



A DIRTY OFFICE
ROMANCE NOVEL

BOSS MAN

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
VI KEELAND

**This is an exclusive sneak
peek of**

**BOSS
MAN**

CHAPTER

1

Reese

What a waste of smooth, shaven legs.

"Jules? It's Reese. Where the hell are you? I *need* you. This is the *worst* date I've ever been on. I'm literally falling asleep. I've considered smashing my head on the table a few times to keep awake. Unless you want me bloodied and bruised, I need you to call with a fake emergency. Call me back. *Please*." Pressing end call, I blew out a frustrated breath as I stood outside the ladies' room in the dark hallway at the back of the restaurant.

A deep voice from behind me caught me off guard. "Unless he's also an idiot—in addition to being boring—he's going to know."

"Excuse me?" I turned to find a man leaning against the wall, his eyes pointed down as he texted away on his phone. He continued without looking up.

"It's the oldest trick in the book...the emergency phone call. The least you can do is put in a little more effort. It takes two months to get a reservation at this place, and it's not cheap, sweetheart."

"Maybe *he* should be the one to put in more effort. His sports jacket has a giant hole under the arm, and he's done nothing but talk about his mother all night."

"Ever consider that your snobby attitude makes him nervous?"

My eyes nearly bulged out of my head. "You want to talk about snobby? You eavesdrop on my call and give me your *unwelcome* opinions, all while staring down at your phone. You haven't even made eye contact with me while you're speaking."

The jerk's fingers froze mid text. Then I watched as his head rose, eyes following a leisurely path starting at my ankles, up over my bare legs, and lingering at the hemline of my skirt before continuing to trace their way over my hips, coming to rest briefly on my breasts before finally settling on my face.

"Yes, that's right. Up here. These are my eyes."

He pushed off the wall and stood tall, catching the lone ray that had been lighting the hallway. The streak illuminated his face, and I could see him clearly for the first time.

Really? Not what I was expecting. With that deep, raspy voice and attitude, I assumed I'd find someone older, probably dressed in a stuffy suit. But this guy was gorgeous. *Young and gorgeous.* Dressed entirely in black—simple and sleek, yet there was an edge to the way he looked. Golden brown hair tousled in that sexy *I don't give a shit* way, but still looked perfect. Strong, masculine features—a square, rugged jaw coated with day-old stubble on sunkissed skin, a straight, prominent nose, and big, sexy, sleepy eyes the color of chocolate. Those were now staring intently at me.

Without dropping my gaze, he lifted his arms from his sides, holding them up over his head. "You want to check me for rips before you decide if I'm worthy of speaking to?"

He was gorgeous all right, but definitely an asshole. "That's not necessary. Your attitude has already decided that for me, and you're not."

Lowering his arms, he chuckled. "Suit yourself. Try to enjoy the rest of your evening, sweetheart."

I huffed, but stole one last fleeting look at the beautiful jerk before I walked back to my date.

Martin was sitting with his hands folded when I returned to my seat at the table.

"Sorry," I told him. "There was a line."

"That reminds me of a funny story. This one time, I was at a restaurant with my mother, and when she went to use the ladies' room..."

His voice faded away while I stared at my phone, willing it to ring. *Damn you, Jules. Where are you when I really need you?* Around the middle of the story—at least I think it was the middle—I noticed the jerk from the bathroom walking past our table. He smirked at me after taking a look at my rambling date and my disinterested face. Curious, I followed his path to get a look at who he was here with.

Figures.

Dyed blonde, pretty in a slutty sort of way, with a heaping amount of boobage falling out of her low-cut dress. She made googly eyes at her date as he returned; I rolled mine. Yet...I couldn't help but glance over at their table from time to time.

When our salads arrived, Martin was talking about his mother's recent appendectomy, and I grew particularly bored. My eyes must have lingered a minute too long, because the guy from the bathroom caught me staring at him. Across the restaurant, he winked, arched an eyebrow, and tipped his glass in my direction.

Jerk.

Since I'd been caught, why bother to hide my watching him? He was certainly more interesting than my date. And he wasn't shy about looking my way either. When a waiter stopped by his table, I watched as beautiful bathroom guy pointed in my direction and spoke. Martin was still telling some mommy-dearest story as I glanced behind me to see what the attractive jerk across the room could've been pointing to. When I turned back, the jerk and his date were standing. Reading his lips, I could make out some of what he was saying...something about joining an old friend, I thought. Then suddenly, they were walking right toward our table.

Is he going to say something to Martin about what he overheard?

"Reese. Is that you?"

What in the hell?

"Umm...yes."

"Wow. It's been a long time." He patted his hand on his chest. "It's me, Chase." Before I knew what was happening, the jerk (who was apparently named Chase) reached down and gripped me in a bear hug. While I was in his arms, he whispered, "Play along. Let's make your night more exciting, sweetheart."

Dumbfounded, I could only stare as he turned his attention to Martin, extending his hand.

"I'm Chase Parker. Reese and I go way back."

"Martin Ward." My date nodded.

"Martin, mind if we join you? It's been years since Buttercup and I have seen each other. I'd love to catch up. You don't mind, do you?"

Although he'd asked a question, Chase definitely didn't wait for a response. Instead, he pulled out a chair for his date and introduced her.

"This is Bridget..." He looked to her for help, and she filled in the blank.

"McDermott. Bridget McDermott." She smiled, undaunted by our new double date or Chase's obvious inability to remember her last name.

Martin, on the other hand, looked disappointed that our twosome was now a foursome, although I was certain he would never voice it.

He looked to Chase as he sat. "Buttercup?"

"That's what we used to call her. Reese's Peanut *Butter Cup*. My favorite candy."

Once Chase and Bridget were seated, there was a moment of awkwardness. Surprisingly, it was Martin who broke it. "So, how do you two know each other?"

Even though Martin asked the question looking at both of us, I wanted to make it clear to Chase that *he* was the one on the hot seat. This was his little game.

"I'll let Chase tell you about the first time we met. It's really a funny story, actually." I propped my elbows on the table and rested my head on my folded hands, turning my full attention to Chase while batting my eyelashes with a sly grin.

He didn't flinch, nor did he take more than a few seconds to come up with a story. "Well, it wasn't really the first time we met that's the funny story—more like what happened after we met. My parents split up when I was in eighth grade, and I had to transfer to a new school. I was pretty miserable until I met Reese here on the bus the first week. She was the off-limits pretty girl, but I figured I had no friends to bust my balls if I asked her on a date and she turned me down. So, even though she's a year older than me, I asked her to the eighth-grade dance. Surprised the shit out of me when she agreed to go.

“Anyway, I was young, with a healthy dose of testosterone, and I got it into my head that she was going to be my first kiss. All of my buddies back at my old school had already gotten theirs, and I figured it was my time. So, when the dance was coming to an end, I tugged Buttercup out of the crappy crepe-paper-and-balloon-decorated gymnasium and into the hall for some privacy. Of course, since it was my first time, I had no idea what to expect. But I went for it—got right in there and started to suck her face.”

Chase paused and winked at me. “It was all good up until then, wasn’t it, Buttercup?”

I couldn’t even respond. I was so floored listening to his story. But again, my lack of response didn’t seem to bother him because he went right along, weaving his tall tale.

“Anyway, this is where the story gets good. Like I said, I didn’t have any experience, but I dove right in—lips, teeth, tongue, and all. After a minute, the kiss started to feel awfully wet, but I was into it, so I kept going and going, not wanting to be the first one to pull away. Eventually, when we came up for air—literally since I’d almost sucked her face off—I realized why it had felt so wet. Reese had gotten a nosebleed in the middle of the kiss, and both of our faces were covered in smeared blood.”

Martin and Bridget laughed, but I was too stunned to react.

Chase reached out and touched my arm. “Come on, Buttercup. Don’t get embarrassed. Those were some good times we had. Remember?”

“How long were you two a couple?” Martin asked.

Just as Chase was about to respond, I reached over and touched his arm in the same patronizing way he’d touched mine. “Not too long. Right after *the other incident*, we broke up.”

Bridget clapped her hands and bopped up and down in her seat like an excited child. “I wanna hear about the other incident!”

“I’m not sure I should actually share it, now that I think about it,” I mused. “Is this your first date?”

Bridget nodded.

“Well, I don’t want you to assume Chase has the same problem anymore. Since our *little incident* was so long ago.” I leaned over to Bridget and whispered, “They gain better control as they grow older. *Usually.*”

Instead of being upset, Chase looked thoroughly pleased with my story. Proud, even. In fact, the rest of the evening went on pretty much the same way. Chase told elaborate stories about our fake childhood, unafraid to embarrass himself in the process, and kept us all amused. I sometimes added to his stories when my mouth wasn’t hanging open at the crap he’d made up.

I hated to admit it, but the jerk had started to grow on me, even while telling stories about my bloody nose and the “unfortunate bra-stuffing incident.” By the end of the evening, I was ordering coffee to stall the night’s end—a far cry from our exchange in the bathroom hallway.

Outside of the restaurant, Martin, Chase, and I all handed the valet our tickets. I preferred to be in control of when a first date started and ended, so I’d met Martin at the restaurant. Of course Bridget had come in Chase’s car like a normal date. She was also practically rubbing up against his side as she clung to his arm while we waited for our cars. When my shiny red Audi pulled up first, I wasn’t sure how to say goodbye to...well...anyone. I took the keys and lingered with the door open.

“Nice car, Buttercup.” Chase smiled. “Better than that hunk of junk you drove in high school, huh?”

I chuckled. “I suppose it is.”

Martin stepped forward. “It was nice seeing you, Reese. I hope we can do this again sometime.”

Rather than wait for him to attempt to kiss me, I went in for a hug. “Thank you for a nice dinner, Martin.”

As I stepped back, Chase stepped forward and pulled me into a hug. Unlike the friendly back-pat I’d given Martin, Chase plastered me against his body. God, it felt good. Then he did the strangest thing... He wound my long hair around his hand a few times and closed it into a fist, using it to tug my head back. His eyes lingered on my lips as I looked up at him, and for a brief second, I thought he might kiss me.

Then he leaned down and kissed my forehead. "See you at the reunion next year?"

I nodded, feeling almost off-kilter. "Umm...sure thing." I glanced to Bridget after he released me. "Nice to meet you, Bridget."

Reluctantly, I folded into my car. Feeling eyes on me, I looked up while putting my seat belt on. Chase watched me intently. It looked like he wanted to say something, but after a few heartbeats, it felt strange to sit and wait any longer.

Taking a deep breath, I pulled away with one last wave, wondering why it felt like I was leaving something important behind.

★ ★ ★ ★

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