell you, if you’re going to repeat my question in another form, I can write the article without your input.”

“You have absolutely no qualms about offending me, do you?”

“I didn’t know my statement was offensive.”

“Why journalism?” He asked, still leaning back comfortably in his chair. He seemed intent on tripping me up. I knew this whole interview had to be for amusement on his part. He must have grown bored running his nearly billion dollar company and needed a few laughs.

“I thought I already answered this question,” I said, reconfiguring my posture in his comfortable reception chair. “And if I didn’t, well, the interviewer becomes the interviewee.”

“Humor me.”

“I like to observe,” I rattled off without contemplation. “Human interaction is fascinating to me: why people do the things they do and act the way they act—especially adults. People age, but it seems they don’t mature.”

“And you felt journalism exemplified this trait... this fascination?”

“It’s another form of expression,” I replied. I started thinking through my answer. I wasn’t sure of what I wanted to convey or why I felt the need to convey it to this person who obviously thought me incompetent. “It doesn’t require the principal be the center of attention. Sure, there is ego involved, but it is

more easily avoided than in other forms like acting or I don't know... painting."

"Hmm..."

"Again," I started. "Your family?"

He sighed, "Ah, yes, my family. You'd like to know if they're important to me?"

"Really, I'd like to know why you act like your life needs to be guarded like the second coming of Fort Knox."

"Have you ever had something embarrassing said about you?"

"We all have."

"Have you ever had it broadcast to a city? Even a country?"

"Of course not and neither have you."

"Exactly."

I laughed. I couldn't help it. I didn't understand why he was going through the motions. I was starting to question whether journalism was the field I wanted to pursue.

"What is it like to have people interested in what you have to say? Who you're dating? What you're wearing? What you do during your off time?"

"I don't know."

I scoffed. "What do you mean you don't know?"

He sat up straight in his chair. "I mean, I don't know." He shook his head and crossed his arms. "I don't think of myself in the same way others do. I'm not important. I'm no different from anyone else. To think that way would be bordering on absurd."

"But you're a public figure."

"My brother is a public figure, I run a business."

"A very successful business."

"But a business all the same."

“So your brother views himself as a public figure?”

He shook his head, “No. He knows he’s not important either. None of us are. We’re just people. We’re no more important or stellar than anyone else. I’m not secretive of my private life because I feel important. I’m secretive about my private life because it is *my private life*.”

“Yes, but what of your fiancée? It’s her private life as well that you keep her from discussing.”

“I don’t keep Amelia from discussing anything. She shares my beliefs.”

“I highly doubt someone that uses social media to share photos of themselves on various bikini shoots values their privacy as much as you do.”

“Then feel free to interview her.”

“I’ll get right on that.”

“Please, have some water,” He said and reached for a glass. He filled it with ice before asking whether I preferred still or sparkling. Surprising myself, I chose sparkling. I figured he thought I would choose the former and I was feeling rather spiteful.

“Thank you,” I said before taking a sip. This conversation was headed nowhere fast and I had no interest in righting the ship.

“Print journalism is a dying breed, yes?”

“I believe in the *CPS*,” I retorted from behind my glass. Wasn’t everything a dying breed, now and days? I didn’t know one thing that wasn’t rapid fire replaced by another thing. I didn’t understand how people could keep up. Weren’t they tired, yet? I was.

“You’re a peculiar woman, Miss Price.”

“I try, Elliot.”

I sat my glass on the table and put pen to paper. I scribbled as much as I could remember. He

interrupted my writing session to inform me he would have a copy of our conversation couriered over. He held up a small recording device and I nodded.

“You never grant interviews. Why the *CPS*?”

“I told you, I read your letter,” He stated matter-of-factly. “I found it odd and interesting that a woman would advocate for a fledgling newspaper to receive an interview when she wasn’t on said newspaper’s payroll—at the time,” He added quickly. “And now that I’ve had the pleasure of speaking with you twice, I think my words will be in good hands, so to speak.”

“But, why don’t you grant interviews?”

“To say what, exactly?” He asked and started to pour himself a glass of water. “What words do I have to bestow on anyone? You’re not speaking with Warren Buffett. I’m thirty-two. I grew up privileged enough to be exposed to things most people aren’t exposed to in their lifetime and was lucky enough to found a company that hasn’t tanked.”

“Exactly: you could speak of your experience.”

“Yes, but my experience is only helpful to other people with a similar background,” He answered. “And those people with a similar background don’t need my assistance when it comes to finances or growing a company. They’re already surrounded by the best.”

“You don’t think others could benefit from your advice?”

“No. Not particularly. Most people have a nine-to-five job because they have no other options. People don’t go to bed dreaming of being poor. They work towards something, but most do not have the capabilities to graduate a prestigious university, discover themselves for a few years then return home to build a corporation. Life doesn’t work that way and

I'm not going to pretend like what I have to say is helpful."

"But what you have to say may be of interest."

"To you, maybe; and that only seems to be because you're as stubborn as a mule and don't want to let the issue die."

"Did you just call me an ass?"

"I don't recall those words, no."

"Why haven't you and your fiancée married?"

"Why aren't you married?"

"I haven't met the right person yet. Are you saying you haven't met the right person?"

"No, I'm saying we all have our reasons. From your answer, it could be understood that you've had the option to marry and haven't. I don't think that was your intent, but that is what could be construed. Better to not answer questions of that sort."

"You don't like traps, do you?" I asked.

"I don't like walking into them. I do appreciate setting them."

Our discussion lasted for nearly an hour. We discussed an array of topics, including his friendship with Andrew Fitzgerald-Jensen, Duke of Exeter and what he thought of the tabloid labeling it a "bromance."

"It's ridiculous. We've been friends since... a while. The guy can't catch a break in the British press and now since he's married Janey, they won't leave him alone here either."

"People love them, though. Their marriage makes Americans feel aristocratic."

"That may be so, but I can't say—off the record," I watched him pause the recorder, "that it isn't obnoxious for them at times."

We also discussed his plans for future investments and acquisitions. He was skittish on providing specifics about where he was looking to lead his company. Judy was his assistant in-title-only, but served as his Vice Chairman and lead consultant.

“You could get most of the information from her,” He said.

I finished up this portion of our interview and gathered my things. Elliot showed me out of his office and followed me downstairs to security.

“I’ll speak with your office to schedule the next series,” I said, handing the security guard my pass for him to sign me out of the visitor log. “It could be scheduled sometime next week?”

He nodded absentmindedly. “I expect your byline on the article.”

“I hope you’ll be pleased.”

“Does Mike need to call your car?”

I shook my head. “No, I took the transit.”

He frowned. “Juliana, wait,” He turned to speak to the security guard, who I figured was Mike, before turning to me. “Mike is calling you a car service,” He said. “Enjoy the remainder of your day.”

V: THE DINNER

“What do they mean they want *you* to write the story?!” Valerie screamed after she called me into her office when I arrived. Apparently Judy phoned to deliver the good news before I had the pleasure of doing so myself—I thought about sending her a fruit basket. “ARE THEY FUCKING MENTAL?!”

I stood behind her reception chair to reduce the impact of her yelling. It didn’t help.

“They didn’t like my article?” Her voice changed suddenly. She sounded like a love struck teenager subjected to unrequited lust. She was inflecting. “What was wrong with it?”

I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to answer. I kept up my nonverbal response routine. She gave me a look that indicated that I needed to speak.

“I don’t think it was that... exactly.”

“Give me the transcripts,” She wailed and flailed her hands towards my work satchel.

“I don’t have them,” I said quietly. I realized that I left the recorder with Elliot. Shit.

“What do you *mean* you don’t *have* them?”

“Elliot allowed this part of the interview to be recorded,” I said quickly, hoping to lessen her wrath. “He has the device. He’ll have it couriered over to us.”

“Well, you have to have something!”

I pulled out my notebook full of scribbles and she snatched it from me. She thumbed through it and stopped when she found today’s writings.

“I don’t care what they say. The headline is ‘Elliot Bishop, quote ‘I’m not important’ end quote’.”

I nodded. Why couldn’t she send Tim again?

She looked from the notebook to me to indicate it was time for me to leave.

I slung my office bag under my desk and headed for Charlie's cubicle. I hoped he could offer advice or potentially assist with the article I wasn't sure I was actually writing. Judy may have conveyed their disappointment in the introductory article, but if Valerie decided to ghost-write for me, her 'I'm Not Important' quote would be a banner across the front page.

"Juliana, to what do I owe this visit?" Charlie asked when I stopped outside his cubicle. He was proofreading his article on the ongoing production woes of the highly anticipated *Tether Unlimited* film.

"Potential assistance with the Bishop story."

"I knew you would come running eventually," He said, minimizing his screen and turning his chair to face me. "My guess is Bishop and Co. didn't like the first article."

"Why waste your talents on journalism when you could predict lottery numbers?"

He laughed. "My powers only work on useless shit."

"The story of life," I conceded and sat in his reception chair. "I think they want me writing the article—why, I don't know—but I realize that isn't going to be completely possible. I figure Valerie will draft something to run by them, they won't like it and then it will be up to me to fix it to *everyone's* specifications."

"What are other shit takers for?" He shrugged and turned back to his article. "Now get the hell out my office. I've got shit to take."

He winked when I stood from my chair and I whispered another quick sentiment of my appreciation.

VALERIE DIDN'T say much to me for the rest of the day. She was still the head writer for the Bishop series and she would finalize the specifics with Judy tomorrow. We received the recording a little after the lunch break ended and she took it into her office to listen and transcribe without further word.

Outside of her dejected behavior I contended with Elaine and Leslie who both wanted further information on their renewed fascination. They pouted when they realized Valerie gagged me with regard to speaking about the interview and individually returned to their respective desks to sulk.

It was 6pm when I clocked out; relatively early for most people that work in media. To reward myself for a job well done I ordered my favorite pasta dish to-go from Tanner Grey Trattoria. I'd swing by on my way home and curl up on the sofa in front of a stalker film showcase on Lifetime Movie Network.

"Ah, my Julia, we knew it was you," Michael, the owner said when I arrived. He smiled and slid the receipt to me on the bar. "I didn't forget your extra breadsticks; always on the house."

"My thighs despise you," I replied and placed the twenty dollar bill on top of the receipt.

"Julia, it's so nice to see you dear," Angela, Michael's wife, exclaimed when she walked from the kitchen with a set of to-go containers for other patrons. "How's life as a big time reporter?"

I grinned. "Getting coffee is strenuous work."

She packaged the carryout boxes into bags and handed them to the waiting customers. "Michael and I can't wait to read one of your stories. We saw your name attached to that article," She said before whispering. "Don't look now, but he's walking back

from the bathroom. He's here with those royals. They always come in for a visit."

"That's because we don't bother them," Michael cut in, giving his wife a reproachful look. He must have sensed the gossipy tone in her voice. "They like that back area where no one can see them."

"Don't look now," Angela said again, grabbing a few dirty plates from the bar. "He's coming over." She turned and headed back into the kitchen where I hoped she would retrieve my dinner.

"Juliana, what a pleasant surprise," Elliot said and leaned against the bar beside me. "Mike, can I have the usual, for all of us, please?"

"You got it," Michael said and left us to fix the drinks.

"Enjoying a drink before you head home or a break from work?"

"Actually, neither," I answered looking towards the kitchen doors, willing Angela to appear. "Grabbing dinner to go."

"You could always join us," He said casually. "It's just me and a few friends."

"Thank you for the invitation, but I'd feel too much like I was intruding."

"Elliot, mate, the missus sent me over here to see if you were lost," Elliot's friend, who I recognized to be Andrew Fitzgerald-Jensen, said when he walked over. "Either that or abducted."

"I went to the bathroom," Elliot replied with a wry smile.

Andrew looked between us before sticking out his hand. "I'm Andrew."

I shook it, "Juliana Price."

"This is the reporter I was telling you and Jane about," Elliot said, squaring up our introductions.

“She’s writing the piece on me for the *Press and Standard*.”

“Boring bloke, isn’t he?” Andrew said with a smirk. “I bet that’s an endless recording of dead air.”

“Actually, I’m just conducting the interview—”

“Here we are, two Amstels and a house red wine,” Michael unintentionally interjected, sliding the drinks in front of Elliot. Andrew picked up two, while Elliot retrieved his own.

“Juliana, would you like to join us?”

“Oh, no,” I declined, shaking my head and wondering where Angela was with my dinner. “I’d hate to intrude.”

“Nonsense,” Andrew answered, looking between Elliot and I. “The wife will be thrilled to have other company besides us two bastards.”

“We’ll have your dinner brought out with theirs,” Michael said and the decision was made.

“Would you like a drink?” Elliot asked, looking at me, then Michael.

I declined, but he insisted and asked for another red wine.

“Actually, I’ll take white,” I interjected.

“White it is then,” Elliot said, before turning to Andrew for conversation.

Michael gave me a look and I shrugged. He went and fixed the glass and I followed him to the end of the bar to retrieve it.

“Only because your birthday is in a few weeks,” He whispered and handed me the glass.

“You can slip me a ginger ale,” I replied, but he swatted away the notion with a grin.

“You’re a responsible kid. Besides, I know it’s a big deal for you reporters to woo your people. This is it though.”

“Yes sir,” I said with a smile and turned to join my dinner party.

“THAT LOOKS delicious,” Jane marveled when the waiter sat my risotto with chicken dish in front of me.

“You’re welcome to try some,” I said and gestured with my fork.

She shook her head. “No, I’ll just end up wanting yours instead of what I have,” She replied with a smile. Her orecchiette pasta and sausage plate looked divine. “Thank you, though.”

I gave a smile and nodded.

“What is it that you have planned for Elliot’s article?” Andrew asked. He cut into his steak and fed a piece to Jane.

“This must mean you want me to do the same?” She mumbled before reciprocating the gesture.

“I’m not yet sure,” I answered, avoiding eye contact with the subject in question. “It depends on what my editor approves of and what information we have from the transcripts.”

“Judy said she spoke with your editor and explained our views going forward.”

“Yes.” I said and turned to him. “Of course, that was between her and Valerie. I do as I’m told and don’t make waves.”

“That seems the exact opposite of you, actually.”

I really didn’t understand how he formed his perception of me. It was odd.

“Well, I look forward to reading it,” Jane said, shooting Elliot a look. “I just hope it accurately represents such a complex person.” She snickered.

“Where is Amelia?” I asked, broaching what I deemed to be the elephant in the room. It appeared

that no one else noticed or cared about her glaring absence.

Elliot reached for his beer and took a swig. "She's on a shoot in Hawaii."

"Oh," I nodded. "You frequently double date when you two are visiting?"

Andrew grinned mischievously, spearing a slice of his steak. "Is this on the record?"

I shook my head. "Of course not," I said. I didn't want them to think I was using this time to gather information for the article. That would be the definition of smarmy.

Jane rolled her eyes. "Ignore him," She said and he turned to give her a peck on the cheek. "We know if Elliot trusts you enough to say more than three words to you, you're fine."

Their playful interaction was charming. "How long have you been married, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Not at all," Jane said with a smile. "It'll be six years this November... or should I just say five years?"

"You're getting ahead of yourself, hmm," Andrew said and stole another bit of pasta from her plate. "It must mean you can't get enough of me."

"Again, ignore him."

"If I could envision a marriage, I think I would say theirs is pretty solid—next to Max and Erin's and Charlotte and Nate," Elliot interjected.

Jane puckered her lips in an overemphasized smile. "That is so sweet," She inflected. "And so full of shit."

Elliot shrugged. "You guys rarely fight."

"Only over who loves the other more," Andrew joked, turning to his wife, "Isn't that right wife?"

“You are really angling tonight, aren’t you dear?”

“Babe, I’m *always* angling.”

“Do you want children?” I asked. Thinking back to my own complex childhood, I hoped one day to have a solid enough relationship for my children. Andrew and Jane, for the small time I observed them, seemed to fit the mold of two people that would potentially be loving parents: they were great friends.

“I want my wife’s children,” Andrew deadpanned. “Outside of that, I prefer being an uncle.”

“You don’t have to work this hard,” Jane said turning to him. Her expression conveyed all the endearment her words missed. I saw her arm shift so that it was angled to rest on his thigh. “You shit.”

Elliot relaxed back in his chair. “You two are obnoxious.”

Andrew draped his arm across the back of Jane’s chair. She turned to Elliot and grinned. “Oh, please; as if you aren’t this way with Amelia.”

I caught the subtlety in the way Jane addressed our missing dinner attendee. From a female perspective, I knew Amelia wasn’t one of her favorite people. Why, I didn’t know. I also caught in her tone that he actually wasn’t that way with his betrothed.

He scoffed and took a large gulp of his beer.

“How long are you visiting Chicago?” I posed and Jane answered they would be in for a few more days to attend Elliot’s 4th Annual Pure Water Initiative Gala.

We finished up the meal with a tasting platter of deserts composed of chocolate truffle cake, tiramisu and warm apple crostata. By this time, everyone was feeling generous thanks to the bountiful supply of wine and beer. As promised, Mike only allowed me ginger

ale, though I wasn't too sure any of my other tablemates noticed.

Our waiter Al handed me an envelope as we stood to leave. "What's this for?" I asked, confused.

"Mr. Bishop took care of the meal," Al answered. "And my tip, might I add." He shot me a look to indicate it was hefty. "Mike told me to give you this back."

I looked in the envelope as he walked off and saw \$20. I turned to Elliot. "This is for you," I handed it to him. "Thank you for allowing me to join you for dinner."

"Thanks for joining us," Jane said as she slid on her jacket.

"Have a good evening!" I waved and turned to leave.

"Juliana, wait," Elliot called, when I was nearly out of the door. "Do you have a ride home?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Take this," He said, handing me the envelope. "You can repay me by writing the article."

Andrew and Jane were trailing him, waving to gawking patrons. Andrew took Jane's hand in his and gripped it. She mouthed her thanks to Michael and Angela at the bar.

"Juliana, you should come to the gala," She said when they approached. "Don't we have a seat at our table?"

"Oh, no, I—"

"I insist," Jane cut in, giving me a look that indicated there was no use in declining.

"Of course you do," Elliot said and walked to his awaiting chauffeured suburban.

"Do you have a ride?" She asked, ignoring him. "Why don't you ride with us?"

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“Oh, no—” I started, but resisted relenting at her expression. I mouthed a thank you and feeling small, climbed in behind Elliot.