

Henley

For the first half of the car ride, things went smoothly. The music stayed loud and Bennett kept his mouth shut. Then around the hour mark, he turned the volume down.

"I'll be parking my car right outside of the city and a driver will be picking us up to chauffeur us the rest of the way," he told me.

"Why don't we just stop at a station and ride in?"

He wrinkled his nose. "Why would I ride in on dirty public transport when I have a driver who gets paid to drive these streets?"

While I wasn't the biggest fan of public transport either, I wouldn't have gone that far. The subways and trains were very useful in the crowded city. We'd probably be sitting in traffic longer than it would take to ride into the city. I didn't argue though. I figured my words would fall upon deaf ears. Bennett seemed the type to do whatever he wanted no matter what anyone else said.

3 And I was getting paid to do this, so I didn't have much say anyway.

"Where are we going?" I asked, looking down at my beaten up sneakers. Hopefully wherever we were eating didn't have a dress code. I'd fail spectacularly.

"It's a surprise," he responded.

"So I'm going to guess that what I'm wearing isn't going to cut it."

"Did you think it would?"


I closed my eyes for a moment, trying not to feel insulted. "I couldn't find any of the dresses I own. Sorry."

"You don't have anything to apologize for," he said offhandedly. "I most likely would have made you change anyway."

Breathe, Henley, breathe. "Do you have to sound so condescending when you talk to me?" I asked, turning in my seat to give him a dirty look.

He seemed surprised. "Am I being condescending?"

He didn't even *realize* it? Oh man, I was dealing with a special kind of arrogance. Just what kind of mindset did this guy have? If I had to deal with this all night, I doubted I'd survive.



As promised, Bennett parked his car in a parking garage and had us picked up by a man in a suit driving a more modest looking BMW. Both of us climbed into the back seat and when we were buckled in, the driver took off. The buildings around us got taller and the streets got narrower and I knew we were getting close to the heart of the city. Predictably, we hit traffic. I expected Bennett to complain, but he kept his mouth shut, just staring out the window. I turned my attention out my own window, watching the crowds of people on the sidewalks coming in and out of businesses and apartments. Crowds usually bothered me, but they rather suited the city. In an aesthetically pleasing kind of way.

"Pull over here," Bennett suddenly ordered, startling me. "Henley, we're getting out."

The driver did as instructed and I immediately opened the door, wanting some fresh air. I looked around, not recognizing where we were. All I knew was that it wasn't Times Square. The older I got, the less I went into the city. The air felt stuffy and the temperature was at least ten degrees higher than it'd been in Poughkeepsie.

"This way," Bennett said and took my hand in his.



I stared at our hands, wondering if I should pull mine away. He'd mentioned handholding would be part of the contract, though, so I decided not to.

We walked down the street a little bit and I followed a few steps behind Bennett so we wouldn't crowd the sidewalk. He was pretty intent on not letting go of my hand. Eventually we came to a store on the corner of Grand Street with wide windows and the lettering *Alexander Wang* under them.

There was a couple coming out of the store. The man wore a suit. The woman wore a tight black dress and the tallest heels I'd ever seen. "I can't go in here," I immediately said to Bennett, pulling on his hand.

He stopped, turning to me with a frown. "Why not?"

"They'll kick me out before I take two steps in," I told him and was afraid that my words might not actually be too far from the truth. They might think I was a homeless person or something.

Bennett smiled a little bit. "They know you're coming. As I said, I made an appointment for you."



I raised an eyebrow, but before I could say anything else, he was already pulling me into the store. As I'd expected, the inside of the store was an incredible sight. Everything was so *organized*—the presentation, the displays, the mannequins. Even the salespeople looked like they were pre-positioned. The minute my foot landed on the hardwood floor, all eyes were on me. Then most of the eyes left me. Probably deciding I looked too poor to be worth their time.

One of the salesladies made eye contact with Bennett and her red lips curved up in a predatory way. "Mr. Calloway!"

Bennett greeted her with a small wave. "Dianna, it's been a while. This is Henley, the girl I spoke to you about earlier."

Dianna turned her attention back to me, her expression falling the slightest bit. I tried to offer her a smile, but I think it came out as more of a grimace. She looked intimidating. Fit, at least four inches taller than me, pin-straight hair. She must've been a model when she was younger.

"I don't want this to take up too much time, so please have her try on what you've selected," Bennett said, pushing me in front of him.



I did my best not to let him move me. There was *no* way I was going with the woman alone.

Dianna looked a little disdainful, but she motioned for me to follow her. "Yes, well we'll see what we can do about her."

"I'm eager to see the results. Go along, Henley."

I gave Bennett a quick glare before walking toward Dianna. He made me sound like a dog or something. As I walked by the displays, I couldn't help but judge them. Half the things they were calling dresses just looked like black curtains wrapped around the mannequins. I peeked at one of the price tags and nearly gasped. It cost more than I could make in three weeks!

Dianna didn't say one word to me as we walked deeper into the store. I had to admit that despite the horrifying prices and weird designs, the minimalist design of the place really suited it. The floors were open and airy. It didn't feel as claustrophobic as most clothing stores did— unless I thought about the many employees just standing around staring me down. It seemed Bennett and I were the only people in the store currently.



We went into a back room that I assumed to be a fitting room, but it also felt more private than that. I wondered if it was open to the public. Dianna turned around and gave my body a once over, her lips pursed. Then she pulled out a measuring tape from god knows where and measured me. "You have a nice body shape," she commented, her face expressionless.

"Oh, um, thanks," I responded.

"I know what style Bennett likes, so I'll go pull out a few dresses for you to try on. I will choose which one suits you the most and then we will find a pair of heels to match it. You may wait in the fitting room and I will bring them to you," she ordered, pointing to one of the stalls along the back edge of the room.

I nodded mutely, unsure of how to respond. I didn't have any say in what *I* was going to wear? Something was a little wrong about that. But then again, judging by the pricing I saw on the displays, I wouldn't be offering to pay Bennett back for it. There was no way.

It felt like at least twenty minutes passed before Dianna returned to me with three different dresses. I didn't understand why it took so long because the store only looked to have only a few different designs. I shimmied out of my clothes and pulled on the first dress and turned to look in the mirror.

I almost burst out laughing. Dress was kind of a stretch to call the material I was wearing. It looked like I'd thrown on a black sheet with a hole cut in it for my arms and head. I looked like a block. Still, I showed Dianna.

"Hmm, that looks alright," she commented.

"I look like I'm wearing a trash bag," I said before I could stop myself.

She narrowed her eyes at me like I'd offended her purposely. "That's one of Mr. Wang's most popular designs."

"I wonder how."

"Tasteless," she muttered. Then louder she said, "Go try on the next one."



I rolled my eyes as I went back into the dressing room. I really couldn't understand people with money. I could make a dress that looked just like this for like five bucks. All I needed was some fabric from A.C Moore. But just because it was a brand name, people would pay several hundred dollars for it.

The second dress was almost as bad as the first one. It made my tits look *huge*. "I'm not wearing this one," I announced as I came out of the dressing room.

Dianna raised an eyebrow at me. "What is it this time?"

I turned to my side and gestured to my chest. The fabric was pulled way too tight against my skin and my boobs looked like small mountains from the side. Not to mention that if I raised one leg too high my ass would surely show. It was so short. I looked ready to work the street corner.

"Yes, that design is more for ladies with desirable body types," Dianna responded, smirking a little.

I refrained from saying anything back. It wasn't good to attack other ladies. Even if said other ladies were rude. "Every size of body is desirable," I said instead and marched back into the fitting room.




I prayed for good things about the last dress. If it was awful, I didn't care about the job anymore, I wouldn't wear it. I wasn't going to parade myself around like an idiot in a sheet of black material.

Like the first two, the third dress was black. Unlike the first two, this one was a long dress, reaching my ankles. There was a thigh-high slit along the side though. Then it wrapped around my chest tightly, like a bustier. Which was perfect because I didn't want my bra to show through. It also had a satin belt that rested a little higher than my hips. I looked in the mirror and while I wasn't too impressed, I found it acceptable. My boobs didn't look huge and I actually looked a little sexy when I pushed my leg out of the slit.

I was very glad I shaved my legs.

I sauntered out of the dressing room, feeling more confident. The longer I was in the dress, the more I began to like it. Dianna's expression told me she was impressed as well, but she quickly schooled it. "Well, I knew that one would suit you."

"Out of the three, this is my choice."



"That one is the most expensive. Of course, I'm sure Bennett is paying for all of this," she said, looking petty.

I shrugged. "Personally, I wouldn't waste my money on this crap."

She scowled. "Let's move onto shoes."

I gathered up my old clothes and slipped on my sneakers before following her out of the back room. Bennett was in the main room, chatting to another one of the sales girls. He didn't notice me as we walked by and made our way downstairs.

"With that gown, you will want to go with a peep-toe pump," Dianna was saying as we made our way through a section that held only shoes. "I have the perfect pair in mind."

I nodded dumbly, because I had no idea what that meant.

She instructed me to sit down on one of the leather sofas, so I did. After measuring my bare foot she took off to retrieve a pair of heels. I lifted my leg up in the air to watch the fabric of the dress fall back to reveal my skin. I liked how sexy it looked. I'd never owned anything with a slit in it.

"Try these on."



A pair of four-inch black heels dangled in front of my face. I took them and slipped my feet into them. My toes peeked out from the bottom of them and I understood why they were called peep-toe pumps. Dianna strapped them for me and then told me to walk around. I pushed myself off the couch and wobbled for a moment, unaccustomed to heels. She gave me a contemptuous look that I ignored. The chunky heels clacked loudly on the floor and I felt a little embarrassed. I couldn't even remember the last time I wore heels.

"Have you ever walked in heels before?" she snapped at me as I almost broke my ankle while turning.

"A couple of times."

"Where in the world did Bennett find you?" she muttered to herself.

I knew she wanted me to hear it though. "Is that something you should be saying to a customer?" I asked.

"*You're* not the customer. Bennett is. I should've expected you'd be like this from what he'd said earlier."

3 We had a mini glaring match and eventually I looked away. I didn't care what she thought of me. I didn't care about whatever Bennett had said about me either. I was just doing this for money. I had to put up with it.

I heard someone coming down the stairs and I turned to see Bennett. His eyes fell upon me and he stopped mid-step. Suddenly feeling self-conscious, I pulled my legs in tight so that no skin would show through the slit.

"Mr. Calloway," Dianna started. "I know she doesn't look her best—"

I started to make a face but Bennett's voice stopped me.

"Henley, you look stunning," he complimented, completely talking over her.

My eyes snapped to him and I felt my mouth open a little. Had those words really come out of his mouth? Did he mean it? Bennett thought *I* looked good? I wondered if it was the brand name.

"Fine clothing suits you well," he continued, coming up to me and totally checking me out.



Dianna watched us with her arms crossed. Feeling a little cheeky, I moved so that the slit would split and reveal my leg. "Don't you think too much of my leg is showing, though?"

Bennett's eyes traveled from my ankle all the way up to the middle of my thigh where the slit ended and he made a noncommittal noise.

I almost rolled my eyes. Guys were so simple.

Clearing his throat, Bennett turned his attention to Dianna. "We have to leave for her hair appointment. Can you ring us out?"

"Of course, let's head back upstairs," she answered, giving him a wide smile.

I made sure to walk in front of the group knowing that the dress would sculpt my bottom. Flaunt what you got and all that.

The total for the dress and heels almost made me want to cry. "I'm assuming you're paying?" Dianna said, directing her question to the richer of us.

Bennett put a hand on my shoulder. "She would refuse it if I made her pay."



Well, duh. Who pays a thousand dollars for a dress and a pair of shoes? Dianna smirked a little and I crossed my arms. Was she expecting me to be embarrassed? If I worked here, I'd be embarrassed about the crap they were selling.

Bennett had no problem swiping his card for over a grand. I just couldn't comprehend his mind. Even if I suddenly became a millionaire, I would still shop low-price to high-price, sale rack first.

"You know, we could find this dress at Forever 21 for like seven hundred dollars cheaper," I said to Bennett as Dianna took my old clothes and put them in a bag for me.

Both of them turned to me, Bennett smiling, Dianna shaking her head. "You and your chain store clothing." He took the bag with my clothes and said goodbye to Dianna as he led me out of the store.

"Next we're going to a friend of mine to have your hair and make-up done," he told me, looking around for his driver.

The wind blew and the dress shifted, revealing my leg. Now that we were out in public and I wasn't trying to show off, I felt self-conscious. I moved so that the slit wouldn't open. "Why do I have to do that? What's wrong with my hair now?"



He glanced over his shoulder at me. "It could use improvement."

I grit my teeth together. "Gee, thanks."

"There is always room for improvement, Henley."

I tugged at my blonde locks. Usually, I tried to straighten my hair to make it look more presentable, but during the summer it was usually too hot, so I skipped it. I didn't think it looked *that* bad though. And as for my make-up, who cared? My skin wasn't that bad in the first place.

After finding his driver, we got back into the car. Walking would've made more sense, but I kept my mouth shut because walking in these heels wouldn't be very fun. For the first time I was glad Bennett had a weird thing against the public.

My appointment at the salon went more or less like the one at Alexander Whatever. We got there, they drooled over Bennett, I got weird looks, and they dolled me up. My stylist was pretty pleasant though. She was a cute girl with curly brown hair. She worked on me for what felt like forever, snipping off dead ends and using every kind of spray in existence on me, but after it was all done, I couldn't believe my eyes. It'd been a while since I'd put any effort into looking good, so getting it professionally done

was something else. I hate to say I barely recognized myself, but it was true.

Simply put, I looked amazing.

"You performed a miracle," I said to my stylist. I think she said her name was Carly.

She smiled down at me. "I'm just bringing out what's already there."

"See? Always room for improvement," Bennett said from above me.

I turned to scowl at him. He just smiled back at me pleasantly. I really couldn't tell if he was trying to be an asshole or was just *really* ignorant.

"She's just as beautiful as she was when she came in," Carly said, shooting Bennett a dirty look.

I decided I liked Carly.

"I'm sorry you have to deal with him," she said to me. "He really doesn't know how to interact with people well unless it's business. He's been that way his whole life."

"He's.... something else, alright."

"Don't be afraid to tell it to him as it is. He probably doesn't even realize he's being rude."



Telling off Bennett sounded nice, but I was also trying to just deal with it. I wasn't a very confrontational person.

"You're all set to go," she told me, taking the smock off of me.

I stood up and gently prodded at my hair. She curled it better than I could even dream of doing to myself. "Thank you," I said as I followed her back to the front of the store where the register was. Bennett kept staring at me, but I pretended not to notice.

"You're very welcome. It'll be one-fifty for the hair and make-up."

One hundred and fifty dollars for hair and makeup? That was crazy! Or maybe it was average. I didn't ever go to a salon. Begrudgingly, I pulled out my wallet to pay, but Bennett stopped me. "I'll pay," he said.

I was tempted to let him, but I still had the ten grand he'd tipped me. "No, I'll pay —"

"I'll pay. No need for you to spend unnecessary money. You should keep it," he interjected, pushing my hand down and pulling out his card.



Carly raised an eyebrow but took the card and swiped it. I turned my gaze to the floor, unable to respond. He was partially right. I'd rather save the money he'd given me, but it was the way he'd said it that irritated me. I got it—I was poor. There wasn't a need to remind me every five seconds.

"Have a great night!" Carly called to us as we exited the salon. "And Bennett, please try and act a little bit more like a proper gentleman."

Bennett glanced back at her in confusion and then to me. "What? I am being a gentleman, aren't I?"

I scoffed and turned it into a cough.

"Aren't I?" he repeated, sounding more unsure this time.

I didn't answer. Best to let him wallow in that for the moment.