

The Billionaire's Second Chance

Chloe Horne

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Chapter 1

Sophia

My palms are sweating. I blame the bright lights; row after row of LEDs burning down on my face, making me wish I'd powdered my nose twice this morning. Twenty boardroom chairs, all full. Two rows of investors behind them. Every single eye is locked on me, and all I can think is: Don't fidget. Don't stammer. Don't screw this up.

"Thank you for being here," I say, voice steady, not betraying the adrenaline flooding my veins. "I'm Sophia Green, lead developer on Project Pulse. Today, I'm proud to show you the app that's going to change the way hospitals track patient data in real time."

I click the remote, launching my slides on the screen behind me. My demo phone sits on the podium, perfectly angled, my code clean and ready to run. I walk them through the key features—HIPAA compliance, customizable dashboards, encrypted cloud syncing. I sense the room relax a little. They like the buzzwords.

Now comes the part that matters: the live demo. I flip my phone camera to the projection and start the sequence. "Pulse is intuitive, fast, and—" I swipe to the integration module. And the screen freezes. Not just lags but freezes, then whites out, and throws up a fatal error message in a red box the size of my panic.

Someone coughs. The CFO shifts in his seat. A couple of investors lean in, waiting for me to falter, maybe secretly hoping for it. My heart hammers. Time stretches thin and tight.

"Looks like we found a bug," I say lightly, forcing a smile. "Good thing I wrote the code myself." I crack my knuckles—deliberate, showy—and hook my phone into the laptop. The projection shifts. I hear a couple of surprised murmurs.

I pull up the error log and spot the culprit: a malformed API call from the hospital data endpoint. My fingers move fast, toggling through code. "This happens sometimes with real data. Watch, three lines to fix it." I narrate what I'm doing, rewriting the call, deploying the fix, keeping the patter going so no one can fill the silence with their doubt.

When I hit save and restart the demo, the module loads clean. Patient records update in real time, the dashboard glows green, and the lag is gone. “There,” I say, pulse still pounding. “Faster, safer, smarter. As promised.” Someone in the back actually exhales. The room shifts again, this time with grudging respect. Even the CFO nods, scribbling a note. The applause is polite, awkward.

At least I’m back on track now.

The applause fades almost as quickly as it starts. I thank them, gather my phone and clicker, and force my smile to linger as the executives line up with polite congratulations. Handshakes, promises to be in touch.

The investors are less effusive, but a few nods, a single, approving *impressive* from someone I recognize from Forbes Tech, and a thin, relieved smile from my boss. That’s all I need. I’ve survived.

As soon as the last suit files out, I escape down the hall and duck into my office, shutting the door with a soft click. My hands are still shaking. I drop into my chair, kick off my heels, and let my head fall back. The adrenaline is still surging through me, making my heart flutter like a trapped bird. I let out a shaky laugh, alone with the hush of recycled air and the hum of the monitors.

The worst is over. I did it.

I check my phone, mostly out of habit, scrolling through messages: congratulations from coworkers, a meme from Claire, a string of emojis from my brother Marcus. All I want is a nap and a large, iced coffee. I’m halfway to convincing myself I’ve earned it when a new notification pops up at the top of my inbox.

Subject: LouTech Opportunity – Confidential Offer

I blink, sitting up straighter, pulse flickering. LouTech. The LouTech. Biggest tech company on the West Coast, known for poaching talent and launching industry revolutions. I don’t know anyone there personally... unless you count late-night LinkedIn stalking, and the one time Claire went for an interview there.

I open the message.

Dear Ms. Green,

We have been following your work on Project Pulse and are excited to offer you a position as Senior Product Lead at LouTech, effective immediately. The offer includes a base salary of \$210,000, a sign-on bonus, and full relocation assistance from San Jose to San Francisco. You'll join a team developing next-generation medical data solutions.

Please find the attached offer letter and benefits overview. We hope you'll consider joining our team of innovators.

Best,

LouTech Talent Acquisition

For a moment, I just stare. I have to reread the numbers twice. The base salary alone is nearly double what I make now. The bonus is enough to pay off my student loans and then some. The word *relocation* makes my breath catch. San Francisco, a city I've only ever visited for conferences, now dangling before me like a prize I never imagined I'd win.

I click the attachment, scrolling through stock photos of happy, diverse teams and benefit charts so glossy they make my eyes ache. It feels impossible, surreal. People like me don't get offers like this.

Except here it is, waiting. A door I'd never thought would open, now flung wide. I press my fingers to my lips, half laughing, half terrified. My world just changed, and I haven't even moved.

By the time I meet Claire and Marcus at our favorite place, the sun's setting and the sky is the pale lavender of a screensaver. Marcus is already at the bar, scrolling through a fantasy football app, and Claire has snagged a booth by the window, waving like she hasn't seen me in years. She takes one look at my face, stands, and envelopes me in a cinnamon-scented hug.

"Tell me everything," she demands, nudging me into the booth. Marcus slides in beside me, eyebrows raised. "You look like someone handed you a golden ticket!"

I laugh, a little too bright. "It's been a day. The presentation was... wild."

Claire leans in, eyes wide. "Did they clap?"

"There was applause. A little. It's over, that's what matters." I let myself breathe, finally. "But—" I hesitate, glancing around as if the secret could leak out through the saltshaker. "I got a job offer. A real one, from LouTech. In San Francisco."

Marcus whistles, low and impressed. “Damn, Soph. That’s huge.”

Claire practically bounces. “Wait, the LouTech? Like, tech royalty? Please tell me you’re taking it.”

“I haven’t decided.” Even as I say it, the idea spins dizzy and sweet inside me. “It’s a lot. I’d have to move. Leave all this.” I gesture at the neon lights, the chipped vinyl booths, my brother, my best friend. My life, such as it is. “Of course, you know it’s close enough for weekends...”

Marcus orders us cocktails, and we toast, Claire’s voice ringing out over the clink of glasses. “To Sophia: for being too smart, too modest, and an absolute overachiever.”

She’s only half joking. The conversation drifts from work to weekend plans, then back to the job offer. Beneath the laughter, there’s a constant undercurrent, tugging at me with the soft ache of memory.

It’s Alex.

I don’t say his name out loud, but he haunts the conversation all the same. Claire knows me too well, catching my eye with a sly grin. “Isn’t LouTech where that ex of yours works?”

I glare, but she just laughs. “He’s CEO,” I mutter, ignoring the pit in my stomach. If I get this job, I’ll be working with him. Directly.

“Claire—” I start, but she waves me off.

“You’re allowed to have a past. Even if he was a broody pain in the ass.”

Marcus looks between us. “Is this the guy you almost moved to Boston for?”

I press my fingers to my forehead. “Can we please not do this now?”

Claire nudges me gently. “You don’t have to talk about him, but you’re not fooling anyone. Sometimes the best code is the stuff you thought you’d deleted.”

I manage a weak smile, trying not to let the old pain show. Sometimes I think I’m over Alex, but then someone says his name and my heart skips, confused and aching.

As we pay the bill and pull on our jackets, my phone buzzes. I glance at the screen, expecting a spam call or a Lyft alert. It's Alex Mason.

The name glows on the display, familiar and impossible all at once. My breath catches.

I answer, voice shaking despite myself. "Hello?"

He sounds exactly the same; deeper, maybe, but still him. "Sophia. Let's meet tomorrow. I can give you the rundown of LouTech."

I can't read his tone, can't parse if it's good news or trouble, but every nerve is suddenly alive. "Sure," I manage. "Text me the details."

The call ends, but I'm left staring at my phone, pulse racing. I want to hope, but dread settles cold and heavy in my stomach. Some ghosts never stay buried.

With love and thanks

Me. Chloe.

Thank you for reading *The Billionaire's Second Chance*.

Alex and Sophia and the belief that true love can survive...

Would you be willing to leave a quick review? Click the Stars.

It would mean so much to me and you'll be helping others find their next good read.

Just click the link and leave your review [HERE](#)

with love and thanks,

Chloe

Turn the lights low, the music up, and fall into a Chloe Horne romance.

For news on upcoming releases, please join my [Chloe Horne Newsletter](#) and receive a copy of *Engaged to My Billionaire Boss*

[Chloe Horne Amazon Author Central](#)

Curious what's next? How about a preview? October 2025

The Billionaire's Bachelorette

The bass thrums through my chest like a defibrillator trying to restart my social life, and honestly? It isn't working. I clutch my champagne flute like a life preserver, watching my sister Aubrey command the dance floor with the kind of effortless grace that makes me wonder if we're actually related.

"Sloane!" Aubrey's maid of honor, a statuesque brunette whose name I've forgotten three introductions ago, materializes beside me with predatory glee. "You can't hide in the corner all night!"

"I'm not hiding," I protest, adjusting my blue-light glasses nervously. "I'm... observing. Anthropologically speaking, this is fascinating behavior."

She rolls her perfectly contoured eyes. "God, you're such a nerd. It's adorable, but tragic." Her gaze sweeps across the club's VIP section, landing on a man who looks like he's been carved from marble and dipped in sin.

"See that guy? The one who looks like he could buy and sell souls before breakfast?"

My eyes follow hers to the elevated VIP area where a man sits with the kind of casual authority that makes kings weep with envy. He looks like Zeus has decided to moonlight as a Manhattan power broker—all sharp angles and devastating masculinity wrapped in a perfectly tailored suit. Dark hair falls across his forehead in controlled chaos that probably requires more maintenance than my entire beauty routine, and even from this distance, I can see the sharp cut of his jaw, the aristocratic slope of his nose, and cheekbones that could cut glass. His expensive suit molds to broad shoulders and what is clearly a body that worships at the altar of expensive personal trainers. He is the kind of beautiful that makes women forget their own names, lose their inhibitions, and probably their undergarments too. He looks dangerous—the kind of dangerous that makes smart women do spectacularly stupid things.

"What about him?" I ask, though my pulse has already started doing interpretive dance.

"Beckett Reed. Owns this place and half of Manhattan. Also rumored to be hung like a—"

"Jesus, Madison!" I nearly choke on my champagne.

"What? I'm just saying, he's exactly the kind of bad decision you need to make." Madison's smile turns wicked.

"I dare you to go talk to him."

"Absolutely not." I shake my head so violently my glasses slip down my nose. "I don't do dangerous men. I do spreadsheets and Netflix documentaries about serial killers."

"Which is exactly why you need this," another bridesmaid chimes in, appearing like a well-dressed vulture.

"When's the last time you got properly fucked, Sloane?"

Heat blazes across my cheeks. "That's none of your—"

"See? Too long." Madison grabs my arm with the determination of a woman on a mission. "Go. Talk to him."

What's the worst that could happen?"

Famous last words. I should know better. I have a PhD in data analytics—I understand probability and risk assessment. But apparently, three glasses of champagne have turned my brain into optimistic mush.

"Fine," I hear myself say, which is clearly my survival instincts malfunctioning. "But if I die of embarrassment, I'm haunting all of you."

I make my way across the crowded club, weaving between gyrating bodies and trying not to trip over my own feet. The rope barrier around the VIP section looms ahead like the gates of hell, guarded by a bouncer who looks like he bench-presses motorcycles for fun.

Before I can lose my nerve entirely, I duck under the rope with all the grace of a drunk flamingo. The bouncer starts toward me, but a subtle gesture from the man in question—Beckett—stops him cold.

Up close, he is even more devastating. Storm-gray eyes assess me with the intensity of a predator sizing up prey, and when his mouth curves into a sardonic smile, I feel my knees consider mutiny.

"Lost, sunshine?" His voice is whiskey and smoke, the kind that makes sensible women forget their own names...

From Chloe Horne

Engaged To My Billionaire Boss

[The Billionaire's Second Chance](#)

The Billionaire's Bachelorette (October 2025)

Snowed In With The Billionaire (November 2025)

And Chloe?

I've been devouring romances forever. Growing up in the land of make-believe made me believe Happily Ever After is always just around the corner. And romance is everywhere when you open your eyes. I like my leading men like my coffee, strong and rich. Protective Alpha Heroes willing to be more than just their bank account. Men who are both entertained and amused by real women. Men who are strong enough to be a little vulnerable. I like my leading ladies smart, curvy, strong, and ready to take on the world. I like them to give as well as they get. I like them to know what they want - in their men. In their life. Together, they arrive at their own Happily Ever After. My hope is that at the end of each book, you don't want to say goodbye. Personally, I love to travel. If there is a palm tree there, I'm there. Mexico, Brazil, the Caribbean, Hawaii. My other passion is music, all sorts of music from sweet to salty, from reggae to rock, from samba to salsa, from country to classics.

Drop a line hello@ChloeHorne.com