



BOSSY
PLAYBOY

Doctor

EMMA SPENCER

Bossy Playboy Doctor

**A Billionaire Second Chance
Romance**

Emma Spencer

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Chapter One

Intrusion into a Disorganized Life

E than

My life had always been one clumsy, full of mess and disorder. But she came, and for the first time in a while, everything seemed in order. Everything was precise. Her soft moans were in my mouth as we kissed. I treasured the gentle way she caressed my hair and even paid attention to my body as well.

It was just a kiss, but it was sorting out a lot of things I didn't know were in a state of disorder. I didn't want to forget this feeling, or I'd return to the clumsy chaos my life used to be.

They say if a man keeps a particular item in a particular spot, and you ask that man where said item is, as long as it hasn't been tampered with, the man will tell you where to find it. You might think that only applies to organized men; but in most cases, you won't be asking an organized man where to find

something because you know he will be careful about putting things where they are meant to be.

In major situations, the person you'd have to ask will be unorganized or careless because they have a habit of putting things where they aren't meant to go. Yet these slobs can find them because they have a system to sort it out.

This is not the same in my case: I am Ethan Sullivan, thirty-five years old and the middle child of the Sullivan brothers and the oldest twin. Compared to my kind older brother, I'm sneaky; and compared to my genius younger brother, I am aloof. As a surgeon, I've honed my skills to the point that the work of my hands is considered machine-like, considering how precise and detailed I am.

I save lives due to how careful I am. But that ability only comes when it's time to save a human life. If my hands were not in the operating room and need to handle other tasks that don't involve the scalpel, I am effectively careless and scatterbrained.

It doesn't stop there. I make jokes every time. I'm regarded as a social butterfly, but I become a bee: my words sting harder than they should. I am not even aware of it. I have my moments when I get my things together; but most of the time, when it concerns paperwork or conversing with people to get my feelings across, I have butterfingers.

So, I hide my true feelings behind laughter and jokes. If only I knew what it cost me.

I was at the peak of life, living a comfortable lifestyle...well, not all that comfort, considering the fact that I had to spend time saving lives. I enjoyed the work, don't get me wrong, but even with facemasks, you can't get used to the smell of medicine and blood.

You need a break. What better way to have a break as a doctor than with a woman?

Well, there are other ways...My older brother, Ben, would rather find a way to take care of his daughter Chloe. Ian my younger brother, hmm, I've never really thought about what he'd do during his free time or to relax. I picture him as the kind to just sit still and read a book.

For me, I'd love to wine and dine a beautiful woman...or several. There is no need to settle down. Why would there be? If a woman met me, she'd only want to be with me because of my wealth or stamina in bed, as if with someone who even forgets her name.

“Where is your scatterbrained mind now?” she asked as she fed me a grape.

This was girl number...I don't know. All I remember is that she was one of my favorites.

“Just thinking about life,” I said as I turned my eyes to her.

She had hair as black as night, and greedy eyes. She was good at what she did. I could afford her tastes with ease.

“Am I part of the life?” she asked.

“Nights like this, you're part of it, Elizabeth,” I replied.

“I'm Gabrielle, not Elizabeth,” she sighed.

“What? Really?” I raised my brows. “You're almost as good as she is, if not better.”

“You really are scatterbrained, aren't you?” she asked with a sigh. “You're not supposed to compare the women you sleep with.”

“Lesson learned,” I acknowledged. “Are you going to get to work now or continue complaining?”

“Damn you,” she spat and rolled her eyes. She kissed my chest.

She continued to kiss my chest down to my stomach and finally got to my pubic area. She held my dick and stroked it gently. She kissed the tip and started to suck on it. Then she swallowed the rest of me. I threw my head back in pleasure. My left hand reached for her head, caressing her for doing a good job.

“You know I’ve been thinking,” she said as she let go of my dick and got ready to impale herself. She rubbed my dick against her pussy, thereby soaking the condom with her juices.

“I don’t think this moment calls for an ‘I’ve been thinking’,” I muttered.

“Mm... hear me out,” she said, moaning. She slowly lowered her hips to take in my length better.

As her ass made contact with my skin, my dick was completely inside her—warm, wet, and safe, tight with bumps in the right spaces.

“Aah, go on,” I urged her to continue.

She leaned backward, using my legs as support, and started to move her hips, pulling my dick in and out.

悪い女: the Japanese kanji on her stomach translated to “bad woman”. I don’t know why she chose it as a tattoo. She was a model; maybe thought it would look cool on her. I have a tattoo as well. I only got it back in college because I wanted something to differentiate me from my twin brother, Ian. Then again, the tattoo wasn’t necessary because Ian didn’t go anywhere that would require him to take off his clothes.

I regretted that tattoo. Well, it won’t be the first time I did something I’d regret. She leaned forward with both her hands on my shoulders; the gentle rocking of her hips was going faster and faster.

“Like I was saying, aren’t you ever going to settle down?” she asked.

“Why? Do you want to settle down with me?” I asked.

“I would love that,” she replied instantly as she bit her lower lip.

“Why?” I asked as I held her hips and forced her down correctly, my dick hitting her womb.

“Ha... aah...oh, my goodness.” She moaned as I started thrusting upward.

“I asked you something, didn’t I?” I reminded her.

“I mean, come on, you’re rich, have a deliciously irresistible dick...what else could be my reason?” she asked.

Do you see?

“You do know that I’m clumsy right?” I reminded her.

“Ah, right, it can be a major turn-off,” she replied amid her labored breathing. “I’m almost... there...”

“Already? I’m not even close yet,” I responded as she started to slow down, leaving me to fuck her myself.

“I’ll finish you off with my mouth, I promise,” she said. “Let me off.”

I’m not the aggressive type, especially if they aren’t into it. I pulled out and watched her finish me off with her mouth. This was fine. I didn’t need love or anything. None of them could get my heart pounding anymore. And even if they did, there was no way anyone would genuinely care about a man as clumsy and careless as I was.

“So, how about it?” Gabrielle asked as she helped me out of the condom and tossed it away.

“Me and you. Happily ever after.”

“I don’t think so,” I sighed and placed my hands behind my head and lay down.

She lay on my chest. “Is it because I can’t finish you off properly? I assure you, no normal woman can do that.”

“Then no normal woman would be my wife then,” I replied and turned to look at her. “Besides, this kind of lifestyle isn’t so bad. No one to remain loyal, and all of you already know the law.”

“Ethan Sullivan doesn’t fall in love,” she said along with me.

“I know, but if you ever change, I will call dibs.”

“If.”

“If,” she affirmed. “It might happen, you never know.”

“I doubt that,” I said and focused on the ceiling.

It isn't going to change. I know that. It was fine. Working long hours and spending free time with my mother, my brothers, and my niece. And if they are busy, I can spend time with a girl of my choice. I wasn't lonely cause I was technically never alone.

To be honest, I thought about it. When my brother was married to his late wife, I often saw a look of palpable joy on his face. I also saw my mother and father so in love that it filled my brothers and me with joy just watching them fawn over each other. It made me jealous, wondering if I could ever have something like that. When my sister-in-law died, I saw how it broke my brother. And when Dad succumbed to an illness, I know how devastated my mother became.

She wasn't my wife, and he wasn't my husband, but I felt weak. I was a doctor who couldn't do anything to save both their lives. That's not the only thing that traumatized me. It was the thought that I might eventually fall in love with someone and be unable to save them. I wanted to avoid that as much as possible. If I slept around more, there was no way that would happen. No emotional attachment. Just purely sexual.

“That reminds me, don't you have work to get to?” Gabrielle asked.

“Hmm? Just an interview with a new staff member, but it’s on Friday,” I replied.

“But, today is Friday,” she said.

I sat upright and checked my phone. It read 7:55 am. Friday. The interview was for eight.

“Fuck,” I exclaimed as I got out of bed and rushed to pick up my things.

“Before you leave, kisses?” she requested.

I frowned at her.

“I know, I know. No kisses,” she sighed and lay down properly. “Stay safe out there.”

I sighed and got ready to leave. I was in Glen Allen and had to return to Richmond for the interview; theoretically, I was late. A private flight changed that. I sped off to one of my hospitals in Malibu and had their chopper take me back to Richmond.

“Good morning, sir.”

“Good morning, Dr. Sullivan.”

“You look exhausted.”

The concerns and greetings from my staff were met with immediate replies and loads of smiles. I made my way to the elevator and check my wristwatch: 9:30 am.

“Shit,” I cursed and started tapping my feet impatiently as the elevator dragged on.

“Sir?” A nurse in the elevator called my attention.

“Yeah?” I turned to her and flashed a smile. “How are you doing?”

“Uh...very good,” she answered. Her cheeks look a bit flustered, “Your fly is down.”

I looked down and she was right. Shit.

I quickly zipped it up and clear my throat, “Ahem, thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” she replied.

There was a stretched awkward silence. The only sound was the gentle elevator score. I wished I could say that I was used to this, but I was not. Slight errors like this usually turned into embarrassing situations. Usually, it started with something small, and the next thing was something that hurt me physically. I was not looking forward to the incoming pain.

As the door opened, I exited the elevator, making my way to my office. If I was lucky, the applicant would still be there.

If...

If wasn't my favorite word because it usually didn't favor me. As I made the turn, I bumped into someone, and her folder and phone fell to the floor. That week alone, I had to repair twelve phones.

"I'm sorry," we both said at the same time and bent down to pick up the materials.

Our heads hit each other and made a loud bonk sound. It hurt like hell.

"Ow," she cried, held her forehead and looked at me.

"I'm sorry, I..." My tongue was tied.

Olive skin, hair as dark as night, and hazel eyes that seemed like they weren't supposed to be there. Even as she remained squatting, her curves belonged in a girlie magazine. The anger on her face from the pain, for some odd reason, made her look hotter.

That wasn't all. My heart was pounding. Like really hard. Did I walk too fast when I came out of the elevator? That must be it.

There's no way she's the reason my heart was pounding so hard.

"I'm sorry," I swallowed hard and helped her pick up the folder and her phone. The phone's screen was damaged.

"Oh God, no," she groaned and took the phone.

"I'll repair it," I offered.

"I should have been more careful, I wasn't watching where I was going," she admitted. "You don't have to pay for anything."

"I insist," I said, as I handed her the folder she had dropped. "Send me the bill."

“Okay, thank you,” she said and got up, then stretched toward me. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Sullivan.”

I must have been hallucinating because I swear I saw a halo around her as she stared down at me. She extended her hand.

What’s going on with me?

I made a mental note to get an ER scan at the end of the day.

“There are three Sullivans, just call me Ethan,” I said as I accepted her hand.

She was short, around my chest level, so she had to look up to me. She was even more breathtaking from this angle. I don’t know why I did it, but I placed my hand on her head and gently rubbed it.

“What are you doing?” she asked, shocked.

“I honestly have no idea,” I replied. “You seem petable.”

“I have an interview with you, sir,” she said but didn’t move her head away.

“Stacy Roberts?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re hired,” I said instantly.

“Okay, I think you’re being hypnotized,” she said as she took my hand off her head. “Can we go to your office and get started?”

“Yes, ma’am,” I answered.

“So, where’s your office?” she asked.

“Oh, right...uh, right this way,” I chuckled nervously and led the way.

Something was wrong with me. Maybe my heart was trying to tell me something. A new woman to satisfy my urges or something more? As we got into my office, she got seated.

“Just give me a second. I think I have a copy of your CV and other things...” I said as I looked at the clutter on my desk.

“Just a second.”

It was embarrassing. I moved files aside and opened my drawers but still couldn’t find them.

“Ahem,” she cleared her throat to get my attention, pulled out her documents from a folder, and placed them on my desk. “Does that help?”

“Thank you,” I answered.

“Are you... perhaps, clumsy?” she asked.

“What? You haven’t heard of me?” I teased. “Darling, I’m the clumsiest man you’ll ever meet.”

“Not something you should be proud of,” she sighed. “Let’s see. Doesn’t know how to keep documents properly, is late for interviews, and doesn’t watch where he’s going. I’m willing to bet you’re the type of guy who forgets his fly is down.”

At her last observation, my eyes went down to my pants to be sure I had zipped it up. I let out a sigh of relief when I noticed that it was in place.

“Before we start the interview, can I help you organize this?” she offered. “I still feel bad that you want to repair my phone’s screen. Let’s take this as a way to settle the score.”

“Thank you, I’d like that,” I said with a warm smile. “We can do it later.”

“Now,” she insisted.

“Right,” I agreed.

Am I the one getting the job, or is she?

We got to work and started clearing and sorting through the files. It was the first time. For a while, someone besides my family helped me declutter. Most times, the ladies take my clumsiness as a cute quirk or something like that. But Stacy wanted to help me out, and we had just met.

“Even if we do all this, it will still end up like the way it was,” I sighed in defeat. “Sorry to waste your time.”

“Don’t say that. You’re not naturally clumsy,” she said. “You’re Ethan Sullivan, the most skilled hands of the Sullivan brothers. You three are like gods in the medical field, and it’s an honor to work with any of you. I refuse to believe that...” She paused and took my hands in hers. “Someone whose hands have saved countless lives balanced on the edge of scalpel blades is a klutz. You might just be thinking that.”

She said it with the warmest and most genuine smile I’d ever seen. “But then again, what do I know?” She let go of my hands and handed me the copy of her CV that I had been looking for earlier. “I don’t even work here yet.”

I looked at her cover letter and CV. She was looking for a position as a gynecologist.

“What is your goal here, besides working as a gynecologist?” I asked.

“I want to know how to run a successful hospital,” she replied.

“Can you be my assistant?” I asked. “That way you can learn how to manage a hospital and help me make sure this place doesn’t look the way it did a few minutes ago.”

“If it’s not any trouble, then okay,” she replied, “I’d love to help.”

That was the first day I met Stacy—the woman who became an intrusion in this disorganized life of mine.

Chapter Two

Never Meet Your Heros

Stacy

Glen Allen, located northwest of downtown Richmond in Henrico County, is my home. Not just a home to me, but home to Roberts Hospitals, a failing hospital—but also my parent’s pride and joy. At least, my father’s after Mom died.

I loved the hospital. Ever since I was little, I looked forward to taking over and turning it into a place suitable to help people get healthy. That’s what I thought it’d be. But as I got older, I got to realize how hard reality was when it came to dreams.

As a kid you want to be an astronaut when you become older, but you realize you have to be smart, and tall. If you want to become a medical doctor, good universities are way too expensive. You want to become a runway model, but you aren’t thin enough or tall enough or hold enough of societal standards of beauty.

Something's always going to stop you. For me, who had a father who sold off most of his possessions to ensure I got the education that would land me my dream job, it was already obvious that things were going downhill. There weren't many patients; most would rather go downtown to Richmond and get treated at the big high-tech hospitals there. I was going to be different.

I believed that if the hospital operated like those downtown did, there would be a chance at success. I just needed to become good. Extremely good. As good as...the Sullivan brothers. If you were a medical practitioner in the US, you must have heard of them: three billionaire brothers, who were also doctors. Ben Sullivan was the oldest and an expert in transplant surgery.

Ethan Sullivan, rumored to be clumsy, was a skilled surgeon so good with the blade, you'd think he was a machine. Ian Sullivan, the man who could change faces, was an expert in plastic surgery.

I heard rumors that you had to pay them to work in their respective hospitals. I had even started saving up to pay for it until I realized it was a false rumor and the hospitals only accepted people, who were either outstanding at their work or wanted to learn. I was going to be the latter by all means. But first....

“You’ll be better if you take your medications,” I said to a patient who was experiencing dysmenorrhea.

Most of the cases were like this. Maybe because I was the only person in town who went to the best medical school in the country, but we were able to maintain or retain a few of our customers.

“Thank you, Stacy,” the young lady said. “I’ll follow your advice.”

“If there’s anything else that bothers you, just let me know,” I said in reply.

“I will,” she smiled and got up to leave.

“That’s all of them for today,” my father said as he walked into the room as the lady left.

“I’ll wait. There might be more cases to take,” I said and went through the records.

“You know? Sometimes I wish I could see the brighter side of everything just like the way you do, and the way your mother did,” he said in a tone that revealed his disappointment. “When she was still alive, this place was brimming with life. I guess it’s my fault that it isn’t.”

“That might be true, but it isn’t fair to give up on yourself just like that,” I said.

“I also forgot that you’re honest with your wording,” he sighed.

“Oh come on,” I said rolling my eyes. “We’re doing a good job as owners of this hospital. But that’s by our standards. We need to have a fresh new look at the way we do things here. That’s why...”

“You need to work with a successful hospital owner so you’d understand how it is they make it successful. I know, I know,” he groaned and stroked the salt streaks of hair peppering his chin. “You sound like a broken record.”

“Because it feels like you aren’t listening to me at all,” I said.

“I am listening,” he said. “It’s just...this hospital was what your mother and I dreamt of. I don’t want you sacrificing your own dreams for this. You can work at those hospitals you talk about and use it as an opportunity to improve yourself. That’s all that matters.”

“I understand your concern, Dad. But seeing this hospital improve, is my dream as well,” I explained. “It is actually

possible to make another person's dream yours."

"If you say so," he sighed. "I also have a dream besides this hospital, you know?"

"What is it?"

"To hear the pitter-patter of little feet running around the hospital or my house," he replied, "with you smiling and a handsome man..."

"Dad?" I frowned.

"Or *woman*, I'd rather you choose a man but as long as I get my grandchildren, and you're happy, I don't mind," he continued.

"Dad, it's not the gender. I don't have time for love and the like," I said. "I just want to focus on this for now."

"Whatever you say, sweetie." He hung his head and let his shoulders drop in defeat as he left the room.

I felt bad for him. But what was I going to do? There weren't any good men in town and as I said, I wanted to focus on reviving the hospital. Romance could wait until that was accomplished. No exceptions.

A few months later, I heard that Ethan Sullivan's hospital needed a part-time gynecologist. He wasn't my personal first choice considering the rumors of how clumsy he could be. He was the only one seeking help among the brothers. My family's hospital wasn't going to wait long enough for an opportunity at the other Sullivan brothers' places, so I had no choice but to seize this one.

Needless to say, I was surprised to see that the rumors about Ethan Sullivan were true. Charcoal hair, six feet tall, playful eyes, and a body that had been toned perfectly. He radiated friendly bad-boy energy if that makes sense. Needless to say, I was drawn to him the moment we bumped heads against each other. But sometimes, he could be a massive pain in the neck.

"How could you have ordered more beds than we need?" I asked as I stared at the delivery receipts. "We needed sixteen."

"I thought we said sixty," Ethan said with a nervous chuckle. "Didn't know...sorry."

"That's not the problem," I sighed. "The company doesn't accept returns. I mean it's a bedding company. Hardly anyone

buys beds, so I bet we've just made their pockets fatter by emptying ours!"

"You're yelling at me," he whimpered playfully.

"Why you..." I stopped and took in a deep breath, then exhaled. "Sorry for yelling."

"It was just a little mistake," he said, pouting.

I gave him a head rub, which was difficult to do considering our height difference.

"So what do we do now?" he asked.

"Why ask me?" I frowned.

"You're my assistant; you know how it works. I mess it up, you fix it," he replied.

"I'm supposed to be helping you become less careless," I sighed.

"And you are," he said as he held my shoulders and stared deeply into my eyes. "Damn, I wish I was an ophthalmologist. It would be a good excuse to continue staring into your eyes."

I shrugged him off. “Stop saying nonsense and focus.”

“I am focused, yeesh,” he sucked his teeth. “You know, most of the girls would have swooned if they were on the receiving end of that move.”

“If they were desperate, or don’t have dreams or plans to make a valid difference in their lives and society,” I stated. “That and I’m not like any of the other girls”.

“Harsh much?” He chuckled, “But you’re right. You’re nothing like any of the girls I’ve met.”

“Right,” I shot him down. “Now what do we do about the beds.”

“Still waiting for you to think about something,” he said.

“Why do I have a feeling you’ve already thought up a solution?” I asked.

“Of course I have, but you’re the one who’s here to learn,” he replied. He rested his jaw in an open palm to support his head. He wore an amused expression. “Go ahead. Tell me your plans.”

“We could just give out the excess beds to hospitals or medical centers that need them,” I said.

“Very good,” he replied. “Now draw up a list of local hospitals and medical centers that fall into that category.”

My parent’s hospital came to mind. They would need some extra beds. So, I added them to the list. I could feel him staring intently at me.

“What?” I asked as I looked up at him.

“I’m just admiring how beautiful you are,” he said with zero effort.

His words almost moved me, but I shook my head negatively and focused on my tab, continuing to compile the list.

“Thank you,” was all that I said.

I observed and learned a lot of things about Ethan Sullivan. From the nurses at the hospital, I had learned that he was a diehard playboy. The flirting was probably just his way of trying to get me to fall in love with him or something—an attempt I found amusing. But who mentions the fact that it’s what he used to get other girls?

I guess his clumsiness wasn't limited to just misplacing files or making the wrong orders.

"I'll go check with the other doctors if they know something," I sighed and got up to leave the office.

"Can we get dinner together as thanks?" he asked.

"No," I smirked and watched his face squeeze in disappointment.

"Yeah, I thought so. I'm busy anyway," he said. He picked up a book and started reading.

"You have an appointment for six pm anyway," I reminded him. "And I'm here all night. So, it won't be possible anyway."

"Oh, right. I forgot," he sighed. "Thanks Stacy."

"You're welcome." I shot back. I smiled and left.

He was a mess but for some odd reason. I didn't mind it at all. As I returned to my office, I sank into my chair and let out an exhausted sigh. It was just eleven am, and I was already spent. Maybe if I believed the rumors and came here with that mindset, I wouldn't have taken on the role of his assistant. I

was still a gynecologist, but he paid me separately for assisting with his activities.

“Good morning, Dr. Roberts,” a blonde man in his late thirties greeted me.

He was Dr. William Johnson, a pediatrician, who had worked with Ethan for almost five years. Although he was just thirty-eight, everyone seemed to treat him like a father figure in the hospital, Ethan and me included. He had a tattoo on his neck and his left arm; there were still signs of a piercing on his left ear. He must have been the wild party type in his younger years.

Still single, though. If the nurses in the hospital weren't swooning for Ethan, they were swooning for Dr. Johnson.

“Dr. Johnson, good morning to you too,” I greeted. “Did you need me for something?”

“Something like that. I need Ethan, but if I told him he'd just forget again, it's better if I just pass through someone who won't let him forget,” he explained.

I groaned and placed my head on the table. “Oh, come on.”

“That and there’s a mother of one of my patients who needs your attention. Cervical cancer signs apparently,” he added. “Why the groaning?”

“I’m a gynecologist first. I’m technically not even Ethan’s secretary or assistant,” I replied.

“I think you’re the only one who believes that,” he shrugged. “It’s been a month, and the rest of us have already accepted that it’s your role. So, there’s nothing much you can do.”

He was right. I had been there a month and Ethan casually started asking people to meet me if they needed to reach him. It was stressful at first, but it was his way of helping me learn. I had started to understand how to delegate, manage time and effectively run a hospital—all things I wanted to apply to my parent’s hospital.

I hadn’t told him the main reason I wanted to learn with him was to help me restructure things back home. In a way, it wasn’t all that bad. Everyone in the hospital started seeing me as his assistant, giving a kind of power over them. If I gave an instruction, they treated it like it was Ethan’s.

“You’re right,” I sighed. “What do you want him to know?”

“Well he mentioned at a meeting a few months ago about his plan to have a nurse exchange program,” he replied. “So we select five of our nurses and get them to switch places with nurses from other hospitals. That way our nurses get to learn how to work in different spaces, and the nurses that come in get to experience how it is to work in a billion-dollar hospital.”

“Ethan came up with this?” I raised a brow.

“He may be careless, but he’s a very intelligent and shrewd man,” he replied.

I thought about it for a moment and shook my head. “I’m having trouble believing that.”

“I think I understand why you think that,” he sighed. “He’s been *freer* with you. If he’s with the rest of us, he becomes overly cautious to not slip up or let his clumsiness affect us. In essence, he acts like he’s around his family when he’s with you. His brothers don’t see him as bright, either. But he has a lot of strengths.”

I don’t know why, but when he explained that. I felt...special?
Special to Ethan.

Stop overthinking it. Focus.

“Oh well, the idea is good,” I shrugged. “I’ll give it to him this time.”

“Right, we all think it is. Just help us remind him and if possible monitor him to make sure he doesn’t make any mistakes,” he advised and turned to leave. “Also, I heard about the sixty bed delivery.”

“So fast?”

“Well, it wasn’t that difficult to hear, or see,” he said, pointing outside the window. “The truck that delivered them is still here.”

“Could you please help me find hospitals, clinics, or medical centers that might need them?” I requested.

“I’ll look around and ask the others too,” he replied. “You’re getting good at this job, Assistant.”

“Shoo!” I motioned for him to leave.

“I’m going,” he scoffed and closed the door behind him.

It was a good idea. I thought about getting a nurse from the hospital back at Glen Allen to work at Ethan’s place, while the

nurse here goes to work there and advises Dad how to make the place better.

“Will Dad listen, though?” I sighed as I thought about it.

At that time in my life, it felt like no one wanted to help me make my dream a reality, except Ethan. But he didn't even know about my goals, so he doesn't count. Or maybe he did.

Ethan

I was fascinated by Stacy. I didn't understand what it was about her that fascinated me but it was a strong feeling of attachment and it scared me.

Is this love?

I dreaded the new feeling. In fact, I was afraid of it. A month had passed since she had arrived, and I still felt unstable. Just hearing her voice was enough to get me excited. When she frowned at me for making a mistake, I would fight the urge to pinch her cheeks.

And every time I tried flirting with her, it failed. Things that easily worked with everyone else, failed perfectly with her.

I didn't understand it.

It frustrated me too.

I had promised myself that I wasn't going to be involved in things like this.

Maybe I was overthinking it.

Even if she didn't pay attention to my advances, it didn't bother me at all (it did...a whole lot).

Sometimes when I saw her with the other male staff, laughing or doing anything with them, I would feel my chest tighten. I knew what jealousy was and how it felt. I never thought that I, of all people, would feel jealousy because of a woman. I had been with several women, wined and dined them, slept with them, and went on shopping sprees with them. And if I saw them with another man, I didn't care.

Forgive me, but I saw myself as superior to other men, or I just told myself that there were more women out there to keep me company. It never once made my heart feel stabbed. I went to sleep thinking about her, and I woke up wanting to see her. We didn't work together a lot, and in the few moments we eventually did, Ethan Sullivan would feel nervous...all because of a woman I had bumped into.

There was a gentle rapping on my door. It was she.

“Ethan? It’s me, Dr. Roberts, can I come in?” she asked without opening the door.

I looked at my desk to make sure everything was in order before calling her in. “Yeah, come in.”

“Took you slightly longer than usual. Are you getting soft on me, Dr. Sullivan?” she asked with a smile.

The smile reached through the cracks in my heart.

“I just finished an operation,” I replied and looked away. “How may I help?”

“Oh, Dr. Johnson was in my office...”

I knew him. The second most handsome doctor in this building, three years older than I was and regarded as a wise old man. I knew how the female staff talked about him.

Does Stacy also have the hots for him?

“He talked about an idea you brought up,” she continued. “Something about the nurses’ exchange program?”

My eyes widened as I remembered it.

“I honestly forgot about it,” I admitted.

“He figured,” she sighed then crossed her arms. “When he told me about the idea, I had issues believing that you were the one who came up with it.”

“Really?” I raised a brow.

“I mean someone with a scatterbrain, actually brings up a good idea?” she teased.

“Oh come on, I have my moments,” I replied. “You should give me some slack.”

“I know, I know,” she chuckled softly; it was like music to my ears. “Show me more of that smart side sometimes, and who knows? I might let you treat me to dinner.”

As I thought, something was definitely wrong with me now.

Chapter Three

It Starts with a Kiss

Stacy

“So how is work going?” my father asked over the phone.

I made it a habit to check in with him periodically, so I wouldn't get any surprise about the hospital closing down.

“It's been going great,” I answered honestly as I read the medical records of a patient I had just finished attending to.

“Did you get the beds?”

“I was surprised to see them,” he replied. “We've replaced the old ones. Thank you.”

“I told you I was going to do something about the hospital's current state,” I said, feeling smug.

“Indeed you did,” he said. I could feel the happiness in his voice. Little moments like this convinced me that I was doing the right thing.

“I’ll come visit as soon as possible,” I promised. “Can you hang in there until that happens?”

“Well, I’ll try,” he said and let out a sigh.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“What?” he feigned ignorance. “There’s nothing wrong, I’m perfectly fine. There’s nothing on my mind at all.”

“Saying it like that doesn’t make you sound any more convincing,” I pointed out.

“Good evening, Dr. Roberts,” one of the nurses greeted me as I walked past her.

I replied with a smile and a nod, and continued making my way to my destination, Ethan’s office. We started preparing for the nurse exchange program. I managed the meetings and Ethan involved the stakeholders. After my medical work for the day, I conducted reviews with him just to be sure everything was in place and on schedule.

“Fine, I’ll admit it,” Father sighed. “It’s just that I’m half expecting you to actually visit with a boyfriend or something.”

“Are you serious right now, Dad?” I groaned as I rubbed my eyelids in frustration.

“You see? That’s why I said there’s nothing wrong,” he said.

“I told you that I’m not really interested,” I reminded him.

“I find that hard to believe,” he said, stubbornly. “You mean to tell me that there’s not a single person in that hospital that has caught your interest.”

The last time my father had asked me a similar question was when he wanted to know if I had any types in Glen, but it was hard picturing myself with any man from the town as a love interest. But as he asked the question, it was so easy to imagine Ethan.

“Why the pause? Is there someone after all?” I could hear the glimmer of hope in his voice.

“No there isn’t,” I replied.

“Are you sure?” he asked. He knew I was lying.

“I am positively sure,” I replied as I opened Ethan’s door.

I saw him half naked about to change out of his scrubs into another choice of clothing. He was sweating, and the light bounced off the beads of liquid on his body, causing him to glisten. There was a tattoo of a scalpel on his left abdomen. His body looked bigger without the clothes.

He turned toward the door, and my eyes went lower, focusing on his sweaty stomach. My body refused to move; it was occupied trying to control the pounding of my heart. My face heated up as I noticed he was staring at me with a confused expression.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

I gulped.

“Stacy? Stacy, are you there?” Dad called repeatedly to get my attention.

“Chest...I mean, yes,” I shook my head negatively. “Sorry Ethan, I mean, Dad!”

“Dad?” Ethan raised a brow.

“Ethan?” Dad asked.

I left the office and closed the door behind me.

“Is everything alright? You sound a bit flustered,” Dad said.

“I’m okay, I just...” I tried to think about various ways to explain that I had just seen a half-naked man, and the sight refused to leave my eyes.

“You just? Who’s Ethan? You’re boyfriend? Oh wait, could it be Ethan Sullivan himself?” he asked.

“Goodnight, Dad,” I said and hung up the phone.

I took in a deep breath and turned to the door.

“It’s okay; he would have put on his clothes by now,” I assured myself as I got ready to open the door. To my surprise as the door opened, I found Ethan eating a popsicle and still shirtless.

“What the hell Ethan?” I asked and shielded my eyes.

“You know,” he started to say as he took the popsicle out of his mouth and pointed it at me. “I’ve been flirting and teasing you verbally about all these things. I started to wonder if you actually see me as a man. But to see you flustered like this is something else.”

He started to walk toward me; all I could do was take a couple of steps back until my back touched the door. Sometimes, I forgot how tall he was. He towered over me, and I could detect

the faint smell of sweat on his body. For some odd reason, it felt nice to my nostrils.

Am I being weird?

His scent turned me on. That and the very sight of his built body overshadowing me.

“I’m not flustered,” I replied, my voice cracked halfway, completely doing the opposite of my statement.

“Hmm,” he hummed gently as a mischievous smirk tugged at the corner of his lips.

He held my chin and lifted my head to force me stare into his eyes because I kept looking away.

“Ethan,” I whispered in a plea, my hands touched his chest to put a bit of distance between us, but it didn’t work.

Rather than pushing him away, I unconsciously started to move my hands, fascinated by how hard his body was. I had touched a lot of bodies and as a gynecologist—that meant mostly female bodies. His body was rigid and well-toned. The bump that his abs provided against my fingers was therapeutic in a way that surprised me.

“You’re getting into this, aren’t you?” he asked, obviously amused by my fascination with his body. “Maybe I should just remain shirtless all the time just to get you to touch me.”

Say something.

My mouth refused to say anything, and he seemed to be enjoying the moment. He pushed strands of my hair behind my

ear and grinned.

Not good. He's going to hear my heart.

He stopped.

“That was fun,” he said as he let go of me and went to his desk, picked up a towel, and started wiping his sweat off.

What's this?

I placed my hand on my chest and it was like heart palpitations. I had never experienced anything like this before. Okay maybe once, but that was with my first boyfriend years ago. Then he cheated on me and dumped me. I guess I unconsciously closed my heart after that.

But Ethan...

“Ethan, look out!” I warned as he picked up a file; the cup on it fell and spilled its contents.

“Shit!” he cursed and used the towel to dab the liquid.

I shook my head negatively. After a month of working with him, I had become used to his clumsiness. At first, it was annoying, but later on, it made him endearing. There was just this urge to look out for him.

“Oh yeah, I got this for you,” he said as he picked up a box and handed it to me. “As a reward for looking out for me.”

“Why?” I asked as I accepted the box and opened it; it was an assortment of chocolate treats.

“I know I'm not the best boss out there. To be honest, you'd rather work with Ben, or Ian compared to me,” he explained.

“I’m grateful that you have to put up with me. A lot of my staff have almost given up on me and previous assistants have quit. But you’re still here. So, I’m grateful.”

“Thank you, I...”

“Also,” he cut me off as he raised a finger and placed it on my chin with a mischievous grin. “You’re very fun to tease and flirt with. Considering how nothing I’m doing seems to work.”

I stared down at his body and he did the same to mine.

“Well, not everything,” he said with a smile.

I moved my head back and put his finger in my mouth and bit down, but not hard enough to hurt him. His eyes switched from confusion to excitement. I don’t know why I was doing what I was doing, but it didn’t stop me.

All this time, his flirting was just annoying. But his persistence and the way he didn’t relent trying to get me to bend to his desires started to have an effect. Couple that with his half-naked form, and it got the outcome he had been waiting for this whole time.

He moved his finger into my mouth properly, and I started to suck on it gently. My hands pressed down on the box he had handed to me. The thickness of his finger made me wonder how it would feel if he happened to use it on a certain part of my body. I pulled back and let his finger out of my mouth.

He stared at his finger and back at me.

“That’s...that’s the only repayment I can think of for the chocolate,” I said.

“I’ll get you more chocolates,” he said instantly.

“No,” I smirked, “and put on your shirt.”

“Fine,” he sighed and picked up his new scrubs and put them on.

I took a piece of the chocolate and ate it. Best chocolate I had tasted all year.

That’s how Ethan was. He could be clumsy, and a bit of a sneak, but he was sweet and a good leader. And...his body.

But I was scared. There were rumors about him being a playboy, but I had hardly seen any of that. He was so focused on his role as a doctor or his ability to see how much of his clumsiness I could take until I snapped. I thought that the same thing that happened with my ex would happen again. I would be skeptical at first, give in, and then cheat on me and disappear.

Ethan wouldn’t do that, right?

What if all this is just really flirting? Is this his process? Could I be just another prey that took longer to catch?

“You don’t like chocolate?” he asked. “You’ve been...looking away.”

“No, I love them,” I replied.

“What’s the matter then?” he asked.

Are you serious about me? There was no way I was going to ask him that.

“I just wanted to know the progress of the stakeholders; we can’t risk any mistakes,” I answered.

The look in his eyes told me he knew that I had deviated from what I had in mind.

“I’ve called all the doctors and asked them to make their selections,” he said. “Don’t worry, I won’t mess this up.”

“Alright, if you say so then,” I said and turned to leave. “Thank you for the chocolates.”

“You’re welcome,” he countered.

I left his office. That night, I couldn’t sleep. The image of a shirtless man kept me awake and restless.

Days had passed and I half expected Ethan to be shirtless every day. He wasn’t. I don’t know why I was disappointed that he wasn’t. He had become sweeter, showing me how to handle most tasks and gifting me advanced books on gynecology. He even started involving me in surgery as his assistant.

Seeing him work was something else entirely. I was worried about his clumsy nature but whenever he put on the mask and picked on the blade, he became an entirely different person. Quick, precise, and delicate. I never witnessed him lose a patient or any of the patients return with a complication.

I was falling for him faster than I expected. My thoughts started to become occupied with him. Watching him relate with his staff like they were family. Treating patients with

love. Or how serious he'd become when someone did something wrong.

Everything he did, scored points with me, but I was still unsure of myself. What if all I felt for him was just admiration? I opened his office door and found him asleep on the couch. He had just finished a surgery that took almost seven hours. I kept the reports on his desk and was about to leave, but I stopped and turned to him. The gentle snore escaping his lips and the rise and fall of his chest gave off an aura of someone at peace.

I walked closer to him and squatted down to get a better look at his face. His beard was badly grown out and needed a trim. He had beautiful short lashes. His lips were slightly open. I focused on his mouth and my heart started to pound again.

I started to move closer. *What are you doing? Stop! But he's asleep, just a light kiss and that's all. Isn't this harassment? I'll get fired.*

But it's Ethan...he probably wouldn't mind.

I need to stop.

I just want to know what his lips taste like.

I was getting closer, and I could feel his breath. I wasn't supposed to do it. I convinced myself that I'd chicken out and stop an inch away. But our lips made contact. He tasted like coffee. I pulled back, and he didn't stir awake. My heart was pounding out of control. It was just a light kiss and yet, I wanted more.

He didn't wake up, you can stop now.

I couldn't understand why. I kissed him lightly again. And again, and again, and again.

Stacy, stop.

I wanted to, but it felt so good.

“Are you still asleep?” I asked.

No response. I went in for a deeper one. I captured his mouth and started to kiss him more intently. I felt a hand behind my head, startling me. He was kissing me back. As I pulled away, I noticed his eyes were open.

“That was harassment,” he pointed out.

“I'm sorry...,” I got up to leave and he caught my arm and pulled me back.

He made me lie down on him. His hands secured my face, and he started to kiss me again.

“Mm...” I whimpered as the kissing intensified.

His groans, my whimpers, and the sound of our mouths filled the room. His hands left my face and secured my waist. I held his face in response and forced my tongue into his mouth. He started to suck on me, numbing my senses and the sensations of my tongue.

Did kissing always feel this good?

His hands went lower and squeezed my ass, causing me to gasp into his mouth. I felt so sensitive all over, and my feminine center was twitching with anticipation for more. I

pulled away from the kiss and stared at him. I tried to catch my breath. He was also out of breath.

“Wow,” he said while panting, and a smile formed on his face.

“What brought this on?”

“I...I don't know,” I replied honestly.

“Well...” he said as he touched the side of my face. “I'm glad it happened. I've wanted this to happen for a long time.”

“I don't know if I wanted it to happen as long as you did,” I admitted.

“That's fine,” he said with a warm smile. “But can the next one be when I'm awake?”

“I'll try to remember that,” I replied with a nervous chuckle.

To be honest, I was still worried about it. I didn't know if giving in to my urges and kissing him was the right choice. All I knew was that the moment I kissed him, everything seemed to be more colorful than usual.

I wanted to experience more of this colorful exchange.

Chapter Four

Changes

E than

Not to brag, and this is merely just to give a comparison, I have kissed a lot of women. That was the first time any woman had attempted to kiss me in my sleep. To be honest, when she first kissed me, I woke up. But I decided to remain asleep and observe if anything would happen. And sure enough, things happened.

As she kept on repeating the kisses, I struggled to feign sleep. The last kiss was the straw that broke the camel's back. When I kissed her back, it was different. I wasn't lying when I said I had been looking forward to something like that happening. But I was scared.

I don't know why, but I was.

It felt like I was attempting to dig out a memory I had put a lot of work into burying. That wasn't the end of my worries, however. The moment we kissed and even when she laid on me to continue the kiss, she became permanently ingrained in my head and refused to leave.

“Are you listening?” Stacy asked, interrupting my thoughts.

“What?” I blinked twice.

“There you go again,” she sighed and looked at the papers on the table. “I’ve finished the paperwork with your brother concerning Olivia. Even after you said you won’t make any mistakes, you still ended up getting an extra nurse.”

“I’m sorry,” I apologized.

It was the week that Olivia was meant to come to Richmond. Olivia was a travel nurse who had been selected for the nurses exchange program, but I had made a mistake. Luckily my elder brother decided to take her in. That’s a story for another day.

“Don’t apologize to me, save it for her when she gets here,” she said.

“Whatever you say, boss,” I smirked.

“I swear I don’t get paid enough for this,” she sighed and continued writing on her pad.

She was really a sight to behold. With her left hand supporting her cheek, she focused on her work. I was completely enamored with her. My eyes focused on her lips. I wanted to kiss her again. It was strange. Normally, I could easily lift her chin and steal a kiss, but I was more concerned about if she’d actually be comfortable with that.

What kind of playboy was I, if getting a kiss was this hard? If anyone told me that I’d become like this. Worrying about what a woman who wasn’t my mother would think about me, I would tell them they were lying.

“You’re so distracted,” she sighed and put her pen down to focus on me. “Should I go back to my office?”

“No, just finish everything you have to do here,” I replied.

“Mm, hmm...” She smiled and looked away, continuing her work.

“Ethan,” she called softly, as she struggled to even look at me. “Can I get another kiss? I know it’s unprofessional and all, but I...”

I didn't wait for her to finish, so I got up and walked over to her side of the table. I lifted her chin and kissed her.

Are kisses supposed to feel this good?

She giggled as she pushed me away gently. "That'll do for this morning's dosage. Thank you, Ethan."

"This morning?" I raised a brow. "Is this a tri-dose thing? Morning, afternoon, and night?"

"Maybe," she smirked. "Now let's get back to work."

"Right," I nodded.

"You know, I'm actually grateful for my work experience here," she said as I sat down. "I've gotten to learn way more than I expected. You may be a clumsy man, but you're a good teacher."

When has anyone ever praised me for just being me?

"The clumsiness doesn't put you off?" I asked.

"Why would it?" she asked. "Well at first it was annoying, but now it gives you a cute gap you know?"

“What’s a cute gap?” I inquired.

“For instance, a guy who looks like a murderer or something, with a lot of cuts and scars on his body, who turns out to like petting bunnies and kittens,” she explained. “It’s like you. Strong, focused, determined, and kind, but clumsy in everything else. It feels good to know that someone as perfect as you has a weakness like clumsiness.”

Did she just call me perfect?

My heart stopped and started to pound again.

What was this feeling?

Why is she doing this much damage to me with little to no effort?

“You’re amazing Stacy,” I admitted, “You really are.”

“Thank you,” she said. “By the way, you have an appointment in the next few minutes.”

“With whom?” I asked.

“Uh...” she picked up the book of appointments and flipped through.

There was a knock on the door, startling us.

“Come in,” I called out.

“Is the doctor in?” a familiar voice asked as she made her way in.

“Oh my goodness; it’s Gabrielle Rodriguez.” Stacy’s eyes brightened.

Everyone knew Gabrielle, she was an international star after all. Normally, I’d be excited to see her. But I wasn’t. If anything, I felt like she was intruding on my moment.

“Nice to meet you,” Gabrielle said with pride. “I take it you’re a fan?”

“I am!” Stacy replied with excitement. “I envy you. You’re so fit, tall, and model-looking. I wish I looked that good.”

Stacy was underestimating herself, she looked a lot better than Gabrielle. The slightly offended look on Gabrielle’s face told me that she was thinking the same thing.

“You don’t look bad at all,” Gabrielle remarked.

“Really?” Stacy asked as she touched her waist and slowly went down to her ass.

Wait, is she...?

She gave it a little squeeze, “I don’t know if guys are really into shorter, slightly curvy girls. So, it makes me a little insecure.”

Gabrielle’s eyes met mine, and I looked away. I had a feeling that Stacy was directly teasing me.

To think the girl who dodged all my attempts at flirting would be this bold.

“I’m sure there are guys who would be into your body type,” Gabrielle replied, emitting a forced smile.

“Alright, thank you. And it’s nice to meet you in person, Miss Rodriguez,” she said before turning to me, “Have a good one...*sir*.”

“Alright, see you later Stacy,” I bid goodbye and smiled.

She gave a nod and she walked away, leaving me in slight pain.

“I’m sorry, did I interrupt something?” Gabrielle asked sarcastically as she approached my desk.

“The plastic surgery Sullivan you’re looking for is in another hospital,” I smirked.

“I have never had to resort to surgery,” she said, then turned to look at the door. “But I might have to.”

“Don’t tell me you’re jealous of her?” I tried to suppress the urge to laugh.

“Girls like her tend to get any guy they want,” she replied. “Who is she to you?”

“I don’t see how it’s your concern though,” I replied. “But she’s just a new addition to my hospital and in a way my assistant. Very brilliant and good at her job. She keeps me in line too, I might be making her work more than she ought to, though.”

She stared at me blankly and I could see the frown on her face as clear as day.

“Is there something wrong?” I asked.

“You don’t usually praise me or any woman for that matter,” she replied. “And yet this woman is suddenly earning your praises?”

“Nothing like that,” I quickly defended.

“It sounds to me like something,” she pointed out. “Are you getting soft on me? You’re finally falling in love?”

“You think I would ever do something like that?” I scoffed. “She’s just interesting that’s all.”

“Is that so? I didn’t know she was your new pet,” she sighed with relief. “You should have said so sooner, making me panic thinking that you had finally gained a heart or something.”

“I’m still the same man,” I shrugged.

“You know I came here for my usual medical examinations but...” She smirked as she walked over to my end and straddled me, “I don’t mind taking a physical exam.”

“If you wish,” I smiled and kissed her neck.

Bitter.

I froze.

It tastes... bitter?

“Is something wrong?” she asked.

Strange...it doesn't taste like it did before. Something isn't right about all this.

“Maybe I should take charge?” she asked.

“I'll love that,” I replied instantly.

“Very well then, Doctor,” she said and started to kiss my neck instead.

Did it feel good? It was okay, and that was about it. It seemed like it was lacking compared to Stacy's. She kissed me; it felt normal. I mean it felt just the way every kiss before Stacy felt like. Just lust. Nothing else.

That wasn't the only problem. It felt like I was betraying someone. Betraying who? Myself?

Stacy? Why?

“Are you sure everything’s okay?” Gabrielle asked as she broke the kiss. “You seem out of it.”

“Hmm?” I raised a brow and held her hips. “Did you do something different?”

“Different? How?” she asked with a confused expression.

“I don’t know; it just feels slightly different,” I explained.

“You don’t want to tell me what it is, specifically?” she asked.

“No, it’s nothing,” I answered.

I placed my hand on my chest and realized that the wild pounding I felt with Stacy wasn’t there.

“Maybe you’re tired,” she said as she slid off me. “We can try this another time.”

“Yeah, we can,” I replied feeling a lot more confused about what was happening to me.

Was I becoming attached to Stacy? The last time something like this happened it didn’t end well.

Maybe Stacy might actually be like the rest of them, wanting something in return.

Stacy

When my father would talk to me about what to expect if I ever fell in love, it would usually consist of the fact that whoever captured my heart would make me unable to see anyone else but him. Moments like sitting together or just hearing his voice were going to be enough to make me excited.

“What’s got you looking all excited?” Cynthia asked.

Alisson was a fellow gynecologist; we worked together on some instances. We were both similar in physique, so it was easier having a girl talk with her. She was someone to rely on for matters of the heart. Only, I didn’t tell her about Ethan. An office romance wasn’t something you’d broadcast that easily.

“Hmmm? Nothing really,” I shrugged, but the grin didn’t leave my face.

“Is that so?” she asked but sighed; she wouldn’t be getting any more than that out of me.

“Oh yeah, I saw Gabrielle Rodriguez,” I said. “She’s here for a medical examination.”

“The model? Well, you see a lot of popular people here,” she said. “If you want to see even more actresses, you go to Ian Sullivan’s hospital.”

“So I’ve heard,” I muttered. “She said I look good.”

“She’s not wrong though,” she stated. “I mean you have no idea how many heads you turn in this office.”

“You’re just saying that,” I remarked and rolled my eyes.

“Let me guess you think that every guy here will be into model-looking girls like Gabrielle?” she asked.

“Are they?” I asked. “Wait, you’ve been here long enough, so what kind of woman does Ethan like?”

“Hmm.” She paused to think about it. “I’m not sure if he’s the kind of guy to actually have a *type*. But if I was to choose, maybe then he’d go for the model type.”

“Oh...”

“Yeah, someone like Gabrielle,” she explained. “And that’s because of his level as a billionaire. He might not have his sights set down on upper-middle-class citizens as us.”

I recalled my conversation with Gabrielle. While I described my body, I could feel Ethan’s gaze on my back, following my hands and settling on my ass as I touched it. His eyes hardly left me, until the office doors closed. Rather than having his eyes on someone accepted internationally, he had his eyes trained on me and me alone. It filled me with a sense of pride.

“I don’t know about that,” I said with a smile.

“Hmm? What’s this? Does a certain someone know something and is keeping it secret from me?” she asked as she pulled my cheek towards her.

“I don’t know anything!” I defended myself.

“Don’t lie to me!” she insisted as she hugged me from behind and held my breasts.

It felt a little sensitive and let out a whimper. I’m not going to lie, it sounded sexy and cute.

“What was that?” Allison’s interest was piqued.

“No, wait,” I pleaded but she continued the attack.

“Is *this* what is giving you this amount of confidence?” she teased as she continued her relentless attacks.

“Stop!” I was bursting with laughter as she continued to tease me.

The office door opened and Ethan walked in.

“Is Allison here?” he asked and turned to find the position Allison and I were in. “Am I interrupting?”

“Boss, you have to check out the sound she makes,” Allison said and squeezed me again.

The moan escaped my lips too easily, and I quickly covered my mouth. Ethan seemed impressed.

“Wow, that was actually very good,” he said. I could see a mischievous smirk begin to form.

A part of me was hoping that he was thinking about doing the same thing to me if we were alone in his office.

“Oh, hush!” I frowned. “Let go of me, Allison.”

“Whatever you say, seductress,” she said as she backed away with both hands raised in defense.

“Don’t call me a seductress,” I pouted.

“I don’t know about that seductress. That was pretty seductive of you,” he said. “It affected me.”

My eyes unconsciously focused on his groin, and I quickly looked away, hoping he didn’t notice the blunder.

“The two of you are annoying,” I sighed.

“That reminds me boss,” Alisson said. “What’s your type of woman?”

I turned to her in disbelief and she shrugged.

“You prefer the model type don’t you?” she continued.

I felt my pride from earlier diminish. Come to think of it, he might have just been focusing on me because of what I was doing and not because of me as a person.

“Hmm.” He held his chin and thought about it. “If I had to pick, it would be a short and slightly curvy woman.”

“So...someone like Stacy then,” she said and looked at me.

“Is that her physique? I didn’t know at all,” he said and smirked.

“Like I care at all.” I rolled my eyes and looked at my phone.

“No wonder she was so confident earlier,” she sighed. “You needed me for something?”

“Could you help me complete the tests on Gabrielle, please?” he requested.

“You normally handle it, what happened?” she asked.

“I don’t really feel like it today,” he replied. “Just help me out.”

“Alright, I will,” she said.

I heard the sound of the doors closing, so I assumed they had both left.

I let out a sigh and leaned back into my chair. “Someone like Stacy.”

“That’s what I said,” Ethan said, startling me completely.

“Why are you still here?!” I asked. I held my chest to calm myself.

“I never left,” he shrugged and held my face.

He kissed me. That warm sweet taste and the burst of color that clouded my tongue and my head was something I never saw myself getting used to. He let go of my lips and kissed my neck. His teeth sank into my neck, forcing me to hold his shoulder for support. He was rougher and more aggressive than when we were in his office.

I didn’t mind it at all. He continued to bite into me, eventually stopping and started to lick my neck instead.

Why does it feel like he’s tasting me?

His tongue lapped up my neck, making me feel like I was his dinner or something. I was getting more and more turned on. My body started getting hotter, and his touch wasn’t helping me either.

He held my breasts and squeezed them. The whimper from earlier escaped again; there was nothing I could do to suppress it.

He kissed my mouth, sucking on my lower lip as he continued to grope me at the same time. I was going dizzy and there was no stopping him. He finally stopped. His eyes seemed to have several questions for himself and me.

I held his face in my hands and kissed his forehead. “Do you feel better?”

“I...I don’t know...” he shook his head negatively.

I kissed him gently on his lips like I did the first time.

“You’ll be fine,” I said softly.

“Okay...” he replied, “I have to go now.”

“No problem,” I smiled. “We can review the nurse’s exchange program again.”

“Can we do it tomorrow?” he asked.

“Sure,” I replied.

He smiled and thanked me. As he placed his hand on the door handle, it was easy to tell that there was something else on his

mind. He let out a sigh and left the door. Maybe I should have asked him what was on his mind.

Ethan

Something had definitely happened to me. After I started Gabrielle's examination, I tried to arouse myself. It worked, but it still felt like something was missing. I don't know what it was, and it frustrated me. When I kissed Stacy again, everything came flooding back.

The colors. The sweetness. The pounding of the heart...and the excitement that knew no bounds.

I was worried.

"Are you getting soft on me? You're finally falling in love?"

There was no way it was the case. If it had to be anyone, it couldn't be Stacy. She wasn't supposed to be anything more than a woman I wanted to occupy my bed. Nothing else. There was no way I could be undergoing changes that I wasn't meant to experience. Something terrible was happening. I, Ethan Sullivan, was falling in love. Again. I couldn't let that happen.

Chapter Five

Curiosity Kills the Cat

Stacy

Until the day the last of the nurses were to arrive for the exchange program, I spent more time with Ethan. Working, of course.

“We have to get back to work,” he sighed. He read through research papers, while I rubbed his shoulders.

“It’s nine pm,” I pointed out. “There aren’t a lot of patients and most of the doctors and nurses can handle them; there’s literally nothing to do now.”

“I normally study,” he said.

“You’ve been on this page for the past ten minutes,” I sighed. “Something’s on your mind.”

“No, it’s nothing really,” he pronounced.

He had been like this for some time after he kissed me in my office. He didn’t flirt like he used to, but he didn’t stop entirely. It just felt to me that he was worried about something that he didn’t want to tell me.

“Are you still bummed about the mistake with the extra nurse issue?” I asked.

“Hmm? Well, no. We’ve already resolved that anyway,” he replied.

“That’s it, get up and get dressed in your normal clothes,” I frowned.

“What? Why?” He raised a brow.

“Just do it, Ethan?” I sighed.

“If you say so,” he shrugged and took off his shirt.

“At least wait till I go get changed or something,” I said as I watched his scrubs drop to the floor.

“I’ll go get changed as well. Meet me outside in ten minutes.”

“Alright boss,” he teased.

I was outside. I changed into my casual clothes: a knee-length dress with a flowery pattern and a jacket to keep me warm from the night air. The streets were still busy but none of our ambulances were coming in or leaving. Ethan had always said that was a good sign.

Understandable.

As doctors, we made people better and got paid for it. But it wasn't a profession that one would pray to have more patients. If you understand what I mean. Most of our time as doctors is involved in saving lives or studying new methods to save lives. Ethan spent his free time practicing his stitches, looking out for new equipment to aid his accuracy and performance.

It was inspiring to watch. I'd find myself fired up after seeing him dedicated to improving his craft. My only worry was the fact that he didn't seem as focused as he was before. He needed a change of pace. I was going to help him find it.

“Where are we going?” he asked, “and why can't we take my car?”

“We’re getting fresh air,” I replied, “and some exercise.”

A car with a sputtering engine drove past us leaving exhaust fumes in its wake.

“I wouldn’t call this air fresh,” he said and rubbed his shoulders. “It’s cold tonight.”

“Here,” I offered him my hand. “It’ll help keep you warm.”

“My hand maybe, what about the rest of me?” he asked.

“Don’t be so difficult!” I sucked my teeth and grabbed his hand while he chuckled.

His hand actually felt cold. I was glad to help him stay warm. He squeezed my hand gently, and I turned back to find a warm smile on his face.

This was perfect.

“Alright, billionaire boy, this is a diner,” I announced as we arrived at the place I had intended for us to visit.

“Fascinating, what does it do?” He played along.

“They serve you breakfast, lunch, and dinner,” I replied.

“So like a restaurant but unhealthier?” he asked.

“You’re going to be having dinner here,” I said.

“No, thank you, I only eat at four to five-star restaurants,” he replied. “I’m no longer roleplaying. Let’s get my car. I know a perfect French restaurant not far from here.”

“Unfortunately, I can’t afford it, so we’ll stick to this one,” I said.

“I’m literally going to pay for everything there so you don’t have to worry,” he assured me.

“Ethan, I took you out to relax. Let me have the opportunity to do just that, okay?” I requested.

“Fine, if you insist,” he sighed and followed me in.

The warmth of the diner and the smell of good food hit us.

I took in a deep breath and exhaled. “Smells good. You good, billionaire boy?”

“It’s billionaire *man*,” he corrected. “I’m older.”

“Right, I forgot.” I rolled my eyes and led us to an empty table.

“No you didn’t forget, you did that on purpose,” he whined but took a seat.

“What would you like to have?” the waitress asked.

“We’ll have two cups of Cocoa and chicken sandwiches,” I ordered.

“They don’t have steak and red wine?” he asked.

“No,” I sighed and turned to the waitress. “Ignore him, that’ll be all.”

She left to get us our meal, leaving me with my billionaire boy.

“Why did you take me out?” he asked. “You said fresh air and walking, but we aren’t doing any of those right now.”

“You don’t have to whine,” I groaned. “You looked worried about something. I figured it wasn’t work-related. Do you

want to share?”

He stared at me deeply before breaking the contact and looking at his hands. “I don’t really know if I should. It’s personal and something I should have been able to handle on my own. But for some odd reason. I don’t know what is happening anymore.”

He looked bothered about whatever it was he was thinking. The last time I experienced something like that was concerning my father’s hospital.

“I don’t know if it’s relatable to what you’re going through but I had something that made me confused on how exactly I was meant to handle it,” I said. “I came to work in your hospital because mine was failing.”

He looked at me with a concerned look, “You own a hospital?”

“No, it’s not mine; it’s my father’s,” I explained. “I’ve always wanted to take over from him. When my mother died, my father handled management but things didn’t go as he planned. And well, we haven’t been doing so well.”

“I’m sorry,” he apologized.

“You shouldn’t be apologizing,” I chuckled softly. “We just need to know how popular hospitals work and we handle the rest. You may be having your doubts about it because it’s a new experience, or maybe it’s a familiar experience that led to failure. But I assure you that you don’t have to think too much about how strange it is. Just start doing what you think is best. Who cares how it’ll turn out? Dad was against me leaving but look at me making a difference with you and learning a lot. I don’t know if that helped.”

“I don’t know either,” he chuckled, “but I get the idea.”

The waitress returned with our meals and offered, “Enjoy.”

“Well this looks good,” he said as he stared at his sandwich and fries.

“Of course it does, it even tastes better,” I said and took a bite.

“Now forget your worries and eat.”

He picked up the sandwich. He ate and gave a nod of approval, muttering, “This is good.”

“Told you that you’d like it,” I smirked and continued eating.

Ethan

To be honest, it wasn't that great. I had eaten in several restaurants and knew chefs who could make a sandwich fit for a king or an emperor. But this was a new experience. The new meal was good, simply because Stacy said it'd be. It reminded me of something my elder brother shared with me concerning his late wife.

“Do you know that food can taste better if it's made by someone you love?” he asked as he cut his steak and ate the piece.

“Is there something wrong with the steak?” I asked as I looked at the meal and ate. “Tastes great as usual.”

“There's nothing wrong with the steak. But it doesn't have that spice that makes it taste good enough,” he explained. “When she was alive. Anything she made tasted better than what these chefs could offer. And if she was the one who ordered the meal, it seemed to just taste better than it should. Food tastes better with her.”

It's probably because I haven't eaten in a diner before; that's why I think it's good.

I was stubborn with my new feelings. Why would I have actually been in love with Stacy? She wasn't an international

celebrity. It was a cliché the way we met, convenient enough for a cheesy romance.

What if she became like the other girl who made me feel this way? Or, I was definitely overthinking it. She mentioned her hospital was failing right? Maybe she wants the affair so she can ask me to help support her hospital.

Yeah, that must be it. There's no woman who won't want a favor from someone as powerful as I am.

Stacy

After we finished our meal, I stopped him from buying anything. I guess rich people just naturally feel they need to pull their wallets out for everything. He wasn't used to just looking at items and not paying for them. He felt that buying me anything I indicated an interest in was repaying me for trying to cheer him up.

“You don't have to do anything like that,” I sighed. I refused him to buy a bag. “I just want to spend some time with you. And that's enough.”

“Oh come on, no need to be modest,” he said. “Just take it as a sign of goodwill.”

“Ethan, I don’t need it,” I repeated myself as I placed my hand on his cheek. “I’m in charge of tonight’s date. The only one spending is me. Okay?”

“Okay,” he gave up and put the bag down. “I don’t get you.”

“I’ve heard that before,” I said with a smile. “Now let’s check out the home appliances.”

We remained outside the hospital for a whole two hours, doing nothing but walking around eating snacks, talking about work, or sharing hobbies. I found out he enjoyed traveling a lot and hanging out with his niece. But she was upset with him for dropping her cake for her birthday the previous year.

Kids hold long grudges. He also talked about his brothers.

“Ben is so great. He might be tough, but he has an insanely large, soft, and kind heart. He was Dad’s favorite. Not that it affected Ian and me in any way because dad gave us equal attention,” he said. “But I look up to him. His success spurred me on. Then there’s Ian. Smart, cold, detached most of the time, and extremely successful. Hardly ever makes a mistake. Then there’s me...” His shoulders dropped. “Well the only good thing about me is how good I am with my hands. My brothers usually have their hands full trying to help me solve my problems or clean up the messes I’ve made.”

“That’s what families are meant to do,” I pointed out.

“But I want to be a little more, you know...less clumsy,” he sighed. “I’m a grown man. I can’t keep making these mistakes. It doesn’t even make sense how I’m yet to change.”

“That’s why I’m here for you,” I said as I held his face in my hands.

I wanted to kiss him to make him feel better, but we were in public and I don’t want him to suffer a scandal. He didn’t seem to care though. He stared into my eyes as my fingers gently caressed his face.

He closed his eyes and exhaled deeply, then reopened them. “Thank you.”

He was being vulnerable with me. I’ve seen how hard he tries to make sure he didn’t slip up around his staff. How bad he’d feel if he made an error. With my help, he was making a conscious effort to change the way things were going with him. I admired that. Besides, seeing him be like this with me stirred something in me. A gust of wind greeted us, causing both of us to shiver in response.

“Are we done exploring?” he asked and shuddered. “We need to get warm.”

“Yeah, we do,” I said. I let go of his face and blew into my hands to warm them up.

As we returned to his office, he raced to the thermostat and turned up the heat. I closed the door and watched him walk around the room; he picked up his scrubs and placed them on the table.

He took off his shirt and went for his belt.

He paused and turned to look at me, “You’re still here?”

“Should I leave?” I asked.

He scoffed and looked away as he pulled his pants down. My eyes went for the bulge, and I swallowed hard. When was the last time I had seen something like that?

“Something interests you?” he smirked as he approached me.

“Maybe,” I said as I struggled to maintain my composure.

I walked backward until my back came in contact with the door.

“You know, I still haven’t repaid you for taking care of me tonight,” he said as he held my neck gently and kissed my brow. I heard the sound of the door locking. “I can also take care of you tonight. Or do you insist on not being repaid?”

“I would accept the repayment as soon as possible,” I answered instantly.

“Good girl,” he whispered and kissed me; his hand on my neck slowly tightened.

I groaned as I held his hand, but I didn’t attempt to stop him. I had just discovered that I was into asphyxiation. He didn’t completely cut off my air supply. He made sure I was still able to breathe while he kissed me.

I was in bliss. He let go of my neck and I exhaled deeply. I placed my thighs between his legs and slowly lifted them until I got in contact with the throbbing bulge that had caught my attention.

“Mmm,” he moaned in my mouth as my thigh made contact with his member.

I lowered my thigh and switched to using my hand. As I touched his length, I realized how heavy and thick he actually was. Taking my advance at his member, as a signal, he slowly

lifted my dress. His hands touched my lap and thighs; the feeling of his hands rubbing against my bare skin was sensational. He squeezed my ass and let go of my mouth and kissed my neck instead.

“Ethan... I want more,” I demanded.

“If you wish,” he said and pulled my dress over my head.

He took a step back and admired my body. I hadn't been seen naked, or even half-naked by any man in years. I hadn't skipped workouts, so I was sure that I still looked good.

“You're even more stunning,” he praised as he eyed me.

I didn't expect something like this to happen but ever since I saw him shirtless, I started putting more thought into my choice of underwear to avoid being caught unawares. He placed his left middle finger against my panties and started to stir me up. I hunched forward, holding on to him for support as he continued his attack.

I was already wet from the excitement, but having his fingers attack me, with assistance from the texture of my panties—all working against my clit—made me weak in the knees instantly. I had been so focused on work and other affairs that I hadn't

even thought about my sexual urges. Masturbation or anything of the sort was lost to me.

Having him touch me so intently and precisely made me realize just how much I had missed out on in the past few years. He added his ring finger, moving my panties to the side and delicately rubbing on my privates directly, turning me on even more.

“Ha. ha...” I started moving my hips, grinding against his fingers.

“You like this, don’t you?” he asked as he increased his attack.

“Fuck...” I moaned as he continued to stimulate me even more.

I gave him a pleading look and shook my head negatively.

“Please, no more...wait...”

“I can’t hear you,” he said.

“Fucking idiot...” I uttered while panting heavily.

My nails dug into his shoulders and my legs started to shake. I lost my balance and he caught me.

“You okay?” he asked. “Don’t tell me fingers are enough to get you to the edge.”

“They...they aren’t...” I muttered.

“That’s good then,” he said and kissed my ear, sending tingling sensations around my body.

He let me fall to my knees and brought out his dick and started to stroke. He was magnificent. His thickness expanded me properly; the length of it hit the deepest parts of me, along with the veins for ribbed pleasure.

“Stunned?” he smirked as he held my head and placed his dick on my face. The heat and the smell of his manliness were making my body tense for his invasion.

I opened my mouth, “Come...”

He placed it in my mouth. I opened my mouth as wide as I could for him to get in properly. I started to move my head from side to side to get him in properly, then back and forth to ensure he was lubed up properly. He held my head and started moving his hips. I have poor gag reflexes, so it was difficult to go along without the urge to puke.

I gagged and gasped on his dick as he turned my mouth into his toy. He continued his relentless thrusting, making me

wonder if I'd ever survive the end of it. I tapped on his sides repeatedly, and he pulled out. His dick was completely covered with my saliva.

“Ha ha ha.” I tried catching my breath as I fought the urge to throw up my sandwich.

I held his dick with both my hands and started to stroke. I returned his tip to my mouth and started to suck on just his tip as I pulled on him. My tongue circled his tip properly; my lips did an outstanding job of sucking him while he was getting stroked.

“Oh my goodness...” he gasped and started to caress my head. “You’re so good at this. Good girl.”

Hearing him praise me was enough motivation to keep going. He stopped me and helped me to my feet. Then he kissed my lips gently and hurriedly. He pulled me into an embrace, letting his dick rest on my stomach and continuing to stroke my head, while he kissed me.

“Your taste...” he said as he helped me take off my bra. “Why is it so good?”

As my bra made contact with the floor, he started to kiss my breasts, cupping them properly in his hands while biting on the

undersides.

“Mmm... easy,” I pleaded as his teeth got slightly aggressive.

He wasn't listening anymore. He focused his attention on my aching nipples...starting with the right and sucking as hard as he could. Trapping my tip between his teeth and flicking them with his tongue. I pulled on his hair to get him to calm down, but it wasn't working. He set my right breast free and started doing the same to my left.

His left hand recalled my pussy and started stirring me up again. The stimulation was too much to handle or bear.

“Ethan...hold on... wait... ha...” I covered my mouth to suppress the loudness of my voice. It was almost midnight and there might have been some staff still around.

One of his fingers made its way inside me, pressing against my spot. If this was his fingers, how the hell would I be able to handle his main course? He stopped sucking and stared at my breasts. My tits were dripping with his saliva. I stared down and saw his dick still twitching. His parts weren't the only thing twitching with anticipation.

“More?” I whispered in a sultry voice as I stroked his dick gently.

“Thought you’d never ask,” he said as he led me to the couch.

“Can I be on top?” I asked; he nodded in approval.

He took his seat, and I got ready to take mine on his legs. As the tip of his dick kissed my entrance, I started to panic, thinking of what could happen if the rest of him gets in me.

He held my hip with his left hand and used his right to hold his dick, gently stimulating my lower lips, before sliding it in.

He was too big, and we struggled to get just the tip in me. When we finally got the tip inside, I started to gyrate my hips, relaxing my breathing and muscles to help me slide down properly on his dick.

“That’s it, you’ve got it,” he said and threw his head back in pleasure.

I couldn’t move at first. We had barely started to move; he had already gotten to my cervix and more of him hadn’t been inside me yet. He held my hips and slowly lifted me, while I held onto his shoulders for better support. I stared at him as he started to help me bounce on him.

“Aah...” I exclaimed in a mixture of pleasure and pain as he started pulling on my insides and putting it back with his dick.

He was groaning as well. I could feel his fingers dig into me with each thrust. His eyes, a mix of lust and desire—all meant for me and me alone. I kissed him and started moving my hips faster and faster getting as much of him as I could.

He didn't stop me and continued to help me get more of him. As our tongues danced in each other's mouths, we continued our movements below. He lifted me and placed me on the couch. My legs were supported by his shoulders as he continued to thrust deeper into me. I was so scared that I'd pass out with how good I felt.

“Ethan...Ethan...I'm going to...” I warned him, but it was too late as I met my climax. The sound of sloshing liquid, accompanied by the sounds of our bodies colliding filled the room.

“Should I stop?” he asked as he continued thrusting.

“No... not until you're ready,” I replied as my legs wrapped around his waist to urge him to go on.

He continued, moving even faster, almost like he didn't care if anyone heard us. This was painful, pleasurable, and bliss at the same time.

“I... I’m about to...” he warned.

“It’s not safe,” I warned as I unwrapped my legs.

He pulled out and started to stroke himself while I touched myself. Watching him masturbate was another fetish I earned for myself. His grunting and the way every muscle on his body pulsed as he came all over me was glorious. I was covered in his essence. My stomach, my breasts, and my face—all marked with his baby batter.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t ask if you minded,” he said amid the panting.

I touched the climax on my face with a finger and brought it to my tongue. I licked it, relishing the taste. A bitter sour taste that I found delightful.

“Now that was good repayment,” I teased.

“Yeah.. it was, wasn’t it?” he asked.

When he approached me earlier with just his underwear, I had a feeling he thought I’d stop him.

But I was curious to know what it would feel like to be taken by him.

“Wait, towel,” he said as he got off me and went to look for the one in his bathroom.

I had been unsure of my feelings but as of that moment, I knew it was the start of something between us.

Chapter Six

It Was Over the Moment It Began

E than

Ten years ago, I was still the clumsy MMC that everyone loved...but I was a prodigy. Ian and I were the top students in medical school.

Why wouldn't we be?

With the legacy Ben left behind, there was no way for either of us to settle for anything less of a distinction.

Wealth, good looks, and insanely intelligent. We had everything any other person would want.

My brother Ian would rather spend his time planning for his future hospital, and rarely found himself with anyone else in

the school. Believe me, I tried. But it just seemed like he wasn't interested in anything remotely related to humans.

To me, it seemed like a waste. I mean popular I was, but my clumsiness was what helped me become popular. I can't even remember how many times I submitted the wrong assignments, arrived at the wrong classrooms, and even accidentally broke school equipment and I had to repay.

I was seen as irresponsible.

"I don't know why you're like this," a professor said and called me aside. "You're a brilliant student. But you show up late and even damage stuff. You're an adult for crying out loud. Your older brother isn't that way, and your younger brother isn't either."

He sighed and rubbed his face in frustration. I didn't blame anyone for seeing me that way. I made up for it by being cautious and friendly to everyone. The professor was a friend of my father's.

"In a way, you're like your father. Brilliant, kind, and a social butterfly. Departments where your brothers aren't doing so well in," he sighed. "You really need to sharpen up. You won't be able to find anyone who'd be comfortable enough to continue enduring how you are."

“I know, sir,” I said. “I’ll try my best.”

He was right, I was never comfortable around anyone. I covered up my displeasure with my inability to be myself, by at least being the image of perfection in every other thing. I mastered stitching and surgery because they were delicate and required sheer focus. My mindset was that if I was able to learn how to do it easily, then I’d be able to make fewer mistakes in other aspects of my life.

It didn’t work.

“Anyway this is the wrong assignment again,” he sighed as he handed it to me, “This is for Dr. Jones.”

“Right, thank you,” I said as I took the report I spent two days working on and left his office.

I leaned with my back against the door and sighed.

“Rough day?” A voice asked, startling me.

I turned to find a green-eyed blonde girl staring back at me. I had no idea who she was. She was tall, for a lady, topping around 5’8. Her blonde hair was tied up in a ponytail that just

seemed to work for her. If I'm being honest, she would have looked better with her hair let down.

"Cat got your tongue?" she asked as she tilted her head to the side, almost cat-like.

"No, sorry," I replied and stepped aside. "He's available right now."

I started to leave. It didn't take me long enough to realize that I was being followed. I turned back and found her humming, as she followed after me.

"Can I help you?" I asked with a smile.

Even when pissed, I made it a habit to just smile at people.

"You're going to Mr. Jones's office right?" she asked.

"Yeah, so?" I raised a brow. "Do you need directions there?"

"Uh no, you're going the wrong way," she replied.

I looked around me and she was right. I was going in the wrong direction.

“I knew that,” I said and turned in the right direction.

“You did? Why waste all that time and go the wrong way?” she asked.

“Don’t you have anything else to do?” I asked. “A class or something.”

“Break,” she replied. “Classes resume in an hour.”

“You’re supposed to be using this time to research,” I stated.

“Are you in a paramedical course?”

“No, surgery,” she replied.

The same course as mine.

“But we don’t have any classes in an hour,” I said.

“We actually do,” she chuckled and showed me the schedule... she was right.

I almost missed a class. It was almost an upgrade from attending the wrong class.

“Thank you,” I sighed and decided to walk faster.

My new company, however, continued to tail me.

“What do you want?” I asked.

“I’m just making sure you don’t get lost,” she said and beamed a smile.

It was just a sentence, and it made me feel...happy.

“You might end up submitting to the wrong office,” she explained. “I wouldn’t want you submitting to Dr. John.”

“I wouldn’t,” I frowned and continued on my way.

Sure enough, I did. I submitted it to the wrong person again.

“Do you believe in curses?” she asked after I had finally submitted it to the right lecturer.

“You want to say that I’m cursed with perpetual carelessness?” I asked. “I’ve heard that already.”

“That’s not it,” she sighed. “I just wanted to know if you believe that you’re cursed.”

I didn't say anything.

"As I thought," she smirked and walked ahead of me, "My name is Emilia. Nice to meet you, Ethan."

She was...perfect. It was love at third sight. Emilia followed me around with every opportunity she had. She kept me out of the wrong classes, and I was able to submit assigns to the right lecturers. She was helping me get my life together and I enjoyed it.

Around everyone else, I was conscious. But with her, I could finally be myself around her. I didn't have to be too conscious. I could be myself. I started to understand a little why my parents loved each other so much. They were willing to be themselves and find people who could correct and accept them.

My love for her turned physical, and eventually sexual. God, she was heavenly. It was almost like she studied the art of giving a man pleasure. The nights we spent together never left my memories. She asked me for help, and I could support her in return. Getting her books and all that. She wasn't from a stable family and I wanted to do my best to make sure she didn't suffer any problems in school.

Why? I was in love. I needed to tell her. We were preparing to move into our final year and I summoned up the courage and told her my feelings. I poured out my heart explaining how much she meant to me and why I couldn't do anything without her anymore. When I was done speaking, I met with her eyes and they didn't return the excitement mine had.

"Well, this is shocking," she chuckled nervously.

"What?"

"I mean the whole confession thing, I didn't expect you to confess your feelings," she said.

"You were going to confess first?" I asked.

"No, there wasn't going to be a confession at all," she said with a blank expression. "I'm not really in love with you at all."

"What?"

"Yeah," she said as she rubbed her neck nervously. "Don't get me wrong, you're an amazing guy. But you're kind of a handful."

“But I thought you were able to help me out. I mean you were able to right? All this time?” I asked in disbelief. “Are you pranking me or something?”

“No, I’m not pranking you,” she replied. “I helped you mostly because well I thought I could call in favors in return. And I did. To make sure that it wasn’t just like I was taking from you, there was the sex, and my God you’re extremely good at it.”

So, she was using me?

I couldn’t ask her. In fact, I didn’t want to be anywhere near her at all.

“Thank you for everything,” I said and turned to leave.

“I’m sorry, Ethan,” she apologized.

I never saw her again. Well, there was the occasional meeting in class and the awkward times when we had to sit together. But that was it. I closed off my heart. It made me start to wonder if Ian faced the same thing, and that’s why he seemed distant from non-family members.

My heart was poisoned and I awakened to a new reality. No woman really loved me. All of them wanted something from me. Time and time again, my theory was correct. I never found

any one of them who wanted me for being me. They'd complain about my clumsiness but praised my wealth, handsomeness, and sexual vigor, which was too good for most of them, leaving me unsatisfied with the outcome of intercourse at almost every time.

I didn't want to be a handful for anyone. I just want to know that I am wanted for something and not to be seen as anyone's problem or handful. I promised myself never again to open my heart to anyone anymore.

Why did she have to do that to me? She definitely wanted something.

I slept at the office. It was the big day. The start of the nurse's exchange program. But I couldn't get my mind off what had happened the previous night. As I stared at the couch, I remembered everything that had happened the night before.

Her voice.

Her body.

The look of desire in her eyes.

How good I felt after the end of it. And the fact that she and I wanted more. But what if I'm mistaken again? She did mention something about her failing hospital.

Could it be that she needs me to help support her hospital?

Is that what it meant? Once again, I was being used.

Stacy

It was the big day. I had gone back to my apartment so I didn't spend the night at the hospital.

I'm glad I didn't because I have a feeling that I would have sneaked into his office and continued from where we left off. My pussy still felt like he was in me, and just to be able to sleep, I had to masturbate again. My poor deodorant had to serve another purpose.

"I should probably buy a dildo," I said to myself as I picked up the can that was practically soaked last night and was now sticky all over.

As I stared at myself in the mirror, it felt like I was looking at a new person. I guess it wasn't just a baseless rumor when they said good sex could make someone glow. I chose the

sexiest transparent lingerie in my collection and put it on. As usual, I wasn't expecting anything to happen, but what kind of woman wouldn't be prepared if anything did happen?

Who knows he might just be tempted to start something.

Yes, I do plan on tempting him.

The major focus of the day was to get Olivia up to speed on her transfer. He still forgot to tell her that she was being moved and chances were that she was arriving in Richmond along with the other nurses that morning.

I looked for an outfit. An outfit easy to take off for a quickie yet looked sexy enough to highlight my features while still looking formal enough for work. It was a shame that I would have to wear my scrubs, though. Then again, we could have a dinner date one more time, and see where the night would lead us.

“Wait...won't I come off as too easy?” I asked myself as I thought about it.

I wished that Allison was with me to help me out with the trouble that was forming in my mind.

I didn't want anything that would make me seem like I was being desperate for anything sexual.

Also, wasn't it a bad idea to sleep with one's boss?

I made a mental note to check out the HR guidelines once I got to the hospital. But I knew one thing for certain: this was the start of something special for me. As I stepped out of the house, everything seemed to be going my way

"Here I made some cookies," my neighbor said as she handed me a small bag with treats in them.

"Thank you," I thanked her and planned to share them with Allison and Ethan.

I boarded a taxi, and the driver didn't charge me a dime. Strange. I shook it off and treated it as a sign that things were going to be perfect today. As I got to the hospital, I noticed a lady in a sun hat, wearing a white shirt and jeans; she had pale skin and toted a traveling bag. I had seen her face on one of the forms and recognized her as one of the nurses that was here for the exchange program.

"Marie, right?" I asked; she turned to look at me.

"Yes, that's me," she answered, her French accent was thick, but it suited her features.

"I'm Stacy Roberts, I'll show you the way," I said.

I pointed her to the receptionist we had assigned to watch the front desk.

“Oi! Where were you last night?” Allison called as she walked up to me. She turned her attention to Marie who was signing her name. “I see the first nurse has arrived.”

“Yeah. Ethan really went all out with this idea,” I replied. “We have one from at least five continents. Except for Antarctica and Australia. I wanted a penguin here.”

“So she’s?” she asked.

“French,” I replied, “shows in her accent as well.”

“She’s gorgeous,” she remarked.

“I know; She’s more of a model than a nurse, to be honest,” I added.

“Speaking of gorgeous, what’s up with your look today?” she asked as she spun me around, “Don’t tell me you have a date.”

“I don’t have a date, can’t a girl look extra good for no reason?” I asked and shook my head negatively.

“Stop lying to me,” she crossed her arms. “Wait is that...” She stopped and started to sniff. “What this is that good perfume. The one used for catching bees (men).”

“Is it? I didn’t know,” I said as I sniffed myself.

Honestly, I didn't. I just picked it because I loved the fragrance. Like I said, I didn't really care about being in a relationship until my family's hospital was in better shape.

She crossed her arms. “Alright, fess up, young lady. What the hell is going on?”

“Nothing, yeesh.” I rolled my eyes and made my way to my office.

As I walked past other colleagues, I was finally aware of how people looked at me when I glided past them. I could feel their gazes and just wished I could have at least shown Ethan how I looked before switching into my scrubs. In the security of my office, along with Allison’s company, I started to take off my clothes and switched to my scrubs.

“Is it Ethan?” she asked, startling me as I adjusted my hair.

“What the? What are you on about?” I asked, maintaining my composure.

“I mean, think about it. You hardly interact with any other males here,” she said. “If you aren’t attending to patients all day or helping me out with emergency cases, you’re working with him behind closed doors. It’s only logical to think that something was going on between the both of you. Ah yes, I saw you both leaving the hospital together. Don’t know when you returned.”

“About that, he was having a slump and I just suggested a change of pace by going out,” I explained.

“Uh no one is actually going to suspect you because of that,” she offered. “We all go out to dinner with each other regardless of gender or whatnot. And judging by how you work with Ethan, it only makes sense that you’d be the one to take him out. I only mentioned it as an example because you have to be close to someone to do some things.”

“I see,” I said, “but it’s not like the two of us will even do anything together. I mean rules and all.”

“There’s nothing against dating a colleague here. As long as it doesn’t get in the way of work,” she remarked. “Well the only restriction would be Ethan, so it won’t seem like he’s giving one person more advantage than the other.”

“Oh, oh well that will be concerning anyone he’d be involved with,” I said, feigning ignorance.

“Is that so?” She raised a brow.

“I don’t think it means anything to me,” I sighed and exited the office.

Well, all I had to do was lay low concerning my relationship with Ethan, but first, we needed to draw a line and define what our relationship was and what we planned to do going forward.

As I got to his door, I grew a little nervous. Before I could open it, Marie exited and thanked me for showing her the way.

I took in a deep breath and walked in. Ethan wasn’t wearing his scrubs. Just a dress shirt and a few buttons open as he focused his attention on the paper in his hands. He looked up at me, and I swear he looked more handsome than ever.

I struggled to find the words to say. Maybe it was because memories of the previous night were still fresh in my mind as I stepped into the office. My eyes immediately went to the couch. I could see myself bouncing on him again, switching positions and finding my legs on his shoulders.

I didn't need any mirror to tell me that my face had turned as red as a tomato.

"Good morning, Ethan," I greeted warmly as I placed my hands behind my back.

"Good morning," he returned my greeting and turned his attention back to the paper.

It was different. No chirpy reply, or flirtatious comment. Was he upset that I arrived later than I normally arrived?

"How was your night?" I asked with a smirk.

I watched his eyes look at the couch before quickly returning to the paper. "It was awesome. Did you get home safe? I was half expecting you to spend the night at the office considering it was late."

"Well I needed a change of underwear," I blurted out but covered my mouth immediately.

My blunder didn't go unnoticed as I saw his attention shift to me immediately.

"Mistake," I said with a grin.

“Is that so?” he smirked, “Alright then. Welcome back, the nurses are already here. At least one of them. I followed your model and showed her what to do.”

“Is that so?” I asked as I walked over to his side of the desk and reached for his hair, but he moved his head away.

I felt like I had been stabbed.

He had never done that before.

“Sorry about that,” he apologized. “I just did my hair. I don’t want to ruin it considering we have a lot of newcomers coming here today.”

“Oh right, I understand,” I said as I forced a smile back to my face.

It made sense. He probably just wanted to look presentable. There was nothing wrong with him. But I was wrong. There was something definitely wrong. He was acting...unlike himself. When the nurses came, he acted normally during their interviews. But as soon as they left, he didn’t engage me in any conversation at all. That was very strange. If he didn’t talk to anyone, I was the one he was comfortable talking with.

What happened all of a sudden?

“Ethan,” I called as we waited for the last nurse to arrive. “Is there something wrong?”

“What? No,” he replied as he shook his head negatively.

“You’re not really a good liar,” I sighed. “Tell me are you in another slump?” I realized that could actually be the problem, and there was something I knew could resolve it. “If it’s another slump, I know what can help you out. How does another date night sound? I got my best dress on. Sadly, it might be too easy to take off. Just kidding.”

“Yeah, I don’t think I want one of those anymore,” he sighed.

I blinked twice and muttered, “Huh?”

“I mean you don’t really have to do all that if you want a favor in return; all you have to do is ask,” he explained with a nervous chuckle.

“What are you talking about?” I asked; he wasn’t making any sense at all.

“I mean last night. You talked about your family’s hospital and stuff. You probably need money to help support it,” he said.

“You didn’t have to sleep with me for it. I could have just done it anyway.”

I don't get it. Did I leave that kind of impression? Didn't I make it clear that I came here to learn?

Ah...this is bad...my hands are shaking.

He was making a mistake. Maybe he had no idea what he was actually saying. He was normally like that sometimes.

“I don’t really understand what you mean,” I managed to chuckle. “You actually think that the reason I slept with you last night was because I wanted something?”

“I mean why else have you been invested in someone as clumsy as I am if you don’t have any interest in my wealth and what I can do for you?” he asked.

I got up and walked over to his side.

“What?” he asked.

The next thing that was heard was the sound of my open palm connecting with his face.

“You’re...you’re a real clumsy fool, you know that?” I spat at him and made my way out of his office.

I raced past two people I assumed were the nurse who was supposed to be there and the nurse who showed her the way.

“Stacy?” the nurse called out, but I ignored her.

I didn’t want to hear anyone’s voice besides mine. I raced to my office and closed the door, staring at my hand that had turned a bright shade of red after striking the face of the man I had started to love.

Did he just indirectly call me a user? What the hell gave him that kind of idea? How could I have been so stupid to actually think that relationships were going to work for me?

“Uh, whenever you’re going to tell me what’s wrong, I’d appreciate that,” Allison said.

I turned to glare at her, biting my lower lip to stop myself from crying.

“Oh okay,” she said softly and looked away.

I didn’t mean to get upset with her, but it sucked. I was severely angry and sad at the same time that I slapped him.

But he deserved it. How could he even think that I would have thought about something like that? I changed into my outfit and packed up my scrubs. I looked through the office and looked for anything that belonged to me, stuffing them into a trash bag. I left the hospital and went to my apartment. Immediately I got into my room, I let myself break.

It hurt. It hurt a whole lot.

My phone started to ring but I ignored it thinking it was Ethan.

On the second ring, I noticed it was Ben Sullivan, Ethan's older brother, "Hello, sir?"

"Are you okay?" he asked. "Ethan isn't answering his phone. Did something happen?"

"He forgot his phone," I said in an annoyed tone but a sob managed to slip through.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

"I stubbed my pinky toe," I replied.

It was definitely a lie but I hoped he didn't bother trying to find out.

“I see, be more careful next time,” he advised.

“Thank you,” I replied before hanging up.

“I need to go home,” I said to myself.

Chapter Seven

On Separate Paths

E than

I was still in shock. My face stung and I couldn't touch it either. Judging by the look on the nurses faces, I could tell her handprint wasn't visible on my face.

Everything was fine.

She was gone.

This was fine.

But was I wrong?

The look in her eyes...the watery nature, accompanied by white hot rage as she slapped me refused to leave the memories of my mind.

It was fine. I could handle this on my own.

“Oh you’re here, Stacy would you...” I stopped speaking as I tried to ask her for Olivia’s file. “Sorry, give me a minute.”

“Sure, take your time,” Olivia said.

It took me time to find what I was looking for; it was the receptionist who even pointed it out.

It was right there on my desk. Stacy had kept them that way for me to easily find them without looking like a complete idiot. I was definitely looking like one.

“Ahem, I’m Dr. Ethan Sullivan,” I introduced myself. “I created this program to train my nurses on how to handle situations better by learning from outstanding nurses in different parts of the world. So, while we bring in nurses, ours are sent to replace the incoming nurses positions. Does that make sense to you?”

Stacy was the one who wrote the speech for me. And all I had to do was repeat it. Making things easier to restrict me from saying anything that would make the incoming nurses feel uncomfortable.

“Yeah, it does. But I don’t remember any nurse coming to take my position,” she replied. “Are they supposed to come when I’ve already left?”

“Actually, they are supposed to be there before you leave,” I explained. “And I guess that’s where we have the problem with you.”

“Huh?”

“Due to a mistake on my part, I asked for an extra nurse when we didn’t need one,” I continued, recalling how upset Stacy was that I made this mistake. “Unfortunately, that was you.”

“Oh, I see,” she said.

“You’re relatively calm about this,” I offered.

“What good is panicking going to do?” she asked.

I let out a sigh of relief, “Stacy and I...I mean, I was worried that you’d be disappointed.”

Why do I keep calling her name?

I explained her role in the exchange program and what to do if she met Ben. I just wanted to get this over with.

“Please, there are three Sullivan doctors. Just call me Ethan,” I said.

“Thank you, Ethan,” she said and smiled.

“Much better. Stacy, could you take her to where she’d get her lunch?” I asked but turned; she wasn’t there.

The receptionist offered to show Olivia where to get her lunch, but she declined. I recognized the look on both their faces—pity. Why won’t they pity me? I was a pathetic man who couldn’t do without the woman who was willing enough to help him get his life back together.

Pathetic.

I looked for my phone and couldn’t recall where I kept it.

“Come to think of it, when was the last time I used that?” I asked myself.

Of course, I couldn’t remember. I found it in my table drawer. I scrolled through my call history and noticed the several

missed calls from Ben. Normally, I'd call back, but this time my heart was occupied with something else entirely. I opened the contacts and looked for Stacy's number.

What do I even say? Sorry?

I pressed the dial. The phone rang and as expected, she didn't answer, no surprise there for me really. I tried again and again, and eventually it stopped ringing. She had blocked me.

"Why am I so stupid!" I yelled at myself, but there was no reply.

I didn't know why I was stupid. Was there no better way I could have approached her even if she was after my money. All I did was drop an accusation on her laps and expected her to just accept it like it was nothing.

I had messed up...badly.

"Ow..." I groaned and held my chest.

My heart hurt. It hurt so bad that I could actually feel it physically. I struggled to breathe. I needed to see her...to beg her for forgiveness. All I had to do was meet her in her office and talk to her. Of course, I quickly realized that there was a

chance that she had already left the hospital, never to return again. It was no one's fault but mine.

There was a knock on the door. I straightened myself and forced myself to smile.

"Come in," I called.

Allison popped her head and looked at me. "I don't even know if I should ask if this is a good time for you."

"It's not," I replied instantly.

"Good, 'cause I don't expect you to be having a good time after what just happened," she said with a frown. "What did you do?"

"Where is she now?" I ignored her question and asked mine.

"She's gone," she informed me and her shoulders dropped. "She took everything she owned."

"What?" I looked up at her. "What does that mean?"

“It’s exactly what it means, sir,” she said. “She’s gone and is never coming back here again.”

“Do you know where she is staying?” I asked.

“No. She isn’t the type to tell people where she goes,” she replied.

“Can you give me your phone? She’s blocked me from reaching her,” I noted.

“I can’t risk her blocking me as well,” she said as she got up to leave. “I’d advise you to look for her file. It has her address in it.”

Why didn’t I think of that?

Immediately after she left, I started to look for Stacy’s file. I couldn’t remember where I had put it. Never before, have I ever cursed my scatterbrained nature. I even started begging the universe to give me a second chance. But nothing.

I was called in to handle an emergency surgery and had to devote my attention to that.

The days that followed were competing for each other, becoming more and more chaotic. With Stacy gone, everything slipped back into how they were before she had helped me get a bearing on them. I was messing up the meetings, getting things wrong; it even seemed worse than before she started working here. As I went through my documents on my computer, I noticed a folder on the desktop.

It was named *Ethan's Welfare*. I opened the folder and there were different documents: *Ethan's usual Monday to Friday Schedule*. *Who to contact for hospital stuff*. *Things you'd forget to do today*. And a text document that was saved as "Read me first!"

I double clicked, and the file opened.

Ethan, you finally found this document. I made this folder to help you get a better grasp of things if I ever went on vacation or back to my own hospital. You don't have to force yourself to remember anything else besides remembering to open this folder every day.

You'll be able to get things mostly under control until I get back.

Sincerely, Stacy.

Even after she had left, she was still looking after me. What the hell have I done?

Stacy

As Ethan had come to the conclusion that my only reason for opening my heart to him and sleeping with him was so I could help my failing family hospital recover, I decided to abandon my first plan of learning anything from him and instead tried to fix my hospital using whatever tricks I had picked up.

My heart was still aching after what happened. I found myself almost going back to Ethan's hospital or unblocking his number and apologizing for hitting his face. But I kept reminding myself of what he did. I was probably a dime a dozen and the moment I left, he would have already found someone to replace me.

I just wanted to go home. When I arrived home, my neighbors were excited to see me. It was a close neighborhood back in Glen Allen, so I knew most of them. I arrived at my family hospital and maybe because I had been away from home for too long, but the facility looked much older than I remembered. I noticed some patients leaving and entering, so there was slightly more activity going on.

I hadn't gotten to my house; I just wanted to see this place first before going anywhere else. My grip on my bags tightened as I walked into the building. I found my father giving instructions to the nurses. He turned and saw me, dropped whatever he was doing and ran to embrace me. I hugged him back, squeezing him as hard as I could.

"You're back much earlier than you said you'd be," he said softly but didn't break the embrace. "You're also with too many bags for someone who might just be visiting for the weekend. Also it's Tuesday. What happened?"

"I... "

I remembered everything and the hand I slapped Ethan with started to hurt again. My heart clenched as I remembered what he said to me. I had been able to stop crying; but, I was with my father, and it was okay to be vulnerable around him. I broke down into tears, sobbing heavily.

"It's okay," he said softly as he stroked my hair and gently caressed my back. "Daddy's here for you, sweetie."

"I shouldn't have left..." I said softly. "I shouldn't have opened my heart."

“Oh, a broken heart. There, it might take time, but it will heal,” he assured me. “Just breathe, okay?”

I nodded repeatedly as I struggled to catch my breath. My nostrils were blocked because of the tears.

“Are you better now? Can you stand?” he asked.

I nodded again and he let me go. He wiped my tears with his handkerchief and held it against my nose. “Blow.”

I blew out the phlegm and he wiped my nose clean.

“Thanks, Dad,” I said softly as I let out a sigh of relief at my ability to breathe again.

“It’s my job,” he said. “Now go drop off your things, and let’s get to work, if you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind at all,” I said as I let a smile form on my face.

I was back and ready to work again, helping patients was therapeutic in a way. I was able to focus on other people’s troubles rather than the affairs of my own heart.

“How was it downtown?” a patient asked me as she had her regular checkup.

“It was great,” I replied. Conversations like this were most of what I faced as I came back from Richmond.

“I heard you worked at Sullivan’s hospital. Which one of them was it?” she asked with excitement in her eyes.

I didn’t want to talk about it but sometimes you just need something to help you communicate with your patients to make things less awkward, especially if you’re prodding in their private lives.

“I worked with Ethan Sullivan. His hospital was a great place to work in,” I replied. “Lots of kind staff who couldn’t wait to help each other out.”

“What about Ethan? What’s he like?” she asked.

I frowned. “He’s an arrogant, clumsy, careless, and scatterbrained idiot who thinks anyone who’s trying to help him make sense of his mess of a life, is after his money.”

“Uh, sorry I asked,” she said nervously.

“No, I’m sorry,” I apologized.

I thought I was over this at this point but clearly not. The pain I felt was slowly turning to anger and that wasn't a good thing for me especially.

I collapsed into my living room chair. The scent of my father's mac n' cheese wafted in the air.

I missed his cooking.

"Here," he said as he handed me my portion and turned down the volume on the TV. "You want to talk about what happened?"

"Long story short, men are idiots," I replied as I took a bite of my meal and melted in pleasure. "You help one of them, and they automatically think you want something back as repayment. So, I can't be kind to someone I love?"

"So you were in love?" he asked.

"No.. I was just stupid," I replied and continued eating.

"You're really going down on that. If you haven't healed, you can take your time and process everything that has happened," he said. "I'm not really good at this."

“Dad, can’t I just live with you forever?” I sighed. “So many men out there are just dumb.”

“I think you’re saying this out of what just happened to you,” he said. “I still want my grandkids.”

“Adoption,” I pointed at him.

“I can take that,” he shrugged. “But I won’t advise that you close your heart to love. It might have not worked out this time, but there’s nothing wrong with trying again.”

“Even if I were to try again, it will not be with an idiot like him,” I insisted. I continued my meal, finishing it completely and starting eating from Dad’s.

“Well, that works too,” he said as he caressed my head. “Try not to eat too much.”

“I hear you,” I said as continued my meal.

I had made up my mind to completely lock Ethan out of my heart and mind, then find a way to make my parent’s hospital prosper. Who needed Ethan?

Chapter Eight

The Favor

E than

It's been five months since everything ended before it even began. My brother had gotten married to a nurse he met through my nurses exchange program. I was happy for them. It reminded me of a future that would have probably been mine if only I knew when and how to shut my mouth at the right time.

I hadn't seen Stacy since then. I eventually found her file and went to her apartment but the owner said she left the following day. That was the only address she had left with me.

Allison refused to give me her contact. I tried using other numbers to call her but whenever she heard my voice the numbers would be unable to reach her anymore.

It was frustrating. I couldn't find her in Richmond. I frequented the mall, and I had become addicted to the diner. I

still couldn't find her. I looked for failing hospitals in Richmond but none matched with her and none of them knew her.

It got to a point that I was desperate enough to almost hire a private investigator to find her. But that would have been beyond creepy. In terms of my life, my clumsiness had dropped. I treated the instructions she gave me as a bible. She had also suggested things to aid with helping me remember things.

Using a phone as a reminder wasn't going to work. I loved collecting small books that could fit in the palm of my hand. I bought several with spiral spines and attached them to a keychain with my belt. If I ever needed something, I just had to check my waist. I'd advise anyone else with my kind of problem to try it.

My skills as a doctor had improved. I had a redemption arc. Ben's new wife before they were married had an injury on her forehead, which wasn't fatal, but I was able to do something about it. Compared to when his late wife was on her deathbed, I was just glad that I was of use to a brother I had long admired and loved.

I stopped womanizing as well. When I realized that Stacy truly cared about me because of me and went out of her way to make me improve, I was sure that I didn't need the other

women who were focused on my wealth and face. I worked on improving my physique and psyche, training until the day I'd meet her again.

I wasn't going to count on that, though.

"Ethan? For fuck's sake ETHAN!" Ian's annoyed yelling got through to my head.

I had forgotten that I was spotting him as he bench pressed.

"Oh sorry," I apologized as I helped him return the weights to their place.

"Are you sure you're okay?" he asked as he checked out his arms to gauge his progress.

"I am," I replied.

"Treadmills is free," Ben announced as he returned.

I was on a month's leave. I needed the vacation but I was bored. Ian was always at the gym in the mornings and Ben hadn't been there in a while. It was one of the few moments we were seen together without having to be wearing our medical cloaks.

“I think I’m done for today,” I sighed. I made a mental count of how many sets I had taken.

“Same. Ethan attempted to kill me,” Ian said.

“I said I’m sorry.” I sucked my teeth.

“None of us are into bone repairs, mind you,” he warned.

“You’re really going to milk this huh?” I raised a brow.

He shrugged and got down, wiping the bench clean for the next person who would use it.

“Oh my God, are they celebrities?”

“They look so hot.”

The giggles and chirps from the female members of the gym attracted our attention and we turned our eyes to them. They giggled and looked away.

“That’s your cue,” Ben said.

“I told you guys. I’m no longer interested in any of that,” I said.

“What?” He raised a brow.

“I’m as shocked as you are, Ben,” Ian said. “It would seem the middle child has finally gotten to the point he no longer thinks with his penis.”

Ian punched me in the stomach but not too hard. “That’s for almost letting me crush under those weights.”

“Why you little...” I rushed after him, but Ben easily held me back with one hand.

“What’s this about changing?” Ben asked.

“That’s what you’re concerned about?” I asked as I calmed down. “I just did.”

“He fell in love and she spat in his face,” Ian revealed.

It was surprising how his behavior could switch from being the most mature of the three of us, and he would easily switch back to being the youngest if we weren’t working.

“Who? Stacy?” Ben asked. “Come to think of it, I didn’t see her at the wedding. I even called her, and she said she couldn’t make it.”

“You’ve spoken to her?” I asked.

“Yeah, she even called to congratulate me,” he said.

“And she called me to ask for advice,” Ian said. “Guess she must really hate you now.”

“What did you do though?” Ben asked.

“I... spat in her face,” I replied. “I called her a user.”

“Stacy was a user?” Ben asked.

“No, I just thought that she was being nice to me because she wanted something in return,” I explained.

“And you told her that? If that’s the way you said it, I don’t get why she would leave,” Ben said as he thought about it.

“Well I didn’t exactly say it like that,” I said as I scratched behind my ear. I proceeded to explain everything that happened.

“You know, I’m not even surprised,” Ben sighed. “Do you want me to talk to her?”

“It’s alright,” I said. “It’s already too late for that.”

“You’ll be fine,” he assured.

“Why lie to him? She’s comfortable talking to us, but she won’t even waste a second talking to him,” Ian said.

“Is this still about the bench press thing?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied as he checked his phone. “I have to get going. Did any of you come with your cars?”

“Bicycle,” Ben replied.

“I walked,” I said.

“Oh well,” he shrugged, “See you two around.”

I pulled out my book and wrote down a reminder to have revenge on him.

“So what are you going to do?” Ben asked.

“Well, I haven’t given up,” I replied. “I mean look at you and Olivia. If you could make it happen then I could too.”

“That’s exactly what I was going to tell you but I’m glad you actually have this sorted out,” he said with a sigh. “I know you’re on a vacation and all, but if you have no plans, you can come visit.”

“I’d love to, but I need to leave for Glen Allen,” I explained. “I don’t know if you remember Dr. Henry Roberts?”

“Dad’s friend?”

“Yeah that one,” I said. “Looks like his hospital is failing. He tried his best but some infrastructure is lacking.”

“You’re going to buy it?”

“I don’t know yet,” I sighed. “I have to inspect the product first.”

“Alright then. Good luck,” he said. “I’ll get some more reps in before I Leave.”

“No problem,” I said as I started to leave.

At least my brothers had encouraged me in their own way. Well, maybe not Ian.

Funny enough, I hadn't been in Glen Allen before. I hardly went anywhere around Richmond. I preferred flying out of the country and seeing different locations across the world. I mean, why have a private jet if you can't see the world?

"Thank you so much for coming," Henry said.

"You don't have to thank me yet," I replied. "I just want to see how I can help in any way I can."

"Just you considering the idea is enough," he sighed.

"Why exactly do you want to sell it again?" I asked.

"I just want it to become successful," he said. "I know if you or any of your brothers own it, the success will be guaranteed."

"You overestimate us," I said with a sigh.

I took a good look at the hospital. It definitely needed a paint job or something. Judging by the ACs I saw on the outside, there was no doubt that they were older models. If the outside alone looked like this, what were the chances of the inside? I could easily guess what the problem was. As he explained,

most people preferred going downtown to the *advanced* hospitals; that restricted the success of the hospital itself as there were little to no patrons.

If he had the right equipment and more experienced staff, then the people living there wouldn't bother going downtown... saving costs and lives at the same time.

Speaking of costs, I could easily subsidize the health services here. I was looking for what to do with some extra hundred million I made. It was a good opportunity.

“Are you the sole proprietor?” I asked.

“Well, when my wife was alive, it belonged to her but we became joint owners,” he explained. “Now it's mine.”

“I apologize for your loss. We'll see what we can do to make her dreams a reality,” I said. “Can I see the insides?”

“Sure thing,” he answered and led the way.

The inside needed work too. In a way, there was something oddly familiar about the setting.

“Has this place always been like this? In terms of how things are arranged?” I asked.

“Well, no, we just changed it a few months ago,” he replied.

“I see. In a way, it reminds me of my hospital back in Richmond,” I said.

“Oh, that reminds me, my daughter actually worked in your hospital,” he said with a hearty chuckle. “Came back and implemented some of the ideas that she learned there.”

“Your daughter?” I asked and tried to make a mental recollection of how many people had worked for me that would match a relation with Henry.

“Yeah. She doesn’t want me to sell this place, insisting that she knows what she’s doing and will be able to save the hospital by herself,” he replied. “I just wished she would focus on something else. She’s a brilliant doctor and could actually work in any hospital of her choice.”

“She chooses not to, because this building is her dream and she sure as hell won’t let you sell it until she’s been able to exhaust all her options,” a familiar voice announced from behind us.

Immediately, I heard the voice and my heart started to pound wildly. My lips remembered its companion. My body tensed

up. I turned to see her, and I wasn't wrong. Staring back at me with her hands crossed was Stacy.

“Dr. Ethan Sullivan, meet my one and only daughter, Dr. Stacy Roberts,” he introduced the both of us.

I couldn't believe my eyes. I didn't even know where to start.

Do I apologize for what I did? Would she listen to me?

She looked even more beautiful than the last time we saw. Rather than scrubs, she wore a dress and a lab coat. She had a pair of glasses sitting on her nose. I didn't even know she wore glasses. Her body had filled out nicely, and she looked even better than the last time.

Someone has been working out recently.

“Stacy...” I called softly, as a smile formed on my face. I was truly excited to see her again. “It's so good to see you. How have you been?”

“What the hell are *you* even doing here?” she shot at me with no hesitation.

The fury in her eyes was a reminder of the sting on my face a few months prior. Just staring at her reminded me of the pain from the slap.

“I’m sorry...I’m really sorry,” I apologized. “I know that sorry won’t cut it for what happened. I just want to let you know that I was wrong.”

“What’s going on?” Henry asked.

“I have absolutely no idea,” she said. She stared at me like I had lost all my sense of reasoning, “He isn’t welcome here. We don’t need his help, and I don’t either.”

After agonizing for months. I finally met her and she refused to even let me be there. I came here thinking I could buy this hospital and turn it into a place that would make Henry happy. But if Stacy was here, and it was going to be a difficult task. That’s not all that bothered me.

The look in her eyes, it was almost as if she was staring at the worst human being that ever existed. I have never wanted to die and disappear so badly at that moment.

Chapter Nine

And so we Meet Again

E than

“Sweetie, what’s wrong?” Henry asked as he held her shoulder.

She didn’t break eye contact with me or stopped glaring at me. Her eyes were laser focused on me, and if she could actually shoot lasers, I would have lost both my eyes. It was oddly funny that I felt intimidated by a woman who was shorter than me.

It felt cute and frightening at the same time.

“Nothing’s wrong, why is he here?” she asked, finally freeing me from her gaze. As her eyes met her father’s they automatically became softer.

“I just thought we’d need his help,” Henry explained.

“And I keep telling you that I’d figure it out,” she said and rubbed her eyes in frustration. “Besides, I would rather go take a loan than rely on *this one*.”

This one?

I recalled what Ian said when he said she hated me. I was thinking he might have been saying that to get under my skin but turned out he was actually right.

“Stacy, I...” I attempted to speak, but she took a step back and turned to leave.

“I’ll be outside, I need the air,” she said as she left.

“Okay, take it easy,” Henry said as she walked away. He turned to face me. “What happened between you two?”

“I don’t even know at this point,” I said.

I actually know; I just don’t know if it was okay to tell him.

“So what do you think?” he asked as he looked around.

“It’s not a bad place. I’ll think of something,” I said, “but she has to be in agreement.”

“That might be difficult,” he said with a sigh. “I understand why she might be against it. She doesn’t understand that there are some things you can’t do alone.”

“I’ll go talk to her,” I said and walked past him.

“Tread lightly. She has her mother’s rage,” he warned.

“I know,” I said. I touched the cheek that she had slapped.

I found her not far from the hospital, staring off into nowhere. Actually, she was looking at her hand. I remembered what that hand had done to my face.

“Hey,” I called out.

She let out an exasperated sigh and put her hand in her coat pockets.

“I didn’t know you’d be here,” I said. “It didn’t even ring a bell when Henry said his daughter worked for me.”

“Henry Roberts...Stacy Roberts. His daughter worked at your hospital...you still couldn't figure it out?” she asked in an amused tone. “That's the scatterbrained Ethan for you, I guess.”

“And here I was thinking I've changed,” I chuckled softly.

She didn't say anything in response and didn't even turn to look at me. I took a deep breath and exhaled, then walked up to her side. She gave me a side eye; it warned that I was too close for my own good. I immediately took a step away from her. She looked away after realizing my distance wasn't a threat. It was silent. I still didn't know what to say.

“I'm sorry. For assuming that you were intimate and kind to me, just because you wanted me to pay you a favor,” I began. “That was very rude and uncouth for me. It also made me an arrogant dick.”

“You've got that right,” she muttered under her breath.

“I understand you hate me now, but I really am sorry,” I reaffirmed.

She exhaled deeply but didn't say anything else. I sighed and looked ahead. If she didn't want to forgive me, I was going to find another way to get her to do that.

“Why exactly are you here?” she asked.

“Your father and mine were friends. When he reached out to me that his hospital wasn’t doing so well, I decided to come see how I’d help out,” I explained, hoping it would score me some affection points with her.

After all, this was the same hospital she had told me about. I was just going to help her out. That’s all and nothing else. And maybe get her to let go of the past? But that’s just a bonus.

“So you want to help out of the goodness of your heart?” she asked.

Uh oh.

“Yeah,” I replied.

“Interesting,” she said and turned to face me, a smile on her face that I could tell wasn’t...nice, “Unfortunately for you, big dick guy, no one here is going to fuck you as a reimbursement.”

“I don’t... what the?”

“I said, no one here is going to fuck you. I don’t need your help, Ethan,” she repeated to clarify, then turned, leaving me standing there agape.

“I said I’m sorry, didn’t I?” I asked. I followed after her and held her hand.

“Let go, Ethan,” she warned.

“If you want to hit me again, I don’t mind,” I said as I steeled my resolve. “I’ll take as many hits as you can offer until you forgive me.”

“I don’t understand you,” she said as she lifted her other free hand and attempted to slap me again, but she stopped before her hand could touch my face.

“I’m not scared of your anger or your frustration. I’m just more concerned about the fact that would never forgive me,” I said.

“You really think it’s that easy? Do you know what your words that day meant?” she asked as the fury returned to her eyes.

“I’m sorry…”

“You called me a user. You acted like what happened the previous night wasn’t anything special. I don’t even care how many women you’ve been with before me. You treated me like I was the rest of them,” she said. “Is that what I was to you? A skank who’d need to be paid millions by just opening her legs?”

Her words were starting to cut too deep but I deserved it, and she needed the release.

“I didn’t even let you buy me anything. I thought you were going through something more serious...related to work. I was aware of just how much you were putting in to improve on yourself,” she continued. “I was drawn to that part of you. You were clumsy but you tried to fix it even though it seemed impossible.”

She paused and looked back at the hospital. “It reminded me of me. I keep trying to fix this, and all I can do is offer temporal solutions. They don’t hold up most of the time, but it doesn’t stop me from trying again...just like you. You know that clumsiness is too difficult for you to handle, but you try your best not to inconvenience anyone around you.”

I was too stunned to say anything. She had me down to a T. I didn’t even know she was paying that much attention to me.

Did she just confess that she was in love with me? I really messed this up, didn't I?

“Even after telling myself that I wasn't going to open my heart to anyone until I had this hospital properly up and running...” she continued, but her tone was softer now; her eyes were focused on my hand holding hers. “I gave you that chance and...” She stopped and pulled her hand free. I let her go. “You did *that*. Only harder and more painful for me.”

“Sorry really doesn't cut it,” I admitted.

“No it doesn't,” she agreed.

“What can I do to get you to forgive me?” I asked.

“You can start by getting out of here,” she replied.

“Something else? I really want to help you and your dad,” I explained.

She sighed. “I don't really care if you want to help me or my dad. The fact is, you've ruined the concept of me accepting anything relatively close to helping from you. Even if you're genuine about your desire to help, all I see is a man who just wants to repay some good sex he had months ago.”

As soon as she was done speaking, she turned away and started heading toward the hospital. “Nice to see you again, Dr. Sullivan. Now get lost.”

In all thirty-five years of my life, no woman had ever told me to get lost. I have never been so turned on by it. Still, this was a pickle. I know she told me to get lost, but now I had a major reason to remain in Glen Allen.

Stacy

“What were you thinking?” I asked my father as I called him aside. “Selling the hospital? You just want to throw away what you and mom built to a random stranger?”

“I’m not throwing it away. When I say selling it, I mean he’s going to be the one who owns it on paper, but at least we’d have enough to improve this place,” he explained.

“Doesn’t make sense.” I crossed my arms, indicating the start of my stubbornness. “I don’t even want that kind of thing. If he owns it on paper, it means he owns it. Even if we’re still running it, it ceases to be Robert’s Hospital. It becomes the Ethan Sullivan Hospital: Glen Allen version.”

“Did something happen between the both of you while you worked there?” he asked. “Wait, that reminds me. You stopped

working there after the heartbreak issue. Could it be that Ethan was the one who...”

“What? No!” I denied it instantly.

I may have been angry with Ethan, but I didn’t want anything that would ruin the good relationship he had with my father.

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“Then what exactly is the problem?” he asked. “If you don’t tell me, I won’t understand. I’m not a psychic.”

“I understand. I know that, but still,” I said and my shoulders dropped. “It can be anybody for him.”

“There isn’t anyone else,” he said and placed his hand on my shoulder. “I don’t know what is it between you two, but you need to sort it out. Besides, he might not even take the hospital after he’s seen just how much you’re against it.”

“I’m counting on it,” I muttered.

“Dr. Roberts,” Ethan called as he walked up to us.

I ignored him; even if I wasn’t the Roberts he was referring to.

“Yes, Ethan?” Dad answered.

“About the hospital, I’ve come to two conclusions,” he said as he raised two fingers to demonstrate. “One, since I’m on a one month leave, I’ll love to work here alongside the both of you. That way we can bring people here using my presence. Two, it will be a good opportunity to wait and see if Stacy will finally approve of me. In getting this place that is.”

“Oh, that makes sense,” Dad agreed and turned to me. “What do you think?”

“You two should just do whatever you want.” I rolled my eyes and switched my stance, with arms akimbo.

“So we’re all in agreement then,” Ethan said. “I’ll get started first thing tomorrow. Looks like I’ll be in your care, Stacy.”

I didn’t say anything and walked away. I found an empty room and stayed in there to think about everything. It had been five months after the end of what never began. I put in all my effort into working on my mind. I searched for the best things to do for struggling hospitals; most of them required money my father and I couldn’t afford it on my own. In a way, I understood my father’s reason for reaching out to Ethan to help.

Personally, I devoted myself to training my body as well. It helped me deal with the stress and the pain in my right hand.

Ever since I had slapped him, I could swear on my life that my hand remained a permanent shade of red. No one else saw anything; I could have just been hallucinating. No matter what I did, my hand would still feel like I had just slapped him.

With time, as I made the conscious decision to forget about him completely, the pain in my hand disappeared. I tried my best not to see him, telling Allison not to give him my number no matter what, turning down his brother's wedding invite, and blocking any strange number that called me. The last part didn't end too well because a patient was trying to reach me.

Luckily I answered. The point was that I wanted to forget him, but he was back. The annoying thing was that the moment I saw his face, my heart started to pound stubbornly. If he stayed here long enough, I wasn't sure how long I could go without forgiving him.

I remembered his apology: it sounded like he had practiced for days just to get it off his chest.

Even when I poured out my words of frustration against him, I could see the hurt in his eyes.

Maybe he was serious. But forgiving him and letting him have another chance was not happening.

Chapter Ten

Life in a New Location

E than

“What do you mean there’s no five-star hotel around here?” I asked Stacy.

As promised I was there the next day. I arrived in Glen Allen with the intent not only to start my new life, but help the Roberts’s with their new hospital. My plan was to find a nice hotel and lodge close enough for an easy commute. I had brought my Mercedes, though.

But...

“It’s exactly like I said, there are no five-star hotels,” she repeated. “God, I forgot how much of a rich guy you are.”

“So where am I supposed to sleep then?” I asked.

“There’s always the chance of you sleeping in your car,” she suggested and shrugged. “Or you could sleep in a ward. Unfortunately, we don’t have a psychiatric one.”

“You’re really laying it on me, aren’t you?” I sighed.

“Not enough to get through that skull but what can I do anyway?” She sighed as well.

“This little...” I stopped speaking and stifled myself. “Are there any hotels at least?”

“I don’t think so. But there are guest houses or inns,” she replied.

“What’s that?”

“They offer bed and breakfast,” she explained as she found a lab coat and handed it to me to wear, “Wear this.”

“I have my own coat,” I said.

“This has our insignia; if you’re going to work here, you’re going to wear it,” she insisted as she forced it into my hands.

“At my hospital, everyone wears their own coat,” I pointed out. “In fact, we just wear scrubs. I mean you were there. Why don’t you wear scrubs here?”

“Well, it was my mother’s idea, and I’m rather fond of it.” She smiled and switched back to a frown.

“I didn’t...I’m sorry,” I apologized.

“Don’t be, we actually wear scrubs. I’m just messing with you,” she admitted.

“You’re one hell of a boss,” I said.

“But unfortunately, I can’t fire you,” she said and walked past me. “Work starts immediately.”

“I guess where I’ll sleep has to wait then,” I groaned and dutifully put on the coat. “When was this last washed?”

“Enough of you and just get out here,” she demanded as she went ahead of me.

“Fine, whatever,” I sighed and followed after her.

I don't know how word got out, but people found out I was here and a lot of people came out to see me.

“Who could have told them I was coming?” I asked.

“Why don't you ask the Mercedes Benz outside?” she retorted and shook her head negatively. “You just find brand new ways to annoy me don't you?”

“You're welcome,” I said smugly.

We had more patients that day. A lot of them were there because I was there. I handled most of the diagnosis. At least they weren't serious cases that required my expertise in surgical practice.

The nurses followed me, squabbling over who would assist me.

Back in Richmond, I was treated normally, maybe because of the influence of the kind of people who came to be treated in my hospital. I actually forgot that I was more or less a celebrity doctor.

I had been in more magazines than both my brothers combined. Social butterfly powers and abilities never ceased to amaze me and everyone who came in contact with me.

“We haven’t experienced this amount of patients in months,” Henry admitted during a break.

The crowd had thinned down. I was a little exhausted as most of the patients had insisted that I’d be the one who’d attend to them. My hands hurt from all the hand shaking and pressing

Well at least this will be enough to get me some forgiveness points from my new boss.

“Most of the patients weren’t sick; they just wanted to meet with Ethan,” Stacy noted. “And the nurses were busy fawning over him.”

I may have not been the best in communication, but even I knew that I wasn’t meant to respond to her anger or tone.

“Well at least we’ve gotten the recognition we’ve been looking for,” Henry pointed out.

“And when he goes back, what happens?” she asked.

“Fair point,” he said as he nodded positively. “That’s why we have to learn as much as we can from him, so despite the

outcome of what happens here, we can be sure that we'd have something that'll help in retaining more patients.”

Nicely said, Henry. Stacy also looked pleased with her father's assessment.

“Well, I'm just happy to help out in whatever way I can,” I said and got up to go for a walk.

“I'm surprised, your first day here and you didn't break anything. Did you sell out your clumsiness in order to acquire a conscience?” Stacy asked with a smirk.

“As a matter of fact I did,” I smirked in return. “It also gave me the ability to charm women in return.”

“Right,” she chuckled softly and looked away, “Classic Ethan.”

What's this? She isn't being so hard on me as before. Did I do something? Well whatever it is, I'll keep on doing it as the results are the desirable kind.

It felt good that I was no longer her gaze as an annoying pest or whatever. I was finally earning some points, although getting used to her was taking me some time. I decided to use

the opportunity to explore the area, as I had no idea what was where.

“Where are you going?” Stacy asked.

“A walk. What kind of man would I be if I didn’t explore?” I said, a look of determination spread across my face.

“Don’t get lost,” she warned. “I would rather you stay here.”

“Oh please, who gets lost in Glen Allen?” I scoffed and left.

It was a few minutes past ten in the morning. Not bad timing for a stroll. As I strolled through the charming streets of Glen Allen, Virginia, I felt a sense of excitement and curiosity. The crisp morning air filled my lungs as I set out to explore this quaint town. My first stop was Crump Park, where the rustling leaves and chirping birds created a soothing symphony. I marveled at the historic Meadow Farm Museum, its aged structures echoing tales of days gone by.

Continuing my journey, I wandered into the vibrant Virginia Center Commons mall, where the buzz of shoppers and the scent of freshly brewed coffee welcomed me. The rows of shops seemed endless, each offering a unique treasure waiting

to be discovered. I paused to admire the intricate designs at the Wine Loft, elegant atmosphere in stark contrast to the park I had just left.

As the sun climbed higher in the sky, I decided to take a leisurely walk along the serene Virginia Capital Trail. The scenic route offered a glimpse of nature's beauty, with the stunning views of the Chickahominy River, captivating my senses. The historic markers along the trail spoke of the area's rich past, giving me a deeper appreciation for Glen Allen's history.

Lost in my thoughts and the surroundings, I continued my exploration, unknowingly straying from the path that had guided me so far. The streets became unfamiliar, and the landmarks I had encountered earlier seemed to blur together. Panic slowly crept in as I realized that I had lost my way. The once-inviting surroundings now felt like a labyrinth, and a sense of unease settled in.

I tried retracing my steps, hoping to find a familiar landmark, but the town had transformed into a maze of streets and intersections. My heart raced as the realization sunk in—I was truly lost.

Stacy was going to get one hell of a kick out of this.

Stacy

It was late. He had gone exploring a few minutes past ten am. It was almost four pm and he was yet to return.

“I wonder if he found something interesting to keep his attention,” Father said.

“I wouldn’t count on that,” I said as I picked up my phone and opened the contacts.

I found his contact. Even after he started working here, I was still skeptical about unblocking his number.

“I’ll just block him again,” I said to myself as I unblocked him and dialed his number.

He had helped out my father and I in one way or the other. He at least didn’t deserve to be eaten outside by hungry wolves.

Am I developing a soft spot for the enemy?

When he started attending to the patients and poured out his heart in diagnosing them, I was reminded of the kind of man he was: the kind dedicated to saving lives no matter how little or big. The frustrating part for me was the fact that I was upset when the nurses started fawning over him. I noticed

something, however; it felt like he was giving them the cold shoulder. I could have been seeing things.

“Why isn’t he answering?” I groaned after calling him for the fifth time in a row.

“I think he left his phone,” Father said as he pointed to a phone in the spot where Ethan had sat.

“You have got to be kidding me,” I groaned and got up to leave, taking his phone with me.

“Where are you going?” Father asked.

“To find him. He’s lost,” I replied.

He didn’t go with his car.

“...and he looked so handsome, staring off into the distance,” a girl said to another, as they walked past me.

“Really? I heard he’s a doctor. A very rich one,” the other one said.

“Pardon me you two, but where did you see this man?” I asked.

“He was at Chickahominy River,” the first replied. “He looked so dreamy.”

“Describe him?”

“Brown hair, well-built body, six feet. He looked like that Richmond doctor in the magazine my mom buys,” the second explained.

“How did he even get to the Chickahominy River?” I facepalmed myself.

“Is everything okay?” the first one asked.

“Nah, everything’s alright,” I replied with a smile. “Thank you two.”

“You’re welcome,” they chorused and left.

He had also left his car keys, and there was no way I was walking.

Ethan

I have lost count of the number of people who had stopped to look at me before leaving. The normal thing was to ask for help. But I didn't know how fast information spread in the town.

I could play like I had returned to the hospital on my own, but I felt that one of the locals was going to tell her what had happened.

I had spent five months working on myself to make sure that my carelessness didn't become a burden to everyone around me.

"Pride aside, what do I do now? Right after I had boasted to Stacy too," I thought to myself.

"You can always follow me back," Stacy said to me.

I turned and found her holding my car keys and my phone.

"Here you go," she said as she returned the keys and the phone.

"How did you know I was lost?" I asked.

"Seriously?" She gave me the "look" to match.

“I know. It’s just...I didn’t expect I’d get lost. I’ve spent the past months working on myself so I don’t make things too difficult for those around me,” I explained, “But...well, here we are.”

I knew I looked so uncool in her eyes but “it is what it is”.

“I know you’ve been trying your best to improve,” she said. “Even the way you attended to patients today showed how much thought you’ve put into improving. I’m proud of you.”

I could tell that she wasn’t trying to flirt with me. She actually meant it.

“Thank you,” I said.

“Also thank you for today,” she said. “Although most of the patients weren’t sick, it’s been decades since I last saw that amount of people in our hospital. So, thank you for giving me a sight for sore eyes.”

“You’re welcome,” I smiled. “And thank you for finding me.”

“In your own words, ‘Who gets lost in Glen Allen?’ ” she asked with a playful grin. “I guess the answer will be you.”

“I guess so,” I chuckled softly.

As the laughter faded, we found ourselves staring into each other's eyes. It felt like years since we had.

“Alright, enough staring,” she said, clapping her hands together and ending the mood. “Do you mind taking me home?”

“I don't mind at all,” I said with a smile and led her to the car.

Little wins like this was enough for me.

Chapter Eleven

Ethan Sullivan: The Man with Machine-Like Hands

Stacy

Three days had passed. Ethan finally swallowed his pride and took lodge at a guest house not too far from the hospital. Of course, he hated it.

“They call it food. Well it’s food alright, dog food,” he complained as he ate the pizza he had ordered.

Besides those moments where he was an overgrown baby, Ethan took his role as a staff member seriously. So much so, that he even ordered the equipment our hospital lacked. He told Dad not to bother paying; the machinery he sent was actually some old ones from his hospital. We soon discovered that it was a lie; we found the receipts, showing he had actually bought brand new equipment.

We decided not to say anything. His clumsiness this time was for our own good. The number of patients was still relatively high in the mornings, but in the afternoons and evenings, we hardly had anyone come around. In medicine, that was a good thing.

The cases that came later in the day were life threatening and put everyone at a high tension.

“Eat,” Ethan said as he handed me a slice. “We’re colleagues here boss, accept the slice.”

I sighed and accepted the slice. It was a peaceful evening. That was until the emergency alarm shattered the tranquility.

“What the...?” I dropped the pizza into the box and raced out, along with Ethan.

“An emergency case?” a nurse asked.

“We’ve never had one,” another noted.

“Oh crap...Dr. Henry isn’t here,” one of them noted.

Dad wasn’t around. He had something important to do downtown. I could understand their worry. In a failing

hospital, we hardly got any emergency cases. I was a little worried now.

The urgency in the air was palpable as the paramedics rushed in with a patient hanging between life and death. The man, James, lay on the stretcher, his face a canvas of pain and uncertainty.

“Quick to ER,” I ordered as they led the patient into the room.

We were all a bit worried. I tried to rack my head remembering my experience in medical school and at Ethan’s hospital. The doors flung open as Ethan strode into the emergency room, his presence radiated an air of calm authority. This was the man who was lost a few days ago and could now crack a joke and eat pizza.

As he took charge of the situation, his determination and unwavering focus left an indelible mark on my heart. He was like a completely different person. The playful glint in his eyes had been completely erased and replaced with a look that said, “This man won’t be lost.”

James was in the throes of a heart attack, his body betraying him in the cruelest way possible. The room was a symphony

of beeping monitors and hurried footsteps, a chaotic dance done to save a life. I watched as Ethan's hands moved with grace, his decisions guided by a combination of expertise and intuition. In that moment, I understood why he was revered by both patients and colleagues alike.

Amid the flurry of activity, I found myself working in tandem with Ethan. Our eyes would meet in fleeting glances, unspoken words passing between us like a secret language. There was a shared understanding, a camaraderie that went beyond words. As the minutes stretched into hours, James's condition began to stabilize, the monitors displaying a more reassuring rhythm.

Hours turned into an eternity as we fought for James's life. Time seemed to lose its meaning in the intensity of the moment. Then, like a quiet sunrise after a storm, a collective sigh of relief swept through the room. James's heart had been coaxed back to life, a testament to Ethan's skill and the dedication of the entire team.

"There," Ethan said as he took a step back. "You don't get to die today, friend."

"Thank...thank you...I thought..." James managed to speak as the tears started to flow.

Ethan took off his medical gloves and wiped the man's tears with his hands.

“Shhh...it's okay,” Ethan assured him. “You're fine.”

It seemed like a father who had just saved his son from falling from an impossible height. I have never been prouder to be a doctor than the moment I saw James regain consciousness.

It was weird. Almost paradoxical. This man named Ethan Sullivan was so clumsy that he could break plates, lose keys, or forget to put something in the right place. But when he handled human life, it was a different ball game altogether. Like freshly laid egg, he'd make sure that life survived.

I had forgotten how kind he was.

He turned to me and smiled. “We made a good team didn't we.”

“It's weird, I didn't know what to do but all of a sudden, I knew,” I admitted.

“It's called resonance. You watched me work and automatically learned on the spot,” he explained as he adjusted imaginary glasses. “I've rarely experienced it with anyone save for my brothers. You're really special.”

There he goes again, wooing you with his words. And there goes your heart beating for him again.

He had definitely changed. But how much of that change was him? Was it limited to his abilities as a doctor or his clumsiness? Or has it stretched to his heart. I couldn't explain it. I was falling for him again.

"Now let's go finish that pizza," he said as he walked past me. "Saving lives makes me extremely hungry for some odd reason."

"Rather than the pizza would you like to come to my place?" I asked.

"For real? Your house?" He blinked twice as he tried to suppress the excitement growing in him.

"Yes, mine. It's to thank you for saving James's life," I explained.

"Alright then, I'll be there," he assured me.

"You have to come with me, you don't know the place," I reminded him.

"Oh right, I forgot," he chuckled.

Stacy...you better know what you're doing.

We arrived at my place.

“Don’t touch anything,” I warned. “Most of these things are antiques from my mom.”

“But they’re all over at the fireplace,” he pointed out.

“I’m just...I want you not to go close them,” I explained.

“It’s okay, I understand,” he said and took a seat on the couch. “I’m just glad I get to be in your house.”

I’m glad you’re here too. But I wasn’t going to tell him that. I had already planned on having a sandwich for dinner. Turkey sandwich was the dinner. Now that he was here, I wondered if this was dinner enough, considering how much he had complained about the guest house food.

After I was done with the meal, I took it to the living room half expecting him to already be at the fireplace. He was comfortably seated and gave off an air of intimidation as he sat still observing his surroundings.

He watched me from the corner of his eye and a smile formed.
“You know, I can’t recall any house I’ve been to that still has a chimney.”

“Well, we do,” I said as I set down the meal in front of him.
“Here, I hope you like it.”

“Sandwiches,” he said and chuckled softly.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“No, it’s just, I was reminded of that night you tried to cheer me up,” he answered.

I had even forgotten that we had chicken sandwiches there.

“Do you know that because of what I did to you, I started to frequent that diner in a desperate attempt to find you,” he admitted. “I grew addicted to their chicken sandwich and had to start working out again.”

“I see,” I said softly. “I honestly thought you wouldn’t have bothered looking. Then the incessant calls....”

“Speaking of calls, you spoke to my brothers besides me,” he said. “It hurt when I found out. It was at that moment I

realized you finally hated me.”

His shoulders dropped; he picked up the sandwich, a sad smile on his lips. He ate the sandwich and his eyes widened. “Maybe you need to open your own diner and run it alongside the hospital.”

“So give my customers cholesterol, and treat them?” I asked.

“That is a brilliant idea! Why didn’t I think of that?” he asked himself and continued eating.

I looked at his body; there were indeed signs that he had done some workouts. His arms had gotten bigger. His shoulders had gotten broader too. He went through that because of me. I stared at my right hand, and it started to hurt again.

“I never hated you,” I said.

“What?”

“I never hated you,” I repeated without looking at him. “I was just angry and betrayed. Furious...hurt...but never hate.”

He didn’t say anything and let me continue.

“I just....I didn’t expect you would say that about me that way,” I continued. “Some days, I would remember how scared I was after hitting you. Even right now, my hand hurts. I still feel your cheek against it. I still see the look of shock on your face. How could I hate you if these memories have refused to leave?”

“I understand how you feel,” he said. I turned to look at him. He touched his cheek, the one I had hit. “To be honest, it was those teary eyes that made me keep calling you again and again. To think that fate would let us come together again.”

“Fate is one crazy thing isn’t it?” I said and hugged my knees.

“Can I see your hand?” he asked as he stretched his hand to me. “It still hurts, doesn’t it? Let the doctor have a look.”

It was a trap. I knew if I had let him take my hand, it would have been the start of another roller coaster of emotions. The only question in my heart was, *could I stand it a second time?*

“Stacy...I know you’re scared,” he said softly, “but trust me.”

It was hard but I gave in. I gave him my hand. He took it and stared at it.

He rubbed both his thumbs on my palm, “It’s still hot.”

I looked at him in disbelief. I thought I was the only one who felt it.

“I’m sorry for making you hit me,” he apologized and brought the hand to his lips and kissed it.

The heat I had felt in five months had suddenly disappeared. He kissed it again and whispered apologies. His stubble tickled a little but I didn’t stop him. His apology kisses were doing the trick. I didn’t want him to stop anytime soon.

“There,” he said after the last kiss. “Did that work?”

“Yes...yes, it did,” I replied and looked at my hand. The reddish color I had been seeing had disappeared, and my skin was back to normal.

“I’m glad,” he said with a warm smile.

He had offered me healing. What kind of person would I have been if I didn’t return the favor?

I held his face and kissed his left cheek; just like my palm, there was heat radiating from his cheek. “I’m sorry I hurt you.”

I kissed it again and again, offering apologies as I did.

“Does that feel better?” I asked.

“You know, when you hit me, your hand fell on my lip,” he said.

I chuckled. “We can’t go down that path—not again.”

“Why?” he asked softly, his left hand had already started to snake around my waist, gently pulling me to him. I was doing a terrible job resisting his obvious attempt.

“I..I don’t know why,” I replied hesitantly. I placed my hand on his chest and tried to push him away. It was no use; my body wasn’t listening to me.

“I understand your fears, and they’re all valid, believe me,” he said. He made me rest against his body. Our faces were inches apart; we could feel our breaths against each other’s faces.

“I have changed,” he said. “I have never stopped desiring you, even after what happened. I was confused then; but now, I’ve never been so sure of anything else in my life as I am right now.”

“What if you’re just saying that?” I asked. “What if you’re doing this because you feel like you owe me?”

“I do owe you,” he said and leaned in close to my neck and whispered, “I owe you all the love and passion you could ever desire. I’m not making the same mistake as last time.”

His breathing on my neck and his whispers started to ignite my body with a fire only he could put out. But I didn’t want to be consumed, not again.

“Let me have you, Stacy,” he demanded as he kissed my neck. “I won’t ask again.”

“Okay, just this once,” I said and gave in.

He wasted no time and bit into me, causing me to gasp. I didn’t stop him. He let go of my neck and kissed my chin, before finally capturing my mouth and started to deeply kiss me.

I missed this.

The colors.

The way reality around me seemed to vanish replaced with the universe he created with his mouth.

The symphony of lips crashing together is an euphonium I never thought I'd experience again.

His tongue invaded my mouth. I accepted him immediately, rolling my tongue around with his. Our mouths remained opened, leaving a stage for our tongues to dance around each other. We finally closed our mouths, my tongue now trapped in his mouth.

He groaned as he sucked on my tongue. I felt all the pent up stress I had built up leave me and became a part of him. We paused the kiss and stared at each other. He was panting heavily; I was as well.

"I've missed this," he said as he brushed my hair with his fingers. "You have no idea how glad I am that I found you again."

"Don't. Ever. Do. What you did. Again," I said, emphasizing the important parts.

"I swear it," he assured me and kissed me again. "You have my word."

"Alright then," I said and let out a sigh of relief.

I attempted to kiss him again but the sound of his stomach growling interrupted us.

“Maybe after dinner,” I said while laughing.

“I’m so sorry about that,” he apologized and covered his face.

We had our dinner while talking about the events of the day. He shared the first time he had to attend to a case like that and how scared he was. But just like how he stepped in to help when it was his own crisis, Ben had stepped in.

I also shared my stories, like the time an expectant mother wasn’t sure of her due date, and on the day she came to inquire, she gave birth. When I had dinner with my dad, dinner had never tasted so good.

After five months when it was over before it began, maybe there was an opportunity for a chance to start all over again.

Chapter Twelve

Why I Did It

Stacy

It was the most peaceful night I had gotten in months. I don't know when I ordered a body pillow, but it definitely made the night comfortable. I squeezed it, bit into it, and lay on top of it. It was the most comfortable thing I had ever owned. The only problem was I didn't have a body pillow. I opened my eyes and found myself on someone.

“Finally awake?” a baritone voice said, boosted by the blessing of a new morning.

“What? Good morning,” I greeted and rubbed my eyes awake.

I blinked twice before finally coming to my senses.

“What the fuck?!” I yelled and got up.

“Good morning to you too,” Ethan said and looked at me with a warm smile.

“You scared me,” I said. I held my chest and tried to calm myself.

Looking around I tried to make sense of what had happened. I was in the living room. I never slept in my own room. I noticed the tray holding the plates from last night’s meal. Ethan was still dressed in the previous days clothes, well relaxed on the couch with his hands behind his head.

“I don’t know why you’re screaming,” he sighed. “Try putting yourself in the shoes of a man who woke up to being bitten by a woman who was half asleep.”

I held my mouth as I recalled my delusion of being with a body pillow. I was actually biting him.

My cheeks turned red from embarrassment.

“What happened?” I asked.

“As I said, you were biting me,” he explained.

“No not that, why are you...why was I..?”

“Oh that’s what you meant,” he sighed. “Well, let’s just say you forgave me.”

I remembered it: the way he kissed me and the fact that I let him do it even when I knew there was no going back for me. There was just another problem. What did this mean between us now?

“Shall we get ready for the hospital?” he asked as he got up.

“Yeah...”

Is he doing it again...acting like nothing happened? Was I stupid again?

He walked up to me and kissed me deeply, “Thank you for dinner last night. Will you be so kind as to feed me every night?”

“Do you intend to pay?” I teased.

“Whatever amount you mention, I’m sure I can afford it,” he replied confidently and kissed me again.

.

This wasn’t so bad after all.

Ethan

It was the most peaceful night I had ever had in five months. It was so peaceful that I was unable to sleep. Stacy had my body captive in her sleep, making me worried for my safety when we were married.

When, huh?

I grinned at the thought. I didn't want to rush things, but I did mean what I said when I told her the previous night that I wasn't going to make the same mistakes as the last time. Now all I needed to do was properly apologize.

I had nothing to wear after my shower, but there was no need to bother. Actually, there was a lot of need, considering the fact that Stacy and I sweated during the course of the night. Stacy had to dig through Henry's old clothes and made me wear them.

"It looks good on you," she claimed as she took a step to admire me.

It was a brown long-sleeved shirt with a check pattern. I'm not sure if it looked good on me, but I trusted her judgment. As we left for the hospital, we had to walk. I started regretting bringing my car in the first place, considering how most of the

places I needed to be (the guest house, the hospital, and now the Roberts house) were all within walking distance. My car was just collecting dust.

I wrote in my diary reminding myself to return the car back to Richmond. Wait...I would actually need the car if I wanted to go back to Richmond and back. That almost went over my head.

“What’s the book for?” Stacy asked.

“Oh right, remember the folder you had created on my computer?” I reminded her.

“You actually found it?” She was surprised.

“I know you expected me to take days to find it,” I said.

“Months but okay,” she smirked.

“Right,” I frowned. “I found them and they’ve been like a beacon teaching me how to properly organize my life. I’m grateful for that. It actually helped more than you think.”

“I just wanted to be able to make your life easier,” she said.

“You *just* had to say that.”

“About that, I haven’t actually apologized,” I remarked.

*But you’ve already apologized,” she reminded me.

“No, you weren’t actually listening because you were still angry,” I explained. “And you don’t know why I did what I did.”

“Oh, makes sense. I honestly wasn’t listening to what you were saying,” she agreed, then stopped walking. “You have my complete attention.”

I took in a deep breath and started my story, “There was this girl, Emilia. She was beautiful, intelligent, smart...and a lot of other things.”

“Is this one of those stories where the ex is better than the current girlfriend?” she asked.

“No, it’s not...wait, girlfriend?” I asked.

“Metaphorically speaking,” she corrected, and added, “Continue.”

“Anyway, when I met Emilia, it was love at first sight. She cared about me and looked out for me despite my shortcomings and clumsiness. It didn’t really take long to start

desiring her in other ways,” I continued. “But when I told her how I felt, she told me she didn’t feel the same way. She was only with me because she wanted an easy way to become rich. I paid for her school, and she told me the sex was simply because she wanted what I could offer her materially.”

I paused to catch my breath. The memory haunted me too much for my own good.

“I was broken then, and the cycle continued. I didn’t fall in love again. I just realized that almost all the women I have been involved with wanted something in return; it usually ended up being money or sex.”

I continued my story, “So, when I started to fall for you, I couldn’t help thinking it was a trap. I found it difficult to imagine that someone wouldn’t want something from me. I have never met any woman who turned down a freebie. It was all too new for me. Out of fear, I pushed away the one woman who cared about me. Just like you said, I assumed that you were like the rest of them.”

I bowed to her. “I am very sorry.”

“Raise your head; what are you even doing,” she blurted out as she held my head and lifted it to see my face. “Now you’re making me feel extra bad for hitting you. You acted on a time

of trauma, and I retaliated with anger. I should be the one apologizing.”

“I’m not going to lie; when you slapped me, it was somewhat sexy,” I remarked. “I just hope you haven’t awakened something in me.”

“You’re the weirdest man I have ever met,” she chuckled and kissed my cheek. “I forgive you. I also have something to tell you, but it will have to be later.”

She headed to the hospital.

“Nooo, don’t do that,” I groaned and followed after her. “You don’t just start with an announcement like that and leave me wondering what you want to talk about.”

“But if you aren’t patient enough, then you might not get a reward for good behavior,” she hinted.

“You’re right; I should wait,” I said, changing my tone completely.

It was the start of something good, and I was all for it.

“Thank you so much, sir,” a woman thanked me with tears in her eyes. She was James’s wife.

“You don’t have to thank me,” I said with a nervous chuckle.
“I just did what any doctor would do.”

“Well, this wasn’t the work of any doctor; it was all you and your team,” she insisted.

I chuckled nervously.

“I made you an apple custard pie,” she said as she handed me the dessert.

“Thank you so much.” I lit up as I accepted it.

“I thought you were going to refuse,” she laughed.

“Are you kidding me? The guest house has terrible food,” I remarked. “I’ll be taking any gift of food offered.”

“Is that so? I’ll make sure to make you extra out of my family’s meals,” she affirmed. “James has been looking for a way to pay you back.”

“Just the pie is enough,” I assured her.

She thanked me again and left. The pie smelled heavenly. Back in Richmond, I didn't get to experience one-on-one relationships with the patients and their families. While I watched Stacy, Henry, and the rest of the team relate to them, I realized how involved they were in each other's lives.

If I bought this place, would that remain the case?

I know Henry felt like it would be the best way to help the hospital. But would that truly make Stacy happy? As she had forgiven me, I wanted to make sure that everything I did with her would only bring her happiness.

Nothing else mattered.

Chapter Thirteen

A Chance to Love Again

Stacy

My father had yet to return. Ethan had, in a way, become the owner of the hospital after the James incident. His popularity increased and more people came for medical treatment. In order not to create a dependency, during free times, he'd teach the nurses and doctors how to handle some of the common cases. That way, the patients were okay with the nurse or doctor who diagnosed and attended to them. People stopped going downtown and came to the hospital once again.

“Why are you doing all this again?” I asked as he got ready to give a child his shot.

After inserting the syringe and taking it out, he handed the child a lollipop.

“Your father told me how this place was your mother’s and his dream. But you’ve already bought into the dream as yours,” he said. “Now I want to do whatever it takes to make sure that dream doesn’t die.”

He said it with the biggest smile I’ve ever seen and it got me.

“But it’s not even your dream,” I said. “Don’t you have yours?”

He thought about it. “I guess it’s to become a successful medical doctor. But I’ve already achieved that.”

“You don’t even have a dream,” I remarked.

I understood that he had reached a level of success where he didn’t have to have any more dreams, but was that advisable?

“It doesn’t mean it’s a bad thing though,” he said. “It means I can easily find a new dream.”

“And what will that be?” I asked.

“Two things, but I can only tell you one now,” he affirmed.

“My dream is to see you achieve your dream of making this place successful. I know you can do it; I’ve watched you work

at it. With my help, I believe you can do it. You just have to trust me.”

“You’re awfully confident in me,” I chuckled nervously. “I even doubt myself a lot of times when I try to get things done.”

“You just need a solid support system,” he said. “Now I may be clumsy, but I’m the most solid support system you’ll ever have.”

He wasn’t lying. He let the kid go his mother.

“Shall we check where else would need our help?” he asked and got up to leave the room.

As we inspected the other rooms, I watched everyone greet him with joy and excitement; he returned with the same excitement.

“Ethan, the girls and I were wondering,” Cecilia, one of the nurses, called him aside. “We’ve been thinking, do you have a girlfriend?”

“Uh, no. Not yet,” he replied.

“Not yet? So you’re searching?” she asked, her voice hinting at desperation and hope.

“No, I’ve actually found her,” he said, “but I’m waiting for her to find me too.”

“Oh, lucky her,” she sighed. “Well, if she doesn’t find you, I will.”

“Whatever you say, Cecilia,” he said nervously.

She grinned and left the both of us.

“The bold ones like that actually scare me,” he said with a sigh.

“You’ve found her?” I grinned.

“Yes,” he replied and walked toward me; towered over me easily. “She’s just the one left to find me.”

“Understandable,” I sighed. “I’ll be leaving before you. My father will not be back today either, unfortunately. We need to have a talk.”

He looked worried. Maybe because of the way I said it. Well, it wasn't bad. The fear would help him take things a little more seriously than normally.

"I'll see you there then," he said.

"Alright."

I left ahead of him. Opening my box, I found the dress and lingerie I had worn five months ago. He never got to experience them, thanks to what had happened that day. I wanted to make things right again and actually go through what I had originally planned. That and hearing him share what had happened to him made me realize that I needed to speak my mind.

Ethan

I couldn't help but wonder what Stacy wanted to talk to me about. Judging by the way she sounded, I was worried that I had committed another crime I was unaware of it. When I arrived at her house, I knocked. She opened the door, wearing a dress that highlighted her features. It gave off a sexy yet formal vibe. Maybe it was my perverted mind thinking about it that way but, the dress looked easy to take off.

She stood with her hands behind her back and swayed from left to right.

“You actually came,” she said and placed a hand on her hip.

I was a little too stunned to speak.

“God you’re so beautiful,” I finally said.

“Thank you,” she said with a warm smile. “Come in.”

I followed along, completely oblivious to my earlier fear.

“Let’s go to my room,” she said as she led the way.

We arrived at her room, and she opened the door. It was neatly arranged, laden with pictures of her growing up along with her awards from sports and science.

“You’re one intelligent lady,” I remarked.

“Got it from my mom,” she said as she sat on the bed, then lay on her back and crossed her legs.

Her thighs were showing off nicely.

“You’re not going to lay next to me?” she asked.

“Don’t mind if I do,” I said as I lay down next to her. “What did you mean when you said you had something to talk to me about?”

“I had an ex-boyfriend,” she said. “He cheated on me. To date I don’t know the reason why. Maybe he realized how unsatisfied I was after having sex with him, or maybe he felt I was too good for him. I don’t know. But besides the dissatisfaction with the sex, he was a good boyfriend. And by all standards, I was an excellent girlfriend. Despite all the love I gave him, he still cheated on me.”

“Why tell me this?” I asked.

“I wasn’t really bothered at first by all your past lovers and all,” she explained. “But if you really want to get seriously with me, you have to promise not to betray me.”

“Is that all?” I asked. “You have my absolute word that my eyes will not stray. They belong to you alone. Besides, I finally find someone who loves me despite all my faults; I wouldn’t be stupid enough to let her down.”

“You’re so good with your words that it actually scares me,” she said with a chuckle.

“Does that mean...”

“Yes, I have found you,” she said. “We’ll take things slow and keep it under wraps.”

“That makes sense,” I agreed. “If anyone finds out, it might be a little troublesome.”

I recalled a case concerning Olivia and her stalker ex-boyfriend.

“Anything else?” I asked.

“I have a feeling that you can’t satisfy my urges,” she teased.

Stacy

He got on me and my heartbeat increased in a fraction of a second.

“Want to test that theory?” he asked as his finger traced my lips.

“You’re on,” I whispered.

He held my face and brought his lips closer and closer until we touched. It was warmer than any other kiss I had received in the past. He held my thighs and spread them open, allowing him to lie properly on me. He still held my thighs, slowly caressing them as we continued the kiss. We paused and stared deeply into each other's eyes. I placed my hand on his face.

“One more,” I requested.

He kissed me again.

“One more,” I pleaded.

He kissed me again as his hand held my waist.

“Deeper, more, please,” I begged as I wrapped my arms around his neck.

He kissed me, even more passionately this time. I felt his tongue in my mouth circling with mine, turning my brain into gooey mush. He helped me out of my dress. He sucked gently on my tongue while his hand caressed my stomach gently. I didn't care that he was slowly taking off my bra. He kissed my stomach, then my hands and shoulders before settling to bite into my neck.

I helped him take off his shirt and got the opportunity to take a good look at his well-toned muscles. His pecs were firm and his abs hard. I embraced him tightly as my hands caressed his back while he inhaled the fragrance from my shampoo.

He kissed my forehead, and I kissed his chest and neck. Our lips made contact; it was hard to stop anymore. My panties and bra, his shirt and pants, along with boxer briefs, made their contact with the floor and formed a pile. I was already soaking wet and ready to go. He greeted my waiting pussy with his dick. It felt like it had been decades since I had anything in me.

“Did you get tighter?” he asked.

“You definitely got bigger, not me,” I admitted, and I wasn’t kidding.

He could barely fit in me; it felt like the last time we had sex. He held my legs and sent them to my shoulders.

“Much better,” he said and got between my legs.

He started to suck on my pussy, his tongue focused entirely on my clit.

“Aah...” I moaned in pleasure at his intensity.

He was relentless and attacked full on. He continued to suck gently until he was satisfied with my juices.

“You should be ready now,” he said.

He tried again, and this time, he got in smoothly.

“Oh...fuck....”

His girth slowly expanded my walls.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“Give me a sec,” I replied as he waited, allowing my insides to adjust properly to the invader.

“Okay,” I replied, “take me.”

He started to move, acting according to my demands. As he moved faster and faster, his face winced in pain as he hit the edge of my womb.

“God please...” I pleaded as he continued to plunge deeper and deeper.

“Stacy, God you’re so fucking good,” he praised and kissed my neck.

“Turn,” he said. “I want to see that ass of yours.”

I obeyed, turning as slowly as I could while his dick was still in me. It felt like my insides were spinning. As I got on my knees, he held my hips and gave a powerful thrust.

“Oh my goodness, Ethan!” I yelled.

“Look at the recoil on this,” he said before spanking me hard on the ass.

I squeezed the bed. I never did like spanking, but this time it actually felt good.

“Do you like this?” he asked. He gave me another spanking on my other cheek while I was struggling trying to move my hips properly.

“I... I...” I struggled to answer.

“I can’t hear you, Stacy...”

Smack.

Smack.

Smack!

“I love it...I love it...” I admitted and started to move my hips in response to his bullying.

“You’re a good girl, Stacy,” he praised as his grunting grew even louder.

I almost passed out. At one point, I wasn’t even hearing anything anymore. I had given in completely to the pleasure. Even when he fucked me while I stood or when we switched into the scissors position...or when I gave him a reverse cowgirl ride.

I was completely gone. He was in me for almost two hours, consuming me hungrily; it felt like he hadn’t experienced anything quite like this. I knew for a fact that no one had ever given me the sexual satisfaction he gave. Maybe teasing him was going a little too far.

“That was...” he said as he finally stopped to let us catch our breaths.

“Amazing,” I completed his statement as I hugged him.

“Maybe I should go back to the guest house, I don’t want to be attacked by a human-sized bedbug,” he teased.

“Don’t you dare go anywhere,” I warned. “And don’t worry it was a one-time thing.”

“I see. That makes me feel better,” he sighed and stroked my hair. “Stacy?” he began.

“Yeah?”

“I love you,” he said. “I couldn’t say it before, but what better time to say it than now?”

“I love you too Ethan,” I replied as my eyes slowly drifted off to sleep, the sign of a well-deserved climax.

Ethan

I had the best night of my life. Stacy and I were finally together. She did bite me, though...in her sleep after she promised she wouldn’t. Sigh. All women do is lie. Well at least she wasn’t lying about loving me. And that was all that mattered.

Chapter Fourteen

Life Anew

E than

Describe new. “New” is a realm of possibility, a canvas awaiting the artist’s first stroke. It is a blank page yearning for words to fill its void. It’s the crisp morning air on an unexplored trail and the unopened book on the shelf whispering tales yet untold.

“New” is a fleeting spark of excitement, a rush of nerves, and the promise of uncharted territory. In the realm of experiences, “new” is the leap into the unknown. It’s the first day at a job that holds the key to unimagined challenges and triumphs. It’s the taste of exotic cuisine that dances on taste buds, evoking unanticipated flavors. It’s the unfamiliar melody that captures the heart, inviting it to sway to rhythms never before encountered.

For me, it was this pounding of my heart whenever I saw her. It made me realize just how blind I had been before I realized something like “genuine love” existed for someone as clumsy as I was. Whenever I got to the hospital, her face was the one I looked forward to seeing before anyone else’s. And almost like the universe heard my inner prayers, whenever I arrived she would be the first I’d meet. She had a different choice of outfit each day under her white coat; each highlighted her curves properly while exuding an aura of professionalism.

For instance...

“Are you just going to stand there all day?” Stacy asked as she placed her hair behind her ear. She wore a black blouse and a matching skirt, without her usual lab coat. She was the most beautiful thing I had seen all day.

“Staring at you may have given me temporal paralysis,” I said with the corniest smile I could offer.

She stared at me blankly; I could tell she was struggling to keep a straight face.

As she couldn’t hold it in anymore, she let out the laughter and playfully punched my arm. “That was the cheesiest thing I’ve ever heard you say.”

“So that’s good, right?” I wiggled my brows.

“Maybe,” she smirked. “Now, enough talk. Let’s get to work.”

I watched her walk away. Her hips swayed, gently and almost hypnotically, until she stopped walking.

“Mister,” she called and covered her behind with her hands.

“Yeah?”

““You’re staring too hard,” she replied.

“Well, it’s hard not to,” I sighed. “Your body keeps demanding that I look.”

“Well, thank you for listening to her. But you’re making me a little conscious,” she said with a bashful expression. “Just not too hard, okay?”

Adorable. She’s simply adorable.

“Yeah, I’ll try,” I said, offering no promises.

As she approached her office, she stopped and touched her behind, rubbing it sensually. She turned and revealed a

seductive look in her eyes, almost as if she were taunting me.

Then she mouthed, “You’re. Staring. Too. Hard,” before going in.

At that moment, my staring was the hard part. I tried to calm myself by naming the different kinds of cells in the human body. It worked, and I tried not to think about her.

My phone rang; it was Ben.

“Yes?” I answered.

“Hmm? You sound different,” he said.

“It’s your imagination,” I replied and started heading for my station.

“Good morning doctor,” some of the patients greeted.

I offered a warm smile and a nod in return and giggled in excitement.

I’ve still got it.

“Women still fawn over you?” he asked. “I thought by now they would disappear.”

“Even if they fawn, I have no interest in them anymore,” I replied in a hushed tone.

The last thing I wanted was to cause any unwanted heartbreaks; this would make the treatment process harder.

“I’m really impressed. How is Stacy doing?” he asked.

“We’ve been doing very well. Henry isn’t back yet,” I answered. “I’ve been pretty much managing things here.”

“When are you getting back to Richmond?” he asked. “I understand your interest in her hospital, but your vacation is almost over, if I’m not mistaken.”

“A week or two. You needed me for something?” I asked.

*Olivia and I will be traveling. Ian isn’t around; Mom isn’t either. I was wondering if you would like to help out,” he replied. “I would rather have a family member watch over Chloe. You two are on good terms now.”

“Alright then, you two love birds can leave the nest. I’ll take care of things.” I assured him. “Just let me know exactly when

you'd be leaving.”

“I will,” he said. “Ethan?”

“Yeah?”

“Are you happy?” he asked. “I know how apprehensive you are concerning love. It's still a bit...what's the word? The point is, I want to make sure everything is going smoothly “

“I am happy,” I replied with all honesty. “I want this to continue a little longer.”

“Good. You'll be fine,” he assured me before hanging up.

Of course, I'll be fine.

“Are you adjusting to life here properly?” James asked.

We might have saved his life, but I liked patients who survived to return to make sure I missed nothing. Ninety-nine percent of the time, nothing was out of the ordinary, and this was one of those times.

“Nothing out of the ordinary,” I said. I took off the stethoscope and let him cover his chest while I wrote down my observations. “I haven’t gotten the chance to actually explore this town properly.”

“Really? I heard that you were lost some days back,” he said. I almost dropped my pad.

“News travels fast, doesn’t it?” I chuckled.

“It’s a small community. News is required to go around fast,” he replied with a soft smirk.

“That’s not really helpful for my heart,” I said pointedly. I don’t want people in the community to know about my clumsy nature.

Well, I had been improving thanks to Stacy, so it wasn’t as bad as it used to be.

“It’s not really a bad thing,” he said. “Tell you what, there’s a farmer market event today. You can come by this evening. With Stacy, of course.”

“Farmer’s market? I don’t think my guest house will let me bring in outside food.

“You don’t have to buy anything. Or even if you do, you can take them to Stacy’s,” he explained. “You two can pick up something.” He added a wink at the end of his statement, making it a bit suggestive.

“What are you getting at?” I asked.

“Small town, remember? Almost everyone knows that you have the hots for her. You don’t do a good job of hiding it,” he said.

Did someone see me staring hard?

“Don’t worry; we’re actually happy about it. You don’t see Stacy hanging out with anyone,” he continued. “Henry has been worried about it. She’s making her mother’s dream a reality. Nothing wrong with that, but she’s still a young lady. As Henry’s drinking buddy, I’ve also been worried about her. But she’s found you, and that’s what’s important to us.”

The man smiled. Maybe it was the terror of almost losing his life, but he was sporting a few gray hairs. The smile on his face was genuine.

“You all love her a lot,” I said.

“Apparently, not as much as you do,” he said. “Swing around the market along with her this evening.”

“Thank you. I will,” I promised.

He gave a nod and got up to leave after I was done giving him some instructions. As he left, I checked my wrist; it was already a few minutes to four pm. I went to check on Stacy. She was in her office, wholly immersed in her work. Her hand was furiously scribbling away at the reports. Her face was comprised of nothing but pure seriousness. She had air pods on, and I couldn't help but wonder what kind of music she enjoyed.

She has given me a chance to start all over again, and I still had no idea what the majority of her life outside work looked like. Maybe because she consistently reported to work. According to the nurses, she never took leaves and was always in the hospital.

James was right; she needed to find something else to do. I didn't want to interrupt her, so I leaned against the door and continued to watch her. It was nice to do so. At some point, she'd start humming the songs or mumbling the lyrics.

I've never witnessed anyone sing *The Shape of You* with a beautiful voice—but so incorrectly. I didn't want to laugh. It

was refreshing to see the serious Stacy Roberts, having a moment. After a few minutes, she finally noticed me and paused the music.

“How long have you been standing there?” she asked with suspicion.

“Ahem,” I cleared my throat and placed my hand on my chest, “Da da da dum dum dum dum, I’m in love with your body. Two songs before that.”

“Why didn’t you say anything?!” She covered her face in embarrassment. “God, you’re an idiot, Ethan.”

“And you’re a talented woman, Stacy. You can open the diner, run the hospital, and even perform as an artist,” I continued to poke at her.

“Stooooop,” she started to laugh and looked away. “You’re making me cringe from imagining it. Who would even want to listen to me sing?”

I leaned in and held her chin, making her face me. “I’ll gladly pay to listen to you sing all day.”

Her eyes scanned my face, moved to my lips, and then back to my eyes.

“You sure?” she asked, almost in a whisper.

I kissed her lips softly. “Positively.”

She licked her lips and kissed me again, biting my lower lip and flicking against it with her tongue, before kissing me deeply again and letting me go.

“I assume that I’ll be expecting a private concert?” I said as she pulled away.

“Maybe,” she smirked. “Now what did you come here for, besides listening to me sing?”

“I want us to go to the farmer’s market event,” I replied.

“Was that today?” she asked. “I haven’t been in one of those since I finished high school.”

“So let’s go together,” I suggested.

“But what if there are patients that need my attention?” she asked with a hesitant look.

“You don’t have to worry about that. I’ve trained the staff and trust me, they know what they’re doing,” I replied.

“But, I need to...”

“Stacy, you’re leaving with me. Now,” I said. “Understood?”

She looked like she was about to protest. I placed my hand on her head, twisting a few strands of her hair around my finger, “You’re coming with me, Stacy. No questions or excuses.”

“Right,” she said as she swallowed hard.

“Good,” I nodded. “You already look gorgeous, so I just have to fix myself.”

“Alright,” she said as I started to take off my lab coat.

Stacy

The last time I visited the farmer’s market was with both my parents. We never missed a week, and I learned how to cook, using that experience. Try as I may, I couldn’t beat my father’s cooking and neither could Mom. But it’s what made it fun.

After she died, I became so focused on the hospital and inheriting it that I didn't have time to fool around anymore. Dad had tried getting me to go many times, but I didn't see any reason to. I'd give excuses about how much work I wanted to get done, but I was sure there weren't any patients who'd come in the very moment I stepped out.

The excuses had held up in the prior years before Ethan. He ordered me to follow him, and I didn't dare disobey. I had a feeling he was going to physically drag me out of my office if I refused to follow him. I waited for him to get ready. He was dressed in business attire: gray pencil pants that worked perfectly for his physique paired a black long-sleeved dress shirt that opened at the neck, revealing a white undershirt. He folded the sleeves of both hands, revealing arms that had seen the intensity of a recent rigorous gym schedule.

"Forgot my comb," he said as he ran his fingers backward through his hair in an attempt to smooth it out. It didn't really work and instead left him with his signature messy yet sexy brunette coif.

"You're still seated?" he asked as he turned to me.

"Oh, sorry..." I apologized and got up to change. I was so lost looking at him that I had forgotten to take off my lab coat.

I took it off, and he stretched his hand to me, “Shall we?”

The heartbeat of Glen Allen resided in its vibrant local events. The town square transformed into a bustling tapestry during the weekly farmers’ market, where vendors became storytellers, their wares narrating tales of far-off lands and local harvests. Colorful tents dotted the landscape, sheltering a treasure trove of artisanal crafts and tantalizing treats. Amid the hum of conversations, friendships blossomed over shared interests and the communal appreciation for creativity.

Ethan was enjoying every second of it. His eyes lit up like a child’s after being given their favorite treat.

“Cotton candy,” he pointed at the stand.

“I’m watching my weight...I haven’t been able to work out,” I pronounced.

He shrugged and bought one, bringing it back for the both of us to share.

“I’ll eat most of it, but I don’t want to eat alone,” he said with pleading eyes as he plucked a piece and waved the sugary treat at me.

“Fine then.” I sighed and opened my mouth, letting him feed me.

I held my face as the sugar rose to my cheeks, tinting them pink.

“There we go,” he said. “There are a lot more things to do.”

As he led me through the stalls, I started to wonder if I was the one from the city. He had befriended a lot of the people he regularly spoke to at the hospital, and they all gave him the gift of fresh produce.

“You’re quite popular now,” I said as he handed me one of the bananas he had received from a vendor.

“Are you impressed?” he asked with a smug look.

“I’m just impressed that...”

I hadn’t finished speaking when he bumped into a child whose candy apple fell to the floor.

“I was about to say that I am impressed that nobody realizes that you’re clumsy.” I completed my statement as he looked lost.

“Here,” he offered the boy an apple and an additional ten dollars. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright. I’m sorry I wasn’t watching where I was going,” the boy apologized and accepted Ethan’s offering. “Thank you, sir.”

“Don’t mention it; just be more careful, okay?” Ethan requested.

The boy nodded enthusiastically before running off.

“There, the secret is safe,” Ethan said.

I shook my head negatively and smiled. “You really are something else, aren’t you?”

“I get that a lot,” he said. “But you love me all the same, right?”

“I do,” I admitted with a wide smile.

The night wasn’t over. There were games to play, and he lost almost all of them due to silly mistakes.

He intended to get me a big teddy bear, but all he could manage was a tiny bear keychain. Ethan sulked about it, but it was the effort that mattered. We continued to explore the event, trying as many food stalls as we could, making me forget about my plan of watching my weight. We enjoyed playing games, and I even got to watch Ethan dance. For someone so clumsy, I half expected two left feet, but he knew what he was doing.

It was fun...the most fun I had had in years. After the night sky started to darken and the people present became fewer, it was time to leave. We took a walk, with no destination in mind...just his hand holding mine. His shoulder became my support structure. We were quiet, each step we took reminding us of our experience at the farmer's event...until we got back to my house.

“Here we are,” he said as he stared at the building. “Thank you for a wonderful evening.”

“I should be the one thanking you,” I said. “I had forgotten how much fun these things used to be.”

“Why did you stop?” he asked.

“I don't know. Maybe I felt that it wasn't going to be the same without Mom around,” I replied. “And I still want the hospital

to thrive; so, I couldn't afford to slack off."

"Stacy..." he called as he placed his hand on my right cheek, stroking it carefully with his thumb. "I understand the drive to achieve your dream, but there are moments you'll miss if you don't take a break."

"I know, I know. But still..."

"It's not really a but thing," he said. "It's how things are supposed to be. You'll burn out, otherwise. Promise me you'll take more breaks."

"I probably won't," I admitted. "If someone forces me to, it's a different case."

"Is that an invitation?" he asked.

I had just said the words without really thinking about it. But hearing what I said, it did sound like I was asking him to do it.

"Well... maybe," I offered and shrugged.

"I'll make sure you pause and relax," he assured me as he let go of my face. "You should go in. It's getting cold."

Just then, a gust of wind blew, sending chills down my spine. I nodded and made my way to the door. I was about to open it when he called out, “Stacy?”

I turned to find him still standing in the driveway.

“Yeah?” I replied.

“I love you,” he said. “I love you so much.”

His words seeped through my skin, and my heart fluttered. He wasn't lying. All his actions up to that moment were proof that he was being genuine. And me? It was clear as day. I no longer saw him as the man who had hurt me. I saw a man ready to save lives, who was clumsy yet trying to improve, a man who could be playful but at the same time take things seriously. He was a man who had been trying to win my affection all over again.

I can't count the number of times I've felt his passionate gaze. Or the mornings when I put extra thought into my outfit for the day, knowing he'd be excited to see me in something new. The jealous pangs would strike my heart whenever I saw any of the nurses or female doctors getting chummy with him.

The feeling of pride would take over when he politely turned them down or ignored them. The jealous or pouting look on

his face whenever I would laugh at a male patient's joke was intense. I, who was always focused on trying to take over the hospital, was torn—one part of me supremely conscious of Ethan Sullivan.

“I love you too,” I confessed.

It was dark, with nothing but porch lights and the moon illuminating the area. But the smile on his face shone brightly. He chuckled and covered his mouth as he tried to suppress the grin that held his face hostage. How could someone so handsome become instantly adorable at the same time?

I stared at the foodstuffs in my hand that we had gotten from the market and an idea formed in my mind.

“Would you come in for dinner?” I invited him.

“I already had enough to eat. I don't think I can eat anymore,” he replied while rubbing his tummy.

“But you can cook for me,” I said, still hoping he would get the hint.

“My cooking is terrible,” he sighed.

I sighed, opened the door, then let myself in. Before I closed the door, I took a look at him and he waved. Yeah, he didn't get it.

"Ethan, why do you think I asked you to come over for dinner?" I asked.

"You want me to eat?" he guessed and raised a brow.

"I wanted you to spend the night," I corrected. "But it's fine."

"Wait...why didn't you just say that?" he asked as he made his way to the door to leave.

I shut the door and locked it.

"Stacy come on, I didn't know," he said and knocked repeatedly.

I sighed. "You really are helpless, aren't you?"

Clumsy and a man who didn't pick up on most social clues... yet talented, handsome, and the most caring man I knew. I really did love him.

Ethan

Stacy didn't let me in. I sighed and started making my way to the guest house. I thought about everything that had happened so far. Stacy, who was a stabilizing force to my clumsy nature, loved me back.

When I said the words, "I love you", I had flashbacks of the time I told someone else the same thing, and a part of me worried that I would get a repeat response. But as she said she loved me too, my heart melted with pure joy. As I walked down the street, I started to wrack my brain: how best could I help her with her dream.

"Maybe it's time I called out the big gun," I said to myself.

Chapter Fifteen

The Best Way to Save Her Dream

E than

My vacation time was over, but I had yet to return to Richmond for two reasons: Stacy was still in Glenn Allen, and I still hadn't figured out how exactly I wanted to help her hospital. The hospital was doing fine, as I was there to help out. If I left, even with all the new equipment I had offered, most people might stop coming.

I had done my part: I had trained the nurses and even made some of the regular patients not rely on me too much. All this was an avenue to make the hospital's structures sustainable. There were still items of equipment the building needed, but I couldn't just keep buying everything; it would make Stacy think I wasn't letting her get a handle on things.

In helping someone achieve their dreams, you must let them have their own part to play; and that part should be the major

one; or else, the dream is no longer theirs, but yours.

“You’ve done a lot for this old place, and I’m really grateful,” Henry said. “You even helped save James’ life. How can I ever repay you?”

Henry had returned from his downtown visit and was in a casual meeting with me.

“You don’t have to repay me or anything. The fact that I got to learn while helping out is enough,” I assured him.

“Your flattery is a major selling point,” he said with a sigh. “So, what’s the verdict? Are you still buying the place?”

I glanced over at Stacy. She looked away and focused outside the window.

“I would love to,” I said. I saw her shoulders twitch and she hugged herself, rubbing her arms like she had a chill. “But I don’t think it’s what you want. If I buy it, it becomes mine and ceases to be yours.”

She turned to look at me, her face a mixture of confusion and appreciation.

“I take it you haven’t been able to convince her,” Henry said.
“I thought as I was away, you would have found a way to.”

Well, I was trying to convince her...just not regarding the hospital—for more of a selfish reason. That may have involved her becoming my love interest.

“Well, I didn’t really put in that much effort. We were both occupied trying to make sure the hospital ran smoothly,” I explained. It wasn’t a lie, just half-truth. “Right, Stacy?”

“Why ask me?” she said and looked away.

I smirked as I noticed her ears redden.

“But what do we do now?” Henry said and sighed. “I don’t know how long I’m going to handle this. I plan on retiring soon, anyway.”

“Stacy and I will figure something out,” I assured him. “I’ll talk to her.”

“She’s a stubborn one,” he said, preparing to depart. “But whatever decision she comes up with, I’ll agree to it. Even if it means not selling the hospital anymore.”

“Dad,” Stacy called out.

“It’s a parent’s job to help their children achieve their dreams,” he said. “If this is truly yours, then I won’t stop you anymore. Besides, you seem a lot different now. I’m sure things will be okay given the way everything is going.”

He gave me a knowing smile. “I heard you two went to the farmer’s market event.”

He knows.

“That was just to make sure he didn’t get lost like last time,” Stacy said in her defense.

Defending right now doesn’t help things.

I shrugged and added, “Whatever she says.”

“Right,” he smiled. “I’m going home now. The hotel beds are nothing like the ones at home.”

“I couldn’t agree more.” I frowned as I remembered my difficulty sleeping in the guest house.

One of the major reasons I was glad the vacation was over, so I could get a proper bed back in Richmond.

I had also made a mental note to buy new beds and donate them to the place for my next visit, along with recipes and ingredients for food that can be served to humans.

Henry nodded and left the both of us alone. Stacy let out a sigh walked away from the window and stood in front of the anatomy model. I got up and walked over to her. I placed my chin on her shoulder and hugged her from behind.

“Lift your head,” she said.

I did as she said, and she leaned back placing her head under my chin. She touched my arms. I tightened my embrace and pulled her to my chest.

“Am I that stubborn?” she asked.

“Yes,” I replied without a second of hesitation.

“You could have just said no,” she said and chuckled softly.

I kissed her hair. “The stubbornness is part of the reason I’m in love with you.”

“You don’t hesitate to say how you feel,” she remarked.

“Should I hesitate?” I whispered into her ear, and her body shuddered. “Are you okay?”

“Your voice reverbs through my body,” she said and pressed her behind against my groin. “That’s a pretty dangerous move against a woman who’s supposed to be ovulating.”

“Is that so?” I asked as I lowered my left hand and squeezed her thigh. “Is this okay?”

“Mm...” she groaned and pulled herself away. She lay on the bed used for examinations. “My thighs hurt. Help, please?”

I cracked my knuckles and got ready to dig in. “It’s not love if I can’t help the one I care about when she’s in pain.”

“Just get over here,” she demanded and started to kick her feet.

“Whatever you say,” I smirked as I walked over to her.

She wasn’t wearing her lab coat any more, just a sexy dress that hugged her body nicely. It stopped a few inches above her knees. I placed my hands on her calves, pressing and kneading gently. It was almost unreal how soft her body was. I continued my massage while she hummed a relaxing tune. I recalled she complained about her thighs, so I decided to focus

on them. I moved my hand upward and under her dress. Her soft flesh sinking into my hands easily was bliss.

“How come you’re good at this?” she asked.

“Practice,” I replied.

“With other women I presume?” she asked.

“I was a different man back then,” I answer honestly. “Trust me. It’s all in the past.”

“I know,” she said. “In a way, I feel bad for them, I’m sure most of them would have wanted to be in a relationship with you.”

“If I were Ian or Ben, then yes,” I said. “Ultimately, none will want to be with a clumsy man.”

“Their loss. My win,” she said proudly. “You may be hopeless sometimes, but you’re the man I fell in love with...with everything that’s wrong with you and right with you.”

She said I was the one who didn’t hesitate to say what I felt! At that moment, I was glad that I was a clumsy person. I wouldn’t have met someone like her if I were... normal.

“Thank you, for loving all of me,” I said. “It feels nice being talked about like that.”

“Don’t thank me,” she remarked.

“I still feel like I have to,” I said and leaned in, planting a kiss on the back of her thighs, making her body tense up.

“Silly you,” she said as I lifted her dress to reveal her underwear.

I swallowed and got to work on her ass, kneading gently. I heard her whimper, but she covered her mouth immediately to make sure I didn’t hear it.

“Ahem, about the hospital, you meant what you said about not wanting to buy it anymore?” she asked.

Changing the topic to hide the shame, aren't we?

“I meant it,” I replied. “But I have to ask: if you really want to make this place succeed, wouldn’t allowing me to buy it make things better?”

She was quiet, swaying her hips gently.

“I’m sure it would be easier, but I don’t want it that way,” she replied.

“Want to tell me why?” I requested as I spread her cheeks and continued the kneading.

“It’s a deep conversation, so you might want to pause the massage a little,” she suggested.

I sat on the bed and covered her up, “I’m listening.”

Stacy

Although the massage was causing a different reaction (the kind that would demand he be inside me, instantly), this was a serious moment.

I started to narrate my reason.

When I was a kid, my mother would tell me about how she always wanted to start her own hospital. She had worked for it and met someone who bought into the dream. That someone was my father. With the two of them working together, she was able to build the hospital of her dreams.

It was the best option for anyone living here. Mom loved her job and took charge of it easily. It was her dream and she was

living it properly. I can't count how many times I would just sit aside and watch her doing her work. The way she would treat patients like they were her family. No matter what the case was, she always made anyone she attended to feel like they were going to survive or become better.

I wanted something like that. A job where I would enjoy myself, just doing it. So, I chose to study medicine when I was done with high school and help out with the hospital any way I could. It was the only way I knew how to help. But Mom and Dad were hiding something from me.

She had cancer. It didn't stop her, though. She would still attend to patients while going through her medications as well. That's how dedicated she was to this place. I wasn't sure why she was that dedicated to this place, but she told me it was her dream to see this place become somewhere that everyone in the community and beyond would be able to access medical services. So when she died, and the hospital was getting fewer patients, with everyone heading downtown, it felt like that dream was coming to an end.

This hospital was an extension of my mother, just the way my dad and I were to her. I feel like if I sold this place, it would be like I had given up on her dream and severed the little of what was left of her. Dad wants me to pause and find something else, but I don't know why he's giving up on what the both of them have built.

I don't want to give up just yet until I'm sure that I've exhausted all my options. Selling it is too much of a shortcut. Stubborn, yes but it's what I've decided to do.

I was done explaining, and I turned to look at him. I was unable to read what he was thinking. But at least he didn't look at me like I was out of my mind.

“Can I be honest?” he asked.

I turned to lay on my back, “Go ahead.”

“I think I understand why your father wants to focus on something else. It's not a bad intention but...”

“I'm chasing after someone else's dream?” I asked.

“Yes, but that's not it,” he replied. “Think about what happened to your mother. She had cancer; yet she still went to work when she should have been focusing on getting her health checked out. It's an admirable feat, no doubt, but not really a wise one.”

“Are you saying what she did was dumb?”

“No, it’s not like that. One shouldn’t chase a dream so hard that they forget to wake up and pay attention to their surroundings,” he explained. “Be honest, when she was aware of her case, did your mom spend more time with your dad and you, or did she spend more time here?”

I paused and thought about it, “Here.”

“And were you really happy? Imagine you knew she had cancer; would you want her to continue working non-stop?” he asked.

I didn’t know she had cancer until it became serious. She spent a lot of time in the hospital for me to even notice. If I knew, would my eyes of admiration dim? Or would they shift to worry?

“I wouldn’t...I would want her to stop and focus on us,” I admitted as I sat up and hugged my knees.

“Stacy, you have a beautiful dream,” he said softly, “but you have to make sure you’re focusing on other things as well. Stop for a second and observe your life.”

Ethan was right. Why did it take this long for me to realize that this was what my father meant?

“I didn’t really think about it that way. I just thought he wanted me to stop,” I said.

“He didn’t want you chasing after a dream that wasn’t yours,” he explained. “Now that you’ve made it clear that the dream clearly belongs to you, he wants you to focus on the beautiful things life has to offer beyond the four corners of this hospital.”

“Like what?” I raised a brow.

“Me,” he replied with a smile as he poked my nose.

I giggled at his silly gesture. “You’re definitely right about that.”

“Now as much as I want you to lie down and let me continue touch—I mean, *massage* you. I want to ask you for a favor,” he said.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Will you come back to Richmond with me?” he requested. “My time here is up, and I need to make sure everything has been going smoothly in my absence. Also, I want us to consult with someone who’s more successful than I am, concerning your hospital situation.”

“One question: if you really want me to follow my father’s advice and focus on you, why not just buy the place?” I asked.

“Because you won’t like that choice,” he said. “It’s not in my nature to do anything that makes the person I’m in love with become unhappy. Wanting you to focus on me doesn’t mean you should sacrifice your dreams entirely. You’re a strong woman. I’m pretty confident that you can love your career and me at the same time. I just want some extra love, that’s all.”

I couldn’t stop myself from grinning. “You sure do know how to make me feel like a high school girl in love.”

“Wait, you aren’t secretly a high school student, are you?” He raised a brow suspiciously.

“Stop being silly,” I punched his shoulder, then pushed him to lie on his back. I got on top of him and pinned his shoulders down. He stared at me with a smile. He was vulnerable, for me.

I leaned in and kissed him, letting go of his shoulders and just holding his face in my hands. He secured my hips and returned with a kiss deeper than mine. Time seemed to slow down; it felt like we weren’t in the hospital room anymore. His tongue

sneaked its way past my lips and found its way into my mouth, letting me suck on him gently.

I love this.

We finally let go of each other and his eyes looked dilated, drunk on the pleasure of the kiss.

He caressed my head gently and smiled, “You look drunk.”

“Have you looked in the mirror?” I asked.

“I’ll just stare into your eyes,” he said in the cheesiest way.

I closed my eyes and puckered my lips, but he kissed my eyelids instead.

“Weirdo,” I said as I tried to get up, but his hand went lower and held my ass, sinking his fingers into the flesh.

“Stay,” he demanded.

I didn’t argue and just lay on him, letting him have his way with my innocent behind, while I listened to his heartbeat. At that moment, I wasn’t bothered about what was going on in the hospital. I just wanted to lie on him.

Maybe I should just let him handle this.

Judging by what he said, all he would do was offer me help and let me handle the rest on my own.

I appreciated that.

“So, who is this expert we’re seeing?” I asked.

Ethan

“Visit soon,” Henry said to Stacy.

Word had gotten around that I was leaving, so a small crowd had formed around Stacy’s place. Patients and their relatives came to bid farewell and offer well wishes. It felt good to have that many people come out to support me.

What the hell, I might actually miss this place.

“You’re saying that like I’m never going to come back,” Stacy said.

“Well, it may be a possibility,” he shrugged as he looked over at me.

Yeah...he knows, alright.

There's no intuition sharper than a parent craving grandkids.

"You'll come back right?" Helen, the owner of the inn I stayed at asked. "I'll have a discount for you."

"Thank you, Helen," I said with a smile.

Hopefully, I won't forget to donate the beds.

"I love you too, Dad," Stacy said and kissed her father's cheek before meeting up with me.

As we got into the car I waved goodbye one last time to the kind citizens who had shown up for us.

"Remind me when we get to Richmond to buy some beds," I said to Stacy as she fastened her seatbelt.

"Huh? Why?"

I missed Richmond. Downtown wasn't that far from Glenn Allen, which explains why people from there wanted to come

down here instead. There had to be a way to fix things. As we arrived, our first stop was Ben's hospital.

"Well, there's a face I've only seen a few times," Olivia said as she put down her notepad.

She was dressed in casual clothes and her stomach was swollen.

"Are you here for antenatal care or today is D-day?" I asked.

"Yes and it's not for another four months," she said. "You look good."

"Thank you," I said. "You remember Stacy?"

"Hello," Stacy greeted her warmly. "It's good to see you again. I trust you had a wonderful exchange experience."

"Wonderful is an understatement," Olivia said as she rubbed her baby bump with a proud look on her face. "Are you here to see him?"

"Yes, I need his advice on something," I replied.

She exchanged glances between the two of us, "Oh..."

“Not like that, Olivia,” I sighed.

“My, my...whatever do you mean by *not like that*,” she teased.

“It’s nothing,” I sighed. “Is he around?”

“Yes, you can’t miss him,” she replied. “You might want to knock first, though.”

“Huh? Why?” I raised a brow.

“Oh, I understand,” Stacy said and pulled on my hand. “I’ll handle it.”

After knocking and getting the affirmation from my brother to come in, I found him with his hair in a mess and his first two buttons undone.

“What happened to you exactly?” I asked as I sat and motioned for Stacy to take a chair.

“Pregnancy,” he replied. “Maybe because it’s been so long. I had completely forgotten that it sometimes happens like that.”

Now I understand why she said we should knock.

It was strange seeing the upright and focused Ben acting differently. I guess love just had its way of changing people.

“So what can I help you with?” he asked.

“Oh it’s nothing much,” I replied. “I just wanted your opinion on how we can help Stacy’s hospital.”

“You’re not buying it anymore?” he asked.

“I don’t want it,” Stacy said. “Even if he were to buy it and let my father and I run it, it would still feel like I had lost sight of what my mother had built.”

“There’s a form of sentimental attachment to the building,” he remarked. “But if he doesn’t buy it, and you don’t have the means to make enough money to buy equipment, so how do you plan on raising funds?”

“I...” she stopped speaking as her shoulders dropped.

Ben could be a combination of all three brothers at once, so we were just witnessing the manifestation of Ian.

“That’s why I’m here to ask you for advice; so, what do you suppose we do?” I asked.

He paused and leaned back into his chair, staring at the ceiling and scanning for answers.

“Wait, I think I have something,” he announced as he sat upright. “Remember how you asked me to take care of Olivia while she reported to you?”

“You mean when I helped you set up a meeting with the fated love of your life?” I reminded him.

“Idiot, but yes,” he frowned. “You could just do the same thing you did with me. A partnership. Think of it like how you place Olivia in my hands to provide the best environment, but she reports to you and works under your name. You could do the same thing.”

“A partnership between two of us?” Stacy asked for clarification.

“Well, between you and Ethan, that is,” he emphasized. “What I mean is that you two should become partners. That way, you can retain your name but are recognized as a part of Ethan’s business. You’d get more patients that way, and Ethan can support you with all the equipment you need.”

“I feel dumb,” Stacy said. “I didn’t even think about that.”

“Same here,” I sighed. “It was just a low-hanging fruit situation.”

“You’re okay with the idea?” Ben asked Stacy.

“I was worried that if the hospital is sold, it would lose its identity. But with this offer, Mom’s dream and mine can remain alive and even thrive,” she said. “I feel ashamed that I didn’t think of this option. I’m okay with it.”

“I’m glad to be of help,” Ethan said with a smile, then turned to me. “Are you finally coming back or you’re going back to Glenn?”

“I’m still here,” I replied as I got to my feet. “But I’ll be heading home to drop off my things.”

“That’s okay,” he said. “Olivia and I might call in for that favor sooner or later.”

“No problem,” I avowed.

Stacy got up as well. “Thank you so much, Dr. Sullivan.”

“Just Ben is fine,” he said, “and you’re welcome.”

She bowed gently and we left.

“Thank you for bringing me here,” Stacy said.

“I still don’t know why I didn’t think of it,” I said, still upset about the whole thing.

“It’s normal for you not to pick up on things that easy. I’m more surprised that *I* didn’t think of it,” she said with an impish grin on her face.

“That was a low blow.” I touched my stomach and faked being in pain.

She smiled. “Alright, so drop me off at my apartment, so I can arrange my stuff.”

“What apartment?” I raised a brow. “You’re staying with me.”

Stacy

He wasn’t kidding. My eyes widened as the sight unfolded before me. Nestled amid meticulously landscaped gardens, Ethan’s mansion exuded an aura of opulence. The exterior walls, adorned with intricate architectural details, gleamed in the warm sunlight. A grand entrance framed by towering columns welcomed me, hinting at the luxury within.

Ethan drove into a vast garage, more like a gallery that showcased an impressive array of twelve cars. The sports cars gleamed like polished jewels, each a testament to power and speed. The luxury sedans exuded an air of sophistication, their sleek lines a perfect blend of style and comfort.

“Why do you have so many cars?” I couldn’t help asking. “If I recall correctly, I’ve only seen you drive three of these.”

“Men have this impulsive urge to buy toys if they have a lot of money. Simply because the toy looks cool,” he replied with a knowing shrug.

I chose to go along with his reply. I had seen Dad buy some things I felt weren’t necessary but he took pride in them.

Moving further into the house, I found myself inside a sprawling living room. Sunlight poured in through towering windows, illuminating plush furnishings that exuded comfort. The walls were graced with tasteful artwork, each piece carefully chosen to complement the room’s refined atmosphere. It was difficult to picture someone like Ethan staying in a place like this.

We ventured upstairs, guided by a grand staircase adorned with a luxurious crimson carpet. The upper floor revealed a

series of rooms, each more captivating than the last. A study lined with mahogany shelves held a collection of leather-bound books, numerous medical research papers, and guides that would cost a fortune to acquire. It was a clear testament to Ethan's intellect, taste, and desire to improve his skill as a surgeon.

The master bedroom was a haven of tranquility, its king-sized bed draped in rich silks and satins. Ethan's first instinct was to collapse on the bed as he let out a sigh of satisfaction.

"God now this feels uncomfortable," he sighed as he punched the bed. "Damn you, Helen."

"So which room am I staying in?" I asked. I already knew what his answer was going to be, but I wanted to hear him say it.

He motioned for me to come closer to the bed. I obeyed and he grabbed my arm, pulling me to the bed.

He cuddled with me and beckoned, "You sleep here, my love."

"As you wish," I said softly.

He slowly drifted off. I turned around and watched his face.

“Thank you, Ethan,” I whispered before kissing his lips. In a way, he had just saved my dream.

Chapter Sixteen

The Smell of Danger

E than

I woke up alone. Normally I would be used to it but for the first time, I was afraid. I looked around me and there wasn't a trace of her. I was still dressed in the outfit I came home in, so I was sure she was here.

“Stacy?” I called, but there was no response, “Stacy!”

I got out of bed and sped out of the room.

Did she change her mind and sleep in the other rooms?

I checked the other rooms, but they were the same as I had left them. Now the panic really set in. Luckily, I had forgotten my car keys in my pocket. I went downstairs, intending to find her outside. As I got to the front door...

“Where are you off to in such a hurry?” a familiar voice asked.

I turned around and found her wearing one of my dress shirts while eating an apple. My heart which had been pounding out of control finally calmed down.

“You look awful, is everything okay?” she asked with a concerned look.

“No, I thought...” I walked up to her as she took another bite without taking her eyes off me.

I touched her cheek as she continued to chew the fruit slowly.

“You thought what?” she asked softly.

“I thought you left,” I replied.

“Why would I leave?” She raised an eyebrow.

“I don’t know,” I admitted. “I just thought that you did. It was frightening.”

“Aw, you poor baby,” she cooed and got on her toes to kiss me.

I sometimes forgot how short she was.

“You don’t have to worry about that,” she said. “Besides. my clothes were in your closet. How could you not notice?”

“I...I didn’t check,” I replied realizing that should have been my first thought rather than panicking.

“Classic Ethan,” she said and kissed my chin. “Whatever would I do with you?”

She took another bite out of the apple and handed me the rest.

“You know apples are poisonous to us doctors, right?” I raised a brow.

“I detoxified this one before eating it,” she said, getting in on the joke.

“How exactly did you do that?” I smirked.

“Like this...” she said as she took another bite, held a piece between her lips, and brought it to mine.

I kissed her and took the piece from her mouth. As I chewed, it tasted better than an apple normally would.

“So what do you think? Is it making you keep away?” she asked with a playful grin.

“No, this one makes me want to stay,” I replied.

“Good,” she said and bit into the apple again, turning away.

I watched her walk away until she stopped to stretch. Her shirt was riding up—it was mine—but not high enough to reveal much. She made her way to the kitchen, and I followed after her. She went over to the sink and started to wash the grapes she had probably found in my fridge. I hugged her from behind as I sniffed her hair deeply. Her scent, for some odd reason, was turning me on. Either that or that detoxified apple from earlier was infused with some kind of aphrodisiac.

“I see you found one of my shirts,” I said as my hands slowly pulled up the shirt.

“Judging by what’s been pressing against my ass for the past few seconds, I’m assuming you like it,” she offered.

“Like, is such a soft word,” I replied as I lifted the shirt and leaned down to kiss her neck.

“Hmmm...” she hummed gently.

I licked her neck slowly and she reached for my hair with her left hand. I watched her pluck a grape and offer it to me. I accepted, but there was something I was more interested in eating. Back in Glenn Allen, we were focused on work, and I didn't want to frequent her house, thanks to the closely-knit community. But this was my house, my domain, and everything that stayed in it was my property, including Stacy.

“Hold it up and bend over,” I ordered as I took a step back.

She took off the last three buttons and slowly lifted the shirt, revealing a teal G-string. She tied the ends of the shirt into a knot across her stomach and bent over as instructed. Her ass slowly jiggled as she did so. She was twerking slowly, causing her cheeks to shake a bit more while she stared at me from behind while eating another grape. She was sucking on her finger seductively. I got on my knees and gave her ass a good spanking. I watched her ass recoil from the impact while she moaned softly.

I pulled her hips closer and shifted her panties to the side. Using my index finger, I slowly stroked her pussy. She wasn't soaking wet yet, but it was only a matter of time. I switched to two fingers, rubbing her pussy gently with a circular motion. She responded in kind, moving her hips with the same motion. She was now getting wetter as expected.

“Grape,” I demanded, and she handed it over to me. I pressed the small ball of fruit against her clit, teasing her with it.

I ate the fruit, seeped with her juices, and it tasted a lot better. I kissed her pussy, softly at first, then almost as if I were imagining it as an extension of her mouth. I started kissing it deeply. My tongue lapped her up, prodding deep into her, before sucking intensely on her outer lips.

“Ah,” she gasped loudly and moved her hips backward, burying my face into her core.

My nose was blocked as I focused on sucking her clit. My tongue flicked against it in a furious attempt to make her juice up some more.

“Godddd,” she moaned as she tried to pull away, but I held her hips in place and started devouring her even harder.

I was starting to feel too good to think about anything else.

“Ethan, wait...hold on...please...” she pleaded, but she tasted too good for me to stop.

I continued my feasting until I had gotten enough. As I pulled away, the string of her wetness connected my nose back to her pussy. I wiped my nose with a finger and kissed her ass cheek.

“I guess it’s your turn,” she whispered. She turned around and removed more buttons to reveal her breasts, but she didn’t take off the shirt. Partial clothing can be way hotter than being completely nude.

She squatted and helped me with my pants while I undid my buttons. Judging by how she only unzipped my pants to pull out my dick, I wasn’t the only one craving the idea of semi-clothed sex. I took off my shirt and undershirt, tossing them aside. I watched her stroking my dick with one hand while the other busied itself with her pussy.

“Ready?” she whispered and kissed my aroused dick. She kissed each part of it. The sound of her smacking lips against my member felt more seductive than it should have been. Then she started to suck. Her wet mouth wrapping around me wasn’t something I could ever get tired of...especially with the way she did it.

Her head slowly bobbed and she started producing more saliva to aid her head movements as she continued to swallow me up. She started to move faster; I held her head to slow her down and go deeper into her mouth, reaching into her throat.

She started to gag, but that didn’t stop either of us from continuing the process. It felt too God damn good.

As she moved her head, it felt like she had turned my dick into a straw and sucked on it—in an attempt to milk me. I felt like I was going to bust at any time soon, so I pulled out. Her mouth was covered with saliva, so we wiped it off gently. It felt like she wanted me to praise her for a job well done.

I rubbed my dick against her cheek. “You were a good girl.”

“Thank you,” she said proudly.

“Now can you bend over once more?” I asked and she nodded with enthusiasm.

She went over to the counter and was about to bend over, but I held her hips and was able to guide her to the position I had in mind. I placed her on the side of the counter and slowly lifted her left leg. She understood my intentions and assisted me in adjusting it properly. I slowly inserted myself into her, and her mouth widened with pleasure, as I got deep into her. Her soft and wet insides wrapped nicely around my dick. I started to move; she accepted me inch by inch, back and forth. Her breasts spilled out of my shirt and bounced freely with each thrust.

“Ha ha...mmm...” Her whimpers were mixed with moans, and she struggled to keep her eyes open. It went even harder and rougher with her.

I strangled her neck with one hand; she held it with one of her hands to ease my grip but didn't stop me.

I started to feel her deepest parts, my dick hitting furiously against her cervix. Well, it had been hitting against it for a while.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

Most women can't stand the pain, but ...

“Don't...even...stop...” she managed to say while struggling for breath as her eyes rolled back into her head, “Fuuuuckk.”

As long as she was okay...I let go of her and lifted her. She wrapped her legs around me. I sat her on the kitchen counter and resumed my pounding while she hugged me, urging me to continue my attack.

“Kisses...please...kiss me, Ethan,” she begged.

“You're so hopeless,” I said as I kissed her more.

“Humph...humph...” Her moans went straight into my mouth as I continued to move.

Our mouths battled for supremacy. My body started to tense as I felt an orgasm approach. I pulled out and made her lie on her stomach—still on the counter—or some back shots.

“Wait.. let me catch my breath,” she pleaded, but I wasn’t having any of it.

I returned my dick to her immediately.

“Aah,” she moaned loudly and tried to push me away, but I pulled on both hands, letting me go deep inside of her.

As my hips resumed the thrusting, she turned to look at me. Her face was a mixture of pleasure and something else...in a good way. I kissed her softly and pulled away, moving again. I enjoyed watching her ass bounce every time our bodies came in contact with each other. I could never get tired of this, but I was getting close.

“Stacy...”

“Go ahead...but don’t stop...please,” she pleaded. “Just try not to stop yet...give me a few more seconds.”

“I’ll try,” I said and got to work, trying my best to hold out.

She said a few more seconds, but it seemed like she was holding back on purpose. I finally came in her and she shook violently. I pulled out and watched my cum spill out of her.

I shouldn't worry about that for now.

“Almost...I was almost there...” she said, panting.

“You weren't finished?” I raised a brow. She turned and pushed me to the floor, pulling my pants and underwear off completely.

She also took off the shirt she wore. There I was, lying on the floor, completely naked, with a naked woman hovering over my dick.

She rubbed her pussy on my dick and uttered, “Get it back up, please.”

Normally I would need two minutes to get back up, but with that pleading look on her face and the urging from her wet pussy—plus her juices and my cum rubbing over my dick—I was back in action. She let my dick drive her and let out a sigh of relief. Maybe it's because of the friction from earlier, but her insides were hot and slimy.

“Let's go,” she said.

Nevertheless, it was the longest and at the same time shortest two hours of my life.

Stacy

They say that when women have good sex they glow. They are right. As Ethan and I took a drive down to the supermarket, I was glowing. My pussy throbbed from all the pounding, my nipples hurt from the sucking and biting, my hair and arms hurt from the pulling, and my neck and shoulders were probably covered with more hickeys than I could count. But despite all that, I felt good and even refreshed.

Then again, it could be the bubble bath Ethan drew for both of us. Ethan on the other hand...

“Sigh....” he said and accompanied it with a long sigh.

“What? This is like your fifth one already,” I said.

“You’re really asking me that?” He raised a brow and focused on the road.

“Did I do something?” I asked.

“I haven’t gone at it that long before,” he replied. “I feel spent and drained.”

True, we went at it till he wasn’t able to cum properly again. His body shuddered as I tried to lick it back up for a fifth try. Although I was gone after the second, I felt like I needed to catch up for all those I couldn’t get back in Glenn Allen.

“Well, I feel refreshed,” I said as I whipped my hair dramatically.

“Good for you. Let’s just get some groceries and go home,” he said.

Because he wasn’t at home, his house staff hadn’t resumed; he had forgotten to tell them when his vacation was going to be over and didn’t call to remind them to resume the day before. Before he had left for the vacation, he had given away most of his perishable groceries besides the ripe fruit and vegetables to his staff. He felt it was going to be a waste if he wouldn’t be around to eat it. But considering how clean his house was, I assumed they came to clean in the morning. As his cook was resuming the following day, we decided to do the cooking ourselves. Something bothered me a little, though.

“About what you said...that you hadn’t gone all out like that before,” I said. “I’m assuming you and your past lovers didn’t

enjoy it that much.”

“Don’t call them lovers,” he said with a frown. “Makes it sound like I had an intimate connection with them when it was nothing but purely physical.”

“Oh...”

I don’t know why that made me feel a bit better.

“But is it bad? I actually didn’t think I’d go all out today,” I said.

“You don’t have to apologize,” he said. “That I’m exhausted doesn’t mean I didn’t enjoy it at all. I’m just a little scared of you.” He turned and furrowed his brows. “You horny little beast.”

“Says the one who was humping me like crazy,” I teased.

Speaking of in me...he did cum a lot, didn't he?

I touched my stomach and worried a little. I wanted to ask him what I should do, but decided not to say anything. I figured I could sneak to plan B later, but at the same time, I didn’t want to. Having his baby didn’t sound so bad.

“Have you ever had a pregnancy scare with any of your past women?” I asked.

“Next to impossible. I don’t remember them able to make me finish in the first place,” he said, “Contraceptives were always a must.”

“I see,” I said.

Maybe he doesn't want a baby?

I was hoping he could pick up on the signs I was giving. But this was Ethan I was talking about. Clumsy in nature and unable to pick up on social cues. I mean who would normally be comfortable with talking about past flings with the person they’re in love with? Well, I didn’t mind. At least he was being honest with me. I figured I’d just get the contraceptives, and maybe when things got more aggressive between us, a baby would be timely. But that would mean marriage.

Married life with Ethan didn’t sound so bad either. I could picture him breaking a lot of my plates, or messing up while building the baby crib. I giggled at the thought.

“What’s funny?” he asked.

“It’s nothing,” I said and pinched his cheek. “Promise me you’ll always be Ethan, okay?”

“I don’t get it, but I promise,” he said.

That was enough for me.

As we got to the supermarket, we decided to split and get the ingredients individually, but Ethan had never been grocery shopping on his own.

“The last time I went with my mom while she prepared for Thanksgiving, I ended up knocking over some items,” he said. “Mom ended up paying for everything; we gave them out in addition to what she intended to donate to the homeless shelter.”

“Please tell me this happened when you were a kid,” I groaned.

“It was last year,” he said with a proud smile.

“On second thought, we aren’t splitting up anymore,” I said and pulled him along.

Sure enough, he almost knocked down a lot of things. I started thanking my stars that we didn't go shopping for some tableware. As we were rounding up, I wanted to get some cucumbers. He didn't have any at home, which was surprising considering that he had a lot of other fruits and vegetables.

I reached for the biggest, thickest one I could find, but someone else reached for it.

"Oh, I'm sorry you can have it," I said.

"Thank you," the lady said. "Wait...don't I know you?"

I looked up at the lady and sure enough, I knew her: Gabrielle Rodriguez, the model from the last visit and one of the women I idolized for her beauty.

"Miss Rodriguez," I said with a smile. "I'm Dr. Stacy Roberts."

"Ah yes, the assistant at Ethan's hospital," she said, looking at the cucumber. "I didn't know you also liked cucumbers."

"Who doesn't?" I chuckled softly.

"What's this? It's Gabrielle," Ethan said as he walked up to us pushing a shopping cart. "What are you doing in Richmond?"

“Ethan, it’s been months,” she said. “I’ve missed you. I’m back because it’s time for my six-month checkup. I heard you were on vacation.”

“I’m back now and will be resuming work tomorrow,” he informed her.

“Well, looks like my timing is perfect,” she said with a smile that made me uneasy for some odd reason.

“That’s a weird-looking cucumber,” he said.

“I’ve decided to stick to the healthy option since I haven’t had any decent *protein* over the past months,” she said as she pointed the cucumber at him. “It won’t be too bad to switch back.”

“I don’t know about that; vegetables are obviously a better choice,” he said with a shrug.

A part of me realized that she wasn’t really talking about vegetables or fruits. But Ethan didn’t get it.

“I’m not really talking about vegetables,” she said as she stroked the cucumber.

Now that I realized what she wanted the cucumber for, I lost my appetite for it. *So that's what she meant by I liked cucumbers.*

“Oh that,” Ethan said as he realized it. “Unfortunately, I’m not really interested. I can set you up with other people I know.”

She frowned but recovered with a smile and a forced chuckle.

“Well whatever you say, Ethan,” she said and turned to look at me. Her eyes seemed to exude rage. “It’s a pleasure to see you again Stacy.”

“You too, Gabrielle,” I said nervously.

She left with her cucumber.

“I’m a little jealous, Stacy. You wanted to buy *that* when you already have me?” he asked.

“No I didn’t...even think about using it for that sort of thing,” I replied.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“I know you had a different life altogether before meeting me, but I don’t think I’ve realized it properly until now,” I explained. “Gabrielle is one of your past flings, right?”

“Yeah,” he replied.

“I see,” I said as my shoulders dropped in disappointment.

He hugged me from the side. “Hey, don’t let it get to you. I know I’ve done a lot of wrong things with the wrong people in the past. But you don’t have to worry about it. You’re all I have interest in right now.”

“I know...it’s just a little...”

“It’s okay, I understand,” he said as his embrace got tighter.

“I’ll prove my commitment to you as many times as it takes.”

“Thank you, Ethan,” I said as I turned and hugged him back.

“I think I’ll be craving your *protein* when we get home.”

“Can we make a raincheck?” he asked.

“No.”

“Dang.”

I squeezed him. This was okay. Nothing there to worry about.

Chapter Seventeen

Assurance

Stacy

I woke up to an empty bed and it was my turn to panic. But as I was about to step out of bed, I noticed Ethan doing pushups on the floor.

“Good, you’re up,” he said. “Get on my back.”

“You look sweaty,” I remarked and frowned.

“Get on my back Stacy,” he ordered.

I got down and lay on his back; before I knew it, I got addicted to him moving up and down. It felt like I was on a seesaw, one with pulsing muscles and heavy breathing.

“You do this every morning?” I asked.

“Since I can’t always go to the gym, I need a way to keep fit,” he replied.

After fifteen pushups, he asked me to get down. I helped him out with his routine, holding his legs down as he did some sit-ups, rewarding him with a kiss every time he returned upward. I didn’t know that workouts could be this fun. I decided to do some exercise myself: squats and sit-ups just to make sure my ass and stomach stayed in shape. After he was done, even trying to do a few chin-ups while I hugged him from behind, he went straight to the shower.

I joined him...to save water of course. As we took turns bathing each other, we admired our bodies and complimented each other. I noticed that every time Ethan took off his clothes, his body would always appear bigger than the last time I saw him. Each time I noticed it, I would crave being held by him as tightly as possible. Even as we bathed, he answered my secret desire by embracing me. He wasn’t stiff down there. I guess he was trying not to get turned on because he had to get to the hospital. I felt weird, though. I didn’t know what it was, but I figured it wasn’t that bad.

I felt nauseous, but I assumed it was all the cum I swallowed the night before along with the food I ate finally catching up to me. My breasts felt heavier than usual too. Maybe that was just the feeling I got after his hands had been holding them for

so long while I rode him. My stomach felt off, maybe because my period was around the corner. Although I had woken up slightly energetically, I felt tired.

“Your boobs look different,” Ethan said as he helped me wipe my body down.

“How different?” I asked.

“Bigger,” he replied and sucked on my left boob. It felt sore, but I blamed it on what he did with them last night.

It felt good, though. I held his head and pushed him closer to myself, to get a better taste of me.

He pulled away, “We better get going.”

“You can’t just leave me like this,” I said. I stared at the nipple he had just sucked on. It glistened with his saliva and had been hardened by the sensation it left.

Also, doesn't it look a little darker? The areola has expanded some more as well.

I shrugged it off. Maybe my body was just going through a new kind of change. Woman perks.

“Sure I can,” he said and placed the towel on my head, kissed my neck, and left me there while he whistled a merry tune.

I sighed and left the bathroom as well. I was meant to join him at the office. Not compulsory, but I just wanted to help in any way that I could. Also, there was no way I was staying in this house all alone.

“Hmm,” he paused almost deep in thought as he walked back and forth looking at the rack of car keys.

“We don’t have all day Ethan,” I said as I ate the flapjacks made by his chef, Daniel. “Thank you so much for breakfast, Daniel.”

Daniel appeared to be in his early fifties. Gray had claimed most of his hair, but you could easily tell that he had been quite the looker in his younger years. His meal was simple yet exquisite in taste. I knew as I ate that I was never going to make flapjacks taste this good unless I trained for ten years. Seeing how Ethan scarfed down the meal in seconds, I was ready to learn as soon as possible.

“It’s a pleasure to serve,” Daniel said with a smile.

“Daniel, what car do you think I should drive today?” Ethan asked his trusty chef.

“Anything luxury would do because it’s a Tuesday and all,” Daniel replied.

“You don’t have to put too much thought into it,” I added. “We need a vehicle capable of going from point A to point B movement without any hassle.”

“You’re right,” he sighed and picked a key at random. “Let’s go.”

As we headed to the garage and he clicked the key, the Ferrari chirped in response.

“Not bad, I even wore red today,” I said as I looked at my outfit.

“And I dressed luxury,” he said.

He wore a suit that hugged his body properly. There was no tie, and his first two buttons were undone. A designer watch graced his left and a gold and black bracelet on the right. His hair was neatly drawn backward. I had mixed feelings about it because I had gotten fond of his messy hair as it reminded me of his clumsy nature.

“Nah, you’re definitely dressed for the car,” I remarked.

“You think so? Alright then,” he said as he made his way to the passenger seat to open the door.

I followed his lead and got into the car, thanking him for the gesture.

“Sir, you forgot this!” Daniel called as he ran to the car, holding Ethan’s phone and wallet.

“I knew I was forgetting something,” he groaned and collected things from Daniel, thanked him, and got into the car.

As he sat and was about to strap himself in, I reached for his hair and roughed it up a bit, restoring it to its messy ways.

“Much better,” I said as I put on my seatbelt, while he stared at me in confusion.

We got to the hospital; and maybe because I had spent almost six months away, the hospital looked a lot bigger than I last saw it. Memories came flooding back. My first time here. The first time I fell in love, and the first time I got my heart

broken. I recalled the slap and my palm started to hurt again. I felt nervous. I looked over at Ethan. He was also staring at the building. His hand touched the cheek I had slapped months ago.

He turned to look at me and a warm smile formed, “Don’t mind me. I just recalled something. I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to apologize,” I insisted as I stared at my palm. “It’s in the past now.”

“It’s nice to have you back here Dr. Roberts,” he said.

“It’s a pleasure to work with you Dr. Sullivan,” I smiled.

“Please there are three Dr. Sullivans,” he said. “Call me Ethan.”

“Ethan it is,” I said and followed him into the building.

“Is that Stacy?”

“The boss is back.”

“Look it’s Stacy. You know the one from months ago.”

“Dr. Roberts is back.”

“Ethan looks lovely as usual.”

The murmurs from onlookers, patients, and the staff alike didn’t fail to reach my ears. I was slightly conscious of how everyone was reacting to my return. I half expected that everyone would have forgotten about me by now.

“The prodigal daughter returns,” Allison announced.

“Alisson,” I called as we raced to embrace each other.

As we ran into each other’s arms, it was at that point I realized just how much I had missed her. She was my only friend downtown, and I wasn’t really that close to anyone back home, including my staff.

“You got shorter,” she remarked. “Put on a little weight, didn’t you?”

“You sound like an old woman,” I remarked. “You don’t look like you’ve aged a bit.”

“Well duh, it’s only been a few months; it wasn’t like it was an entire year or two,” she said as she let go of me.

“It felt longer, to be honest,” I admitted.

“Come closer,” she motioned, and I obeyed.

She gave my head a flick of her finger.

“Ow!” I winced and covered my forehead in pain. “What was that for?”

”*That* was for leaving for so long without telling me what exactly happened,” she said. “You even dodged the topic several times and I gave up.”

“I’m sorry,” I apologized with regret.

“You don’t have to apologize,” she said. “I’m just glad you’re back. Most of the patients missed you a lot.”

“I miss them too,” I said. “Do you have an extra scrub? I forgot to bring mine.”

“Yeah I do,” she replied. “I hope you like navy blue.”

I turned to look at Ethan and he shrugged, “I’ll see you later. Swing by my office if you need anything.”

“I will,” I said with a smile and followed after Allison.

Ethan

I was glad she was back. As I watched her head off to get ready for work, I almost wanted to stop and ask her to change in my office. But the self-control thing I’ve been learning was finally paying off. I got to my office and got ready to see my patients. The first person wasn’t a patient.

“You’re back,” Ian said as I walked into my office. He was seated on my couch and staring at the ceiling.

“You’re still here?” I raised a brow.

When one of us wasn’t around, the others would routinely check in on the hospitals and make sure everything was still going okay. I met Ian when it was his turn.

“Just like the rest of our places, members of your staff are competent, so I basically come here to relax,” he explained.

His tone was cold, nothing new there but it felt like something was on his mind.

“You alright?” I asked.

“I am,” he replied and got up to leave.

“You sure? I just got back we could have tea and catch up or something,” I suggested.

“It’s fine,” he said as made his way to me.

“It doesn’t seem so,” I said quietly.

As he walked past me, I could have sworn I heard him ask,
“Why is it always you?”

“Huh?” I raised a brow but was met with a closing door.

Weird.

Stacy

I only came to help out, but I forgot how busy his hospital was compared to mine. Six months away from all this, and it felt like I was rusty...as one patient stepped out, another immediately took their place. It was fun and at the same time exhausting. I couldn’t help wondering if after I partnered with

Ethan, would my place be the same way. With the very idea of experiencing something as fun as this, I started to feel a little excited. The excitement had to wait, however. I wasn't used to the new pace of things, and my body was still feeling weird.

I took some drugs for my upset stomach and hoped it would settle down. It was my break time, so I decided to take a walk outside and get some fresh air into my system.

"You there," a familiar voice called rudely.

I turned to find Gabrielle with a pissed-off expression. I pointed at myself questionably, even looking around to confirm if I was the one she was referring to. I mean, she knows my name after all.

"Yes, you," she said as she walked up to me.

You know, it often escapes my memory, and I hardly pay attention to it, but I was shorter than most people around. Gabrielle was already topping 5'11, a freaking giant. If she was going to have a catfight, I was definitely going to lose.

"Can I help you, Miss Rodriguez?" I asked calmly, my eyes scanning my surroundings to make sure there were witnesses.

There were a few people, and most recognized her, stopping to look; so, I was good.

“What is Ethan to you?” she asked, “Are you another fling?”

Oh, I see what she was doing. Trying to taunt me. Won't work, unfortunately.

“No, I'm not,” I replied.

“Why were you two together? Even the last time I came here, he was with you,” she inquired.

“I don't know,” I said. “Is it weird for a boss and his worker to be together? Coincidentally even?”

I wanted to play it safe. There was no need to anger her any further. She seemed to compose herself and gave off this look that seemed to say she was better than me. It disgusted me, but at the same time it had almost zero effect. If anything, I felt bad for her.

“You know he's a playboy right?” she asked.

I didn't say anything.

“Anyway, I am his favorite, so there’s no way a runt like you is going to stand a chance,” she smirked.

Yeah, I feel bad for her.

“I see,” I replied.

“So whatever dreams you have of spending time together with him should be abandoned and dumped,” she said with a threatening voice that wasn’t really working.

“Okay, I’m sorry,” I apologized.

“Better,” she said, with a satisfied expression that made her think like she won something. “Stay away from him.”

“Whatever you say, ma’am,” I said.

She nodded and left me alone.

I let out a sigh, “Ethan, you dummy.”

As the activities at the hospital wound down, I decided to see Ethan and tell him what had happened.

But as I stepped into his office, I found him on his computer biting down on his pen, looking extra sexy.

He turned to look at me and a smile formed on his face. “Welcome. I missed you.”

I decided not to tell him. He motioned for me to come over so I did and sat on his thigh. He hugged me tightly and kissed my neck and cheeks repeatedly, tickling me in the process.

“Geez, we’re in the office,” I reminded him.

“And yet you had no problem sitting on my thigh,” he mocked.

“Well, I could always say you forced me to do it for a higher raise,” I joked.

“Take off the top of your scrubs, and I’ll wire you a hundred thousand,” he said with deadpan seriousness.

“You know I’ll do it for free,” I raised a brow.

“And that’s why I love you,” he said and kissed my lips softly before pulling away.

Your loss, Gabrielle.

I held his chin and started to kiss him again, slowly and sensually, getting to taste him properly and deeply.

Did he always taste this good?

I snuck my tongue into his mouth, and he captured it, sucking intensely on it, making my head spin with pleasure. I started to whimper as I was dragged into what I had started. His possessive hold on my hips told me there was no way he was letting me go. Never again. That filled me with more pride and satisfaction than she would ever have. We finally stopped the kiss, and I placed my forehead against his.

“That was...intense,” he remarked, “Is everything okay?”

“Everything is,” I replied. “Just the way they are now.”

“I see,” he said. “Well, I enjoyed it.”

“Me too.”

I didn't have time to worry about anything else right now. All I wanted was nothing to change between us.

If there was anything to worry about, why was my body acting differently.

Chapter Eighteen

Plans

E than

After work, I dropped her off at home and we had dinner courtesy of Daniel. We stayed on the couch and watched a movie together. It was a movie about doctors, so we spent the night criticizing everything they got wrong or handled incorrectly, coming up with scenarios of how we would have handled things differently.

It was a new and fun experience. Stacy fell asleep, lying on my body, and I didn't bother to wake her up.

Both on our drive home and while we were watching the movie and having dinner, there was something on her mind. I prodded, but she insisted that it was nothing to worry about. As she slept and I stroked her hair, I felt grateful for a moment like this. I hardly slept in the mansion.

My staff had their own lives to live. After dinner, Daniel left; he wasn't always there. I worked overnight most times, so there was no need for him to stay longer than he ought to. But with just one more person in the house, it felt like the house was full. It was a wonderful feeling and one I didn't want to let go of. I was a little worried about what was bothering Stacy, but I knew better than to keep pestering her about it. It was Stacy we were talking about. Eventually, she'd tell me what was up.

The next day I woke up and found her still asleep on me.

"Stacy?" I called as I shook her a little.

"Hmm?" she responded lazily and curled up against me.

"We're going to be late," I said.

She lifted her body but her eyes were still closed. She kissed me lazily and returned to lie down. Cute, but not needed right now.

"Get up, you lazy bum," I said.

"I don't think I want to go out," she said. "I'm not feeling too good."

She finally got up from my body and stretched. Another of my dress shirts had been turned into her pajamas, and I was all for it.

“Can you give me today off?” she asked.

“You don’t have to show up. Rest up for me,” I demanded.

“Thank you, you’re the best,” she said. “I won’t be having breakfast early either. I want to sleep some more.”

It was odd. She had the drive to go to the hospital as long as saving lives was involved. It was weird to see this new side of her: a lazy Stacy.

I guess this is the moment when your girl gets comfortable enough to show off a side they don’t normally show to anyone else. I was honored, to witness it.

She turned to look at me, her hands still in the air, and a smile warm as the sun on her face.

“Will you miss me?” she asked.

“I’ll skip work today and stay with you,” I said.

“No, I can’t have that,” she said. “Go to work and save lives that need you to.”

“If that is your command, then I must obey,” I said with a bow.

“Good boy,” she said as she made her way upstairs. “Unfortunately, you have to bathe yourself. I’m sure you can handle that alone?”

“Of course I can. I’m not that helpless.” I rolled my eyes.

“Yeah right,” she scoffed and smiled. “I’m in love with you Ethan.”

It struck me like lightning, leaving me dumbfounded as she turned to continue her ascent. I watched her leave and immediately decided that this was a sight I wanted to wake up to every day.

On my way to the hospital, I made a diversion to a jewelry store.

“Good morning, sir,” the attendant greeted me.

He was an old man and very friendly. I knew the shop from my father's stories about how he had proposed to my mother. I wanted to buy a ring from this place if I ever got married.

"Good morning, sir," I replied with a smile.

"You look familiar," he remarked.

"Dr. Ethan Sullivan," I introduced myself.

"Sullivan? Sounds familiar," he said. "A customer with the same name bought from me some decades ago."

"My father," I replied with pride.

"Well, that makes sense," he said while laughing. "He had this unsure look just as you do right now. Tell me, have you found the one?"

"I have," I answered.

"Good, good, but, is she ready?" he asked.

I...I don't know. I couldn't say it. Was she ready for the next level? We had just reconciled after five months of being apart.

There were still things that I wasn't clear on. I just wanted to propose and make sure that she stayed with me forever.

Wait that makes marriage sound like a cage.

The point is, I wanted her by my side.

"Everything is," she replied, "Just the way they are now."

Maybe I was rushing things.

"Looks like an 'I don't know' reply," he said. He noticed that I had yet to give a reply as fast as when he asked if I had found "the one".

"I don't want to rush her. She has this dream, you know, and I don't want her to give up on it for me," I said as I looked at the rings in the showcase: beautiful stones, sitting on rings of silver and gold.

"You don't have to worry about whether she's ready now or not. You could always buy one now and wait until the perfect moment to give it to her," he advised. "Sorry, the salesman in me spoke for a second there."

"It's alright," I chuckled. "I'll buy one. What do you recommend?"

“I don’t recommend rings for marriage,” he replied. “The customer decides the one worthy enough to grace the fingers of his loved one. It’s a conscious decision and only one you can make alone. Walk around the store until you find something useful.”

“Alright, thank you.” I appreciated him and started my quest.

All the rings were beautiful no doubt, but none of them seemed to signify the bond I had with Stacy.

I wanted it to be special. Something that she would see and immediately think about us. I was beginning to lose hope when something glimmered in the corner of my eye. I turned and found an open box with a particularly beautiful engagement ring. From the moment I saw it, I knew it was the one.

“How much is this?” I asked.

I didn’t want to show off my new item so I placed the ring box in my pocket and made a little note in my strap diary to make sure I hid it when I returned home. I was going to propose but not yet. Things were okay the way they were, and there was no need to rush things. I just wanted to enjoy it a little longer until

I was ready to take the next step. Maybe by then, Stacy would have achieved her dream.

As I got to the hospital, I contacted the board and explained the plan to partner and sponsor Stacy's hospital. I was supposed to contact them with Stacy, but I just wanted to help her out the best way I could.

Once that was settled and out of the way, I patrolled the hospital, checking on patients and encouraging family members.

I wanted to make sure that none of my team members were slacking off when there was work to be done. Then I stopped by the kid's ward to play with the children. I had built a playroom to let the children who could move have a way to exercise rather than lie down all day. There were books to read, among other things like crafts and games to keep them busy.

"I should probably visit Chloe soon," I said to myself as I left the ward, satisfied with the sounds of laughter that now nourished my body and energized me to go on.

"There you are," Gabrielle said as I made my way back to my office.

"Oh, Gabrielle, what's up?" I asked.

”*What’s up?*” she asked in disbelief. “Man these few months away has really got you acting all strange.”

“How?”

“Never mind,” she sighed and ran her fingers through her hair. “I meant to meet with you yesterday for my checkup, but you seemed to be occupied.”

“Well a lot of people wanted to see me as I came back,” I explained. “You could have just done the checkup with another nurse or doctor.”

“Come on, don’t say that,” she whined. “You know I would rather have you checking my body out than anyone else.”

Funny. If I heard that any other time before Stacy, I would have been excited. Now I just feel...disturbed.

“Right,” I said.

“And besides, you’re the one with my past medical records,” he said.

“Oh, yeah right,” I realized that she was right. “Maybe I should make copies and hand them over to the other

gynecologists here. That way you could have them check you out.”

“No, Ethan. I want you to do it,” she insisted with a frown.

“Well, don’t come crying if you can’t meet me on time,” I shrugged.

As we went to my office, I handed her the outfit to change into and pointed her to my office bathroom to change while I looked for my gloves.

“You’re not going to compliment my outfit?” she asked.

“Hmm? To be honest, I didn’t even notice,” I replied honestly, as I observed the black or dark blue dress she wore. “Looks nice.”

“Why do I have to change in the bathroom?” she asked.

“Patient’s privacy?” I raised a brow.

“What even are you talking about? You’re not going to help me undress?” she asked.

I took a good look at the dress; there wasn't a zipper that I could see.

"I don't think so," I replied.

She bit her lip and started to take off the dress. I looked away and excused myself from the office, waiting for her to change.

Strange. I had absolutely zero interest in her.

I checked my wristwatch to guess how much time had passed. Then I buried my hand into my pocket and pulled out the ring box. I grinned to myself as I opened it. I could easily picture it on her finger.

"I'm done," Gabrielle announced.

I closed the box and returned it to my pocket before opening the door. She was wearing a hospital gown but had a sour look on her face. I couldn't care less why she looked so pissed. Not my concern...not my bullshit. I wanted to get started immediately, but it seemed like she had other ideas.

"Are you playing some kind of new fetish game?" she asked with a teasing smile as she approached me.

“Trust me Gabrielle, whatever idea you think you have now is completely bullshit,” I assured her.

“Oh, I get it, it’s a no means yes kind of thing.” She seemed intent on continuing whatever plot was playing in her head.

She hugged me and made to kiss me, but I covered her mouth and pushed her away slowly enough to make sure she didn’t fall over, or I’d risk hearing that I had assaulted someone in my office.

“Gabrielle, if you don’t want to have this checkup, you can leave, I have other important things to attend to,” I said to her as I walked over to my desk and picked up my stethoscope.

“What happened to you?” she asked, obviously frustrated by my actions. “Why are you treating me like I’m some kind of patient?”

I took a good look at her hospital gown and back at her face. “Trick question?”

“Just shut the fuck up!” she yelled.

“Woman, you don’t get to speak to me that way,” I warned in a threatening tone and she simmered down. “You can either sit down and get checked or get the fuck out of my office.”

Her shoulders dropped and she bit her lower lip, then made her way to the bed.

“Good,” I said and got to work.

After I was done, I saw that she was healthy as usual. As for the anger decorating her face, there was nothing I could do about that medically.

“What happened to you?” she asked as she adjusted her dress, after changing out of the hospital gown.

“In what sense?” I retorted.

“In everything,” she replied. “It’s that girl, isn’t it? You found a new favorite. A temporary one.”

“In a way yes, only she’s not temporary,” I answered. “You could say she’s permanent.”

“You fell in love,” she said as the realization set in.

“I sure did.” I couldn’t help laughing.

“That’s not possible. Ethan Sullivan doesn’t...”

“Fall in love?” I raised a brow. “I thought so too, but well, I guess I found someone worth falling for. Best decision ever.”

“Then what’s going to happen to me?” she asked.

“What?”

“Don’t give me that. I thought if you were ever going to settle down, it would be with me,” she insisted. “We have the best chemistry in everything. Same taste in fashion, cars, and we’re both celebrities. The sex was phenomenal.”

Subpar compared to my woman, but I’ll let this slide since she’s upset.

“Point is, it should be me. Do you know how many men I’ve turned down because I was hoping that you’d finally settle down with me?” she asked.

“I didn’t ask you to do that now did I?” I asked. “I made it clear that I wasn’t going to settle down.”

“You think I don’t know how you’d suddenly get baby fever?” she asked. “It was only a matter of time until you gave in, and I was going to be the one to step in. Not some good-for-nothing middle-class doctor to come and...”

Her words were cut short as I raised my hand to hit her, but I stopped myself. She had pissed me off, but I wasn't going to let my rage do anything to cause problems for Stacy and me. Not because of someone like Gabrielle.

“I understand you think it's unfair,” I said as I lowered my hand. “But this is the path I've chosen. I'm sorry for the wrong signs I gave you. I'll make it clear now. Gabrielle Rodriguez, I'm no longer interested in you as a sex partner or romantic interest. My heart, soul, and body belong to someone else. You can't fulfill her role in my life. I really apologize and hope you understand.”

She stared at me with smoldering rage, reached for her bag, and slung it over her arm. She walked past me shoving me in the process.

“This isn't over, for both of you,” she said.

“Oh and Gabrielle,” I called and she stopped. “Don't be stupid. You'll regret it.”

She sucked her teeth and left.

“Ah I forgot to fork over her test results,” I said as I picked up the report.

I decided to mail it to her instead.

Chapter Nineteen

The News and Uncertainty

Stacy

That morning, as I couldn't join Ethan at the hospital, I slept in as planned. Well, I wish I did because the nausea started getting aggressive for no reason. As I kneeled over the toilet seat, heaving out my guts, I was sure that something else was going on than just an upset stomach. It was the one thing most women fear. My period wasn't due to arrive until two weeks, so there was no time to sit around and confirm it. I rushed to my purse and pulled out the pregnancy test strips I usually kept in hand for patients. As I peed on the strip, I was shaking.

I crossed my fingers and prayed, but my prayers weren't needed nor were they answered because the strip showed I was indeed pregnant. But it could be wrong. Strips usually had that issue. I needed a proper test.

I borrowed one of Ethan's cars and headed to a pharmacy nearby. I found a trusted pregnancy test and took it to the

counter.

You know that moment, when you're in panic and it just seems like the universe is tossing various things to remind you of what you're panicking about? Yeah, I was having one of those moments. A woman was buying baby diapers and another was with her baby along with a prescription slip, showing it to the pharmacist.

I felt nervous as the receptionist motioned for me to come to the counter. I placed the test on the table. I could feel the women's gaze on me and the little item. Even the receptionist found the situation a little funny. I chuckled nervously and prayed that the ground would swallow me up. Now I understood why my patients, especially the ones who didn't plan for pregnancy, would ask me to buy the tests or strips for them.

She gave me the bill, and I paid for it and bolted out of there and into the car. I considered the possibility that I was actually pregnant. How was it even possible? As I returned home, I took another test. My heart raced as I stared at the pregnancy test on the bathroom counter. Two pink lines. Positive. The realization hit me like a tidal wave, sending a mix of emotions crashing through me. Joy, fear, uncertainty—all swirling together, leaving me breathless. I sank onto the edge of the bathtub, my mind racing a million miles an hour.

Thoughts of Ethan who could be the father consumed me. How would he react? Would he be excited, or would this news shatter his world? I tried retracing my steps.

“Yes we had unprotected sex two days ago, but I’m not supposed to have developed the symptoms this fast,” I said to myself as I paced back and forth. “Is it even medically possible to develop the symptoms so fast? Who am I even asking? I’m a medical doctor.”

I couldn’t even think clearly. I started wondering why I didn’t even go for plan B as I had planned. Did I actually want a baby? I had thought about it, but it was just a thought. Imagine actually giving birth to a baby, and he has his father’s eyes and messy hair...and my lovely cheeks, and nose.

It would be the cutest baby I had ever seen.

“No...no stop it, Stacy, you’re supposed to be panicking,” I reminded myself and forcefully tore my attention away from the fact that Ethan and I would make lovely parents.

This wasn’t how I had planned things. If I were ever going to have kids, I wanted it to be just the way my father desired. I get a boyfriend, we date, I introduce him to my dad, we date some more, he proposes, we marry, and then, the kids. Now it feels like I missed a lot of steps. Well, Ethan had already met

my dad, but not as my boyfriend and that worried me. Would Dad be disappointed with me? Not important...I needed to remember. And then it hit me. Back in Glen Allen. That's when it happened. We went at it raw; it felt so good that I actually forgot about taking anything.

“That means, I'm already three weeks gone,” I said as I collapsed onto the bed. “What and how am I going to tell him?”

I could do nothing but wait for his return.

Ethan

Although I had warned Gabrielle not to try anything stupid, I was sure she was going to do something. Being human and all, possessing the *make me* gene makes us naturally do stupid things that people tell us not to do.

I wanted to give Stacy a heads-up at least. As I returned home, I took a good look at the ring box and a smile crept along my face. I just needed the universe to present me with an opportunity to give it to her.

As I got into the house, Daniel had already left, but I was sure dinner would be waiting for me. Stacy wasn't in the living room or kitchen. I was almost expecting a wife welcoming

husband home kind of situation, but I chose not to say anything aloud.

I hid the ring box again and opened the master bedroom. I found Stacy on the bed, hugging her knees like something terrible had just happened.

“Stacy?” I called as I rushed over to her. “What happened?”

She looked at me, “Oh, welcome back, Ethan. How was work today?”

She didn’t look like she was crying, though. I guess that was okay in a way.

“Work was fine.” I decided not to tell her about the Gabrielle issue just yet. “You don’t look so good. Was it that bad?”

“Well turns out that I am actually sick,” she said nervously; her eyes refused to meet mine anymore.

“What?” I raised a brow. “Then exhaustion.”

“No...” she said, still unable to summon the courage to tell me.

“Stacy, just tell me what it is,” I said softly. “If you’re scared of upsetting me, then don’t. I’m not going to be upset with you.”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

“Okay.” She took in a deep breath and exhaled. “I’m pregnant.”

There were the sounds of fireworks in my head, trumpet fanfares, and screams of joy. I had flipped twenty-four times in my head, and yet my body remained frozen in place.

“You okay?” she asked. “Your face looks frozen.”

“I am,” I said.

“You sure?” She was worried. “Was it that shocking?”

“Yes,” I replied. “I can’t believe it.”

“Oh,” she said as she hugged her legs. “I’m sorry.”

“No not that. I was just...I can’t...” I struggled to find the right words.

“You can’t take responsibility, I know,” she concluded. “That’s why I apologized.”

“What are you talking about?” I laughed. “I was just frozen at how good the news is. I can’t believe I’m actually going to be a father.”

“Wait, you’re not upset?” she asked with a surprised expression.

I kissed her and said, “You’ll make a lovely mom.”

She blinked twice in disbelief, and her cheeks turned red as a tomato. “Thank God.”

“And here I was thinking it was something else like you finding my childhood album.” I let out a sigh of relief.

“Wait, are those here?” she asked.

“No,” I lied.

I didn’t want her to see how ugly I was as a kid.

“Hmmm.” She didn’t believe me but, thankfully, she didn’t even try to argue with me.

“Wow...” I said softly. “I’m going to be a dad.”

“You know the normal thing would be to panic, right?” she asked.

“I’m actually panicking,” I replied honestly. “How do I carry the baby? I almost dropped Chloe once and Ben almost killed me.”

“Now you’re making me worried about our baby’s safety,” she said as she touched her stomach and scooted away from me.

“Get back here,” I demanded and pulled her to me. She tried to protest by playfully escaping.

I caught her and pulled her to my chest. She lay on my chest and finally calmed down.

“Your heart is pounding wildly,” she remarked. “My God you are terrified.”

“Yeah,” I agreed.

Parenthood was going to be a scary hurdle to cross. I touched my pocket where the ring was. I swallowed hard, as another fear crept up. The atmosphere was okay and she was pregnant. Was there any better moment than now to propose?

“You know...I actually wanted to get married first before having a baby,” she said.

My hand froze as I pulled away from the ring.

“Yeah?”

“My plan was simple. I get a boyfriend, we date, introduce him to my dad, we date some more, he proposes, we marry, and then, we have kids,” she explained. “But that doesn’t seem possible anymore.”

“I don’t know if I should mention this, but I think your dad knows about the both of us,” I informed her.

“Proof?”

“Guy hunch,” I said with a shrug. “Don’t worry about it. I’ll talk to him.”

“I’ll leave it to you then,” she said and hugged me. “But I wanted to at least get Mom’s hospital running properly first

before chasing after all this. I hope I'm not a bad daughter for deviating."

"No, you're not," I confirmed. "You don't have to worry that much about it. We'll get the dream first. Then we can focus on the rest later, okay?"

"Yeah," she said. "Thank you."

"Don't mention it," I said as I stroked her hair.

It wasn't time to propose but at least she had indicated that she was interested in the idea of marriage.

I just needed to wait and...

"Stacy?"

"Yes, Ethan?"

"Why are stroking my groin?" I asked.

"No reason," she replied and continued touching me gently.

My body responded to her touch, swelling up in response. I didn't even try to resist; I just let out a sigh and let it happen.

“You sure you have no reason why you’re doing what you’re doing right now?” I asked for clarification.

“I don’t need a reason to desire the father of my baby do I?” she asked.

“No you don’t,” I replied.

“There you go, *Daddy*,” she said as she got down and made to pull down my pants.

I remembered the box in my pocket and had to think fast. I held her hair and pulled her to me.

“Proper kisses first,” I demanded.

“Alrighty,” she smirked and rushed for my lips.

While she was devouring me, I was distracted. I pulled out the ring and hid it under my pillow. Now I could completely focus on her. I kissed her deeply. She gave back, a little more aggressively than normal. She bit on my lower lip and sucked on it. Her hands returned to my pants, struggling against my zipper desiring to get into them. I didn’t even want to stop her.

“Ah, fuck this,” she said and stopped kissing me.

She started to take off her clothes. I knew not to keep her waiting so I took off mine. She got into the 69 position hovering her ass over my face before turning it into her throne as she lowered her hips. I knew a lot of men would kill for this. To be honest, I was never able to convince my past flings to do it to my face. Stacy was busy scoring herself some free wifey points.

I took in a deep breath and got to eating. Her pussy had graciously straddled my mouth and was greeted by tongue; her body flinched in response. I started to lick, and she started to move her hips, almost suffocating me. If I died, so be it. I continued to eat her out and she slowly ground her hips against my face. I was still suffocating, but her labored breathing urged me to hang in there for some odd reason, so I did.

She finally lifted her hips, “It’s been five minutes...ha ha, are you okay down there?”

My nose and mouth were covered with her juices, so I had to clean my nose to let me breathe freely. I gave her a thumbs up.

“Alright then,” she leaned forward, held my dick, and started to stroke it, before putting it in her mouth.

I was greeted with the sight of her twitching, dripping pussy. I spread her open and blew some air against it and she

shuddered.

“Damn, what are you doing over there?” she asked.

“Oh it’s nothing,” I replied before sliding two of my fingers into her core.

“Ah...mumph,” she muffled herself by sticking my dick into her mouth.

Her pussy tightened around my fingers, and I continued to finger her deeply. She threw her ass back to swallow up my fingers. I could tell she wasn’t completely satisfied with my fingers but...

“You know my fingers aren’t going to be enough,” I said. I started to turn my fingers inside her rapidly, and her body tensed. “Why don’t you let my dick go inside you instead?”

“No, wait...the fingers. They feel good,” she admitted. She tried to pull away from me the more intense my fingers got inside her.

I didn’t see any need to stop if she was satisfied with the fingers. I decided to do a remake of the talon technique. I pressed down the fingers in her against the top part of her

pussy, while my thumb got to work stimulating her clit properly.

“Oh...fuck yes,” she groaned as she started to move her hips.

“Don’t forget to suck, princess,” I reminded her.

“Mm, hmm,” she agreed and resumed giving my dick some attention. I focused on her pussy as it started to gush.

The sounds of her saliva lubing my dick, her pussy’s wet sloshing sounds, and our groans and moans brought both of us close to the edge. She was the first to climax, bathing me with her squirt. I followed after, releasing deep into her mouth. She forced her head down to make sure she had captured everything until I stopped throbbing. When I was done, she pulled out and turned to look at me. Her flushed cheeks were filled with the fruits of her labor.

She swallowed and wiped her mouth. “You’re drenched.”

“Thanks to you,” I said, and I wiped my face as well.

“I’ll let you charge up,” she said as she leaned forward and kissed me. “Then we’ll see if we can make twins.”

It still was a huge turn-on that someone as straight-laced as she was would be this freaky. And... I was going to be a father.

Chapter Twenty

Preparations towards a Happily Ever After

Stacy

Love. It's vague in description, but at least it is associated with other positive emotions like joy. When I woke up and found Ethan sleeping soundly next to me, I could feel nothing but joy. I got out of bed and turned to look at him. He was sleeping like a baby. Just the thought of a baby reminded me of what was growing in my womb. To think that I was worried that Ethan wouldn't want to be a father...but his reaction last night surprised me, and I was grateful for the kind of man that he was.

He was worried about being a good dad, but who doesn't want a clumsy yet kind father? I didn't want him dropping our baby, though, so I told myself that he needed to take some training during the pregnancy on how to properly hold a baby. Knowing him, if he accidentally dropped our baby, he would hardly be able to carry the child again.

I didn't want that.

"Look at me thinking about life as a parent," I chuckled to myself. I realized that I was acting out of character.

Normally, I'd be totally focused on growing the hospital. But now my mind was on something else entirely. Not a bad thing, though. I wanted to do something special for him. I went downstairs, properly dressed in a shirt and robe. I found more staff, busy keeping the house clean.

One of them noticed me and brought down her mask, "Good morning, I'm Leah."

"Nice to meet you Leah, I'm Stacy," I said.

"Are you here to help?" she asked. "I haven't seen you before. Hope you aren't offended?"

"No, I..."

"She's Ethan's woman," Daniel stepped in to rescue me.

"Ethan's woman?" She raised a brow. "I haven't seen him bring a woman here, though."

I'm the first woman here?

With all the women in his life, I automatically assumed that most of them had already been to his house.

“Welcome to Ethan’s place,” Leah said with a warm smile.

“It’s a pleasure to be here,” I said and turned to Daniel. “I need your help with something.”

Working with Daniel, I was able to make some breakfast and brought it upstairs. The smell wafted through the air as I got into the room, forcing a lot of them to retreat. The smell of good food stirred Ethan awake. He looked confused at first, but when he found me with his meal, he relaxed.

“Now, I could wake to this forever,” he said and sat upright.

“I had help from Daniel,” I said as I handed the tray to him.

It was a simple breakfast: toast, sunny-side-up eggs, and crispy bacon along with honey tea. He took in a deep breath and started eating.

“Are you going to the hospital today?” I asked.

“Yeah,” he managed to say with his mouth stuffed. “This is actually pretty good.”

“Really?”

I raised a brow. I had made them without even tasting anything. He fed me the bacon, and it was as good as I expected.

“Delicious,” I remarked. “I didn’t even taste anything as I cooked.”

“Awfully confident aren’t ya?” he smirked.

“Very confident,” I replied with a smug look.

“You don’t want to come to the hospital today either?” he asked.

“I feel a little better,” I said. “I’m sure I can come out.”

“You don’t have to force yourself,” he said. He reached for my stomach and gently caressed it, a proud look on his face.

I loved how eagerly he looked forward to becoming a parent. As a gynecologist, I had gotten my fill of seeing different women panic because their partners didn't want babies. But Ethan's excitement felt childlike. I was content with just watching him poke my stomach and caress me gently.

"I'm not forcing myself, Daddy," I replied. "I'm just three weeks pregnant."

"But stress is possible," he said. "And that might affect the baby's growth."

"Ethan, I'll be fine," I assured him with a smile.

"If you say so," he gave up and continued eating his meal. "Oh yeah, I spoke with my board of directors and explained the situation. Looks like everything's going to be a go. If you're coming along, it's going to be a busy day."

"You already discussed the terms of the partnership?" I asked in disbelief.

"Well, yes, but we haven't agreed on anything without your approval," he explained. "All I did was lay the groundwork. You just need to let them know what you want from the partnership and that's it. "

“Thank you,” I said. “You’re really going all out for me.”

“Trust me, I’m still holding back,” he said. He turned slowly to look at his pillow and then back at me.

I didn’t get it, but it was probably something important.

“Do I call my father?” I asked.

“Well, yes,” he replied. “Although I feel like he’s just going to agree with whatever you come up with.”

“True,” I admitted.

“Let’s get started then, shall we?” he suggested as he finished his meal.

The following days were filled with plans and ample meetings for getting the hospitals to partner. The first day was a meeting with the board of directors. Ben and Ian were both members of the board so that made things a little more comfortable. Ethan didn’t say anything at the meeting; before it, he had explained that I would be on my own to convince them to buy into my dream.

“So, why are you trying to get us to partner?” the chairman of the board asked. He was Andrew Wiliam, a man in his early sixties. I recognized him as a successful doctor in Maryland. It was amazing to see the kind of people that influenced Ethan.

This is no time to be impressed so I proceeded...

“I’ve always had this dream of rebranding my mother’s hospital,” I started. “And now, I see people in my community going downtown to get access to the medical services that should be readily available in the community. But, unfortunately, I’m unable to provide them with access to proper medical care because I don’t have most of the equipment for more serious cases. That’s not all; in terms of staff and patient relationships, we’re doing pretty well, but I’ve worked with Ethan’s hospital and noticed a very different atmosphere. There is a different way of doing things. I want to be able to provide them with the kind of care they would get downtown.”

“So, basically, you just want more customers,” he asked.

“I won’t deny it and say no. But the primary reason is because I believe that no one should go to another state if what they’re looking for can be provided next door,” I replied with a smile.

“I’m sold,” he said as he leaned back into his chair. “Anyone else?”

Ben, Ian, and Ethan exchanged glances and shrugged. The other two people—I honestly can’t remember their names—seemed to have no problem with my proposition.

“Alright, I’ll just leave you with a piece of advice,” he said. “It’s good to see that a young lady like you has grand dreams, but it’s very important to take breaks and try your best to ensure you find something else to keep you occupied.”

I passed a knowing glance at Ethan, wondering if he had snitched. His face simply said, I told you so.

“I’ll do that, sir,” I said to Andrew as I sat up and got ready to discuss other things that could crop up.

Ethan had already drawn up a partnership agreement. I was touched by how he was taking everything that concerned me into careful consideration. All I had to do was read through it and send a copy to Dad. The partnership was a bit weird; it felt like it was just going to benefit me alone. For instance, Ethan’s hospital was going to donate pieces of equipment to aid our work and send some of their workers to work alongside my staff and teach them what to do.

Ben and Ian were helping out by subsidizing the medical bills, so the patients had to pay less than they usually would. Downtown hospitals were expensive, so this was a way to help them save costs while restoring the way things used to be when Mom was alive.

No...even better than when she was alive. It was a deal too good to be true.

“Ethan, this agreement feels like everything will be totally dependent on you,” I said as I reread the document.

We were in his office immediately after the meeting, so we could review what we had discussed.

“You’re probably imagining it,” he said and shrugged.

“I’m not,” I pouted. “I don’t want to feel like a parasite. Partnerships are supposed to be symbiotic. aren’t they?”

“To me, there’s nothing wrong with the agreement,” he assured me. “This is just a way to help you achieve your dreams even faster. You can always turn it down but think about the future. This offer will let you focus on *other things* without being stressed.”

When he said *other things*, his gaze lowered and focused on my stomach.

“You just want me to have this baby by all means, don’t you?”
I sighed.

“It’s like I’m having an anxiety attack,” he replied as he squatted to hug my stomach. “The sooner I help you achieve your dream, the sooner I get to buy dad socks.”

“Thank you so much, Ethan.”

We moved along with the plans and had to return to Glen Allen to effect the changes we had come up with. As we arrived, a small crowd had already formed; they wanted to see us. The contractors had already gotten there with some of the equipment. Dad was standing outside the hospital, a look of pride on his face.

“You did it,” he said as he hugged me.

“I didn’t do much. Ethan handled everything,” I insisted.

“Well, I wasn’t the one who tried to convince the board,” Ethan said. “You should take credit sometimes. No one’s

going to stop you or take it away from you.”

“I guess you’re right,” I agreed.

One of the contractors present was adding an inscription to the hospital sign.

A Partner of Ethan Sullivan Hospitals

Partner huh?

I touched my stomach and wondered if I should tell my dad. Ethan has already said he’d handle it so there was no need for me to go ahead and tell him. At that moment, I was content with watching the hospital transform before my very eyes. Some painters were recoating the building to bring the old colors back to life. The community looked on with awe and wonder at everything unfolding.

My staff, and friends, congratulated my father and me for a job well done...and Ethan for the opportunity given.

“This is just the first step, you know,” Father declared. “Filling this place and handling it is going to be up to you.”

“I know. I’ll be needing your help too, Dad. Think you can give me an extra year before you retire?” I asked.

“Anything for you,” he replied. “There’s still some medicine in my system anyway.”

“Thank you, Dad,” I said with a smile.

“You’re welcome,” he said and embraced me.

A part of my dream was finally coming true, and I had only one man to thank.

Ethan

“These beds are for me?” Helen asked as the delivery company brought the new beds I had ordered for the guest house.

“Yes, please change everything in there,” I said. My back started to hurt remembering what it was like sleeping in there.

“Thank you so much, Ethan,” she said. She hugged me and quickly went off to inspect the materials that had made their way miraculously to her inn.

“You just like spreading joy, don’t you?” Stacy asked as she walked up to me and leaned on my shoulder.

“Oh I’m not doing Helen’s place just to spread joy,” I said. “I just need better sleeping conditions.”

“Yeah, that does sound like you,” she sighed.

I basked in the comfort of the prevailing silence. I spread an arm over her shoulders, pulling her to myself, while we watched the men switch out the beds. Helen and her family beamed with joy.

Henry’s face and those of his hospital staff were adorned with the same expression.

It was a sight I didn’t get tired of seeing. If I proposed, would Stacy’s face radiate that same energy?

The box was in my pocket. I found it difficult to leave the house without it. It was still seeking the perfect opportunity to propose.

Maybe, it’s time.

“Dad and the staff are thinking of organizing a party to celebrate our union,” she said.

“What?”

“Huh?”

“Our *union?*” I repeated.

“Oh no no no...not like *that* union,” she corrected.

I let out a sigh of relief because I almost thought that someone had found out about my plans and leaked them.

“I mean the union between both our hospitals,” she explained as she looked away bashfully.

“I think it’s a matter worth celebrating though,” I said. “This would be the first time I didn’t have to buy another hospital.”

“So I’m your first,” she said with a teasing smile.

“Yes, you are a lot of my firsts,” I said.

“That is something that makes me genuinely happy to hear,” she said and snuggled up to me.

A party celebrating our union huh? Wait...that’s not a bad idea at all.

Chapter Twenty-One

Practice

E than

Everything was moving smoothly at Stacy's hospital. As planned, I had sent staff over to help get her staff up to speed with modern practice. With the subsidized health plans, Henry reported that they were receiving more patients than usual. They didn't have a fully operational surgery team, so Ben and I sent some of our forces over.

Ian helped with making sure that they understood how the management would work. The mistake that Stacy and her mom had made was making the team dependent on them. Not a bad thing, but it would backfire if they weren't able to coordinate properly. Like what happened during the James incident.

Allison went there as well to help run the emergency drills. It might seem like we're preparing them for the worse while

helping them become more stable with self-reliance, but the main reason I was doing all this was to make sure that Stacy wouldn't have a lot to do during this initial period.

I felt bad, considering how much she enjoys the four walls of the hospital. But whenever I recalled what happened to her mother, I worried that she'd suffer the same fate during her pregnancy. Maybe I could get Olivia to talk to her. Stacy was a month pregnant, so there was no problem for now. I even left her behind in Glen Allen so she could get a feel for the new changes and her specific role.

I went back to Richmond because I still had work to catch up on. No offense to Stacy's place, but I couldn't get enough practice. I worried that I had gotten rusty. I had to switch roles with my staff, working under their supervision during surgery. I became their assistant. The new nurses and doctors found it weird, but the rest of them knew this was simply how I did things.

I needed to practice more. Ian mentioned that he had gotten a lot of demands for correctional plastic surgery. Not my forte, but something worth learning. So I helped out there as well. I jotted down the things I had learned and practiced them on the plastic anatomy models I had bought. My stitches were still sublime and in peak condition.

It didn't take me long to realize that the only reason I was working this hard was because I missed Stacy and needed something to distract me. I sank into my chair and pulled out the ring box. I inspected the ring again and again. I've never really feared anything; but with Stacy, I realized there are things I am afraid of.

Being abandoned.

Being a parent.

Asking her to marry me.

She promised that she wouldn't leave; that was no longer a problem anymore. I wasn't confident of my ability as a potential parent. She said we'd have some training sessions but, I didn't think it would work.

Asking her to marry me left a lump in my throat. She was going to say "yes", of course...I was just worried about the proposal going wrong. I could easily imagine losing the ring. Or proposing at the wrong time...or something else entirely ruining it for both of us. I didn't want to think too much about it, but that's how things worked for me.

"I should probably just practice first," I said to myself as I walked over to the anatomy model and got down on one knee. I held the box in hand, then visualized that the model was actually Stacy.

It was frightening even if the model wasn't alive, but simply picturing it as Stacy caused me to panic. I swallowed hard and forced the words out of my mouth, "From the moment I laid eyes on you, I knew there could be no one else. Would you like to make me the happiest man in the world?"

"What exactly are you doing?" Ben's voice called me back to reality.

I turned to find him looking at me like I had lost my mind.

I got back to my feet and adjusted myself, "You could have called first."

"I did. Where's your phone?" he asked.

I checked my pockets and the drawers. "I forgot it."

"Figured," he said and let himself in.

He took a seat and still looked worried about what he had just witnessed. He even exchanged glances between the model and me.

"You know that's a male anatomy model, right?" he asked.

“What?” I raised a brow and looked over at the model. I noticed there was no female reproductive system, just a male’s.

“I had no idea that the model is a male,” I admitted.

“You two would make a good couple, though,” he mocked.

“Idiot, I was practicing,” I said.

He pointed at the box in my hand. “Bring it.”

I handed it to him. He opened it and raised a brow in question.

“This is what you’re going with?”

“Yeah,” I replied. “Is there something wrong with it?”

“No,” he said with a smile as he shook his head negatively, then he returned it to me. “She’ll love it.”

“Thanks. So what are you here for?” I asked. “You should probably book an appointment in advance for your next meeting.”

“I’ve already booked an appointment,” he said with a frown. “I told you that Olivia and I are going to be away for some

alone time. Could you help watch Chloe?”

“I’m still worried about babysitting,” I said. “I almost dropped her, remember?”

“You know I had actually forgotten about that,” he replied. “This isn’t going to be a good idea, is it?”

“I doubt it. And I don’t know any babysitters,” I replied. “Oh, Chloe doesn’t do too well with strangers.”

“Hmm...” he muttered and paused to think about it. “I should probably just take her along with us.”

“No, not a good idea,” I said. “I can handle the babysitting, but I’ll need backup.”

“Stacy?” He raised a brow.

“Yeah, it will be good practice for when we’re both parents,” I explained.

“She’s pregnant, isn’t she?” he asked with a smirk.

“I didn’t say that,” I remarked. “I just said it would be good practice.”

“Right,” he said with a smile that told me he didn’t buy my excuse. “I’d feel more comfortable if Stacy is with you. I’m sure Chloe will calm down if you were there too. Just don’t break anything.”

He got up to leave. “Oh, and, congratulations in advance. Don’t think too much about the proposal. It’s not that hard. You just get on one knee and demand that the other party marry you. Done it twice.”

“I forgot you were a veteran,” I smirked, “Now get out of here.”

He nodded, “Don’t break anything, Ethan.”

“I’m not a kid anymore man,” I said with a frown. “Have some faith in me.”

He sighed and left.

A babysitter gig, huh?

“It’s... smaller than I expected,” Stacy remarked as she stared at Ben’s place.

“His first wife wanted it like this,” I said. “Too small for my liking.”

“Is Ian’s place like this, or like yours?” she asked.

I pictured the two-bedroom suburban-looking house he called home.

“Far more minimalistic,” I replied. “Hardly associates with anyone besides family members, so I don’t see anyone visiting him. He doesn’t seem to care, though.”

“I see,” she said and stared at the door.

I pressed the doorbell and Chloe answered.

“Uncle Ian?” Her eyes lit up.

“Nope,” I grinned.

Her shoulders dropped, and she made to close the door, but I put my foot between the door, stopping her.

She ran off screaming, and I followed her.

“Get back here you little rascal.” I chased after her and caught her.

She kicked the air squealing as I tickled her sides.

“Stop! I’m going to pee!” she warned as she emitted peals of laughter.

“You give up?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said, and I put her down.

She hugged my leg, “It’s nice to see you, Uncle Ethan. Who’s the lady?”

“Nice to meet you, I’m Dr. Stacy Roberts,” Stacy introduced herself nervously, which was a little surprising.

“I’m Chloe Sullivan,” my niece said proudly, then turned to me. “Is she your girlfriend?”

“Yes,” I replied instantly.

“Ethan,” Stacy said and punched my arm.

“What? It’s true,” I said and shrugged.

“I know but...” She looked away as her cheeks turned a shade of red. “Dummy.”

“Wow,” Chloe exclaimed.

“I know right?” I chuckled.

“Oh good, you’re here,” Olivia said as Ben followed behind her, holding their things.

Olivia knelt in front of her daughter and kissed her face repeatedly. “Are you sure you’re going to be okay on your own?”

“I’m with Uncle Ethan,” Chloe pointed out.

“I know, and that’s what I’m worried about,” Olivia sighed.

“I’m standing right here,” I reminded her. “Nowhere else... just here. Right here.”

“Stacy, please tell me you know what you’re doing,” Olivia asked.

“It shouldn’t be that hard,” Stacy replied.

“Oh God, no...” Olivia looked worried.

“Just leave them to it,” Ben said. “It’s not that hard. I mean I could do it.”

Olivia, Chloe, and I gave him a serious look.

“Let’s get going. I don’t want to miss the flight,” Ben said as he headed out.

“You’re using a private jet, so how do you miss a flight?” I asked.

“Hush, and don’t break anything,” Ben reminded me.

“Whatever you say, boss,” I said.

“Okay, sweetie, remember to brush twice, study, and don’t forget to take a break and play with your toys, as for candy...” Olivia rained down instructions on the six-year-old.

“Mom, I’m going to be fine,” Chloe assured her and kissed her cheek. “Go.”

“Alright my love,” Olivia returned the kiss, and Ben kissed her forehead as well.

We watched the two of them drive off; all three of us let out a sigh of relief when they were out of sight. Chloe went into the house. I was about to follow behind her, but Stacy held me back.

“I don’t know how to babysit,” she admitted.

“I kind of figured that part out,” I said.

“But if we’ve never done it before, how are we going to take care of things here?” she asked.

“Don’t worry about that,” I said. “We’re both going to be parents soon, right? We won’t have any idea what we’re doing, either. But this can count as practice for both of us.”

“I guess you’re right,” she said and exhaled deeply. “Okay, I’ve got this.”

“There you go,” I said with a smile and held her hand as we both went into the house.

Chloe was already seated on the couch with a book in her hand and the life-sized teddy bear I had bought for her birthday.

“So uh, Chloe, how do your grandma and your parents take care of you?” I asked.

There was no need to come up with a new way of doing things if the old ways were still valid.

“You both have no idea what you’re doing, right?” Chloe asked.

Ben had talked about how intelligent she was for her age, and how scary it can be sometimes.

“To be honest...” I exchanged glances with Stacy and uttered, “This is going to be our first time babysitting.”

“Oh, I see,” she said. “Well, this is reading time. I’ve already had breakfast. So, we’ll read and I ask you questions.”

“Damn this parenting thing is easier than I thought,” I couldn’t help saying aloud.

She giggled, “Sure it is.”

“I got some juice,” Stacy said as she brought out the drink from the bag she had brought. “Do you like apple juice?”

“I thought that was toxic to doctors,” Chloe offered.

“Is that a Sullivan thing?” Stacy asked, recalling what I had told her the last time.

“Dad said it’s super effective against doctors,” Chloe said with a smile.

“Well I’m immune to it,” Stacy said with a smirk. “I’ll pour out some for us.”

Stacy brought some cups with ice cubes in them and poured the juice. We took our cups and relaxed. Chloe was immersed in her book, so I focused on the TV, occasionally glancing over at Stacy, who seemed content with just staring at Chloe while taking a sip of her drink. I could easily guess what she was thinking.

“Do you like kissing Uncle Ethan?” Chloe asked out of nowhere, causing Stacy to choke.

“Wha.. what?” Stacy asked as she managed to calm down.

“He’s your boyfriend, right? I wondered if you like kissing him too,” she explained.

Stacy looked at me for backup, but I was also interested in knowing her answer.

“Well, that’s not a topic for a young lady,” Stacy said.

“Fine,” Chloe sighed and put down the book. “Let’s make popsicles.”

“Don’t we need some materials for that?” I asked.

“No, we’ll make special popsicles,” Chloe said. “Wait, juice cubes!”

“How do we do that?” Stacy asked.

We both knew how it was made, but we wanted Chloe to have her moment.

“So this is how it’s done,” she said as she poured the juice into the ice tray, with our supervision. We helped her place it in the freezer, but we needed something to keep her distracted from checking the freezer every five minutes.

“Let’s play house tag!” she suggested as she jumped on the couch.

“I don’t think...” Stacy tried to stop her.

“We can if we’re careful,” I said.

Chloe beamed with a smile, “Please Aunty Stacy?”

“Fine but the kitchen is off limits and stay away from the TV area,” she warned.

“Yes!” Chloe agreed and touched me. “Uncle Ethan is it.”

I got to my feet and the both of them got to running. I decided not to run but jog, so I didn’t knock down anything. I caught them easily. We took turns and chased each other around the house. Chloe said she was hungry so Stacy made hamburgers for lunch.

We played some video games and helped Chloe review schoolwork. The more activities we had, the more she seemed to have energy to spare. Eventually, we were both exhausted, and she was still brimming with energy. I wanted to call Ben or Mom and ask for advice on how to put the little gremlin to sleep. But I gave up on the idea.

“You guys are tired already?” she asked as she poked my cheek.

“Yes...don’t you have an off switch or something?” I asked. I lifted her and poked her waist, tickling her in the process.

“Ha ha, nope!” she said as I put her down.

Stacy was on the floor looking at the both of us. Chloe made her way to her and lay on Stacy’s back.

“Aunty Stacy? You love Uncle Ethan, right?” Chloe asked.

I feigned a lack of interest in their conversation, but my ears were still there.

“Yes, I do,” Stacy admitted.

“Why do you love him?” she asked.

“Do you love him, Chloe?” Stacy asked.

“I do.”

“Why?”

“Well, he’s clumsy and funny too. He can be sweet too. Oh, but he doesn’t spoil me like Uncle Ian does,” she revealed.

“Wait Ian spoils you?” I asked.

“Yeah, give me all the macarons and treats I want,” Chloe replied.

“Is that so?” I made a mental note to go shopping for treats.

“Well, those reasons you gave are also the same reasons I love him,” Stacy said. “Minus the Ian part. I’ve hardly associated with your other uncle.”

“That’s nice,” Chloe said. “Uncle Ethan is a goofball.”

“Yeah, but he’s my goofball,” Stacy said as she flashed a smile.

I looked away to hide the grin on my face.

God, I need to marry this woman soon.

“You two are so sweet,” Chloe remarked. “Ah! The juice cubes!”

I had completely forgotten about them too. The three of us went to check on the experiment from earlier.

The juice cubes had frozen nicely, and Chloe was getting a little impatient as Stacy tried to scoop the cubes into a bowl.

“Alright, here you go,” Stacy said as she moved the bowl toward Chloe.

Chloe grabbed some of the cubes and placed them in her mouth, but regretted it instantly as brain freeze took over. I took a cube and Stacy did as well. We watched Chloe still forcing herself to take some more.

“You should take it easy, though,” I warned.

“But, they’ll melt!” she whined with the cubes still in her mouth.

“True, but you don’t want to see the dentist about a sensitive tooth now do you?” I asked.

She shook her head negatively.

“Alright,” I said. “But this is a very nice way to enjoy apple juice. Looks like you’ve taught me something new.”

“I also know how to cook,” she said proudly.

“So will you cook dinner for us?” Stacy asked.

“No, I want pizza,” Chloe replied.

“Not a bad choice, I’ll place an order,” I said. “Oh can we eat in the living room and watch a movie?”

“That doesn’t sound bad,” I said. “Stacy?”

“I don’t mind,” she replied.

We ordered pizza and watched a movie, but Chloe didn’t last thirty minutes after eating and was already drifting off to sleep. We got her ready for bed and tucked her in. She seemed at peace and innocent for someone who was practically jumping around everywhere.

“Ethan?” Stacy called.

“Yeah?”

“I think I’m ready to be a mom,” Stacy said. “Well it’s too late to say that now,” she added as she touched her stomach. “I

don't think I would want to pay a hundred percent attention to the hospital after I have the baby.”

“Looks like someone finally gets what it means to take things easy,” I remarked.

“I do,” she said. “I was worried about how today would turn out. I'm exhausted as hell and craving to go to sleep too. But watching her sleeping face is making me envy Ben and Olivia.”

“We'll do good too,” I said. I hugged her from behind and kissed her neck. “Can we turn in as well? I don't think I have the strength to pull through the movie.”

“No problems here,” she said with a sigh.

I led her to the guest bedroom where we'd spend the night. I placed her in bed and lay next to her.

“Ethan?”

“Yeah?”

“I had a lot of fun,” she said with a smile but her eyes remained closed.

It was our first day watching over a child, but we knew we'd do better when our own kids were involved.

"Me too," I said.

Chapter Twenty-Two

It'll Go Away if I Ignore it

E than

“I can’t believe you’ve moved on so easily. What we had was real, and you know it. This new relationship won’t last because you and I are meant to be together. You’ll realize your mistake soon enough.”

“You think you’re in love? Ha! That’s a joke. I know you better than anyone else, and you’re just deluding yourself. You can’t replace what we had, and you’ll regret leaving me.”

“Enjoy your little fairytale with your new ‘true love.’ But don’t forget, I’m the one who knows every inch of you—the good and the bad. She’ll never understand you as I do, and she’ll never love you as I can.”

“I’ve been patient, but I’m done waiting for you to come back to your senses. You’re making a huge mistake, and you’ll see

that soon. Don't come crawling back to me when this new romance falls apart. I won't be here."

I looked at the texts and let out a sigh. All of them were from Gabrielle. From the looks of things, she was still upset about me and Stacy. I didn't care about her texts. Some of them made no sense. For instance, what did she mean by, *what we had was real, and you know it?* I thought we both made it clear that there was nothing else between us besides sex. That's not even all. The sex was okay but like with other girls, I was barely satisfied. I didn't get what she was aiming at, but I decided it wasn't that important to worry about.

"You don't want breakfast?" Stacy asked as she plated the scrambled eggs she had made with Chloe's help.

We were still babysitting and getting the hang of it too. The last thing I wanted was to distract myself with the drivel of someone who didn't have anything better to do.

"Of course I am," I replied. I put my phone back into my pocket and joined them at the table. "My niece made me breakfast. So, I must have it."

"I made the toast," Chloe pointed out.

“I’ll have that first,” I said and took a bite out of it.
“Deliciously toasted.”

“Thank you,” she said with the biggest smile I’ve seen on her.

She looked a lot like her late mother when she beamed and at the same time looked like Olivia.

Strange.

“Uncle Ethan, I’m going to be a big sister!” she announced.
“Did you see Mom’s tummy? She said she’s going to have a baby.”

“Oh really, I didn’t notice,” I replied. “Are you ready to be a big sister?”

“Hmm.” She nodded. “We’ll share rooms and play princesses and even braid each other’s hair.”

“That sounds really fun,” I said.

“What did you and Dad do when you were kids?” she asked.

My childhood was filled with me messing things up, with Ben and Ian stepping in to fix it. Or trying to hype Ian up to talk to

some girls. Or just simply admiring Ben.

“It was something similar to that. But we’re boys, so we wrestled a lot,” I replied.

“Did Dad lose?” she asked.

“No way that monster is going to lose when it comes to a show of strength,” I answered.

“He he he.” She seemed proud of her father. “What about you Aunty Stacy? Do you have any sisters?”

“I don’t have any siblings,” Stacy said. “But I do have cousins. So they were more like siblings to me.”

“I want cousins too,” Chloe admitted.

I stifled myself from laughing.

“We’ll see what we can do,” Stacy said, beaming a smile.

The union party was next week, and I decided to make it more than a union of two hospitals. I could hardly wait. My phone started to ring. I pulled it out; it was Gabrielle.

“Excuse me,” I said to Stacy as I excused myself from the table to answer the phone.

“Hello?” I answered.

“Why aren’t you responding to any of my messages?” she asked.

“And a good morning to you too, ma’am,” I greeted. “What do you want?”

“I already...good morning,” she snickered. “You’re ignoring me. You read the texts and didn’t respond.”

“Gabrielle. I didn’t respond because I don’t see any reason to,” I said. “The texts you sent didn’t make any sense in the first place because that’s not the kind of relationship we were in.”

“I know, but you told me I was your favorite,” she reminded me.

“I don’t want to sound like that guy, but did it ever occur to you that there was a favorite before you?” I asked.

“I...”

“And what we had was physical nothing more,” I reminded her. “Alright, let me say that I believe you; what made you think you were in love with me, and why are you still in love with me.”

“I...I thought...remember I told you that you were perfect for marriage,” I said. “I always saw you as a romantic interest.”

“If I remember correctly, you mentioned that my clumsy nature is a turn-off,” I reminded her.

She didn't say anything. Her silence was a testament to her guilt.

“Tell you what, I'll send you a million,” I offered. “Will that be enough to get you off my back?”

The line was disconnected. I shrugged and returned to the table. Half of my toast had been eaten. I looked at both of them, and they averted their eyes, feigning ignorance. I sighed and continued eating.

“So, was it from Glen Allen?” Stacy asked, but her voice sounded like she was chewing something.

“Nah, someone else,” I replied. “Nothing serious, it'll solve itself.”

“Oh okay,” she said. “I’ll be going to the hospital today. Can you handle Chloe by yourself?”

“Leave her to me,” I said with a thumbs up.

Whatever Gabrielle was up to, it was better just to handle it on my own. There was no need to involve Stacy right now.

Stacy

Alison asked me to help out with some patients; so, I headed to Ethan’s hospital to help out again.

“You didn’t tell me Glenn Allen was such a sweet little community,” she said as I went into our shared office.

“You enjoyed your stay?” I asked with a smile.

“I did, the beds at the inn Ethan recommended were heavenly,” she said. “My bed back at home now feels like a rock.”

“Ethan complained that the bed wasn’t right, so he switched out the beds and ordered new ones,” I explained. “Just in case he visited next time.”

“That had to be the most selfless selfish thing I’ve ever heard,” she said in disbelief.

“You don’t know the least of it,” I laughed. “He could have just said that he wanted to help her out or something.”

“Knowing Ethan, he might have actually done that out of a whim,” she said. “He’s like that.”

“He just does kind things out of a whim?” I asked.

“Well, I don’t really know,” she said. “Children in this hospital don’t pay medical fees you know?”

“I didn’t. That’s amazing,” I said.

“Mm...but not for extreme cases like surgery level,” she clarified.

“It’s still enough for me,” I confirmed.

“Of course it is. For you, that is,” she declared with a knowing smile.

She hugged me from behind and playfully pulled my ear.

“Now tell me, my dear Stacy, why didn’t you tell me that there was a fiery spark between you and our darling boss?” she asked.

“Whatever do you mean, my dear Allison?” I asked in the same tone.

“Oh don’t play dumb with me. I know a pregnant woman when I see one,” she whispered. “You and Ethan have been busy under the sheets, haven’t ya?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” I continued to act dumb.

“I’m happy for you two, especially Ethan,” she said as she let go of me. “When you left, this place wasn’t the same anymore. Sure, he seemed to have gotten by, using whatever methods you had left behind. But he wasn’t the same person.”

I didn’t say anything in response and just kept listening.

“You know he even lost weight at one point? Then gained some more?” she asked. “He was a mess. But with the time you spent here and until you left, we all noticed that he had actually found someone worth being with.”

“He wasn’t himself with you guys?” I asked.

“He would joke with us and play around. But it always stopped there,” she explained. “He was worried that he’d mess things up. He may have been a social butterfly but in reality was a cautious caterpillar.”

I smiled, it felt good knowing that there were people out there who genuinely cared about him.

“Now that caterpillar put one of his metamorphosis eggs in you,” she said as she poked my stomach. “On behalf of the rest of the staff here, could you please promise to keep our boss happy forever?”

“I will,” I promised.

“Thank you,” she said. “Now who are the most eligible husband materials of Glen Allen?”

“I hear Stuart won the local pageant this year,” I replied. “He’s very good with his hands. Or so I’ve heard.”

“The playboy type? No thank you,” she spat.

“But he is sweet,” I said. “Or so I’ve heard.”

“You don’t get it,” she said. “I have no problems with him as a person. But I don’t have the strength to pay attention to every Helen, Mary, and Nathalie from his past life who wants to act as a wedge between us. I don’t even know how you’ve been able to handle it.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Oh uh, no offense to you both, but we both know that Ethan was the playboy type,” she replied. “Chances that if you two were to get married, one skank will pull out of nowhere to ruin things. I’m sure they haven’t shown up yet, but get ready for a catfight.”

“I can’t handle a catfight,” I said as I raised both hands in defense. “Can I ask you to fight on my behalf.”

“You can count on me. I get to finally put the jiu-jitsu classes I spent two hundred dollars on to good use: beating up the past lovers of my best friend’s boyfriend,” she announced as she punched the air skillfully.

“Thank you, Alisson, you’re the best,” I said as I kissed her cheek.

“Now I want to steal you from Ethan,” she said. She touched her cheek and swooned backward, but I caught her. “Ah, my

princess.”

“Get up, you’re heavy,” I complained and shook her.

“Meanie,” she called me and got to her feet. “I’m happy for you. Once again, congratulations on the hospital’s successful comeback.”

“Thank you for your help in making that a reality as well,” I said with a smile.

She nodded. “Alright, let’s get back to work.”

I followed her and focused on helping out. What she mentioned about the past flings still stuck with me. I thought about Gabrielle. Ethan didn’t deny the existence of girls like her in his life. So in a way, I wasn’t worried. But as I remembered her approaching me, I started to worry again.

I headed to a nearby mart. Ethan and Chloe had asked for ice cream treats. I thought it would be a good distraction from the fact that I felt like I was being watched. I felt a person’s company from the hospital and all the way to the mart.

“You, Stacy Roberts,” a familiar voice called out.

As I recognized Gabrielle's voice, I was no longer worried or panicking.

"Oh, evening Gabrielle, came shopping too?" I asked, trying my best to sound friendly and not irritated.

"Didn't you say you and Ethan were worker and boss?" she asked.

"I think so, but not anymore," I replied. "I'm more of a volunteer now. I have my own hospital and all. But I do come around to help him out."

"Why do you insist on acting dumb?" She frowned. "What exactly is you two's relationship? And I don't mean work-related."

"You should have said so earlier," I sighed. "Ethan and I are lovers."

"Well, I want you to know that you're not the only one who is his lover," she said as she placed her hand on my shoulder.

I stared at her hand until she took it off herself.

"What do you mean, I'm not the only one?" I asked.

“I just thought I should let you know about how things work with him,” she said. “I’ve heard the rumors. He’s helping you rebrand your hospital. It won’t be the first thing he’s done material-wise for anyone. I mean, he’s bought me stuff, and I know some other girls he’s given things to. But with all of us, there’s a clear ranking among the girls he prefers.”

“Okay?”

“And I’m at the top of that list,” she said like it was something worth mentioning. “A rookie like you can’t simply just take that position. Oh, I thought I should warn you about something. Ethan doesn’t love anyone. He doesn’t even kiss during sex. I’m sure you’ve noticed.”

I don't know about that, ma'am, The man enjoys a good lip smacking.

“What’s the point in telling me all this?” I asked.

“Just take it like an experienced person’s advice,” she replied. “I’ve seen many girls do desperate things when they realize that he no longer has eyes for them.”

Wait...isn't that what you're doing right now?

I tried my best to suppress my laughter but a part of it came out.

“Is something funny?” she asked.

“No, nothing at all,” I replied.

“Good. I see he bought you a Lamborghini,” she said. “Nice.”

“Oh no, he didn’t buy this. I picked it up from his house,” I explained. “I normally choose one of his cars.”

“You’ve been in his house?” She seemed ready to pop.

“Yeah, I have,” I said. “But I’m sure as his favorite you’ve been there so many times that it’s boring now.”

“Just stay away from him, you desperate slut,” she spat and turned to leave.

“I guess I look like a mirror today,” I said softly.

I should have told Ethan about it, but there was no need to bother the gentleman. Gabrielle wasn’t really all that threatening; her words just sounded like she wanted to encourage herself rather than tear me down and taunt me.

I still felt bad for her.

“Ice cream!” Ethan and Chloe exclaimed as they ran to me to grab their treats. I was already having an ice cream sandwich when I handed them their plates.

“You seem oddly badass this evening,” Ethan remarked.

“It would seem so,” I said and kissed his lips.

“Mmm...banana,” he said as he licked his lips. “Thank you.”

Sorry, Gabrielle. Another loss for you.

Chapter Twenty-Three

I Tried Ignoring it but it Didn't Work

E than

I paced back and forth in her living room. I was back in Glenn Allen for the party. I had booked the Cultural Arts Center for the night as the venue for the union of our hospitals. Originally, I intended to get The Dominion Club, but I felt like it would give away my plan to propose that night. The Dominion Club has a solid reputation as being the wedding capital of the West End. Anyone who used there would automatically mean he had intentions to marry. The cultural center would have to do for the night.

I continued pacing. I wore a white suit with a black dress shirt and a white tie. The colors of the day were white and black, so this was the best I could come up with. I left my hair messy as usual; Stacy seemed to like it that way. Her father had asked me to pick her up.

He definitely knows.

It felt like it was prom. Surprisingly, neither of my brothers, including myself, actually went to prom.

Ben was studying, I forgot to set a reminder, and Ian didn't tell me his own reason for not going. He seemed excited about it at first but all of a sudden, he was no longer interested.

I had gone to events with several women, but this was the first time I felt this nervous. I pulled out the ring box and inspected it again. The ring was still inside the box. I closed it and memorized my lines for the twenty-third time. I still hadn't found the right words.

"Are you ready?" her voice called, startling me.

I put the box back into my pocket and composed myself. I turned around, "I'm ready."

I watched her descend down the stairs.

"Don't laugh okay?" she pleaded as she continued to descend.

She wore a sleeveless white dinner gown. Judging by how it looked from the front, I could tell that her back was bare. Her neck and ears were adorned with sparkling jewelry that

highlighted her complexion and added a little bit of spice to her outfit.

Normally a dress like this in any other color would scream seductress. But all I saw was an angel.

“What do you think?” she asked as she placed her hands behind her back and swayed gently.

She turned around to give me a proper 360° look at her outfit.

“Wow,” was all I could say at first. “You look like an angel.”

“It was my mother’s,” she said. “I had it redesigned. Dad loved it, but that was Dad; he thinks everything looks good on me.”

So, that’s why you asked me to come pick her up. Sly old coot. You won’t be sent to the retirement home anytime soon.

“It looks very beautiful,” I said as I extended my hand. “How long did it take you to have it redone?”

“A week and...” she replied as she took my hand. “Took me an hour to get ready, and I’m afraid of melting.”

“But you barely have makeup on,” I remarked.

“Nude,” she said.

“Oh, I see,” I let out a sigh of relief. “Well, thank you for all the effort you put in.”

“I’m still nervous though,” she admitted with a chuckle.

“How about a kiss to help boost your morale?” I offered.

“I would love that,” she said.

I kissed her gently, avoiding touching her face so I wouldn’t ruin her makeup. Her lips felt sticky from the lipstick, but it tasted like strawberry so I didn’t mind one bit.

“I feel a little better,” she said. “Thank you so much, Ethan.”

“You’re welcome, now let’s go show them,” I said.

The drive wasn’t long but it felt that way. I’m sure she was nervous about watching her dreams finally realized. As for me, I was worried about proposing. We arrived at the event; and to

our surprise, we were the only ones wearing the colors of the day. At first, I didn't get what was going on, but I saw my brothers grinning.

"You have got to be fucking kidding me," I said and frowned.

"Why is no one else wearing the colors?" Stacy asked softly.

"I have no idea, but I think I know who may have the answers," I said.

Allison approached us, so I left Stacy in her hands and went to confront my brothers.

"What did you do?" I asked. "And which of you did it?"

"It seemed like a funny prank," Ben said. "We told everyone that none of them should wear the colors of the day."

"Why?" I asked and raised a brow.

"Aren't you going to propose?" Ian asked. "We figured if we reduced the chances of you chickening out, then you'd propose."

“You didn’t have to, I already have this under control,” I said with a frown.

“Are you serious? Alright, so what’s the plan?” Ben asked as he crossed his arms.

“Oh, I would love to hear this.” Ian wore an amused expression.

“It’s simple as the event comes to an end, I call her aside and propose,” I said.

“That’s boring,” Ben said.

“You don’t get to call my idea for proposing boring,” I said and pointed at Ian. “And you don’t have a love life to begin with.”

“You’d be surprised actually,” he said and shrugged.

“Why do you two feel the need to help me out, I’m not that helpless you know?” I asked. “I’m thirty-five years old, and I can pull my weight.”

“They know that,” said a familiar voice from behind me.

I turned and found my mom, holding Chloe's hand while Olivia followed behind her.

"Mom, you made it," I declared.

"Of course, I did; it's a big day for my baby after all," she said and pinched my cheek.

I pulled away. "Mom, what if she sees you doting on me?"

She grabbed my ear and pulled me to her. "Did you say something, sweetie?"

"No, nothing, Mom, you're the best," I replied.

"That's what I thought," she muttered and let go of my ear. "Your brothers don't look down on you in any way."

"I do." Ian raised his hand, but Ben hit him in the side. "Ow!"

"It's a family's job to look out for one another," Mom continued. "So, if they see an opportunity to help you out in whatever way they can, just let them."

"I understand," I admitted defeat. "I was just worried about Stacy being startled and all."

“I’m sure she’d be expecting something to happen now,” she said. “And that’s where you come in. Where’s the ring?”

I placed my hand in my pockets. “Fuck.”

“As I thought,” she sighed.

“I’ll check the grounds,” Ben said. “Go check your car.”

“We’ll help too,” Olivia said, and Chloe nodded in response.

“You’ve got this alright,” Ian smirked.

“Shut up,” I frowned as I made my way to the car.

“Ethan,” Ian called, stopping me in my tracks.

“What?” I asked.

He walked up to me and whispered, “I didn’t mention this to Ben because I didn’t want him going berserk. But a woman approached me. She mistook me for you and started asking me to forgive her. I cleared the misunderstanding, but it didn’t seem like she was up to any good.”

“You caught her name?” I asked.

“I didn’t, but she looked familiar,” he replied. “Be careful, though.”

“Thanks,” I said.

“Don’t mention,” he said. “Now go find that ring.”

I nodded. There was only one woman that could come to mind, but there was no way she was actually here.

Stacy

“You look so beautiful,” Alisson said as she circled me. She wore a red cocktail dress, and a minimal amount of jewelry, among other things.

“You look vixen-ish. Did you come here looking for Stuart?” I asked.

“What? Nooo,” she shook her head negatively. “It’s not like I saw his picture in a magazine. I found out that I didn’t care about him having a Playboy past and wanted to try my luck or anything.”

“Your explanation doesn’t sound very convincing,” I said, laughing.

I didn't feel so nervous after all.

"Oh come on, you're getting your man. I should get mine too," she stated.

"I suppose that's the only fair thing to do," I agreed.

"Good, now point me to this Stuart of a hunk," she said as she rubbed her hands together. "Little miss Doctor wants to make him a patient of the heart."

"Over there." I pointed at Stuart, engaged in a conversation with James.

"A two-for-one special?" she asked.

"The other one is married," I warned.

"Thank you," she said with a sigh of relief.

"Wait, before you go, why are Ethan and me, the only ones wearing the color of the day?" I asked.

"I have no idea," she shrugged, "But it kinda makes sense since you two are more or less the stars of the day."

“Ah...it makes sense, carry on and happy hunting,” I ordered.

She gave me a thumbs up and went to meet with Stuart. I looked around and there were so many familiar faces. I couldn't find my father or any of the Sullivans, though. Not even Ethan. My staff motioned for me to join them. I shrugged and was about to make my way to them when someone stood in front of me.

It was Gabrielle in a black dress and other items I didn't care to remember.

“What's the meaning of this?” she asked.

“I should be asking you the same question,” I replied calmly. “This is an event to celebrate the partnership between Ethan's hospital and mine. If you're interested, I could register you for a discount if you pick up a medical card.”

“Didn't I warn you to stay away from Ethan?” she asked.

“Gabrielle, calm down, You're going to make a scene and you'll regret it,” I warned. “This is my territory.”

“Where do you get off threatening me?” she asked.

“That’s the funniest thing. I’m not even threatening you,” I replied. “I’m trying to tell you to...”

She poured the drink in her hand over my dress. The gasps and murmurs from everyone around didn’t go unnoticed. I stared at the dress I had inherited from my mother, the dress that made Ethan call me an angel, the dress that my father told me was his favorite, and the last one my mother wore for him before she died now ruined by the red liquid.

“You sneaky little bitch,” she spat. “I told you to stay away from him, didn’t I? Now you come here acting all high and mighty?”

She raised her hand to slap me but Alison slapped her first.

“Bitch,” Allison called, then turned to me, “Are you okay?”

I nodded hesitantly, trying my best to keep myself together because of my nature and the people watching. I just needed a teensy bit of a push and I was doing to break.

“You little...” Gabrielle seethed as she wanted to attack again.

“Hey!” a loud yell tore across the field, startling everyone.

Ethan walked up to us and looked at Allison and Gabrielle. As he turned his attention to me, his eyes lowered to my dress. I watched his face turn from confusion to anger. I got the push I needed and started to cry.

“Ethan,” Gabrielle called out. “I was...”

He rushed over to her and raised his fist, but Alison stopped him.

“I already hit her, sir,” she said to him.

He let her go and hugged me. “I’m so sorry, Stacy.”

“Mom’s dress...” was all I could say.

“I’m sorry. I should have resolved this a long time ago. I’m really sorry it had to be now,” he sighed with regret.

“Ethan, I don’t get it. You said you weren’t the type to fall in love, so why did it have to be her, of all people?” Gabrielle asked.

“I’m not obliged to respond to filth, but I’ll tell you,” Ethan replied. “It’s because she’s willing to settle for someone like me when there are a million options out there. It’s something you’ll never understand. Unless you want me to put you in a

place where you can never be found anymore, I'd advise you to never show your face around me or Stacy. My hospital will refund you every single dime you've spent. And then you are no longer welcome at my place."

"It's not fair," she said.

"It's either that or a night in the cell," he said. "I will gladly let you have the second option, and it won't stop at merely one night."

He was deadly serious. Everyone was quiet as he spoke. We had witnessed someone who is always meek as a dove easily become a cobra ready to kill. I even stopped crying.

"I'm sorry," Gabrielle apologized and bowed her head in shame.

She shot me one last spiteful look before leaving. Ethan had held me possessively while threatening her. Even as he watched her leave, he didn't let me go.

"Are you okay?" he asked as he pulled back.

"I can't stay like this," I said as I looked at my dress.

I looked at his suit and noticed that I had stained it with red.

“I’m sure it won’t matter if we’re both messed up,” he said with a chuckle. “Besides no one really cares.”

“I’d look like I was being careless,” I said.

He looked around and motioned for one of the stewards to bring a glass of red wine. He took the glass and splashed the contents over his suit.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“I don’t want you going home,” he replied.

I heard a splashing sound. Allison had poured her drink on herself. “Oops.” Everyone started doing it. His family, my staff, even the stewards.

“I guess you can’t go home now, can you?” he mocked.

I held back the laughter and exhaled deeply. “You’re a very strange being.”

“But you love me the same,” he said with a smile.

“I love you the same,” I agreed. “Gabrielle had been threatening me, but I didn’t take it seriously as I kinda felt bad for her.”

“You should have told me,” He said. “Well, not like I can say anything, considering she was threatening me too and I didn’t say anything.”

“I didn’t want to bother you with something trivial,” I explained.

“Same thing here,” he said. “I really should have said something.”

“But it’s fine,” I said. “I didn’t know you were going to rage like that.”

“I’ve never had to raise a fist against a woman before. It still feels odd.”

“And you never will again,” I assured him. “I’ll do the lifting next time.”

I didn’t expect the night to go that way, but seeing everyone stand up for me in my time of shame was enough of a proper motivation. I only had the ringleader to thank.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The Story of the Broken Ring

E than

From the moment I saw the ring, I knew it was the one. The ring looked a bit rough around the edges, and the gem, as expensive as it looked, seemed like it was cut by an amateur. It wasn't the best of the rings but I could tell whoever made it, put their all into making it and it came out like this.

A clumsy, yet beautiful mess.

"How much is this ring?" I asked as I pointed at it.

"That one? It's merely a showpiece, not for sale," the jeweler replied.

"Why? It's a lovely ring," I stated and he looked at me like I had lost my mind.

“Sir look at the ring,” he said, “The edges aren’t smoothly cut and the gem isn’t either. The only thing that looks good is the box and that was something I decided to place it in.”

“Why is it on the showpiece if it isn’t for sale?” I asked.

“Because it’s not really the showpiece,” he said as he pointed at the sign: unfit for sale

“That’s kind of a harsh thing to say about it,” I said. I was still unable to take my eyes off the weird looking ring.

“Maybe if I told you its story, then you would understand,” he said. “I bought a bunch of rings from a fellow jewelry maker. His assistant gave me that ring, saying it was his first. I didn’t even look at it then because I trusted the work of his master.”

“But I got back here and further inspection showed that it wasn’t a good ring. I’ve asked the boy to come pick it up today.” He said, “If you’re having difficulties selecting a ring for your woman, I’ll be happy to select one for you.”

“If I remember correctly, you said I’m the one meant to choose my ring,” I said.

“Yes, but...”

“Give me a price,” I said.

“\$600,” he replied. He genuinely didn’t want to sell the ring for the price he would sell the others in thousands.

The door opened and a young man in his early twenties walked in with a sullen look on his face.

“Oh, there he is,” the jeweler said. “Marcus, this gentleman wants to buy your ring.”

“Really?” The man’s eyes lit up.

“Yes,” I answered.

“It’s not perfect though, but I can recommend you to my teacher, he’ll get you a better ring,” he said.

“Marcus, are you a clumsy person?” I asked.

“Yes,” he didn’t even hesitate in admitting it.

“Then we’re of the same feather,” I smile. “Name your price.”

“Okay, \$1000?” he asked.

“I’ll buy it for \$10,000,” I said and his mouth dropped open. “I’m not encouraging you to create messy rings, but it should be an opportunity for you to improve your craft. Maybe you’ll sell a ring worth that amount one day, who knows?”

“Thank you so much, sir,” he said with a bow.

I wrote him a check and took the box. In my eyes, the ring was perfect. But those were my eyes. I wasn’t sure what she would think.

“And to give us a few words, here’s Dr. Stacy Roberts,” the compere announced.

Stacy got on the podium as we all applauded.

“A lot of things didn’t go the way I expected tonight,” she started to say. “I expected everyone to wear the same colors, and I got baptized in red. Turning from the lady in white to the lady in red. Chris de Burgh would be proud.”

We chuckled at the joke.

“I always had this way of seeing things. I thought I was going to be the one who would *singlehandedly* reignite the dream my mother once had,” she continued. “And for a while, I thought I knew what I was doing. I decided to go to Richmond. I

realized how wrong I was about being able to pull this off on my own. I knew I couldn't do it alone, but I was blinded by the image my mother created; it felt like she was always doing it on her own. I forgot there was someone standing right there beside her, making everything look very easy. I'm sorry for forgetting about that, Dad."

She looked in Henry's direction, and the father raised a glass to the daughter, accepting her apology.

"Now after a month of being stubborn, I was finally able to come to an agreement with myself and my father on the best way to make this happen. That was where I met someone who bought into my dream.

Ethan Sullivan," she said and I smiled. "He may be a little clumsy, but he's so humble and ready to learn from those beneath him staff-wise. He still wants to help whoever he comes across in a selfish yet selfless way that I could get addicted to seeing."

She paused. "I'm glad I met him. We may have had our ups and down, but...I am very glad I met him. I'm grateful that he was the one who bought into all this. I also want to thank Ben and Ian Sullivan for their help as well. Allison and everyone from Ethan's place who came to help, my staff and I are very grateful for your acts of kindness. I will never forget it. And I hope to pay it forward one day."

Everyone cheered and clapped.

“And to every citizen of Glen Allen who has remained on my family’s side all these years, I’m grateful as well,” she said and raised a glass. “Now, if there are still drinks in your glass, I would like to make a toast to the beginning of a partnership that won’t end for a long, long, time. Cheers.”

“Cheers!” we chorused followed by the clinking of glasses.

“There’s no better time than now,” Ben whispered to me and pushed me back to get going.

She came down from the podium, she clinked glasses with other guests. She turned to look at me and a smile formed on her face.

Here we go.

I started to make my way to her.

Stacy

The speech went well. Although it wasn’t what I rehearsed. I thought about thanking Gabrielle for giving me something to help break the ice with the guests. Amid the congratulations

and cheers, I could feel someone's gaze. I turned around and found Ethan standing there with a very nervous expression on his face. He started walking toward me. People seemed to just clear out of his way. I tried to calm myself down, I had no idea why my heart started to pound.

He stood in front of me. "Hey."

"Hey," I echoed with a smile.

He started smiling as well and chuckled nervously. "Your speech was amazing. You really outdid yourself preparing for it."

"That wasn't what I actually planned on saying and it wasn't what I wrote down either," I explained. "Everything you heard was not scripted.

"Off the top of your head?" He raised a brow. "You really are something else."

"Stealing my lines? Plagiarism!" I teased and poked his stomach playfully.

A slow ballad started to play and everyone found a partner and started dancing.

“Want to dance?” I asked.

“I’m a good dancer when I’m on my own. But with someone else? Unless your shoes and feet have a death wish,” he said.

“Well, I know a good orthopedic,” I mocked.

“Alright, if you say so,” he said.

My breath caught as his hand enclosed mine, warm and strong. His eyes held a promise of adventure, and suddenly, all my doubts melted away. The music carried us into a world of its own creation. With every sway and every step, I let myself be guided by the melody. The area spun around us, a whirlwind of color and sound. His touch was firm yet gentle, leading me through a dance that perfectly matched the rhythm of the song.

Each movement was a language of its own, a conversation between two souls eager to connect. I lost track of time as we moved in harmony. My laughter mingled with the laughter of others; and for a while, the worries of the world faded into the background. It was as if the universe had conspired to bring us together, to let us share this fleeting moment of beauty and connection.

The world outside ceased to exist as our steps quickened, the music reaching a crescendo. His eyes locked onto mine, and I

felt a rush of emotion that words could never capture. In that instant, it was just us, a shared heartbeat echoing in the dance. As the final notes hung in the air, we slowly came to a stop, our breathing synchronized.

The applause of the audience brought us back to reality, and we exchanged a smile.

“My feet are still fine,” I remarked.

“I was hyper conscious about it,” he confessed.

“I don’t mind you stepping on my toes,” I said.

“Well I think I’m about to,” he said.

“Hmmm? How so?” I asked.

“I’ve tried to think about the right words to say, but I don’t even know how best to ask a woman this kind of thing,” he replied. “It’s torn me apart for days now.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

He took in a deep breath and exhaled deeply. “I guess I’ll let the action speak for itself.”

He got down on one knee. I realized what he was talking about. He pulled out the box and showed me the most unique ring I had ever seen. The ring looked a bit rough around the edges. The gem, as expensive as it looked, seemed like it was cut by an amateur. To be honest, it looked like something Ethan would make if he were a jewelry maker.

It wasn't perfect; it was clumsily put together, yet the ring still had this appeal that said, *I'll continue to improve.*

“So...will you marry me?” he asked. “If you don't like the ring...”

“Ethan.. I love the ring,” I said and offered my hand. “And I'm not about to let any wine spilling woman take it from me.”

He laughed and put the ring on my finger. It fit like a glove. I was convinced that this ring was specifically made for me. He got to his feet and held my hips pulling me possessively to himself, then kissed me. The whistles, cheers and applause reminded both of us that we weren't alone. As we broke the kiss, he gave me a long look of admiration.

“What?” I asked.

“I just managed to propose to the most beautiful woman I know,” he answered. “I must be dreaming.”

“No, you’re very much awake,” I assured him. “For one thing, you’ve made my second dream come true.”

“What’s that?”

“Getting married to the father of my child,” I replied.

“We’ll make awesome parents,” he assured me.

Ethan

SHE SAID YES!

I was able to contain my joy. I knew I was going to throw a celebrity dance when I got back home.

“You have to meet my mom,” I said. “Knowing her, she will have already met your dad.”

“Does my dress look okay?” she teased.

“Perfect,” I gave her a thumbs up. “I’m sure a fashion designer somewhere would be going bonkers right now, saying this is the next big thing.”

“I won’t buy it. I’ll make mine,” she mocked.

“I’d like to place an order in advance,” I said and offered her my arm.

She accepted the arm, and I led her to where my family was gathered. As I suspected, her father was there as well.

“Dad, Ethan and I are getting married,” she said. “I’m sorry that I skipped a lot of steps.”

“It’s okay, I knew,” he said with a smile.

Called it.

“How did you know?” she asked in surprise.

“Think of it as the instinct of a parent who wants grandchildren,” he snickered.

She turned to look at me and I shrugged.

“Besides from the moment he started working here and you were against him, most of the staff already figured it out as well,” he explained.

Her cheeks were as red as a cherry tomato. “I thought I was being discreet.”

“Far from it,” he chuckled, “...but I’m glad you’re taking my advice and taking the time to pause and focus on other things life has to offer.”

“Thank you, Dad,” she said.

He turned to me. “Thank you for taking care of her and helping her dream come true.”

“You don’t have to thank me. It’s simply my role as the love of her life,” I avowed.

“That’s a pretty interesting concept,” he said. “Good luck, my son.”

I nodded and thanked him.

“Alright Stacy, meet the Sullivans,” I said as I pointed at my family. “Ben, his wife Olivia, and their daughter, Chloe, with an extra on the way, my younger brother Ian, and our mother.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet all of you,” Stacy said with a bow.

“No need to lower your head,” Mom said as she lifted her chin. “Oh, you’re pregnant.”

“She is?” Henry asked.

“I was going to tell you later,” Stacy said with an apologetic look.

“Well you and the father are getting married, so that’s good enough for me,” he said. But it was easy to tell that he was excited to become a grandfather.

“I’m going to be a big sister and a big cousin?” Chloe asked as she hugged Stacy’s leg. “Thanks, Aunty Stacy and Uncle Ethan.”

“I don’t know the appropriate response to that, but you’re welcome,” I said.

“Welcome to the family Stacy,” Olivia said. “It’s nice to know I’ll finally have a sister.”

“Single child too?” Stacy’s eyes lit up.

“Hmm,” Olivia nodded and the two embraced like they were lost comrades in arms.

“Welcome to the family; take care of our idiot brother,” Ben said.

“He’s afraid of spiders, live or fake...if that’s any useful information,” Ian said.

“Why do you both hate me so much?” I asked.

They both shrugged. Well, I loved them all the same.

“Are you going to stay for the after party?” Chloe asked.

“Not for you, young lady,” Ben scolded. “We’re heading home after this.”

“Aw...” Chloe whined.

“Don’t worry, gremlin, I’ll party hard for both our sakes,” I promised.

“About that, I’m actually tired,” Stacy said. “Maybe I should sleep at your place.”

“But it’s a thirty minu– oh, I understand,” I smirked. “Good night guys.”

They bade us goodnight, and we headed for Richmond.

I helped her out of her dress and she tossed it to the side.

“I didn’t expect everyone to ruin their dresses for my sake,” she said. She picked up the dress and inspected the stain. “I hope that was the last of your crazy exes?”

“I hope so too,” I said and pulled out my phone. “I’m going to warn each of them, then block and delete their numbers.”

“What if they have medical emergencies?” she asked.

“There’s always the age-old method of just making an appointment,” I insisted.

“Alright, but can you do that later?” she asked as she stood in front of the mirror. “Come help me take these things off, please.”

I walked over to her and unclasped her bra hooks and let the garment fall.

“Wow,” we chorused at the same time.

Her breasts had gotten heavier and fuller; the areolas had gotten darker too.

“They look so beautiful,” I said as I held them and squeezed gently. “Softer too.”

“Mm,” she whimpered. “They’re more sensitive as well.”

“That’s a good thing in my books,” I said and started to suck on them.

Trapping her left boob in my mouth, I sucked gently on her nipple. Using my tongue, I flicked at the stiff bud as she gasped and groaned in response. I switched from her left and moved to her right instead, applying the same motion. I used my teeth to graze her nipple, then turned her to face me.

My hand secured her ass and made her face me. She hugged my head and pushed her chest forward to fit more of herself into my mouth. While my mouth was busy attending to her breasts, it was time to put my hands to work. My left index and middle finger caressed her panties, rubbing slowly at first, then moving even faster.

I started to move in a circular motion, just the way she loved it.

“Aah... yes...” she affirmed. I got rougher with her breasts and her pussy.

I moved the panties to the side and gently rubbed her pussy directly. Her wetness lubricated my fingers, making touching her all the more pleasurable. I pulled my fingers away and took a step back to inspect her body. Her breasts dripped with saliva; her eyes were hypnotized, and her lips slightly ajar before she licked them.

I stared at my finger blessed with her juices and licked them clean.

“You should have given me,” she said with a pout.

“The next one, I promise,” I said, and she got on her knees.

As she pulled down my pants, my dick whipped her face as it sprung to life.

“Ow!” she exclaimed as she held her face while frowning at me.

“It wasn’t intentional,” I promised while trying not to laugh.

“I’m not going to suck it anymore,” she mocked.

“I don’t think you have a choice,” I said as I held her head to get ready.

She opened her mouth to breathe, and I slid my cock into her mouth, then let her nose breathe in air. She had a stubborn look on her face, but I was having none of it.

“You don’t have to look at me like that sweetie. I started to move my hips, fucking her mouth slowly.

She managed to keep the scowl on her face, but her eyes started to roll back as I started to move faster. I could hear her gagging, yet she held my hips to make sure I didn’t stop. I intended to punish her but she had turned tables on me.

“Ha...you’re really hanging in there, aren’t you, baby?” I asked and moved slightly faster.

“Hmm,” she managed despite the rough handling.

“Good, I’ll give you a breather,” I said. I pulled out and she started coughing.

The saliva decorating my dick dropped to the floor. I stepped out of my pants and underwear. She attempted to take off her panties, but I stopped her. It was sexier that way.

“That was awfully mean of you stopping like that,” she insisted.

“Judging by the way you coughed, you were clearly cho— ?” My words were interrupted as she placed my balls into her mouth and started sucking on them.

“God..” I groaned as I bent over, completely taking in the pleasure her mouth offered.

She stopped sucking and just started using her tongue instead, moving it around while stroking my dick at the same time. Double pleasure, double the fun. My body started to tense up as I felt the urge to end the first round.

“Stacy...I’m...”

“Hold it with your hand,” she instructed, and I obeyed.

She got up and bent over, moved her panties to the side to let me in. I felt the first, second, and third jets of my seed quickly exited my system. I let out a groan as the process ended, but I could feel my dick getting back up immediately without a lag time.

“Oh, I see,” she smiled. “You’re really in the mood to breed aren’t you?”

“I could ask you the same thing,” I said.

I wasn't at full mast yet, but I was still ready to go. I started to move; with each motion, I could feel my dick get harder and bigger, until it returned to its proper breeding state. I held her from behind, my left hand reaching in front to choke her neck, while my right hand held her hips securely. Her small stature made the position easy, and I put it to immediate use.

“Ha.. ha.. ha...Ethan!” she called out as I started to move faster.

Each time she tried to resist or pull away, I would spank her ass. I did this repeatedly until she wasn't even resisting anymore; she was now accepting every part of me able to make its way into her. I lifted her and held her hips. Her hands reached backwards to hold my head for support as I resumed my pounding.

“Ethan, I'm...close...” she warned as her orgasm hit.

“Bold of you to assume that I'm going to stop now,” I said. I pulled out and tossed her on the bed.

I watched her try to crawl away; she turned to cast a pleading look. I remembered what had happened to me in the kitchen

some weeks back, and from the look in her eyes, she remembered it as well. I placed her on her back and slid my dick back into her pussy. I used her head as a cushion for both hands. I started to pound again. I saw her cling desperately to the bed sheet, panting heavily. I observed the ring I had given her and smiled.

“We’ll be husband and wife soon, won’t we?” I asked.

I couldn’t hear her reply besides the incoherent words; I assumed she was supporting the statement. I pulled out and lay on my back, allowing her to get into the reverse cowgirl position. I watched her compress and decompress with each bounce. She paused and gyrated her hips slowly before resuming her thumping until I was finally ready to bust. As we hit our second...well, third for her...we finally gave in and decided to rest.

“Don’t tell me we’ll only be doing this once a week,” she declared. “I just remembered that we’re doctors.”

“Fuck,” I groaned as realization set in.

“Nevertheless, I’m happy that I have a budding family now,” she said as she embraced me.

“Me too,” I agreed. “I love you so much Stacy.”

“I love you too, Ethan,” she said.

To think someone as clumsy as me would be able to find true love. I still felt like I was in a lucid dream. If I was, I didn't plan to wake up anytime soon.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Richmond's Butterfingers and Glen Allen's Doctor

Stacy

In the heart of Glenn Allen, a tranquil suburban haven, life unfolded like a captivating chapter in a romance novel. The community breathed with an air of familiarity, where white picket fences framed picturesque homes and blossoming gardens adorned the streets with a kaleidoscope of colors. It was a place where time seemed to slow down, allowing the residents to savor the simple joys of life. Nestled amid the rolling landscapes, Glenn Allen's scenic charm was only matched by its warm-hearted inhabitants.

Neighbors were more than mere acquaintances; they were characters in each other's stories, united by a shared sense of belonging. Every morning, the aroma of freshly-brewed coffee wafted from open windows, inviting casual chats over picket fences and impromptu gatherings on front porches. Children's laughter echoed as they cycled along sidewalks, weaving tales

of their own adventures. Sometimes, on their way to school, they would skin their knee or discover they had an aching tooth.

A neighbor could fall sick. Another could have a heart attack. Or a visiting family member would want to ensure everything was working perfectly with their body systems. That's where the biggest hospital in Glen Allen came to play...

Yeah, my hospital. It started out small after the partnership, but with the introduction of the subsidized healthcare plans, we experienced people coming from downtown and the surrounding neighbors flooding the hospital. Even after the subsidy was reduced to make sure my husband's and his brothers' vast pockets remained vast, we ensured the stability I had always wanted. So, the first goal had been achieved, and after a year the hospital sustained itself.

“Goal!!!” the men's voice echoed. We were having a family picnic at Crump Park.

“Why are we doing the barbeque again, aunt Stacy?” Chloe asked as Olivia and I watched over the meat on the grill.

“Because some people don’t know how to lose on purpose!” I yelled at the three brothers, who had brought a ball to play with the other dads.

“I love you too honey,” Ethan yelled back.

Ian kicked the ball to him. He tried to stop the ball with his feet, but the ball pulled him along, and he fell.

“Adorable klutz,” I said and rolled my eyes.

“You love him still,” Olivia teased.

“I’m more worried about Jason turning out like him,” I sighed.

My son, who was a year and a half, watched his father and uncles play from the comfort of my father’s thighs. The boy and his grandfather turned to look at me almost in perfect sync, and they flashed a smile. I was relieved if he ended up like his grandfather instead but still have his father’s smarts and skills. I still remembered how his birth went.

Ethan stood by as he watched the process. His hand held mine and whispered words of encouragement. But it didn’t sound like they were for me.

“Come on Ethan, you’ve got this. You’ve helped a lot of women give birth,” he said. “You already know what it’s going to look like. You don’t have to be scared. She knows what she’s doing. Everything’s okay. You’re okay. She’s okay.”

If that was his idea of trying to make me feel better, it was actually working because I completely forgot about the impending pain.

“Ethan?” I called.

“Yeah?” You don’t have to worry about me, I’ll be fine.

“Yeah, I know,” he looked at me like I had said nonsense. “I’m more worried about how this will go.”

“You better watch the crowning,” I reminded him.

He didn’t have to do it, but I thought it would be funny to watch.

“I will, just let me know when you’re ready to start pushing,” he said.

“Ethan... I’ve been pushing,” I said, “Labor started ten minutes ago.”

“Fuck,” he cursed and I laughed.

I focused and squeezed his hand.

I felt his kiss against my forehead, “Make us proud parents.”

“Thank you,” I said softly and resumed pushing.

“Sir, there’s crowning,” Allison announced.

He walked over to the end. I expected him to collapse, but he took over the delivery, aiding our son’s entrance into this world. After I delivered and the nurses concluded their checks, I held my child.

“I didn’t drop him,” Ethan said with a smile as he burst into tears while laughing. “I thought I would.”

“Your butterfingers lost this time,” I mocked.

He stopped laughing and switched into full blown sobs, “I’m a dad...I didn’t screw it up.”

I watched him break down in tears of joy. I had never been prouder of myself or childbirth than when I saw how his body shuddered under the tears.

“You adorable klutz, come here,” I called and he wiped his face, before coming close.

I rewarded his cheek with a kiss. He took his son’s hand while he suckled. In a way, he was like his...

“Don’t you think he’s like me with how intense he is?” Ethan let the intrusive thought win.

“Don’t ruin the moment Ethan.” I sighed, “But yes... yes he is.”

Ethan kissed the boy’s hand, “Welcome to earth, my son.”

“Alright ladies, the meat won’t cook itself,” my mother in-law announced. “Sophia is getting tired here.”

My second niece seemed more interested in what we were doing. Chloe may have complained, but the girl enjoyed cooking more than the other Sullivan women. I couldn’t wait until she was older and helped us out.

“Are you tired?” Olivia asked as she blew a kiss at her baby.

“But betting on who would handle the grill?” my mother-in-law asked. “You know the boys won’t lose.”

“I thought chivalry or something,” I said with a sigh.

“Not when it comes to competitions,” Olivia said. “Thank goodness, the food is ready.”

“Let’s get seated!” I announced.

I was surprised to find Ethan and Ian dog piling Ben. They let him go and headed to the table. I could hear the other mother’s or single women murmur words of admiration as our boys approached.

“You did good sweetie,” Ethan said and held me possessively. He kissed me before poking my sides and then inspecting the meat.

“Ben, no... you’re sweaty,” Olivia complained, but she didn’t do anything to push him away as he kissed her neck repeatedly.

I saw him more as the gentle guy, so it was odd seeing him act so aggressively. Chloe and Ian set the table and I got to plating with Olivia’s help. We all got seated.

“Drinks are missing,” Ian said.

“I forgot to bring them,” Ethan chuckled nervously.

At this point we were all used to him.

“I brought back up in my car,” Ian said as he got up to go get them. “You guys start without me.”

I was yet to understand Ian.

Ben said Ian was the smartest.

Ethan said he was antisocial.

Chloe said he was sweet.

His mother said he was the kind of guy you’d baby.

Olivia found him a bit scary.

They all seemed to know different sides of him.

Well, a story for another day.

“How could you forget the drinks?” I asked Ethan. “I thought you wrote it in your pocket diary?”

“I forgot it as well,” he said.

“Whatever am I going to do with you?” I asked in a mocking tone.

He brought Jason and placed him like a shield between us.

“Continue loving me unconditionally?”

“Like I have any other thing to do with you.” I rolled my eyes and grinned.

I kissed him and we started eating. He may be a clumsy human being, but he was my clumsy human being. And I made up my mind to continue loving him, butterfingers and all.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Epilogue

Ian

Ian Sullivan, the youngest of the Sullivan brothers.

I'm not antisocial. I actually enjoy the company of people; but unlike my twin brother who casually expresses his desire to socialize, I rather wait until I find someone that will want to understand that part of me. It didn't work out that way for me. As everyone already knows that my brother is openly sociable, I get treatment like I don't want to be around anyone.

"There you are," a voice called as I brought out the cooler filled with the drinks I had brought.

A beautiful woman, with golden hair and green eyes. My heart was stolen immediately. She ran to me and embraced me. "I heard you were in Glen Allen, so I came here to find you."

“Okay?” I raised a brow.

She kissed me deeply and pulled back. I was at a loss for words.

“You look confused, I’m so sorry,” she apologized and stepped back. “I’m Dr. Natasha James.”

Why did that name sound so familiar? If I knew someone as beautiful as this, I was sure that I would never forget.

“I know you once set up a date between me and your older brother, but the truth is, I’m actually in love with you,” she said.

I did? She is?

“Ethan? Aren’t you going to say anything?” she asked.

She thought I was Ethan. Do I tell her the truth? Or do I become the person she desires? What is this feeling in my heart that desires her in return?

The end

Chapter Twenty-Seven

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