



MR. BENTLEY

MACKENZY FOX



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TABOO SERIES

BOOK ONE

MACKENZY FOX



CONTENTS

[Author's Note](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Blurb](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[WANT MORE?](#)

[Mr. Petrov...](#)

[Mr. Devereaux...](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Mackenzy Fox](#)

[Also by Mackenzy Fox & Dakotah Fox](#)

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Mr. Bentley is a taboo, age gap, ex's dad, silver fox romance with praise, spanking, better use for ties, and lots of steamy scenes that will have you turning the pages in my new Taboo Series. For mature readers only. Dirty talking alpha alert...

DEDICATION

*Things are so much better when there's a dirty talking,
tattooed, silver fox.... Don't you think?*

BLURB

They say what happens in Mexico, stays in Mexico, right?

It all happened when I saw him in the airport; Lukas Bentley.

My ex's dad.

He's a silver fox, with a face like a fallen angel and eyes like a wild storm, and he's twenty years older than me.

On the outside, he's a successful businessman who wears Armani suits and rocks salt and pepper hair like nobody's business.

Under that suit, he's covered in tattoos and has a body better than men half his age.

He owns most of Seattle, and I know he's dark and dangerous; but most of all, he knows how to seduce a woman.

What I didn't expect was for him to seduce me, or that I'd like it.

It's wrong. Forbidden. And totally addictive.

I don't know if I'll ever get him out of my system, it was only supposed to be a fling.

But now I've got all sorts of feelings going on for Mr. Freaking Bentley.

And I don't know where that leaves me, aside from totally screwed.

CHAPTER ONE

ARIANA

I stare at the boarding gate wondering how the hell it all came to this.

How is this my life?

Maybe if I keep asking myself the same dumb question, I might get a better answer.

I tap my ticket on my knee aimlessly, knowing full well that this bleak situation isn't going to get any better. So screw it, I may as well get shitfaced and enjoy the fact I've got two weeks' vacation, champagne on ice, and definitely no boyfriend in tow.

I plonk myself down at the bar and order a glass of their finest sparkling concoction, then I wait what feels like eons to board the plane to my lovely vacation in the sun that I booked and paid for six months ago.

My fuckwit ex screwed up this whole trip, hence why I'm going on it alone.

I caught him cheating a few months ago and kicked his ass to the curb. I might be many things, but I'm not a sap, and I had no desire to hear him out.

James wasn't the guy I thought he was, though they never are.

He was smart, sweet, and deliciously attractive, always wearing a suit and works in finance. I'm not usually into guys like that; I prefer them a bit rough and rugged, but he was

charming, *very* charming, and I fell for him. Which just goes to show you how naïve a person can be.

Never judge a book by its cover. I should have remembered that little ditty from my first grade teacher. That will teach me to be so smug.

Things were great, until they weren't. We'd been dating for almost six months, and though we had our ups and downs, I thought things were solid. I dumbly thought we were going places, but turns out James liked to dib his nib in the office ink and then some.

Anything in a skirt, according to some. *How could I not have seen the signs?*

It turns my stomach to think of what was going on behind my back.

He wasn't the type to grovel, but he said he was sorry and that he didn't love what's-her-name. He claimed that he wasn't thinking straight, and when that didn't work, he tried the blame game.

Of course, it was all my fault. I was too busy, too tired, too whatever to give him the attention he needed. What about the attention that I fucking need?

I throw half the champagne down my throat furiously in one gulp.

I was so done with his shit, I gave all his expensive Armani work shirts to charity and threw the rest of his belongings off my balcony. Sayonara. Anything of his flew out onto the street. Granted, I'm only three floors up, so there was no risk of hurting anyone below. It really was a sweet moment, probably not my finest hour, but sweet all the same.

I love seeing a grown man cry over a smashed apple mac. So worth it.

No matter what he thinks of me, I would never cheat on or lie to someone. Not ever.

I'm also not docile or inclined to blame myself over his misgivings. I have a stronger backbone than that, but a part of

me wonders why I keep attracting these types of men.

Since I prepaid for this trip on my credit card months ago, it was too late to get a refund on the flights or the accommodation. And I wasn't about to stay at home and lick my wounds.

So, Cancun Mexico, here I come.

Pathetically alone.

Pathetically single.

Pathetically pathetic, really.

None of my friends could get the time off work, and to make matters worse, I have my birthday while I'm away, so I'll be celebrating spectacularly alone.

Best fucking birthday ever.

Twenty-eight, here I come.

I take a more ladylike sip of the bubbles, knowing it's not gonna last if I keep slugging it back like a sailor. The bartender looks at me and his lips twitch. It's like he can tell this isn't gonna be the last time he sees me before boarding.

I'm not usually a big drinker, but I think the situation calls for it. And I fucking deserve it.

When I think about it, I didn't really mix in the same circles as James, since most of his friends are rich snobs. A couple I got along with when we met on occasion, but not that many. I don't like people who treat waitstaff like slaves; they're people too, just doing a job.

The bartender tops my glass up without me having to ask, and I smile at him gratefully. He gives me a sympathetic look that tells me he's seen it all before.

I even—if you can get any more pathetic—splurged on new bikinis and a cover up, as well as a couple of new dresses for my romantic holiday alone. Urgh. How tragic.

At least I will have my book boyfriends to keep me company. Maybe there'll be a hot guy at the resort who I can

get to be my cabana boy for a weekend. You know, when in Mexico and all that.

I sigh, wondering if I should order a bowl of peanuts because that's about all I can still afford on this trip. Lucky for me, the accommodation is all inclusive, which was another expense that I thought was a good deal at the time.

Someone's got the game on really loud in the bar. I don't know who's playing, nor do I care.

I just want to wallow in my own self-pity.

By my third glass of champagne, and still no food, I warn the bartender to cut me off. If I have any more, I'll be looking for the nearest karaoke machine and any innocent looking bystander to join me in an out of tune singalong.

It could get messy.

I glance around the bustling bar and wonder how in the hell I'm going to have a fun time by myself in romantic Cancun for the next two weeks... I mean, *who am I kidding?*

With James, I did what I usually do; made him my entire world, putting his needs before mine, even though he'd say differently.

I wear my heart on my sleeve, I always have, and deep down, I'm a hopeless romantic.

I suck on the strawberry at the bottom of my champagne glass and that's when I see him.

Oh, holy shit.

What's worse than seeing James in a busy airport? James's dad is what.

Lukas Bentley sits at one of the booth tables adjacent to the bar.

Though I've only met the man twice when me and James were dating, he isn't the kind of man you can easily forget.

He's graying, though he wouldn't even be quite fifty yet, and his hair is perfectly styled; short back and sides, and longer at the front, with it slicked back off his face.

He's a handsome man, and he's grown a beard since I saw him last. It's dark with white and silver peppered in at the sides, similar to his hair. His jaw is chiseled and strong, like his son, and he has the same light blue eyes. Beautiful eyes.

I don't know if it's because I've had three overpriced glasses of champagne, and that's why I'm noticing, but James's dad is a fucking silver fox. The gene pool runs well in that family.

Pity James didn't inherit any of his father's poise or stoicism. That's clearly an assumption, but he looks like a man you wouldn't mess with.

I bite my lip and giggle. Jesus. I've really lost the plot. Maybe I should stop drinking.

I slink down in my chair and turn away, so he doesn't see me.

I know now why I like him. I remember James complaining that his dad refused him his trust fund, pushing the age back to thirty, or until he can 'grow up,' I think were the words I remember.

Go Mr. Bentley.

At least his dad has some redeeming qualities; it just seems they weren't bestowed upon James.

What are the fucking chances that I'd see him in the same goddamn airport?

Kill me now.

Today couldn't get any worse, and the last thing I need is his dad's sympathy. That is, if he even remembers me after the one dinner we had.

The other time we met was when James childishly stormed out of a bar when they had a fight over money. That was kind of awkward. I wince at the memory of me and Mr. Bentley standing there, staring after him as I excused myself to run after James.

What I should have done was pat Mr. Bentley on the back for not letting James get what he wanted. *Spoiled little rich*

kid. He might have everyone else wrapped around his little finger, but he definitely doesn't control his father.

I smile at the memory of James's furious face.

If only I'd known then that he was a dufus, I would've saved myself a lot of heartache.

"Would you like another?" the bartender asks me as I lean on the bar, knowing I'm at my limit.

I shake my head and push my glass toward him. "Better not, I've got a plane to catch." I give him a wink, and he smirks.

I manage to make my way out of the bar without Mr. Bentley seeing me, not that he'd give a shit. I'm sure when all is said and done, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

He looks like the kind of guy that gets all the chicks. James mentioned to me one time that he's a womanizer, and I can see how. Smartly dressed in a suit, with expensive looking loafers. He's got the whole Miami Vice vibe going on. For an older guy, he is pretty hot.

You're drunk, I remind myself.

I shake off my weird reverie and look up at the screen. Hoorah, my plane is ready to board. Finally.

I make my way to the gate, and line up in the queue. My phone chimes in my pocket as we start moving forward.

I pull it out and see it's my best friend, Charlize. She's Australian, and we met in college when she was here on an exchange program. We've been inseparable ever since, hence the fact she never left Seattle. Along with my other bestie, Imogen, we think we're the three musketeers.

Have a safe trip, babe. I'm so sad I can't come with you 😞

That's ok. I've got Mexico and copious amounts of tequila to keep me company.

I feel so bad you're spending your bday alone, that sucks ass.

Who said I will be? 😊

Way to go, tiger! That's how you show him.

I sigh to myself. I don't really mean it. I'm not opposed to a one-night hook up, but it's been a long time since I've done that. College, to be precise. And this is Mexico, so it could be dangerous.

It occurs to me then and there that I've been in relationships since I was twenty-one. Seven fucking years. It's like a lightbulb goes off in my head.

Seven years of solid relationships. Thinking that the next guy could be *the one*.

I feel like giving the universe the big middle finger.

I shuffle up the line and make a vow to myself that this vacation is going to be about me. For the first time in my life, I'm going to put me and my needs first instead of twat-faced James.

IKR. James who?

She sends a high five emoji, and I laugh.

Boarding. GTG. Text you when I get to the resort.

Be safe. Love ya guts, chick.

Right back at ya. xx

I switch my phone off and hand my boarding pass to the attendant at the gate.

"Have a great flight." She smiles.

I smile back. "Thank you."

It's not her fault I'm jilted, broke, and a little bit tipsy.

No, this is the new me.

I'm a strong, independent woman and I don't need a man.

I don't.

Two weeks in paradise, here I come.

CHAPTER TWO

ARIANA

I take a seat by the window in coach and stare out at the tarmac. It's dreary as usual in Seattle. The best thing about going to a warm climate, is the thought of lying by a pool and eating nothing but burritos and drinking cocktails. And I'll finally get around to reading that hot new romance on my kindle. I can't remember the last time I bought a book, much less read one. The monotonous thrum of everyday life has just gotten in the way of simple joys like reading for pleasure.

It's amazing, the amount of clarity you get when you're newly single and on the rebound. It's like your life flashes before your very eyes, and you may not like what you see, but you're too preoccupied with moping to care.

I wonder if I can order some more bubbly...

I never drink like this, but those few glasses have certainly taken the edge off.

Nobody sits in the seats next to me yet, not that the plane is full or anything, and I hope it stays that way so I can spend the next six hours losing myself in the selection of movies on offer. Another thing I haven't indulged in for at least six months is seeing any new releases.

I begin to scroll through the channels. There's a new Hugh Jackman movie out, or better still, absolutely anything with Jason Momoa in it. I could do with a perve festival.

As I glance up, I see Mr. Bentley boarding.

What the fuck? He's going to Cancun, too?

I suddenly remember it was him that gave me the heads up on the package deal at the resort I booked. I wanted to surprise James, and his father mentioned the resort he stays at and how nice it is, hence why my credit card is maxed out, and it isn't even the best room they had.

I sink down farther in my seat, but it's not like I need to. Duh. He's not in cattle class. He turns left to first class, and I watch him disappear up the aisle.

I really hope I don't run into him. He's probably aware that me and James broke up by now, but if not, then I'll have to tell him and it'll be awkward. Or, who knows? He may even give me a pat on the back.

I wonder what it would be like flying first class, just once in my life. The thought is indulgent.

And no, I didn't get with James because I thought he was rich. He actually isn't, because dear old dad keeps making him go to work and won't give him his inheritance.

I giggle in my seat, and the lady in the aisle opposite spares me a glance.

I don't know what she's looking at. It's my party, and I'll cry if I want to.

It could be worse; I could be still with the jerk and not know he was cheating. Apparently, he's been screwing this girl from his administration department for months. My stomach curdles at the thought. I slept next to this bastard night after night and lived with his lies.

I settle on watching Sweet Girl, the new Jason Mamoia flick. Nothing like a hottie, badass, pissed off father, out for revenge, with his teenage kid in tow, as they fight the bad guys and vow to bring justice to the innocent. Swoon.

I buckle up and search around in my purse for snacks. I'm not one of those girls who doesn't like to eat. If I'm not snacking, I start to feel faint.

While I rummage, thankfully finding a jumbo pack of M&M's, the flight attendants come down the aisles to check

that everyone is buckled in and help people with dumb questions.

I'm just about to rip the bag open when out of nowhere I hear; "Surprise!!!!"

I jump at the same time I open the bag, and the M&M's go flying in the air. Lots of little colorful balls land on the people in front of me as I splay them with chocolate treats they didn't know they wanted.

I gasp as I gape at my two friends, while also trying to apologize to the people in front of me, now wearing my M&Ms as ornaments.

Charlize and Imogen are standing in the aisle, beaming at me as I stare up at them.

"What the fuck?" I blurt out.

The lady behind me tuts.

"We didn't want you to spend your birthday alone," Charlz says, diving into the seat next to me and into my arms, squeezing me as she steps on my now wasted candy.

"And you were so sad about it when Charlz rang you," Imogen adds, getting in on the act as we do a three-way hug. My heart constricts. "It killed us not to run over there and ruin the surprise early. You looked like you were about to go plummet off a bridge."

"You fucking bitches!" I whisper-shout.

Charlize cackles as she picks up a M&M from under her ass and pops it in her mouth.

Imogen slides into the aisle seat and takes a photo of me on the verge of tears with Charlize doing the peace sign in front of my face.

"There's one for the gram," Imogen laughs. "If you could've seen your face when we yelled surprise."

"What a classic." Charlize laughs, as Imogen shows us the screenshot of me looking like a deer caught in headlights, and

Charlize beaming at the camera with a M&M between her teeth.

“It killed me not to say anything,” Charlize goes on. “I was so sure we were busted; we could see you in the bar, getting tanked. By the way, it would have been cheaper to order the whole bottle.”

I shake my head, overwhelmed. “When did you cook this up?”

“Weeks ago.” Imogen beams. “You didn’t think we were going to let you be all alone, having a blast in Cancun without us, did you?”

Charlize elbows me in the ribs in jest. “The boys down there are gonna be sweet, babes. Don’t you worry, we’ve got some fun all lined up for you.”

I shake my head and wipe my tears away. I can’t believe it.

Fuck Jason Momoa.

I have the two best friends in the world.



We spend the whole trip laughing, joking, and eating all my pre-packed snacks.

Turns out the girls really did plan this out weeks ago. It may be a squeeze with us all in the hotel room with one bed, but we’ll manage.

Imogen already offered to sleep on the floor, bless her. All that matters is that they’re here, and I’m not a total jilted loser with no friends.

The good thing about my besties, too, is they will not let me wallow. Nope. No sitting around here feeling sorry for myself. Not on their watch.

We all watch the Jason Momoa movie together with copious amounts of free diet coke and packets of peanuts. When that’s over, I mention to them that James’ dad is on the same fucking plane, just ahead of us in snob-class.

“What are the chances?” Charlize winces. “I mean, talk about awkward.”

I hold a finger in the air. “He’s actually really cool. He’s also the one who told me about the resort. He and James don’t get along that well, so he’d probably be happy for me. Weirder things have happened.”

“You were always too good for him,” Charlize quips, annoyance in her tone. “It’s a dead giveaway the guy’s more into himself when he’s got more hair products than you do. And I mean, have you seen that bitch from his office? I’ve seen better heads on a mug of beer.”

“Ugh, don’t remind me,” I groan, like I need another visual of them doing the wild thing, all the while laughing at my expense.

“That’s it!” Imogen cries, clapping her hands together, making us both jump.

Charlize and I glance at one another, puzzled.

“What’s it?” I query.

“No more talking about fucking James!” she whispers at us.

She’s probably right; it is kind of depressing.

“She started it!” I point at Charlize.

She shakes her head. “I was merely pointing out all of Ariana’s good points, to which there are many. Look at her. She’s a goddamn hottie and she’s successful, not in her love life *obviously*, but in other areas. She’s got a cool apartment, and she’s got amazing posture. I’d kill for a spine like that.”

This is honestly how she talks. *Amazing posture?* I laugh out loud.

“Keep up with those kinds of compliments,” I quip. “Just less of the love life comments, thanks.”

“She’s right,” Imogen joins in. “I’d so do you if I were gay.”

I snort diet coke out of my nose as I take a badly timed sip. “Thank you for *that* visual.” I cough and splutter while they both laugh at me.

When we land, it’s still just after lunch. I can feel the humidity already and we haven’t even stepped outside yet.

This trip is going to be so awesome! I can’t wait to get into a bikini and dive into the pool. For the first time since my breakup, I actually feel like things are a little less bleak.

There is no way I’ll be down in the dumps with these two around.

None of us have been to Cancun before, so the excitement bubbles as we make our way off the plane and into the airport terminal.

It takes a while to get through customs, but after we do, we wait by the carousel for our luggage. As usual, it’s slow, and everyone mills around, waiting.

When the carousel finally starts, the whole terminal is packed with people. I don’t see Mr. Bentley anywhere, thank God. I sigh with relief.

I only brought one suitcase plus my carry on, but we get two carts because Charlize is an over packer from way back.

When we finally load the last case onto the cart, we make a diversion to the bathrooms, or rather, my friends do, while I’m left to guard the luggage.

I walk over to the vending machine to buy a soda. When I turn back, I run right into a wall of steel and tumble sideways, losing my footing.

Two hands suddenly reach out and grab my forearms to stop me from falling.

“Holy crap, I’m sorry...” I begin, but I halt in my tracks because I’m met with icy blue, penetrating eyes that bore into me, his furrowed brow momentarily confused, as he tries to figure out where he knows me from.

Holy fucking crap. No, no, no!

“Ariana?” Mr. fucking Bentley says, assessing me as he grips onto my arms. “Is that you?”

For some reason, my mouth feels like sandpaper.

“Hello, Mr. Bentley. Yes, it’s me,” I reply, which is about as lame a response as you can get.

He frowns again. “Whatever are you doing here?”

I could ask you the same thing, *hot shot*.

“Umm, I’m on vacation with my friends.” I point over to my two travel buddies who reappear from the bathrooms.

Please do not ask me about James...

He nods, but I can’t tear my eyes away from his.

How did I not notice how smokin’ James’ dad is before? Or maybe I did during the champagne heist at the bar. Maybe I missed a lot back then because I was too besotted with his asshole son... *penalty box, Ariana. Let it go.*

And I mean, even noticing that Mr. Bentley is smokin’ hot is just so wrong, on so many levels.

“How lovely.” God, even his voice sounds like soft, gooey caramel. He has a concerned look on his face. “Where are you staying? We’ll have to have dinner. That is, of course, if you can spare the time.”

Dinner? He thinks you’re still with James, idiot.

“Uh. Umm, that would be... uh nice.”

He gives me a small smile, his eyes creasing at the corners. “You didn’t tell me where you’re staying, Ariana.”

“Oh,” I stumble. “At the Grand Pacific.”

“What a stroke of luck, so am I.”

I nod rapidly, though I want to go and hide somewhere. *Please don’t ask me about...*

“How is that wayward son of mine treating you?”

I can’t tell him. I don’t know what’s come over me, but I don’t want to get into it right now.

“Uh, just fine. Thanks, Mr. Bentley.”

He lets go of me, finally, but gives my chin a small squeeze. “Please, it’s Lukas, Ariana. You make me sound like an old man.”

His small touch goes straight to my core, and while I contemplate what that’s all about, he continues to stare down at me, like he’s waiting for an answer.

Talk about dark and dangerous.

No, you’re a fucking fox, Mr. B.

“Oh, sure, sorry... Lukas.” *It sounds so wrong.* “Well, it’s really great running into you, a coincidence, really.”

His lips twitch. “I’ll be in Cancun for about a week. It would be lovely to catch up. I’ll be staying in the Penthouse suite.”

Of course, you are.

Having drinks or dinner with him may just be the end of me. I’d rather die than have a family get together and discuss my breakup, leaving out all the good parts where I cut up all his sons designer ties and smashed his computer.

“Uh, yeah sure.”

He leans into his jacket pocket and pulls out a business card. “Here’s my number. Text me when you’re free.”

It doesn’t even sound like a question, more like a foregone conclusion.

I take it, giving him a smile. “I will, for sure.” I have no intention of doing that in a million years.

He gives me a big shit-eating grin as my eyes go slightly wide, and he stalks off, cool as anything, with his one small suitcase in hand. There is no way he can fit a week’s worth of stuff in that small suitcase. Though, he probably gets his suits and ties flown in on a private jet.

I meander back to my friends, who stand there assessing me with judgy eyes.

“What?” I say when I finally reach them.

“Who was that hot, old guy?” Charlize’s eyes narrow.

I laugh. “Old? He’s not *that* old, he’s like forty-eight or something, and get this... that’s James’s dad.”

They both gape at me. “*That’s* James’ dad?” Imogen splutters.

I nod my head. “Yup.”

“Fuck me. He’s a bit of a stud,” Charlize goes on. “He’s got that whole sugar daddy vibe going on.”

I wince. “Thanks for that unwanted visual. He has quite the reputation with the ladies, or so I’ve heard.”

“I can see why. I’d do him.” Charlize snorts.

I roll my eyes. “Nobody is doing anyone, especially not James’ dad. And, like, eww.”

“You’re no fun,” Charlize replies. “I’ll have you know older guys can be very good in the sack. I once dated this guy who was older than me, and it was the best sex I’ve ever had. Like *the best*. They get right down to it without missing the mark, if you get my drift.”

“Don’t remind us.” Imogen side-eyes me. “It’s all we heard about for weeks on end.”

“I’m just saying, older guys know how to please you better, so sue me.”

“Can we please stop talking about this?” I begin to push the cart toward the exit. “We’ve got tequila to drink and a pool to swim in, and I don’t want to hear any more about older men. Let’s go.”

CHAPTER THREE

ARIANA

The room is amazing, with a view over the ocean and the huge swimming pool below. Palm trees are literally everywhere, and with the lush greenery and neatly manicured lawns, it's spectacular. We organize a roll out bed, so some lucky person gets to share the main bed with me.

Just having my two besties here makes all the difference. While I was all psyched to spend ten days alone, I'd much rather be having a blast with them and not feeling sorry for myself.

We're not even in the resort for an hour before we head down to the pool for a swim and some much-needed cocktails.

The whole resort is like something out of a magazine and worth every penny. Too bad James never got to see it.

"I don't know about you, but I'm never leaving." Charlize sighs, her eyes closed as we all lie on the deck chairs around the pool. It's so nice to feel the sun, especially after such a long winter. "You can't make me."

"Tell me about it," I agree. "You don't get sun like this in Seattle. Or margaritas."

"Speaking of which," Imogen pipes up. "Where is that waiter?"

I laugh. "You just have to turn the flag thing up. They'll come to the table."

She does just that on the little table next to us, and sure enough, a few moments later, he appears with a pad and pen.

We order three more cocktails, and two bowls of fries to munch on, because, well, we should really eat something before we get totally shitfaced.

The pool is crowded, even though this is the adult pool. There are no kids running and jumping and squealing their heads off. I don't hate kids, but I don't want to hear them or get jumped on and splashed to death.

Charlize passes around the sunscreen. She has dark, olive skin, and being from Australia, she's used to the sun and never gets torched. Me, not so much. I'm pale with blonde highlights. Imogen is the polar opposite to both of us, with olive skin, black hair, and striking blue eyes.

I make sure the umbrella overhead is completely covering me. I once got badly sunburnt in Florida, and I've vowed to never do that again. There's nothing worse than spending two days of your vacation in the emergency room because you resemble a lobster and can't sit down. I definitely don't want a repeat.

"How's your new job going?" I ask Imogen. "And when do we get that discount?"

Imogen just got a job with Cartier. She was the top sales executive for Louis Vuitton for two years. Imogen is also training to be a buyer, something she's so excited about. She takes elegance to a whole new level and is the only one out of the three of us in a successful relationship with a man who isn't threatened by her success.

"I knew you just loved me for my discount," she muses. "And it's going great; I'm loving it. Best place to find yourself a rich man with good taste ladies."

"I love diamonds," Charlize agrees. "About as much as I love dildos, which is a lot."

I splutter my margarita, and she reaches over to pat me on the back.

"Jesus, Charlz."

"Oh, what? You love it."

“Please do not tell me you brought that thing with you.” I laugh.

“Don’t be crazy... it’s disguised as a lipstick.”

I shake my head. Charlize is a restaurant manager at The Vibe, a very hip and happening joint downtown. She loves mingling and meeting people, especially men. She’s kind of boy mad, not that it isn’t obvious.

“Jeepers, don’t look now...” Imogen whispers behind clenched teeth. “But isn’t that James’s dad?”

Charlize and I both turn in unison to where she’s looking toward the other end of the pool.

Holy fucking crap.

We watch as Mr. Bentley walks to the edge of the pool in a pair of swimming shorts. His bare chest, wait for it, is heavily tattooed as well as his shoulders and arms. To say it’s a surprise is an understatement. I’d never in a million years pick him for being inked like that, especially all over his body.

With clothes on, he seems so... *sophisticated*. There’s nothing sophisticated about his body, though; rippled and muscled, like he’s a man half his age. There’s a smattering of hair on his chest that does things to my insides.

For fuck’s sake, this isn’t fair.

His body is like a gift from God for all who witness it. So much so, I see Charlize adjust her sunglasses down her nose to get a better view.

“Holy fuck,” she whispers. “I didn’t know older guys could have eight packs.”

It’s so wrong, but we keep staring.

I notice he has a couple of tattoos running up both legs, too, so he certainly likes his ink. Who would have ever thought that under the suits and ties he always wears that he looked like this?

Goddamn. It’s so fucking hot.

He runs both hands through his hair, and then dives into the pool. His smooth transition into the water has every muscle in his body contracting.

I hear Imogen and Charlize groan out loud at the same time.

“Fuck me dead,” Charlize says in our direction behind her hand, as we all continue to stare at him when he surfaces and begins to effortlessly glide through the water.

“I think I just came,” Imogen whispers.

I don't know why we're whispering. It's not like he can hear us.

Lucky for me, I have a huge hat and sunglasses on. I definitely don't want to run into him, or worse, have him see me gawking.

I chew my straw as he makes his way through the water like Adonis to the Gods.

“What's his name again?” Charlize wonders, leaning forward to watch him swim.

“Mr. Bentley.”

They both turn to me and laugh out loud.

“What?” I say, throwing a pretzel at both of them.

“That sounds so wrong, but oh so right.” Charlize smirks. “He can flip me over anytime he wants.”

I screw up my nose at that thought.

“You're insatiable.” I roll my eyes. “And his first name is Lukas.”

“Think I prefer Mr. Bentley,” she mutters dreamily.

“So do I. Harder, Mr. Bentley,” Imogen croons in a sexy voice. “Oh yeah, just like that, Mr. Bentley, it feels soooo good.”

They both laugh like idiots.

“Does anyone mind? That's my ex's father!” I splutter.

“Who’s fucking hot!” Charlize cries. “Look at him.” She claps her hands together. “Holy shit balls, I’ve had a brain wave. You know what would be really perfect?”

Imogen and I glance at each other and wait for it.

“Spare us, will you? It’s been like a hot minute and you’re already cooking something up,” I groan.

She ignores us. “What if you boned Mr. Bentley to get back at James?”

I pinch the bridge of my nose and shake my head. “Umm, firstly eww, and secondly, are you out of your mind?”

“Answer me this, then?” she goes on, since there’s no stopping her now. “Does he have a better body than his twenty-eight-year-old son?”

There is literally no competition. “Ugh, yeah,” I reply without having to think about it. James went to the gym, but he wasn’t ripped like his father is. “He’s obviously gifted.”

“I rest my case.”

“We shouldn’t be doing this.” I take a big, long needed sip of my margarita. My brain doing somersaults.

“Doing what?” Charlize pretends to be confused.

“Perving on Mr. Bentley,” I whisper-shout.

Imogen looks between me and Charlize. “You’re not actually serious, Ari? I mean, it’s not our fault. He’s out on display with hot swimming shorts on, and his tattoos all out on show. What are we meant to do, not look?”

“She’s just pissed because she should have gone for the dad, instead of the son,” Charlize says matter-of-factly. Then she ducks when I toss the sunscreen at her head.

The fries arrive, and I smile sweetly to the waiter as he sets them down on the side table. “Because it’s just wrong,” I snap once the waiter leaves. “On so many levels.”

She smirks. “That’s only because now you’re probably thinking about if he’s better in bed than James ever was.”

I shake my head, trying to get that vision out of my head. “You are deranged. Has anyone ever told you that?”

She taps her nose while she laughs. “You are so thinking it.”

Imogen laughs right alongside her. “She so is.”

“The both of you need your heads examined. That’s so gross.”

Charlize takes a wedge and shoves it into her annoying mouth. “You’re just saying that because it’s taboo. You’re not supposed to get off on looking at your ex’s dad. But who made those kinds of rules? Who says you can’t?”

“Uh, most of Seattle, probably,” I reply. “I could just see the headlines now, and I’d rather die. Not to mention, it’s ridiculous.”

She sits back and sighs. “I’m so over society dictating what you should be doing in the dating world. I’m happy being sexually free. I’ve no problem with it. But some men are threatened by that, like they’re the only ones allowed to play the field.”

“Sounds like most of my exes,” Imogen agrees, sagely. “When I met Nate, everything changed, including all my preconceived relationship ideas before him. I think it depends on the person. It’s about the connection. In fact, that’s the only thing that matters.”

“Have you two ever thought about going on Dr. Phil?” I snark.

“Thought about it but couldn’t be bothered.” Charlize sighs.

Imogen may talk some sense, and though Mr. Bentley is hot as fuck, I’m seriously going to drown my friends in the pool if they keep it up.

“Can you imagine, though...” Imogen starts again. “It would be a middle finger to James, and I bet his dad is way better in bed.”

I block my ears with my fingers.

“Well, if you’re not going to have a go, Ari, do you mind if I do?” Charlize taps her chin in contemplation, as she and Imogen both fall about laughing, like a pair of demented hyenas.

“Have you two finished?” I snap. “That’s beyond disgusting.”

God, poor Mr. Bentley. If only he could hear my idiot friends right now, he’d be disgusted too.

No matter how hot he is, as well as charming and all business-like, there is no excuse to have such illicit ideas... no matter that he’s a thousand times hotter than his son... and he’s probably a virile, horny old bastard.

Clearly, the pair of them can’t be trusted to shut their mouths, so it is best that I change the subject.

He’s swam off to the other end of the pool anyway, lucky for him. I’m sure there’s a harem of women waiting for him wherever he goes.

“We’re not even remotely finished,” Charlize giggles.

I roll my eyes. “Well, I don’t know about you two, but I booked us midnight massages, and I was thinking we could go to the buffet tonight. It’s prepaid, all you can eat.”

One thing that always gets Charlize’s mind off the pepperoni, is swaying her with food.

“Oh my God, you freaking rockstar!” Charlize fist pumps me as Imogen passes the fries around.

“My shoulders are so sore; I need a good rub down,” Imogen says.

“How come everything you say now just sounds sexual?” I mutter.

“Because you won’t admit you have a dirty mind?” she counters.

“I wonder who taught me every dirty, disgusting thing I know, hmm?”

She snickers. “You learnt from the best, and by that, I mean Charlize.”

“Hey, I get away with it because men can’t understand me.” She shrugs. “You can insult them and their manhood, and they’ve got no idea what you’re saying.”

Charlize has always been very confident around members of the opposite sex, not that I haven’t, but I’m no way near as game as she is. She can walk up to a guy in a bar and just strike up conversation. I can’t say I’ve got quite that amount of confidence.

Since James cheated on me, my self-esteem has taken a bit of a hit.

I’m not a bad person. I wasn’t a bitch to him. Sure, we had our ups and downs, and lately we had been fighting a lot, but that’s no excuse to cheat. I thought we were okay; he wasn’t even mean, just very self-centered, and now that I think about it, secretive. Now I know why.

Urgh. I have to stop thinking about him.

I’m here to relax. I know I’ve only been here for a few hours, but already I feel transformed.

Even if I do nothing except lie on this sunbed and read my book the entire time like a slob. Not having to be anywhere feels really nice, and I made a vow to leave all of my stress and worries behind me in Seattle.

There is no going back there.

That chapter of my life is over.

I deserve this, and goddamn it, since I maxed out my credit card, I plan on enjoying every single second.

Oh, and drink tons of Margaritas. That goes without saying.

CHAPTER FOUR

LUKAS

I stare at my blank computer screen and wonder why the hell I even opened the damn laptop.

I promised myself no work this week, and it's barely been twenty-four hours.

My first proper vacation in three years, and I'm doing it alone, but that's how I wanted it.

After recently burying a friend of mine, I had to take off for a while and get out of the city.

I needed it.

Craved it.

Shit gets rough.

But old habits die hard, so even though I have a large office full of people who run my empire, I can't help but keep abreast of what's going on back in Seattle. I'm like an old dog, and this old dog ain't up for any new tricks.

I'm set in my ways. Some call me stubborn, some call me a tyrant, but it depends on the situation.

I like control in all things; it's how I'm made. When I see something that I want, I take it.

I don't live with regrets or what if's; life's too fucking boring for that.

Stepping away has been extremely hard for my controlling tendencies, even if it is only for a week.

Actually relaxing? I honestly haven't done that in years. My last vacation was in Aspen.

The most relaxing thing I ever do is coffee with the Sunday paper, and that usually lasts for no more than half an hour, if I'm lucky.

It's my own fault. I enjoy what I do, running a successful advertising company, along with acquiring property, both commercial and residential. I've been in the real estate market for a while now, and it's more of a passion of mine than a job.

Becoming CEO of my own company was the ultimate goal I set out for myself. I worked my ass off, building my businesses from the ground up. I never grew up with money; I just worked hard and got my foot in the door early. I knew what I wanted and went for it. Plus I took risks. Risks that paid off.

I glance at my inbox.

There's an email from my assistant, Emily, telling me that if I'm reading this, then I'm in deep trouble because I'm not even meant to have my phone or computer switched on.

I smirk into my glass of scotch. I did promise that, but Emily knows business never stops for CEO's. You can't just check out, whether you want to or not.

Another reason I'm on this vacation is the fact that I got into a fistfight just after my friend's funeral. I can't stand fucking gold diggers. Tempers ran deep, and while I should regret it, I don't.

It's not great publicity, though. The media was all over it, and now lawsuits and lawyers are circling.

Henry, my attorney, said I should cool off for a little bit, lay low and stay out of sight. Let the dust settle.

While I'm not one to high tail and run, I do need to decompress. I don't like losing control, but I can never quite reign my temper in when provoked or resist a fight when the occasion calls for it.

If someone disrespects me, or someone I care about, then I'm going to fight back.

Thank God Henry is the level-headed one. I guess that's why I pay him so much.

Added to that, my ex-girlfriend keeps calling, and I don't need to hear any of her shit while I'm in this state of mind.

We're over, but she won't accept it. I don't want to be an asshole, but it looks like I'm going to have to do something about Samina before too long.

I should have known better than to tie myself down. Not that I can't be monogamous, I can, and I have, and I do enjoy it, with the right woman. Though variety is the spice of life, or it has been for the last six months.

And while I admit the sex was great with Samina in the beginning, it soon fizzled out. We just didn't have that spark anymore. We had nothing to talk about.

Now that I think about it, she's the longest I've been with since... fuck, since James's mother, and look how well that turned out. We never stood a chance.

We were kids ourselves and having a kid at twenty wasn't in the game plan, but I did the right thing and married her. I became a husband and a father, but our marriage didn't last.

I love my son, but I don't really like him at times. His mother spoilt him rotten, and when I refused to follow suit, he became distant and bratty. Then when he was a teenager, I saw less and less of him over the years. He didn't like my rules, and I didn't like his attitude, and in that regard we clash heavily... still do.

He's disrespectful, and I don't stand for that shit, not from my own flesh and blood.

I grew up in a shit neighborhood. We never had much, but my parents taught me one valuable lesson about hard work and respect. James has none of those traits, since he unfortunately takes more after his mother than he does me, and he thinks everything should be handed to him because he has my name. Whether he's worked for it or earned it doesn't matter.

I built the life I have now with ethics and hard work. None of that has rubbed off onto James, and that disappoints me, especially when I've tried to help him. He just thinks he can get money handed to him to piss up the wall.

He's already been riding off the family-name coattails for quite some time, and I wait for the day he steps up and becomes a man and tries to make it on his own two feet.

I'll always help him, but I won't hand it to him. He has to work for it, and James hasn't done a day's work in his life. It remains to be seen if he ever will.

My mind drifts to his pretty girlfriend, Ariana, and how I saw her at the airport.

It's kinda weird how he isn't here with her, and she seemed nervous when I asked her how things were going. In fact, I know the signs enough to safely say things are not going so well at all.

I know she has no reason to lie to me, but given the fact I'm James's father, I guess she isn't going to pour her heart out to me in the middle of a busy airport. I'm not her keeper, though, so if he's being a jackass, which is just about guaranteed, then it's between them.

I've never really understood how James got a girl like that. She seems so levelheaded, and, well, nice, I guess. So many of his exes were either snotty, dumb, or a mixture of both, and obviously dating him because they thought he was rich.

It puzzles me, though, the way she couldn't meet my eye.

I pull out my phone and log onto Facebook, and in less than a minute, I have my answer.

I scroll down on James's page, and I see him with another woman. They're hugging for the camera, and in another, they're in the same pose but kissing.

What the fuck?

So, she did lie, but why? Obviously, it's to save face.

It's not like I care; she was always too good for him. He didn't treat her nicely from the couple of times we met. He acted like an errant child.

The one time we even got close to having dinner, the conversation quickly turned sour, and I remember being left standing there with the poor girl, feeling like a complete fucking idiot. If I remember correctly, he stormed out in a tantrum over money. Not very eloquent.

I don't think we've spoken properly since then.

The girl he's hugging is pretty enough. After all, he doesn't date ugly women, but she's not a patch on Ariana.

I scroll down some more, and it takes a long time to locate a picture of Ariana and James.

This was back in the spring.

When I do locate a picture, they're both laughing, and Ariana's eyes light up the camera. They're a beautiful blue, like on a clear summer's day.

I scratch my chin as I scroll.

Ariana.

She's petite but curvy, with long blonde hair, and pale skin. It's not just her natural beauty that shines out from the photo, it's the fact she's a sweet person. As sweet as they come.

I really fucking hope James didn't do anything bad like mess around with someone else. It wouldn't be the first time.

I find myself itching to know.

I'll beat his ass if he did.

I suddenly have an idea and click up to the search menu.

Fuck.

What is her last name again?

I don't fucking know.

I click back to James's Facebook page and scroll along his friends list. With any luck, she's still Facebook friends with him and I can find her that way.

Sure enough, I find her: Ariana Michaels. I guess she didn't get around to removing him, or maybe they really are still friends?

Hoping her page is not set to private, I click on her profile. A recent photo pops up first, of her and her two friends by the pool.

Not just any pool, the adults pool at this resort.

My lips turn up in a small smile. If I didn't know any better, it looks like a girls' weekend away.

I run a hand through my hair.

Then I expand and read the caption: *Girl power – Happy almost Birthday to me!*

Her birthday, hmm.

I vaguely remember her asking me some months ago about hotels and resorts in Cancun because she was arranging a joint birthday surprise for herself and James. His birthday is this week.

The plot thickens.

Since I've been here a lot over the years, I recommended this resort. I get it's awkward, but I don't get why she didn't just tell me they'd broken up.

I scroll down her Facebook page. There aren't many photos or anything to go by on here, so she's obviously not the kind of person that spills the guts and glory of their entire life for anyone to read on social media. I respect that; so little is private these days.

I meant what I said to her about catching up. She's always been gracious, but I'm probably the last person she wants to see after a breakup. That could be awkward.

For some reason, I keep scrolling, and I see a few posts from a few months ago. She isn't a regular on here, which isn't common for most young people. There is nothing worse than millennials with too much time on their hands, posing and checking themselves out from all angles, making money by acting like an ass and calling themselves creators.

They wouldn't know hard work if it bit them on the armpit.

I look closer.

One shot she's posted is a cup of coffee with a deer drawn into the foam with the caption: *How cool is this?*

Another is a shot of her computer at work; she's asking for suggestions on what to do for a Halloween themed wedding, and there's an emoji with a brain explosion below it.

Ahh. I forgot, she's some kind of events planner or coordinator or some shit.

There are barely any pictures of herself, or of her and James, and they dated for a while.

The only one I find of them together is at Christmas, and they're smiling under a huge Christmas tree, wearing matching reindeer sweaters. They look happy, so it must have been early on in the relationship.

After a few minutes, I wonder why the fuck I'm scrolling through Ariana's Facebook, and click off.

It's really none of my business, and it's definitely not a good idea to have dinner with her or otherwise. If she's the one who got dumped, then it could be a very awkward conversation and potentially include tears. The last thing I want to hear about is what a douchebag my son is. Trust me, women of the world, I get it, but he definitely doesn't take after his father.

I treat women well. Granted, I can't always commit, but we have a good time. They know what they're there for. I might be forty-eight, but I still enjoy sex. In fact, I enjoy a lot of sex.

It's meaningless and definitely non-committal, but sometimes after a long day at work with meetings, deadlines, and constant headaches, a man needs to unwind. There is nothing better than a long, hot fuck with a random stranger with no strings attached. Don't get me wrong, though, lately, I have been craving the idea of a woman being around when I get home after a long day.

I love beautiful women, of all shapes and sizes. If she has a bit of personality to boot, then I'm really sold. I can't bed a fucking idiot. I just can't.

My dick twitches at the thought. It's been a few weeks since I did just that because I've been busy beating people up and attending funerals.

Surely, there will be some cute, single women here on vacation. I know it's Mexico and all, but that's even better, meaning I can stay anonymous.

Women seem to still appreciate how I look, but that's only because I stay in shape, and—for want of a better word—manscape the fuck out of myself. I draw the line at waxing, but I trim south of the border and keep my beard short and neat.

I like to stay in shape, keep fit, work off the booze. Oh, that and tattoos, which have become my favorite thing to collect. None are visible until I remove my clothes, and that's how I prefer to keep it.

Women love it.

I shift in my seat and avoid going back to my emails. I'm tired and it's late.

I make a mental note to text James tomorrow, not that he'll reply, but it's worth a shot. He tends to carry things on for a while, until he runs out of money and needs a cash injection.

But I'm interested to see what he has to say about Ariana, and if he'll tell me what happened. If I run into her again, then maybe I'll ask her myself.

I pick up the telephone and dial room service. I'm too tired to dine out tonight.

A steak and a bottle of red should do it, and I'll indulge in front of the television. Another rarity for me, because I don't watch anything unless it's the Sopranos or the news.

Tomorrow will be better.

I always sleep much better when I'm in someone else's bed, as fucked up as it sounds. I like the unknown, the

unexpected. It keeps me on my toes.

I may not look my age, but I certainly feel like it.

I close my laptop and pad through the enormous suite and into the shower.

The Penthouse is lavish, too big for just me, but I don't mind over-indulgence. I deserve it.

I must send Emily an email, and maybe something nice like her favorite chocolates for organizing this at such short notice. I literally left work yesterday and told her to book me a trip before I end up in jail. I know I pay her handsomely, but still, I like to keep the good staff around, and she's worth her weight in gold.

Then there's my lawyer... thank God for people in low places, that's all I can say.

I'll deal with Henry later.

If I can get through the next few days without killing someone, then it'll be some kind of miracle.

CHAPTER FIVE

ARIANA

I blame my friends. If it weren't for them, I wouldn't have a thumping headache, and I also wouldn't have the mariachi band playing in the back of my head, or the front, for that matter.

Realistically, I know I'm in control of my own stupidity. To get shitfaced on the first night was probably not a great idea since you always pay for it the next day, ending up in recovery mode, like the one currently in progress.

No amount of greasy food or hot coffee can dispel the aftermath of too much tequila, and my friends don't help matters.

I don't know what it is about Australians, but Charlize looks and acts like she never even had a sip of liquor, much less drank more than me and Imogen put together.

While I drag myself to the bathroom, she's outside on the balcony, plotting our day. All I really want to do is lie by the pool and try to somehow crawl my way out of my Mexicoma.

"Don't be too long in the shower," she yells out at me as I pass a sleeping Imogen, still curled up and out of it on the roller bed. "We've got a buffet breakfast in ten minutes, and I'm not missing out on pancakes for all the tea in China!"

"Nobody drinks tea," I yell back. "You've been saying that stupid quote since I met you ten years ago. It's time for a new line."

"Ooh, who's a cranky pants?" she yells back as I slam the door closed. I chug down a glass of water and two Tylenol that

my annoying best friend left on the counter for me.

She is annoyingly thoughtful.

But I'm seriously never drinking again.

It all started when I decided to check Facebook and saw dickhead James is now not only shackled up with that two-faced bimbo that he cheated on me with, but they're going away on vacation together for his birthday. *Our birthday weekend.*

They display everything on social media. I shouldn't be surprised, even if most of it is on her page, where she documents absolutely everything.

What's worse is some of our mutual friends were commenting on how sweet they looked together.

Pass me a bucket. I feel like commenting that they deserve each other, but I somehow manage to stop myself. It'll only seem like I'm bitter, which I undoubtedly am. In fact, I think it's time I unfriended him. I don't need those memories.

My mood plummets as I turn on the taps to the shower and glide into the warm water.

Asshole.

I thought I was over him, and I am, because I'm thankful for the reminder that his new girlfriend is welcome to have a cheater who she'll have to keep her eye on for as long as it lasts. I also didn't spend a ridiculous amount of time trying to fit into the mold he wanted to squish me in. It didn't feel like it at the time, but I'm glad we're over. I can do better. I deserve better.

I wash my hair with vigor, and I know that just thinking about him is putting me in a sour mood. I didn't come here to wallow in self-pity, and I sure as heck didn't come here to spend my lovely, over-priced vacation living in the past, wondering where it all went wrong.

Maybe Charlize is right, maybe I just have to find Mr. Right Now, instead of Mr. Right?

Bang, bang, bang. “Hurry up in there!” Imogen yells through the door. “I need to pee!”

This is the trouble sharing a tiny hotel room with one bathroom, where the toilet isn’t separate.

My meager paycheck only goes so far.

“Don’t blow a fuse, Imi, you were comatose three minutes ago,” I yell back.

I hear her mutter as I quickly rinse my hair, dry myself off and get dressed. When I open the door, she flies past me, hopping from one foot to another.

“You’ve got one minute!” I hear Charlize yell from the balcony.

I join her outside as she scribbles in her planner.

“Did anyone ever tell you you’ve got a slight case of OCD?” I say, reaching to take her coffee, since I don’t have time to make one for myself.

“Why, because I’m trying to give you the best possible experience, *and* plan the best birthday surprise ever?”

I slump back in the chair. Even the mention of my birthday can’t dispel the party going on in my head. All I really want to do is go curl up on a lounge by the pool and forget tequila ever existed.

“While that does sound amazing, please tell me we have nothing planned after breakfast?”

She glances up, her bright, sunny features not even the slightest bit sympathetic. “Just because you can’t hold your liquor, don’t blame me for your sour mood, here...” She reaches into a beach bag hanging off the chair she’s sitting on and then tosses me a silver packet. “Take some more Tylenol, and you’ll be right as rain as soon as you have some food in your stomach.”

“So that means we’re having a pool day, right?”

She sighs. “I suppose looking the way you do right now, a pool day is probably best.”

I lob a coaster at her head as she ducks and it misses. “Thanks, friend. And here I was thinking I looked ravishing.”

“Ravishingly hungover?”

I roll my eyes. “A good friend wouldn’t have let me drink so much.”

“Quit complaining. You’re on a detox until your birthday.” She claps her hands together. “And boy do I have some surprises lined up for you.”

I groan. “Please, Charlz, don’t tell me you’re organizing anything crazy.”

She looks at me pointedly. “This is exactly why you keep attracting all the wrong types,” she says, matter-of-factly.

I shake my head. “Is that right?”

“Yes. Dudes that are not worthy of you and never will be. You need to let them do all the chasing, not the other way round. You’re a giver, babe, and you need to start being a taker.”

I facepalm myself. “Ever think of charging for your helpful advice?”

“That’s on the house, but if I don’t see some serious flirting action with a hot, single, handsome stranger by the day’s end, drastic measures must be taken.”

I can’t help but laugh. “Drastic measures? As in, you’ll find me someone to hook up with, that way I’ve got someone else to blame instead of myself when he turns out to be a douchebag?”

“Exactly!” She points at me. “No offense, babe, but I think if I choose your next boy-toy then you’ll be thanking me for all of eternity.”

“Got it. And I’ll pretend you didn’t just use the term *boy-toy*.”

“Younger guys go longer, and harder,” she sing-songs. “No strings attached.”

“You know that’s a myth, don’t you? What about older guys that have more experience, and actually know where your G-spot is.”

“Good point,” she concedes. “It isn’t that fucking hard. They should teach it in sex education. Imagine the awkwardness it would save down the track, as well as the time factor.”

“I don’t think guys in high school are too focused on getting a woman off first, more like just getting off as quick as possible,”

Charlize grimaces. “Urgh. Do not remind me. I wish I could erase high school from my memory permanently.”

God, let’s not go there.

“Where is the coffee?” Imogen yawns, stepping out onto the patio.

I hand her Charlize’s, now cold, coffee up. “Knock yourself out.”

She winces as she gulps the last mouthful. “God. I need food.”

“I see you don’t seem to be fairing any better than little-miss-ray-of-sunshine over here,” Charlize says, jabbing her pointer at me. “The pair of you are lightweights, honestly! I’ll have to rethink my bridesmaid selection if this is how you two roll.”

“Right, like you’re ever getting married,” Imogen snorts, plonking down next to me. “I think you’re pretty safe. We put up with your weird accent and that shit you call food that nobody in their right minds should eat, like ever.”

“Don’t even go there with vegemite, my friend.” Charlize pretends to be insulted. “And Tim Tams and pineapple on a pizza are a delicacy where I’m from.”

Tim Tams are an Australian cookie that Charlize never stops going on about.

“There’s no excuse for her,” I say to Imogen. “I don’t know why we keep her around.”

“Because she’s cute as a button.” Imogen tries to pinch her nose, but Charlize pulls back and swats her hand away. “And she might know the Hemsworth brothers.”

“Don’t touch what you can’t afford. And those boys are mine, all of them.”

“If you two don’t shut up, we’re not going to get any pancakes,” I say, feeling my stomach growl.

Charlize, as if remembering we’re on a strict regime, jolts up out of the chair like her ass is on fire. “I’m so freaking hungry. Kudos for including brekky in your package, Ari. It’s the best meal of the day, especially when it’s free.”

“Don’t thank me, thank my credit card,” I call after her as she drapes a kaftan over her body and flips us the bird. “Last one to the buffet buys the cocktails tonight!”

So much for my relaxing vacation.



The buffet is freaking amazing. I’ve never seen so much food in my entire life.

There is literally everything you could ever want.

I’m not usually one to pile my plate full, but since I didn’t eat much last night, and in my current hungover state, I go all out. And the coffee is to die for.

I think I’ve died and gone to foodie heaven.

“They won’t mind if we just hang out here all day, right?” I say, “Because seriously, I could get used to this.”

The girls nod in agreement, both having full mouths as we sit in air-conditioned comfort with a view of the family pool and the swim-up cocktail bar.

This place is truly magnificent; it was worth every penny.

“I am totally coming here for my honeymoon,” Charlize agrees.

“You know.” I point at her. “That’s the second time this morning you’ve hinted around marriage. Is there something

Imi and I need to know about?”

“I’d like to dignify that with a very smart and sassy comeback,” she retorts, “but Mr. Dark and Dangerous DILF from the airport is looking over here, nine o’clock.”

“Oh no,” I whisper, looking down at my plate. “I was kind of hoping not to run into him.”

“Why?” Charlize sounds genuinely surprised.

“I second that. He’s hot,” Imogen agrees, subtly looking past me as I poke around the food on my plate, hoping he won’t come over.

I really didn’t want to run into him again.

Of course, it immediately brings back the memory of them both saying all those dirty things about him that I want to acid wash from my brain permanently.

“What’s he doing?” I whisper.

“I hope he can’t lip read,” Charlize whispers back, trying to mute her lips. “But he’s a fucking hot sausage. Pepperoni hot. I can’t believe you never told us that James’s dad was hotter than James. I thought the airport and the pool was just a fluke, maybe the altitude from flying... but fuck me. Come to mama, you sexy beast.”

My eyes go wide as Imogen clears her throat. “Don’t look now, he’s heading this way.”

“Shit,” I curse under my breath.

I take a gulp of my coffee, and I suddenly feel very conspicuous.

“Just act natural.” Charlize smiles as her gaze stays glued over my shoulder.

Give me a goddamn break.

Mr. Bentley has always been a formidable presence to begin with, and in this bustling buffet in the hotel he recommended to me, it’s no different.

I feel his presence before I even see him. It's like he animates power.

"Ladies," he says as he approaches and comes into view.

You would expect a man on vacation to be wearing appropriate attire.

Shorts, and maybe a tank top, or at the very least, a t-shirt. Hell, a sarong for all I care.

But not Mr. Bentley. Oh no, he's in a league of his own.

He dons linen pants and a long-sleeved shirt with a collar, with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. I still cannot believe or get over his array of tattoos. I can't even...

I feel Charlize kick me under the table.

"Mr. Bentley!" I say, finally remembering my manners. "Good morning."

Unbeknownst to you, we spent the better half of yesterday afternoon ogling you and your hot body in the pool....

"Good morning. We have to stop meeting like this," he replies, his eyes sparkling with humor as our gazes meet. "And I insist you call me Lukas."

Not awkward at all.

He turns to my friends. "And who might these beautiful ladies be?"

My friends practically melt into a puddle when his gaze falls on them, which gives me a good opportunity to study him a little more as he woos my friends into submission.

"This is Charlize," I reply when she holds her hand out, and he shakes it as she gives him a wide grin. "And that's Imogen. They both fight for best friend status; it changes daily."

"Pleased to meet you," Charlize croons as she sizes him up. I kick her under the table this time.

I know what she's doing, and flirting with my ex's dad is a no-go-zone. "May I also call you Lukas?"

“Of course,” he replies, moving his attention to Imogen. “Any friend of the lovely Ariana is a friend of mine.”

If only he knew what we’ve been talking about.

“Charming,” Imogen smiles up at him as well, and I want to give her a kick too, just to be sure she knows not to mess with Mr. Bentley.

I slap myself internally.

I can’t believe I’m even admitting it, but now all I can think about is Charlize calling him a DILF.

His jaw is strong and masculine, and I have no idea why my pussy clenches when I look at his dark beard with flecks of white, and how he’s styled his hair to perfection.

I have absolutely no control of my body’s sudden reaction to him, and that is concerning.

“How are you girls enjoying the resort?” he asks, his eyes finally coming back to me.

“It’s beautiful,” I reply, finally finding my voice. “Thanks again for the recommendation.”

Kill me now.

“We’re actually here for Ariana’s birthday,” my traitorous friend Charlize declares, as Lukas spares her a glance.

“Is that so?”

“Yep, we’re making it a fun girls’ trip this year.” She leans closer to him and whispers behind her hand. “No boys allowed.”

His eyebrows shoot up as his eyes turn to look at me, and I feign a smile while kicking Charlize under the table again.

“That’s a shame, I was going to ask you all if you’d like to have dinner with me...”

Imogen and Charlize’s eyes go wide as I internally shake my head while still smiling sweetly at him.

“Mr. B...”

He holds up a finger to stop me, and my eyes trail up the long line of tattoos snaking up his arm and disappearing under his rolled-up shirt sleeves. It's very sexy.

"Sorry, Lukas, I... ugh..."

"She'd love to," my other traitorous friend, Imogen, pipes up. "I mean, I'm sure we can make an exception to the no boys allowed rule, right?"

They all stare at me as I squirm in my seat.

"Agreed," Charlize pipes up. "And Lukas doesn't count, he's not a boy, he's a man." She gives me a wink, which Mr. B doesn't see because he's still staring at me.

Seriously, Charlize?

I shoot my friend daggers, and while Mr. B doesn't smile, his lips twitch ever so slightly. He's not a man to be reckoned with, that much I know. I've always been a little bit intimidated being in his presence, but not until now did I realize just how intimidating he really is.

"Your friend does have a point," he says when words fail to come out of my mouth. "Out of the fifteen restaurants at this resort, I'm sure I can find something to wet our palettes."

My eyes go wide.

Why does it sound so fucking dirty?

More to the point, why does he want to have dinner?

Or am I just being paranoid?

CHAPTER SIX

LUKAS

The girl named Imogen chokes on her coffee.

I wasn't even meaning that to sound devious, but I am a devious kind of man deep down, so it sort of comes with the territory.

"I'm sure you can. Thank you, Lukas," Ariana says, tucking a piece of hair behind her ear. "That's awfully kind of you."

I have no idea why I just agreed to dinner. Maybe it's because I feel like I need to get to the bottom of what happened between her and James. They were together only the month before last, so what could have changed so dramatically? And he's already hooked up with someone new.

I go in for the kill. "What's your room number?"

I can feel the tension mounting, as if she's debating if this is a good idea.

It's dinner. Not a marriage proposal.

Fuck knows the domineering gene runs strong through the Bentley blood, but I can't force myself to smile.

What would be great is if Ariana decided what she wanted to do for herself, rather than let her friends tell her. There's nothing wrong with a woman who has her own mind.

I've known a lot of women, not just casual acquaintances, and there is nothing more delightful than a woman that can challenge you. I might want a submissive in the bedroom, but I certainly don't want one in the dining room. And I've always

liked Ariana; she's always been very gracious, even when James was acting like a dick and showing her up in public.

I still feel bad about that.

I may be an arrogant asshole, but there's a time and a place to have a row with your father with your woman in tow, and it isn't in a busy restaurant or on the sidewalk for bystanders to hear. I wonder if she even remembers it.

James has had many the tantrum over the years. I should know, his wrath is usually aimed at me.

"Two six five," she says, glancing down at the little card on the table that holds the room key.

"Her birthday is in two days," Charlize says. "We could have a little birthday party."

Woah, hold the bus. Maybe I have overcommitted.

"I'm sure you girls have plenty to be doing on Ariana's birthday. I can give you the names of a few clubs that might be up your alley."

I note Ariana wrinkle her nose; she doesn't like clubs? Good girl.

I'm not a fan of them either, the music is too loud and usually very unimpressive. I own a couple downtown in Seattle but rarely visit them. I gave that shit up about twenty years ago, I've been out on the town my whole life, and while it's very old-mannish to admit, these days I crave the quiet.

I get so little of it in my working life that to have peace, to me, is like finding gold.

"That won't be necessary, thank you. I don't really like clubs," Ariana speaks up, tossing me another sweet smile. Her eyes are even prettier than I remember, cloudless blue on a perfect day.

She looks a little paler today, and a little tired, but she's the kind of girl who is naturally pretty. She doesn't need makeup, and it'd spoil her skin if she did.

Why the fuck do I care?

I try to think of one reasonable explanation as to why I would even think such a thing.

Fucking vacations. They make you insane. Maybe I have cabin fever, and its only day one on the island. I'm fucked.

"Well, I'll send a message to your room, and if you change your mind, or get a better offer, just let me know."

Maybe it's best to stay away. Her friends are cute, but like Ariana, they're a little too young for me.

My fucking son's age.

I need to get the fuck out of here, pronto.

I turn to her friends. "Ladies."

They look at me dreamily and say goodbye in tandem.

I touch Ariana on the shoulder as I leave. "Enjoy your day, Ariana."

She looks up at me like a frightened deer and smiles shyly. "You too, Mr... umm, Lukas."

I chagrin as I pass her by and make my way back up to my room.

I have no fucking clue why I'm now sporting a raging hard on.

This is just ridiculous.

I could lie to myself and say it's because of the Australian and her fucking cute accent but I'd be lying to myself.

Ariana caught *all* my attention, and it's making me feel a little uneasy.

Maybe I need to leave.

That thought alone is even more ridiculous, and I could punch myself in the face for even thinking it.

I don't fucking run from anything, especially a woman. If anything, women run from me. Or they should, if they were smart.

I'm never short on female attention but this feels different. Maybe because it's forbidden, as well as utterly absurd. She wouldn't even look twice at me, not that I want her to.

I press the button to the elevator once I storm out of the restaurant.

I need to go work out; that always helps with my frustrations and idiotic ideas, though it's a little too late to renege on my dinner invitation.

What the fuck was I thinking?



I spend an hour on the treadmill, lifting weights, and punching a boxing bag at the gym before I finally decide I've had enough.

I need to check my emails and take a swim.

This relaxing bullshit has me more edgy than ever.

While I have a very good team at the office handling all my day-to-day agendas and meetings, I still have to approve certain deals and propositions. So Emily can chastise me all she wants; I still have work to do.

I sent my son a message last night, and he still hasn't replied.

At least this morning, Ariana could look me in the eye, not like at the airport.

I mean, I'm going to pretend I don't know about her and James. It's not like my fucking son tells me shit anymore and breaking up with her is kind of important.

I should give him the benefit of the doubt. I shouldn't always just jump to the conclusion that he's done something bad. The trouble is, I know him better than anyone, and my gut instinct is rarely ever wrong.

I take a cold shower and dress in my khaki shorts and slap some sunblock on my body as I head out to the adults only pool. I don't want kids splashing me and deafening my eardrums with their squealing.

I take a lounge as close to the bar as possible and order a scotch. I know it's only early afternoon, but what the hell, I'm on vacation. And I have to read through a thirty-page document on my laptop, so I need all the stamina I can get to not fall asleep while reading it.

I'm itching to hear from Henry, but I've received no emails from him yet. I'm not going to call, because I'm holding out on the fact that no news is good news.

I don't like fights but sometimes it's necessary. Nobody disrespects the people I care about.

The whole reason of me being here is to lay low and let everything settle down.

I take a sip of my scotch, and as I glance up at a girl laughing while being splashed by the other, I realize it's Ariana and her two friends.

Just fucking great.

I just took care of myself in the shower after this morning, and really, it's not as good as it sounds. While a man has to get his kicks when he needs them, let's be honest here, the thought of Ariana and her cute mouth and crystal blue eyes did cross my mind while I was in the act, but that's all it was. A thought.

And besides, nobody has to know. Just me and my hand.

I glance up, and Ariana is squealing as she tries to get into the pool without her loud, annoying friend soaking her. But it's not that lovely sound that averts my attention. It's the fucking bikini she has on, that leaves very little to the imagination.

I stare at her voluptuous body, and my mouth goes dry.

Is James a fucking idiot? Clearly, my parenting skills are coming into question as I wonder why he let her go.

She's wearing white, and while it isn't see-through, unfortunately, it's certainly very becoming and hangs onto her body to perfection.

Her stomach is flat and toned, and her hips are wide, leading smoothly into perfect legs. My gaze moves to her huge tits barely contained in her bikini top, jiggling as she tries to

get around her friend and the other one holds onto her arms so she can't get away.

I should not be noticing any of these things. I fucking shouldn't.

The thing with Ariana is that she has a zest for life that can't be ignored. It rolls off her in waves. In her smile, in her slight wariness, in how she holds herself.

It makes me wonder about her, about why she hasn't been snapped up, married off with kids on the way. Most girls her age are at this point, or at least, headed in that direction.

She's just here to have fun.

Don't get fucking involved!

Then I hear; "Hellooo! Mr. Bentley?" It's the Australian again.

I glance up from pretending to study my laptop screen, and the cute blonde is waving frantically at me.

I give her a small wave.

"Why don't you join us for a swim?" She's pushy too.

I raise my scotch glass and take a sip.

I'm not used to twenty-something-year-old's telling me what to do, and I'm not sure if getting into a pool when I'm having indecent thoughts about Ariana is a wise thing, but it's a hundred degrees out here.

I give her a nod as she swims closer toward me, her friends in tow as I sit up in the lounge.

I do not miss the way her friends act a bit giggly around me. I'm used to women being flirty, but this is something else.

When Charlize reaches the side of the pool first, she props her arms up on the side.

"How's your day going?" she asks, giving me a cutesy smile as she rakes her eyes up my body.

"There are worse places I could find myself," I reply, as Imogen and Ariana swim up beside her.

My eyes find Ariana, and she says, “Hi, Lukas.”

“Hello, Ariana.” I’m careful to keep my gaze at eye level. I can’t get up now, the fucking wood in my shorts will be plainly obvious, and that disturbs me more than it should.

What the fuck is the matter with me?

“Would you girls like a drink?” I blurt out, before I can stop myself.

I own over fifteen different corporate companies and almost fifty businesses in Seattle alone, and I’m getting tongue-tied over my son’s ex-girlfriend and her two friends. I need to get a grip. I need to get fucking laid, and soon.

Maybe I’m having a mid-life crisis? That would explain a lot.

“We’d love one!” Charlize says, before the others get a chance to answer.

I call the waiter over.

“What’ll it be?” I ask.

“Three screaming orgasms, please,” she replies, completely straight-faced.

I’m glad I’m not taking a sip of my scotch because I would have just spluttered it all over myself.

I nod to the waiter and order myself another scotch, then tell him to keep them coming. I’m gonna need it if I’m to get through this conversation.

“Aren’t vacations just the best?” she goes on as I wonder why Ariana is acting so shy.

I try to imagine those words coming out of Ariana’s mouth and I hide my smirk.

“Especially when you get to lie around and suntan all day while enjoying multiple orgasms, surrounded by a beautiful view and beautiful women,” I reply as I lower my sunglasses. “What’s not to love?”

“All work and no play?” the quieter one, Imogen asks, nodding to my laptop.

“I’m a CEO of a very large firm and multiple businesses, so my work never stops I’m afraid.”

“Wow, what do you do?” Charlize asks, as I try not to monopolize staring at Ariana the whole time.

“I own an advertising company, and real estate, commercial businesses mainly. I travel a lot, but this is the first real vacation I’ve had in three years.”

“Is it true that you have your own plane?” she asks as the others balk.

“Charlz! You can’t ask people that!” Ariana chastises, facepalming herself.

I grin into my glass. “You ask a lot of questions.”

“So that’s a yes?”

I roll my eyes. “It’s a company plane; I use it for business. Hence why I traveled here by a commercial jet.”

Her friend needs a good spanking for being so direct. Not that I’ll be the one to give it to her.

Yeah, I like some kinky shit. Spanking is definitely one of them, in the right circumstance.

I try not to imagine Ariana bent over my knee in her white bikini, her tits spilling out the front as I remove her bottoms...

“Three screaming orgasms,” the waiter interrupts as he crouches down, and hands each of the girls a tall, decorated glass, with a straw and umbrella in each one.

I make my move; I have to get into the cold water and cool my body down before I fucking combust.

I’m not sane.

I’m clearly going through something, and I may need to call my therapist.

I dive in and glide through the water, not coming up until I’m halfway down the pool, and I continue on until I get to the

wall at the other side. When I turn around, they're all watching me.

Fucking great.

I swim back to them, going to the left of the wall, closest to Ariana.

“How is your orgasm?” I ask, knowing I should give it a rest, but it's like my brain has no filter at the moment.

She smiles as she tries not to look at my chest. “The best I've had in a while.”

I smirk, and with my back to the wall, so I'm facing the length of the pool, I ask, “Why did you lie to me at the airport, Ariana?”

She turns to me, her cheeks slightly pink as the realization dawns on her.

I don't know what to make of this delightful creature, and I know I'm playing with fire, but I'm not going to act on any of it. It's a bodily reaction, nothing more.

She's cute, alright, point taken, but she's not interested in me in *that* way. Why would she be? She can have any guy she wants, ones half my age.

But I still wait for her answer, wondering what the hell my fucking asshole of a son did to her.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ARIANA

I bite my lip as I try to think of the right thing to say, but when nothing comes to me, I just tell him the truth. “I was embarrassed.”

I don’t know why, but Mr. Bentley has this thing where you can’t lie to him. It’s like he commands the truth out of you, no matter what.

“Embarrassed about what?”

I shrug. “Our breakup.”

“I don’t see what’s to be embarrassed about, it happens. I just hope that James didn’t do anything wrong, anything untoward... did he?”

I gulp and take a sip of my drink. I don’t know what’s come over me.

I’m not used to being this submissive little creature that I become whenever Mr. B is around, but ever since I unexpectedly ran into him, I’ve been exactly that. I don’t know why he’s gotten me into a tailspin, but this nonsense has to stop.

“No, I, ugh, it was a joint decision. We weren’t working out.” So much for not being able to lie to him.

If he knows I’m not being truthful this time, he doesn’t say anything. Instead, he swipes his hand through his salt and pepper hair and flexes his neck side to side.

“You know James and I have a strained relationship,” he says.

I nod. “Yes, I know. I remember the couple of times we met, and things got a little... heated.”

“Then you’ll understand that we have some common ground in a sense. James may be my son, but I don’t always agree with what he does or how he does it. The apple fell farther from the tree where his morals and values lie, so in that sense we’re worlds apart, and if I may speak freely?”

I nod as I suck on my straw and wonder what the hell he’s going to say next.

“He’s a fucking idiot for letting you slip away.”

I take a long sip of my drink. “You hardly know me.”

“Right, but I know him. I know James doesn’t always treat women with the respect that they deserve.” He’s damn straight on that front. “He’s always had this holier than thou attitude; it comes with being raised with a silver spoon in his mouth. Part my fault, yes, but mostly his mother’s. She coddled him to the point of insanity. He’s never had to do anything for himself, down to tying his own shoelaces.”

Wow, first world problems right there.

“That explains a lot,” I mutter. Though we never lived together, James wasn’t exactly what you’d call domestic.

“Tell me, Ariana, how is your job going, are you still enjoying it?” he asks.

I can’t for the half of me remember when I told him what I do or why that would interest him, but he seems to remember.

“It’s busy,” I say honestly. “Planning events and weddings is hard work, and the clients vary. I’ve had a few bridezillas and monster-in-laws in my time, but it’s mostly good.”

He chuckles. “Trust me, they’re no better in the advertising business, wherever money that isn’t yours is concerned.”

“What about you?” I ask. “Still ruling Seattle?”

He shrugs. “It pays the bills, keeps me out of trouble.”

I try not to laugh. I don’t know exactly how rich he is, but I know he’s pretty well off. I mean, he has his own plane.

I don't know how people handle being that rich; it would kind of freak me out. Especially when things get written about you in the papers, and you have gold diggers probably throwing themselves at your feet.

Mr. Bentley has been photographed on the arm of many a beautiful woman.

The guy is a womanizer, after all. I remember James telling me on more than one occasion. He used to laugh about it.

“So, you're still a workaholic?”

His lips twitch. I cannot tear my gaze away from his attractive face.

“I didn't say that.”

“Yet you're here, taking some time out, so that's got to be a good thing.”

It's only day two, and I feel like I've been gone a month. I needed this vacation.

His lips twitch. “Most successful people I know are married to the job; it's what makes us tick. Taking this vacation for example, I didn't make the decision lightly, but something has to give, or you end up suffering in the long run.”

“I know what you mean. Working like a maniac becomes so normal. This is the first real vacation I've taken since I was a kid,” I admit.

I glance over to my friends as they sip their drinks quietly for a change. I know it won't be long before Charlize butts her nose in.

“There comes a time when you have to take a step back and check in with yourself. Burning out is a common theme, and I've been there, in my younger years, of course. Now I find I've got more energy in my forties than most have in their twenties because I try to let off steam when I need it.”

My mouth goes dry. It's so ridiculously hot that I'm imagining the wrong sort of steam...

No. *No!*

“Ooh, do tell, what’s your secret?” I muse, trying to cover up the discomfort at my wayward thoughts.

He turns his head. “Sleep. Exercise and sex.”

I’m glad I’m not holding my cocktail because I would have dropped it to the bottom of the pool.

He grins when I don’t answer. He has a nice smile; you don’t see it often, and when you do, it’s simply dazzling. It lights up his whole face.

He clears his throat. “That was inappropriate, I apologize,” he says the words, however, he doesn’t look very sorry. He looks like he may actually enjoy making me squirm.

Holy fucking shit.

Talking about sex with Mr. B... I mean, how much more surreal could it get?

“Uh, that’s okay. I asked, I guess.”

“How is single life treating you?” He stares at me with those piercing eyes, like he’s actually interested in the answer.

I smile and dip down into the pool to wet my shoulders. “I think it actually agrees with me.”

“Yeah?”

“Yup. Nobody to pick up after, and I don’t have to explain where I’m going or what I’m doing or who I’m with. I think the single life may be for me, after all.”

He gives me a nod of approval. “As long as James hasn’t put you off men for life.”

I know he’s making a bit of a joke out of it, but a part of me thinks he is also fishing for more information. He obviously doesn’t know the real reason we broke up, and I don’t really wish to divulge to his dad that he’s a goddamn cheater. If he wants to take it up with the douchebag himself, then he can go right ahead.

“No, he hasn’t. If anything, he’s reminded me of what I really want, and what I truly deserve in a man.” I don’t care how I sound, it’s the truth.

“Maybe my son just doesn’t like hard-headed women,” Lukas suggests, pulling on the end of his beard. I stare at his fingers as he looks down the pool again, avoiding my gaze.

I get a fully-fledged gander at his toned body.

The man is a machine, and it should be illegal.

He has a large American Indian in full headdress covering one peck on his chest and a dream catcher on the other, then there’s writing close to his neck, but not so much that you can see it with his collared shirts on; it just dances at the edge of decency. I’m still so shocked at his full sleeves and body tats that I can barely take my eyes off them.

“That’s something we can both agree on,” I say.

“Enjoy this time,” he tells me. “When you get to my age, you start to realize that time doesn’t go on forever. I may work a lot, but I’m starting to feel a little relaxed, and not having my damn phone ringing in my ear a thousand times a day is pretty nice. Switching off for a while is actually very good for your psyche and overall well-being. I recommend it.”

“It is really good not having my alarm go off at five am every day,” I admit. “Especially in winter, on those cold Seattle mornings.”

He winces, his eyes coming back to meet mine. They’re like blue diamonds, full of promise and secrets, and very bad things. I have no doubt at all that Lukas Bentley is a player in his normal everyday life. There is no woman on earth that couldn’t find him attractive.

“One thing I never get used to is the cold,” he agrees. “What’s your favorite season?”

Nobody has ever asked me that question. I like how he’s so badass but also endearing. “I like summer. I like the heat. What about you?”

“Fall,” he says. “I like the trees changing color, the smell in the air, the cozy fires. I don’t like those horrible pumpkin smelling candles, weird drinks and stupid shit they’ve got for sale on every street corner shop, though. That’s damn annoying.”

I laugh. “That’s the best part. A pumpkin spiced latte and a pumpkin pie candle burning throughout my apartment is the thing I live for each fall season.”

“You need to get out more,” he mutters. “Don’t tell me you’re one of those Halloween obsessed types as well?”

“I love Halloween!”

He sighs. “Ariana, I had such high hopes for you.”

The way he says my name...

“Do you scare all the trick-or-treaters away with a broomstick?” I laugh.

He grunts. “No, sweetheart, they can’t get inside the gates to my home.”

Wow. Gates to his home. He probably lives somewhere stately. I should have known.

“That’s so mean! But kind of understandable, kids can be annoying.”

“Little kids eating candy and other sugary shit? They should thank me for not letting their teeth rot.”

“You’ve got a point, but it is kind of fun dressing up like a monster and scaring other kids. I used to love it,” I say.

He shakes his head. “What was your favorite monster?”

“Aside from my stepmother?” I say. He laughs as I take another sip. “I had an obsession with cats when I was a kid, so I had a cat suit with a squiggly tail and pointy ears, and my dad would draw whiskers on my face and color the end of my nose black. It wasn’t really a monster, but I had a pretty mean scowl.”

He turns and faces the wall and holds onto the edge of the pool. “You scowling? Now that I can’t imagine.”

I lean up on the edge and his eyes follow my body. “I’m not always a ray of sunshine, you know,” I tease.

“Well, you look better when you’re smiling, Ariana, all pretty girls do.”

My heart lurches at his words, and I know I shouldn’t be reacting to him like this.

It is mortifying that I’m even admitting he’s attractive, but now he’s freaking easy to talk to as well. I think there’s something in the water here, other than bacteria, that is making my brain go into meltdown mode. There’s no other explanation for my weirdness.

I glance at my friends, who have gotten to talking to a couple of guys next to them. Trust Charlize to sniff them out.

He nods to my friends. “Maybe you’d like to join them? Plenty of young, available men in Mexico. Just make sure you’re careful, Ariana. Some of them may not have the best intentions.”

He has no reason to worry, because despite what Charlize says, I’m not going to pick up a stranger in a foreign country.

I want to tell him I’ve no intention of doing that, none at all. But I don’t.

I nod. “I always am.”

His eyes drop to my mouth, but they don’t linger there long. If I’d blinked, I’d have missed it.

He moves closer to my ear. “Glad to hear it. I’m glad you’re having a good time. Let me know about dinner, won’t you?”

I’m too dumbfounded at his close proximity to form an answer, so I just nod stupidly.

With that, he swims toward the steps, then pulls himself out of the water as I try my hardest not to let the quivers taking over me turn my insides to jelly.

What the hell?

Was Mr. B, like... flirting with me just now?

No. He was just being nice.

Our eyes meet as he crosses in front of me, back to his lounge, and I look away. I can't help but notice the slight upturn of his mouth, like he knows all about my racing heart and my illicit thoughts.

But that's ridiculous.

Mr. B is sexier than most men half his age, and that's not a line, it's a freaking fact.

But I have to take a breath and a beat.

I haven't gotten any in a while, and even though Mr. B is my ex-boyfriend's father, which is obscene to even contemplate, he's still a ripped, masculine, silver fox with a dirty mouth, and for some strange reason, that's hitting every nerve in my body.

I can't keep thinking about him like this. I'll put a stop to it right now....

I glance over to my friends again, and I want to groan out loud. I've literally no intension of flirting with guys, especially in *his* presence. I have some freaking decency.

Yet, a part of my brain wonders why the hell it matters what he thinks.

Point one to Mr. Bentley.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ARIANA

We spend the afternoon in the spa, and I'm so relaxed and happy after a ninety-minute massage that I've decided I might quit my job and move here permanently.

Nobody at work will even miss me, and I barely see my dad and my stepmom these days anyway. We've always had a strained relationship, my real mom left when I was eight.

The cool liquid she pours on my face smells like cucumber and feels incredibly hydrating as she places cool eye pads over my eyes. I practically fall asleep for the next half an hour.

I seriously wonder how I ever fit work in.

The staff here are so amazing, always smiling and friendly, not like in America. I've forgotten the last time I received good service anywhere at home. People just rush around without a care in the world, but not here. They don't seem to be in a rush to go anywhere.

I think about Mr. Bentley's words when he said about taking the time out for yourself, and he's so right. I've not done that in years, and I don't know where this bout of self-confidence is coming from, but I feel like I'm on some kind of euphoric, vacation high.

It'll all end when we touch back down on the tarmac in Seattle, so why not enjoy it while we can?

When we return to our room, we're all so relaxed that we decide to have a night in, ordering room service and sitting out on the balcony.

When we get inside, Imogen hands me an envelope that's been slipped under the door while we were out.

It has the hotel's letterhead on it, and my name.

I rip it open and frown.

There's a key card with a new number on it and a note from the concierge saying we've been upgraded to a suite.

The girls peer over either side of my shoulder.

"Upgraded?" Imogen says, as she and Charlize glance at one another. "Is this for real?"

I shrug. "I should call down there first, just to be sure they haven't made a mistake."

"It has your name on it, though," Charlize points out. "Let's go check it out. What number is the floor?"

"Eight."

"Wow! There are only ten floors," Imogen squeals. "Jesus, is the concierge one of your many admirers?"

I ring my ear out with my finger. "Seems a little odd." I frown. "But I'm not going to question it."

"Maybe it could be someone else?" Imogen winks at Charlize as they both giggle.

I stare at her blankly. "Who?"

Charlize sighs. "This is exactly why she's single," she snaps, then begins fanning herself with her hands. "Could it be Mr. Dark and Dangerous who bought us screaming orgasms and couldn't keep his eyes in his head with you in that hot, little bikini."

I still haven't forgiven her for ordering those. More to the point, my self-consciousness at wearing basically a thong and a tiny top that barely held my boobs because I was having some kind of 'aha' moment when I bought the damn thing.

"He doesn't know we have a teeny tiny room," I argue, ignoring the quip about my bikini. "And anyhow, why would he care if we did?"

“He knows our room number,” Imogen helpfully points out. “And he seemed to be enjoying himself a whole lot more when you gave him your full, undivided attention.”

She and Charlize cackle between themselves like they’re hilarious.

“You two are sick.”

“What’s sick is how cool this suite is gonna be. Let’s go check it out.” Charlize grabs the key card out of my hand, as she and Imogen make for the door.

We get to the elevator and scan the card, hitting the button to the floor. While the resort isn’t that high, it is very large, with over two thousand rooms, and it expands across the vast space on the cliffside of the beach. The property is outstanding, really. I can’t imagine anyone complaining about anything in this place.

When we get to our new floor, it’s like we’re trespassing. I glance around like someone will pounce on us at any second, telling us we’re on the wrong level.

A butler, however, greets us as the elevator doors open.

“Miss Michaels?” he says, as my friends and I all stop in our tracks.

“Is it April Fools?” I ask out loud.

“I don’t follow, Miss,” he replies, confused.

I shake my hand. “Sorry, nothing. Yes, I’m Miss Michaels.”

“Right this way.” He smiles as he leads us down a small, secluded hallway.

“I’m Manuel, your private butler. If you need anything at all, you just press number three on the telephone, and I will be here to serve you.”

Oh. My. God. I mouth to my friends as they try to contain their excitement. I’m actually speechless.

He takes my card and scans it on the door.

When we enter, we all gasp in unison.

Before us is the most opulent, beautifully decorated, spacious room I've ever seen.

There's a huge lounge right before us with a TV the size of my entire apartment on one wall. A ridiculous chandelier hangs over the space, sparkling like a million tiny diamonds as the sun sets behind it, casting small flecks of rainbow colors around the room.

I'm stunned into silence.

Beyond that is a large, bi-folding door that overlooks the entire resort as well as the sea.

"Please," Manuel says, holding the door open for us as we edge inside.

"Is all of this for us?" I ask, bewildered.

"Yes, Miss. There are three bedrooms, a study, three bathrooms, a separate lounge, a private bar, dining room, wine cellar, a private pool, and twenty-four-seven butler service."

I turn to him. "Can you pinch me, please?"

He frowns. "No, Miss..."

"She's kidding, Manuel, keep your hair on." Charlize laughs. "But we do have one burning question. Don't we, Ari?"

Manuel waits in anticipation.

"I'd like to know who upgraded us," I say.

He doesn't waver. "Courtesy of the resort, Miss."

"Does Mr. Bentley have anything to do with this?" I arch a brow.

He looks momentarily uncomfortable. "Mr. Bentley is a very special guest of ours," he says, clearing his throat as he walks ahead of us. "And any friend of Mr. Bentley is a friend of ours."

That goes without saying.

I don't have words. I suddenly hope that him knowing about me and James breaking up hasn't made him think I'm a charity case. That would be tragic, and as much as I love the upgrade and appreciate it, I don't want him feeling sorry for me.

The suite is beautiful, though. Truly stunning and well beyond anything I could ever afford.

Each bedroom has a four-poster king sized bed with beautiful furnishings and large, private bathrooms filled with marble and gold details, as well as a claw foot tub. It's opulence at its very finest.

"Imagine what you're going to have to do to Mr. B to thank him for this," Charlize whispers as we follow behind Manuel as he leads us out to the balcony. I give her a sideways glare.

I can't dispute it is absolutely amazing. We have a full view of the pool, restaurants below, and the entire beach. Not to mention, the rest of Mexico.

"I belong here," Imogen sighs. "I think me and Cancun are kindred spirits."

When the tour is over, and we stand there bedazzled, Manuel says, "I'll have someone bring your luggage up to your room, Miss Michaels. Would you care for some refreshments?"

I gape at him.

Imogen saves me by ordering three sangria cocktails, and a cheese and fruit platter, already quite comfortable in her new surroundings, as is Charlize.

She shrugs when I side-eye her. "Why? It's free, and he asked."

"Thank you, Manuel," I say, as he disappears down the long hallway and out of the room, leaving us to it. Once he's gone, we all squeal in unison.

"I can't believe this. Mr. Bentley is fucking God!" Charlize laughs as she runs into the open bedroom door from the

balcony and belly flops on the bed. Imogen soon follows, and they proceed to bounce up and down.

“This is so cool!” Charlize laughs.

“The man is insane.” I huff, still feeling a little bit weird about all of this... for free.

“Insanely rich, and he has impeccable taste,” Imogen singsongs. “If I do say so myself.”

“God, you look like you’re going to faint,” Charlize quips, assessing me as she sits up on her elbows. “Come and test the bounciness.”

“I can see from here.”

“Glad you got that wax now, aren’t you?” Charlize says, giving me a cheeky wink.

“Charlz, I’m not sleeping with Mr. Bentley to thank him for the upgrade! God, that’s so disgusting.”

She and Imogen belly laugh as I cast my disapproving frown at them. “Fight it a bit harder, princess.”

“She so wants it,” Imogen whispers.

I throw a pillow at her head. “I heard that.”

“Don’t be such a stick in the mud,” Charlize groans. “We just got this cool suite with all this free shit and anything we want, and you look like you just sucked on a lemon. Cheer up, it might never happen.”

I know. I am an ungrateful bitch. I should be feeling elated and over the moon. It is very, very generous. But a part of me feels weird about him thinking I’m some kind of pauper, which I am, but still. I’ve got principals.

“It was very generous, I just feel... you know, a bit weird, being he knows me and James broke up. This may be his way of feeling sorry for me.”

“Ugh, who cares,” Charlize groans. “Let him feel sorry. If we play it up a bit, we might just get shares in the resort. Can you act a little downtrodden, maybe turn on the water works?”

Imogen snorts as I throw another pillow. “Seriously, Ari, you need to chill,” she says. “It was a nice thing to do. You deserve it, so just enjoy it for what it is.”

She’s right. I do have a hard time accepting things without suspicion.

Every time fuckface bought me a bunch of flowers after standing me up, I should have smelled a rat, and I didn’t. More fool me.

“You’re right, you know how I get...”

Their faces soften.

“I’m sorry, babe,” Charlize says, leaping off the bed to stand in front of me. She brushes my arms with her hands. “But we still love you. You were too good for *him*, and this is the way the universe is delivering what you truly deserve. Okay, it’s through fuckhead’s dad? So what? The world works in mysterious ways.”

Of that I know to be true.

“You know, you’re right,” I say, a small smile playing on my face.

“Where are you going?” Charlize calls when I go over to the nightstand and press 3 on the telephone.

“Hello, Manuel. Could you bring up a bottle of champagne, along with the cocktails, please?”

I watch as my friend’s grins split across their eager little faces.

“Yes, Miss Michaels, it would be my pleasure,” he replies.

“Thank you so much.” I hang up and then I run toward them and do one better, I yell out ‘weeeee’ like a five-year-old as I flop in the middle of the bed and splat onto the mattress facedown.

If you can’t beat them, join them, right?

“Oww,” I add when my head jolts from the giant leap I took.

“Careful, you’ll put your neck out, and you need all your body parts working if we’re going to do one better than this shitty suite. We’ve got plans for you if this is what you can get for a little bikini flash,” Charlize says as she and Imogen burst out laughing, and I bang my face down into the mattress repeatedly.

Kill me now.

CHAPTER NINE

LUKAS

I glance down at my phone as a text chimes, alerting me that I have a message. I sit in the restaurant and tuck into the most delicious steak I've ever eaten.

It's a number I'm not familiar with.

Hey, Lukas. It's Ariana.

My mouth curves into a sly smile as I sit back in my chair.

She got the upgrade, then.

Good.

The second I realized she was sharing a tiny double room with one bathroom, I had to remedy that immediately. And it's her birthday, so she deserves the luxury.

If it's your first trip to Cancun, you may as well do it right.

I read on.

Thank you so much for the upgrade, but you really didn't have to do that. It's beautiful, though, like being up in the clouds. It was really sweet of you.

She's so poetic.

The suites here are magical. I had to pull a few strings to get a three bedroom, but I am a good customer here, and I send a lot of business their way.

I type back:

Evening, Ariana. You're very welcome. I hope you enjoy it. Happy birthday for tomorrow.

I hesitate. I wonder if I should broach dinner again, but I should probably leave it well alone. She's young, and despite her admission that she doesn't like clubs—something that pleased me no end—she should be out enjoying herself.

Thank you. My friends think you're pretty amazing 😊

I take a sip of my red wine.

They do? What about you?

I stare at the message and then backspace over the last part; it sounds like I'm fucking flirting...

They do? Happy to oblige.

The least I could do is buy you dinner, to say thank you properly.

I smile despite myself. Eager little thing.

Nothing to thank for. And I'd love to have dinner, except I'm paying. It's your birthday, and a woman cannot and will not buy her own dinner on her birthday, not when there's cake involved. It'll be my treat.

I sound like a fucking pussy, but the thought of a woman buying me dinner is charming.

I should not be grinning from ear to ear, but who gives a shit. I can admire a beautiful, attractive woman without seducing her, I think. The fact she's my son's ex kind of puts the breaks on anything romantic. It isn't my fault he can't keep a good woman, and she's as cute as a button.

I'll leave the arrangements up to you since you probably know more about all the 15 restaurants at the resort than I do. Let me know what time and where x

I stare at the *x* with too much vigor. *Stupid old fool.*

I will. Goodnight, Cinderella.

I'm a fucking prick, but I can't help myself. This does kinda feel a little bit like a fairytale, one where I'm not Prince Charming; I'm more like the evil villain.

If Ariana knew what I was really like, she wouldn't be having dinner with me. She'd run a mile. But since she's never going to find out how singular my tastes are in the bedroom, I don't have to worry.

I see the bubble go gray again, like she's typing, then it goes blank.

I wonder what she was going to say...



My doorbell rings, and one of the resorts steward stands with my suit over one arm and a bag with my shoes in the other.

Ah, my Gucci has arrived.

"Mr. Bentley," he says as I let him in. "Good evening."

I glance at his name badge. "Good evening, Olly. If you can place that on the bed for me, please."

He does as I ask, and I slide a tip into his hand on the way out.

I paid a fucking fortune for this suit and the black polished shoes, mainly because I didn't bring any three-piece suits to wear, as I wasn't planning on going out for dinner in a fancy restaurant. So much for laying low.

I know it's hot as fuck in Mexico, but I'm not going to a Michelin star restaurant in shorts. Anyway, it's air-conditioned.

I admit, I've taken a little bit of care in my appearance tonight, even trimming my beard and styling my hair. It's slightly ruffled at the top in a messy, *I just got fucked by my neighbor's wife* kinda way.

I drop my towel and unzip the bag.

The crisp white shirt is a soft linen, and the light gray pants and jacket are about as casual as a suit should go. It's perfect.

I dress and affix my diamond cufflinks, omitting a tie, which I toss back on the bed and leave the nape of my shirt open.

I wonder why I give a shit that I don't want the girls to think I'm trying too hard. I'm probably already cramping their style as it is, and they likely feel obliged to take me up on my dinner offer because of the room upgrade.

It could be worse.

I could be eating alone again, and that is by my own choice, but it's nice to have the company of someone I actually don't mind talking to. That someone being Ariana, obviously. Her friends are just an added tag along, but I really don't mind.

I step back and assess my appearance.

I look good.

I know that it sounds conceited, but I didn't get anywhere in my life by lying to myself.

I know my limitations, and I have many, but I learned a long time ago that it's all right to be honest with yourself without fear of sounding stuck up. And anyway, it's not a crime to say I like the way I look.

I've worked hard to stay in shape, and I like women looking. Sue me.

I spray on a little cologne, not too much, and then I head out.

I told Ariana earlier that I'd meet them at eight at the Round Tree. The resort's finest restaurant.

I went down myself to choose a table because I'm a CEO in all that I do, even at resorts I don't own. I like to take full control, and I want Ariana to have a nice time since I have the honor of dining with her.

God, I remember being that young. James was seven, and my whole entire world had taken a massive turn when I'd taken over my father's failing business. I was a newly found, reluctant CEO, and I had to work hard to not sink the little money we had into a drowning ship. I managed to turn it around, make some life-altering business decisions, and a hell of a lot of risks, and it's now a multi-million-dollar company.

I feel like an asshole for thinking about Ariana inappropriately. She's a good girl, and I'm obviously not about to pursue her. But there is no reason why we can't have a dinner together and celebrate with her friends. I'm not a total fucking stick in the mud; I still know how to have a good time.

All thoughts of reason go out the window when I see her.

Well, I'll be damned if I can't still be shocked at forty-eight years old.

I stand as the three talk to the maître d and then he heads my way with them in tow.

They each look pretty in their own way; the tall Australian showing her most valuable assets in a figure hugging bodycon dress, Imogen in a strapless blue tube dress with a long train, and Ariana... there are no words for her.

She wears a sparkly gold wraparound dress, with one shoulder clipped with a bronze jewel.

It hugs her curves in all the right places.

Her light hair is swept to one side, tumbling down past her ample cleavage, where I avert my eyes.

Fuck.

I paste a smile on my face as they approach.

"Good evening, ladies," I say.

They all chime a good evening back.

I kiss them all on each side of their cheeks lightly, like any well-bred gentleman should.

When I get to Ariana, I whisper happy birthday in her ear, and motion to sit next to me. I hold out her chair as the maître d does the same for her friends.

I bought each of them a red rose, and they seem thrilled by that little touch. I motion for the waiter to bring some champagne, then settle back into my chair.

Ariana has more makeup on than I've ever seen her wear. She's done something to her eyes; they're lined with dark liner, and she wears a bronze-colored shadow that matches her cute dress.

Cute? No. She's a fucking bombshell.

My body's reaction to her is completely not of this world, and I can't say that I'm in any kind of control of where my dirty mind goes. I cross one leg over the other.

"Mr. B, this is so sweet of you!" Charlize smells her rose and grins up at me.

Mr. B?

So that's what they call me behind my back? I guess it's better than *asshole*.

"You each look absolutely beautiful," I say with sincerity. "Thank you for joining me when I'm sure you had better things to be doing."

I fucking hope not, because being surrounded by beautiful women, all almost half my age no less, is a bit of an ego boost.

"On the contrary," Ariana says, fidgeting a little as my gaze falls on her. I try not to let my gaze linger on her very fine rack. "We're honored, really, and for the room and everything..." she trails off.

"Yeah, cheers for the suite," Imogen pipes up as the waiter approaches. "Really, five-star living is the only way to go, but we are now ruined for any other hotel in the future."

I smile into my fist as I clear my throat. “It’s nothing, and you’re very welcome. I couldn’t bear the thought of you sharing a poky little room, and with it being Ariana’s birthday and all, it was the least I could do.”

And to make up for that piss-ant of a son who I fucking know has done something bad to her. I’ll ring his little neck when I get hold of him. He still hasn’t returned my texts.

The waiter fills each of the girl’s champagne flutes, and I use the opportunity to check in with Ariana. She seems quiet.

“Are you all right?” I whisper near her ear.

She glances at me with big blue eyes, and I see a little sadness in there.

What’s that all about?

She nods. “I’m fine.”

“You’re only twenty-seven, right?” I whisper. “You’re not sad about getting older, are you?”

Surely not, she’s a knockout.

She shakes her head. “Birthdays are a bit of a hard time for me.”

I frown. “How so?”

She shifts in her seat. “Family stuff.”

Oh. I let it drop since the waiter has moved.

I take my knife and cling the side of my bourbon glass as I raise it.

“A toast,” I begin as each of the girls raise their flutes in unison. “To living life to the fullest, with no regrets. To being young and alive, and doing what makes you happy. Life is short, so here’s to making the most of it in beautiful Cancun. Happy birthday, Ariana.”

“Happy birthday!” her friends coo as we all take a sip.

I watch as her lips daintily sip on the thousand-dollar bottle of champagne like she was made to do it. Her lips are a

light pink, like a rosebud, and I marvel at how elegant she is. She suits opulence; it rolls right off her without a hitch.

I take a sip as our eyes meet.

Fuck me if there isn't an electricity between us that knocks me off my feet.

Her breath hitches as her eyes drop to my throat.

So, she feels it too?

Shut this down. Shut it down now.

This is wrong.

I try to shut down the inner demon in me that is begging me to seduce her. Take her back to my bed and unwrap that gold, sparkly dress and fuck her stupid, devouring her with everything I've got, leaving her spent and spoiled for any other man.

No!

Yes!

Jesus, I'm fucked.

She's your son's ex-girlfriend, you prick. Get a fucking grip.

I'm clearly going through some kind of weird mid-life crisis or something. I don't know what's gotten into me.

I'm the CEO of a huge international company, who handles million-dollar deals, acquisitions, and takeovers all day long, and I can't handle one little girl.

I should be ashamed of myself.

I make coffee fucking nervous...I can handle this.

I tug on the lapels of my jacket as I check myself.

If that were the case, why does it feel like I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place?

As long as the scotch keeps coming, I'll get through this dinner without one more illicit thought...

CHAPTER TEN

ARIANA

I try not to guzzle the champagne down, but I'm nervous. I can't help it.

Lukas Bentley looks like he just stepped out of a freaking G.Q. magazine.

His suit is sharp, as is his slightly trimmed beard, and the way he holds his crystal tumbler, like he has all the authority in the world.

Silver and gold rings don his hands, and I see a couple of tattoos on his knuckles that I never took the time to notice before. It's as if he gives you a little peek into the carefully crafted world of Mr. Dark and Dangerous. And yes, I kind of want to kill my friends for nicknaming him that in the first place because it's stuck now.

If I thought he looked good half naked in the pool, he's even better fully clothed in a suit. It's ridiculous.

Every woman in the room notices, of that I'm certain. Mr. Bentley would turn heads wherever he went. If his looks don't get you, his presence would. He commands attention.

Just as I'm thinking it, guilt hits me at every damn turn.

His age has nothing to do with it, nothing, not that I've really ever considered an older guy. It's the fact he's asshole James's dad.

It's so dirty, but for a fleeting moment, I imagine him.

What he'd be like in bed. His hand tilting my chin up as he looks into my eyes.

Just thinking about him naked has me all hot under the collar.

Focus!

I should also not be noticing the spicy scent of his cologne, or the way his fingers drum on the table while he talks. He's mesmerizing; everything that comes out of his mouth is interesting, funny, direct, and he holds everyone's attention at the table.

We have an amazing appetizer of roasted parmesan-crusting asparagus, and the waiter tops up our champagne. Imogen and Charlize excuse themselves to use the bathroom, and usually I'd go too, but for some reason, I'm glued to the seat.

I try not to look at Lukas, but I feel his penetrating stare as I reach for my glass. This is kind of awkward.

I remind myself for the umpteenth time to not drink too much tonight.

I definitely don't want a repeat of my first night, when I ended up suffering the next day. Instead, I enjoy the champagne, knowing just by the sheer elegance of the bottle that it's expensive.

"Are you having a good time, Ariana?" His voice is deep and smooth, and I'm forced to look at him.

A smile tugs on his lips.

He's so fucking handsome, and I've had just the right number of bubbles for a cheeky response, even though I know I shouldn't play with fire.

"Yes, I am, thank you. I think the champagne has gone right to my head, though."

His eyes brush over my face, amusement dancing in his eyes, so much so that I add, "What?"

He shakes his head.

"Mr. Bentley," I insist.

He leans closer to me, one elbow on the table. "I've told you over and over to stop calling me that."

“Everyone else calls you that,” I protest.

“It makes me sound like an old man.”

“You’re definitely not old,” I tell him firmly. “And you’re only as old as you feel, or so they say, right?”

He bites his bottom lip, and my eyes flick down. I don’t know why, but my whole core just about throbs into submission.

He swallows hard. “I’m not even going to ask you how old you think I am.”

“It doesn’t matter.” I shrug, suddenly all bold. “Age is just a number, and for the record, you still look good.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.” He smiles. He moves his hand to the back of my chair and then says, “Can I ask you a question, Ariana?”

The way he says my name...

“Um, yes, of course.”

Shit. I hope it’s no more talk about dreaded James.

He watches me carefully. “Why are you flustered when we’re alone together?”

Of all the things I expected him to say, it is most definitely not that.

My throat suddenly feels like the Sahara. The way he looks at me... I don’t think it should be legal.

“Uh, I didn’t think I was.”

I feel his thumb gently touch the back of neck, and though it’s the slightest, tiniest movement, I feel it *everywhere*.

“You’re flushed,” he says in his low, sexy voice. “Is it the champagne, Ariana? Or do I make you nervous?”

I suddenly get the feeling that he’s being a bit fucking flirty. I try and hide my utter shock and surprise.

What is he doing?

“You don’t make me nervous, and I didn’t think I was flustered,” I say firmly, looking him in the eyes and steeling myself as best I can. “It’s the champagne. It’s delicious, by the way.”

I hope he buys it.

He leans toward me. “Good. Because I don’t wish to make you nervous or uncomfortable.”

A bit late for that, but it’s not for the reason he’s thinking.... then again, why did he touch me?

I blink a few times before he takes another slow sip of his drink, and sits back in his chair, perfectly relaxed.

Well, he’s not winning this round, not by a long shot. I take another sip of my champagne for liquid courage before firing back, “What if you did?”

He flicks his dark blue eyes at me as I squeeze my legs together. My heart is beating so fast in my chest, I’m sure he can hear it. “What if I make you nervous or uncomfortable?” he repeats.

I nod.

He tilts his head, his eyes never leaving mine. “Then I’d ask why.”

He waits for an answer, and I realize I’m an idiot for bringing it up again because now I have to give him a reason. And I don’t even know what I really mean.

“Well,” I start, taking another unceremonious gulp, “you’re Lukas Bentley.”

His lips twitch again. He has to know what that movement alone does to a woman. Surely.

I really shouldn’t flirt... but he’s making it difficult not to, so here we are.

“Meaning?”

I snort, then lean toward him as I lower my voice. “You’re a little bit of a badass.”

One eyebrow shoots up as he brings his elbow up to the table and cradles his cheek in one palm. “A badass?” he smirks, then adds, “How so?”

I look around, wondering if my friends took another freaking vacation, to the other side of the planet?

Help!

Feeling like I’ve bitten off more than I can chew, I plough on. “Well, you’re a CEO, like you said; an important businessman, who people respect.”

He tsks. “Ariana, you can do better than that, surely. And I don’t know about people respecting me but indulge me a little.”

I cannot understand the feelings cooking up in me. It’s like I’ve taken Mr. Bentley heroin, and now I can’t get enough.

Fine. He wants honesty? I’ll give it to him.

“Well, aside from your commanding presence, and the fact that you’ve got really good taste in suits and picking out resorts in Mexico, the giveaway might be the tattoos hidden under your clothes, or the fact that you have a body like a twenty-five-year-old.”

I have the urge to slap my hand over my mouth like an errant child, but I hold my own.

The only tell-tale sign that he may be a little bit surprised by my admission, is the way his eyes dip down to my mouth, and he gets this strange look in his eyes.

The hand at the back of my chair moves down to my thigh, and I’ve no idea what he thinks he’s doing, but my friends suddenly appear back at the table as I feel his hand squeeze my knee. A few moments later, his hand is gone, and I’m left hanging. Like a fucking drooling puppy.

He half-stands as my friends sit back down, ever the gentleman, and I know for a fact my cheeks are probably burning beet red. His lightest touch has me feeling it everywhere, and I mean, *everywhere*.

This is definitely not normal behavior. I am going to Hell.

I steal a glance as Charlize prattles on about the soap being in the shape of a mermaid's tail, and I know he knows I'm looking at him.

Saved by the main course, our meals arrive, and Lukas falls into easy conversation once again, asking each of the girls about their work, how we all met, that kind of thing. He's certainly a seasoned host and takes great interest in conversating.

By dessert, we're onto our third bottle of champagne, and Lukas orders aperitifs. Then, much to my embarrassment, the waiter and a few other of the staff come out of the kitchen with a cake lit with candles, and they start singing Happy Birthday in Spanish.

Of course, when I glance at Lukas, he grins as he claps along with the music, and my traitor friends, who no doubt organized this, sing along with them, in English, so it's a comical mishmash of utter mortification.

I thank them all when they're done and oblige everyone by blowing out the candles.

"Make a wish," Lukas reminds me.

I wish to not to be so freaking attracted to you Lukas Bentley. Damn it!

The cake is chocolate, my favorite, and it's decorated beautifully with frosting and gold sprinkles. It almost looks too good to cut into, but I definitely want a huge slice.

"This is so nice, guys," I say when the commotion dies down, then add, "I'm utterly mortified, though."

"She's not kidding," Charlize chimes in. "She hates surprises."

"Why do you hate surprises?" Lukas asks, taking a bite of cake with his fork.

I shrug. "I don't know, I guess it's because I like the idea of being in control."

I don't know what he's thinking with that reply, but he steels his jaw, and I see it tick ever so slightly.

What did I say?

Surely, that can't have been annoying.

He picks up the check an hour later, and we all leave the restaurant. I don't miss the feel of his hand on the small of my back as he lets us walk ahead of him.

Every time he touches me, my skin lights up like the fourth of July.

The fact I've had a lot of champagne hinders my already waning judgement on what to do about it.

Nothing, idiot!

YOU DON'T NEED TO DO ANYTHING!

At least one part of my brain is working.

Lukas insists on walking us to our floor, like the good Samaritan he is. Even in the elevator, I can't help but feel his heady presence next to me, tantalizing me, making me think illicit thoughts that I know I shouldn't.

When we get to the door of our suite, the girls thank him profusely for dinner and the champagne we all consumed, and he kisses them on the cheek goodnight.

They discreetly go inside as his attention turns to me.

"Alone at last," he muses.

My skin prickles.

I can't help but smirk. "It's been a really great night. Thank you for spending it with me on my birthday," I say, as he lingers in front of my doorway. "The food was lovely."

"Thank you for making it far more interesting than I probably deserve. Your friends care a lot about you, they're very... sweet."

I laugh. "Yes, Imogen is. Charlize, on the other hand..."

"She'd make a great CEO," he says, his eyes never leaving mine.

I get that tingle up my spine again.

“She would, amongst other things, but mostly, I usually want to staple things to her head. She has no filter.”

He laughs. “I figured that.” He shuffles his feet and adds, “Well, goodnight, Ariana. I’m glad you had a nice evening and that you shared it with me.”

He moves toward me, and I feel his bristle on either side of my cheeks as he kisses them softly. I don’t know what possesses me, but my hands reach up to his jacket, and I hold onto the lapels as he goes to pull away.

He glances down at my hands. “Ariana,” he whispers, “what are you doi...”

I don’t know who’s taken control of my mind, and how my bodily functions disobey too, but I reach up and kiss him, needing to feel his lips on mine, even though it is so very, very wrong and a part of my brain screams *no!* just as I do it.

I’ve never kissed a man with a beard before, and I’m delighted that it’s surprisingly soft and so very sexy.

It’s when he kisses me back, after a moment of hesitation, and—let’s face it—surprise, that things kick up about several hundred notches.

His hand comes to my jaw, where he holds me firmly, his other hand skating to my hip, and all of a sudden, our lips are locked. A small mewl leaves my throat as I feel his tongue gently probing as he seeks permission into my mouth.

I flatten my hands on his chest as he moves me to the door, pressing me up against it. In return, our bodies mold together, and I feel his erection digging into me as my heart rate kicks up like a runaway freight train.

Holy fucking Jesus.

And it goes on for several, wonderful, delightful seconds.

I’m also fully and acutely aware of his hand making its way up my body from my hip, past my stomach, as it skates my breast when he cups the other side of my face. Our kiss heightens, and I feel the urgent need for friction between my legs.

All too soon, he breaks away, pulling back, panting as much as I am, and it's as though he shakes himself out of the situation as he steps back. His eyes cloudy, but if I'm not mistaken, full of lust.

Oh yeah, he's fucking into it, the dirty bastard.

I secretly like that I've done this to his composure. Something dark inside of me likes the fact I've gotten him this turned on.

"Ariana..."

"I'm sorry, Mr. B..."

He holds up a finger to my lips, and before I can protest, he moves back in and kisses my neck, biting gently as I try not to convulse right then and there against the door, in the hallway, for anyone to see. I want him to touch me, relieve the ache. I want to see what he's made of.

Instead, I squeeze my eyes closed and pray this never ends as my hands clutch onto his strong, wide shoulders.

I try not to imagine his mouth moving south, sucking me, biting me, giving me what I need with his tongue alone.

"It's only Mr. Bentley if I were inside you, Ariana," he breathes against my ear. "But trust me when I say, you're not ready for that. You'll never be ready for that."

He presses a box into my hand as he mutters something in another language, then turns to leave.

I lay pressed upright against the door, his kiss still assaulting my body in the aftermath of its deliciousness, and I'm so freaking horny right now that I don't know what I'm going to do as I stare at his back.

When the elevator pings, he strolls in, turns, pulls on the lapels of his jacket and says, "Happy Birthday, Ariana."

Then the doors close, and he's gone.

I continue to stare at the shiny pressed metal as the lights tell me he's going up. To the Penthouse.

Holy fucking crap. *What just happened?*

I bring my hand to my chest, then look down at the little box he gave me.

The box lid reads: *Cartier*.

Oh, holy shit. He didn't...

I open the lid and the most beautiful, shiny, elegant pair of diamond stud earrings stare back at me.

They're simple but absolutely stunning.

He bought me fucking Cartier?

My heart races as I press my fingers to my mouth, feeling his illicit kiss, and how I've never felt more alive in my entire life. It held the promise of so much more.

And he's right, I'll never be ready for that, because Mr. Bentley is a red-hot silver fox.

If his mouth and tongue are that skilled and have the ability to bring me to my knees, I wonder what else he's capable of with his other body parts. I shudder to think, and sigh out loud when I remember his hard cock digging into me.

I made Mr. Bentley hard.

Not only that; I made Mr. Bentley lose his composure.

A sick smile spreads across my face. If I weren't so horrified at my actions, I'd be mildly impressed with my efforts.

I did make the first move. Technically.

It's like I'm having an out of body experience, and what's worse... now I'm going to have to tell my friends what just happened.

There goes the neighborhood.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LUKAS

I definitely have no explanation for my actions.

I know she kissed me first, but that's hardly an excuse. I flirted with her all night at the table.

I could barely keep my hands to myself. I asked for this.

I also can't remember a time when a woman has had me this excited, and while I'm no fool, I know part of it has to be the fact that she's forbidden.

I can never have her. She's off-limits.

That's what it is, and it makes me feel somewhat better.

Not the fact she's a fucking temptress, with a body and a mouth built for sin.

Her plump, large breasts teasing me with that wrap around dress I wanted to peel off, not to mention her ample ass I'd love to grab with both hands. Fuck. Who am I kidding, I wanted to rip the whole damn thing off her, and go fuck her in the bathroom.

Not a good move. Definitely not.

I make the mistake of remembering her in her white bikini the other day at the pool, and how her hard nipples peaked through the material as I tried to keep my gaze at eye level.

I take a shower, and my hand slides to my dick. I start rubbing myself because I'm so damn hard, and I have to get off. I imagine she's in here with me, and I'm pulling on her nipples, kissing and caressing her, teasing her as she begs me

to go harder, doing her doggie style in the shower with my fingers rubbing her clit.

Jesus.

I also need to see those tits. I need them in my face.

Jerking off is nowhere near as good as being inside a woman, of course.

Imagining Ariana's body only gets me more frustrated, because if it were anyone else, she'd have been in that elevator with me, then on my bed, spreading wide for me. If we even made it that far. Then I'd lie her down and suck on her sweet, little pussy all night with her hands restrained with my expensive tie, so she couldn't move.

Oh yeah. I wasn't kidding when I told her she wasn't ready for me.

I like to use my tie for all kinds of bad things and imagining her wearing mine with nothing else on only makes me want to go downstairs and drag her up here and shove my cock in her mouth. The little prick tease. I don't know who she thinks she is.

While I shouldn't have touched her at dinner, she was giving me an appreciative eye all night, and when a woman does that and I'm sexually attracted to her, it's like my hands have a mind of their own.

Stupid me acted on it instead of letting her down gently, which is the right thing to do. Now I've had my tongue down her throat, and I've got a wood that will not quit.

I didn't fucking come here to hook up with my son's ex-girlfriend. I should feel repulsed and disgusted, but strangely, I don't. If he was so fucking perfect, then he should have held onto her, and not let her go like she's so easily replaceable.

If I had a girl like Ariana, she wouldn't know what hit her... wait... what the fuck am I saying? *If* I had a girl like Ariana? I'm never going to have her. Let's get that straight.

I have to end this now.

Imagining how I left her plastered against the door only makes matters worse. Her hair disheveled, her lips smeared from our kissing, her breathing coming in fast and heavy as her rack enticed me to take her regardless of where we were. And I could have; she'd have let me. I'd have hitched her hot fucking dress up, slid her panties aside and fucked her raw against the door.

But I'm not a man who is out of control, and that's what has bugged me the most.

I never lose control.

Except for tonight.

Tonight, I was a fucking idiot.

Maybe I was right in the fact that I need to get out of here. All this shit is messing with my head, and now I'm resorting to satisfying myself, because I can't take the woman I want.

And I don't want to go pick up another chick. Besides, I doubt they could quench the sudden thirst I have for Ariana Michaels.

She's like a vixen with the face of an angel. A body built for sin. Lips made for my cock, and a tongue that I could suck on all night.

Her little mewls, and the way she responded to me, was nothing short of spectacular.

I need to change resorts or go the fuck home.

I contemplate that as get out of the shower, after coming hard, then I down another scotch. It's useless; there is nothing on earth that is going to satisfy me of this ridiculous thing that I've started. And make no mistake, she may have seduced me unknowingly with her see-through bikini, and her pert little mouth that I want to devour, but I was the one who acted on it. *I kissed her back.*

I walked her right back into the door and made her feel my raging cock, and plunged my tongue into her mouth. I'm just as much to blame.

But one of us has to be the voice of reason.

I pace the entire floorspace of my suite as I think about what to do.

I'm not apologizing.

That would mean I was sorry, and I'm only sorry that it ended.

Not even the guise that she's James's ex can deter me. Imagining them together only makes me angry, not put off.

It's settled: *I have a serious problem.* As in, psychological.

Since my jerking off didn't dispel my hormones, I decide I'm going to go down to the gym and take my frustration out on the punching bag. Maybe while I'm down there, I'll get some sense knocked into me. Who knows, maybe if I look hard enough, I might find someone to actually punch me in the face and wake me up from this nightmare that I've found myself in.

It'll be fine.

I'll have a punch out.

I'll change resorts in the morning or book a flight home.

I've had about as much vacation as I can handle.



"I don't fucking care, Eloise, get it done," I bark down the phone.

So much for enjoying my last morning in paradise. I'm arguing with my second in charge over a minor detail, and I know I'm being an ass. She doesn't care, though, she's used to me.

While I love what I do, the stresses have been weighing on my mind for some time, mainly because my doctor has told me I need to slow down. I know that's probably true, since I'm no spring chicken anymore, but this is what I do. I submerge myself in the business, I always have. It's what I know. I don't know how to not be this.

I love going in for the kill; it's in my blood.

My father taught me everything he knew about how to run a profit; how to buy smaller companies and build them up or break them down and sell them for a profit. By doing that, I was able to expand the media giant I have today. I have him to thank for it, God rest his soul.

But what I don't take too kindly to, is other people in my company not giving a hundred and ten percent. There is no room for tardiness and laziness in my employ.

Eloise is none of these things, but the people beneath her leave little to be desired.

"You're very grumpy today, Lukas," she says in a smooth voice. She's more than used to my daily tantrums by now and is one of the few people who don't cower in my presence. "Aren't you supposed to be lying on a sunbed somewhere, soaking up the sun?"

Her attempt at making light of the situation only fuels my annoyance.

I should be there. Doing what I do best.

"You know, I *could* be doing that, if I didn't have to micromanage from my hotel suite because the ridiculous sum of money I pay my staff doesn't seem to be enough to get them to do what I expect."

"Keep your pants on," she sighs. "I've got it covered. I'll update you later when the merger has been signed."

"No need, I'm on the four o'clock flight."

There's a pause. "Aren't you supposed to be lying low of this whole *situation* until the charges are dropped?"

"No," I snap. "And running away to Mexico only looks like I've hightailed it and ran."

"It's an assault charge, it's not like you killed somebody."

"I fucking felt like it," I mutter.

"Well, anyway, I better get going, since I've now got a day to rearrange because you woke up on the wrong side of the bed. Time is of the essence."

I didn't wake up on the wrong side, I woke up in the wrong bed.

My mind flashes to Ariana, and I shake it off quickly. *Don't go there again.*

"Fine. I want to see the report by the time I board the plane."

"Yes, sir."

I hang up on her sarcastic tone, and I'm about to throw the phone on the bed when I get a text.

Are you ignoring me, Mr. B?

I rub my chin as I crack my neck from side to side.

She texted me last night, thanking me for the earrings. I didn't reply.

She also didn't mention anything about our kiss.

I'm an asshole. Now she's going to feel the wrath of it, because if I don't, I'm going to make a very bad mistake and we both know it.

But I shouldn't ignore her. It isn't fair. She may not be totally innocent in all of this, after all, she kissed me just fine all on her own, but I know that I can seduce women very easily.

The trouble is, I wasn't even trying to do that. If I had, she'd have been mine the second I decided I wanted her. And I didn't know that until she kissed me.

I sigh, not wanting to let this moment go, but I know I have to. For both our sakes.

Sorry, Ari. I've been busy with work. I have to cut my trip short, unfortunately.

A reply bounces back in record time.

That's a shame. I wanted to talk to you, about last night.

Oh, holy shit. Here we go.

I know that she probably feels like she was under duress, since they'd downed three bottles of France's finest champagne after all. Yet she has nothing to feel embarrassed about.

That isn't necessary, Ariana.

She can make of that what she will, but I put it down to alcohol, on her part. On mine, it was sheer lust.

So, I can't see you?

I don't think that's a good idea

I run a hand through my hair.

The real question at hand is why I even care. She's just another broad, right?

As soon as the thought comes, I dismiss it. Ariana is not like any other woman.

I step outside and dive into the lap pool and do ten quick laps without stopping. I really do love this place. It's a shame.

I step out and grab a towel as I glance up at the time, it's then the telephone rings.

I go over to answer it.

"Sir, it's Sergi from the front desk. I have a Miss Michaels asking to visit you at your suite, Sir. She's quite insistent."

I close my eyes and shake my head.

Fuck no. I can't have her up here. Can't I just make a clean getaway? It's not like our paths have crossed back in Seattle. We don't exactly run in the same circles; all we have in common is James.

My next words betray me. "Very well, Sergi," I reply, knowing this is a mistake.

I hang up the phone, and in less than three minutes, there's a knock at the door.

Nobody can access the penthouse suite without the code, or by the front desk.

I walk to the door, still aware I'm in my towel, but in her haste it didn't give me time to change.

I open it, and she stands before me in a long green and white floaty dress, with her hair in loose waves, and her skin is glowing and lovely. I notice the sparkle of the pear-shaped diamonds in her ears. She's so fucking beautiful.

"Ariana," I say, motioning for her to come inside. "I'm sorry, you just caught me out of the pool."

Should have fucking dressed. She eyes my body, and I look away from the impact of her stare.

"Uh, that's okay. Sorry to barge in like this, but I didn't want you to leave before I said goodbye."

I cock an eyebrow at her as I pad to the kitchen.

"Can I get you a drink?"

"Just a soda water, please, if you have it."

I go to the fridge and pour us both a glass with some ice.

I hand it to her, and she looks up at me with those big, blue eyes. Innocent ones I'll never forget.

"Thank you for the beautiful gift," she whispers. "They are amazing."

She's killing me.

"They look beautiful on you," I state.

"Um, I need to talk to you about last night, about what happened..."

I hold up a hand. "Please, I already feel bad enough about that already. I should have apologized earlier and not drawn it out this long. I'm sorry if I did anything that was untoward or unwanted, Ariana. You have to believe that doing that wasn't my intention."

She stares at me for a second, and I have no idea what is going through her mind.

“Oh,” she says.

I frown. “What’s *oh*?”

She looks down at her feet.

“Ariana,” I prompt.

Her eyes meet mine again, and she looks sad. For what reason, I don’t know.

I seem to just confuse the hell out of this poor girl, and now I’ve left her hanging.

Women. Sometimes I think I’ve worked them out, and other times I feel like a school kid again who knows nothing.

Yet here we are.

The trouble with this girl is, I care about her. She’s sweet. She’s kind. She’s everything I’m not. And while I wouldn’t intend on hurting her intentionally, it would be inevitable.

She’s out of my league.

Ariana Michaels is in a whole league of her own. She doesn’t need to be tainted by me.

“I was... shit, I don’t know how to say this.”

I gesture to the balcony; she might feel more comfortable sitting down.

When we’re settled outside, she begins again.

“I thought about it long and hard, Lukas, about... about what we did, or what we *almost* did.”

Shit.

We’re gonna have the sex talk. Oh, great. Like this isn’t awkward enough.

I don’t interrupt her as it seems she wants to get this off her chest.

“And I don’t know why I’m feeling like this, but I can’t... I’m just going to come out and say it... I can’t stop thinking

about you.”

Her faint voice fills every part of my being and wraps me in her warmth.

Shut. Her. Down.

“Ariana...”

“I know. I know.” She waves her hands at me, a flush coming over her pretty skin that I quite enjoy. “It’s wrong. It’s really, really wrong on so many levels... but haven’t you, you know, kind of wondered?”

“Kind of wondered what?” I repeat. It takes all of my might to not reach over and run my hand up her knee and give her thigh a squeeze, just to touch her. That won’t help me.

“What it would be like,” she whispers, like someone might hear us. She looks up from the table, her big, blue, beautiful eyes assessing me for my reaction, and I’ll admit, I did not expect that. “Us. What we’d be like together.”

I feel like I’ve been hit in the face. Repeatedly. And there ain’t a damn thing I can do to stop it. I have fucking wondered. All night, in fact.

Stop it? I scarily ask myself the dreaded question; would I really want to?

CHAPTER TWELVE

ARIANA

I really don't know what they put in my coffee this morning at the buffet, but things are flying out of my mouth that don't even belong there.

The truth is, when Lukas told me that he was leaving, I panicked.

I panicked because I laid awake all night thinking about him.

About his touch.

About how gentle he was with me... up until the kiss, that is. He wasn't very gentle with that.

How I felt when he steered me out of the restaurant, and the elevator, his hand on the small of my back. How he sends shivers down my spine whenever I lay eyes on him.

I mean it; it is all wrong. It's dirty. But I can't help how I feel.

I want Mr. Bentley.

I look down again, and he reaches over and tilts my chin up with his fingers.

"Don't hide from me, Ariana," he says in his low, sexy voice. "Whatever we have to say to one another, it should be done with absolute honesty, and I thank you for yours, but don't hide your beautiful face from me."

I meet his gaze, but I can't find the words.

He smiles kindly. “I’m too old for you, for one, and even if that wasn’t an issue, I’m James’ father. Even though we may not be getting along the best right now, or ever, I don’t think that he would appreciate...”

“Did you know he cheated on me?” I fire back.

His eyes snap to mine, and I see disbelief in his gaze, followed swiftly by anger.

“He... he what?”

“I caught him in bed with that bitch he’s been flaunting all over Facebook,” I say, folding my arms over my chest. “Of course, he tried crawling back a few weeks later, but when I told him to take a hike, he went back to her. She works in his building, and it had been going on for a month before I caught them.”

“Ariana, I had no idea. I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be.” I wave a hand at him. “I was pretty sure he hadn’t told you, since you didn’t even know we’d broken up. And trust me, I’ve thought about it, and by telling you that it’ll probably only push you farther away, because now you’ll think I’m only coming onto you to get back at him. Which I’m not, by the way.”

He stares at me.

I wish he didn’t have to be so goddamn handsome.

His hair is slicked back off his face from the water, and I am too distracted by his taught, muscled, tattooed body to even give a shit that I’ve been caught having a dirty perve.

Why does he go to the gym and work his butt off if he doesn’t want women looking?

He probably does. *Just not me.*

“You’re coming onto me?” He smirks, shaking his head like he can’t believe it.

Huh? *That’s what he got from that.*

I bite my lip. “I encouraged you. We both know I’m not innocent in this. I partook in the flirting, the touching, and I

initiated the kiss...”

He looks down at my mouth, and he can't hide the hunger in his eyes. I see it.

“Tell me honestly, are you not trying to get back at James?”

“No,” I say, looking him firmly in the eyes. “I swear to God, I'm not. Granted, I came here to get away from things, to have a vacation where I work on myself for the first time in a long time. Was I still peeved about James? Of course. It was only a few months ago, and nobody likes being cheated on, but I dumped him and threw all of his shit out. I'm also not heartbroken, Lukas. I'm glad. We weren't meant to be, and that's how I look at it. I didn't want to waste any more time on someone not worthy of me, someone who could do that to me. And, I honestly never thought about you like *this* before. I swear to God. I first started to feel something more than friendship in the pool that day.”

He takes a sip from his glass as he watches me. “And?”

“And, as I say, I spent all of last night going over what happened. I'm an overthinker from way back, I overanalyze everything.”

His lips twitch as he listens, and I wish I knew what he was thinking... if he was feeling the same way. I mean, I know he was last night, I felt it...

“Ariana, you're going around in circles. What is it you're trying to say?” His eyes command my answer. Like a true CEO, he cuts right to the chase.

“I... I don't regret it, and... I wanted... I wanted more.”

He swallows hard. “Wanted, past tense?”

“No.” I shake my head. “God, this is so embarrassing.” I fold my head into my hands and wish the ground would swallow me whole.

He's just making me feel like a fool.

I look up. “I should go.”

He nods. “That is probably best.”

Awesome. He doesn’t even want to hear me out. He doesn’t want me.

I was stupid to think that he would be interested, foolish even.

“I’ll see myself out, then.” I stand, and he does as well. As I try not to feel even more ridiculous than I already do.

“Ariana,” he calls. I know he’s right behind me. I feel his hand on my wrist as he makes contact, and I turn to face him. “Please don’t leave upset.”

“What’s the point?” I throw back, and I know my attitude just reaffirms I’m acting like a baby.

But he should feel bad. He’s the one who made the first moves by touching me. Now he can barely look at me.

“The point is, I’m protecting you, because in the long run, we both know that we can’t work.”

I nod. “You’re right, Mr. Bentley. But you’re the first man that’s actually treated me like a real woman. When you talk to me, you look at me, you’re genuinely interested in what I have to say, and...” I know I’m rambling, but what the hell, I’m never going to see him again after this. “When you touch me... when you touch me, my body heats up with something I’ve never had before. I want to get lost in you and never resurface, and I’m confused, I’m confused about all of it...”

I feel his hands at my hips, and then his mouth moves over mine. It’s not hot and urgent like last night, but soft, tentative and gentle.

My hands go to push him away, but who am I kidding? I keep my hands on his bare chest and reciprocate the kiss, my heart racing.

He kisses me with so much sensual tenderness that I do not recognize the sound I make in the back of my throat.

When he pulls away, I’m breathless as I stare up at him.

“You make me lose control, Ariana,” he says in a low voice, his eyes on my lips. “And I’m always in control. What do you think that means?”

Is it a trick question?

“Maybe that we’re attracted to one another, despite all the obstacles in our way,” I whisper.

The way he looks at me, it prompts me to grow some kind of backbone and add, “I don’t want you to leave. I’ll be in the Zulu bar tonight at eight if you want to see me again. If not, we’ll pretend none of this ever happened, and I’ll delete your number off my phone.”

I feel his grip on my hips tighten.

Yeah, I bet you don’t like that, do you, Mr. CEO?

“Ariana...” he whispers.

“Please,” I say, moving one finger over his lips to quieten him. “I’ve said all I have to say. If you want to see where this goes, you know where I’ll be. If not, thank you for everything. The suite. The dinner. The earrings, and most of all, that kiss. I’ll never forget it.”

With that, I very reluctantly move away from him and go to the door, holding my head as high as I can muster when I leave him standing there staring after me.

Way to kill a mood.

I want to applaud myself for such bravery, but my body curses me to a thousand deaths.

I may have choked, but at least I said my piece.

He doesn’t get to be the one making all the decisions, and at the end of the day, it’s just sex. I’m not asking for a freaking marriage proposal.

It’s wrong. We both know it. But we’re consenting adults, and now that I’ve had a taste, I can’t get the thought of him out of my brain.

I want him.

When I get back to the room, I'm glad Imogen and Charlize have gone down to the pool bar. I already told them we kissed but didn't go into too much more detail. They were already bombarding me with questions and telling me sparks were flying all night over dinner.

Of course, Charlize is on board for me to jump his bones, but Imogen is a little more reserved, telling me to seriously think about what I'm doing before I do it. I know it's because they both care about me and because of the situation I'm in.

I just can't stop the race of my heart whenever I think about him.

I know it's kinda insta-lusty, but I've not had this kind of attraction to a man before.

It's a new sensation for me to even make the first move. I couldn't meet his eyes when I told him about the Zulu bar, but when he went to protest, I saw a look cross on his face between longing and pain.

I can't decide which was more prominent.

If he doesn't want me, then I will move on from this.

I'll forget all about it, because my life will not revolve around a man again like it did before. I'm a strong, capable woman, and I can make my own decisions about who I spend my time with and who I let in my bed. If Lukas doesn't want to be in it, then more fool him.

I'll deal with it.

I'm taking control. So, Mr. CEO can suck it.



Despite my gung-ho attitude this morning, I don't feel quite as confident now. Sitting here at the bar with a martini is only a ploy, as my nerves are all over the place.

I try to remember a time when I wasn't this nervous, and nothing comes to mind. Even my first freaking interview for my very first job doesn't compare.

Being in Lukas Bentley's presence is a whole new world altogether, and I can't believe I said what I did. Well, I guess it'll sort the men from the boys.

I'm so sick and tired of being told what to do, what to think, what to be by everyone; society at large, my dad and stepmom. I just want to break away and be free to be me.

So this is me being true to myself. No holds barred.

I'm attracted to Lukas Bentley. Hell, I freaking propositioned him!

Take a sip.

I have to pace myself. I don't want to get sloshed, as I need my head in the game... that's if he even shows up.

My stomach churns at the thought he may stand me up, and there's a good chance he will.

I saw his packed suitcase on the rack close to the bed as I walked past his bedroom.

Leaving early, because of me.

I know I affect him, but he doesn't have to be an ass about it. Even if he is trying to do *the right thing*. Maybe I don't want him to do the right thing, maybe I want him to give me dirty, hot, nasty sex and use my body for pleasure. Maybe I want to drown in him, just for a night.

Lose myself. See what it's like to lose total control. Maybe I need it.

Who am I right now?

I don't know, but being on this holiday and enjoying my friends, and my freedom, has given me a newly found insight to how I want to live my life: on my terms.

It's so fucking liberating.

I glance up at the clock, and my heart deflates. It's a few minutes past eight, and he's not here. I glance at my phone for the zillionth time to see no message.

Mr. Bentley is the type of man who is prompt. He'd never be late.

So I imagined it all?

Maybe I did. Maybe he'd just had one too many too that night, and the kiss didn't mean anything.

I sigh and tap my fingers on the bar. I should order another to dull the disappointment...

"Ariana," comes a low but dark voice at my shoulder.

I smell his cologne, and a jolt of excitement encases me as my stomach flutters at the way he says my name.

I turn and meet his stormy, fierce eyes as his brows knot together.

"Hello, Mr. Bentley."

He leans into my ear. "I told you once before, it's only Mr. Bentley when I'm inside you."

My insides jolt at his dirty words.

Mr. Dark and Dangerous is here.

I gulp. "Would you like a drink?"

He smirks, his hand resting on my shoulder as he nods to the bartender and orders a scotch neat and another martini for me.

He glances down at my dress. "You look beautiful."

I kept it light, with my bikini on and a pink halter dress over the top and sandals.

I smile at him. "I'm glad you came."

He watches me as he takes a sip of his whiskey. "How could I not with a proposition like that?"

"Are you shocked?"

He smirks. "Takes a lot more than that to shock me, sweetheart, but I'd be lying if I said I wasn't surprised. I did try to warn you that you weren't ready for me, but you played with fire."

I bite my lip.

He's so sexual; everything he says and does has my body aching for his touch.

I take a sip of my martini as he continues watching me, his face giving nothing away.

I take in his attire; a clean white shirt rolled up at the elbows, with dark blue dress pants and a belt. He can't dress casually to save himself.

When my eyes meet his again, he smirks. "Like what you see?"

I nod.

"Good, but I want to feed you first."

First?

I swallow hard again but follow his lead as we move over from the bar to a table by the pool. It's more casual here than the restaurant last night; it's more my style. I don't really like stuffy places and having to dress up in a ballgown to have dinner. Wearing floaty things is more my scene, though I think Lukas didn't seem to mind my wrap dress.

He's tentative through dinner, and we chat about everything. The conversation is never strained or forced, and it flows naturally.

I meant what I said earlier; when he talks, it's like he is genuinely interested in me and what I have to say. He watches me and gives me little touches here and there that have butterflies swirling in my stomach.

He tells me about his work and the new projects he's working on and about the reason he's here: he's waiting on assault charges to be dropped. I can't imagine him getting into a fist fight, but there's something terribly masculine about that.

It's safe to say, I'm a little love drunk on Mr. B right now.

The thing with him is, he takes his time.

If we end up in bed tonight, it's not like he's letting it affect him one little bit. He's a smooth customer, and I know he's been around the block a time or two, and it shows.

He's in absolutely no hurry to go anywhere, and I kind of dig that. His thumb very lightly skims the sensitive flesh on my thigh as he draws small circles while talking to me.

It sets my insides, and my pussy, on fire.

Every little touch that he gives me, I'll gladly take and then some.

We skip dessert, but he leans over and asks me if I'd like to have a swim in the pool at his suite, since I'm wearing my bikini and all.

My heart races in my chest at being alone with him, without prying eyes, even though this is what I've been wanting since he kissed me.

Now that it's happening, I can't help the nerves that dance in my stomach as he takes my hand when we leave the bar and make for the elevator.

It's the longest freaking ride of my life, and I fear it's just the beginning.

I wanted this. Oh, I did.

But now that we're heading to his room, a slight bit of trepidation hits me at full force, yet it isn't enough to have me change my mind.

Nothing is. And that's what scares me the most.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LUKAS

So, I'm a schmuck. And definitely going to hell.

I lead Ariana up to my suite, but it feels more like the lion leading the lamb to his lair.

I thought about what she said, and it made no sense for me to tuck tail and run.

I don't fucking run.

Not from her, not from anybody, even when I have their best interests at heart.

I've still no idea how I thought that was ever a plausible excuse. It isn't.

I take what I want and fuck the consequences. However, with Ariana, everything is different.

We share an uncommon anomaly, and while it's the white elephant in the room, I'm glad the subject of my son hasn't come up tonight. It's bad enough imagining them together. In fact, it twists my gut.

"Feel free to change in the guest bathroom," I say, because I really fucking don't want that, but it's the gentlemanly thing to do.

She smiles tentatively as I make my way to the bedroom to change into my swimming trunks. When I come out, she's already in the pool.

Fuck me if she hasn't just dropped her halter dress on a sun lounger and is doing a lap in her hot pink bikini. I watch

her glide through the water, with her hair tied up in a knot on her head.

I dive in and swim the whole length under the water, and only come up when I reach the end.

She laughs as I surface and shake my hair, splashing water on her.

It's a beautiful night, balmy and hot, and there is nowhere else I'd rather be.

"The water's nice," she says as I grip the side, trying my best to keep my eyes at her eye level and not on her huge rack, busting out of her bikini top.

Jesus, I can't wait to get those babies out and go to town.

Hold it, hot shot. She hasn't agreed to sex.

She moves in front of me, and I hold her hips in place. Her mouth reaches mine before I know what's happening, and I wrap my arms around her, holding her to me as I guide us back to the shallow end, her legs wrapping around my waist.

Okay, so maybe I was wrong. Maybe I'm getting a little rusty in my old age.

Her hot little tongue seeks entry into my mouth, and there's no way I'm letting her lead the charge. I move my mouth to her bottom lip and suck on it as she gasps. When her back hits the wall, I push into her so she can feel my hard cock.

"Jesus," she whispers.

I grin as I nip her neck, slowly, gently, taking my time.

Making out with her is turning me on so bad. I want to reach between her legs and see if it has the same effect on her, but I refrain.

All in good time.

I move my head to her clavicle, skimming her décolletage to my destination of choice; her rack. Fuck, her tits are perfect.

I move my hands up from her waist and cup them, testing their weight as she gasps at my touch.

Oh, baby, this is nothing. Wait till I'm sucking on your sweet little pussy.

I kiss her nipple through the material of her bikini as my thumb works the other one, pebbling it until she's whimpering, her legs tightening around me.

I slowly peel the bikini to one side, then do the same to the other. Her tits spill out, and I stare at them in absolute awe.

"Fuck," I growl. I grasp them in both hands roughly, pushing them up, rubbing my thumbs over both nipples at the same time, then lower my head to suck one into my mouth.

I glance up at her as she watches me. I so badly want to rip her bottoms aside and plunge in, but I'm not fucking her for the first time in the pool.

This pleasure is something I want to draw out of her, make her beg for it. Ruin her for any other man.

I suck, nip, flick and lave the hard bud with my tongue, then I do the same to the other one while my hand pinches the reddened peak, twisting and pulling as she groans against me, trying to gain friction.

"Don't worry, Ariana," I whisper. "Plenty of time to eat your pussy, baby. I'm gonna make you come so fucking hard. I tried to warn you, but you didn't listen."

I'm delighted with the look on her face as her cheeks redden. I move my mouth to her other nipple and continue my slow, sensuous torture. It's like fucking heaven.

"Bet I could make you come like this, couldn't I?" I mutter.

She whimpers in reply, but I'm not a selfish bastard in the bedroom, or in the pool. I snake a free hand down her body and dip into her bikini bottoms.

I'm rewarded with her smooth skin, and as I probe my fingers down her slit, I feel her arousal and groan at the same time she does. I suck her tits harder and rub her clit with my

thumb, circling it slowly, then I smooth my fingers through her folds. I know she's not far away; I can tell by the color in her cheeks, and her panting breath.

"Let go for me, Ariana," I whisper as I insert a finger, and she cries out as I finger fuck her to an orgasm. I don't stop, though. I spread her wetness around and insert another finger, sliding them in and out as her tits bounce in my face while I watch her. She closes her eyes.

"No," I tell her. "Eyes on me when you come, I want to hear you say it..."

"Say what?" she breathes.

"Mr. Bentley," I reply as I latch onto her nipple and tug it with my teeth. She detonates around me and screams my name across the pool as I drown it out with my mouth.

I need to taste her, now. I glide her over to the steps and place her on the top one. As soon as she's out of the water, I rip her bikini top off and throw it behind me, then I push her bikini bottoms aside and tell her to lean back on her elbows. She follows instructions very well. Once she's bared to me, I move my eyes to her pretty pussy, marveling at how fucking beautiful she is.

I run my tongue through her wetness as she calls out, placing both her hands over her eyes. I know she's sensitive after I just rode her through two orgasms. My dick's so hard in my shorts, I could blow a load right now, but I know how to hold on. I'm a master at it.

I open her up with my fingers and blow on her clit. She bucks each time I do it, then I latch on and suck the little bud into my mouth as she cries out. I lap her with my tongue, enjoying her mewls, her hands reaching into my hair as I feel her pulling.

That's it, baby girl. Enjoy it.

I insert two fingers, sliding them deep inside her, letting her feel each and every thrust. I stare in fascination as her head throws back and she comes hard, calling Mr. Bentley across

the entire fucking resort. I couldn't give a shit. I love it. She tastes so goddamn sweet.

I move over the top of her, knowing it would be so easy to shove into her little cunt and have my way with her before she can beg me. I don't, though. I kiss her hard, my tongue in her mouth as she clutches onto my shoulders, pulling me closer, edging me to my oblivion with just the lightest touch of her hands.

"I need to be inside you, Ariana," I breathe as I reach down and rip her bottoms off, throwing them behind me, too. Then I scoop her up in my arms and carry her into the suite, to my bedroom.

Before I can lay her down, she slides off my body and down onto the floor, her hand reaching up to my crotch as she feels my arousal in her hot little hand.

Oh, what...

She looks like a fucking goddess down on her knees, naked before me.

"Fuck," I say as she undoes the string, and then slides my shorts down. My fat, hard cock springs out in her face, and she gasps in shock. Yeah, I'm not exactly small.

"Mr. B..."

I smile down at her like the devil. "Good girl. Suck it, baby. Take it all, because I can hardly wait to be inside you and fuck you all night long."

Her eyes go wide at my words, but she is a good girl. She does as she's told and takes my cock in her hand and begins to lick the tip of it.

I look down at her in awe as she takes her time, her pretty mouth taunting me like the cock tease she is. It takes all my might not to ram it down her throat and let her choke on me for doing what she's done to me already.

Instead, I watch her take more of me, bit by bit, as she slowly sucks me in and out, in and out. I hold her head gently so not to put pressure on her. And fuck me if she doesn't look

like an angel down there on her knees, with her big, delicious tits out and my dick in her mouth.

I will never grow tired of seeing this picture; it's every man's fucking dream.

She cups my balls, and I jolt from the movement, pushing my dick farther into her mouth as I hit the back of her throat. Her gag reflex is pretty good as she recovers and pumps me with her hand as I start to slowly thrust my hips.

No!

I'm gonna come quickly if she keeps it up. I pull out abruptly and yank her to her feet.

"You're a naughty little cock tease, Ariana," I say, my voice hoarse. "I should spank your beautiful ass red for making me so hard."

She looks up at me with big eyes and grins. "Don't you want to fuck me first, Mr. Bentley?"

I swear, her using my name and those dirty words make my cock swell even more.

I fist my cock and move toward her as she steps back, slight fear in her eyes at my tempo, but I'm not going to hurt her. Sure, I like rough sex, but I won't do anything I'm sure she can't handle, which means not tying her to my bed tonight.

I push her back on the bed and crawl on top of her as she scoots back.

"Spread your legs," I tell her as I reach to the bedside table and pull out a rubber from the box.

She does as she's told, and her eyes go wide as I roll it on over my dick and sheath it, staring down at her glistening pussy. She's so fucking hot.

I come down over her and kiss her hard and rough as she pulls me closer, our kisses frantic, urgent even, as my dick probes at her entrance, begging to be let in.

I grab her tits again and push them together. I know they're sensitive after my mouth was on them earlier, but I brush my

beard over them, causing her to moan in a way that I'll never forget as long as I live.

"Mr. Bentley..." she cries out.

"Yes, you dirty little girl?" I whisper, letting her nipple go with a reluctant grunt. "What do you want, Ariana?"

"Put your dick inside me," she cries.

"Say please," I whisper in her ear.

"Please," she whispers. "I need you now..."

I love her begging me, and she doesn't have to ask me twice. I rise onto my elbows, and push into her in one grunt. I hiss, and she whispers a string of profanities as I still.

She's tight.

Oh, this is gonna be so fucking good.

"Wrap your legs around me," I command. "I want to be in you so deep."

I know if she does that, and I tilt her hips, I'll hit her G-spot nicely, giving her something that no other man has likely had the ability to find.

She does as she's told again, and I grin as I kiss her, our tongues going at it as I angle her up slightly, then pull out and slowly sink back in.

"Your little pussy swallows me so good, baby," I tell her as she squeezes her eyes shut. "I knew we'd fit well. You like this big dick in you, don't you, Ariana?"

She nods frantically as I pick up the pace, moving up onto my hands as I plunge in deeper.

I love when she cries out as I angle forward, knowing I'm now brushing her clit, touching her G-spot, and my balls are bouncing against the rest of her sensitive flesh; the trifecta.

Like clockwork, she detonates and moans my name as I quicken, pumping her hard, in and out, fucking her like the little cock tease she is until I've ridden her through it. But I'm not done with her yet. Oh no.

I flip her over so I'm on the bottom, my head resting against the bedhead as she settles over my lap.

“Sit on my dick. Ride me hard, beautiful.”

She positions herself over me and slides down, her hands resting on my shoulders as I grip her waist and move her up and down on top of me. Watching every single pleasurable moment cross her delicate face.

It's magic. It's pure fucking magic.

I spank her plump, gorgeous ass cheek, then soothe it with my hand.

“Push your tits in my face, Ariana,” I tell her.

She does, cupping them as I sit forward and lick them both, moving my tongue over them as she holds them in place. I suck one, then the other, then repeat going back and forth between the two as she moans, her head falls back as she pumps up and down on me furiously as I roam her body with my hands, taking what I want.

I grab her ass cheeks and give her another smack, making her yelp, then she comes again as I pump up into her just as furiously. She lets her tits go and they bounce in my face as she whispers my name over and over like a silent prayer.

I flip her back over, gripping her thighs, and I move one leg over my shoulder, then the other. I grasp the headboard and move in and out of her slowly. It's maddening even for me, but if I kept going at that pace, I would have come, and I'm not ready yet. I want to give her at least one more orgasm.

“Sore yet, baby?” I chuckle as her eyes pop open, and she stares up at me.

She shakes her head.

“Do you like my cock, Ariana?”

She nods.

“Say it.”

“I love your cock,” she pants.

I add a thrust at the end as I move in and out of her, my eyes burning into hers.

“I love your cock, *what?*” I prompt.

She bites her lip, and I almost lose it. “I love your cock, Mr. Bentley.”

I grin as I quicken my pace, lifting her hips off the bed.

“I know you do. Your sweet little pussy takes everything I’ve got and begs me for more.” I glance down at my cock disappearing in and out of her, and I know I need to let go. Her pussy is like a vise, squeezing me for all I’m worth. Taunting me in the most delicious of ways.

Like a siren’s call, as if she knows what I need in order to explode, she grabs my ass cheeks and grips me hard. “Fuck me harder, Mr. Bentley.”

I move faster, moving up onto my knees as I pump in and out of her with vigor.

“Oh God, Mr. Bentley... oh... oh...” She comes again, and our eyes meet. I see her cheeks flush as I lose my load too, stilling as I groan, coming hard in long, agonizing spurts while I stare down at her.

“Fuck, fuck, fuuuuck,” I groan.

I still and set her legs down on the bed as I collapse on top of her.

“How did I do?” she squeaks beneath me as I rumble with laughter, pushing up, hovering over her so she can breathe.

Our lips meet as we kiss, slowly, gently. Like we’ve been doing this for a long time, not just tonight.

“Just fucking perfect, baby,” I say as I make absolutely no attempt to pull out of her or roll off her.

I just want to savor the moment, and savor it I will.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ARIANA

I wake up with a start, and I momentarily forget where I am.

It takes a few seconds until I realize that I'm in Lukas Bentley's hotel suite, and I'm wrapped around him.

The first thing I notice is his scent.

Strong. Masculine. Heady.

It's enough to make my toes curl and my core clench at the same time.

Who am I kidding? Lukas is a sex god.

My heart races as I recall our wild night together.

He took me good and proper. I can safely say, I've never been screwed with such reckless abandon ever in my life, and it may be even safer to say that I could be ruined forever.

Men in your twenties, move the fuck on over. Mr. Bentley runs circles around you and then some.

I don't know if it's the fact that he's older, and he's had more experience in pleasing a woman, or that he's just downright crude and dirty. Maybe it's a combination of all those things, but when he goes to town, he really goes to town.

He didn't let up, driving me insane.

After the first round on the bed, we had some champagne. Champagne turned to sucking strawberries, then sucking strawberries turned to me riding him on the couch while he

slapped my ass until I called out his name again and again. He likes it when I call him Mr. Bentley in the throes of passion.

The dirty fuck.

But I can't talk, because I enjoyed every second of it.

I sneak a glance up at him. Even sleeping, he's freaking perfect.

He looks softer like this; if that's even possible. In real life, when he's alert and his eyes are on you, he's a machine. His impenetrable stare could make you stop in your tracks, make you do anything he wanted.

Not that we didn't do anything I didn't want to do. We did it all.

I can see how when he's in CEO mode, he'd be a hard ass; he's known for it. But there's also a side to him that isn't all business.

We talked about places we've visited, not that I've traveled much. His many failed relationships, and why he's single. While I don't doubt that he has many a female admirer, I appreciate the honesty. I told him about my strained relationship with my dad, and my stepmom; they live in Montana now, so I don't see them as much. And how my mom left us when I was young.

He's a good listener. I also appreciate how attentive he is. Touching me ever so slightly, making my body tingle all over.

If I even cast my mind to the reality of the situation; that he's James's father, it makes me want to jump out of bed right now and run away and hide.

I mean, I know we're grown adults and all, but it is kinda weird, even to me, what we've done.

I try not to hyperventilate, and brush those nagging thoughts aside as he stirs in my arms.

His salt and pepper hair is squashed into the pillow, his body... his body is even more freaking insane up close. This dude seriously works out, and he's not shy with his body. He walks around perfectly at ease naked, like it's nothing.

I've never known confidence like that. I don't even do that at home, but Mr. B has a lot to shout about. His body is a toned mass of perfection, if there ever was such a thing.

And he also likes to snuggle.

I smile despite myself.

I know it's wrong.

I know it's just a fling.

But I allow myself the indulgence of enjoying this moment. Being in his arms, feeling empowered, feeling the most sexual that I've ever felt in my life, and I've got him to thank for it.

He spent all night telling me how perfect my not-so-perfect body is. I'm curvy. I have cellulite and a fairly substantial derriere, but Lukas loves it all. Lord knows he couldn't stop touching me, pinching me, sucking me, and then there was the spanking. I can safely say I've never been spanked before. He claimed every inch of my body.

My skin flushes at the thought of what we got up to.

It's so dirty.

Suddenly his cool, blue eyes are staring at me. *Oops.*

Now I've been caught gawking.

"Hi," I whisper, embarrassed. I feel his hand tighten around my waist, then he smooths a hand down to cup my bottom.

"Hi yourself, Ariana. Sleep well?" There's amusement in his tone.

He knows I wasn't meant to sleep here tonight. I planned on going back to my own suite after our night of debauchery.

We both know he wore me out.

I bite my lip as his eyes drop, that hungry look clouding over those perfect features.

"Yes," I whisper. I trail a finger up his chest, loving how the faint, dark hair feels on my fingertip.

“What about the rest of you?”

I swallow hard. “The rest of me?”

He reaches down to cup my sex as I gasp. “You’re not sore?”

I look down, embarrassed as he leans in and kisses me gently on the lips. He wouldn’t allow me to wear anything to bed, not that I had anything to put on except a robe.

I shake my head. “You lubed me up pretty well.”

His version of lube is giving me sixty-five orgasms before he penetrates.

“Did I now?”

I nod as he begins to rub through my folds. God, he’s heaven on a stick.

He reaches up, pulling the sheet down to my waist so he can fondle my breasts.

I moan as he plucks my nipple, then moves his head down and sucks one into his mouth.

Jesus. What a freaking wake up call.

His hand moves back down south, and he continues to slowly, effortlessly, spread my slickness around as he rubs my clit, forcing my legs to open. I slide back onto the pillows, giving him better access.

I watch as he rolls me onto my back, climbs his fucking hot body over me and moves his mouth to my other eagerly awaiting nipple. He sucks on that one too as he inserts a finger inside me slowly, ever so slowly, taking his time and making me gasp.

“So fucking beautiful,” he whispers in between sucks and nips. “We fit so well, Ariana. I knew we would.”

I can’t speak; it’s too erotic watching him. His mouth on my sensitive breasts, one hand squeezing my nipple, the other one finger fucking me torturously slow.

“What a way to wake up,” I muse.

He grins, nipping my flesh gently, moving up to nip my neck and jaw. “Nobody’s ever woken you up like this before?”

“As if.” I laugh.

I’m sure I hear him tut as he explores my body with his mouth. Occasionally, his lips meet mine and his tongue seeks entry, but all too soon it’s gone as he moves back down my body. He inserts another finger and rubs my clit with his thumb as I begin to come.

Like this, it’s different, slow, so goddamn slow, which means my orgasm draws out, on and on, feeling like it’s never going to end. I try to quicken it up, needing my release as I buck my hips, but he just grunts into my skin and keeps the slow tempo until I combust. And combust, I do.

Quickly, he rolls on a rubber as I fist his hard length. His cock is fucking perfect too. Of course, it is. He’s a beast.

He’s large. Smooth. Godly in every sense of the word. And I love what he does with it.

“You like that, Ariana?” he drawls as our eyes meet, sensing my thoughts.

“God yes,” I breathe.

“Tell me what you want me to do with it?”

Fuck me.

“Put it inside me,” I stammer.

He grins. “I think you can do better. Where’s my dirty little girl from last night?”

Shit.

I might have said a few choice things in my orgasmic haze. I don’t even remember fully, but at one point, I’m pretty sure I begged him.

“Put your glorious, big, fat cock inside me, Mr. Bentley,” I purr, trying my best sultry voice.

He grins and shakes his head. Without warning, he shoves that big cock inside me full tilt, as I gasp at the intrusion.

He wastes no time mounting me, kissing me. Doing that slow roll with his hips, he moves in and out of me with the same slow rhythm as his fingers just did.

“Do you feel that, baby?”

He’s so freaking dirty.

“Yes,” I stammer as he thrusts at the end, hitting my clit with his pubic bone as his body molds into mine.

“Yes what?”

“Yes, Mr. Bentley.”

He grunts, then moves up to his knees and spreads my legs wide, resting my feet on his chest as he stares down at where we’re jointed. “Jesus Christ,” he mutters.

“Now, now,” I admonish. “I think we’ve established you can do better than that.” I like throwing his words back at him, and a part of me thinks that he likes it too.

“Your pussy is so tight, Ariana. It’s choking my cock, baby, sucking me dry. You like sucking my hot cum out of me, don’t you?”

My eyes go wide as he grins, his eyes sparking as we stare at one another. I don’t have time to think; I lose it as he pumps me harder, faster, losing himself as I cry out and spasm uncontrollably as he comes too, grunting and pulsing violently.

When he collapses on top of me, I welcome the contact. I love how attentive he is even after we fuck. It’s like he wants to make sure I’m okay. I’m far beyond okay, I’m in orgasmic heaven.

We lay there for what feels like forever.

“I should get back to my own room soon,” I say, when he finally rolls sideways, taking his time sliding out of me.

“Why?” he asks as I stare at the ceiling, still out of breath.

“Because my friends are probably wondering where I got to.”

He snorts. “Yeah, I’m sure they may have worked it out.”

I remember his present to me, and I feel up to my earlobes, running my fingertips over the beautiful diamond earrings he bought me.

He wanted to see me wearing them, them and nothing else. “Do you like your gift?” he asks, turning on his side to look at me, noticing my movement.

“I love them,” I say quietly. “They’re perfect.”

“Not as perfect as you.” His hand strokes my hip as he makes my heart race, his chest rising and falling rapidly. “Diamonds suit you, and you deserve the best, Ariana. Any man blessed in your company should be treating you like a queen. You shouldn’t take less than you deserve, remember that always.”

I don’t know if he means his son in particular, or just men in general, but I dare not ask.

And he’s also right. I have been taking far less than I deserve.

Being with a man who appreciates you, even if it is just for one night, makes you reevaluate a lot of things.

When I don’t reply, not out of rudeness, I just don’t know what to say to that, I feel his weight shift as he props up on his elbow. I turn my head to look at him.

“Ariana?”

I bite my lip.

Please God, don’t ask me.

I wait for it.

“Did James...”

“Can we not do this?” I start, pulling the sheet up to cover my body, tucking it under my armpits.

“I want to know if he hurt you.”

I frown at him. “Aside from my feelings? Then that’s a no.”

He stares at me with those eyes that I can't lie to. "You didn't love him?"

"I didn't say that."

"No, but you said aside from your feelings. You didn't mention your heart being broken."

God, this is uncomfortable.

"I don't know if we should be talking about your son and my relationship with him while we're in bed together," I snap, sitting upright.

"Why not? It's a simple question."

"Because it's not appropriate!" I don't know why I'm so mad. Maybe because I feel a bit guilty that James's dad just fucked me, and he's a hundred times better than James ever was.

Heat flushes in my cheeks as I try not to compare.

"You're overthinking it," he tells me, and he doesn't go to stop me when I climb out of bed in search of my clothes.

"Am I really?"

"Yes," he confirms. "And there's no way to win with that train of thought."

"Who says I'm trying to win?" I fire back, anger striking me from every angle.

Have I made a really big mistake?

He sits up, leaning his head back against the headboard. "Let me get this straight, I ask you one simple question and you get this upset?"

I don't know why but his disappointment makes me feel insecure. I don't need his approval.

"I'm not upset," I say, pulling my clothes on rapidly.

"No? Then why won't you look at me?"

I turn and purposely stare at him. "You have to admit... this is a little... strange."

He sits up, looking like a fucking perfect Adonis as the sheet pools around his waist.

“Strange how?”

I shake my head.

“Because I mentioned James?” he surmises as I refrain from answering. I wish he could just stop saying it. “You’re just acting out because you feel guilty, is that it?”

“Acting out?” I say, astonished, feeling the heat rising in my body. “What are we, five years old?”

“No, but I expected a bit more from you, Ariana. You’re acting like a little childish.”

I snort as I pull myself together. “Well, thanks for the pep talk. I’d better be going.”

He runs a hand over his face. “Don’t go,” he says, but he doesn’t get up. If he does, I’m afraid that I’ll just give in and do what he wants.

“I have to.” I look at the floor, remembering our perfect, beautiful, lovely night. And now I’m ruining it because all I can think about is how wrong this is.

“Are you coming back?” he asks.

I look up quickly, unsure why he’s asking me that.

“I’ll message you later,” I say. I’m quick to get away. “I... I had a really great time, Lukas. I’m sorry, I just have to go...”

He nods once, like he doesn’t believe me, and I practically run out the door.

I manage to sneak into my suite, my heart racing the whole elevator ride down, without waking the girls. It’s still early, and I shut the door to my room, then take a long, hot shower.

I don’t exactly like the thought of washing his scent off me, though. I play our conversation over and over in my mind, remembering the confusion in his eyes when I left.

I know Lukas Bentley isn’t used to women dashing out the door like that. In fact, he looked livid. But he was right on one

thing; I am feeling the guilts.

I may not have loved James but imagining what he would say if he found out had me fleeing Lukas's room like my ass was on fire.

I don't know why I care, it's not like he did when I caught him in bed with another woman.

He didn't give two shits about me.

I'm confused.

I'm confused because I didn't want me and Mr. B to end and that's stupid.

It's a fling. Nothing more.

I can't go getting all weird about Lukas. It's bad enough that my conscience is screaming at me for being a dirty ho, while my inner goddess is yelling *you go girl!*

If only he wasn't my ex-boyfriend's dad...

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

LUKAS

Thank God I have a stupidly long meeting to distract me from this morning's turnaround of events. Unfortunately for me, though, the meeting is boring as bat shit, and I find my mind wandering.

I can still smell her on me.

Her beautiful scent of wild berries and cream.

She's sweet like candy, her body soft, her skin smooth. I've never been so excited to be with a woman in a very long time. That may be partly due to the fact that it is somewhat taboo, but mainly because she's fucking gorgeous.

I wish I could give a shit the way she does, but the fact is, I don't. I gave up giving a shit what people thought of me a while back. I didn't get this far in business being a sap.

I'm known as a shrewd businessman, a hard ass, apparently, and I didn't get that way from laying down and getting all butt hurt when someone disagreed with me.

I get the logistics, I really do. But I'm not James. He didn't treat her the way she deserves and that's on him, not me.

What's more, I shouldn't give a shit that she walked out on me like she did. Albeit that was a first, but I felt a strange pain in my chest when she left mad and a little upset.

I don't like upsetting her.

The only tears I would ever want to see on Ariana's face are those that form when she's in the throes of passion, riding my cock.

Jesus.

There is no repenting from my sins.

I shift in my seat, remembering our sweet, sinful night of hot sex.

My head between her legs as she rode my face. Goddamn. The way her big, bountiful breasts swayed and bounced, her nipples changing color when I plucked and sucked at them.

It's enough to drive a sane man mad.

That woman can move her hips. She's definitely a tiger in the bedroom; no sign of my little lamb anywhere.

I definitely went full vanilla on her, though, not wanting to scare her off. I'm not Christian fucking Grey by any means, but the thought of trussing her up with my tie has me hard as a rock as I try to concentrate on the merger that I'm meant to be interested in.

The truth is, I'm kind of mad that she left like that. She worries way too much about what people think.

I have to remember that I've got twenty years on her, and I'm not exactly one to wear my heart on my sleeve.

It fucks me over that she practically ran from my suite and high-tailed it as quick as possible.

I know she enjoyed herself. I know she was surprised at how good we were together, at what I did to her, but it's doubtful she's going to get over the fact of who I am and who she is and what all of that means. She's so caught up in her own head, and giving her the benefit of the doubt, I suppose she has a right to be.

Still. It kind of ruined the moment.

I get such little downtime, and though I enjoy pleasure, it felt different with her. I care about her, and there is my first mistake.

The women I usually fuck are just nameless faces. We both get off and have a good time and that's that. There are no feelings involved, and I rarely see them again. I don't like to

keep all of my eggs in one basket, but with Ariana, I felt a strange coldness when she left me in bed.

I didn't want her to go.

That's a first for me, and I'm still processing my thoughts over it.

I would never purposefully hurt her, but I feel by doing what we did and how she's so stuck in her own head, it's probably better if we don't continue. If she gets too invested or clingy, things could get bad.

That admission has had me reeling for most of the morning, hence why I took this fucking meeting when I should have just gone down to the pool and done some laps or smashed it out in the gym.

If I'm worried about her getting too invested and clingy, which, judging by how she left me this morning, she's clearly not, then why do I feel like I'm the one who got screwed over?

Now I've got to sit here and pretend I give a shit when what I really want to do is text her and make sure she's all right.

I've lost my fucking mind.

Remembering me shoving her bikini top aside while I saw her bare breasts for the first time, squeezing and plucking them while I ate her sweet pussy has me excusing myself from the meeting and shutting my laptop down.

This is fucking ridiculous.

I don't do this shit.

I don't get affected by women to this capacity, and I certainly don't blow important meetings because I can't keep a straight thought in my head, even if I am supposed to be on vacation.

So why, oh why, do I unzip my shorts, pull my dick out and pleasure myself thinking about her hot, curvy, sexy body, like I can't get enough. Her sweet, sinful mouth when she sucked me off.

I close my eyes, and I know deep down that I'll rub this one out and then that'll be that.

I'll be done with her.

I'll ignore her for the rest of my trip, and pretend it never happened.

My fist pulls my dick so tight as I imagine her mouth on me, her tongue swirling... I come quick, spurting into my free hand as I groan, milking every drop, and know that I'm nowhere near being satisfied.

I'm already hatching a plan to see her again after I just told myself I was done with her.

No good can come of any of it, not how she left things.

It's just a fling, I tell myself for about the hundredth time. Nothing more.



I hit the gym for over an hour, then take a swim in my private lap pool. I don't want the risk of running into Ariana at the main pool. It seems like she needed a little time to cool off.

I may not be a patient man, but I do know how to wait.

She can't deny we had chemistry last night, and frankly, I'm only here for a short space of time and I'd like to use that time productively, like by spending more time in bed with her.

I know it's ludicrous; this can't continue when we get back to Seattle. For one, she's hellbent on making me out to be some kind of monster, and two, she cares too much about what my arrogant son thinks.

It may sound like I have no conscience whatsoever, but that isn't true. I just don't give others the opportunity to rule my life. I'm the one in it. I'm the one who rules it.

And ruling Ariana's body is something that I'm very interested in doing.

After my swim, I order a cocktail from the butler, and I think about going out for dinner.

There's a sushi restaurant in the resort that just opened, and I don't feel the pull to sit around in my room all night when I could be enjoying the sunset from the lounge bar.

The sunsets here are magical, not like Seattle, where I barely remember to look at the sky there, it's always clouded over anyway.

I dress in khaki shorts and a short-sleeved button up shirt. The occasion doesn't call for a suit, and it's a nice change.

I've also been avoiding talking to Henry all day. It's only bad news where all of that's concerned, and being the current mood I'm in, it's best to leave him alone, or I may say something I'll regret.

I check my phone, and there's no messages.

I dial the concierge on a whim.

"Mr. Bentley, how may I assist you?"

"Please send a dozen red roses to Ariana Michaels in suite five zero four."

"Certainly sir. Did you wish to leave a note?"

I ponder that for a moment.

"Yes, let it read: I'd like to see you again."

"Will we let her know who the flowers are from, sir?"

"Add Mr. B at the bottom, please."

"Very good, sir."

I hang up.

Then I dial him back.

"Mr. Bentley?"

"I need the retail manager, or a woman in that department."

"Very good, sir. Connecting you now."

He connects me, and a few moments later, a woman's voice greets me on the other end of the phone.

“Good evening, Mr. Bentley, how can I assist you?”

“I’d like to order a lingerie set, the very best you have, elegant but sexy.”

“La Perla, sir?”

“Excellent.”

“What cup size?”

I think for a second. “D cup, I think.”

“And brief size?”

“About a six.”

“Any color in particular, Mr. Bentley?”

I think about her skin tone, and how good she looked in that white bikini.

“White and see-through.”

“Excellent choice. I’ll have it to your room within the hour.”

I hang up wondering what the fuck I’m doing.

I can’t deliver it to her room because then her friends will want to see what’s inside, so I can only hope she’ll like the flowers and realize I’m not trying to be a fucking prick.

I like her.

I like her a little too much.

And she’ll look good in La Perla; she deserves nothing but the best.

It’s just sex, I tell myself... we’re just fucking, but I’m afraid that if I don’t see her soon, I may just lose my mind.

I still feel fucking pissed about her leaving. We should be able to have a conversation about it.

I’m halfway through my noodle bowl, which is utterly delicious, when I get a text.

I glance at my phone and see Ariana’s name on the screen. I open my messages.

Thank you for the flowers, they're beautiful.

I contemplate whether to reply, but I'm not playing childish games.

You're welcome. You left in a hurry. I never meant to upset you, Ariana.

The gray bubble tells me she's replying.

I don't know how to do this, and I freaked out.

I rub my chin and shake my head.

When I want something, I go for it. I never intended that this is where we'd end up, that's the truth.

Well, the ball is in your court. I'd like to continue seeing you while we're here, but that's up to you. Know this; you're smart, witty, and beautiful, Ariana, and whatever happens, I enjoyed our night together immensely. Do what you want to do, always x

She doesn't reply back.

I go to the bar and down a couple of shots. Some of the ladies sitting there try to grab my attention, but I'm too pissed off to bother. I should just go and let off some steam and forget about her.

The more I try to turn my mind to something else, the more I can't let it go.

But I have to.

She isn't mine to have, tonight or any night.

I'd do well to remember that.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ARIANA

“You know what I think,” Charlize says, as we tuck into the all-you-can-eat buffet. We took a cab ride to a nearby restaurant, and I’m starving, being I haven’t eaten since breakfast. “And I’ll say it again; you’re crazy not to take this opportunity to bang it out.”

I almost spit out my drink, and Imogen doesn’t hold back from snorting out laughter. I give her the stink eye.

“Banging being the operative word,” Imogen pipes up, once she’s done laughing her ass off.

“Thanks, guys, really great advice.” I roll my eyes.

Of course, they wanted all the gossip from my night of saucy sex with Lukas, and while I’m not one to kiss and tell, I had to give them something or else I’d never hear the end of it.

All Charlize really wanted to know was if Mr. Bentley was better than his son, to which I threw a pillow at her head and did not reply with an answer.

The truth is, he’s out of this freaking world. It’s the best sex I’ve ever had.

I wonder if he’s like that all the time in bed, so attentive. He’s certainly very generous with his time, and his tongue.

My phone has been burning a hole in my pocket all day, and I feel like such a bitch for ghosting him. I’m clearly not of sound mind, and he thinks I’m acting like a child. Well, he did say as much.

I have to stop caring about what fucking James would think. He didn't want me.

A part of me wants to throw caution to the wind, but another part wants to run and hide.

I feel when I leave Mexico and go back to real life in Seattle, it'll be really freaking hard to forget about Lukas Bentley.

"The worst thing you can do is over analyze this," Charlize says, waving her fork at me. "Think about it. He's hot in the sack, he's gaga for you, and nobody has to know except us. I don't know what you're complaining about, Ari, seriously, I might have to start rethinking my dating age limits. Older guys know what they're doing, obviously."

"I'm not overthinking it," I reply in a hurried whisper. "And I don't know what you mean by *obviously*. Do I have a sign on my head saying *recently laid*?"

She shakes her head, stuffing more shrimp into her mouth. "No, but you have this glow about you. Doesn't she, Imi?"

Imogen nods. "It's like an afterglow; a post orgasm flush."

I glance around to make sure nobody is within hearing distance; this is a family place, after all.

"Will you two shut up. You're really not helping the situation."

They look at each other and laugh.

"There's nothing wrong with feeling happy," Imogen goes on, resting a hand on mine on the table. "In all seriousness, babe, I've not seen you like this for so long, so it's nice that you're letting loose and enjoying yourself. You deserve it."

I know she's right, but it's become convenient to berate myself and second guess everything in my life, so this is no different.

I realize that I do actually feel happy, not just because of the post orgasm glow, but because I'm finally taking my life back in my own hands.

I'm free to do what I want. I'm not under any restraints. I'm my own person. Why has it taken a few days on vacation to make me realize this?

I guess sometimes you do have to physically leave your real life to understand the things that need to change.

I know this is just a holiday glow, but I don't want things to go back to 'normal' when I get home. I don't want normal anymore; I want fucking extraordinary.

"Thanks, Imi. Even though you guys annoy the shit out of me, it was super sweet of you to surprise me on this trip. I couldn't ask for better friends."

Charlize holds up her cocktail glass to the middle of the table. "A toast."

We follow suit, and Imogen is already shaking her head, but Charlize's toasts are usually priceless.

"To the amazing achievements that we've each had in our lives and the things we are working toward," she says with bright eyes. "To the friendship we have, and the craziness that comes with it, may we always be like this."

"Here, here!" I agree.

We clink glasses as she adds, "And to the men that have come and gone in our lives. I raise a middle finger to the losers who lost us, kudos to the ones that get to know us, and blowjobs to the lucky bastards that get to keep us."

"You never disappoint," Imogen mumbles into her Mai Tai.

"Life would be so boring without you." I sigh.

The girls want to go to a club nearby, and I know I'm a stick in the mud, but all I really want to do is go see Lukas. I feign a headache and blame lack of sleep and take a cab back to the resort, not that they buy any of it.

It's past eleven, and when I get into the elevator I don't even stop at my own floor, I go straight to his. I know the code; I saw him punch it in.

It's only been a few hours since I left, but I already miss him. I miss his touch. He makes me feel good. He makes me feel better about myself.

After Charlize's little speech, I wonder if it is wrong at all. Maybe I am being irrational?

It's not like we're going to be a couple or anything, it's just sex...

I ring the doorbell, and as soon as I do, I realize I should have at least texted him.

It's kind of rude showing up here unannounced... what if he has company? Oh God, what a horrible thought. Though I know he's a womanizer and could pull any woman he wanted, that doesn't mean he's going to... does it?

A few moments go by, and I realize he's probably not even here.

What an idiot to think he would be. It's the weekend, and he's not sitting around the hotel deliberating or wondering what I'm doing. *Stupid.*

I turn to leave, pressing the down button on the wall and waiting for the elevator. It's then I hear a commotion at the door, and as I turn, I see Lukas standing there, his shirt unbuttoned at the nape, wearing shorts of all things.

His legs are tanned, and I almost smile at how good he looks in anything. Sure, I've seen him with nothing on, but when he's dresses I've only ever seen him in suits and ties and those linen pants.

He looks surprised to see me.

"Ariana, what are you doing here?" At least his voice sounds soft. My heart flutters in my chest.

"I..." *What am I doing here?* "I wanted to come by and say I'm sorry about this morning, and to thank you for the flowers..." It sounds lame, I know.

"You already thanked me."

Okay he's pissed.

“I just needed to clear my head,” I say.

He frowns then opens the door wider. “Come here.”

I do as he says and duck under his arm as I enter his room.

He follows behind and switches the television off, his glass of whiskey on the rocks resting on the outside table. “You don’t have to be sorry for anything, Ariana. Like I said, do what you want to do. It’s that simple.”

I turn to him. “I know, it’s just, I kind of rushed out on you without much of an explanation.”

He stares at me. He’s gotten more tanned since he’s been here, giving him that holiday glow.

It sends shivers through my body, and I know I’m starting to have feelings for him, and that is very stupid.

“I think I can do the math.” He gestures to the balcony. “Please have a seat, can I get you some wine?”

I nod. “Yes, please.”

He pads barefoot to the kitchen and pulls out a bottle of wine from the fridge. “Is rosé all right? It’s not too sweet.”

“That would be great, thanks.”

He doesn’t look at me. I don’t know if it’s just me or if he seems to have cooled a little bit.

A man like Lukas Bentley probably doesn’t like to be ignored all day, but you know what? I’m not playing by anybody’s rules, I’m playing by my own.

I step out onto the balcony and marvel at the view. It’s so pretty up here, like you’re on top of the world. The dark sky full of stars is a stark contrast to the bright lights and traffic in the distance. There’s a buzz of activity below, and the resort spans for what seems like an eternity.

A few moments later, Lukas appears and hands me the wine.

“How was your day?” he asks, as I take a sip of the pink liquid. It’s delicious.

“Good. We hung out at the pool and had tapas, and then went to the Blue Lagoon for dinner and had a buffet. They do a really nice shrimp.”

He sits in the chair opposite and looks right at me. That’s the thing with Lukas. He actually listens when you talk. I don’t think I’ve ever had a man ask me how my day was, and that feels incredibly sad.

“What are the girls up to?”

I glance at him. His scrutiny is always unnerving, but tonight he seems more serious than usual.

“They went to a club.”

His eyebrow quirks slightly. “You didn’t feel like going?”

I shake my head. “I wanted to see you. I’m sorry I didn’t text back...”

“You don’t have to keep apologizing. I’m not your keeper. You should be out having a good time with your friends. That’s what vacations are for.”

I dare not tell him that going out and dancing and meeting up with other guys is about the last thing on my mind, but as he looks at me with a primal look in his eyes, it’s as though he already knows the truth.

“I think we both know where I’d rather be.”

His lips twitch ever so slightly. “Is that so?”

Why does his voice sound so husky and sexy?

I nod. I don’t have words for him because I know that what I’m feeling is reckless abandon, and I can’t even blame alcohol.

“Ariana, look at me.”

I force my eyes to meet his.

“What are you really feeling?”

I bite my lip. “That I shouldn’t be here, as much as I want to be. It shouldn’t feel like this.”

“Like what?”

“So good between us.”

He laughs. “Ariana, it seems to me you continue to punish yourself for feeling good about something. I don’t understand it. I know because of our circumstances, it complicates things. It’s not ideal, but I like you. I’m not ashamed to admit it, and I like spending time with you. If you’d let me, I’d like to see you until we go home.”

Until we go home.

The words hang there, reminding me that we’re nothing more than a holiday fling.

I can’t read too much into this. He’s made it pretty clear.

So, I should enjoy this for what it is. I’ll probably never run into him in Seattle. I haven’t for the last twenty odd years. We’re from two different worlds. I also don’t know why my heart feels heavy when I think about going our separate ways. It’s not like we could really work in the real world.

“I would too,” I whisper.

He reaches across the table and runs a finger over my hand, gently caressing me.

“Does that mean you’d like to stay here tonight?”

My body screams *yes!* My mind tells me to get the fuck out of there.

“I’d like that,” I hear myself say.

He smiles slowly. “Would you like to have a swim?”

The great thing about Mexico is I always have a bikini on under my dress, because nine times out of ten, we’ll have a swim when coming back from dinner, and it saves going all the way back up to the room to change.

“I like your lap pool,” I say, taking another sip, albeit a little larger.

“I like you.”

I almost splutter my wine.

He smirks again and stands, then goes into the suite. I watch from the clear glass door as he strips himself naked and disappears into the bedroom, returning in his swimming trunks.

I mean, if there was ever a God on earth, it has to be this man.

I can't take my eyes off him, and he knows it.

"Are you going to swim in that pretty dress?" He nods to me as he steps back out and holds his hand out. I take it and follow him with my wine in my other hand.

"No."

"Are you naked under there?" he muses.

I grin behind his back. "No. I have a bikini on."

"Pity," he mutters.

I place my glass down on one of the side tables next to the sunbed and peel my dress off. Lukas dives into the pool and does a lap and back again before I'm even in the water.

He swims to the edge and eyes my gold tube bikini, his eyes raking my body, making me feel like I'm the sexiest woman in the world. In his eyes, I am, even if it's just for tonight.

I dive over the top of his head and glide through the water, squealing when I come up because he's on me in seconds, grasping me from behind as I reach the surface.

I hold onto the edge of the pool.

"You turn me on so bad, Ariana," he mutters in my ear. "With your itty-bitty little bikinis." He pulls on the straps to emphasize his point. "This shouldn't be legal."

I stifle a laugh. "Everyone knows you buy a top a size too small, so your boobs look bigger."

He nips my neck, and I don't hold back from groaning, especially when I feel his cock pressing into my back. "I don't think they need to look any bigger, sweetheart. But I do want to come all over them."

My pussy clenches as I spin from his dirty words.

I feel elated when I'm with him. He does a lot for my ego, and I know it's indulgent, but I don't care.

I'm having him, and tonight I'm not going to feel guilty about it.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

LUKAS

Everything about the beauty in my arms tells me she's trouble. Everything.

She's a beautiful woman. She has no idea just how beautiful, and that makes me feel annoyed for all mankind. A woman like her should be treated like a queen.

I know that this can't go beyond this vacation, and I saw the sadness in her eyes when I repeated it earlier. It didn't escape me, and it leads me to thinking that maybe she wants more out of this, but we both know that can't happen. *Don't we?*

I ponder it for a moment but brush it off.

The sex is great. She's probably not had anyone treat her body like I do, and that can be confused with feelings, but I can't let her fall for me, if that's what's happening.

I don't know how she would fit into my world. She'd be scrutinized, and it'd be a scandal. Then there's James.

I close my eyes and wish it could be different.

But I know it can't.

I pull on the strings of her bikini top until it slides off. I want her naked. I *need* her naked.

I grasp both her breasts in my hands and pluck her nipples as she leans back into me. God, I could worship these all day, they're so round and perfect. I reach one hand down and slide it into her bikini bottoms as she parts her knees wider, allowing me access.

“I love how ready for me you always are,” I whisper in her ear. “Ever done it in a pool?”

She shakes her head. Of course not.

Ariana is much younger than me, yet she hasn't really lived carelessly, or at all, if I'm the first man to truly own her body.

I feel a surge of protectiveness over her that I shouldn't. I can't help it. She's a strong, capable woman, yet she seems to take issue with expressing how she feels. Maybe it's just me and it's because of our situation, but I wish she'd just enjoy it. Let herself get swept away in pleasure. There's nothing like it.

I tease her clit with my fingers as she grinds against me, and my cock swells. Jesus, she feels so good.

She relaxes against my chest, and I want to give her everything, make her feel everything, and I intend to. I pinch her nipple, and she groans as I nibble her neck, telling her dirty, dirty words as her cheeks burn and she begins to climax. I ride her through it as she slides back and forth over my hand, murmuring my name.

“You come beautifully, Ariana,” I whisper.

“You feel so fucking good, Mr. Bentley,” she whispers back, out of breath.

“I want to fuck you here.”

She has no choice in the matter. My cock's so hard it's about to explode.

I exit the pool, leaving her panting, and return kicking my shorts off as I roll a rubber on, sheathing myself as I walk toward her in the water.

Her eyes drop to my cock, and the way she looks at it makes me want to lose my shit. She's so drop-dead gorgeous when she's at my mercy.

I reach for her bikini bottoms, pull the ties at the sides, letting them slide away.

The great thing about the top floor is that nobody can see you, and that means I can do whatever the fuck I want.

I slide my hands down her body, and she shivers. Even though it's humid outside, I see goosebumps rise on her flesh. I smirk as I bite down gently on her shoulder, then I run my hands over her ass and cup both cheeks.

"You're a sight for sore eyes," I tell her. "So beautiful, Ariana. I want you to say my name next time you come. What's my name when I make you come?"

I slide my hands around her torso and up to cup her tits again. I want them so badly in my mouth.

"Mr. Bentley," she breathes.

"Gonna take you hard and fast because I need to come too. Then I'm going to take you to my bed and then the shower, and wherever the hell else I want to fuck you slowly." It's not a question, it's a fact.

"Oh God," she whispers.

I grin into her neck, plucking her nipples as she grinds back against me.

I slide my hand down to my cock, and she sticks her ass out, leaning farther onto the edge of the pool as I find her entrance and enter at full tilt, without warning.

She cries out as I move and ram into her again, then I repeat. Each time I slam back in, the breath leaves her lungs with force.

"Hold onto the side and don't let go," I tell her as I grip her hips, and she rests her forearms on the edge.

I hold her hips in place and lift her so she's almost horizontal, and I'm standing behind her. I run one hand up her back, marveling at her beautiful skin, at how sexy her body is. I glance down to where we're joined, and it only makes my control slip all that bit more.

"Oh God," she cries out, but it sounds more like a wail.

“Let go, Ariana,” I command. “Show me how much you like it. Tell me.”

She comes hard as I pump her harder, faster, as she calls out my name over and over.

Mr. Bentley, Mr. Bentley, oh fuck, Mr. Bentley.

Jesus, it’s my undoing. I wish I could hold on, but I can’t. She’s just so tight around me, and her body is driving me insane. I’ve waited all day for this.

I pump faster, harder, the water splashing everywhere as I find my release, grunting something undecipherable as I still, gripping her hips tighter and shoot my load.

We stay together, unmoving, for a few moments.

“Still glad you skipped out on the club?” I growl in her ear.

“Definitely.” She giggles as I pull out of her and set her back down.

I turn her around and claim her mouth. She plasters her body against mine and wraps her legs around me as we kiss. I carry her out of the pool and into the suite and straight into the bedroom. I lay her down and discard the rubber, then crawl up her body as she reaches to touch me. She’s needy for me, not quite satisfied yet, and I love that feeling I get in my chest when she knows what she wants.

I know I can give it to her, give her every pleasure possible and make her forget about anything that’s troubling her.

I dip down her body and raise her legs over my shoulders as I lick her pussy, parting her.

I suck on her clit as she cries out, already sensitive from the orgasms I just gave her. She bucks her hips, and I push her torso down and hold her hips still. She grips my hair in her hands, and I don’t let up until she’s literally screaming my name in a rush of pleasure.

There could be nothing greater than watching her come undone.

I insert a finger, then another, watching as I finger fuck her and she mewls under my touch.

“Such a pretty pussy, Ariana,” I whisper, blowing on her sensitive flesh. I haven’t even touched the surface of exploring her body yet, and with her so responsive, I can only marvel at the pleasures she could experience.

“I love what you do to me,” she says, releasing the grip on my hair ever so slightly. It’s like she can read my mind.

“I don’t think I could ever grow tired of pleasing you,” I tell her honestly. “This sexy body has me wanting to never let you have any sleep.”

She groans. “I need you inside me.”

“Greedy girl.” I smile, watching her continue to unfold. “Open your eyes, Ariana. Watch me eat you. Watch what I can do to you.”

Her eyes flutter open and she looks down at me between her legs. I continue to slowly pull my fingers in and out, I part her again and lick her slowly, circling her clit. She bites her lip as she watches me, and it turns me on so bad seeing the heat in her eyes, they plead for more. There is nothing on earth like watching a beautiful woman come undone.

She’s even more sensitive now in the aftershocks, so I drag out her next orgasm on purpose, slowing the rhythm and pace until she’s clutching my head with force, crying out the most delicious sounds.

I climb up her body, reach for the box of condoms on the side table, roll one on with haste, then slowly sink into her as she wraps her legs around my waist.

I roll my hips slow, letting her feel every inch of me, enjoying how responsive she is to my touch. Her eyes look at me with wildness and passion, and a little bit of wonder.

She grips my biceps as I continue my slow assault on her body.

“You’re so good at this,” she whispers as I shift and press my chest to hers, my tongue sliding in her mouth.

“Helps when you’re fucking beautiful,” I tell her when we break apart.

I roll us over, and she straddles me. I sit up and continue kissing her, holding her head, her hair in my hands as I move them down to her back and then cup her ass and squeeze it.

“Mr. Bentley,” she cries as I grip her hips and bounce her up and down on me, keeping the pace slow but firm, letting her feel the intensity.

“You like it when I fuck you slowly, don’t you, Ariana? When I draw out your pleasure.”

“Yes,” she cries into my shoulder, biting down on it as I squeeze her ass, then give it a slap. “Oh God, yes...” I do it again, and she groans and grinds against me.

Sweat beads on her skin as she lets go, throwing her head back as I move her up and down faster, surging upwards, knowing I can make it last longer, but also needing my release.

I pump harder, her tits bouncing in my face as I grunt out my release, stilling as she collapses on me, both of our breathing ragged.

I roll back down to the mattress, taking her with me, and she lies on top as we catch our breath.

“How’d I do?” I ask, staring at the ceiling as her hair covers my face. She smells like cotton candy. It turns me on like nothing else.

“Not bad.” She giggles.

I bump her with my hips. “Not bad?”

I like it when she laughs.

“Okay, pretty great.”

“Getting warmer.”

“It’s safe to say that nobody’s ever done anything like that to me as good before.”

“Better,” I muse.

“This is such a bitch.” She sighs.

I feel my heart gallivanting rapidly, and it’s not from what we just did.

Her words spear me in the chest, where it hurts, in my fucking heart, and I don’t know why.

“Why do you say that?” Though I know why, I’m interested to hear her explanation.

We lie entwined, with me still inside her, as she makes no attempt to move.

“Because this feels too good.”

She assumes we can’t continue, and she’d be right, and for a fleeting moment, I consider it. Aside from the obvious of my son’s disapproval, and possibly her family’s, there would be no reason...

No.

I couldn’t do that to her. And anyway, things always feel different on vacation. You have no cares in the world, as it isn’t real life. Everything is meant to feel good when there are no strings.

But, she’s just so easy to be with, to look after, to talk to... *what the fuck is happening to me?*

I clear my wayward thoughts. I don’t want to be an asshole, and I hope I don’t have to be, but she can’t fall for someone like me. I’m not good for her. She knows that, deep down. She knows who I am and what I’m about, and I’m no fucking hero.

But as she snuggles into me, I can’t stop the racing of my heart.

It beats like I’ve got a runaway freight train headed for a cliff locked inside my chest. It’s a strange feeling. I can’t say it’s something normal, but then again, there’s nothing at all normal about being with Ariana.

She’s like the sunshine on a stormy day.

She lights up a room just by being in it.

I don't think she truly grasps just how radiant she is, and I hope that she has good people in her life. People that don't try to dull that spark. It would be such a travesty if someone were to put it out, like how my own flesh and blood did by cheating on her.

I may be many things, but a woman knows where she stands with me. When I've been monogamous, I've always been faithful. I've never cheated in a relationship.

I've never let anyone believe there was something more than there was if there wasn't, and here I find myself doing the opposite; trying to understand how I can get Ariana to not fall for me. Or maybe, it's the other way round.

I battle with what it means. I'm an objective man and I don't fall for women easily.

My last relationship was with a woman a lot like me; cold and non-committal. And it worked for a while.

But maybe I don't want a woman like me.

Maybe I want something more. Someone with a little more substance. Someone I can actually make a life with.

"What are you thinking?" She asks.

I circle her back with my knuckles, rolling my hand up and down her soft skin.

"How beautiful you are." It's not a lie.

"Do you sweet talk all the girls you bed like this?"

I smirk to myself. "Only the ones who run away from me."

She inhales and lets out a slow breath.

"What are you thinking?" I throw her words back at her.

She takes a moment and then says, "How if we shouldn't be doing this, then why does it feel so good?"

"Who says we shouldn't be doing it?" I know she's right, but I want to hear her answer.

I feel her head lift and she peers up at me. "Probably everybody we know."

I stare back at her. “What do your friends think?”

She rolls her eyes. “They don’t count.”

I grin. “They’re the ones that encouraged you, aren’t they?”

“Charlize, mainly,” I admit. “Because she’s dirty, with a foul mouth, and she said if I didn’t jump you then she would.”

“Christ,” I mutter.

She giggles.

“Tell me something, Ariana,” I go on.

She bites her lip as I brush the hair off her face.

“What do you think about all of this, really?”

“You know what I think. I bounce back from: we shouldn’t be doing this, to: this is so fucking good, how am I going to stop?”

I love her honesty.

I try, and fail, to hide my amusement. “Summed it up pretty well.”

“It isn’t my fault, in all fairness.”

I caress her cheekbone, loving how her skin is pink and flushed. Though we’re still connected, I need her again, I need her all fucking night.

“Oh?” I reach up and peck her gently, beginning our next round of foreplay. “Why is that? You think you’re so innocent, Ariana?”

She returns my kisses, grinning as I pull back when she wants more.

“Tell me,” I whisper, denying her.

“Because you’re so fucking hot, Mr. Bentley.”

I let her kiss me, and I run my hand down her body and squeeze her ass. She pulls back and shakes her head with amusement on her face.

“What’s so funny?”

“You haven’t even pulled out yet, and you’re up again.”

I buck my hips. “Again? It never goes down when you’re around,” I say honestly. “But I think we should reconvene in the shower.”

She bites down on her lip. There’s so much she’s thinking but she won’t let herself say.

I wish she would.

I’m not a monster. I am capable of listening and maybe even giving some good advice.

I know she’s been hurt, and I have to tread carefully, but I would never purposely hurt her. I want what’s best for her, and I’m not selfish enough to think that that’s me.

But as I roll her over and begin kissing her again, I realize that it’s been a long time since I’ve been this passionate with anybody, and then a worse thought strikes me right in the gut; maybe I never have been.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ARIANA

There's nothing like the sun beating down on you while sipping a cocktail after a wild night of sex, basking in the afterglow of multiple orgasms and a man that you just can't stop touching.

It's been three days since I turned up at his doorstep and spent the night. Since then, I've been spending my days with the girls, and my nights with Lukas. I'm not going to ditch my friends, who surprised me on this trip, just because I'm having a holiday romp with an unsuitable and completely taboo man. One that I can't stop thinking about day and night.

It isn't just the sex. I've never had a man that was so interested in me as a whole.

With Lukas, he takes an interest in everything. We talk all night. He knows about my childhood and the strained relationship my parents had, all the shitty jobs I've experienced, and my current underwhelming position in the events industry. I know about his family and how he grew up poor, how he started his empire and then he got a football scholarship, of all things, so he could go to college. It's why he's so careful with money.

He's profoundly passionate, something I never picked up on when I met him before.

When we're alone together, he's still alpha, but he's softer somehow. I see a side to him that nobody else does, and I like it.

I couldn't help but feel, as he talked about all that stuff, how it seems so incredibly lonely. Surely, you can only live in bachelorhood for so long before it gets monotonous. Having women throw themselves at your feet has to wear off at some stage, doesn't it? He comes home to this amazing, huge castle, and there's nobody there to greet him, to talk about his day, to help him unwind.

I could understand if he sounded happy about it, but it didn't come across that way. Or maybe I've read it all wrong.

One thing is for sure; Lukas Bentley would treat his woman like a queen.

It's just who he is.

When he talks to you, he touches you absentmindedly, like he can't get through the night without being able to feel you.

It sends chills through me when I think about it. I don't even think he realizes he does it.

Then, when I think about what else he can do, how he makes me feel, and it seems, how I make him feel, it makes my heart race. Maybe it's just me, but I like to think that he's enjoying himself as much as I am.

He unnerves me so easily because everything he does is with utter precision. He's in full control, yet with him I feel like I take more of a lead in my decisions. He makes me feel like I can do anything, be anything, and I don't understand it. Maybe I don't want to because I know it has to end.

Why that makes me feel so empty is ridiculous. I barely know this man, and in our reality in the real world, it would certainly raise some eyebrows and cause him some bad publicity.

People would talk. Not that he seems to care about that, but it would still be a scandal and it would get scattered across the papers for all to see. I'd be seen as a gold digger, as well as a tramp; the woman who went after her ex-boyfriend's dad, a man almost twice her age.

I cringe at the thought of what they would say.

The worst part is, Lukas goes home tomorrow, so this is our last night together.

Me and the girls still have three more days before we have to go home. I can't say I'm looking forward to it.

It reminds me even more that we're on borrowed time and that all of this is coming to an end.

"Cheer up, it may never happen," Charlize says, looking down her glasses at me as she sits up to sip her cocktail.

"Urgh, I'm thinking about work and the dreary weather back in Seattle." There is no point blabbing about my sudden and unwarranted feelings about Mr. B. Especially to Charlize. She'll only encourage me, whether it's a bad idea or not.

"God, don't remind me," Imogen sighs. "It's been nice having girl time and being able to sleep in and having the bed all to myself."

"Well, enjoy it while it lasts, though I'm sure lover boy Nate will be wanting you back by now. You are one of those sickeningly happy couples who've got your shit together." Charlize laughs.

"God, tell me about it," I agree. "How do you find an uncomplicated man who's loyal, smart, sexy and funny, oh, and one who doesn't want to jump into bed with someone else."

"Maybe you've already found him." Imogen shrugs. "When I met Nate, it wasn't like he was my type at all. Then we got talking and went out on a date, and it was the best date I've ever been on. I guess sometimes in our minds we have this person in mind, and it rarely ever turns out that way. Look at how many toads I've kissed. Look at Charlize..."

"Hey!" She pouts. "I've enjoyed all my toads, except maybe a couple. Okay, maybe more than a couple, but that's all part of the fun. Taking a potential out for a test drive. There's no point trading in for a second hand Datsun when you can have a fucking red Ferrari."

I shake my head. "I pity the man who gets stuck with you."

“Men, sweetie, I might start my own reverse harem.”

Imogen splutters her drink as I pat her on the back before she chokes. “You’ve been reading way too many of those romance books, girl.”

“Yes, and it’s why I have such high expectations,” she maintains.

“Back to the subject at hand,” Imogen goes on, looking back at me. “Are you having feelings for Mr. B?”

I didn’t exactly expect either of them to come right out and ask me. It was easy fooling myself, but I guess I’m a little more transparent than I thought.

I shrug. “He’s wonderful, what else can I say?”

They exchange a look.

“What?”

Charlize narrows her eyes. “I know that look, Ari.”

I glance at her bewildered. “What look?”

“That look that says you’re feeling a little bit more than something down under.”

I shake my head. “That’s insane.”

“Why?” Imogen counters. “I’ve known you a long time, Ari, and I’ve never seen you this blissed out before. You have a flush to your cheeks and a glow to your skin and just a general happiness in your step. That can’t all be for nothing.”

“She’s got a flush because Mr. Bentley’s been eating her out every freaking night,” Charlize chirps.

“Why don’t you announce it to the whole pool?” I say through gritted teeth.

“And anyway, everyone has a holiday glow when they’re on vacation. It’s because we’re not at work.”

“You forgot about the hot sex with an older man who clearly knows what he’s doing,” Charlize snorts. “Imi has a point, though, you do seem pretty relaxed, there’s no denying it.”

“Well, I *am* relaxed. It’s been the best birthday ever. I couldn’t have wished for better, and not just because of the upgrade.” I give them a smile. “You guys aren’t too bad either.”

“We aim to please,” Charlize says with a wink. “And you’re not so bad yourself, for an old duck.”

I couldn’t honestly wish for better friends. They never judge, and while Charlize is a sex-crazed maniac, I wouldn’t want her any other way. Imogen has always been the peacemaker out of the three of us, and she’s way more level-headed. Together, I think we balance each other out.

“It is gonna suck, though,” Imogen goes on, turning onto her front. “When we get back to Seattle, and I mean, has he said anything about seeing you when you get back home?”

I sip on my drink as dread fills through me. I know it’s stupid, and I battle with right and wrong with Lukas every time I nut it out in my mind.

“I doubt he wants that,” I reply, feeling the swell of regret in my gut.

Let it go, it’ll only hurt worse in the end.

I know it’s true.

I should know better than to latch onto what feels good, because what feels good isn’t always what’s best for you.

“Did you ask him?” Charlize butts in.

I shake my head. “No, but when I mentioned that we shouldn’t be doing what we’re doing, but it felt too good to stop, he said I summed it up pretty well. He didn’t say anything about continuing on or wanting to see me, though.” I sound pathetic, then add, “Not that I want that.”

“You’re crazy about him,” Imogen states, still staring down at the magazine she’s flicking through. “It’s written all over you.”

“I am not.” I laugh.

“I think Imi’s right,” Charlize adds. “You could just hint a little bit, see where he’s at with it?”

“I think if he wanted to see me again, he’d have already asked,” I reply, hoping I don’t sound like a sap. “And I’d rather die than ask him anything like that. He’s Lukas Bentley. He can have any chick he wants.”

“So, what does that mean?” Charlize snaps back. “Who gives a fuck who he is? He’s not freaking royalty for Christ’s sake, he’s your ex’s dad. Boo-hoo. Everyone will get over it. And it’s not like he seems to care. You’ve been in his bed every night. I think you owe it to yourself to see if there’s anything more to it than just a holiday romp.”

A part of me wishes I could be that brave and ask him. Even when I’m unsure how he feels, if anything.

It’s all great on vacation, thousands of miles away in a luxury resort. One that I wish I never had to leave from. They’re right; this is a bitch.

“I don’t even know what I want,” I say, because it’s the truth. “I’m still trying to work it out. Lukas isn’t like any other man I’ve been with. He’s a good man, but I don’t think that this is anything more than what it is. And I don’t want to dwell on that. And when he’s gone, I don’t want to be sad. I want to remember it for what it was; the best time of my life. And I’ve got you guys to thank for it.”

“That’s it!” Charlize, says, waving her hands at me. “Get in here for a group hug. You’re going to make me cry.”

“You’ll cry over anything,” I admonish, though we group hug it out.

I really do have the best friends in the world.



I stare at the white bag that has been delivered to my suite, and when I open the contents, I gasp at the luxuriousness of the skimpy but silky and beautiful material of the teddy that Mr. B just had delivered. It’s white and see-through, with mesh all

around the front of the bodice and a high cut G-string in the back.

There's a note: *Can't wait to see how this looks on you... and off you. Mr. B x*

I grin to myself as I take a shower and try it on. It's very, very sexy.

I feel giddy thinking about the fact that he picked this out for me, and that he gets to see me in it later.

I take extra special care with my makeup tonight, since we're having dinner, and I try not to think about tonight being the last night I may ever see him again.

The girls have been so nice about me flitting off every evening, though I usually eat with them first, then slip up to his suite late at night.

He's always waiting for me. Hungry for me.

When I see him each time, he pulls me into his arms and kisses me like he's a starving man. Sometimes I don't even make it in the door and he's on me, pinning me against the wall, undoing my dress, kissing me and whispering dirty things in my ear.

The man is insatiable, and I've had more sex on this trip than I have in the last five years put together.

We meet down in the lobby as he wants to take me out somewhere special.

When our eyes meet as the elevator opens, all I see is the raw passion behind his stare as his eyes rake over me. That's the other thing, Lukas always lets you know when he appreciates something.

I wore a white dress with gold sandals and a matching gold belt.

When I reach him, he pulls me to him and kisses me roughly, dirty, right there in the middle of the lobby. His tongue sweeps into my mouth as I grip the collar on his shirt.

“Fuck,” he whispers in my ear as we break away and embrace. “I don’t know if I should just cancel dinner and take you upstairs and fuck you till the sun comes up.”

I bite my lip as we pull back from our hug, my nipples pebbling at his dirty words.

“I think I like the idea of teasing you,” I reply, giving him a shy smile.

He smirks. “Come,” he says, as he interlocks my hand with his, and we walk to the exit.

There’s a private car waiting for us, and the minute we get inside, he switches the partition up. He’s on me like a deviant.

I clutch his biceps with one hand as we kiss like passionate, lovestruck teenagers instead of what we really are, and I grasp his thigh with the other. I squeeze, and he growls low, his hand snaking down to clutch my breast as he kneads it and rubs my nipple.

“You look so fucking good, Ariana,” he says. “I missed you today.”

“Is it wrong to say I missed you too?”

He grins. I don’t get to see him smile a lot, so I take this as a win.

“Why would it be wrong?”

I shrug. “You’re leaving tomorrow.”

“I know.” He sighs. It feels like he’s about to say something else for a moment, but then, he sits back in his seat.

“Thank you for your gift too, by the way. It’s very pretty.”

He turns to look at me, his eyes darkening. “I can’t wait to see for myself.”

“I had no idea that you’re so good at picking out women’s underwear, what a talent, amongst many.”

His eyes drop to my mouth as his thumb tugs on my bottom lip. “I wouldn’t say I’m good, and I wouldn’t call it

underwear. It's more like a cock tease because now I have to sit through dinner imagining you filling it out."

I smile, liking where his mind is going. "I'll be sure to order the thing on the menu that takes the longest to cook, just to draw out your frustration, then. As well as dessert."

He leans in and moves his hand to my chin, where he grips it hard. "You would do that, wouldn't you, Ariana? Because you know how much you like it when I tease you and use your body as my dessert."

My pussy clenches at the thought of his head between my legs, his prickly beard roughing me up, the sweet sharp sting of his tongue...

"Is that what you're going to do later?" I muse.

"That's a given, after you swallow me whole."

I blush under his dirty words, but he doesn't let me look away. "I don't know why you put on this shy little act," he whispers. "But it turns me the fuck on."

"Who says it's an act?" I look up into his eyes, and I honestly don't know how I'm going to live without his touch. It's already searing me in two, and he hasn't even left yet.

Stupid. You knew this was just sex...

He stares at me for a moment. "Why do you say one thing and mean another?"

I frown. "What do you mean?"

"You were talking sassy, but you looked sad."

I don't want this to end.

"I'm already missing the seven hundred orgasms you've given me," I muse, trying to make light of it. If he sees what I'm really feeling, he'll run a mile. And I still want to have this last memory of him, of us. "Then again, my body might be thankful for a rest."

He leans in and kisses me hard. "I can do house calls in Seattle, you know."

My breath hitches in my chest.

But all I hear in that sentence is *house calls*. Though, it is the first time he's actually mentioned anything to do with seeing me back home. My stupid, idiotic heart aches to hear more.

"Do you do that often?"

He pulls back and searches my eyes. "Is that a roundabout way of asking if I do *other* house calls to other women?"

I look away as soon as he drops his hand. He can't see the hurt in my eyes. I'm a fucking fool.

"Don't be ridiculous, Lukas."

"I thought I was Mr. Bentley?"

"You're only Mr. Bentley when I'm screaming it from your hotel suite," I say. Humor covers all bases; except he definitely isn't laughing.

"You know I'm not the greatest at being monogamous. It's the lifestyle I lead..."

I hold up a hand. "You really don't have to do this."

"Do what?" He seems genuinely surprised.

"Explain about why you love bachelorhood so much." I sound snappy but imagining him going back to his manwhore cave back in Seattle is just about my undoing. I have no right to be feeling like this, not at all.

"I never said I love it so much. I just haven't had a girlfriend in a long time."

I look back at him. "Well, that's good, then. We both knew what this was from the beginning, that it isn't anything more, so let's just have tonight..."

I can't let him know how I really feel because as well as his rejection, thinking about him fucking other women would be the end of me. I get to go home and pine for a man I can't ever have, and that's torture enough.

Hearing him say that he couldn't be monogamous kills me, no matter how true it may be, it's not like I want to hear it. It may not be reality, but I knew going into this that I had to guard my heart. I knew deep down that any connection I have with Lukas Bentley had to be just physical.

House calls?

I've got nobody to blame but myself.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

LUKAS

When we finally make it to the restaurant, I feel like eating about as much as I feel like a kick in the balls.

Her admission and her sad eyes have me questioning whether this was a good idea at all.

On one hand, I wanted to devour her in the back of the car, but on the other, I wanted to savor her until we get back, and then another part of me wants to keep her forever. Though that last part has me the most worried.

I just couldn't escape the look on her face when I said I wasn't good at being monogamous.

And then the house calls comment... I made it sound like she was a fucking whore.

I chastise myself, even though I know it's for the best.

Of course, I'm a bastard because I'm good at keeping my feelings switched off.

I wanted tonight, being our last night together, to be special. I wanted her to remember it and keep it with her. I never set out to hurt her, and I feel that I may just be doing that. Little by little.

Does she want more?

I explore the possibility.

We live in the same city.

We have a lot in common.

I like her.

We fit perfectly together in the bedroom.

She likes my dirty talk.

And she's absolutely beautiful.

Plus, she's interesting and has the rare ability to make me laugh. Really laugh.

I fucking like that.

Too young for me? Maybe. But that never stopped me before.

Yes, there is the obvious elephant in the room of her being my son's ex-girlfriend, which he would probably never get over if we were to continue this back in Seattle, but it isn't even that that fazes me.

It's the thought of not seeing her again.

Then I made it out to her like she could be some fuck buddy that I stop in on whenever I'm horny.

She doesn't realize that I didn't mean that the way it sounded. I question why I said it, but I know why. Because I'm a fucking bastard, that's why.

And tonight, she looks like a fallen angel all dressed in white. I shouldn't be putting my dirty hands on her, but her hot, sexy body tempts me like no woman has in a long time.

It's like I can't control myself when I'm around her. I lose it.

I don't mean to be such a wild beast, but she brings out the monster in me that wants to just take. I have to remind myself that this is about her and giving her what she needs. I like pleasing her. No, I fucking love it.

When she's just come undone, and she stares at me with wild abandon. *Fuck*. I haven't seen a look like that in a long time... She looks at me like I could save her. From what, I don't know, but she has no idea that she holds all the power.

I didn't know about the possibility of wanting more, but only with her have I considered it, and that may be what scares me the most.

In a short space of time, she's slowly knocked down all my defenses, and I'm losing the argument with myself about staying away.

I know I want to see her again, but my disastrous track record with women is just that.

I tend to hurt women by just being myself, and I don't mean to. I'm hard to handle, but once you have me, you have all of me.

My heart.

My soul.

My body.

My loyalty.

This is why random sex may not feel better, but it certainly is less complicated. When there are feelings involved, everything gets fucked up. Everything gets fucking messy.

When we're seated inside, I glance across the table at Ariana, and my breath catches.

Every red-blooded male in the room watched her walk through the restaurant, not that she has any idea. She doesn't. She passes off her beauty like it's something she's unaware of, like she genuinely doesn't realize just how stunning she is.

I could have taken her in the car. I wanted nothing more than to take her in my arms and straddle her across my lap while I ravished her, fast and furious, before we arrived.

The thought of what I'm going to do to her later has my dick hardening again.

When is it not up when she's around?

Breaking my Ariana habit is not going to be hard; it's going to be fucking torture.

“Are you looking forward to going back to work?” I ask. Knowing that, in reality, most people don’t. Unless they love their job, which is rare.

She winces a little, which tells me everything. “To be honest, I’ve been really burnt out at work. I’ve been thinking about having a change for some time. I’d really love to get into something new, try my hand at something a bit more creative.”

I tilt my head to the side. “What is it you think you’d like to do?”

She shrugs. “I’ve always liked the idea of flower arranging. Some of the bouquets that come into the venues we hire are like something out of a magazine. I love all the contrasts of colors, different shapes and sizes, how to mix and match to make each arrangement unique. I almost took a course once, but I pulled out at the last minute.”

“Why did you do that?” I ask, intrigued.

“I don’t know. I was going through some stuff at the time, it just seemed like a far-off dream, and I had to go to school at night, so juggling a full-time job and then night classes just kind of freaked me out. Sometimes I wish I’d have done it, though. I’d love to run my own business.”

Bingo. And there you have it.

Everyone has a dream.

I’d never pick her for a florist; it’s so refreshingly honest... and normal. I’m surrounded by highfalutin businesspeople all day, so I sometimes forget what it’s like in the real world and that makes me sound like an even bigger asshole.

“Everyone has a dream, Ariana. There is no point living a life that’s half lived if you’re not happy and not doing what you love. It’s quite simple as it is pointless working just to live, which is what most people do, but I’ve never understood it. Time is so fragile, so precious.”

She smiles gingerly. “You’re right. We live to pay bills and get by. It’s kind of sad when you think about it. You get paid to just exist.”

I watch her carefully. “No truer words spoken. You should go back to school; do something that makes you feel good. There are plenty of ways to make money, but from what I’ve learned over the years, you’ll run out of steam if you don’t at least enjoy the thing you do all day. Eventually, you’ll burn out and end up hating it. I know a lot of people who are rich as sin, but they’re divorced, kids don’t speak to them anymore, and they can’t hold down a relationship, let alone a civil conversation. Bitterness will lead to resentment and you’ll end up hating yourself, hating your life. My friend, the one who died, he killed himself.”

She gasps. “Lukas, I’m so sorry.”

He waves a hand. “It’s still so raw. I knew he wasn’t happy, but I never thought he’d put a gun down his throat.”

She watches me with sad eyes and reaches over to squeeze my hand.

I need her comfort like I need oxygen.

“Do you want to talk about it?” she asks gently.

I shake my head. “Maybe in time, but I don’t want the mood to ruin tonight.”

“What about you?” she asks. “Are you happy?”

I stare at her.

Nobody has ever had the gall to come out and ask me that.

I ponder it for a moment. “I’m not unhappy, Ariana. That’s almost the same thing, isn’t it?”

I so badly want to take her.

She shakes her head. “That sounds like one of the saddest things I’ve ever heard.”

I turn her hand up and link our fingers.

“I live a good life,” I tell her. “I’m not at the point of a gun down my throat.”

Her lips twitch. “I’m glad to hear that.”

I take a sip of my red wine as I feel the depth of her warmth.

“I’ve lived a fast life for a long time. After graduating, I went right into saving my father’s dwindling business. He was an alcoholic and heavily in debt. Some said I should have let him drown in it. He wasn’t always a model father, but loyalty runs deep. I could see the cracks, where he had failed, but I could see success. I could see a new way of doing things that he couldn’t. Everything expanded rapidly after he stepped down. It was the one time he was proud of me. Believe me, those moments were rare.”

She stares at me unblinking. “That’s really admirable,” she says eventually. “To be kind of lumbered with the responsibility right out of college, and you made it a success. You made something of yourself, where others would have folded. I guess as time goes on, we all get lost on the never-ending hamster wheel. I still have dreams, things I want to achieve, and this vacation has made me realize it even more so.”

I love how her eyes light up when she talks about it. I can tell right away her true passion lies within going after her dreams, not wasting her life away in a dead-end job.

“Which is why you should go for it. Life’s too short to sit and wonder what could be. If you don’t do it now, then you will never do it. I used to make up excuses too. I was too busy. Too tired. Too everything. But that’s what all those things are, excuses,” I go on. “Sometimes you have to sacrifice in the short term to get where you want to be in the long run.”

She smiles as she casts her warm glow on me. “You’re like the Anthony Robbins of pep talkers.” She laughs. I smile back at her.

“I can safely say I’ve never been called that before.”

“But you make sense. Maybe it’s because I’ve been on vacation, and when you’re not at work and you’re away from your real life, you start to wonder what a new life would look like.” She takes a sip of her wine, her eyes sparkling with delight at what her dream would look like.

And I want her to have it. I really fucking do.

I want to be the one to fucking give it to her, but more than anything, I want her to have it for herself.

If this is her slightly unhappy with her life, I can't imagine how she'd look if she were really happy.

Ariana Michaels is the type of woman that is sensational, but she could be spectacular in every inch of her life if she'd take it by the reins.

She doesn't need a man to lead her, but I'd love to be the one beside her.

What the actual fuck?

Well, we're all allowed to dream.

The turning point in changing your life is never taking less than you deserve. I tell her as such and she looks down at her plate, like when she's thinking something but won't say it.

"You know you can tell me, Ariana," I say, when a silence falls between us. "Whatever it is you're thinking."

"I'm thinking we should get dessert to take with us," she says, looking up at me with a shy smile.

I know that wasn't what she was thinking, and I want to explore it more, but she tends to shut down and kid around when things get too serious.

"Let me ask you something," I go on, ignoring her dessert implication, though I call the waiter over at the same time. "What stops you? Aside from the obvious fear of trying something new."

She circles the rim of her glass as she thinks. "I guess I have self-doubt. Procrastinating is a wonderfully horrible thing. It gives you hope that there's a dream there, but it's just out of reach enough for you to say that you'll see tomorrow, or the next day. It's a vicious cycle, at least for me."

"All successful people suffer from imposter syndrome," I tell her, leaning forward. "I made mistakes in business, many mistakes, in fact. But I got back up. I didn't let the knocks

keep me on my ass. I got on my feet, and I tried it again, a different way. Failures aren't always a bad thing. They teach you what to do right next time, so they make you stronger."

She bites her lip as she smiles at me. "That's good advice, Mr. Bentley."

So, I've redeemed myself?

My heart lurches at her beautiful face. She looks at me like I'm a fucking messiah.

When really, I'm just a middle-aged man who is falling for a woman I can't have. And what's worse? If I let her know and she wants to keep seeing me, I'll end up losing her, because eventually, she'll realize I'm a workaholic who can't commit.

With her, though, I feel like I could be everything she needs. Everything she could want.

Having another woman after her somehow feels foreign to me, like I'd be betraying her, and that's got me all fucked up inside.

How in the world did I let this happen?

She got under my skin. And I let her.

I can't help it; I have to touch her.

I lean over the table and brush my knuckle over her cheek, then palm her jaw. She leans into my touch and closes her eyes. I've never had a woman do that to me before.

Actually lean into my touch, wanting more. It's not a sexual thing. It's a comfort thing.

And it makes me feel like a God.

"Promise me one thing," I ask, my eyes pleading.

She nods, her eyes full of promise.

"Never let anyone douse that fire inside you, Ariana. There's nothing more tragic than a woman who has a fire inside her that is kept contained. Nobody owns you or your mind, except yourself. Master your own thoughts and put those ideas into practice, and I promise you, you will succeed.

You just have to take a chance. Life is about risk, baby girl, and stepping out of your comfort zone, and having a little fun along the way.”

We stare at one another, and something shifts.

She feels it, I know she feels it.

“What are we doing?” she whispers as I grasp to hold onto my own sanity.

“Going home,” I reply. I turn to the waiter who appears at the table.

Once we’re back in the car, I hold onto Ariana like she’s my lifeline.

We don’t kiss. We just bask in each other’s silence. Like nothing can touch us in these rare moments of perfection when I have clarity like I’ve never had before.

But deep down, I know that Ariana is young. She doesn’t want a man who’s almost fifty years old. I don’t really want any more kids. I’ve been around the block, and she’s just starting out. It wouldn’t be fair to her to not give her the things she may want.

The fact I’m even entertaining this just goes to show how far down the rabbit hole I’ve fallen.

When we get back to the resort, we ride the elevator in silence, our hands entwined. It’s like I can feel the rapid beat of her heart, even when I know that isn’t possible.

When we get inside, I turn her in my arms and kiss her hard, backing her up against the door.

I press my cock into her so she can feel my all-night arousal, and hopefully, she’ll do something about it now.

When I kiss her, I do it with total possession. Like she’s the only woman I’ll ever have, and I don’t want to let her go. She deserves this much. She deserves to be worshiped.

I hitch up her leg as she wraps it around my waist, and I move my mouth to her ear.

“You’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever laid eyes on, Ariana,” I tell her, as she clutches onto my biceps. “I’m going to show you just how much I want you...”

I move off her and shrug my shirt over my shoulders, throwing it behind me. Then I pull my belt off and loosen the button on my shorts, but I keep them on.

“Take your dress off,” I tell her.

She bites her lip but follows my command, undoing her straps as I reach around and help her unzip the back. She steps out, leaving her gold heels on, and my eyes trail down her body.

Her tits sit perfectly in the mesh bodice, her rosy buds taunting me as the scrap of material covering her sweet pussy may as well wave a red flag. I feel like ripping the thing off her body like a caveman.

“Turn around,” I grunt, hands on my hips as I adjust my dick, it’s straining to get out and play.

She does, and my eyes devour her succulent, plump ass. I know I’m not going to let her get any sleep tonight.

When she’s facing me again, I move on her fast, so fast that her breath hitches in her chest as I cage her in against the door.

“You look good in silk and see-through mesh,” I tell her as she smiles at me, resting her hands on my shoulders. My hands move up to her breasts, cupping them, reveling in her moans, and I know I need to make her come, right now.

I dip down and kiss her, my tongue in her mouth as she groans, and I lift her against the door, pressing my dick into her as my tongue fucks her mouth.

I absentmindedly move to the bedroom, and instead of sinking her down on the mattress, I have a better idea. I grab one of my ties and run it over her breasts, taunting her as she gasps, and I tie it over her eyes. Fuck, she’s a sight. I sink down on the floor, keeping her standing, my back to the base of the bed.

“Lean forward and put your hands and knees on the mattress,” I tell her.

She complies, hovering above me as I pull the scrap of material covering her pussy to one side.

I reach up and palm her tits as she groans, then run my tongue through her wet heat. She bucks the minute I touch her, and I part her with one hand as I find that perfect little pink bud.

I suck on her, hard, and she gasps while beginning to move her hips. I help her along, holding her calves as I swirl my tongue over and over again, laving at her, lapping up her sweet juices like I can't get enough. She comes in no time, the sweet sound filling my ears, my heart, and my soul, as I take in every single second.

“Spread your legs wider,” I grunt.

She does as she's told again.

I clean her up with my tongue and then insert a finger, spreading more of her slickness around from her ass to her clit, wishing and hoping for more. We haven't done ass play but I'd certainly like to explore it. The thought has my dick jumping in my already strained shorts.

“Pull your tits out, I want to see them,” I tell her.

She pulls the top part of her teddy down and her big, juicy tits spill free.

She looks so good wearing my tie. She's a fucking vision.

I tug the zipper down on my shorts and pull my dick out, fisting it with one hand as I fuck her with my fingers. Hearing her mewl and plead makes me want to spurt my hot cum all over her, marking her, branding her.

I've never felt so possessive over a woman in my life.

“Mr. Bentley... Oh God, oh God...” She comes again, as I ride her through it, my cock so hard that I can't continue. I have to be inside her. Now.

I pull my fingers out and discard my shorts, only stopping to pull a rubber on as I move behind her. I slide the tie off her eyes and pull her back to the bedframe, then tie her wrists to the bed. She gasps, completely bent over, her ass in the air as I take in the sight.

“Fuck, Ariana, you are so fucking beautiful.”

Her wet pussy glistens, and I want my fill of her. I want all of her.

I slap her ass as she gasps, then wiggles her butt at me, taunting me.

I slap the other side, my dick so hard it's begging me to plunge into her.

“You like this, don't you, baby?” I whisper.

“I love everything you do to me, Mr. Bentley,” she breathes.

I smirk, grabbing her hips as I hold my dick and run it through her slickness.

“One day I'm gonna take that ass, Ariana,” I tell her.

She whimpers as I tease her with my tip.

Without any warning, I dive into her full tilt, balls deep.

She's so tight, it feels like there's a vise around my cock.

I reach around and cup her breasts, pulling on her nipples as she gasps.

I pull out, and then slam in again, just as slow.

“So fucking wet for me, Ariana,” I growl. I run one hand up her spine, fisting her hair as I pull her head back. “You like what I do to you, don't you, baby girl? You like being my dirty little girl. You can't get enough of my cock.”

“Yes!” she cries out. “Don't stop, oh God, please don't stop... I need you so fucking much...”

I slap her ass cheeks again as she yelps, loving the sound it makes, so I do it again.

“Harder!” she screams. I smack her again and ram my dick in harder, picking up the pace. Looking at her pink ass and seeing my hand mark has me wanting to let go right here, right now.

I fuck her hard, ramming my cock in and out faster, harder. Glancing down at her sweet pussy swallowing me whole, I know I’m not gonna last at this pace. She’s prick teased me all night. She deserves to be pounded.

I reach around and pinch her clit as she yelps, then groans as she grinds back down onto me and comes hard.

“Gonna come, Ariana. Fuck, I’m coming so hard for you...” I groan as I shoot my load and still, making sure every fucking drop is milked while she squirms underneath me.

I’ve no fucking clue how I’m going to give her up.

CHAPTER TWENTY

ARIANA

I lie in between Lukas's legs, my back to his front as we soak in the huge spa tub.

Tonight has been one of the best nights of my life.

Aside from what he just did to me for the last few hours, he's been so sweet, so attentive, so beautiful. I've no way of knowing how the hell I'm going to go back to real life. I don't even want real life to exist if this is just a dream.

He sponges water over my stomach as we lie in blissful peace, bubbles encasing us as we gaze out at the stars.

"Have you enjoyed your vacation?" I ask, my eyes closed as he swirls the sponge over my body. My heart already breaking because I don't want this to be goodbye.

"I have, immensely," he tells me. "Now I have to go deal with a lawsuit, and a marketing team who don't know their ass from their elbows."

"Uh, no shop talk tonight, remember," I remind him. "You can do that tomorrow."

Not that he's been able to quit work while he's been here. I know being a CEO would never really end, but I think even he can admit that being here has been good for him to relax a little.

He doesn't strike me like the type who gets a lot of down time.

"Don't remind me," he sighs. "I've got nothing but lawyer meetings waiting for me when I get back. That's what you get

when you try to solve problems with violence.”

“What happened to make you sock the guy?”

He kisses the back of my head. “He insulted my secretary, Emily. That, and he can’t hold his liquor.”

“Do you have a good lawyer?”

“The best,” he says. “It was his idea that I take a week off to cool down. And he was right. I lost my cool, and I shouldn’t have. I should send him a case of wine or something. Without his words of wisdom, you and I never would have run into each other.”

“It’s been the best week of my life,” I say, because it’s the truth and I want him to know it means a lot to me. “I’m glad too.” *You’ll never know how much.*

We spend the rest of the night soaking. Drinking expensive champagne. Then he takes me to bed, spooning me because I’m too exhausted to go another round, and we fall asleep naked in each other’s arms.

It shouldn’t feel this heartbreaking letting him go, but I can always rely on my heart to tell me when it’s about to be shattered.



The morning he left, we didn’t make any formal plans to meet back in Seattle, and secretly, I was disappointed that he didn’t ask me.

It’s hard not to wonder what the hell I got myself into if this is how I feel in his wake.

I’ve spent the last couple of days trying to pretend that I’m not in a post-Lukas withdrawal haze. I don’t want to ruin the rest of the vacation, so I have to put on a brave face for my besties. They did, after all, come here to surprise me, and I’ve ditched them most nights to shack up with Mr. B and get laid.

We make the most of it. Eating. Drinking. Going to the spa. Dancing. We even went windsurfing. And I pretend I’m okay.

I pretend that nothing about Lukas Bentley has affected me. Like I'm perfectly fine.

When we reluctantly leave for Seattle, I almost dread going back to my dreary apartment.

It's always a fall from grace when you've spent ten days in the lap of luxury in a place like Mexico.

We've lived like queens, and I can't say I regret any of it.

Spending nights by myself should feel normal; I've done it for long enough. But every night, I dream about Lukas and being in his arms.

I remember how good it felt, how he smelled, how his hand caressed me in his sleep like I was something precious to him.

He texted me when he got back, and we've exchanged a little bit of banter back and forth, then he said he was going out of town again.

Busy guy.

I still can't shake the feeling that he's back in the big city, and he's back to being Mr. CEO.

A pit of dread hits my stomach as I unlock my apartment and set about unpacking my case, hauling all my clothes to the washing machine.

I take a long, hot shower and make some instant noodles for dinner since I don't have any food.

Nothing spells a fall from grace like pouring hot water into a mug of noodles and calling it a meal.

A short time later, the doorbell rings, and I'm faced with a large bouquet of pink roses.

My heart leaps in my chest as I thank the delivery guy and shut the door, hunting around for the card.

Welcome home, Ariana. Thinking of you. Mr. B x

I stare at the card and my heart tries not to do little flips in my chest.

Of course, I overanalyze it. *Thinking of me?*

I try to send something back a million times before settling on;

Thank you for the flowers. They are beautiful x

I see the grey bubble of him replying, then it disappears again.

No more messages come through, and I spend the next few hours looking at all the photos Charlize sends me from our trip.

They're right. I do look glowy; happy. And we look like we're having a blast.

I miss Mexico already.

I miss him.

I throw myself into work after the weekend is out and make sure I don't have any spare moments to mope in my post Mr. Bentley haze. He also doesn't message me all week.

I feel like I've been hit with a cold blast of reality.

I don't even know how I am going to possibly look at another man again and not think about the hot, kinky sex, and the connection me and Lukas have. I just don't see how it's possible.

Of course, like usual, Charlize sniffs the truth out of me over drinks after work on Friday.

"I think you need to move on from this. If the stupid dick face hasn't beaten your door down since you got back, then he's clearly deranged."

I smile into my drink. "Trust you to be the voice of reason."

She shrugs. "Well, it's only the truth. You don't need a man, Ari. You need a champion. And you'd be shortchanging yourself if you took anything less."

I laugh. “And here I am paying for a therapist when I could have been getting my help for free.”

“Laugh all you want, but I’m serious. There’s plenty more fish in the sea, Ari. You just need to spread your wings.”

“Yeah, I’m not sure that I’m a spreading my wings kinda person. I have to feel a connection with someone before I jump into bed with them,” I say. “I don’t know how to do the casual relationship thing.” *I wish I fucking could.*

She reaches across the table and squeezes my hand. “I know, babe, I’m just saying. You always feel too much, way too much, and I’m the first to admit, you two were really cute together, but maybe you should make the first move? Why do you have to wait for him to call you?”

I know she’s right, but a part of me thought that a man like Lukas Bentley would take the lead. I want him to want me, and now I realize how juvenile that actually sounds.

He’s a busy guy. And he’s probably off with the next available broad, having the time of his life, not thinking about me.

I can’t help but feel like a bit of a sap. But remembering our last night together... it was so passionate. It was like we’d known each other for not just a few days, but a lifetime. He’s amazing.

I just don’t know what to do with all these feelings floating around inside of me.

“I don’t have to, but he made it pretty clear that we were just a vacation thing, and if I call him, he’ll think I’m needy and pathetic.”

“So fucking what?” she whisper-shouts as I shoosh her anyway. “Or, he might like the idea of a woman being sassy and strong, owning what she wants and taking matters into her own hands. If he doesn’t fall over himself to get to you, then right him off, seriously.”

“It’s harder when you’re not in Mexico, under the guise of having a fling.”

She looks at me long and hard. “You really did fall for this guy, didn’t you?”

“What?” I reply. “That’s ridiculous.”

She narrows her eyes. “I don’t think so. I know that look.”

“What look? The look that says I read more into it than what there was?”

“No, the look that tells me you’re hook, line, and sinker for Mr. B.”

“You talk a load of shit.”

She rolls her eyes. “You can’t fool me, Ari. Which is why I say either take matters into your own hands or forget him altogether. There’s nothing wrong with waiting for a guy to pursue you, but a man like Lukas Bentley doesn’t seem like the type to stick to just one woman, if you know what I mean.”

I do know what she means, and she isn’t trying to be mean. Just realistic.

Lukas has a bevy of women at his beck and call. I’m just another notch on his belt, a willing participant, but a notch, nonetheless.

“I do know, which is why I’m washing my hands of it. I need a reality check, and while we’re at it, I’ve decided I’m going to start that new course I was telling you about, then see if I can use some of my contacts to get some practical training. I realized a lot of things while I was away, one of them being that I’m stuck in a dead-end job that I’m sick of and I want to change it. I want to do something else.”

“Good for you, sweetie.” She beams. “I think you’d really suit having your own flower shop. It’s kind of romantic.”

“Well, I’d have to start at the bottom, and work my way up, but there’s no time like the present.”

Even if I don’t exactly relish the idea of night school, I still can’t quit my job until I’m qualified, and that may be a long time coming. However, I’m excited about the prospect.

Another week drags on, and I haven't heard from Lukas at all.

I'm starting to think I imagined it all.

Why hasn't he called me?

I've tried and failed so many times to message him, but each time, I talk my way out of it.

All that I have left of him is the memory, and that's bad enough.

I know it's crazy, but it's like I feel him everywhere. Like I can even smell his distinct, spicy scent, though I know that's impossible.

It's my turn to do the coffee run the following Monday morning, and I feel a little bit chipper knowing that I'm starting my course this week. I couldn't be happier, in fact. Not that I'm going to tell work at the moment, but if they find out, I can always say that I'm trying to expand my skills. They'd buy it.

The thing about bosses, is they think they own you. Well, I'm sick of paying the debt to my slave grinder of a boss. I want to be free.

I'm about to open the coffee shop door, when I'm almost bowled over by a wall of steel and a flash of a gray suit.

I smell his scent first, but I'm still shocked when I look up and see him, of all people.

Lukas.

He reaches out to hold my shoulders and straightens me as I wobble.

"Ariana," he breathes, and he's exactly how I remember him.

Tall. Dark. Sexy as sin. Fuck, he's beautiful, and he's in full boss mode in his expensive looking suit and long coat.

His beautiful crystal blue eyes look more surprised than ever to see me.

“How have you been?” he goes on, his eyes assessing me intently.

I didn't even know he was back from his trip. *Maybe he never left.*

I try a smile and hope it looks believable. “Fine,” I stammer. “Really good, actually.” God, I'm such a liar.

“I only just got back,” he explains, and I try not to imagine him whisking off some leggy blonde to Aspen for the weekend. “It was a business trip,” he adds, like it needed an explanation.

“I've been busy too.” I feel the need to say, though it sounds forced. “I've enrolled in my new course.” Like he'd even care about the boring logistics of my everyday life.

He smiles down at me. “I'm so happy for you.”

God, he smells so fucking good.

It's then his eyes rake down my body, and when they meet mine again, I see the fire behind them. I swallow hard, and I'm about to respond when a tall, beautiful woman runs out of the café and slides her arm into his.

“Are you ready to go?” she purrs, without even a glance in my direction.

I try not to let my gape hit the floor. Talk about a cliché.

He's here with another woman, and not just any old woman, but a six-foot-tall Amazonian.

This is just fucking great.

My heart thuds in my chest like I've been socked. My ego won't ever recover, but it's my heart I'm worried about. It shatters at the subtle but obvious display of affection.

They know each other well.

I blink away the hurt, but I think he sees it.

Before he has a chance to answer her, I make my escape. “Nice seeing you... Mr. Bentley.”

I duck into the café with my racing heart and head to the counter.

What a fucking idiot.

It's been almost two weeks, and he's already out and about with another woman. Not just any woman, a fucking supermodel!

Why was I so stupid to believe what we had was something special? That we had a connection.

Was it all in my imagination? Yes. Clearly, it was.

I get back to my office, and I feel my phone vibrate in my pocket. Taking it out, I see a message from him.

My heart races as I scramble to read it.

That wasn't what it looked like.

My breath quickens as I read it over and over again.

I think carefully about what I might send back, then finally, I find the right words.

You don't owe me any explanation. We were a fling, nothing more, and it was fun.

I think I'm having a panic attack as I try to slow my breathing. I curse myself. I'm the one who got myself into this mess. I knew fine and well that Lukas was a player and a womanizer. What did I honestly expect?

I've missed you

I stare at the message for what seems like forever, and at one point, I consider throwing my phone against the wall. Since I can't afford to just go around smashing i-phones and replacing them, I find the will to just cuss him out instead.

Of course, it's what I've been wanting to hear him say, but it took me running into him with another woman to prompt him to remember my existence? Well, I've got news for him. I'm nobody's fool, and I'm not a runner up prize.

He can go fuck himself, or her, or anybody, but he won't be fucking me.

My heart wants me to reply that I missed him too, that it's lonely without him, that I want to be wrapped around him in bed, but all of that sounds lame. Like Charlize said, take matters into my own hands or walk away.

You shouldn't say things you don't mean. I think we both need to move on x

I turn my phone off for the rest of the day. If I have to see one more text with his name at the top, I might scream bloody murder from the roof tops.

I'm done with Lukas Bentley.

He can do whatever the fuck he wants.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

LUKAS

I curse the ground that Rebecca Sanchez walks on. First, I have to put up with her helping herself to the chair opposite me, without being invited, then she orders a coffee so she can stay longer and bore me some more, like what we had was anything I'd want to repeat—and it was months ago. Then, I run into Ariana, and she molests me in front of her.

I'm mortified and pacing in my office.

The only reason I was there, why I've been there since Ariana got home, is so I can see her go in and out of her workplace.

The coffee shop is opposite where she arrives each morning at eight twenty-five, and I watch her go in the double doors and through security. Each day, I want to rush out and greet her, sweep her off her feet and kiss her pretty little mouth, taking in her scent and her warmth.

But I've been too gutless, so I've stayed away.

Instead, I lurk around like a goddamn stalker, taking her in from a distance, trying to gauge if what I'm feeling is just because I've got the holiday blues, but this feels like far more than that. This feels nuclear.

Today, she disappeared inside, and I thought that was it. I drank my coffee, then left, not realizing she'd crossed the street and was about to enter the coffee shop.

I don't know why exactly, but the fire in me isn't a simmer anymore, it's a raging beast.

And now she thinks I was with another woman.

Holy fuck, this is messy.

I don't do messy, and I sure as hell don't do complications, but this girl has me all wound up.

I don't know what happened in Mexico, I don't fucking know, but now I'm pacing my office like a madman, wondering if I should call her. The mortified look in her eyes said it all, and it told me so much.

She was pissed.

If she's pissed, it means she cares. If she cares, it means she wants more.

And now, I've ruined it.

I thought by staying away, I was protecting her. I thought it was what's best for her.

I try to call, but her phone goes straight to voicemail, so I decide fuck it, I'm going to go to her office and confront her in person.

When I make it past security and to her floor, I ask the receptionist where her office is and march down there like I own the fucking building before she has the chance to stop me.

I stand outside and brace myself.

I knock a couple of times, even though the door is open. When nobody tells me to come in, I figure she's not there, so I walk in and look around the small space.

It's old and tired, but Ariana has put some nice touches around the place, making it her own.

There's a huge white board on one wall with names and dates, and a stack of open files on her desk. It looks like she's got a fair bit on her plate.

I walk over to the bookcase and peruse the titles, though lord knows when she'd find time to read.

Then I go over to the window, but all I see is the building next door. No views. Nothing down below but a parking lot.

This is as dreary as all fuck. No wonder she wants to leave.

A few moments later, I hear someone at the door.

“I’ll get it all organized and email you the changes,” Ariana says.

I turn around at the same time her eyes look up and find mine.

There she is.

My beautiful girl.

Wearing a pastel blue skirt suit and low heels. Her hair spun like gold up in a bun, and she’s wearing fucking reading glasses. She looks like a naughty secretary, and I’m already feeling my cock spring to life for the first time since I got back from Mexico.

Her eyes look alarmed for a moment before she recovers.

“Yes, I will...” she goes on, halting in the doorway as I stare at her. “I agree, being that it’s a spring wedding, I’ll check which flowers will be in season and we can match the colors and get a costing. All right, that sounds great, I’ll speak to you soon. You too...”

She hangs up but doesn’t come any closer.

“Ariana,” I say, after a few moments of awkward silence.

“What are you doing here?” she breathes, looking like I’ve definitely caught her off guard.

“I wanted to see you,” I say, simply.

“Lukas,” she begins, then straightens her back and walks to her desk, sliding her phone onto it. “I don’t think that that’s such a good idea.”

“Why? Because you saw me with that woman, or you don’t want to see me?”

“Both.”

I frown. “Why don’t you want to see me?”

“I just don’t.” Her frown says it all.

“Fine, well the woman you saw me with is someone I dated some time back. I wasn’t there with her. She came up to me in the booth and wouldn’t leave. Why she felt it necessary to manhandle me, I don’t know. I assume it was to throw you off guard, and it seems she succeeded.”

“Like a pesky mosquito?” she snarks.

My temper flares. “Yes, very much so.”

“Well, I’m not surprised. You have women falling all over themselves wherever you go. I guess you just attract all the wrong types of women, Mr. Bentley.”

I don’t like how she says my name like that. It sounds a whole lot different to the way she screams it when I’m fucking her and making her come... but that’s irrelevant right now.

“Not always.”

She rounds her desk and sits down.

“May I?” I indicate to the chair in front of her, seeming she’s not inviting me to sit, but she nods. “Tell me why you’re so pissed off, Ariana. For a woman who says she doesn’t care, it seems like you’re quite interested in my love life.”

“I’m not interested. After all, it’s been almost two weeks. Variety is the spice of life, or so they say.”

I try not to see red, but I get it.

I’ve not dealt with a jealous woman for some time, but it all comes flooding back to me now.

I don’t like that she’s pissed, but I do like that she doesn’t want to see me with another woman. Just as I don’t want to see her with another man. The thought makes me want to smash someone’s face in.

“That isn’t fair.”

“Did you sleep with her?” she blurts out.

I can’t believe she’s asked me that.

I look her in the eye. “Yes, but it was over six months ago.”

She looks for any sign that I'm lying, then satisfied, she leans back in her chair. "I've no claim over you, so it doesn't matter anyway."

"It does matter if you're asking me," I say. "I've wanted to come to you, Ariana... I've been watching you since you got back from vacation."

Her eyes flick to mine, and I know it sounds a little creepy, but I just wanted to get a look at her.

"What do you mean?"

I sigh, unsure if I should let her in on it, but I've nothing to lose at this point. "I've been at the café since your first day back at work. I watched you go into your building each morning..." Fuck. It does sound stalkery.

She regards me with a frown, one that I probably deserve. "You've been watching me?" she repeats, trying the words out slowly.

"Yes. But it's not what you think. I wanted to talk to you, but I didn't want to complicate things. Then I got called away for work, and I thought that would cure me. But it didn't, Ariana. I don't know what the fuck is wrong with me. I tried to stay away, believe me, I have tried, I just..." I glance up at her as she watches me, her expression guarded. "I can't stop thinking about you."

I've no idea if she's going to relent, or whether she's going to kick me out on my ass. The only thing I do know is that it's been a long couple of weeks.

"Lukas..."

"Tell me that you don't feel the same way," I interrupt. "Look me in the eye and tell me."

There's a chance, albeit a slim one, that she may not.

Her eyes betray her. "I've..." I wait with bated breath. "I admit I have missed you," she says eventually. I don't know why she's so coy and shy with me. I've seen her from every which angle, so now isn't the time to play hard to get. I need to know how she really feels.

“I feel a *but* coming on?”

She sighs. She knows she can't hide from me.

“I thought when I was in Mexico that that's all this was; just a great vacation with a hot man and awesome sex, but as it turns out, I ended up...” she pauses.

I arch a brow, not wanting to interrupt her.

“I ended up feeling a whole lot more than I bargained for. I told myself not to get too attached, too involved, but I couldn't help it. You're just so... you're just so wonderful, Lukas, and when I got back, those feelings didn't go away like I thought they would. I've been craving you ever since you left.”

My heart races in my chest. “Craving me?”

She meets my eye, straightening her back, like she's ready to duel. “I know that isn't what you want to hear, is it?” she fires back.

She's no idea what her admission just did to me.

“I just want the truth.”

“You don't want the truth,” she snorts. “Trust me.”

I give her a look, and she relents.

“Fine, do you want to hear about how fucked up it was when you left? I'm trying to figure my life out and now here I am not only craving your touch, but *needing* it. I think about you day and night, wondering what you're doing, who's sharing your bed. And it's fucked up.

We had eight fucking days together! Is that what you want to hear?”

I hate that I've made her upset. “What if I told you, it's exactly what I want to hear?”

She frowns. “You don't. You're Lukas fucking Bentley, ruler of the world. You can have anybody, and when you tire of me, Lukas, where does that leave me? And I hate it, I hate that I sound so needy because I really *don't* need a man, but you've ruined me,” she goes on, her face getting red. “You've ruined me for all other men, just like you wanted.”

A slow smile spreads across my face.

She shakes her head, anger forming in her features. “You think this is fucking funny?”

I stand and round her desk before she can even blink.

“I meant to ruin you for all other men. I did it on purpose, Ariana, because I didn’t want any other man to have you,” I tell her, crouching down, holding her shoulders so she can’t get up and flee. “Did you ever stop to think that maybe I had the time of my life too, and maybe I want more?”

“You didn’t ever tell me that in Mexico,” she whispers. “You said you could do *house calls*. And you should know now, I’m not going to be your bit on the side that you come and fuck whenever the fancy takes you. That isn’t me, and it will never be me. I could never share you.”

“You think I enjoy the thought of another man having you?” I bark, and it sounds harsher than I mean it to, but the thought alone drives me mad. “Touching what’s mine?”

“Yours?” She frowns.

I bite my lip as I try not to smirk. “Yes, mine. And you sound so sexy when you say fuck about a thousand times.”

She opens her mouth, then closes it again.

I brush the hair back off her face. “You know what I think?”

She looks at me warily. “That I should call security?”

I ignore her. “I think we should try this dating thing.”

Her breath hitches in her chest. “What do you mean?”

I smile. I so desperately want to kiss her, but if we’re going to do this, it can’t just all be based on sex. That isn’t how you win a woman; not one you intend on keeping.

We have a connection, and I deeply wish to explore that.

“I mean, our relationship in Mexico was all based on sex, pretty much, not that I didn’t enjoy it, but I barely know anything about you. I want to take you out to dinner, see a

show, go to a movie, do something you'd like to do, see how we connect in other areas, not just the bedroom."

Her lip trembles. "Why would you want that?"

"Don't you?"

"Yes, but would that mean..."

"We'd be exclusive," I finish. "I get it. I obviously wouldn't see anyone else, and neither would you."

She stares at me confounded. "You want to date me?" she repeats.

"Exclusively," I state. "Yes."

She swallows hard and then looks back up. "Does that mean no sex?"

This time I do smirk. "For a little while, not that I want that, but the anticipation will be worth it. If we'd met any other way, I would woo you. And that means no sex for the first few dates. I would seduce you slowly, Ariana. I haven't done that in a long time. What I've had in the past with other women is just sex, nothing more. It's different with you."

"Why?" she whispers as my hands move down to link with hers. Her eyes soften at my touch.

"If I wanted just a physical relationship, Ariana, I wouldn't be here because I know you deserve more than that. You'd never be anybody's fuck buddy, and I'd never treat you as such. You're special. And I can't stand the thought of any other man being with you."

She stares at me with wide eyes for a few moments. "I think I like the sound of that."

I grin. "So does that mean I can take you out on a date?"

She bites her lip, all anger and animosity vanishing from her face. Pity. She's beautiful when she's mad. "Yes, but do I get to choose where we go?"

"As long as you don't say to a Taylor Swift concert or anything."

“You’re a bit too old for that,” she snarks. I nip her and grip her chin in my grasp.

I waste no time in crashing my lips to hers, kissing her brutally. Showing her exactly how much I missed her, how much I want her.

My tongue finds hers, and she pulls on the lapels of my jacket as I think about what I could do to her while she sits on this chair and pretends to work.

This has to be about our connection, though. I know we’re compatible in the bedroom, but I want to find what makes her tick.

Maybe I am old fashioned in a roundabout way.

With her, I want to do things right.

She’s panting when she comes up for air. “You expect me to not jump your bones after that?” she says, holding my face in her hands.

I grin. “This is a marathon, sweet girl, not a sprint.”

She rolls her eyes.

“Does this mean I’m forgiven?” I prompt.

She runs her hands through my beard, and I try not to shudder at her touch. Every slight touch from her sets me on fire.

“When I can stop imagining you with tall, beautiful models...”

I cup her face. “Everyone has a past, Ariana. And if we’re going to give us a go, then you need to understand there will be backlash. Your family, for example, and mine, including James, then there’s the tabloids.”

“Not if we keep it on the downlow to begin with,” she says. “I mean, we don’t have to announce it at the Met Ball or anything.”

I grip her chin and kiss her chastely. “I do make a mean carbonara.”

“A man who cooks? I’m surprised. I thought you’d have a personal chef to do all of that,” she muses.

“I do, but it isn’t beyond me to make a meal every now and then.”

“You’re an incredibly decent man, Mr. Bentley,” she says, the color rising in her cheeks.

“Are you sure about that?” I mutter in her ear. “I’ve been called a lot worse.”

I snuggle my face into her neck, kissing and nipping as she throws her arms around me.

I take in her soft, sweet scent, and she moans. “We should stop,” she whispers. “Need I remind you I’m at work, and technically, you haven’t taken me on that date yet.”

I smile into her skin. “I’m already regretting taking things slow,” I mutter.

The thing I’m not regretting, is being here in her arms.

I didn’t plan it like this, but I’ve always followed my gut, and it’s never let me down before.

I knew she was mine the first time she fell into my arms, and every night after that when we made long and passionate love. It went way beyond fucking.

The way she looks at me makes me feel like her king, and I want to make her my queen.

But we can only take it day by day, and weather the stormy waters that will come.

And I will, for her.

EPILOGUE

Lukas

One year later

James sits across from us. The look on his face says it all, and I know Ariana is uncomfortable, but it was inevitable this moment had to come. He's known about us for a while, and while I never expected his blessing, I didn't expect the barrage that shortly followed. To say he's been intolerable is an understatement.

I get it's weird. I get he's not thrilled about it, but it wasn't like we set out to do this... to fall in love.

This past year of dating Ariana has taught me so much, and I've never felt more alive. She makes me feel things I've never dared to imagine before. While the tightening in my chest hurts, it's better that it's all out on the table, because we're moving forward in our relationship, and I want James to be the first to know.

"...got to be fucking kidding me..." he's saying.

Yeah, I tend to zone out when people start to yell, because he's my son I'm kind of obligated to at least hear him out. Not that he deserves it. He cheated on the other girl he was with too, the one he cheated on Ariana with.

"We're not fucking kidding, James, and we wanted you to be the first to know." I don't add *out of respect*, because frankly, he doesn't deserve that courtesy. Instead I say, "Before you hear it from someone else."

"This is absurd!" He turns to Ariana sitting next to him on the other armchair. We're in my office since he came barging in here when I summoned him. Naturally, he thinks I've changed my mind on his inheritance, so now he's just pissed.

"And you!" he snarls at her. "How long was this going on, huh? I mean, it's sick. I'm a laughingstock!"

She turns to him, cool and composed. My girl has come so far with her confidence this last year, and it wasn't before time. She's come on in leaps and bounds, opening her own florist boutique with all on her own merits, changing her career, taking charge. She's done it, and I couldn't be prouder of her.

"Nothing was going on when we were together, James," she says, meeting his enraged face. "You know that. We met on vacation, by accident. We didn't do any of this on purpose, and might I remind you, it was *you* who cheated on *me* while we were together, so I don't think you're in any position to lecture me on anything."

I know Ariana feels bad about how this is affecting James; she's just that kind of person.

I, however, don't give a fuck. He should've looked after her when he had her, not let her slip away, and certainly not have cheated on her.

There was a time when I started to feel a little bit guilty, but that passed as soon as he started talking shit about Ariana. All my sympathy went out the window, and it seems he still doesn't know how to treat a woman. Let's just say, he didn't learn any of that from me.

I really want to smack him upside the head for speaking to her like that, but I know that as much as I want to defend Ariana when she's being attacked like this, she's her own woman and she's one tough cookie. Some things, I've got to let her do for herself.

"Ha!" he snorts, his anger building. "Everywhere I go, people are asking about it. It's so fucking embarrassing, Ari. You could have picked any other fucking guy in the world, but my father?" He makes a face that leaves no question about his disgust. Finding out it's not just a whim has only added to the animosity in the room.

I stopped making excuses long ago. She's mine now, and he has to learn to accept it.

"So let them?" She shrugs. "It'll be yesterday's news soon. There's always some new scandal ready to print tomorrow. And you can't help who you fall in love with, James. Maybe if you spent more time on your own relationships instead of worrying about mine and your father's, you might be able to hold onto a good woman. I doubt it, though, as past experience shows us that you're not very good at communication."

He shakes his head, scowling at her. "Maybe if you were around more during our relationship, I wouldn't have had to go looking for my needs elsewhere."

I wince. I know that loyalty runs deep with Ariana. Her upbringing, him cheating, the way she always gives one hundred percent to everyone else and puts herself last. But that's all in the past now. She's learning that it's okay to put yourself first, and that it's okay to get the things you actually want.

"That's a low blow, and you know it," she snaps back. "There is no excuse for cheating, James, none. I didn't deserve that. I deserved better. You were busy too, and I never went looking elsewhere, so that's just a cop out. Turn that finger around and take a good, hard look at yourself."

"You're starting to sound like him!" he barks, nodding in my direction. "Or worse, my mother! Wait, do I have to start calling you mom now?"

I snort a laugh because he's so fucking out of line. "That's utterly absurd," I cut in. "And really immature for a man who's almost thirty."

"Is this what you called me over here for?" He swings his head back to me. "To humiliate me even more? To rub it in my face?"

I link my fingers on the desk and look at him like he's five years old.

"Contrary to what you think, this isn't about you. It's about me and Ariana, and our future," I say. "So, you may as well get used to it."

"I think I'm going to be sick."

I ignore him. "I know you're leaving for Vancouver soon." *Thank fuck.* "And I personally didn't want things to end like this, but that choice is yours. I can't, of course, speak for Ariana, but after the way you treated her and how you're talking to her now, you're lucky she's even sitting in the same room as you, much less trying to make peace and be friends."

He rolls his eyes arrogantly. "I'm lucky?" He pokes himself in the chest. "I feel like I'm in the twilight zone. I'm not fucking friends with her, and I'm certainly not fucking *anything* with you!"

God, he's such a spoiled brat. I feel a surge of disappointment in my chest. He's a grown man for Christ's sake.

"One thing you could never do is get over yourself. Nobody did anything on purpose, and we certainly didn't do it *to* you. It just happened, and we're happy. Not that I expect you to care about any of that, but that's the truth. And when you can give your loyalty to one woman, you might find some happiness of your own. Or, keep playing the field of lying and cheating and see where that gets you."

He snorts, then turns back to Ariana. "Is he a better lay than me?" he snarls. "Is that what this is? Try us both out and see who makes you scream louder?"

“James!” I bang my fists on the desk, making them both jump.

“No,” she states calmly, as if choosing her words carefully. “Your father knows what a woman wants, unlike you, so there’s really no comparison, and I’m not going to indulge you or sink to your level because you’re lurking in murky waters. I don’t want to be a part of it. I’m happy, and your father’s happy. I’m sorry you’re not, but that isn’t our problem.”

I like how she says *our*.

His eyes go round, and I stifle a laugh, even though this isn’t funny in the slightest. I didn’t want a fucking fight, and my head is pounding from all of this.

Still, it has to be done. We each have our lives to live.

“You fucking bitch!” He stands angrily, and I do too, ready to pounce on him.

Ariana just looks up at him with pity.

I knew this wasn’t ever going to go well, but I didn’t expect him to go postal.

“James, that’s enough! I won’t have you speaking that way to Ariana, or to anybody, in my house.”

“So she can say whatever she likes?” he throws back.

I shake my head exasperated. “I can see that we’re not going to get anywhere with this tit for tat. I hope you have an enjoyable time in Vancouver and come back with a different perspective, and perhaps a better attitude, though that’s just wishful thinking.”

“That’s it?” he screeches. Real meaning: *no money?*

Ariana goes to stand and doesn’t look at James. “I’ll leave you to it, I’ve said what I wanted to say.” She doesn’t like getting involved where money or tantrums are concerned.

James looks at her as I give her a nod. She turns to leave and then looks over her shoulder, meeting his eyes.

“Oh, for the record, James, you never made me scream.”

He opens his mouth, then closes it again as she disappears.

I hold my smile as I round the desk, and we face each other.

“James, despite what you think, you’re my son and I love you,” I say as his eyes narrow. “One day, I hope we can have a relationship. I see so much of me in you when I was your age, but the one thing I never did was cheat on a good woman; lie to them and treat them like shit. It only reflects back on yourself and how unhappy you are in your own skin. I want to help you, and when you decide to have an adult conversation with me, I’ll be here, until then...”

“I want my inheritance,” he demands. Gee, didn’t see that one coming.

“And you’ll get it.”

“Good. When?”

I turn to my desk. I wished I didn’t have to do this, but unfortunately, a form of blackmail is the only way he won’t run to the papers and shoot his mouth off. He’s already been harassing Ariana online and mentioning her in comments and making her upset.

He needs to grow the fuck up.

“You’ll need to sign this, and I’ll give you half now. The rest of the money will sit in a trust until I see fit that you’re not going to blow it all in Vegas and pay for hookers.”

He shakes his head. “What is that?”

“An NDA.”

“What? Why do you want me to sign that?”

I click the end of the pen and hand it to him. “It’s not for me, it’s for Ariana’s sake. When you run out of money, I don’t want you selling out to one of those gossip magazines and flaunting your disgruntlement at our relationship with a tell-all book. Fuck knows, I have enough drama in my life without you adding to it.”

“You really are fucking full of yourself, aren’t you?”

I shrug. “It doesn’t matter either way. I want to protect her, so sign it and I’ll release the trust.”

“Bribery, dad? I mean, really?” His tone is full of scorn.

I know that’s what it seems like, but it’s the only way. He’s already been on social media, being an absolute dick and also tried to sabotage Ariana’s business.

“That means no posts on social media about her or me, and that all this shit has to stop. You’re a grown adult, so it’s time to start acting like one. If you renege, I’ll not only cut you off for the rest of your life, but I’ll make damn sure that when it’s time to return, you won’t be working in this town ever again.”

He shakes his head. “Thanks, dad, that’s real sweet of you.”

I wish it could be different. I really do. I know I’m part to blame, but it is what it is. I can’t change how I feel. I didn’t do this on purpose.

“The offer is still there, and my door will always be open, but only when you decide to start acting like an adult.”

“That’s big of you.”

He scans the contract, and I doubt he even reads a word. A few moments later, he scrawls his signature across the bottom, above where his name is printed.

I don’t know why I expected this to ever go the way I planned, because with him, nothing ever does.

“The money will be wired into your bank account tomorrow.”

He drops the pen and looks up at me, then something flashes in his eyes, regret maybe. Or perhaps it’s just the fact I didn’t give him all the cash.

He nods once, looking down at his shoes. “Bye, dad. Don’t forget to write.”

He turns and heads out the door. A few moments later, I hear the elevator doors ping open and he’s gone.

I rub a hand over my face.

It could have been worse. At least no punches were thrown, though, fuck knows I felt like it.

The law suit was dropped. It was deemed self defense, and under the circumstances was put down to stress. That was the least of my problems, but now I look back, it was a turning point. If not for that, I would never have gone to Mexico.

I saunter and go in search of Ariana. I find her in our bedroom. Yes, she moved in six months ago. I bought this place at the top of a new high rise in downtown Seattle. I still keep a place out in the country so we can disappear when the city becomes too much. Sometimes I need peace and quiet.

She smiles when I enter. She's sitting on the window seat, looking out at the traffic below.

"How did it go?"

"He signed the NDA."

She frowns. "I wish you didn't have to do that."

She's never been on board with that kind of bribery, but it's for her own protection.

"Well, it's done now. I bought my son off with half his inheritance, so at least it'll give us a reprieve from his online barrage until he can act like a human being."

She smiles sadly. "I'm sorry that I caused this rift."

I walk toward her and tilt her chin up. "Baby, the rift was in place long ago. None of this is to do with you. He's angry at me and angry at himself. He's got a lot of growing up to do. He knows I'll be here, if and when he decides to change."

"I love you, Lukas."

I smile as I bend down and crouch on my hunches. "I love you too, Ariana. Any regrets?"

She kisses me gently as I nuzzle her with my nose. "None," she says as I smirk into her lips.

"That's my girl."



Ariana – two weeks after that

It's my birthday, and Lukas has, as usual, gone over the top, flying us to Hawaii for the weekend. He rented out an entire restaurant just for us to have dinner. The man's completely insane, but there is no slowing him down.

I've realized a lot of things since being with him, and one of them is that he doesn't do anything by halves.

To say I've had a whirlwind of a year is an understatement.

After we got back from Mexico, we dated for a few weeks. Had dinners, went hiking, went to the movies, and did all the things courting couples are supposed to do. Of course, we couldn't keep our hands off one another for very long. He's very persuasive.

He is by far the sexiest, most unselfish lover I've ever been with.

He's generous, kind, and completely unstoppable. He's good for me, and I hope I'm good for him. I think I have brought a softer side out in him, and when we're alone, I do see it, because only then does he let himself relax and unwind. When it's *our* time.

I see how he looks at me and how his eyes light up when I come into a room.

I never thought it could be like this.

It's a pity that James won't come on board, but really, did we ever expect him to? I had hoped in time that their relationship would repair, but only more time will tell. I used to feel guilty, but now all I feel is sadness. I know Lukas cares about James, so I wish he would just stop being a spoilt brat and move on.

Us breaking up and me going to Mexico by myself was the best thing that ever happened to me.

The unexpected happened when I least expected it, which is ironic when you think about it.

"What are you thinking about?" he asks across the table. A smirk playing on his lips.

“Mexico,” I say honestly. “How hot it was.”

He takes a sip from his glass of red wine. “The temperature, or are you referring to me?”

I smile wickedly. “Both.”

He shakes his head. “I’m disappointed, Ariana. I thought I took the cake in terms of hotness. I did pull out all the stops, after all.”

I don’t blush as much anymore as I used to. I’ve gotten used to him and his devious ways, but he still manages to thrill me every chance he gets.

“You certainly did,” I muse.

“I hope you brought that little white bikini with you.”

“What for? It never stays on long enough.” He knows it’s true.

He leans over the table and kisses me, taking my hand in his. “You’ve made me a very happy man, Ariana.”

I smile back at him. “Does this mean I tamed the wild beast?”

He smirks. “Can you sit on your ass without wincing?”

I bite my lip. Another thing he likes to do to me is spank me when I get too sassy, which is apparently all the time. And I admit, sometimes I do answer back, just so he’ll punish me.

“It’s not too bad.”

“You’re thinking about it right now, aren’t you?”

I shake my head. “No.”

He grins, pulling my hand to his mouth, then he kisses my knuckles one by one. “Yes, you are. You can’t wait to get dinner over with so I can do it all again. So, you can take my big cock in that pretty little ass again.”

I roll my lips inward, so much for not blushing. Yes, we’ve progressed in many ways and I love everything he does to me.

“Do you have to be so crass?”

He opens my palm and sucks a finger into his mouth, making my insides jump. He nibbles on the pad of my fingers as his eyes blaze at me.

“You love it when I’m crass, and besides, I’m pretty proud of the fact I’ve taught you a few firsts.”

“Lukas!” This time I do blush, and he notices.

He drops my hand to the table. “You look beautiful tonight,” he tells me.

“So do you. You know, it’s hardly fair, looking like that when it’s supposed to be all about me.” I mock, tossing my hair over my shoulder. “Give a girl a break already.”

He purses his lips. “I think I’m going to enjoy what I’ve got lined up for you tonight. And since it’s your birthday, I might let you ride my face.”

I shake my head. “You’re incorrigible, Mr. Bentley, and a bad influence.”

He nods toward me. “If I asked, would you wear something for me tonight?”

A hot sensation rises in my body as I imagine what it could be.

“Maybe, it depends.”

He smirks again, then rises from his chair. He comes to my side of the table and then drops down to one knee.

I don’t really believe what’s happening until he pulls out a little box from his top pocket.

My eyes go wide.

“Uh, what are you doing?” I whisper.

I’ve never seen Lukas Bentley nervous. Hell, I don’t think anybody has. But right in this moment, he swallows hard as he looks up at me.

“Ariana, you’re the most beautiful, special soul I’ve ever met. You’ve done nothing but enrich my life, and I hope in turn that I’ve done the same for you. I want to spend the rest of

my life with you,” he says. Then he flips open the lid of the box and a huge, square, sparkling diamond as big as my knuckle stares back at me. “Would you do me the honor of being my wife?”

I stare at him dumbfounded.

I did not see this coming.

“Lukas,” I whisper, looking down at his palm, then back to his earnest face. “Oh my God, I... I...”

“Say it, baby,” he pleads. “Tell me...”

“Yes!” I squeal, flinging my arms around his neck, almost bowling him over. “Yes, I’ll marry you.” I pepper his face with kisses as he laughs and holds me by the hips, almost pulling me into his lap. Then he takes control of the kiss, our tongues meeting as I groan into his mouth.

When we break free, we’re both panting. He removes the ring from the box, and I hold out my hand. He places it on my ring finger, and I stare down at it.

It’s the most beautiful ring I’ve ever seen. Tears form in my eyes.

“Lukas, it’s so beautiful.”

“We can get it adjusted,” he says. “If it doesn’t fit.”

“It’s perfect.” I glance back up at him and cup his face in my hands. “I love you so fucking much.”

“I love you too, baby. Fuck, I almost thought you were going to say no there for a second.”

I giggle in his arms as I hold my hand out and examine the huge rock again.

“You did good, Mister. Sorry, I didn’t mean to make you sweat.”

We kiss again. It’s soft, passionate, and full of everything Mr. Bentley.

My heart swells. *His wife? How did I get so lucky?*

“I’m sure you just dropped into my life to keep me on my toes,” he muses, his lips brushing mine again softly.

“Someone has to, old man.”

He nips my bottom lip with his teeth and I yelp.

“Do that again, and I’ll fuck you right here, right now, on the restaurant floor,” he warns.

I shake my head, his eyes sparkling back at me with what I hope is the same spark I give him.

“I’m so happy, Lukas. Thank you for coming into my life. I never thought it could be like this. You’ve made me see that anything is possible. You turned the light on inside me when I thought I’d never get it back.”

He kisses me again. “You’ve always been the light, my darling,” he tells me. “You’re the most precious thing in my life, and I’m going to spend every moment making sure you never forget it.”

I melt into his arms.

Maybe it wasn’t smooth sailing in the beginning, but I know how far we’ve come in the last twelve months. Imagining myself as Lukas’s wife sends a thrill through me that has me beaming at him with pride.

“I love you,” I whisper.

“I love you too,” he says, “but if you don’t hurry up and finish your meal so I can devour you, then I’ll make good on my word about taking you right here, right now.”

“Such a romantic,” I muse. “That’s why it’s never dull with you. You always keep me guessing.”

He buries his face into my neck. “I’ll always be honest with you, baby. You can be damn well sure of that. I can’t wait to make you Mrs. Bentley.”

I like how that sounds, and I know I’m smiling like a goofy idiot. “That has a certain ring to it.”

“So does you wrapped around me.”

I do just that and squeeze him tight as we hold each other, enjoying this moment; the happiest day of my life, and by the look on his face, I'd say it's his too.

Nothing else matters. We will weather the storm and get through anything. As long as he's by my side, I don't care.

I'm home. My compass points to wherever he is.

"I wouldn't expect anything less, Mr. Bentley."

THE END



Thank you to all my readers for continuing to support me on my author journey. None of this would be possible without you.

If you loved Mr. Bentley, I would love a review or a rating on Amazon, Good Reads and Book Bub. Ratings and reviews really help me as an indie author x

WANT MORE?

Grab the EXTENDED EPILOGUE for Mr. Bentley here with never seen before scenes including their wedding:

<https://dl.bookfunnel.com/2v1pheqngj>

AND.....

[Mr. Petrov will be here: 29 March 2024](#)

[Mr. Devereaux will be here: 29 April 2024](#)

Both are stand-alone books in the Taboo Series

Mr. Petrov will feature Imogen

Mr. Devereaux will feature Charlize

Yep – Ariana’s best friends will both be getting their happily ever after’s!

MR. PETROV...

Mr. Petrov Excerpt (unedited and subject to change):

Tropes: Age gap, boss/employee, office romance, good girl, BDSM kink, sex club fun, touch her and die, he falls harder, always a HEA

Dear Imogen,

Endeavors Seattle is delighted to confirm your appointment at our exclusive club.

We are pleased to invite you to our beautifully appointed Premiere Suite located adjacent to our club at the Platinum Hotel.

Please check the date and time below.

Date: Friday 12th January 2024

Time: 10pm - overnight

The keys to your room will be at reception upon check in.

A copy of your ideal man questionnaire is attached, along with your copy of the agreement.

Your experience is valuable to us, so if there are any issues or you need to change anything, please let me know as soon as possible.

I'm very pleased to welcome you to Endeavors.

Yours,

Margaret

Office Manager

Endeavours Seattle

Questionnaire:

Age:

- 45-55

Appearance:

- Facial hair /beard
- Short hair
- Tall
- Rugged
- Suit
- Blue eyes

Traits:

- Patient
- Romantic
- Takes charge

Desires:

- Dirty talk
- Good girl
- Praise

Pleasures:

- Oral giving/receiving

■ Vaginal intercourse

■ Spanking

Consent to:

■ Vibrators

■ Spanking

■ Masturbation

■ Food play

■ Ice play

■ Blindfold

Forms of discipline/punishment?

■ Light BDSM

- Hands bound in front
- Hands bound behind back
- Binding to fixed items (bed post)
- Bondage with cuffs
- Spanking with hand
- Spanking with cane

Describe your ideal Endeavours experience. Details are important to us to ensure that your experience is exactly what you desire:

A man who is romantic and notices the little things.

Tells me I'm pretty.

Loves my body, curves and all my wobbly bits.

Desires me.

Enjoys giving oral sex.

Ideally a silver fox, or a man who knows what he's doing.

Doesn't have to be overly... "big"

Must have a dirty mouth and likes to give praise.

Your dream date awaits...

Blurb:

I thought I had it all.

My five year plan was set:

The perfect job.

The perfect boyfriend.

The perfect life.

But then it all fell apart.

Spectacularly.

As if things couldn't get any worse?

I met my new potential boss for the first time...

Khristian Petrov.

The man I spent the night with at a club two weeks ago.

The man I was never meant to set eyes on again.

And now he's here.

Interviewing me in a suit wearing a smirk that only I can translate.

He's asking me questions about my work history while I try to push out the thoughts about what we did.

Mr. Petrov is my new boss.

I know it's wrong... to continue where we left off, but he is the epitome of dark, dangerous and exciting. Everything my life isn't.

I'm drawn to him like a moth to a flame.

I can't get him out of my system, and now I've had a taste, I'm not sure I want to stop, or if I even know how.

Order here: <https://books2read.com/mrpetrov>

MR. DEVEREAUX...

Mr. Devereaux

Tropes: Age gap, ex step-dad (did not grow up together), BDSM/sex club fun, grumpy-sunshine, sugar daddy, British billionaire, protector, sassy FMC who is desperate for love, HEA.

Blurb:

It wasn't supposed to happen like this.

Seeing him again.

My ex-stepdad.

Mr. Devereaux.

The man I thought was long gone and out of my life, not that he was ever in it.

His dark eyes resemble thunder as he takes me in.

Granted, I am in my underwear, answering his expensive booty call, but still.

I had no idea he'd be my first client. Not that I even wanted to do this, but money is tight.

London is expensive.

But Mr. Devereaux is having none of it, much to my delight.

So, we make a deal; I won't do this with any other man, and he will be my sugar daddy.

The time we spend together will be our little secret.

And it's not like it's a chore. The man has it all.

He can buy anything. Including me.

The only problem is, when it's time to let him go, am I really ready for the fall?

And will he feel the same way?

Order link here: <https://books2read.com/mrdevereaux>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mackenzzy Fox is an author of contemporary, enemies to lovers, motorcycle and dark themed romance novels. When she's not writing she loves vegan cooking, walking her beloved pooch's, reading books and is an expert on online shopping.

She's slightly obsessed with drinking tea, testing bubbly Moscato, watching home decorating shows and has a black belt in origami. She strives to live a quiet and introverted life in Western Australia's South-West with her hubby, twin sister and her dogs.

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