



Wicked
TIES

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
SUSANA MOHEL

Wicked Ties

Susana Mohel

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Note from the Author

To my wonderful readers:

Thank you for taking the time to read *Wicked Ties*, I appreciate it beyond words.

This story contains violence, sexually explicit scenes, speech/hearing-impaired character, and references to child abandonment. The female main character suffers severe hearing loss, respectfully, I've underlined her dialogs. She communicates in a few different ways, sometimes using ASL, others writing, or through a text to speech app.

I hope you enjoy the story, I left a big chunk of my heart in there.

All my love,

Sx

Epigraph

*Whatever is done from love always occurs beyond good and
evil.*

—Friedrich Nietzsche.

Chapter One

Spencer

The scent of aged wood fills my nostrils as I stand in my workshop, surrounded by the soft tremble of tools on the old wooden floor. Sawdust clings to my clothes, creating a layer of fine particles that add texture to my simple black leggings and worn t-shirt. The antique dresser, a diamond-in-the-rough find from a local thrift store, sits before me, patiently awaiting its transformation.

My green eyes narrow with determination as I lean into the task, gripping the sander with practiced precision. The machine vibrates against my palms, blurring my vision momentarily as I guide it over the rough surface of the dresser. As the old varnish peels away, I imagine the vibrant colors and intricate patterns that will adorn this once-forgotten piece, giving it new life.

Sweat trickles down my brow, dampening the stray strands of hair that have escaped from the messy bun atop my head. My muscles tense with each pass of the sander, the rhythmic motion becoming more demanding as I work to erase every imperfection. Each stroke brings me closer to revealing the hidden beauty within the wood, fueling my resolve to see this project through to completion.

“*Spencer,*” I say to myself, since I haven’t been able to hear anyone else saying my name for so many years. “*This is going to be a masterpiece.*”

As the dust settles and the dresser's true form begins to emerge, I feel a connection with the neglected furniture. Just like this battered piece, I too, have faced my own share of challenges and setbacks—my hearing loss being just one of them. But I've learned to adapt and find solace in the quiet world surrounding me.

In this workshop, I'm free to create and dream. Here, I can transform not only furniture, but myself, crafting a future where I can flourish as both an artist and a person. It's in these moments, covered in sawdust and sweat, that I find my truest self—the Spencer O'Hagan who is strong, capable, and unafraid to chase her passions.

"Almost there," the voice in my head whispers, my breath hitching with anticipation as I make one final pass with the sander. The rough surface now smooth beneath my fingertips, I take a step back to admire my handiwork, my heart swelling with pride at the progress I've made.

"Another step closer," I think, grinning through the fatigue. *"One day, this will all pay off."*

With renewed energy, I set down the sander and brush away the remaining sawdust. The old dresser stands before me, a blank canvas awaiting my creative touch. Together, we will continue on this journey of turning the forgotten into something beautiful and cherished once more. And as I reach for my paintbrush, I know that no matter how challenging the path may be, I will see this project through to the end—because that's what fighters do.



Just as I'm about to dip my paintbrush into a vibrant shade of turquoise, the workshop door swings open. Startled by the movement, I lift my gaze to see Gianna, my adventurous and outgoing friend, standing in the doorway.

"Spence! Your aunts sent me to find you," she announces; after years of friendship, I can read her lips easily. Her wild, curly hair frames her face like a golden halo. "They said you've been cooped up in here for days."

"Hey, Gia," I make the signs with my hands, trying to hide my frustration at the interruption. "I'm just finishing up this dresser. What's going on?"

"Come out with us tonight!" Gianna's eyes sparkle with excitement. "We're grabbing drinks downtown. It'll be fun, I promise!"

I hesitate, my gaze drifting back to the half-finished dresser. My fingers twitch with the urge to continue painting, to make progress on the project that feels so close to my heart. But Gianna's infectious energy pulls me in, tempting me with the promise of a carefree night surrounded by friends.

"Thanks, but I really should stay home and work on this. I need to get it done." She knows how much we need the money. Our bills are starting to pile up.

"Spencer, you can't keep hiding away in your workshop all the time," Gianna insists, stepping closer and placing a hand

on my shoulder. “You need to take breaks and have some fun, too. Trust me, one night won’t hurt.”

I look into her eyes, searching for the right answer. Part of me wants to give in to her persuasive charm, to let go of my responsibilities for a few hours and just enjoy myself. But another part—the part that’s determined and driven—knows that I can’t afford to waste any time. Not when my dreams are finally starting to take shape.

“Gianna, I appreciate the invitation,” I signal slowly, my resolve strengthening. “But I really need to focus on my projects right now. They’re important to me.”

“Alright,” she makes a dramatic sigh, her disappointment evident. “Just remember, life’s too short to spend it all working. You deserve to have fun and let loose sometimes, too.”

“I know,” I agree, nodding. “And I will—when the time is right. But for now, this is where I need to be.”

Gianna gives me a tight-lipped smile, her eyes softening with understanding. “Okay, Spence. Just don’t forget that we’re here for you, no matter what.”

“Thanks, Gia,” I reply, touched by her concern. “I won’t forget.”

As she leaves the workshop, I feel a twinge of guilt for turning down her offer. But deep down, I know that I’m making the right choice. Because even though my friends and family may worry about me, they can’t see the transformation

that's taking place within these four walls—the metamorphosis from a caterpillar into a butterfly.

Back to work. My words resonate in my head while picking up my paintbrush once more. And as I watch the turquoise paint glide across the wooden surface, I find myself smiling—because, in this moment, I am exactly where I need to be.

As I continue to work on my dresser, I can't shake the feeling that maybe Gianna is right. Maybe I do need a break. After all, my hands are cramping from gripping the paintbrush for so long.

Alright.

I text her after setting down my paintbrush and wiping my hands on my leggings.

You win. Let's go out for drinks.

“Really?” Gianna's smiley face appears at the threshold two seconds later, her eyes lighting up with excitement. “I promise you won't regret it!”

“Fine,” I sigh, rolling my eyes playfully. “But just for a little while, okay? I really need to finish this project.”

“Deal,” she agrees with a nod of her head, holding out her hand for me to shake.

As we make our way to the bar, a sense of anticipation mixed with trepidation fills my chest. It's been a while since I've allowed myself to step out of my comfort zone like this, but I know that sometimes growth doesn't happen without taking risks.



Upon entering the bar, the smell hits me like a wave—beer, a mix of perfumes, and something else I can't identify; it's almost overwhelming. The dimly lit room is packed with people, many of whom appear to be fans of a local soccer club—their jerseys giving them away.

“Isn't this place great?” Gianna mouths, guiding me toward a table near the back. “The team always comes here after their games. Who knows, maybe you'll meet your future husband tonight!”

“Ha, very funny,” I reply, glancing around at the sea of faces. “I highly doubt that.”

“Hey, you never know!” Gianna insists, ordering us both a round of drinks. “Besides, even if you don't find love, at least you'll have a good time. And isn't that what life's all about?”

As I look around the lively bar, trying to absorb the energy and excitement that seems to pulse through the room, I wonder if Gianna might be onto something. Maybe it is time to embrace new experiences, to push myself beyond my self-imposed limits. And who knows—maybe in doing so, I'll find the transformation I've been seeking and also the happiness I deserve.

As I stand at the back of the bar, sipping my drink and absently watching the soccer players celebrating their win, a twinge of boredom and disinterest dulls my mind. The noise,

the laughter, the smell of alcohol and sweat—it all feels so... foreign to me. My thoughts drift back to my workshop, where the antique dresser sits. I can almost feel the smoothness of the wood beneath my fingertips, the satisfaction of seeing the transformation taking place.

Gianna waves her arms from across the room, catching my attention. “Hey, Spencer! Check this out!” She’s talking to a tall, muscular guy with a charming smile, his arm casually draped over her shoulder. I can tell by the way she’s leaning into him that she’s completely captivated. Good for her. I try to muster some enthusiasm for her flirtation.

“Looks like you’re having fun,” I say back, forcing a smile. Gianna just grins and gives me a thumbs-up before turning her full attention back to her conversation.

Taking a deep breath, I try once more to immerse myself in the lively atmosphere. I watch as people dance, cheer, and clink their glasses together, seemingly having the time of their lives. But no matter how hard I try, I just can’t shake the feeling that I don’t belong here—that my true passion lies elsewhere.

I glance over at Gianna again, noting that she’s still fully engaged with her new friend. This could be my chance, I realize—my opportunity to slip away unnoticed. A mixture of guilt and relief washes over me as I consider the option.

“*Who am I kidding?*” I think, taking one last sip of my drink before setting it down on a nearby table. “*This just isn’t me.*”

As I make my way toward the exit, weaving my way through the sea of bodies, I feel a strange sense of freedom. It's as if I'm shedding old skin, leaving behind a part of myself that no longer serves me. And while I know that Gianna may be disappointed in my departure, I'm sure this is the right decision for me.

The cool night air is a balm to my heated skin as I step out of the bar and into the dimly lit street. Relief washes over me, feeling lighter now that I've left the chaos behind. My fingers run along the outline of my ear, a reminder that the world outside has its own version of silence—one that I can embrace wholeheartedly.

“Finally,” I whisper, inhaling deeply. The scent of ocean air drifts in from the shoreline, carrying with it a promise of tranquility. “Time for some peace.”

I start walking, my boots hit the pavement providing a steady rhythm, grounding me in this moment. As I move further away from the bar, the noise in my head fades, replaced by the familiar hum that fills my mind. My thoughts turn inwards, filled with visions of paint-splattered drop cloths and furniture waiting to be transformed into something new.

“Who needs a night out when there's so much to do at home?” I chuckle softly, shaking my head. Determination settles in my chest, a resolve to prioritize my passions rather than getting caught up in someone else's idea of fun.

As I continue down the street, a movement catches my attention. It's barely perceptible in the darkness around me, yet

it stands out, demanding my focus. I pause, looking for my kitty knuckles and pepper spray, then strain to see more clearly. There it is again—a sort of commotion making the hairs on my nape stand.

“I should probably text Gianna and let her know I’m okay.”

I look around, but everything looks normal, but there is more than that. The air smells like desperation—a mixture of pain and fear that sends a shiver down my spine.

At the same time, my phone vibrates with an upcoming text. It’s Gianna asking for my whereabouts. I roll my eyes. I’m sure she wants to drag me back to the bar. As my fingers run over the screen, another message comes in.

This isn’t going anywhere. Send me your location, I’ll be there in a minute.

Alone.

While I’m busy sending my best friend my location, a couple of guys—one of them with a big hand tattoo—come running from the corner. My heart beats faster, and adrenaline surges through my veins as I trudge forward and come face-to-face with the source of the disturbance. A man lies sprawled on the ground, blood oozing from a wound on his side. His eyes, wide with fear, find mine, pleading for assistance.

Immediately, I send my friend another text.

Gianna, call 911.

A guy is on the ground bleeding.

Give them my location. Hurry up and get here.

“Shit,” I say, pocketing my vibrating phone. I’m sure Gianna is panicking. I drop to my knees beside him.

Gianna needs to run here, my mind races, trying to make sense of the situation. Who is this man? What happened to him? And why, of all places, did he have to end up here?

Stay with me. I urge him with my eyes, my whole body trembling. *Help is on the way.*

As if he were listening my words, the man manages a weak nod, his lips pressed into a thin line as he fights to stay conscious. I hold his hand, willing him to stay strong.

The man’s dark hair is matted with sweat and blood, his face pale as the moonlight washing over us. A short stubble covers his jawline, hinting at just hours without care. His starched white shirt, torn in places, reveals a lean, muscular frame that speaks of stamina despite his current weakened state. The vulnerability in his eyes cuts through me, stirring my protective instincts like a lioness guarding her mate.

Blue and red flashes start to lighten the darkness as they approach as relief washes over me. The man’s eyes flutter, and I can tell he’s fading fast.

“You...” I can read the words on his lips. “You... saved me.”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” I say in my mind with a weak laugh, even if I know he can’t hear me. *“But you’re not alone.”*

As the emergency vehicles pull up and paramedics swarm around us, I keep holding his hand. I refuse to let go until they pry it from my grasp, promising they'll do everything in their power to save him.

The paramedics' urgent movements seem to blend with the whirl of blue and red lights, and I feel a strange mixture of hope and anxiety. As they work on the man, I step back and give them space, watching from a distance. My hand feels cold without his grip, and I rub them against my leggings, trying to find warmth.

The familiar figure of Gianna finally appears as she jogs towards me, her eyes wide with concern. "What happened? I saw the commotion, and then I saw you!"

"This man..." I signal, glancing over at the wounded man who's now being loaded onto a stretcher. "I found him like this, Gianna. Bleeding and in pain."

"Who is he?" she asks, her brow furrowing as she tries to make sense of the situation.

"I don't know," I admit, feeling a pang of guilt for not knowing more about the person whose life now hangs in the balance. "But I couldn't just leave him there, G."

"Of course not," she agrees, pulling me into a tight hug, then releases me to keep talking. "You did the right thing, Spencer. I'm proud of you."

As the ambulance doors close and the vehicle speeds away, I can't shake the nagging feeling that there's more to this story

than meets the eye. A part of me wishes I could be by the man's side, seeing him through this ordeal, but I know that's impossible.

"Come on," Gianna says gently, tugging on my arm. "Let's go home."

"No," I'm sure I say this out loud. "I can't leave him alone, G."

"What?"

But she has no time to protest as I run behind a paramedic, asking him silently if I can ride in the ambulance with him. After he rushes me inside, I keep holding this strange man's hand as if my own life were on the line. And I swear I can feel his fingers tightening against mine. *He wants me here.*

No one should go through this alone. No one.

Chapter Two

Percival

My head throbs like someone's pounding a drum inside it, and the pain in my chest is almost unbearable as the dimly lit room spins around me. I blink, trying to focus on something—anything—to anchor myself to reality. My fingers grip at the scratchy sheets as I struggle to sit up straight. What happened?

“Easy there, Mr. Hills,” a soft voice cautions from somewhere in the shadows, a gentle hum that only intensifies my pounding headache and the pain in my torso. “You had quite the night.”

Quite the night is putting it mildly. Images flit through my mind like a frenetic kaleidoscope; the champagne bubbles dancing in my glass, the blinding flash of the paparazzi cameras, the electric energy in the air as the contract was signed. That soccer player, man... he's going to make us all filthy rich.

I can almost feel the crisp paper beneath my fingertips as I signed my name on the dotted line, grinning like a fool in my thousand-dollar suit—sans tie. Those things always feel like they're going to choke the life out of me. The money hasn't even hit my account yet, but I swear I could already smell the intoxicating scent of wealth wafting off the leather of my designer shoes.

“Jesus, what did I do?” I murmur, running my free hand through my tousled hair.

“From what we heard, you went a little overboard with the celebrations,” the woman says, her tone light but firm. “Then you were attacked and ended up here in the hospital.”

What?

Hospital?

I groan, though part of me still clings to the thrill of last night’s victory. Sure, I’ve landed myself in the hospital, but I’ve also landed a deal that’s gonna change my life forever. It’s hard not to smile at the thought, even if the pain in my chest threatens to split it open.

“Try to rest,” the nurse advises, her soft footsteps retreating toward the door. “You’ll need your strength to get better.”

I sink back into the pillows, my body aching and my mind racing with memories of last night’s celebration—the laughter, the cheers, the endless stream of booze. It’s all worth it, I tell myself as I drift back into sleep, the promise of a brighter future shimmering like a mirage on the horizon.

As I drift in and out of sleep, a haunting image flickers behind my closed eyelids—a pair of vivid green eyes that seem to bore straight into my soul. The memory is hazy, distorted by the fog of bright lights, alcohol, and pain, yet the intensity of the connection I felt with the mysterious woman remains.

What the hell happened to me?



“This is heartbreaking,” a familiar voice says, pulling me back to reality. Is that my sister, Morgan? What the hell is she doing here? I blink open my eyes, squinting against the harsh sunlight as it floods the room. Morgana, my older sister, stands a few feet away, her arms crossed over her chest and an expression of concern etched on her face.

Darkness calls me again, but from the blur around me, her voice can still be heard.

“This is frustrating, Evan... He’s breathing on his own, yes, but we’re still waiting for more news,” she whispers. “The doctor should be here any time soon. Yes, the same you recommended.” Then she pauses. “The police have no leads. I called the mayor, but... and he had been moaning about a girl who saved him. I’m not sure if she was also part of this....”

Was she real, or is my mind conjuring her up?

Time and memories mix up together, making my mind even more confused, and then something pulls me to a place where everything vanishes, and my thoughts are forgotten. At least momentarily.

The sun streams in through a crack in the blinds, casting a sliver of light across the sterile white walls of the hospital room. My chest is still throbbing, but at least I can think straight now. Morgana paces back and forth by the window, her phone pressed to her ear. I strain to catch bits of her

conversation, my curiosity piqued despite the dull ache in my skull.

As much as it pains me to hear my sister so upset, I can't blame her. I've always been the one to bounce back from any situation, ready to face whatever comes next. But this time, it feels like my body isn't quite ready to cooperate with that mentality.

"Calm down, Percival," a familiar voice says, pulling me back to reality.

A groan leaves my throat, my head throbbing with each word. "What happened?"

A few seconds of silence follow, as if she were considering what to say.

"From what we can tell, you partied too hard last night, and then someone attacked you," she finally replies, her voice stern but laced with worry. "You're lucky a girl found you and called 911."

"A girl?" I ask, my curiosity piqued. The green-eyed woman flickers through my thoughts again, making me wonder if she was the one who saved me.

"Lance has been trying to piece it all together," Morgana says, nodding toward the other side of the room where he sits, hunched over his phone. He looks up, catching my eye, and gives a full-hearted smile before returning to his investigation.

"Hey," I croak, lifting my hand in a feeble attempt at a return gesture. He simply shakes his head, clearly frustrated with my

slow recovery and the mystery surrounding my current predicament.

“Do you have any idea about what happened?” I ask, hoping my siblings have discovered something about the enigmatic woman from my fragmented memories.

“Nothing concrete yet,” Morgana answers, biting her lip. “But don’t worry, the police are on it. A detective has been around making questions.”

“Thanks,” I murmur, touched by her concern and determination.

As the hours pass and my body fights to recuperate, I find my thoughts drifting back to that night and the woman with the mesmerizing green eyes. The intensity of our connection still lingers as her hold on my hand was. It’s a crazy notion—we’re talking Southern California, not some mystical land of destiny—but I can’t shake the feeling that she holds the key to something more.

“Promise me you’ll be more careful from now on, Percival,” Morgana says as she stands to let Lance take the place she was occupying. Her voice is soft, her eyes filled with love and concern. I nod, knowing that I owe it to her and to myself to make the most of this second chance I’ve been given.

“Promise,” I whisper, my heart swelling with gratitude and the feeling I’ve been given another chance in life. As my brother sits in front of me, I close my eyes, allowing the image of the green-eyed woman to fill my mind once more. She may be lost in the sea of faces that populate this sprawling city, but

I'm determined to get out of here and find her and thank her for saving my life—and for showing me that sometimes, even in the chaos of this big city, fate has a funny way of making itself known.

A knock on the door interrupts my thoughts as a man walks in, his weathered face creasing into a warm smile when he sees me. “Good to see you awake, Mr. Hills. I’m Detective Wayne Taylor from SDPD,” he says, coming to stand by my bedside. “I’m here to help you figure out what happened on Saturday night.”

“In fact,” I start. “Who took me to the hospital? There was a woman, right?”

“What do you mean?” he comes back with a question. I know this game, but at this point, I’ll follow it.

“I have this memory of a young woman holding my hand...”

“At the worst moments, our minds can find a way to comfort us.”

Ha, no. This is more than that.

“I know she was real,” my voice is firm even if I’m not positive. “She brought me here.” The ultimate bluff by Percival Hills, poker master.

“I can’t talk about an outgoing investigation,” he replies while looking for his phone. I should call my assistant to hire a PI and start digging around.

The man asks me many questions, sadly, there are no answers. Even if I was wounded on my flank, my memories

are foggy. Everything about that night is a blur.

“Thank you, Detective.”

He leaves a business card on the bedside table.

“Call me any time if you need anything, all right?” he says, and there’s genuine concern in his eyes. With a nod, I watch as he exits the room, leaving me to contemplate the tangled mess of memories from the night that landed me here.

Morgana finishes her call and comes over to sit by my side, taking my hand in hers. “We’ve been so worried about you. What happened is beyond our understanding.”

“Thanks, Morgan,” I say, giving her hand a squeeze. In that moment, I feel a newfound determination to find the green-eyed woman who saved my life. I owe it to her, and myself, to uncover her identity and repay my debt.

As Morgana leaves the room to fetch some water, I gaze at the card Detective Taylor left behind. My mind buzzes with questions, but one thing is certain: the mysterious woman with the vivid green eyes wasn’t just a figment of my imagination. She’s real, and I’m going to find her.

Southern California may be known for its superficiality and excess, but there’s something about this situation that speaks to a deeper truth, a connection that transcends the mundane. With each passing moment, I become more and more convinced that she holds the key to unlocking a new chapter in my life—one filled with hope, growth, and the kind of

evolution that only comes from confronting your demons and emerging triumphant.

As I lie there, surrounded by the sterile white walls and antiseptic smells of the hospital, a spark of excitement runs at the thought of what the future might hold.

Footsteps echo in the hallway outside my room, a rhythmic reminder of the hustle and bustle of the hospital. I feel like an intruder in this world of beeping machines, crisp white sheets, and whispered conversations. The door swings open, and a woman who identifies herself as Doctor Eliana Sanders enters the room, her lab coat billowing behind her like a cape.

“How are you feeling?” she asks after the introductions.

“Better, thanks,” I reply, attempting to sit up straighter. My body protests, but I ignore the discomfort. No pain, no gain. “Just eager to get out of here.”

“Understandable,” Dr. Sanders says, flipping through the pages on her clipboard. “You were lucky, considering the severity of your wounds and the amount of blood you lost. The surgery went well, and you’re responding how we expected you to. Your vitals look good, and your recovery is progressing just fine. The wound is clean, and there are no signs of infection. We’ll keep monitoring you for any complications, but you should be able to go home soon.”

“Thank God,” I mutter under my breath, relief washing over me. The thought of returning to my own bed, without the constant hum of medical equipment, sounds like heaven.

As Dr. Sanders finishes her examination and exits the room, a chatty nurse named Latisha breezes in. She's a ray of sunshine in the otherwise sterile environment, her laughter echoing down the hallways and brightening the moods of everyone she encounters.

"Hey there, handsome," Latisha teases, giving me a playful wink. "I heard you've been asking about the mysterious lady who brought you in."

"Guilty as charged," I admit, unable to suppress a grin. Despite my current predicament, the intrigue surrounding my enigmatic savior has captivated me.

"Well, I won't keep you in suspense," Latisha says, leaning in conspiratorially. "The nurses at the ER couldn't stop talking about her. She was stunning—dark hair, porcelain skin, and those eyes... Like emeralds, they were. She seemed really concerned about you, too. Stayed by your side until your sister got here."

"Really?" I ask, my heart pounding in my chest. The fact that this woman, a complete stranger, cared enough to see me through the worst of it... It's humbling, to say the least.

"Absolutely," Latisha confirms with a nod. "She didn't leave any contact information, though. Just make sure you were in good hands and vanished."

"Damn," I mutter, disappointment gnawing at the edges of my excitement. The trail has gone cold before it even began.

“Hey, don’t worry,” Latisha reassures me, patting my arm gently. “Fate has a funny way of bringing people together. You’ll find her. I just know it.”

I smile at her optimism, allowing myself to bask in the hope that maybe, just maybe, she’s right. With each passing hour, the desire to uncover the identity of the dark-haired beauty with the vivid green eyes intensifies, driving me forward on a quest for answers and self-discovery.

“Thanks, Latisha,” I say, meaning every word. “I appreciate that.”

“Anytime, sugar,” she replies, giving my hand a reassuring squeeze. “Now, let’s get you feeling better so you can get out there and find your mystery girl.”

As we chat about my recovery and the steps I need to take to regain my strength, I feel invigorated. The journey ahead may be riddled with challenges, but one thing is certain: I won’t stop until I’ve found the woman who saved my life.



As the days pass, my determination to uncover the identity of the dark-haired beauty only grows stronger. I spend hours in bed, envisioning her face, her voice, and the fierce concern she displayed when she brought me in. I can’t shake the feeling that she’s someone important—not just in my life, but in the grand scheme of things.

“Who are you?” I whisper into the quiet room one night, staring at the moonlit ceiling. “And why do I feel like I owe you so much? Once I find you,” I vow, clenching my fists, resolving rushing in my veins. “I’ll make sure you get the reward for saving my life.”

“Hey, Percy,” my brother says, entering my room with Ariel, his wife, close behind. “How are you feeling?”

“Better,” I answer, my voice carrying a newfound determination. “I’ve got something important to do.”

My sister-in-law’s brow furrows with concern. “Percy, you need to focus on your recovery first.”

“Trust me, this is part of it,” I assure her, my heart swelling with gratitude for their support. “I need to find her, the woman who saved me.”

Ariel and my brother exchange glances before nodding in understanding. They know I won’t be dissuaded, that the fire within me has been rekindled by this mysterious woman.

“Alright, we’ll help you,” Ariel agrees, her eyes reflecting the same spark of determination that now burns within me.

The sun sets outside my window, casting long shadows across the room as we discuss our plans. We talk strategy, pooling our resources, and brainstorming ideas on how to uncover the identity of my savior.

“Let’s start by visiting some of the places from that night,” my brother suggests. “Maybe someone saw her or knows something about her.”

“The ER nurses,” I reply, eager to embark on this quest for answers. “And I’ll ask Detective Taylor if he can dig up any information on her.”

As we finalize our plans, I feel invigorated by the renewed sense of purpose coursing through my veins. This isn’t just about repaying a debt; it’s about honoring the new chance her actions allowed me to have and proving that I’m worthy of it.

“Thank you,” I tell, genuine appreciation in my voice. “I couldn’t do this without you.”

“Of course,” Ariel replies, squeezing my hand. “We’re here for you, always.”

“Let’s do it, then,” I say as the last rays of sunlight slip below the horizon. “Tomorrow, we begin our search for the dark-haired beauty who changed my life.”

The night is filled with a sense of anticipation, as if the universe itself is holding its breath, waiting to see what unfolds.

Chapter Three

Percival

“Mr. Hills,” Detective Taylor begins entering my room, his voice low and measured. “I understand you’re looking for the girl who brought you in. While I appreciate your gratitude, I must remind you that there is an ongoing investigation, and any information we have is confidential.”

“Detective, I—” I start to say, but he holds up a hand to stop me.

“However,” he continues, the slightest hint of a smile playing at the corner of his mouth. “I also understand the importance of repaying a debt. So, let’s talk about what you remember.”

My thoughts race as I try to recall any detail I can about that fateful night—the girl’s face, her voice, anything that might lead me to her. As Detective Taylor listens intently, his gaze never leaving mine, I feel a flicker of hope ignite within me. Maybe, just maybe, with his help, I’ll be able to find this girl and repay the debt that weighs so heavily on my soul.

“Detective Taylor,” I say, my voice weak but determined. “I’m not asking for much. Just a hint, a lead, anything that could point me toward the girl who saved my life.” My heart races as I muster every ounce of charm and persuasion I possess. “I owe her everything, and I can’t rest until I’ve found a way to repay her.”

Detective Taylor studies me carefully, his eyes flicking between my pleading gaze and the IV drip hanging beside my bed. It's clear he doesn't want to compromise the investigation, but beneath his gruff exterior, I sense a flicker of empathy.

"Mr. Hills," he sighs, running a hand through his silver hair. "You have to understand that we need to keep certain information under wraps for the integrity of our work." He pauses and then leans in slightly, his voice lowering to an almost conspiratorial whisper. "But... I get it. You feel indebted to her, and as a man of honor, I respect that."

As Detective Taylor takes a moment to consider his options, I try to keep my breathing steady, focusing on the steady beep of the monitors surrounding me. The air in the hospital room seems to grow thick with anticipation, the sterile scent of disinfectant and latex mixing with the warm sunlight drifting in through the window.

"Alright," Detective Taylor finally concedes, his voice tinged with reluctance. "I can't give you all the details, but I can give you the number the call came from." He raises a warning finger before I can interrupt. "That's all I can tell. Do with that information what you will but remember" —his eyes narrow— "you're not the only one looking for her."

"Thank you, Detective," I manage to choke out, my heart swelling with gratitude and hope. "I promise I won't let this information go to waste."

Detective Taylor nods, his expression softening slightly before he rises from his chair. “Just remember, Mr. Hills, we’re on the same side here.” With that, he turns on his heel and strides out of the room, leaving me to contemplate my next move.

As I lay there in my hospital bed, the sun casts long shadows across the sterile white walls. The girl who saved my life is out there, somewhere in the golden haze of this city, and with Detective Taylor’s reluctant help, I now have a way to find her. I may be bruised and battered, but my resolve has never been stronger.

I take a deep breath, trying to steady the whirlwind of emotions that threaten to overwhelm me. I look into Detective Taylor’s eyes, searching for any sign of empathy or understanding. “You have to understand, Detective,” I say, my voice cracking with vulnerability. “I owe this girl everything. She saved my life, and if I can’t find her, I’ll never be able to repay that debt.”

Detective Taylor sighs, rubbing the back of his neck as he paces in front of the window. He seems to be wrestling with something, a battle between duty and compassion playing out behind those sharp, calculating eyes.

He nods, seemingly satisfied with my response. As he heads for the door, I can tell that his internal struggle isn’t completely resolved, but for now, he’s willing to help—and that’s more than I could have hoped for.

“Good luck, Mr. Hills,” he says as he steps out into the bustling hospital corridor, leaving me alone once again with my thoughts and determination to find the girl who saved my life.

The faint scent of antiseptic and the distant sound of footsteps echo through the room as I look at Detective Taylor, my heart pounding with anticipation. His eyes meet mine, and for a moment, all I see is the internal struggle on his face before giving me a piece of paper with some numbers scribbled on it.

I got you!

While the Detective leaves the room, my eyes stay focused on the parchment, my mind starting to plan. First step, get the hell outta here.

Chapter Four

Spencer

The light from the TV fills my living room as I sit cross-legged on the floor, my eyes locked onto the screen. Captions scroll at the bottom, keeping me informed about the latest news.

My brows furrow in concentration, each line of text deepening the creases. As the news races by, I search for any mention of the man I found in the alley—any hint that he’s still alive or an update on his condition. My thoughts are consumed by him; it’s like a strange magnetism that I can’t shake off.

“Local woman finds an injured man in an alley” flashes across the screen, but the details remain sparse. Desperation claws at me, urging me to find out more, though I know I should focus on my own life—my bills, my work flipping furniture. But this man, this stranger I barely know, has somehow taken up residence in my mind.

That night at the hospital, a grim-faced detective arrived. He flashed his badge and proceeded to ask questions but didn’t seem satisfied with the answers we gave him. He warned us not to tell anyone about the crime, fearing that the perpetrator might come after us. Gianna wasn’t present, so she had very little information to provide.

“*Spencer, you’re obsessed,*” I scold myself, shaking my head. “*Get a grip.*” But even as I try to push him from my

thoughts, my heart races with worry. The simple leggings and sweatshirt I'm wearing suddenly feel suffocating, trapping me in my own unease.

“Authorities identified the man as Percival Hills, an important sports agent who recently signed Anastasio Rivera, the new star of *The San Diego Wave*,” the captions continue, offering no reassurance. A wave of frustration washes over me. “San Diego Police Department is investigating the leads, but there is nothing new until now. Mr. Hills condition remains private.”

“Damn it,” I whisper, my fingers clenching into fists as my eyes narrow, determination rising within me. I won't give up so easily—not when there's still hope, I have a name now.

My heart continues to race, and I can't shake the feeling that I need to know more about him. It's as if my entire being is consumed by a whirlwind of curiosity and concern that I can't seem to control. What is this pull, this magnetic force, that compels me to want to help him? I struggle with myself, knowing that I have other priorities in life that need my attention.

“*Think, Spencer,*” I tell myself, tugging at a loose strand of hair. “*You're resourceful. You can find a way.*”

“*Alright, Spencer. Time to get some answers,*” I say to myself, gripping my phone tightly. I scroll through my contacts until I find Gianna's number, tap her name, and start texting with determined presses of my finger.

I need you to come home.

An hour and a half later, when I'm ready to work, my response is delivered.

“Hey, Spence! What's up?” Gianna's cheerful smile appears at my shop threshold.

“Gianna, I need your help.” My hand trembles slightly, betraying my anxiety despite my best efforts to look confident. “Remember that man I found in the alley? I can't stop thinking about him. I've watched the news, they said very little, but his name.”

“Aw, babe, I'm sorry,” she replies sympathetically, her usual exuberance tempered by genuine concern. “What do you want me to do?”

Gianna can understand and use ASL, but she always complains about being too slow at signaling, so usually, I read her lips.

“Could you call the hospital for me? Maybe you'll have better luck getting some information. Ask for a nurse who knows about his case, please.” Finishing, I fidget with my phone, tracing the edge of the screen nervously.

“Sure thing.” Gianna's the best friend ever.

“Thank you, Gia,” I signal, my heart pounding in my chest like a trapped bird against its cage. Thoughts race through my mind, each more frantic than the last. What if he's not okay? What if it's too late?

My heart races. Tension coils in my gut. I bite my lip, struggling for patience.

“Uh, hi.” Gianna starts. “I’m the one who found Mr. Percival Hills... in the alley.”

Then I must wait for an answer. Phone calls aren’t friendly for me.

Silence. My chest tightens.

“Is he...?” I swallow hard. “Is he okay?”

She holds her hand up. “We need to wait,” Gianna mouths. “The woman is looking for his information.”

Mmmm. Weird, almost too easy to be true.

Then Gianna’s eyes open wide like saucers, something isn’t right. “Hey...” she says. “Oh my gosh...”

This craziness needs to finish now. I take my phone from her hands and end the call.

“Spencer? What did you do? You wanted to know about him, he was on the phone!”

Taking a deep breath, I try to steady my racing heart. Percival’s alive and taking calls. That should be enough for now. But it isn’t. My mind continues to whirl with unanswered questions, an inexplicable need to know more about this enigmatic man who’s somehow found his way into my life.

Chapter Five

Percival

As I lounge on the uncomfortable couch in my hospital suite, I find my thoughts consumed by her. The mysterious woman who saved me from that precarious situation, with eyes as green and captivating as emeralds. I replay the scene in my head, admiring her resolve and courage.

“Damn,” I mutter under my breath. “Who are you, Butterfly?”

I’m not one to let things go easily, especially when it comes to a woman who’s piqued my interest. And she’s done more than just that. She’s saved my life, for Christ’s sake. I need to find her, thank her, and repay my debt in any way I can.

The room phone rings abruptly, pulling me from my reverie. Intrigued, I hurriedly answer the call, pressing the device to my ear.

“Hello?”

“Mr. Hills,” comes a sultry voice, one I don’t immediately recognize. “I believe we met briefly at a recent event.”

“Did we now?” I ask coyly, leaning back against the cushions. “And what event might that be?”

“Listen, Percival,” she says, her tone suddenly serious. “This call is about that night, but I’m just an...”

But before she can finish her sentence, the line goes dead. I stare at the phone, dumbfounded.

“Damn it,” I curse, tossing the device onto the coffee table. The call may have ended abruptly, but my intrigue has only grown stronger. *This call is about that night.*

It had to be her.

“Who are you?” I whisper to myself. “And why did you save me?”

I know one thing for certain: I won’t rest until I’ve found her and learned the truth. My green-eyed beauty has sparked something I never knew I needed, and I intend to see it through to the very end.

It’s time to take a step ahead.

The cool breeze from the air conditioning brushes against the portion of my chest that the bandages leave bare as I pull up my laptop. These days, you can find anything online. With a few clicks, I search for any information linked to the mysterious digits.

My heart races as I wait for the results, praying for a clue that will lead me to her. Finally, the search engine reveals its findings: Gianna Renee Bartley. The name seems nearly as enigmatic as the woman herself.

“Alright,” I murmur. A grin spreads across my face as I imagine meeting her, “let’s get acquainted.”

I decide on sending a text—something casual but intriguing enough to pique her interest. Tapping away at my phone, I

write:

Hey there, Gianna.

This is Percival Hills. The man you found at the alley.

I believe you called me, but the line went dead suddenly.

I hit send and lean back, watching the sun dip below the horizon. Gulls cry out overhead, their silhouettes dark against the vibrant sky. It's been far too long since life has offered anything more than a string of glamorous parties and shallow encounters. And now, here was a chance to chase after something truly captivating.

As the minutes tick by, anticipation curls in my stomach like an impatient snake. I fidget with the hem of my shirt, unable to sit still. Just when I'm about to give up hope, my phone buzzes with an incoming message.

Her: How did you get this number?

Me: That doesn't matter. We need to talk.

Her: Look, you're alive. That's all we needed to know.

Me: I don't think that's true.

Let's be honest here for a minute.

I'd like to take you for dinner, but my options at the moment are limited, and time is precious.

Would you come to the hospital?

Her: I don't think that's a good idea.

Me: I'll find you. Make this easier for both of us. Please come to the hospital.

Her: What do you want? We talked with a detective and told him all we knew.

We? This is more complicated than I initially thought.

Me: No police involvement. You saved me that night. I'd like to thank you in the proper way.

Her: You're persistent. I'll be there tomorrow at two.

A triumphant smile dances across my lips as I read her response.

"See you soon," I whisper to the fading light, my heart swelling with hope and curiosity. The journey to uncover the identity of my savior is just beginning—and I can hardly wait.



The sun casts its golden rays through the hospital window, illuminating the luxurious silk robe draped elegantly over my shoulders. When Gianna accepted meeting me here, I made sure to have a lavish spread of food delivered to my room: fresh fruit, gourmet crepes, pastries, freshly pressed juice, and some of the finest coffee Colombia has to offer. The mere thought of eating hospital food sends a shiver down my spine.

"Remember, Percival," my reflection in the polished mirror reminds me, "you need to make a good impression—not just

for yourself, but for her.” The woman who saved me deserves nothing less.

“Morning, Mr. Hills.” A nurse enters the room with a warm smile, her gaze lingering on my attire. “You have a visitor coming?”

“Indeed,” I reply, straightening my silk robe. “A very important one.”

“Must be a special lady,” she teases, giving me a wink before leaving the room.

As the time for Gianna’s arrival nears, a mix of excitement and anxiety fills my chest. I arrange the food on the table, making sure everything is perfect. My heart races with anticipation, fueled by my impatience of finally meeting her.

“Focus, Percival,” I tell myself, taking a deep breath. “This is your chance to repay her kindness, to give her something incredible in return.”

When the door finally opens, I stand tall, ready to greet my savior with all the charm and charisma I possess. She steps into the room, her blond curly hair framing her face like a halo, and I’m struck but not in the way I was anticipating.

Chapter Six

Spencer

As odd as it sounds, a thrift shop has always been a haven for me. A place where I can get lost in a world of forgotten treasures and stories waiting to be discovered. The vibrant colors and patterns of vintage clothing hang from the racks, each piece telling its own tale of yesteryears. Quirky knick-knacks line the shelves, and I smile at a ceramic cat wearing a polka-dotted bowtie.

As I navigate through the narrow aisles, I glimpse a piece of antique furniture tucked away in the back corner. My heart races with anticipation as I walk towards it, brushing past an ornate lamp and a frayed patchwork quilt. And then I see them—the perfect pair of nightstands. Their craftsmanship is exquisite, with delicate carvings adorning the wooden frame and brass handles that gleam in the dim light.

“Wow,” I run my fingers over the smooth surface. I can already imagine them standing proudly beside my bed, the fresh coat of paint I’ll give them, bringing new life to their aged beauty. They would fit perfectly into the vision I have for my home, a blend of old-world charm and modern simplicity.

“Can you believe these were just sitting here? They’re going to look amazing once I’m done with them.”

My mind fills with ideas for how I’ll transform these nightstands, the countless hours I’ll spend sanding and painting until they become the embodiment of my dream. It’s

moments like these that make me feel alive, the thrill of unearthing hidden gems among the clutter and giving them a second chance to shine.

I carefully pull out one of the drawers, taking a closer look at the intricate joinery and appreciating the time and skill that went into creating such a fine piece of furniture. It's hard to believe someone could part with these, but their loss is my gain.

"Spencer, you've got yourself a real treasure here." Right now I'm more determined than ever to bring out the best in these nightstands and, by extension, myself. The world may be chaotic outside these walls, but here, surrounded by the relics of the past, I find peace, purpose, and the promise of a beautiful future.

"Alright, that'll be forty dollars for the pair and five for the t-shirt," says the woman behind the counter, her smile warm and genuine. I place a crisp fifty-dollar bill on the counter, my heart swelling with pride as I take this small step toward building the life I've always envisioned.

As the woman thanks me and bags up my purchase, I imagine what it would be like to have the freedom to come and go as I please, to drive myself to the thrift shop without relying on others for assistance. It's not just about the car or the nightstands; it's about the independence I crave, the chance to make my own decisions and live life on my terms. I know I can't change everything overnight, but each choice brings me one step closer to the person I want to become.

“Take care now,” the woman says as she hands me the receipt. “Can’t wait to see what you do with those nightstands!”

“Thank you,” I reply, then hand her a note saying I’ll pick up the furniture later when my Aunt Orla is available.

With that, I head back to my home. The sun is shining brightly overhead, casting long shadows across the parking lot and bathing everything in a golden glow. It should be a beautiful day, yet something feels off, like an itch at the back of my mind that I can’t quite scratch.

As I walk, I can’t shake the feeling I’m being watched. My steps quicken, my breath coming a bit faster as I glance over my shoulder, searching for any sign of danger or unfamiliar faces. But there’s nothing out of the ordinary—just a few other shoppers going about their day, lost in their own thoughts.

“*Get a grip, Spencer,*” I chastise myself silently, trying to dismiss the uneasy feeling as nothing more than the overactive imagination of an artist. “*You’re just being paranoid.*”

But even as I reassure myself, my instincts tell me that something isn’t right. The air feels heavier, charged with an energy that makes the hairs on my neck stand. My heart races, each beat a reminder that I can’t ignore what my gut is telling me: something is lurking in the shadows, something that has its sights set on me.

And so, as I reach the bus stop, I glance around one last time, searching for any sign of the danger that seems to be

closing in. But there's nothing there, just the empty expanse of the parking lot and the relentless passage of time.

"Maybe it's all in my head," I admit. "Or maybe I'm not as alone as I think."



The ride on the bus back to my aunts' house is mercifully uneventful. The dilapidated Victorian house comes into view, its worn-down exterior a stark contrast to the warmth and love that reside within. Paint peels from the wooden siding like memories of better days, and the garden, though overgrown with wildflowers and weeds, has an undeniable charm.

I step inside, the comforting aroma of freshly baked pastries mingling with the familiar scent of old books and well-loved furniture.

"Hi," I say, one of the few noises I dare to make.

Then my Aunt Fiona's smiley face comes into view. "You're finally home. Come join me in the kitchen. We have a guest."

With my curiosity piqued, I follow her into the cozy kitchen. There, sitting at the table sipping coffee and enjoying a pastry, is a man. One I thought I would never see again. Let alone sitting in my home as if he belongs there. His charming smile lights up the room, his confident demeanor a striking contrast to my own cautious nature.

“Hey there, Spencer,” he greets me, his eyes sparkling. “I’ve been looking for you.”

“Uh...” I stammer, taken aback by his sudden appearance. Somehow, I manage to take the notebook from my bag and scribble on a sheet. “What are you doing here?”

“Your aunt invited me a coffee,” he explains, taking another sip of coffee. “I hope you don’t mind.”

“Of course not,” my aunt says with a smirk pulling up her lips. The traitor. “She’s just surprised, that’s all.”

“Surprises can be fun,” he teases, his smile never wavering. “Besides, it’s nice to see you in better circumstances.”

Maybe, I think to myself, the future holds more surprises than I ever imagined.

“Spencer, dear, you must be tired after your day shopping,” Aunt Fiona says, sliding a plate of warm pastries in front of me. “Why don’t you sit down and tell us all about it?”

“Thanks, Aunt Fiona,” I reply, my stomach grumbling at the delightful aroma of her freshly baked treats. As I bite, my mind begins to race with conflicting thoughts. “I found a set of amazing nightstands. I thought they would look beautiful in my room, but they will sell well, and you know...” I say, trying to focus on the conversation.

“Your aunt told me you’re an amazing artist,” Percival chimes in, leaning forward with genuine curiosity. “What do they look like?”

“Well, they’re made of solid wood with intricate carvings on the sides. They’re really beautiful,” I describe, feeling my cheeks flush under his intense gaze while knowing my aunt will take over and translate for him.

“Sounds like you found a treasure,” he compliments, flashing that charming smile of his.

“Spencer has always had an eye for finding hidden gems,” Aunt Fiona adds affectionately, patting my hand.

As the conversation continues, I’m increasingly drawn to Percival’s captivating presence. At the same time, my desire for independence gnaws at me; having a private moment with a man is challenging.

“Spencer, are you okay?” Percival asks, noticing the faraway look in my eyes.

“Uh...” I answer hastily, forcing a smile. “Just lost in thought for a moment.”

“Thinking about those nightstands?” he teases, with a laugh I wish my ears would register.

“Something like that,” I write, my internal struggle deepening as I wrestle with the magnetic pull of Percival and my yearning for self-sufficiency.

“Listen, Spencer,” he says, his gaze turning soft. “I know we barely know each other, but I’d love to learn more about you. If you’ll let me, of course.”

My heart races as I weigh my options, torn between the allure of this enigmatic man and the independence I’ve always

sought. As I glance at Aunt Fiona's encouraging smile and Percival's unwavering gaze, I find myself on the precipice of a decision that could change my life forever.

"I don't know." My words on the paper.

The warmth of Aunt Fiona's kitchen envelops us as she refills our coffee mugs, the rich aroma of freshly brewed beans mingling with the sweet scent of her homemade pastries.

"I like to surf in the mornings. These days will be slow for me." He pats his side, a reminder of what happened that night. "Would you like to come with me?"

"Spencer, dear," Aunt Fiona interjects gently, her eyes twinkling with affection. "I remember when you were just a little girl, playing on the beach. You've always been more of a sandcastle architect than a wave rider, haven't you?"

I chuckle, feeling a wave of nostalgia wash over me. A long time ago, my mother used to take me to the beach, when I wasn't sick. As a child, I was very skinny, always struggling with a cold. My mother was a carefree woman and didn't pay a lot of attention to me. In the end, when a respiratory infection made me very sick, the best she could do was leave me here with her two best friends. Orla and Fiona aren't my blood family, but they took care of me as if I were.

"Ah, a true SoCal native, huh?" Percival muses, sipping his coffee thoughtfully. "I can respect that. But who knows? Maybe you'll discover a hidden talent for surfing after all."

I roll my eyes playfully, though secretly, I'm touched by his interest in my life and the easy way he's managed to draw me out of my shell. The comforting atmosphere of the kitchen eases some of the tension within me.

"I'm sure you're both curious about my presence here," Percival says after finishing his coffee.

Curious is an understatement, but I nod in agreement, trying to keep my face neutral and my heart rate like a drum.

Percival leans back in his chair, running a hand through his tousled hair. The man is wearing navy pants and a crisp white shirt. How he managed to look so edible after spending days at the hospital is a mystery to me. "Well, after you saved my life, Spencer, I feel indebted to you. And I thought, what better way to repay that debt than by helping you achieve your dreams?"

My heart skips a beat, and I wonder if this is some sort of elaborate joke. But as I glance between Percival and Aunt Fiona, their expressions remain sincere. It's clear they've discussed this already, and I can't deny that the idea of having someone on my side, someone who genuinely wants to support me, is enticing.

"Are you serious?" I write on the notepad hesitantly, the pen shaking as the words.

"Absolutely," Percival responds, his eyes locked onto mine. "Don't be afraid to ask for whatever you want. I offer you to live the time of your life, to help you to achieve your dreams."

I blink back tears, overwhelmed by the offer and the emotions flooding through me. A part of me still longs for independence, but another part yearns for this chance to follow my dreams, even if it means accepting help from someone else.

“Spencer,” Aunt Fiona says gently, resting a hand on my arm. “This is an incredible opportunity. I know you’ve always been determined to do things on your own, but sometimes, we all need a little help.”

Her words resonate deeply within me, and as I look at Percival, I can see the sincerity in his dark eyes. He truly wants to help me, and maybe, just maybe, I should let him. With a deep breath, I reach across the table and grasp his hand, feeling the warmth of his skin against mine.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” I write. This sounds like winning the lottery. I’ve never considered myself lucky enough.

Percival takes my hand and electricity runs into my veins. What is happening to me?

“Let me do this for you,” he mouths slowly, as if talking to a kid. “I owe you my life.”

“What kind of person would I be if I accepted your offer?” My penmanship is a mess on paper. My hands are sweating.

“A smart one,” he counters with a wink.

Aunt Fiona is looking at us with her blue eyes open like saucers. Her thoughts are evident in those orbs.

“No,” I know he can hear me, but I give him a shake of my head.

We aren't playing this game.

“At least think about it.” Damn the man is persistent.

“No.” The word leaves my mouth again, and that's the last thing I'm saying.

Believe me, it will be.

Chapter Seven

Percival

Anastasio “Tasio” Rivera, the world’s best soccer player, is throwing a tantrum like an opera diva in my office. The walls of glass rattle as his booming voice echoes throughout the building. His complaints drip with frustration and arrogance:

“I can’t score goals looking like this! How are we ever gonna win a championship?” At this point in his career, he should know the jerseys are made with every player’s measure, and the fabric is specially manufactured for the team.

His sharp gaze raked across me and then rested on the bookcase filled with awards earned by various athletes and achievers, past and present. He wouldn’t dare think of taking down one of those trophies! But then again...

Ignoring the urge to close my eyes, I lean back in my chair and think about how to handle him. The reports I got yesterday said that Tasio has been behaving worse than usual. It’s something I needed to get used to when I became his agent two years ago, but now it was taking its toll on me physically. My head throbbed worse than ever, and I wondered if I could process anything he said or do any work at all right now without passing out from pain. Somehow, I still had to ensure everyone got paid what they were owed every couple of weeks and kept our company running smoothly. And yet there will

always be things money can't buy, and frankly, that list just keeps getting longer for me...

“Gotcha,” I declared with a hint of sarcasm. As an agent, it's my job to ensure my clients get the best outcome, even if that means altering football shirts. “If you want me to be your advocate next time, I expect you to call me before pulling a stunt like this in the locker room. You're the team's captain, for crying out loud! Have you considered what type of memes your team will make during their snack breaks? Better watch your back, Tasio. No one wants to look like a drama queen.”

With that, I delivered one last metaphorical slap to his ego, and the man calms down immediately. After that, we chat for a little bit. He reminds me about the upcoming game coming in the next weeks against the team's legendary rival, Los Angeles Stars. The season's grand finale was around the corner. As his management head, I had already reserved a balcony for myself—and what's more, I invited my brother and Adrik to join me. Then, like a bolt out of the blue, it occurred to me that Spencer should also be there. She'd never witnessed such a monumental occasion before; this would truly be something special.

After spending some hours at the office dealing with other urgent matters, I'm opening the door to my home when my phone rings. Fuck, even if I don't want to, I need to pick up this call.

“Detective Taylor,” I greet him. “I wasn't expecting news so soon.”

“Then this isn’t the conversation you were looking for, Mr. Hills.”

Hmmm, this man is playing one of his usual games. “What can I do for you, detective?”

“We are following some leads. But I’d like to ask you for a favor.”

I knew it. Someone like Taylor doesn’t give a huge piece of information like Spencer’s phone number without a reason.

“What can I do for you?”



The warm aroma of freshly brewed coffee surrounds me as I sit at a table in the cozy café, taking in the bustling crowd around me. Gosh, I missed this. After a fast recovery, and despite Morgan’s complaints, the doctor discharged me to the hospital a few days ago. Once I took a proper shower in my own bathroom, I drove to Spencer’s home. The need to surprise her urged my steps.

Sipping my cup of joe, I marvel at the assortment of people that fill this small space. Artists, businessmen, and families alike. My gaze wanders from one face to the next, each person carrying their own story. But my thoughts are somewhere else as my mind refuses to let her go. Gosh, she’s stunning. That dark hair and those eyes, the color is so unique. And the curiosity shinning in them...

“Excuse me, Percival?” a soft voice interrupts my thoughts. I look up and find myself caught in the gaze of striking blue eyes. The woman before me is Fiona McDonald, her curvy figure outlined by a simple black dress. She has an air of warmth and kindness radiating off her, making me feel instantly drawn to her.

“Hey, Fiona.” I stand to greet her, trying to maintain my usual confident demeanor. “Please, have a seat.”

“Thank you,” she replies with a smile, her accent lilting through the air. As she sits down, I notice the faint scent of baked goods clinging to her, reminding me of the stories Spencer has shared about her doting aunt’s penchant for baking.

“Can I get you anything?” I ask, gesturing towards the menu on the table.

“Oh, no, thank you,” she answers, waving her hand dismissively. “I just had a lovely croissant from that bakery down the street.”

“Ah, I know the place. My sister-in-law owns it.” I nod, letting my eyes wander back to the crowd for a brief moment before returning my attention to Fiona.

“I love Ariel. The girl is amazing.” I nod in response. Yes, Ariel is pretty amazing, and has a way of putting my brother in his place that is admirable.

“So, how have you been?”

“Busy, as always,” she chuckles lightly, her eyes twinkling with amusement. “But enough about me. I hear you’re quite the character, Percival. A wicked womanizer and a party-lover.”

“Guilty as charged,” I admit with a grin, leaning back in my chair. “But I promise, I’m not all fun and games.”

“Good to know,” Fiona says, her eyes narrowing playfully. “Spencer could use someone with a heart of gold in her life.”

A spark of hope ignites inside me. Since the day Spencer saved my life, I’ve been determined to repay the favor—and maybe even win her over in the process. But first, I need to find a way to bridge the communication gap between us.

“Speaking of Spencer,” I begin cautiously, “I was wondering if you might have some advice on how to communicate better with her. You know, given her hearing loss.”

The sun casts a warm glow on Fiona’s face as she talks, and I’m captivated by her storytelling. The way she describes Spencer. Her strengths, struggles, and passions brings her to life in my mind, making me feel like I know her even better than before.

“Wait,” I say, holding up a hand to pause the conversation. “Did you just say she taught herself how to do all of that?”

“Absolutely,” Fiona replies, her eyes glittering with pride. “Spencer has always been resilient and resourceful. She never lets anything hold her back, especially not her hearing loss.”

I nod, jotting down notes on my phone that I've pulled from my pocket. "Resilient" and "resourceful" are now permanently etched into my understanding of who Spencer is. It's truly admirable, she's more than a gorgeous face.

"Speaking of her hearing loss," I venture, looking up from my phone. "What's the best way for me to communicate with her? I want to ensure I'm not doing anything that might make her uncomfortable or frustrated."

Fiona smiles warmly at my question, clearly appreciating my concern for her niece. "That's very thoughtful of you. Honestly, Spencer is quite adept at reading lips and understanding people, but it's important to make sure you're facing her when you speak so she can see your lips clearly. And try not to cover your mouth with your hands or anything like that."

"Got it," I reply, scribbling down those key points. "Face her, speak clearly, don't cover my mouth. Anything else I should know?"

"Patience is key," Fiona advises. "Sometimes, it may take her a moment to process what you're saying, especially if it's a complex thought or idea. Just give her time, and don't rush her."

"Patience," I repeat, adding it to my list. It's something I'm not always the best at, but for Spencer, I'll make the effort.

"Lastly," Fiona adds, "remember that just because she can't hear everything doesn't mean she isn't perceptive. Spencer is incredibly intuitive and often picks up on nonverbal cues even

better than most hearing people. So, be genuine with her—she'll know if you're not.”

“Thank you, Fiona,” I say earnestly, folding up my notepad and tucking it back into my pocket. “I appreciate your insights and promise to do my best to communicate effectively with Spencer.”

“Of course,” Fiona replies, a warm smile spreading across her face. “She deserves someone who will truly understand her world and make the effort to connect with her in a meaningful way.”

As our conversation winds down, I thank Fiona for her invaluable insights and promise to keep her updated on my progress. We part ways, leaving me energized and filled with anticipation for what the future holds. With newfound determination, I return home, call my assistant and instruct her to find me the best teacher in town—meanwhile, I'm starting on my own. The first step will be setting up a quiet corner dedicated to learning ASL as I'm eager to embark on this journey that will bring me closer to the stunning woman who gave me a second chance in life. “Alright, Hills, let's do this,” I murmur to myself, diving into the first lesson. I sit bare-chested on my favorite chair while I familiarize myself with basic signs and fingerspelling, envisioning the look on Spencer's face when I surprise her with my newfound skills.

There is a knock on the door that makes me furrow my brow. I'm not expecting any guests. Fuck people, I'm busy. But whoever is there is insistent.

“Hey, bro!” my brother calls out from the doorway, a paper bag in his hands, while he flashes me a teasing grin. “No shirt again? You know, you have plenty of them in this house.”

“With a body like this?” I pat at my chiseled abs; I’ve worked hard for this. “I’m not wearing shirts unless it is necessary.”

“What are you doing?”

“I’m learning ASL to better communicate with Spencer.”

“Really?” he asks with genuine surprise in his voice. “That’s... actually pretty awesome, brother.”

“Thanks,” I reply, feeling a surge of pride at his words. I know that in order to win Spencer’s trust, I need to transform myself—no more being the party-loving womanizer. It’s time to grow and change for the better.

“Keep at it, Percival,” I whisper to myself, my heart swelling with anticipation for the day when I can finally bridge the communication gap with Spencer. “You ready for some In-N-Out? We gotta celebrate your freedom, SoCal style.”

“Man, I’ve been dreaming about a Double-Double with Animal Style fries since I woke up in that hospital bed,” I reply, my mouth watering at the thought.

“Spoken like a true Californian.”

This isn’t a social visit. My brother came to check on me. To see how I’m doing. Since the very moment the doctor gave me the green light to leave the hospital, Morgan and Lance were adamant about taking care of me. But there was—and there is

—no need for them to do that. The little boy who needed his siblings all the time grew up, and I'm determined to not be a nuisance to anyone.



I sit on the edge of my bed, still reeling from the realization that I may have come on too strong with Spencer. My fingers fumble with the ASL learning materials I printed out earlier across the duvet and an open laptop all serving as reminders of my decision.

“Maybe I should give her some space,” I admit aloud, my voice echoing in the dimly lit room.

As if on cue, the setting sun casts a warm golden glow through the window, painting the walls with streaks of tangerine and russet. The sight brings me back to the first time I met Spencer, her green eyes shimmering like emeralds in the alley's dimmed lights. My chest swells with emotion as I remember how she saved me, despite not knowing who I was.

“Damn it, Percival,” I mutter, swallowing hard. “You've got to do better.”

My gaze falls on the ASL alphabet chart with each hand shape representing a letter and another opportunity to understand Spencer's world. In this moment, I make a decision—a decision born from the undeniable connection we share and the faith that she will eventually come around.

“Alright,” I say with determination, standing up and clenching my fists. “She’s like a butterfly. I need to give her some time and space. Here’s to hope,” I murmur, the words hanging in the air like a promise waiting to be fulfilled.

Chapter Eight

Spencer

Sunlight filters through the dusty windows of my workshop as I sit on a wooden stool, sandpaper in hand, working on the antique dresser I found last week. My leggings and sweatshirt are covered in sawdust, and the tendrils of my unruly hair have escaped from my messy bun. The old wood comes alive under my fingertips, revealing its intricate patterns and telling the story of a time long past.

But the thought of stepping into the unknown sends a shudder down my spine. My cautious nature kicks in, and I start to weigh the pros and cons of accepting Percival's offer. On one hand, it could be an incredible opportunity to explore my passion for art and perhaps even transform my life. On the other hand, it means leaving behind the stability I've worked so hard to achieve.

As I continue to work, my thoughts drift to Percival and his words when we last met. His charm, that disarming smile, and his shirtless confidence have been lingering in my mind, playing like a movie reel on repeat. I wonder what it would be like to go out with him—to step out of my quiet world and embrace the unknown.

Let me do this for you, he had said, his eyes shining with a mix of gratitude and mischief.

Is it really worth the risk? I muse, pausing my work for a moment. It's not like me to get swept up in fantasies,

especially with someone like Percival. But then again, something about him that makes me feel alive—a spark of excitement that I haven't felt in years.

I picture him in my mind's eye: those broad shoulders, his eyes crinkling when he smiles, and the warmth of his laughter. It's hard to deny that he's attractive, even if he does have a reputation for being a party-loving womanizer. But beneath that exterior, I've glimpsed a heart of gold; a loyalty to the people he cares about that can't be faked.

“Maybe,” I whisper, my fingers resuming their rhythmic dance across the dresser's surface, “maybe it's time to take a leap of faith.”

For the first time in my life, I find myself yearning for something more than the monotonous safety of my daily routine. The prospect of an adventure with Percival, as terrifying as it may be, stirs a newfound curiosity within me. And, perhaps, that's exactly what I need.

“Spence!” I look up just in time to see her wild, curly hair bouncing as she skips towards me. She stops right outside the workshop, her eyes sparkling with excitement. “You'll never guess what happened!”

“Hey, Gia,” I say, setting aside the sandpaper and wiping the sweat from my brow. “What's up?”

“Okay, so your aunt told me what happened with Percival earlier, and she told me about this amazing offer he made you,” she says, her face flushed with enthusiasm. “He wants to

take you on an adventure! You know, something out of your comfort zone. Surfing is a good start.”

I sigh, glancing back at the half-finished dresser. “Yeah, he did mention something about that.”

“Spence, this is huge!” Gianna exclaims, her hands waving in the air. “When was the last time you did something truly exciting? Something that made your heart race and your palms sweat?”

I fidget with the hem of my sweatshirt, a little embarrassed. “I guess it’s been a while.”

“Exactly!” Gianna beams at me, her infectious laugh filling the air. “This is the perfect opportunity for you to break free from the monotony and embrace life—really live, you know?”

I bite my lip, thinking about the weight of her words. My life has always been structured and predictable. The idea of stepping into the unknown with someone like Percival both terrifies and intrigues me.

“Come on, bestie,” Gianna urges, her eyes pleading. “You’ve got this incredible talent and passion for art, but you’re always hiding behind your excuses. Don’t you think it’s time to take a risk? To see what else is out there?”

“Maybe,” I sigh, feeling the familiar flutter of anticipation in my chest. “But do you really think Percival is the right person for that?”

“Absolutely!” she insists with confidence. “He may be a bit of a playboy, but he won’t let you down.”

I look at my friend, her unwavering belief in both me and Percival, giving me courage. Maybe she's right. Maybe it is time for me to step out of my comfort zone and embrace the adventure waiting for me.

“Okay,” I say, nodding slowly. “I’ll do it.”

Gianna squeals in delight—in my imagination the sound is loud and clear—wrapping me in a tight hug before starts jumping up and down. As I watch her, I feel a sense of hope and excitement for what the future holds. And maybe, just maybe, this leap of faith will lead to something truly extraordinary.

Feeling the weight of my decision, I take a deep breath and reach for my phone. My fingers hover over the screen, anxiety swirling in my stomach as I prepare to text Percival. The anticipation is electric, and I feel a sense of excitement at the possibilities that lay before me.

“Alright, Spence,” I whisper to myself. “Time to take the plunge.”

I tap out a simple message, my heart racing with each word:

Hey, Percival. I’ve thought about your offer, and I’m in.

Hitting send, I release the breath I didn’t realize I was holding. A thrilling mixture of hope and uncertainty fills me as I imagine what might come from joining forces with Percival. His undeniable charm and good looks have captivated me since our first encounter, and the thought of growing closer to him sends a shiver down my spine.

As I wait for his response, my mind drifts to the last time we were together. The way he looked at me, his eyes sparkling with mischief and warmth, made me feel alive in a way I hadn't experienced in years. And when his hand brushed against mine, the touch sending sparks through my veins, I knew that there was something between us—something that went beyond gratitude or friendship.

“Spencer!” Gianna touches my shoulder, breaking through my reverie, and making me jump. “You’re doing that thing again!”

“What thing?” I ask, trying to play innocent.

“Staring off into space with that dreamy look on your face,” she teases, her eyes twinkling. “Come on, spill it. What’s got you so lost in thought?”

“Nothing,” I lie, my cheeks flushing with embarrassment. “Just... waiting for a text.”

“From Percival?” Gianna asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Maybe,” I admit, biting my lip. “I told him I’m in for the adventure, and now, I’m just... waiting.”

“Good for you!” she exclaims, giving me an encouraging smile. “Who knows what the future holds, right?”

“Right,” I echo, the word filled with hope and possibility as I cling to the promise of having fun.

But no matter what awaits me, I’m ready to embrace the unknown and chase after the life I’ve always dreamt of. With each step forward, I’m leaving behind the person I once was

and transforming into someone new—a woman unafraid of taking risks and pursuing her passions.

And for the first time in my life, I can't wait to see what lies ahead.

Chapter Nine

Percival

I can't shake the feeling that I need to do more to connect with Spencer. As I sit on the sand, my fingers fumble over my phone screen, searching for more ASL tutorials. I'm determined to communicate with her in a better way, even if it means stumbling through sign language like a newborn giraffe learning to walk.

Spencer's figure comes to view like a mirage as she jogs towards the water's edge.

The sun has just begun to rise, casting a warm glow over the ocean and turning the sky into a canvas painted with shades of pink, orange, and gold. The sound of waves crashing against the shore creates a soothing rhythm, and I can almost feel the pulse of the Earth beneath my bare feet. Oceanside is truly at its best during these tranquil hours when the world seems to be holding its breath, waiting for the day to begin.

"Ready for some surfing?" I ask, trying to suppress my excitement. She nods with a glint of anticipation in her green eyes.

As we prepare our surfboards, I steal glances at her graceful movements. I need to keep my hands to myself or obvious things are going to happen here. Yeah, behaving like a teenager at the age of thirty-two. Great.

“Let’s do this,” I say, and she answers with a nod, smiling as she catches me watching her. I grin back, hoping my efforts will pay off. And maybe, just maybe, I’ll finally find a way to express my gratitude for everything she’s done for me.

The woman I can’t get out of my head hands me a note as she steps onto the sand beside me. “Why does the sun have to rise so early?” Spencer complains. Her eyes squint against the brightening horizon, and I can tell she’s not used to waking up at this hour. “You sure this is the best time for surfing? It feels like an ungodly hour.”

“Trust me, it’s worth it,” I assure her, my enthusiasm unfazed by her skepticism. “The waves are perfect right now, and there’s something magical about catching a ride just as the world wakes up. You’ll see.”

Spencer sighs but nods in resignation. She looks stunning, even in her grumpy state. Dressed in an old-fashioned black swimsuit that hugs her curves in all the right places, she exudes an air of vintage elegance. It will be a challenge to keep my instincts under control as my cock sometimes has a mind of its own.

She gives me another nod, but her eyes are focused on the ocean in front of us while pulling her hair back into a tight ponytail. Her green eyes narrow with determination, and I sense that she’s ready to embrace the challenge despite her initial reluctance.

“First things first,” I say, leading her toward the water’s edge while making sure my face remains in her sight. “We need to

get you comfortable on the board.”

As we walk, I take note of the smooth sand beneath our feet, the salty scent of the ocean filling my nostrils, and the sound of the crashing waves growing louder with each step. My heart races in anticipation of what’s to come, and I silently hope Spencer will fall in love with surfing as much as I have.

Something inside me screaming why? But I silence the question, getting into the here and now.

“Okay, here we go,” I say, positioning her on the board. “Remember to keep your weight centered and bend your knees slightly. And most importantly, have fun!”

Her skeptical expression slowly transforms into a smile as she nods, and I feel a sense of pride in knowing that I’ve managed to coax her out of her shell, even if just a little. As we push off into the waves, I find myself more excited than ever before, eager to share this exhilarating experience with the woman who has come to mean so much to me.

As Spencer shifts her weight on the board, her black swimsuit hugs her body in all the right places. The way it accentuates her curves and flatters her figure sends my heart pounding against my chest. I swallow hard, momentarily entranced by her porcelain skin and the droplets of water glistening like diamonds upon it.

“Alright, let’s start with the basics,” I say, shaking off my distraction. “When you feel the wave coming, paddle with both arms to gain some speed.”

She makes a gesture, demonstrating a tentative stroke.

“Exactly like that!” I encourage her, impressed by her keen intuition. “Now, when you want to stand up on the board, put your hands by your chest and push up, like doing a push-up before stepping or jumping into a standing position.”

Her green eyes meet mine, filled with determination. “I think you got it. Can we try it?”

I smile warmly, feeling a strong connection forming between us as we share this experience.

We spend the next hour practicing, with me offering tips and guidance while Spencer applies herself wholeheartedly to every aspect of the lesson. Her cautious nature has been replaced by a newfound sense of thrill, and I’m struck by the beauty unfolding before me.

“Damn, Spencer! You’re really getting the hang of this!” I exclaim after she manages to ride a small wave for several seconds.

She beams at me, her face flushed with excitement as my chest swells with pride.

As we continue our lesson, I find myself increasingly drawn to Spencer, not just her physical beauty but also her resilience and spirit too. She is like the ocean itself. Powerful, mysterious, and alluring. And as we ride the waves together, I hope our bond will continue to grow stronger, just like the tides surrounding us.

Catching a wave together, Spencer and I glide effortlessly across the water's surface. The ocean spray tickles my skin, and the adrenaline courses through my veins, igniting a fire within me that I've never felt before. Beside me, I see Spencer grinning ear to ear as she maneuvers her surfboard with surprising ease, her green eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Look at you!" I shout, unable to contain my joy, even if I know she can't hear me. It doesn't matter, she can feel it. "You're a natural!"

Spencer laughs in response, her happiness infectious. As we ride the wave toward the shore, I'm captivated by her playful spirit. She splashes me with a flick of her hand, sending water droplets onto my face, and I find myself laughing with her. We're like two kids enjoying a day at the beach, free from worries and responsibilities.

"Ready for another one?" I ask as we paddle back out into the deeper waters. Spencer nods eagerly, her determination evident despite her hearing loss. She's not letting her disability hold her back, and I'm beyond impressed by her resilience.

As we position ourselves for the next wave, I decide to try something new. Paddling closer to Spencer, I sign, "Let's ride this one together."

Her eyes light up with excitement as she nods her agreement. When the wave finally reaches us, we paddle in unison, the powerful force of the ocean propelling us forward. The sensation is electrifying, our synchronized movements creating

a sense of unity between us. It's as if we're becoming one with the ocean and each other.

Together, we've conquered the waves, and I think that this is only the beginning of something unknown.

As the sun continues its ascent, casting a warm glow on the water, I realize our connection has deepened even further. Our laughter and playfulness have given way to a bond forged in trust and understanding. As I look into Spencer's eyes, I see a glimpse of our future—one filled with joy, adventure, and endless possibilities.

"Let's do this again soon," I sign, my heart swelling with hope.

"Ok," she makes the basic sign, her smile radiating pure happiness.

And with that promise echoing between us, we ride the waves, embracing the freedom the ocean has to offer.



The sun beats down on us as we take a break, sitting on our surfboards and floating atop the gentle swells. I notice how Spencer's damp hair frames her face, accentuating the softness of her features. The sea breeze carries the faint scent of her sunscreen, mingling with the salty air.

She looks for her notepad and then touches my arm softly, catching my attention. "I have to admit, this is way more fun

than I thought it would be.” She wrote.

“Really?” I ask, grinning. “What did you expect?”

“Well, I don’t know... I guess I was nervous about falling and looking like an idiot.” She shrugs after finishing, a sheepish smile playing on her lips.

“Hey, we all fall sometimes,” I reassure her. “Besides, you’re a natural. You just needed someone to show you the ropes.”

“Thanks,” she scribbles, her green eyes sparkling with gratitude. “It means a lot that you took the time to teach me.”

Our conversation doesn’t flow effortlessly, but it’s punctuated by laughter. I need to keep practicing my ASL as I find myself drawn deeper into Spencer’s world, captivated by her unique perspective and quiet strength.

“Before we met,” I begin, hesitating for a moment before continuing, “I didn’t know anything about ASL or the community. But now I see how much richer life can be when we expand our horizons and learn from one another.”

As the day flies by, we continue to share our thoughts and experiences, each revelation only strengthening the bond between us. The ocean serves as a backdrop for our burgeoning connection, its endless depths mirroring the infinite possibilities ahead.

“Hey, how about we catch one more wave before we call it a day?” I suggest, feeling the pull of the water beneath me.

Spencer doesn’t reply, but her face alight with anticipation.

As I glance over at her, I am struck by this pull that has taken place within both of us. A world we are eager to explore side by side.

Chapter Ten

Spencer

As I sit on the shore, sand clinging to my damp skin, reflecting on the exhilarating experience of riding those waves. Every crest and trough seemed to defy my expectations, offering a thrill that surged through me like electricity. The feeling of being so close to the raw power of the ocean, with nothing between me and the water but a thin board, was both terrifying and intoxicating. I never thought I'd enjoy surfing this much, but now I find myself craving more.

My eyes follow Percival as he dances across the waves, his mastery evident in every smooth turn and daring maneuver. He moves with a grace and precision that belies his reputation as a wicked party boy, commanding the surfboard as if it were an extension of himself. Sunlight catches the droplets of saltwater on his chiseled muscles, making them glisten like polished bronze. I'm captivated by the sight, barely able to tear my gaze away.

I feel my cheeks grow warmer, unsure of how to respond to whatever is happening to me. Instead, I focus on the way the sun reflects off the water, casting shimmering patterns across the surface. It's moments like these, where the world seems to slow down and I can appreciate the beauty around me, that make me long to capture it all on canvas. Maybe, if I'm lucky, I'll find a way to do just that someday.

“Alright, enough daydreaming,” Percival says playfully, snapping me out of my reverie. “I’ve got something else planned for us today, so let’s get a move on!”

And with that, he strides confidently across the beach, leaving me to scramble after him, curiosity and anticipation bubbling up inside me like champagne.

We stroll down the pier, the sound of seagulls cawing overhead and the warmth of the sun on our faces. As we round a corner, the scent of freshly brewed coffee reaches my nostrils, and I instantly perk up.

“Ah, here we are,” Percival announces, gesturing toward a quaint café nestled near the pier. The cozy atmosphere, complete with mismatched chairs and tables, gives off a welcoming vibe.

“Let me guess, you’re a regular here?” I ask, writing the words on my notebook, already knowing the answer.

“Guilty as charged,” he admits with a grin. “Best breakfast burritos in town.”

I accept with a nod, stepping inside and taking in the warm ambiance of the café.

As we approach our table by the window, Percival pulls out a chair for me with a chivalrous smile. “Here you go,” he says, his eyes crinkling at the corners.

I marvel at how effortlessly Percival seems to navigate social situations. It’s a skill I’ve always struggled with, given my hearing loss. But today, there’s a newfound confidence within

me, sparked by our time spent surfing and the undeniable connection that's forming between us.

“Ready to see what all the fuss is about?” Percival asks, raising an eyebrow.

I give him my response with another nod, my curiosity piqued and my heart beating a little faster.

The ocean breeze gently brushes my face as Percival and I continue our breakfast, savoring every bite of our breakfast. He chats nonstop about everything from his favorite surf spots to the latest art exhibitions in town. Despite our differences, it's easy to see that we share a mutual love for the beauty life has to offer.

“Did you ever imagine you'd be out here, surfing with someone like me?” Percival asks playfully, his eyes locked on mine.

“Never in a million years,” I write, laughing. Dang, I hate the fact our conversations have to be so complicated, penning every word cuts the emotion and spontaneity. “But I'm glad I am. You've shown me a side of life I never knew existed.”

Percival grins, and I notice the way his smile lights up his entire face, making him even more attractive than before. It feels as though an invisible thread connects us, drawing us closer with every word we exchange.

“Spencer, have I ever told you how much I admire your determination?” he says, sincerity lacing his voice. “You don't let anything hold you back, and that's truly inspiring.”

I reply with another nod, touched by his words.

He leans in closer, his mischievousness shining through as a gleam of excitement dances in his gorgeous dark eyes. “You know, I’ve always believed that life is meant to be lived to the fullest. And I’m glad to share some time with you.”

A warmth wave spread through my chest. It’s in these moments that I truly appreciate the connection building between us—something I never thought possible with someone like Percival.

“Speaking of time,” he continues, lowering his voice conspiratorially, “I might have something special planned for us soon.”

“Oh?” I tease, intrigued by what he has up his sleeve.

“Patience, Spencer,” he says with a wink. “All in due time.”



A burst of laughter escapes me as Percival shares another amusing anecdote. He leads the flow of the conversation with ease, our chemistry undeniable.

“I have a question for you,” Percival says, his gaze filled with anticipation and a hint of mystery. His eyes lock onto mine, gleaming with excitement.

I reply with a hand wave, inviting him to keep talking, curiosity piqued.

“Can you take a few days off? Like, soon?”

I raise an eyebrow, my interest further ignited, looking for my pencil and then write. “I probably can. But what’s this about?” My eyes sparkle with intrigue as I study his face, searching for any clues.

Percival smirks, leaning back in his chair. “It’s a surprise. You’ll love it, I promise.”

“Really?” I press, unable to contain my curiosity. “No hints at all?”

“None whatsoever.” He grins, clearly enjoying keeping me in suspense. A smile pulls my lips up, captivated by his playful energy.

Taking a sip of my coffee, I mull over the idea. My heart races with excitement at the thought of experiencing something new and unexpected with Percival. At the same time, my cautious nature kicks in, reminding me that I have bills to pay and responsibilities to uphold.

As I weigh my options, I notice the hopeful look in Percival’s eyes. It dawns on me that this is more than just a fun adventure. It’s an opportunity for us to grow closer and to build on the connection we’ve already established. And if there’s one thing I’ve learned from spending time with him, it’s that life is too short not to embrace these moments.

“Alright, you got deal,” I write decisively. “I’ll take a few days off, but this better be worth it.”

His face lights up, and I feel a surge of anticipation for whatever he has planned. As we continue *chatting*, the world around us fades away, leaving only Percival and me.

With each passing moment, I find myself becoming more and more grateful for this unexpected journey—and for the enigmatic man sitting across from me, who continues to challenge my boundaries and push me towards new horizons.

As we finish our meal, I feel a mixture of anticipation and excitement for the days ahead. My heart swells with gratitude for this unexpected journey, and I find myself eager to discover what awaits us around the corner.

“Ready to go?” Percival asks, standing up and offering me his hand.

More than ready, I think, but my head moves as a reply, accepting his hand and allowing him to pull me to my feet. Together, we step out into the warm sun, ready to embrace whatever comes ahead.

“Let the fun begin,” his eyes alive with mischief and delight. And with that, we stride confidently into the next chapter of our story, hand in hand, hearts full of hope and curiosity.

Chapter Eleven

Percival

The sun shines up in the sky as I stand on the porch of Lancelot and Ariel's home, the warm air feels humid and warm. I smile at the thought of another family dinner. I know... how weird of me. A couple of weeks ago, I just came here if was necessary, my life was too exciting, too busy... too empty. Shaking my head, I run a hand through my hair and push open the door, stepping into their cozy abode.

"Finally! The guest of honor decides to show up," Lance teases with a grin as he catches sight of me, his hands on his hips. I chuckle and give him a brotherly punch on the shoulder.

"Can't start without the life of the party now, can we?" I retort, soaking in the lively atmosphere that fills their home.

Ariel appears from the kitchen, her purple hair bouncing as she rushes over to give me a hug. "You're here! Everything's ready, I made some appetizers, and your brother is grilling. Come to the patio!" She exclaims, her free-spirited aura brushing off on me as she leads me outside.

The table is laden with delicious food, each dish more mouthwatering than the last. The aroma of hot wings mingles with that of garlic and rosemary mashed potatoes, spinach artichoke dip, stuffed mushrooms, and many more, making my stomach growl in anticipation. Laughter and conversation fill the room as everyone finds their seats around the table.

Arthur, my oldest nephew, walks out the patio, “What’s up *whatafuckers*? What the fuck, nicks? What the fuck, folks?”

My chest bubbles with laughter. “What is this about?”

Lancelot makes a face before replying. “Ariel forgot our son is like a parrot. She was listening to Marc Maron’s podcast while picking him up from daycare.”

“Alright, everyone!” Ariel claps her hands together, drawing our attention. “The appetizers are getting cold, let’s dig in!”

We all reach for our plates, eager to indulge in the feast before us. Ariel is the best cook I know. As I take a bite of the succulent chicken, I notice how much warmth and love there is in this room. My family gathered, engaging in animated discussions about everything from the latest Hollywood gossip to the state of the world.

“Percy,” Lance nudges me with a sly grin. “You’ve been keeping yourself busy lately, huh? Spill the beans, bro.”

I chuckle, a mischievous glint in my eye. “Well, you know me. Always on the lookout for new adventures,” I reply, taking a sip of my wine.

“Speaking of adventures,” Ariel chimes in, her eyes sparkling with curiosity. “We’ve all heard about this beautiful woman you’re so keen on showing how to surf the other day at the beach. Care to share more?”

I let out a sigh, knowing there was no escaping their prying questions. But as I glance around the table, seeing the genuine

interest and support from each person here, I'm grateful for these moments.

"Alright, alright," I concede, leaning back in my chair. "Her name is Spencer, and she saved my life. That's all I'm saying for now. You'll just have to wait and see how it all unfolds."

"Ooh, a mystery!" Ariel coos, clapping her hands together. "I love it! Just promise me one thing. If things get serious, make sure you introduce her to us. We want to meet the woman who can tame the infamous Percival Hills!"

Laughter erupts around the table as I roll my eyes, grinning despite myself.

"Deal," I agree, raising my glass. "To family, friends, and new beginnings."

"Cheers!" everyone choruses, clinking their glasses together in a symphony of celebration.

As I take another bite of the succulent wings, my eyes drift to the door where Adrik and Jordania enter, their twin girls in tow.

"Look who finally decided to show up!" Lancelot exclaims, raising his glass in welcome. "The prodigal son returns."

When I was at the hospital, my brother told me Adrik was spending some time overseas, commissioned by the Navy, where he is a high-ranking officer.

"Getting out of the house with the girls was a challenge," Adrik grumbles. His usually stoic expression softening as he catches sight of the feast laid out before us. "But we made it."

“Pull up some chairs!” Ariel encourages, clapping her hands together excitedly as she makes room at the table for our new arrivals.

Jordania, a stunning woman with dark hair cascading down her shoulders, shakes her head and laughs as she chases after her twin daughters, who made a beeline for the dessert table.

“Slow down there, girls,” she calls out, scooping the little girl into her arms. “Save some room for dinner!”

“Aw, Mom...” Luana pouts, her eyes locked onto the array of sweets.

“Come on, let’s get you settled,” Jordania says, leading her daughter towards the table.

As the chatter resumes and plates are filled, I feel a pang of longing for my sister Morgana and my little niece. It hasn’t been too long since I’ve seen them, but I wish it was under better circumstances. My heart aches for the sound of her laughter and the sight of my niece Hope’s infectious smile.

“Hey, Percival.” Adrik claps me on the shoulder, jolting me from my thoughts. “You look like you’re a million miles away. What’s up?”

“Nothing,” I lie, forcing a grin. “Just thinking about Morgan and Hope. Wish they were here.”

“Me too,” Adrik agrees, his gaze growing distant for a moment before snapping back to the present. “But we’ll see them soon enough, right?”

“Absolutely,” I reply, my determination renewed. “Morgan is in full mother-hen mode. She will be here soon to check on me. Since that night, she seems to treat me like I’m a toddler again.”

“Hey,” Jordania calls from across the table, her eyes twinkling with mischief. “I heard you’ve been quite the hero lately. What’s this I hear about you saving someone’s life? That was the reason you ended up wounded in the hospital?”

“Actually, it was the other way around,” I confess, feeling my face heat up at the attention. “Spencer saved mine.”

“Spencer?” Adrik raises an eyebrow, intrigued. “You know, Morgana would be thrilled to hear you’ve met someone who might keep you on your toes.”

“Maybe,” I admit, taking a sip of my drink. “But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. For now, let’s just enjoy tonight with the family we’ve got here.”

“Amen to that,” Adrik agrees, clinking his glass with me before we both dive back into the lively conversation surrounding us.

“Are Chase and Rose coming over?”

“Maybe later,” Ariel replies with a roll of her grey eyes. “The pregnancy is kicking her ass, and Chase is in full protective mode. She told me she feels lucky if the man lets her lift something heavier than her toothbrush.”

We laugh again. I can imagine a man like Chase Holland taking care of his wife and their precious cargo every minute

of the day. *What would happen to me in the same position?* Where the fuck that thought came from? I'm the king of funny times, not a keeper. My life is an endless party. I don't settle. But the question lingers in my mind... what if?

The sizzling sound of seared steaks fills the air as Lancelot flips them expertly on the grill. My mouth waters at the aroma, and I can feel my stomach rumble in anticipation. Ariel sets a platter of grilled vegetables on the table, glistening with olive oil and speckled with herbs.

“Alright, everyone,” Ariel announces, clapping her hands together. “Dinner is ready!”

We all gather around the table, helping ourselves to generous portions of food. The steak is cooked to perfection—tender and juicy, with a hint of smoky flavor from the grill. Beside it, a mountain of garlic mashed potatoes begs to be devoured, their creamy texture melding perfectly with the savory meat.

As we dig into our meal, the conversation flows effortlessly, punctuated by laughter and the occasional playful banter between close friends.

Despite the warmth and joy filling the room, my head is full of memories of Spencer and the way she looked in that black swimsuit. My mind races with ideas for how to make her laugh, each more extravagant than the last. A weekend getaway to a luxurious resort in Hawaii or Dubai dunes? Does she have a valid passport? A hot air balloon ride over Napa Valley? Or maybe something as simple as a home-cooked meal, just the two of us?

The sound of laughter fills the air as everyone around the table shares stories and reminisces about old times. I lean back in my chair, drink in hand, soaking in the joyful atmosphere. It's not often that we all get together like this, and it feels good to be surrounded by family and friends.

“Alright, team,” I announce, raising my glass in a toast. “Here's to new beginnings and to the incredible woman who's saved my life. Cheers!”

“Cheers!” the group echoes, clinking their glasses together as laughter and joy envelop us once more.

Chapter Twelve

Spencer

Sunlight streams through the dusty windows of my workshop, casting a warm glow on the two nightstands I found at a thrift store. Sawdust seems to dance through the air, landing gently on every surface as I sand down the rough edges. The vision for these drawers is clear in my mind: funky, unique patterns that'll bring life to any bedroom. It's been a while since I've felt this confident in my skills—maybe it's the recent turn of events or the simple joy of being lost in my passion.

“Spencer!” Gianna’s wild, curly hair bounces with each step she takes towards me. “Girl, you are not going out with Mr. Percival Hills dressed like that!”

I look down at my sawdust-covered leggings and sweatshirt, then back up at Gianna with an uncertain expression. My hands form the words, “He’s just taking me just on little getaway, not a date.”

“Trust me,” she replies, eyes sparkling with mischief. “With a man like Percival Hills, there’s no such thing as ‘just on a little getaway.’ You need something more than your usual outfits to go out with a man who exudes elegance like him.” She grins brightly, and I smile in response.

“I don’t know,” I sign hesitantly, feeling both excited and nervous about the idea of shopping for clothes. What if I can’t find anything I like? What if I don’t look good in anything?

“Come on, Spencer,” Gianna urges, reading my thoughts from my expression. “It’ll be fun, I promise! And besides, when was the last time you treated yourself?”

A sigh escapes my lips, and I nod in agreement. Maybe it’s time I stepped out of my comfort zone, even if just for an afternoon.

“Alright, let’s do this,” I sign with growing enthusiasm, brushing the sawdust from my clothes.

Gianna claps her hands in excitement, and together, we head out for our little shopping trip. Little do I know this will lead to so much more than just a new wardrobe and a fun day out with my best friend.

Reluctantly, I glance back at my workshop, the nightstands waiting for their transformation. My fingers twitch, itching to pick up a paintbrush and create something beautiful. But Gianna is already impatiently tapping her foot, her wild curls bouncing with every movement. “Spencer, come on! It’s time for some retail therapy!”

“Fine,” I sign, trying to hide my reluctance. Yet, I can’t deny that I’m curious about what Gianna has in store for me.

As we walk through the outlet mall, I realize the shopping trip isn’t as bad as I thought it would be. The sun warms my skin, and the smell of salt from the nearby ocean wafts through the air, mingling with the aroma of food court pizzas and pretzels.

Gianna leads the way, chattering away like a magpie as we weave in and out of stores. She fills the time with stories and jokes, making me laugh without even realizing it.

“Okay, let’s find you some jeans!” She exclaims, dragging me into a trendy boutique filled with distressed denim and colorful tops. As I browse through the racks, Gianna continues her one-woman show, offering commentary on potential outfits and daring me to try on things I never would have considered before.

“Hey, look at these!” She holds up a pair of high-waisted jeans covered in embroidered flowers. The colors are bold and bright, just like Gianna’s personality. “These are perfect for you, Spencer. Trust me.”

I hesitantly take the jeans from her, unsure if I can pull them off. But when I catch a glimpse of myself in the dressing room mirror, I feel a spark of excitement. The jeans fit like a glove, and the vibrant flowers seem to be an expression of my own blossoming confidence.

“See? I told you!” Gianna exclaims triumphantly when I show her. “Now, let’s find some underwear that’ll make you feel as amazing as those jeans do!”

“Really, Gianna?” I sigh, raising an eyebrow at her enthusiasm for this particular mission. But she’s already pulling me towards a lingerie store, her laughter ringing like bells in the air.

In the end, I leave the mall with several new pairs of jeans, a collection of lacy underwear, and a new pair of sneakers—all

thanks to my effervescent friend Gianna. As we drive back home, I feel a mix of anticipation and anxiety about my upcoming escapade with Percival Hills. But just like these new clothes, maybe it's time for me to embrace the unexpected and see where life takes me.

Stepping into the familiar warmth of our home, a smile pulls my lips up at the heavenly scent of Aunt Fiona's baking wafting through the air. Gianna bounces in beside me, excitement radiating from her as she clutches our shopping bags.

"Look what we've got!" she exclaims, holding up one of the bags like a trophy. Aunt Fiona beams at us while Aunt Orla narrows her eyes, clearly not as enthusiastic about my upcoming road trip with Percival.

"Spencer, I'm worried about you going off with that man," Aunt Orla says while we sit around the kitchen table. Her stern features softening just enough to show her concern. "He's a womanizer, and you barely know him."

I love Aunt Orla very much, and she's always the voice of the reason. Also, I'm sure she's trying to protect me from the world around me. But now I'm a grown-ass woman who can take care of herself. Not the same sick kid my mother left at their doorstep.

"Orla, relax," Aunt Fiona chimes in, wiping her flour-covered hands on her apron. "She's a grown woman, and she's allowed to have some fun. Besides, he's so dreamy and seems genuinely grateful for what Spencer did for him."

She's not wrong. Percival Hills is what dreams are made for. Even if they are not meant for me.

“Exactly!” Gianna adds, nodding vigorously. “And just look at these amazing clothes she got! It's time for our girl here to live a little!”

Their words wash over me like a comforting wave of support, though Orla's worry still lingers in the back of my mind. As much as I want to embrace this new side of myself, the fear of the unknown is hard to shake. But before I get too lost in my thoughts, I remember I need to text Percival.

Me: Where are you taking me?

He replies, a playful tone evident even through the screen.

Him: Let's just say it's somewhere you've never been before.

Me: Somewhere I've never been? That could be anywhere!

I shoot back, grinning despite my nerves.

Exactly.

Percival responds, his message accompanied by a winking emoji.

Him: Trust me, you'll love it.

He's not playing fair.

Me: Alright, Mr. Mysterious.

I type, rolling my eyes playfully.

Me: I'll trust you... for now.

Him: Good. See you soon, Butterfly.

He teases, sending another wink before signing off.

My heart flutters at the nickname, and despite Orla's concerns, a thrill of excitement coursing runs through my veins. It's been a long time since I've taken a leap into the unknown—but maybe, just maybe, this adventure with Percival Hills is exactly what I need to rediscover my inner fire.



I stand in front of my open suitcase, unease creeping up my spine as I fold the last of my clothes into it. My fingers brush over the new jeans Gianna helped me pick out. They feel foreign against my skin, like a reminder of how different this is going to be from my usual quiet life.

“Spence, you’re going to have a great time,” Gianna assures me, sensing my apprehension. Her face is full of excitement as if she’s the one about to embark on this journey.

“I know,” I respond, forcing a smile onto my face. “It’s just... I’ve never done anything like this before.”

“Exactly!” Gianna exclaims, her eyes lighting up. “That’s what makes it all the more thrilling! And besides, you deserve to have some fun after everything you’ve been through lately.”

Fun was not exactly the word I would use to describe my impending getaway with Percival Hills. A self-made man with

countless admirers and an infinite supply of charm, he was practically a different species compared to me—a deaf woman who finds solace in the silent world of furniture restoration.

“Gianna, he’s only doing this because he owes me,” I remind her, my stomach twisting at the thought of how little we truly have in common. “He’s not really interested in someone like me.”

“Spence, don’t sell yourself short,” Gianna says firmly, placing a hand on my shoulder. “You saved his life, remember? And if he didn’t want to spend time with you, he wouldn’t.”

“Maybe,” I concede, biting my lip. “But I feel like I’m stepping into a world I don’t belong in.”

“Hey,” Gianna says softly, squeezing my shoulder gently. “You are an incredible woman, Spencer O’Hagan. Don’t let anyone—not even yourself—make you believe otherwise.”

Her words stir something within me, and I find myself nodding in agreement. “Thanks, Gigi.”

“Anytime, girl,” she grins, giving me a quick hug before stepping back. “Now, finish packing. You’ve got an adventure to embark on!”

With a newfound sense of determination, I zip up my suitcase and take one look around my room. It’s filled with the familiar scents my existence has been filled with, remnants of countless projects that have kept me grounded over the years.

But for the first time, I feel ready to step beyond these walls
and embrace the unknown.

Chapter Thirteen

Percival

The early morning sun glistens on the hood of my car as I pull up to Spencer's home. The anticipation of our day together sends a surge of excitement through me, making my heart race. I glance at my reflection in the rearview mirror, ensuring my smile is charming enough for her. Today is going to be special.

As I step out of the car and approach the door, I notice the dilapidated beauty of Spencer's home—much like her own unique charm. I can see the places where she tried to do some repairs, but not nearly enough to accomplish the task. This home needs a lot of money and TLC. I knock gently, my pulse quickening even more when the door swings open to reveal Spencer. Her green eyes sparkle with curiosity, and she's dressed comfortably in leggings and a sweatshirt, her preferred attire. An outfit designed to torture me.

She smiles at me cautiously. I know she's not used to grand gestures, but her genuine spirit draws me closer.

“Good morning!” I say cheerfully, my eyes twinkling with enthusiasm. “Are you ready for our day?”

She replies with a nod, donning a small, shy smile that tugs at my heartstrings. As we walk back to the car, her movements are graceful yet reserved, a testament to her quiet determination.

“Fantastic,” I say, opening the passenger door for her. “I promise, this will be a day to remember.”

As Spencer slides into the seat, I marvel at how different we are. She seems so content in her simple world, while I’ve always been drawn to luxury and extravagance. Yet, despite our differences, I find myself captivated by her presence. There’s just something about her that makes me want to explore her depths, to truly understand who she is beneath the surface.

“Thank you,” she signs, fastening her seatbelt.

“Anything for you,” I reply, my voice soft and sincere. I climb into the driver’s seat and start the engine, ready to embark on our adventure. Little does Spencer know, she’s already captured my heart.

Two hours later, as we enter the park, my heart races with anticipation. Disneyland’s vibrant atmosphere washes over us: the enticing aroma of churros and popcorn, the laughter of children, and the melodies of familiar tunes playing in the distance. I watch Spencer take it all in, her green eyes wide with wonder.

“Ready to start with the day?” I ask her, my voice filled with excitement.

She nods, a gesture that is becoming familiar to me. A playful smile dancing on her lips.

“Let’s start with Space Mountain,” I suggest, leading her toward the iconic ride. With our VIP access, we bypass the

long lines and are quickly ushered onto the coaster. As we strap ourselves in, Spencer's nervous excitement is palpable. Her hands grip the safety bar tightly, knuckles turning white.

“Relax,” I reassure her, placing a hand on hers gently. “I promise you'll love it.”

She moves her head again, taking a deep breath as the coaster begins its ascent. The thrill of the ride takes hold, and soon enough, we're both laughing and screaming, completely lost in the moment. As we disembark, Spencer's cheeks are flushed, her dimple making a charming appearance as she grins from ear to ear.

Her head tilts slightly to the left as she tries to catch her breath. It's a subtle gesture, but one I find endearing, nonetheless.

“See? Told you so,” I tease, winking at her. “Now, let's conquer the rest of the park!”

As we continue our day, moving from one ride to another without a hint of delay, I'm increasingly captivated by Spencer's unique qualities. The way she intensely observes the world around her, despite her hearing loss, speaks volumes about her resilience and determination. And the way her laughter bubbles up, unrestrained and genuine, makes my heart swell with a warmth I've never experienced before.

She hands me a note as we stroll through the park, and I read it out loud. “I just wanted to say thank you again for today. It's been so much fun.”

“Spencer,” I reply, looking into her eyes, “you don’t need to thank me. Seeing you this happy... it’s more than worth it. Now, let’s make some more memories!”

Together, we continue our journey through the park, hand in hand, sharing laughter and creating unforgettable moments that will be etched in our minds.

The sun casts a warm glow over Disneyland, and I’m entranced by the way Spencer’s green eyes seem to sparkle with every ounce of happiness she exudes. As we walk side by side through the park, leaving another thrilling ride behind us, I notice the way her laughter seems to dance through the air, touching the hearts of everyone around her. I’m pulled to visit the Royal Hall and take pictures of her grinning beside Snow White, Cinderella, and Belle. Then we use our passes again to cut the line and see the most famous mouse in the world. And more pictures, of course. My eyes are rolling, but somehow, this makes me as happy as Spencer is.

“Spencer,” I say, unable to contain my admiration any longer, “you have this incredible ability to light up any place you go. I’ve never seen anything quite like it.”

In response, her cheeks flushed with a rosy hue. I chuckle, feeling a warmth in my chest that I’ve never experienced before. It’s as though her genuine personality is casting a spell on me, making me forget my past transgressions and focus solely on the present.

“Are you hungry?” I ask her, and her stomach rumbles softly. “I’m starving,” I admit, suddenly realizing how

famished I am. “Let’s find the best restaurant around here and treat ourselves.”

She agrees, her dimple peeking out as she smiles.

We make our way to one of Disneyland’s exquisite restaurants, taking in the tantalizing aroma wafting from the establishment. As we’re seated at a cozy table near the window, our eyes scan the menu, eager to indulge in the delicious flavors awaiting us.

“Everything looks so good,” Spencer leaves the remark in her notebook, her eyes widening with delight.

“What are you going to get?” she asks.

“Definitely the filet mignon,” I reply without hesitation. “I can’t resist a perfectly cooked steak.”

“That does sound tempting... and expensive.” She writes, her finger tracing the menu’s offerings.

“Don’t worry about this,” I say softly, taking her hand in mine. Hers looks so small compared to mine. “My treat, remember?”

Doubt still lingering in her eyes for a few minutes, at the end, she writes on the notebook again.

“But I think I’ll go for the seafood pasta. I can never say no to shrimp and scallops.”

“An excellent choice,” I praise, my taste buds already watering in anticipation.

As we savor our mouthwatering meals, we find ourselves lost in conversation, sharing stories and experiences that draw us even closer together. With every word she speaks in her unique way, I'm reminded of the incredible woman sitting before me—someone who defies expectations and embraces life with open arms.

“Spencer,” I say once our plates have been cleared away, “I’ve had such an amazing day with you. And it’s not just because of Disneyland. It’s because of you—your presence, your laughter, everything about you.”

She thanks me with a nod, her eyes shining with sincerity. “I’ve had an unforgettable day too. I can’t remember the last time I felt this happy.”

“Then let’s make a promise,” I suggest, holding out my pinky finger. “Let’s promise to always bring out the best in each other, to keep creating memories like these.”

As the words leave my mouth, I find myself conflicted and confused. Always? That’s not a word I’m used to. Always, forever? That sounds too permanent for a man like me. I don’t do that shit.

“Deal,” she agrees, locking her pinky with mine, cementing our pact. As we continue our day at Disneyland, I feel as though I’ve discovered something truly magical—a connection that transcends the enchantment of the park itself. And I know, deep down, that this is only the beginning of our story.



As we walk toward our next ride, I find myself constantly stealing glances at Spencer. She's dressed in her usual simple outfit, yet she looks effortlessly beautiful. There's an unpretentiousness about her that I find incredibly refreshing. In a world where everyone seems to be trying so hard to impress, Spencer remains genuine and true to herself.

"You ready for this one?" she hands me another note, grinning up at me as we approach the towering roller coaster.

"Absolutely," I respond, matching her enthusiasm. But internally, I'm grappling with my growing feelings for her. I've always been known as a womanizer, someone who never took relationships seriously. Yet here I am, undeniably drawn to this incredible woman who has managed to break down my defenses without even trying.

She grabs my hand and leads us to the front of the line, as if she were making a declaration. As we strap ourselves in, I notice how her green eyes sparkle with excitement, making my heart race even faster than the anticipation of the ride itself.

The roller coaster surges forward, and we're both swept up in the thrill of it all—the adrenaline rush, the laughter, and the shared experience of pure, unadulterated fun. As we disembark, still buzzing from the ride, I marvel at the way

Spencer's mere presence seems to amplify the magic of the world created for a guy with his mind full of magic.

My mind is a whirlwind of contradictions—the desire to keep things lighthearted and fun while simultaneously yearning for something deeper and more meaningful with Spencer.

She shakes my arm, her brow furrowed with concern.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I reply, offering a reassuring smile. “Just lost in thought for a moment there.”

She scribbles fast in her notebook. “Alright, but if you ever need to talk, you know I’m here for you,” The sincerity in her eyes makes my heart swell even more.

“Thank you. That means a lot to me,” I tell her, my voice cracking slightly with emotion. It’s becoming increasingly difficult to keep my feelings at bay, but I know I need to tread carefully—not only for my own sake but for hers as well.

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The sun dips below the horizon, casting a warm orange glow over Disneyland as it transitions into the night. Spencer's face mirrors the sky, radiant and illuminated with happiness. We find ourselves near Sleeping Beauty Castle, the perfect spot to watch the fireworks display that marks the end of our magical day. The anticipation buzzes in the air, and I steal glances at her in the fading light.

Spencer's green eyes wide with excitement, then using her pad to communicate with me, she says, "I've always wanted to see the fireworks up close. Thank you for today."

"Anything for you," I reply without even thinking, my heart thudding against my chest. The tension between us swells, almost tangible as the first firework explodes overhead, painting the sky in vivid colors.

She breathes, her gaze fixated on the dazzling display. I take this moment to really study her, appreciating how her eyelashes cast shadows on her cheeks and the dimple that forms when she smiles. My desire for her, both emotional and physical, reaches its peak, and I struggle to resist the magnetic pull that draws me closer to her.

"Spencer," I begin, my voice barely audible above the sound of the fireworks. She turns to me as if her ears were straining to catch my words. "There's something I need to tell you."

Her curiosity piqued. Her sweatshirt falls slightly off her shoulder, revealing the curve of her collarbone, and I'm reminded once more of her unpretentious nature—a stark contrast to the superficial world I've come to know.

"Ever since we met, I've been feeling... different," I confess, my heart racing as I lay my emotions bare. "Here I am, standing next to you in the happiest place on Earth, and all I can think about is how grateful I am that you're in my life."

Her eyes open wide like saucers. All the words I need to hear are there, ready for me to read them.

“Say you feel it too,” I plead, my voice barely more than a whisper.

She nods, her body trembling as the fireworks continue to light up the sky above us.

“I’ve never met anyone like you before, and I’m...” My confession is barely a breath, but she doesn’t need to hear it to get it.

As the final firework bursts overhead, showering the night with glittering stardust, I realize that our story is just beginning.

Her lips parted ever so slightly as if sensing the intensity of what’s about to transpire.

As I take her into my arms, I can feel her heart pounding beneath the simple fabric of her sweatshirt, her vulnerability shining through despite the confident exterior she usually displays.

I take a deep breath, the scent of gunpowder and night air mingling with the faint aroma of popcorn and cotton candy from the park. “There’s something I need to do,” I confess, my hands trembling with anticipation.

Without hesitation, I close the remaining distance and press my lips against hers. It’s a tender kiss at first, hesitant and exploratory, but it quickly escalates into a passionate and desperate melding of mouths as we both give in to the desire that has been smoldering between us all day. Our lips move in

perfect sync, a dance of passion fueled by longing and unspoken emotion. This kiss has ruined me forever.

Fuck, I wasn't expecting this.

# Chapter Fourteen

## Spencer

The sudden warmth of Percival's lips on mine takes me by surprise, and I gasp softly, my eyes widening. But as he continues to kiss me passionately, I find myself melting into him, my body responding to the intensity of his touch. My heart races and the lingering taste of his tongue dancing with mine sends shivers down my spine.

I'll never forget this kiss. The way he holds me, the way his body reacts to mine. Yes, the evidence is trapped, hard, and big between us. The last speck of light shines over us when our mouths separate, but he refuses to let go. His forehead touches mine while our breaths mingle.

*Oh, Percival, what are you doing to me?*

"The day hasn't ended yet," he says and takes my hand to guide me through the horde to the park's exit. Before opening the car's door for me, my body is trapped against the cold metal and his warm frame. This time I feel more adventurous as my fingers start to explore his hard muscles, the lines on his back, and his strong arms.

"Let's go," he mouths. "Before we start our own private show."

Somehow, I manage to nod and buckle on the seat. The ride doesn't seem too long. In the mist of emotion, I didn't realize before how exhausting the day was. We left San Diego at

sunrise, and now it is past midnight. The car movement lulls me to a light sleep. I wake up with Percival shaking my shoulder softly.

“We are here,” he informs me, then runs to open the door for me and guides me to an elevator. “You gonna like this.”

Curious, I follow him through a corridor, then a pair ornate doors that open to reveal a hotel suite that takes my breath away. The room is bathed in soft, golden light from the chandelier above, which casts intricate patterns across the plush beige carpet. Floor-to-ceiling windows offer a stunning view of the city skyline, twinkling like a thousand stars in the distance.

He knocks the air out of my lungs, unable to tear my gaze from the opulence surrounding me. Everything about this place screams luxury—from the velvet-upholstered furniture to the intricately carved wooden bed frame, complete with satin sheets and a mountain of pillows.

“Like it?” Percival asks, grinning at my astonishment.

I nod in excitement, still stunned by the luxury around me. This isn’t a room. It’s like one of those penthouses you see in the movies.

“Only the best for you,” he says with a wink, pulling me further into the room to explore the lavish surroundings together.

As I stand there, taking in the sheer opulence, a wave of conflicting emotions washes over me. On the one hand, I’m

elated by the thought of spending time with Percival in such an exquisite setting; on the other, the intensity of my feelings for him both excites and terrifies me. It's as if our connection is something I can't quite comprehend, a force that threatens to consume me entirely.

“Spencer, are you alright?” Percival pulls me out of my thoughts. Concern etches his handsome face, making my heart swell with affection. I give him a nod and a small smile.

As he holds me close, the warmth of his body and the scent of his cologne enveloping me, I find myself surrendering to the moment. The doubts and fears that plagued me moments ago seem to dissolve into nothingness, replaced by a sense of peace and contentment. For now, at least, I allow myself to believe that everything will be alright.

Standing at the threshold of my hotel room, I take in the grandeur of the door before me. The intricate wooden carvings and polished brass handle make me feel like royalty—a far cry from the simple life I've always known.

“Spencer...” I can read my name on his lips, his brown eyes hooded and warm as he leans in close to me. His hand gently cups my cheek, and my heart pounds with anticipation.

I turn my gaze towards him, my green eyes meeting his, and time seems to slow as we share an electrifying connection. With a tender smile, Percival leans down, pressing his lips against mine in a passionate, breathtaking kiss that sends shivers down my spine.



Our bodies melt together, our breaths mingling as one, and my entire world narrows down to this single moment—this intimate connection between us that defies explanation. The kiss leaves me feeling lightheaded and giddy, my pulse racing with exhilaration.

“Good night, Butterfly,” he says, his words brushing against my lips before he pulls away, leaving me breathless and reeling.

Grinning, he gives me one last lingering look before disappearing down the hallway.

As I enter my room, my thoughts are consumed by Percival—by the intensity of his kiss, the warmth of his touch, and the magnetic pull I feel towards him. Despite my exhaustion, sleep eludes me as I lie awake in the plush, king-sized bed, my mind replaying the events of the day.

When morning finally comes, I drag myself out of bed, my body heavy with fatigue but my spirit buoyed by the prospect of spending more time with Percival. I step into the hotel’s opulent dining area to find him waiting for me, dressed in one of his impeccably tailored suits—sans tie, of course.

“Good morning,” he greets me with a mischievous grin. His chest is bared, and his eyes twinkling as if he knows I spent the night tossing and turning, unable to escape thoughts of him. “Did you sleep well? Or did you spend the hours thinking of what we should be doing but didn’t?”

Fucking cocky man, he knows what he’s doing to me. My cheeks are hot, and my panties wet, and it’s just seven in the

morning.

As we eat, our conversation flows effortlessly—punctuated by playful teasing and flirtatious banter that leaves my heart racing and my stomach fluttering with nerves. And though I'm still tired from the sleepless night before, my excitement for the day ahead—and the undeniable connection I share with Percival—fuels me like nothing else ever has.

“Ready for the next step?” Percival asks, sipping his coffee with a mischievous glint in his eyes. “Got something real special planned for today.”

I respond with an enthusiastic nod, excitement coursing through me like electricity. Despite the exhaustion clinging to my bones, I feel alive and invigorated, ready to embrace whatever comes next.

“Good,” he says, his hand reaching out to brush against mine ever so briefly. “You just wait and see, Spencer. You ain't seen nothing yet.”

And with that tantalizing promise, we finish our breakfast and prepare to embark on the next chapter of our journey together—a journey filled with anticipation and an undeniable connection that refuses to be ignored.

As I take a bite of a warm croissant, the buttery flakes melting on my tongue, I catch Percival watching me with an amused smile. “You like the food?” he asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Love it,” I write on my pad, savoring every morsel. “I’ve never had anything this fancy for breakfast before.”

“Ah, well, you deserve the best,” he says, his voice dripping with sincerity. “And speaking of today, we’ve got some fun planned.”

“Really? What are we doing?” I ask, writing, curiosity piqued. I can feel my heart rate pick up.

“Ah-ah,” Percival chides playfully, wagging a finger at me. “No spoilers. Just trust me, you’re gonna have a blast.”

While my lips pull up in a smile, my chest swells with excitement, and I find myself completely captivated by the twinkle in his eyes.

“Good choice,” he replies, grinning back at me. “Now, eat up. We’re gonna need our energy for what’s ahead.”

We continue eating as Percival shares stories from his past—first, about growing up with his older siblings, then about his college years, turning into wild parties, extravagant vacations, and hilarious mishaps—while I read the words on his lips with rapt attention, hanging onto every word.

“Your life sounds so... free,” I remark over a piece of paper, feeling a pang of envy.

“Maybe,” Percival says thoughtfully. “But your quiet life has its own charm, too. Sometimes, I wish I could just slow down and enjoy the simple things, you know?”

As we finish breakfast, I can’t shake the sense of anticipation building within me. I’m eager for whatever adventure awaits

us, but I'm also nervous about stepping outside my comfort zone. Yet, with Percival by my side, I feel a sense of reassurance that makes the unknown less daunting.

“Ready to go?” Percival asks, standing up and offering his hand. I take it without hesitation, feeling a thrill at the touch of his skin against mine.

My answer is a grin, and he doesn't need anything else. He knows it.

“Then let's do this.” And with that, we set off, hand in hand, the world opening up before us like a book filled with endless possibilities.

# Chapter Fifteen

## Percival

I toss and turn in my bed, sheets tangled around my legs, sweat beading on my forehead. The images haunting my dreams are unbidden, yet I can't seem to shake them. Spencer's naked body, her smooth skin glowing in the moonlight, beckons me, stirring something deep within my chest. It's a struggle I've never experienced before, this desire to both possess and protect someone so fiercely.

"Come on, Percival, get it together," I mutter under my breath, fighting the urge to reach out and touch the tantalizing curves that tease me from the shadows of my imagination. I force myself to think of anything else—work, sports, even the weather—but nothing can erase the allure of Spencer's form from my mind.

As the morning sun creeps through the curtains, I finally surrender to the exhaustion weighing down my eyelids. But sleep brings no relief, only more vivid fantasies of Spencer that leave me aching with need.

"Ready for an adventure?" I ask, grinning at Spencer as we stand in the driveway. She nods enthusiastically, her eyes sparkling with anticipation.

She replies with a grin spreading across her beautiful face. I open the door to my black Porsche SUV allowing her to slide into the passenger seat before taking my place behind the wheel. With a roar, the engine comes to life, and I shift into

gear, pulling onto the Pacific Highway that stretches out before us like a ribbon of possibilities.

As we drive north, I open the sunroof, and the wind whips through our hair, carrying with it the salty scent of the ocean. The sun beats down on us, casting a warm glow over everything in sight. Spencer's laughter fills the air, mingling with the sound of crashing waves and the call of seagulls overhead. Already, this feels different from any other trip I've taken—more thrilling, more alive.

I can hear her laugh above the roar of the wind, her expression tinged with pure joy. I feel the same, pure freedom.

She throws her arms wide, embracing the world around her as I steal a glance at her. Her spirit marvels me, and I wonder how I ever lived without it. For the first time in a long while, I feel truly alive.

As we continue our journey, the sprawling cityscape gives way to rugged cliffs and azure waters. The road winds along the coast, hugging the edge of the continent like a lover's embrace. I feel a deep connection to the land itself as if it were an extension of my own soul.

The sun casts a warm golden glow on the Santa Monica pier as we pull up to the iconic entrance, its vibrant colors beckoning us to explore. I can hear the laughter of children echoing through the air and feel the energy pulsating from the lively crowd. The scent of cotton candy and popcorn wafts towards us, making my mouth water in anticipation.

“Ready for this?” I ask Spencer, turning to face her with an excited grin.

She replies with a short nod, her green eyes twinkling with eagerness.

As we step onto the bustling pier, I notice the way Spencer’s eyes dart around, taking in every detail. We pass families snapping selfies with the brilliant Pacific Ocean behind them while buskers perform their hearts out for the enamored crowds. The Ferris wheel looms overhead, its colorful lights already starting to shimmer against the setting sun.

“Hey, check this out,” I say, nudging Spencer and pointing to a caricature artist sketching away at his easel, then surprise her signing with my hands. “Wanna get one of us?”

She beams and raises her hands, forming a question using American Sign Language (ASL). “How did you learn to sign?”

“Ah, well, it’s a funny story,” I admit sheepishly, rubbing the back of my neck. “After that afternoon at your home, I realized how important communication is, especially with someone who had such a profound impact on my life. So, I started taking ASL classes. I wanted to surprise you.”

Spencer’s eyes widen in astonishment, and she signs back, “That means so much to me, Percival. Thank you.”

“Of course,” I reply, signing the words not as fast as I wish. “It’s the least I could do.”



We continue wandering down the pier, trying our luck at various games and sharing a funnel cake, the sugary sweetness making our fingers sticky. The sun dips lower in the sky, casting a warm orange hue over everything. As we stroll hand-in-hand, I think about how different this feels compared to my past experiences. With each step, it's as if Spencer and I are creating our own language—one that transcends words and gestures.

“Hey, want to go on the Ferris wheel?” I ask, watching her eyes light up at the suggestion.

“Definitely,” she signs back, grinning from ear to ear. It makes me so freaking happy to be able to communicate with her in a more fluid way. No more notepads. She's able to read my lips, but I want her to know I'm taking the extra lap for her.

As we ascend into the sky, our laughter mingles with the hum of the bustling pier below. From our elevated vantage point, we watch the sun sink below the horizon, leaving behind a tapestry of vibrant colors. In this moment, suspended between heaven and earth, I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the connection Spencer and I share—a connection that defies convention and embraces the unexpected.

“Thank you for today,” I sign to Spencer, my heart swelling with emotion.

“Thank you,” she replies, her eyes shimmering with unspoken emotion. “For everything.”

As we descend back toward the ground, I know that this day will remain etched in my memory.

Feeling the gentle sway of the Ferris wheel, I steal glances at Spencer as she gazes out at the sparkling ocean. The sun casts a warm glow on her face, and suddenly, I'm struck with an unfamiliar sensation—something that goes beyond physical attraction.

“Beautiful, isn't it?” Spencer signs to me, her eyes locked on the horizon.

“Absolutely,” I reply, trying to focus on the view, but my thoughts are elsewhere. I've had my fair share of flings and one-night stands, but this... this is different. The connection I feel with Spencer runs deeper than any I've ever experienced before. It's confusing, disorienting even. This trip was meant to be my way of repaying her for saving my life—not an opportunity to fall in love.

“Are you okay, Percival?” Spencer asks, her fingers dancing in the air as she notices my far-off expression.

“Of course,” I sign back, forcing a smile. “Just taking it all in.”

But the truth is, I'm not okay. I'm struggling to make sense of these feelings that have taken root within me. How do I navigate these uncharted waters? Can I let myself truly open up to someone like Spencer, knowing how different this relationship could be from anything I've ever known?

“Let’s go down to the beach,” I suggest, eager to escape the confines of the Ferris wheel and the thoughts that seem to be spiraling out of control.

“Sounds perfect,” Spencer agrees, her enthusiasm infectious. As we walk hand-in-hand toward the water’s edge, I can’t shake the feeling that I’m standing on the precipice of something extraordinary. But am I ready to take the plunge?

The sand between my toes, the crashing waves, and Spencer’s laughter as the cold water splashes our legs all serve to anchor me in the present moment. I watch as she bends down to pick up a seashell, her green eyes filled with wonder.

“Look at this one,” she signs, holding the shell out for me to see. “Isn’t it amazing how something so small can be so beautiful?”

I nod, struck by the simple wisdom in her words. And yet, all I can think about is the beauty before me—the woman who has unexpectedly turned my world upside down.

“Spencer,” I begin, hesitating as I consider what I want to say. “I need you to know that... well, you’re different from anyone I’ve ever met.”

“Good different or bad different?” she asks, a playful smile on her lips.

“Definitely good different,” I assure her. “You make me feel things I’ve never felt before. And I’m not sure what to do with that.”

She looks at me for a moment, her expression a mix of surprise and understanding. “Maybe we don’t have to do anything with it right now,” she suggests. “Let’s just enjoy this day. I have no expectations. I’m not looking for Prince Charming. You said this is a repayment trip, remember?”

Her words are meant to bring me comfort, but the effect is the opposite. Why am I not relieved by the fact she’s not hunting for a ring and the white fence? Why am I so determined to make this trip unforgettable for her?

Fuck.

# Chapter Sixteen

## Spencer

**A**s I stand by the door, I can hardly contain my excitement. Percival has planned an entire day just for us, and it's not just any day—we're going on a road trip. My heart races in anticipation of what lies ahead.

“Spencer, you ready?” he asks, his charming smile making me weak in the knees.

“Absolutely,” I reply, unable to keep the grin off my face.

We hop into his luxurious car and drive to our next destination—a museum I've always wanted to visit but never had the chance to, a wonderful Mediterranean Villa with manicured gardens and a famous last-name at the front door. The moment we step inside, I'm struck by the grandeur of the place. It feels like stepping into another world, one that's full of history, art, and magic.

“Wow,” I whisper as we begin to explore. Percival's hand finds mine, our fingers intertwining, and I feel a little giddy.

“Check this out,” he says, pulling me toward a massive painting that takes up an entire wall. The scene depicts a chaotic battle, with soldiers charging forward, swords raised and faces twisted in fierce determination. As I take in the vivid colors and intricate brushstrokes, I feel my own artistic soul stirring within me. “It's incredible, isn't it?”

“More than words can say,” I answer, my green eyes wide with wonder.

We wander through the various exhibits, discovering ancient artifacts and marveling at the craftsmanship of long-lost civilizations. At one point, we come across a collection of sculptures so lifelike, I half expect them to start moving.

As we continue through the museum, I find myself lost in thought, trying to decipher what it is about Percival that has me so captivated. He’s nothing like the men I’ve known before, and yet I feel drawn to him—not just physically, but emotionally as well. Every touch from him sends shivers down my spine and gives me goosebumps, making me yearn for more.

“Spencer?” Percival asks, pulling me out of my reverie. “You okay?”

“Of course,” I say, smiling at him. “Just caught up in all the beauty around us.”

“Speaking of beauty,” he says, gesturing toward a breathtaking exhibit of stained glass windows. The sunlight filters through them, casting an array of colorful patterns on the floor below. I gasp in delight at the sight, momentarily speechless.

“This is amazing,” I say slowly.

“Anything for you,” he replies, his eyes turning soft, and the terrifying part is, I believe it.



Leaving the museum behind us, a rush of excitement goes through my body as we head to our next destination. The sun is shining brightly, casting its warm glow on everything it touches.

I can feel the electricity between us crackle, and time seems to slow to a crawl. In this instant, surrounded by the enchanting lanterns and the captivating murals, I am completely lost in Percival Hills—and I wouldn't have it any other way.

The road trip continues as Percival drives us along the coast, each curve revealing a new breathtaking vista. The ocean stretches out to the horizon, its endless expanse of blue sparkling beneath the sun rays. I press my hand against the cool glass of the window, eager to soak in every stunning detail.

“Check this out,” Percival says, tapping his phone screen and showing me a photo he's taken of a massive sand sculpture competition taking place at a nearby beach. “They're creating some insane masterpieces down there.”

“Let's go!” I declare, excitement bubbling up within me.

“Say no more,” he replies with a smile, steering our car toward the beach.

Once we arrive, my eyes widen in awe at the incredible creations dotting the shoreline. Towering castles, intricate



dragons, and whimsical fairy tale scenes crafted from nothing but sand and water. I feel a surge of inspiration for my own art, and Percival seems to sense it.

“Your paintings are gonna be even more amazing after today, Spence,” he tells me, flashing that charming smile of his.

“I won’t ask how you know that. My aunts talk way too much,” I respond, a warm blush creeping across my cheeks.

We wander among the sculptures, pausing occasionally to snap photos or simply marvel at the skill of the artists involved. Percival gently takes my hand, guiding me toward a particularly impressive piece—a mermaid perched upon a rocky ledge.

“Look at her,” he points, leaning in close so I can read his lips. “She reminds me of you—strong, determined, and beautiful.”

“Stop,” I tease, feeling the heat rise in my face. But secretly, I’m thrilled by the comparison.

“Never,” he grins, giving my hand a reassuring squeeze.

As we continue our journey, our conversation flows effortlessly, touching on everything from our favorite movies to the ongoing drought in Southern California. Percival’s knowledge of local issues and his passion for the region only serve to deepen my admiration for him.

As the sun begins its descent toward the horizon, casting a warm golden glow over the landscape, I realize that this day, these experiences, and the connection I share with Percival

Hills are all precious gifts that I will forever cherish. And for the first time in my life, I feel truly alive.



As the sun sinks lower in the sky, painting the horizon with hues of pink and orange, Percival steers our car off the highway and onto a winding road lined with tall, swaying palm trees. I feel a flutter of excitement rise in my chest as we near our final destination.

“Almost there,” Percival’s lips form the words, his green eyes twinkling with anticipation. “I can’t wait to see your reaction.”

“Is it that impressive?” I ask, curiosity getting the better of me.

“Let’s just say it’s a little taste of home for you,” he replies cryptically, a playful grin tugging at the corner of his mouth.

Moments later, we pull up to an incredible Victorian mansion nestled among lush gardens and towering trees. It takes my breath away. The elegant structure boasts intricate woodwork, delicate stained glass windows, and a striking tower that pierces the sky.

“This is amazing,” I say, unable to hide the awe in my voice. “It reminds me of home.”

“Thought you might like it,” he replies, pleased with my reaction.

We step out of the car, and I take a moment to soak in the beauty of the place. The scent of blooming jasmine fills the air, transporting me back to my childhood days spent exploring grand, historical homes with my parents. Nostalgia washes over me, mingling with a sense of comfort and warmth.

“Thank you,” I say sincerely, my eyes meeting his. “You really didn’t have to go to such lengths, but I appreciate it more than you know.”

“Anything for you, Spencer,” he responds, his gaze genuine and tender.

As we make our way up the stone pathway leading to the entrance, I notice a sign that reads, “The Beaumont.” Intrigued, I look to Percival for an explanation.

“Figured we could use a little history on our trip,” he says with a wink. “Plus, the gardens are perfect for a romantic stroll.”

“Romantic, huh?” I tease, though my heart skips a beat at the thought.

“Hey, I’m just saying,” Percival laughs, his hand brushing against mine as we walk side by side.

Entering the mansion, we’re greeted by the rich aroma of polished wood and antique furniture—a comforting smell that fills me with a sense of belonging. As we explore the art-adorned halls and opulent rooms, our conversation flows easily, delving into topics such as Southern California’s

architectural history and the importance of preserving these beautiful landmarks.

“Promise me something,” Percival says suddenly, pulling me from my thoughts. His eyes hold a serious intensity that sends a shiver down my spine. “Promise me you’ll always remember this day, the laughter, the connection between us.”

As if I were able to forget all of this. All of him.

“I promise,” I reply solemnly, my heart swelling with emotion.

As night falls and the stars begin to twinkle above us, my chest is filled with gratitude for this incredible journey and the unforgettable moments shared with Percival. And as we stand together in the soft glow of the moonlight, surrounded by the grandeur of the past, I know that the future holds for us both.

# Chapter Seventeen

## Spencer

The Victorian mansion comes into view again as we wind our way up the cobblestone path, its grandeur making my heart race in anticipation. It's like something out of a fairy tale, reminding me of my childhood home with its ivy-covered walls and stained-glass windows.

“Spencer, isn't this place amazing?” Percival beams at me, his excitement contagious.

“Unbelievable,” I sign back to him, my hands dancing with the words. “I never thought I'd be in a place like this.”

As we walk through the heavy wooden doors, the scent of roses and lavender fills the air. The B&B is like an oasis amidst the chaos, a sanctuary where time seems to have stood still.

“Welcome to The Beaumont!” the innkeeper greets us, her eyes sparkling with warmth. “I'm Mrs. Harper, and I'll be taking care of you during your stay. Your suite is ready, so please follow me.”

We trail behind her, taking in the sumptuous details of the mansion, from the antique furniture to the intricate wallpaper. I imagine what it would be like to paint each room, capturing the essence of its beauty.

“Here we are,” Mrs. Harper announces, unlocking the door to our room. “I hope you enjoy your stay.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Harper,” Percival says with that charming smile of his, effortlessly disarming the older woman.

“There is a good restaurant at the patio. The chef does an amazing job, if you’re feeling hungry... or you can order room service.” She adds with a confident smile. My stomach grumbles at the thought, but considering how fancy Percival is making this trip for me, I can’t help but imagine the big dent this is causing on his bank account.

Stepping inside, my breath catches at the sight of the three adjoining rooms—two with luxurious king-sized beds and the other with a cozy fireplace and plush armchairs. The atmosphere is simultaneously romantic and elegant, stirring a mix of excitement and nervousness within me.

“Wow, this place is incredible.” Percival pulls me back to the moment, his eyes wide with wonder.

“Very.” I sign, feeling the weight of our decision to spend the night together. “It’s so different from my usual life.”

“And you haven’t seen it all yet,” he grins, his enthusiasm like fuel on the fire of my anxiety. “Who knows? Maybe we’ll discover something new along the way.”

I nod, hoping that he’s right. This is uncharted territory for both of us, but there’s no one else I’d rather explore it with than Percival—the charming, shirtless wonder who saved my life and captured my heart.

“Let’s make the most of this experience,” he says, reaching out to squeeze my hand. “Starting with some amazing food at

that restaurant Mrs. Harper recommended. What do you say?”

“I second the motion,” I sign, allowing myself to get swept up. As we prepare to leave the suite and explore the town, I feel a thrilling sense of anticipation, wondering where this journey will take us next.



After our plates were cleared at the restaurant, we run back to our room. The instant the door clicks shut behind us, an electric charge crackles in the air. It's as if we've stepped into our own little universe of longing and desire, separate from the rest of the world.

“Spencer,” Percival breathes, his voice laden with warmth. He steps closer, and I can hardly breathe as the space between us dwindles to nothing.

“Hi,” is all I manage to sign, my fingers trembling. His eyes lock onto mine, those brown irises of emotion that have haunted me since the day we met.

Without another word, he pulls me into a fierce embrace, our bodies pressed together as if trying to make up for the time spent apart. Our lips meet in a passionate dance, the taste of him like a drug I didn't know I craved.

“God, I've missed this,” he pulls back, so I can read his lips. A shiver runs down my spine, and a soft moan leaves my mouth.



“Me, too,” I admit, my hands roaming over the hard planes of his chest, tingling with each pulse of his heartbeat beneath my fingertips.

“Spencer,” Percival says softly, his hands cupping my face, “tonight could be... special.” There’s a question hidden in his words, a silent request for permission. My heart hammers in my chest, thrill and uncertainty.

“Special?” I sign hesitantly, searching his eyes for answers. The truth is, I want him—I crave the connection, the intimacy. But am I ready for that step? What if it changes everything?

“Only if you’re ready,” he assures me, his thumb stroking my cheek tenderly. “I don’t want to push you, Spencer. We can just enjoy each other’s company if that’s what you want.”

“Thank you,” I sign, relief flooding through me. It’s not that I don’t trust him—it’s just that I need time to process my emotions, to understand what this could mean for us.

“Whatever makes you happy,” he smiles, pressing a soft kiss to my forehead. “Let’s make tonight a good time—no expectations, no pressure. Just the two of us exploring this beautiful place together.”

“Sounds perfect,” I reply, my heart swelling with gratitude. Together, we make our way over to the plush armchairs by the fireplace, settling in to plan our evening. The fire crackles and pops, casting flickering shadows on the walls as we share laughter and stories, creating memories that will last a lifetime.

And though part of me still yearns for the happiest ending, I know we're forging something special—a bond that transcends mere physical passion. In this moment, it's enough.

The firelight flickers on Percival's face, the shadows accentuating his strong jawline and chiseled cheekbones. He smiles at me, that irresistible grin that makes my heart flutter in my chest.

“Spencer,” he says softly, reaching out to take my hand. “I want you to know that I'm here for you, no matter what. If you're not ready for that next step, I'm willing to wait. We can make this night about anything you want.”

I feel a swell of gratitude wash over me, and my fingers squeeze his gently. “Thank you, Percival,” I sign, knowing how important it is for him to understand my needs.

“Of course,” he replies with a wink. “Now, I think I'll go get cleaned up. I got a little sweaty from all that excitement earlier.” He raises an eyebrow playfully, making me giggle.

As Percival retreats to the bathroom, the door is slightly ajar, but I remain seated by the fireplace, my eyes tracing the intricate patterns of the wallpaper. My mind wanders, considering the promise that awaits us tonight. A part of me wonders if I'll ever be ready to cross that threshold with Percival—to lose myself in the intensity of our connection.

I shake my head, focusing instead on the present moment. This is our time to explore, to discover new facets of each other beyond the physical. And that, I realize, is an adventure all its own.

Later, I sense movement in the bathroom. Moments later, Percival's figure emerges through the slight slip, naked, his body glistening with droplets that catch the light. Unabashedly confident, he strides around, leaving a trail of damp footprints on the hardwood floor.

As I watch, my eyes drink in every inch of him—the curve of his shoulders, the ripple of his muscles, the enticing V that leads to his crotch. My cheeks flush with heat, and I know my desire for him hasn't diminished. But there's something more now, something deeper than mere lust.

I step back into the living area, guilt gnaws at my insides. What am I doing here? Percival deserves someone who can jump with him wholeheartedly. Yet here I am, hesitating at every turn.

I bite my lip, torn between wanting to be close to him and fearing what that closeness could bring. If I go in there, will I be able to resist the pull of his body, the heat that radiates from his very being?

The door is slightly ajar, and as I approach, I see Percival stretched out on the bed, his body still glistening from the shower. His hand moves downward, wrapping around himself, and he lets out a low moan that makes my stomach clench with desire.

“Spencer,” my name on his lips, his eyes closed, lost in his own pleasure. “God, you have no idea what you do to me.”

My hands grip the wooden frame of the doorway, knuckles white. I should look away, give him his privacy, but the sight

of him—so vulnerable and yet so powerful—holds me captive.

“Hey,” he says, his voice wavering with the effort of keeping it steady. “If you’re watching, just know that I’m thinking of you.”

His words echo in my mind, and I guess: What would it be like to truly let go, to give myself over to him completely? The thought both excites and terrifies me, but one thing’s for sure—I can’t deny the connection we share any longer.

“Adventure,” I whisper, my voice barely audible even to myself. “That’s what you promised me, Percival. And maybe that’s exactly what we need.”

I take a step back from the doorway, releasing my grip on the wooden frame. Maybe tonight isn’t the night for us to cross that threshold together, but it’s a start.



Gianna’s words come through my phone speaker as I get a text.

Her: How’d it go with Mr. Tall, Dark, and Sexy last night?

Me: It’s...complicated. We made progress, but we’re taking things slow.

Her: Slow? With a man like Percival Hills?

I can see her pout even from here. I know her too well.

Her: That's like trying to put a leash on a cheetah. But hey, if it works for you, girlfriend!

Me: We're finding our way, and it feels right.

Her: Good for you, Spence. Hey, I've gotta run, but let's catch up soon, okay?

**Me: Later, Gi!**

I put the phone aside and swing my legs over the side of the bed, my heart pounding with anticipation.

“Morning.” Percival’s smile greets me as he opens the door between our rooms, clad only in a towel slung low on his hips. His damp hair sticks to his forehead, making him look both boyish and utterly irresistible.

“Morning,” I manage to reply, unable to tear my eyes away from the droplets of water trailing down his chest.

“Listen, about last night—” he begins hesitantly, running a hand through his damp locks.

“Hey, it’s okay,” I interrupt, not wanting him to feel guilty or pressured. “We’re on this together, remember? The limits are clear, no worries. Let’s have fun, ok?”

“Ok,” he replies, his eyes locking onto mine with a look of doubt.

“Good.” I smile, my fingers itching to reach out and touch him, but I restrain myself. “So, what’s next?”

“I won’t say a word,” Percival points out, the excitement in his gaze contagious. “But you gonna love this.”

“Percival, you have made this journey so perfect for me.”

My chest swells with happiness at his thoughtfulness.

“Great, let’s get ready and hit the road!” He grins before disappearing back into his room.

As I slip into my favorite denim shorts and sweatshirt, my mind swirls with possibilities. Time may be the key to unlocking our desire, but one thing is certain—our journey has only just begun, and there’s no telling where it will take us.

“Adventure,” I whisper once more, stepping into the bright sunshine, hand in hand with Percival, ready to face whatever comes our way.

# Chapter Eighteen

## Spencer

**A**s we head out the door and climb into Percival's luxurious car, I marvel at the world I've found myself in. From flipping furniture to exploring California with a charming womanizer, life has taken a turn I never could have predicted.

"Here we go," Percival announces, starting the engine. The purr of the car sends a shiver down my spine, and I feel a thrill of anticipation.

"Can't believe we're doing this," I confess, gazing out the window as we speed along the California coast. The ocean sparkles beneath the morning sun, its waves crashing against the shore in a steady rhythm.

"Life can be wonderful, Spencer," Percival says, his eyes on the road. "And I'm glad I get to share this one with you."

"Me too," I reply, my heart swelling with a mix of affection and gratitude. As the miles slip by, I find myself more and more drawn to this enigmatic man beside me—and I wonder what the future holds for us.

We drove along a winding coastal road, the blue waves of the ocean gently crashing against the shoreline on our left. Lush green hills spilled onto the right side of the road, dotted with sheep grazing in the afternoon sun. As we rounded a bend, an intersection appeared ahead. I checked the signpost



for our destination: Hearst Castle, it read, clear as day as the cloudless sky above us.

“What?” My fingers are flying. “I love this place. I’ve seen all the pictures and documentaries... this was on my bucket list, but...”

“I know,” he admits, and something inside me urges me to ask him how he got this information, but I stop myself. *Never ask a magician for his tricks.* “Are you ready?”

“Definitely,” I reply, my eyes with excitement and uncertainty. With each passing mile, the magnetic pull between us grows stronger, and I’m left questioning if resisting my desires is truly worth it when Percival is making everything so special for me.

The sun beats down on the visitor center of the marvelous Hearst Castle, casting playful shadows across the pavement. It’s a picturesque scene, with tourists milling about, chatting animatedly about the castle’s history and architecture.

“Come on, Spencer,” Percival invites me. “I’ve got something for you.”

Curiosity piqued, I follow him into the gift shop. The air conditioning inside is a welcome relief from the heat, and I breathe in the scent of glossy postcards and novelty keychains. Percival navigates the shelves with ease, arriving at a rack filled with cozy sweatshirts.

“Check this out,” he says, plucking one from the display. It’s a beautiful shade of teal, the color reminiscent of the ocean

waves we'd passed earlier. He hands it to me, and I admire the softness of the fabric. "For your collection, Butterfly Princess."

"Thank you," I say, my heart warmed by his thoughtful gesture. "It's perfect."

"Alright, now that you're all set, let's get this show on the road," he announces, grinning mischievously. I loop the sweatshirt around my waist, securing it in place before following him back outside.

Percival takes my hand, the warmth of his fingers sending tingles up my arm, and leads me to where an antique car awaits. It's a luxurious vehicle, its sleek curves and gleaming chrome adding to the sense of wonder already filling the air. I stare at it, wide-eyed, unable to believe that this is really happening.

"Ready for our VIP tour?" he asks, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

"What? VIP?" I reply, I don't know why I'm surprised. Everything with this man is luxurious and exclusive. As I take a step towards the exit, I'm torn between my growing affection for Percival and the knowledge that his womanizing ways could spell heartache for me. But for now, as the ocean breeze cools down my skin, I push those thoughts aside and let myself be swept up in the magic of the moment.

Sunlight reflects off an antique car's chrome, casting a kaleidoscope of colors on the asphalt. The sight takes my breath away. I glance at Percival, whose face is lit up with

excitement and pride. His eyes meet mine, making my heart skip a beat.

“Spencer, this tour is gonna be the bomb,” he says, his gaze warm and full of promise. “I’ve planned every detail to make it unforgettable for you.”

“Wow? That’s... that’s really sweet.” My cheeks flush as I take in the extent of his effort to make this trip special. He could have easily just booked a standard tour, but instead, he went above and beyond.

“Don’t tell anyone.” He gives me a wink, flashing me that charming smile of his. For a moment, I forget about his womanizing ways and allow myself to bask in the warmth of his affection. “Besides,” he adds, “I know how much you love sweatshirts and antiques, so I figured a sweatshirt and an antique car would be right up your alley.”

“I’m becoming predictable, I see,” I say, unable to contain my excitement any longer. The thought of exploring Hearst Castle in such a unique way has my pulse racing, and I feel grateful for Percival’s thoughtfulness.

“Predictable?” he asks. “Never!”

We admire the car for a minute, then the chauffeur comes to meet us and gives us the history of the model. A Rolls-Royce Phantom III convertible, once owned by the visionary who built this magical place.

“Shall we?” Percival asks, extending his hand towards the car door. With a nod, I slide into the luxurious leather seat, my

heart pounding with anticipation. Percival follows suit, settling in beside me.

As we glide along the winding road, I steal glances at Percival, trying to piece together the man he truly is beneath his confident exterior.

“Are you having fun yet?” he asks, a teasing grin on his face.

“More than I could have ever imagined,” I admit, my words full of emotion. The tour, the sweatshirt, the car—every detail contributes to this special moment, and I feel my walls crumbling down around me.

“Good,” Percival says, his eyes alight with happiness. “Because there’s so much more to come.”

As we continue towards Hearst Castle, I allow myself to be swept up in the magic of the journey, all the while wondering what other surprises await us—and what that means for the growing connection between Percival and me. The sun kisses my face, warming my skin as we speed towards our destination.

“Is driving really this amazing?” I blurt out before I can stop myself. Percival chuckles, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he turns to face me.

“Nothing quite like it,” he replies, his gaze full of exhilaration. “Why? You thinking about learning?”

“Maybe,” I admit sheepishly, feeling my cheeks heat up. “But first, Aunt Orla’s car isn’t in the best shape, and I’m not

sure if they'd even let someone like me drive here in California."

"Someone like you?" Percival raises an eyebrow, a hint of challenge in his gaze. "You mean someone who's intelligent, independent, and absolutely stunning?"

I roll my eyes, trying to hide my embarrassment. "I meant someone who's deaf, dummy."

"Ah, gotcha." He nods, looking thoughtful for a moment. "Well, I don't see why not. You're more than capable. Besides, driving is all about feeling the road beneath you, the vibrations of the engine. It's like dancing—feeling the rhythm and moving with it."

His words stir something within me, igniting a spark of hope and excitement. I never thought of it that way before, and it makes me crave that sense of freedom and independence even more.

As we continue our journey, I steal glances at Percival, admiring the way the sunlight plays across the planes of his face, casting him in an almost ethereal glow. Despite his reputation, there's a kindness and depth to him that I can no longer deny. My heart flutters with each stolen glance, and I find myself falling deeper under his spell.

"Hey, Spencer," Percival says suddenly, his hand on mine pulling me out of my thoughts. "If you want, I could teach you how to drive."

“Really?” My eyes widen in surprise, and I can’t help the grin that spreads across my face. “I don’t know about that.” After this trip ends, does he want to spend time with me?

“The offer is open. I’d be happy to do it,” he replies, flashing that charming smile that always manages to disarm me. “Just promise me one thing—no sweatshirts behind the wheel, alright?”

“Deal,” I agree, laughing as we continue down the winding road towards Hearst Castle, our day only just beginning.

# Chapter Nineteen

## Spencer

The moment we step into the Hearst Castle, my heart races with anticipation. I can see Percival's eyes light up as he watches my reaction, his charming smile spreading across his face. He planned this entire VIP tour just for me, and I feel a thrill of excitement at the thought of exploring this historic place with him by my side.

“Spencer, you’re going to love this,” he signs, his enthusiasm contagious. “This is Casa Grande, inspired by the Church of Santa María la Mayor in Ronda, Spain. It’s the centerpiece of Hearst’s estate.”

The air around us buzzes with excitement as Percival leads me further into the castle, his hand gently holding mine. The scenery transport me to another world, one where I can almost forget my worries and simply lose myself in the moment.

“Spencer,” Percival signs, his eyes twinkling with mischief. “I’ve arranged something special for you during this tour.”

My heart flutters at his words, and a surge of gratitude for the effort he’s put into making this experience unforgettable fills up my chest. “What is it? More important, how much longer must I wait?” I sign back, unable to keep the curiosity from my expression.

“It’s just right here,” he replies, a playful smirk on his lips.



A tall guy, around my age, come to say hi. It knocks the wind out of my lungs when Ben, our guide, starts talking using ASL. I'm about to say something, but Percival stops me, pointing with his chin to the place where Ben is welcoming us to the Castle.

As we follow Ben through the lavish rooms, I immerse myself in the sensory feast surrounding me. Each room tells a story, from the ornate tapestries adorning the walls to the intricate carvings etched into the stone fireplaces. The tour guide's hands flow gracefully, painting a vivid picture of the history and architecture that make this place so extraordinary.

In the Roman Pool room, my fingers trace the cool, smooth edges of the blue-and-gold mosaic tiles that line the pool, imagining the countless gatherings that must have taken place here. I glance over at Percival, noticing the way his gaze lingers on my face as if trying to capture every detail of my reaction. He smiles warmly, and I can't help but return the gesture, feeling cherished under his watchful eye.

“Did you know that this pool was inspired by the ancient Roman baths?” the tour guide signs, drawing me back into the historical narrative. “The gold tiles were imported from Italy, and the entire room took nearly a decade to complete.”

As we continue our journey through the castle, my thoughts dance between the present and an imagined past, each room bringing new wonders and surprises. And with Percival by my side, the experience is all the more magical.

“Ready for another special surprise?” Percival signs as we round a corner.

“More surprises?” I sign back, anticipation making my heart race.

“Close your eyes,” he instructs, his grin contagious.

I do as he asks, allowing him to lead me forward. As we walk, a faint scent of roses tickles my nose, and I wonder what awaits me. But whatever it is, I know that with Percival here it’s bound to be something truly remarkable.

I step into the next room, my eyes widening as I take in the ornate details surrounding me. The walls are adorned with priceless tapestries and intricate wood carvings, while gilded chandeliers hang from the ceiling like jeweled crowns. It’s as if we’ve been transported to another era, one of elegance and sophistication.

“Isn’t this amazing?” Percival signs, his eyes mirroring the awe and wonder I feel.

My hands move quickly, unable to contain my excitement. “It’s breathtaking. I can’t believe I’m actually here.”

“Neither can I,” he replies, an impish grin spreading across his face. “But I’m so glad you are.”

Our fingers brush against each other as we explore the room, sending shivers up my spine. Each touch, even the most fleeting, is charged with electricity, making my heart race. There’s something about Percival that makes me feel alive, cherished even. And it’s not just because of the grandeur of

our surroundings; it's everything he does—every smile, every glance, every subtle gesture.

As we continue through the castle, pausing to admire a stunning art collection or an exquisite piece of furniture, I reflect on the significance of this moment. Despite my reservations, I find myself drawn to Percival, captivated by his charm and kindness. But deep down, I know our relationship has an expiration date.

He hasn't promised me forever, and I think it wouldn't work even if he had. We are worlds apart—he's rich, successful, and undeniably handsome, while I'm just a deaf girl with no family and bills to pay. Yet, for now, I allow myself to indulge in the fantasy.

“Spencer, look at this!” Percival signs excitedly, pointing to an intricate mural on the wall. I lean in closer, admiring the craftsmanship and vibrant colors.

“Wow,” I sign back, genuinely impressed. “The attention to detail is incredible.”

“Right?” he agrees, his enthusiasm infectious.

As we stand there, shoulder to shoulder, I steal a glance at him. He's so different from anyone I've ever known—confident and a bit arrogant, yet gentle; worldly, but also down-to-earth. And despite all our differences, I can't deny the connection we share.

“Let's keep going,” he signs, offering me his hand with a warm smile.

And as I take his hand in mine, my heart flutters with anticipation of the moments still to come. For now, I'll embrace this adventure, living fully in the present and savoring each memory we create.



As our tour continues, I am captivated by the spell casting its magic here. My hands gently trace the intricate details of a carved fireplace mantel, and I imagine all the people who have stood here before me. With each new room we visit, my appreciation for Percival's thoughtfulness only grows.

"Isn't it amazing?" Percival signs, his eyes alight with excitement.

I nod, unable to find the words to express the depth of my awe. Our connection deepens with every shared discovery, and I do my best to remain fully present, pushing aside thoughts of our uncertain future.

Overhead, the sky turns a moody shade of gray as clouds roll in. I shiver, feeling the chill of the damp air. Noticing my discomfort, Percival reaches into his backpack and pulls out the soft gray sweatshirt he bought for me earlier in the day.

"Here you go," he signs, handing it over with a warm smile.

"Thanks," I sign back, slipping the sweatshirt on and instantly feeling its comforting warmth. Percival's smile broadens, and I take a moment to admire him—clad in a black

T-shirt and jeans, he looks effortlessly handsome. My heart swells with gratitude for the man who has made this day possible.

“Ready to continue?” he asks, his fingers forming the words with ease.

“Absolutely,” I reply, eager to see what other surprises await us.

As we explore the castle’s enchanting grounds, I find myself lost in the beauty of it all. The vibrant gardens, the ornate architecture, and the sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean, everything about this place is breathtaking.

“Spencer,” Percival signs, snapping me out of my reverie. “I have another surprise for you.”

“Really?” I ask, my heart racing with anticipation. “You’re like Mary Poppins, with a bag full of surprises. What is it?”

“You’ll see,” he teases, a mischievous smile playing on his lips.

“Can you at least give me a hint?” I plead, curiosity piqued.

“Nope,” he replies, shaking his head playfully. “You’ll just have to wait and find out.”

A grin pulls my lips up, thoroughly enjoying the sense of awe that colors our every interaction. With each new discovery, Percival’s world seems to grow more vibrant, and I find myself longing to be a part of it—even if only for a little while.

As the sun slips below the horizon, casting a warm golden glow across the Neptune Terrace, Percival leads me to a secluded spot overlooking the ocean. I gasp in awe as my eyes take in the stunning scene before me: a beautiful table adorned with flickering candles and delicate white roses, all set against the backdrop of the starry night sky.

“Is this for us?” I sign, unable to contain my amazement.

“Of course,” Percival responds, his smile broadening. “I wanted our dinner to be as magnificent as the rest of our day.”

My heart swells with gratitude, and I try to wrap my mind around how I ever got so lucky to have met someone like him. As we take our seats, a gentle sea breeze rustles the leaves above us, carrying with it the scent of saltwater and blooming jasmine.

“Spencer,” Percival signs, he’s becoming better and better. His dark eyes twinkling in the twilight. “This place is incredible, isn’t it?”

“Absolutely,” I reply, my gaze drifting past the ornate Neptune Pool and out toward the endless expanse of ocean beyond. “I’ve never experienced anything like this before.”

“Neither have I,” he admits, reaching across the table to gently touch my hand. “And I’m glad we get to share it together.”

The warmth of his touch sends shivers down my spine, reminding me just how much our connection has grown over the course of these past several days. And yet, I can’t shake the

nagging feeling that our time together is fleeting, that our vastly different worlds will soon come crashing back down around us.

“Spencer, what’s wrong?” Percival asks with concern etched across his face. “You seem lost in thought.”

“Nothing, really.” I force a smile, unwilling to let my fears taint this perfect moment. “I’m just... overwhelmed by all of this.”

“Good overwhelmed, I hope?”

“Definitely.” I assure him, my smile genuine this time. “I can’t thank you enough for today. It’s been a dream come true.”

“Today is just the beginning, Spencer,” he promises, his eyes locked on mine with unwavering sincerity. “There’s so much more I want to show you.”

“Even if our time is limited?” I ask, my heart heavy with the weight of unspoken truths.

“Especially then,” he replies, squeezing my hand gently. “We’ll make the most of every moment, wherever our journey takes us.”

As Percival speaks, I find myself believing in the possibility of a future beyond our differences transcend the boundaries of our worlds. And as we savor our dinner under the stars, laughter, and conversation filling the air around us, I hold onto that hope—that somehow, our story will continue to unfold against all odds.

# Chapter Twenty



## Percival

The engine of my black Porsche roars as I push the gas, the wind whipping through my hair. A grin turns my lips up—oh, how I’ve missed this exhilarating speed. My heart races in anticipation of what’s to come.

As we race towards the B&B, the picturesque coastline stretches out alongside us.

“Your hand is freezing!” I say, as our fingers entwine on the center console. Her skin is soft and delicate, but her grip is firm. It’s a sensation I never knew I craved until now.

“Yours is like a furnace,” she retorts. “It’s nice.”

“Ha! I always knew I was hot stuff.” I give her a wink, but inside, my thoughts are racing. Touching her like this, it’s so intimate, so thrilling. I want more, my cock right now is hard as a rod, but I don’t want to push her away. Hell, I owe her my life—I can’t just waltz in and take what I want without giving something back.

“Speaking of hot stuff,” she says. “I’ve been meaning to ask you, why don’t you ever wear a shirt in private?”

“Ah, you’re talking like Lancelot.” I laugh, shaking my head. “My brother gives me crap about it all the time, but I just can’t resist the call of luxury. Only the finest fabrics for this body, and sometimes, that means no fabric at all.”

“Ah, I see,” she responds, her laughter tinkling like wind chimes. “Well, I must admit, it’s a nice view.”

My heart skips a beat, and my grip tightens around the wheel. Could it be possible that she wants me so bad, too? The thought sends a shiver down my spine. But for now, I focus on the road ahead in every sense of the word.

“Patience, Butterfly,” I whisper, squeezing her hand as we continue our drive into the night.

As we speed along the winding coastal road, the wind whipping through our hair, I feel alive. My heart races in anticipation of what lies ahead at the B&B. Exploring the woman I’ve come to know and like on a deeper level. I want to be with her, and to my astonishment, more than just for sex.

Spencer’s hand remains entwined with mine, her soft fingers sending currents of electricity through me. I steal glances at her as we drive, marveling at her beauty and grace. Her green eyes are filled with desire and longing, and I know that she feels the same magnetic pull towards me. The tension between us is palpable, like an invisible thread drawing us closer together with every passing moment.

“Spencer,” I say softly, unable to keep the emotion from my voice, “I want you to know that this means a lot to me.”

And I’m not lying.

“For me too,” she responds, her eyes never leaving mine. Then she bites her lip, a hint of vulnerability showing through

her usual gentle confidence. She wants to say more, but this tension between us goes beyond words.

As if drawn by an irresistible force, Spencer leans over, her lips finding the skin of my neck. The sensation sends shivers down my spine, and my grip on the wheel tightens reflexively. My mind races with thoughts of what could come next, but I know that we must wait just a little longer for our destination.

“We’ll be there soon.”

“Promise?” she asks, using just one hand, but her breath is hot against my skin.

“Promise,” I reply, my voice firm and determined. As we continue speeding towards our destination, our hearts beat in sync, anticipation building with each mile that passes beneath our wheels. And when we finally arrive at the B&B, we’ll let go of our inhibitions and embrace the passion that has ignited between us.

The moment our car pulls up in front of our lodging, the anticipation between Spencer and me reaches a fever pitch. I can practically feel the heat radiating off her body as we scramble out of the vehicle, our hands fumbling with the door handles in our haste.

“Come on,” I say breathlessly, tugging Spencer along as we rush into the foyer. Our laughter echoes through the empty space.

As soon as we are in a hidden corner around the stairs, I pull Spencer into my arms, our lips crashing together in a frenzy of

passion. The world outside our embrace fades away, leaving only us and the fire that burns between us like a living, breathing entity.

She gasps when we finally break apart for air. I know what she means.

“Trust me, the feeling is mutual,” I murmur, my lips on her line of vision, then I get busy trailing kisses down the side of her neck, delighting in the way she shivers beneath my touch.

We need to hurry. I take her hand we stumble out into the hallway, our bodies locked together in an urgent dance of need and desperation. We make it to our room in record time, our fingers fighting to get the key card into the slot before finally—finally—the door swings open.

“Get in here,” I growl playfully, pulling Spencer inside and kicking the door shut behind us. We don’t waste any time; our hands are all over each other, racing to peel away the layers of clothing that separate us from the heated skin beneath. My shirt is the first to go, followed closely by Spencer’s hoodie. She’s wearing one of her t-shirts underneath—a soft, well-worn band tee that somehow makes her even more irresistible.

“You’re not going anywhere... but those clothes must leave,” I command with a grin, my fingers finding the hem of her shirt and tugging it upwards. She raises her arms, allowing me to strip the fabric away and toss it aside.

“Your turn,” she breathes hard while signing the words, her green eyes burning with desire when she unbuttons my pants. I step out of them, kicking them to the side while

simultaneously working on the elastic band of her leggings. A man like me enticed by Lycra... Who would have thought?

We're both down to our underwear now, the thin layers of fabric doing little to dampen the intensity of our shared lust. I pull Spencer against me once more, our mouths colliding in another searing kiss as we fumble with the clasps and hooks that hold the last remnants of our clothes in place.

"Finally," I groan when we're both gloriously naked, our bodies pressed together from head to toe. I can feel Spencer's heart pounding against my chest, a perfect counterpoint to the racing rhythm of my own pulse.

And as we tumble onto the bed, our hands and mouths, exploring every inch of each other's flushed, trembling flesh.

"Beautiful," I murmur, my hands gliding across Spencer's silky skin like a sculptor admiring his masterpiece. She shivers beneath my touch, her breath hitching as I trace the curve of her hips and the dip of her waist. I'm addicted to my hands on her body already. Fucking hell.

"Your hands... they feel so good," she confesses. My fingers dance over her body, exploring the terrain of her delicate collarbones, the swell of her breasts, and the firmness of her thighs.

Spencer moans into my mouth, her nails digging into my back as if trying to anchor herself to the moment. In response, my own grip tightens on her, our bodies moving in sync like two puzzle pieces finally finding their place.

“I want your taste on my fingers... and my mouth,” I say, my words muffled by her eager kisses.

Her eyes are wide and luminous as she nods her consent. The heat between us is palpable, a living entity that threatens to consume us both if we don't surrender to its demands.

“Talk to me, Spencer,” I breathe against her neck, nipping gently at the sensitive skin just below her earlobe. “Tell me what you want, what you need.”

“More,” she gasps while her fingers tremble with the word, her body arching towards mine in silent supplication.

“Your wish is my command,” I assure her, my heart swelling with a mixture of pride and affection.

She laughs, the sound warm and genuine like sunshine after a storm.

# Chapter Twenty-One

## Spencer

As Percival's fingers continue their tantalizing exploration of my body, I feel as if I'm being swept away in the most exhilarating time of my life. The sensation is both terrifying and utterly thrilling, a heady mix of emotions I never knew existed. My mind is busy conjuring the sound of his voice, dark and seductive, urging me to let go and embrace the pleasure.

"Spencer, trust yourself," he mouths, his hot breath just an inch away from my skin. "Give in to this desire. Let it carry you away."

I glance up at him, my green eyes filled with a mixture of hope and uncertainty. Can I truly let go and relinquish control to this man who has managed to break down my barriers so effortlessly? It's a daunting prospect, but with each touch, each searing kiss, I find myself inching closer to the edge of abandon.

My head moves, conceding as my heart pounds so hard I'm sure he's hearing it right now. "I'll try."

"Good girl," he praises, a wicked grin spreading across his handsome features. "Now, just relax and let me take you on the ride of your life."

With that, he leans in to capture my lips once more, his mouth devouring mine as if trying to quench an insatiable



thirst. Our bodies move together in perfect sync, a sensual dance that sends shivers of delight coursing through my veins. Each caress, each word of encouragement, serves only to push us further towards the brink.

“Damn, Spencer,” he growls, his grip tightening on my waist as our movements become more frantic. “You’re incredible, like nothing I’ve ever experienced before.”

I gasp, my nails digging into his back as I struggle to maintain some semblance of control.

His eyes twinkle with mischief as he pulls me even closer. “That’s it, Butterfly. Do as I say, and you’ll be rewarded.”

With a nod of agreement, I allow myself to give in to the sensation completely, my body melting into his as we soar toward heaven. And as we crest the peak together, I realize that this is just the beginning. And that realization scares me to death.



The moon bathes the room in a soft silver glow, casting long shadows across the rumpled sheets. I lie tangled up with Percival, our limbs a mess of satisfaction and exhaustion. My heart still pounds in my chest, but it’s gradually slowing down, coming back to reality after the mind-blowing experience we just shared.

“Hey.” His dark brown eyes sparkle as they lock onto mine, and there’s a mischievous smile playing on his lips, something hard pocking me from behind. “You ready for round two?”

A breathless laugh leaves my chest. “You’re insatiable.”

“Guilty as charged.” He grins, leaning in to press a lingering kiss against my temple. It’s tender and sweet, making my heart swell with affection for this man who’s come to mean so much to me.

His fingers trace idle patterns on my arm, sending shivers skittering down my spine. I can feel him watching me, his gaze warm and intent as if he’s memorizing every curve and line of my face. It’s a strangely intimate moment, and it leaves me feeling vulnerable in a way I never have before.

“Spencer,” he says softly, his thumb brushing over my lower lip. “I want you to remember this moment, okay? Whenever life gets tough or things seem impossible, I want you to think back on this and remember that you are strong, beautiful, and capable of anything.”

“Fly high, Butterfly,” he mouths, and something about the way he says it—with such genuine belief and conviction—makes me believe it too. “We’ll take on the world together, you and I.”

“Thank you,” I manage, my hands trembling with emotion. “For everything.”

I don’t know how much time has passed when I wake up, but the room is dark, and the only sounds are the distant crashing

of waves and Percival's steady breathing. My heart races as I realize what just happened between us. It was incredible, yes, but also terrifying. What does this mean for us? For me?

Panic rises like bile in my throat, and I carefully untangle myself from Percival's embrace, trying not to wake him. I need some space to think, to breathe. Pulling on my hoodie and leggings, I tiptoe out of the room and head for the safety of my own space.

Percival moves as if he were saying my name, but I'm already slipping out the door, leaving behind the warmth and intimacy of our shared moment.

*"Sorry,"* I plead in the dark. *"I just... can't."*

My heart feels as though it's going to burst through my chest as I half-stumble, half-run down the hallway, desperate to escape the onslaught of emotions threatening to drown me. The quiet of my own room envelops me like a cold blanket, offering neither comfort nor solace. But at least the shadows offer me a place where I can hide from the chaos swirling inside me.

*Get it together, Spencer.* I tell myself, clutching my hands into fists. *It's just an adventure, remember? Temporary. Fun. Nothing more.*

But deep down, I question if that's really true. Is this a fleeting moment of excitement in my otherwise ordinary life, or is this the beginning of something much, much more?

# Chapter Twenty-Two

## Spencer

Sunlight leaks through the curtains, casting a warm glow over my room. My eyes flutter open as I stretch and yawn, suddenly aware of the butterflies fluttering in my stomach. Last night with Percival is still vivid in my mind; our bodies entwined, the sensual dance we shared. As nervous as I am about confronting him, it's time to face the music.

As I sit up on the edge of the bed, my hands fidget nervously with the hem of my oversized hoodie. My thoughts race with uncertainty, like a tumbleweed blowing across a desolate highway. Where do we go from here? I've always been cautious, especially when it comes to matters of the heart. But there's something about Percival that makes me want to throw caution to the wind, and it's both thrilling and terrifying.

I stand up and wander over to the floor-length mirror, taking in my reflection. My green eyes are wide and searching, reflecting the storm of emotions brewing inside me. The smudged mascara beneath them tells a tale of passion, but also vulnerability. My cheeks flush at the memory of our heated encounter, and for a moment, I'm lost in the sensation of his strong arms around me, the warmth of his body pressed against mine.

But reality quickly sets in as I remember that he's a notorious womanizer—a man who craves adrenaline, luxury, and the finer things in life. That's not me. I'm just a simple girl

who loves flipping furniture and dreams of painting masterpieces someday. We come from different worlds, and yet I can't deny the magnetic pull between us.

“Okay, Spencer. Get it together,” I mutter to myself, determined to face the day. I fish out a clean pair of leggings and a t-shirt from my dresser and change into them, trying to shake off the lingering doubt and fear. “*You're stronger than this,*” I remind myself, taking a deep breath.

I glance at the door, knowing that on the other side lies the answer to my questions—or maybe just more uncertainty. But I can't hide away forever. So, with one last look in the mirror, I gather my courage and prepare to step into the unknown.

Gathering my courage, I step out of my room and make my way towards the kitchenette. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee fills the air, guiding me to where Percival must be. As I round the corner, I see him lounging against the kitchen island, bare-chested, wearing grey sweatpants that hang low on his hips. He's as gorgeous as ever, with his sun-kissed skin and tousled dark hair.

“Morning,” I sign, trying to keep my expression neutral despite the butterflies in my stomach.

Percival looks up from his mug, a scowl already etched on his face. Of course, I can't hear his response, but the tension in his body speaks volumes. I brace myself for whatever comes next, determined to stand my ground.

“Look, about last night...” I start, my hands shaking slightly as I sign the words. “I don't regret it, but we need to talk.”

A spark of surprise flickers in his dark eyes before he takes a deep breath and nods, setting his mug down on the counter. “Alright,” he signs back, his fingers moving with practiced ease. “Let’s talk.”

“First, I want you to know that I care about you,” I emphasize, my hands steady now as I express my thoughts. “But you should also understand that I’m not one of your usual conquests.”

“Spencer, I never thought of you as just another—” he begins, but I cut him off, needing to get this off my chest.

“Let me finish,” I insist, my green eyes locked on his. “I’ve heard all about the women who come and go in your life. And I’m fine with that, but I won’t share you while this lasts.”

For a moment, he just stares at me, his scowl replaced by an unreadable expression. Then, he leans back against the island and crosses his arms over his chest. “You’re right,” he signs slowly, his eyes never leaving mine. “I’ve had my fair share of fun and have nothing to be ashamed of. I’m a single man having fun with single women.”

Women, as in plural. I won’t go there. There is no point.

I glance at the floor, tapping my fingers against the kitchen island. My mind races with thoughts of the uncertainty surrounding us. I look back up at Percival, his toned body so close and yet emotionally still distant. “Listen...” I start, signing my words with purposeful movements. “I want to make something clear. If we’re going to try, it’s going to be on my terms.”

His eyebrows raise, curious as to what I'm about to say. I take a deep breath, gathering my thoughts. "First, we need to be honest with each other. Second, I want us to take things slow." I pause, gauging his reaction before continuing. "Lastly, I need you to understand that my duties come first, and I'm not willing to give that up for anyone or anything."

The tension turns thick as Percival processes my words, his gaze intense. A wave of vulnerability washes over me as I stand there, waiting for his response. I can feel my heart pounding in my chest, trying to break free from the cage of my ribs.

"Alright," he signs finally, nodding his head. "I can agree to those terms. Trust, take it slow, and support your dreams. But Spencer, you need to know that I have my own ambitions, too. We need to support each other equally."

I nod, understanding the importance of balance in any relationship. "Agreed," I sign, allowing myself to smile. "Respect for each other's life and boundaries. Good."

As I watch Percival's face soften, the sunlight pours through the window, casting a warm glow on his skin. For a moment, my world seems to be here like a blank canvas waiting for us to paint our story. Together, we'll navigate this step by step. And maybe, just maybe, we'll find what we're looking for along the way.

A flicker of something indefinable sparks in Percival's dark eyes as he meets my gaze, and I wonder what thoughts are running through his mind. His demeanor shifts, the tension



between us seeming to dissipate like fog under the bright California sun.

“Alright, Spencer,” he signs, his fingers moving with a newfound ease. “I’m in. Let’s do this.”

We both stand there for a moment, taking in the significance of our decision. The possibilities stretch out before us like the Pacific Coast Highway. I feel a thrill deep in my chest, the kind that comes from setting off on a new journey, where the destination is unknown, but the ride is exhilarating.

“Are you hungry?” Percival asks suddenly, his hands waving animatedly. “I’m thinking about whipping up some breakfast tacos. You game?”

“Feed me tacos and tell me I’m pretty.” I joke back, my stomach rumbling in agreement. As we move around the small kitchen, I watch him with curiosity, wondering what he has up his sleeve. He seems genuine in his willingness to take things slow, but there’s a part of me that can’t shake the suspicion that he might have an ulterior motive.

# Chapter Twenty-Three

## Spencer

The sun spills golden warmth across my face as I dig into my plate. The B&B suite's terrace offers a stunning view of the property garden. Percival sits across from me at the other side of the counter, his charming smile barely contained beneath a bite of his taco.

"Isn't this just yummy?" he asks, eyes twinkling with satisfaction. I nod, savoring the flavors dancing on my tongue. For someone who loves luxury like Percival, this breakfast certainly lives up to his standards.

My fingers trace the outline of the seashell-patterned napkin on my lap, and I ponder the whirlwind of events that led us here. Saving Percival's life, our blossoming connection, the shared secrets, and vulnerable moments—it all feels like a dream, yet here we are, together.

Percival's phone buzzes on the table, and he glances at the screen before excusing himself. "I'm sorry, Spencer, I need to take this call." He stands, brushing imaginary crumbs from his pants, and heads inside his bedroom. I know I can't hear him, but I appreciate his respect for my space.

Life has a funny way of throwing curveballs, but maybe, just maybe, this adventure is meant to be. While Percival's on the phone, I let my thoughts drift to my work, thinking of painting a colorful garden in one dresser's door, my style, of course. My hands itch to pick up a brush, but for now, I'll store these

images in my mind, ready to bring them to life when I return home.

Through the open door, I see Percival's face fall, his confident demeanor replaced by a tense frown. His free hand runs through his hair as he listens to whoever is on the other end of the line.

Percival hangs up and stares at the phone for a moment, deep in thought. I worry about what could have caused such a reaction. This isn't the carefree, party-loving Percival I've come to know. Whatever the person said, it left him rattled.

As I wait for Percival to rejoin me, I take a sip of my orange juice, the cool liquid quenching my thirst and offering a brief distraction from my concern. The sun continues its climb into the sky, drawing shadows on the room, and I feel that the weight of those shadows now rests upon both our shoulders.

"Spencer," he begins, searching for words, "there's something I need to talk to you about."

"Is everything alright?" I ask, my voice wavering slightly, trying to read his expression.

"Everything's fine," he reassures me, reaching across the table to take my hand. His touch sends shivers down my spine, igniting that familiar spark between us. "But I think we need some time alone to figure out... well, us."

"Us?" I repeat, heart pounding at the thought. Despite the uncertainty of the situation, the idea of exploring our connection further sends warmth coursing through my veins.

“Yeah,” Percival says, determination etched on his face. “I want to take you to Monterey. It’s beautiful there, and we’ll have the privacy we need to push our limits and see where this goes.”

“Monterey, huh?” I reply, trying to sound casual despite the butterflies dancing in my stomach. “That means more days on the road. What about my work?”

“You don’t have to worry about anything,” he grins, the familiar twinkle returning to his eyes. “So, what do you say? Are you ready to take this leap with me?”

“I need to think about it,” I respond, full of hesitation, my pulse racing at the prospect of what lies ahead. The thrill of the unknown is exhilarating. I trust Percival, and I’m more than willing to embark on this journey together.

“Come on, Spencer... I promise it will be fun.”

Gianna’s face comes to my mind while she begs me to go with the flow and push my limits.

“Ok, I’ll go with you.”

“Great,” says Percival, leaning in to brush a tender kiss against my cheek. “We’ll leave as soon as possible. Start packing your bags, Miss O’Hagan. We’re in for one hell of a ride.”

With that, he walks away to organize everything for the trip, making arrangements for accommodations and ensuring we have everything we need to embark on our steamy adventure. I watch him as he moves through the room with purpose, his

bare torso showcasing his sculpted muscles. He wouldn't be my typical type, but there's something about him that draws me in, igniting a hunger within me I never knew I had.

"Alright, Spencer," he announces later, pocketing his phone with a satisfied grin. My two small bags are sitting on the floor at my feet. "We're all set. Are you ready to hit the road?"

"Absolutely," I reply, my heart racing in anticipation.

"Great," he says, grabbing our bags and leading me outside, where his black SUV awaits us. The vibration of the engine is like a siren's call, beckoning us towards the open highway. "Monterey, here we go!" Percival says, his eyes gleaming with excitement as he settles into the driver's seat. I slide into the passenger side, feeling the buttery soft leather embrace me.

As we hit the road, driving north towards Monterey, California, the wind whips through our hair, and the excitement builds. The sun kisses our skin, and the scent of the ocean fills the air. I feel alive, electric even, as we speed along the coast.

"Spencer, have you ever been to Monterey?" Percival asks, his words filled with genuine curiosity.

"Never," I confess. "But I've always wanted to."

"Then it's about time we changed that," he states triumphantly, his grip on the wheel tightening as he maneuvers through the winding coastal roads.

"Damn right, it is," I say, feeling a thrill of excitement ripple through me at the prospect of spending more time together.

As we continue to drive, the landscape around us changes from sandy beaches and palm trees to jagged cliffs and crashing waves. The beauty of it all leaves me breathless, but it pales in comparison to the anticipation of exploring our desires together.

“Almost there,” Percival announces, his voice tinged with eagerness.

“Can’t wait,” I reply, my imagination already painting vivid images of what’s to come.

The coastal breeze whips through my hair as we take a winding, secluded road along the cliffs. Percival takes the short detour to a Vista Point and stops the car. The picturesque scene before us looks like it’s been plucked straight from a postcard, with Monterey Bay sparkling in the distance. Percival’s fingers trail delicately up and down my arm, each touch sending shivers across my skin.

“Spencer, have you ever seen anything so beautiful?”

I shake my head, my eyes fixed on the breathtaking panorama unfolding before us. The truth is, I’m not just talking about the scenery. In that instant, I realize that the real beauty lies within the connection Percival and I share, electric, powerful, and undeniably intense.

“Neither have I,” he admits, his gaze flickering from the road to me. There’s a fire in his eyes, a burning desire that seems to mirror my own. I shiver despite the warmth of the setting sun.

“Stop looking at me like that,” I tease, trying to break the spell he’s cast on me.

“Like what?” he grins, feigning innocence. But we both know there’s nothing innocent about the way he makes me feel.

“Like you’re undressing me with your eyes.”

“Can you blame me?” he retorts. “You’re a goddess.” His words send a thrill down my spine as his free hand brushes my thigh, moving ever so slowly higher.

We are flirting with danger, and I’m willing to risk it all.

“Keep it together, Mr. Hills. We haven’t arrived yet,” I warn playfully, even as my body trembles with anticipation.

“Trust me, I’ve got everything under control,” he replies confidently.



# Chapter Twenty-Four

## Spencer

While we are silent, just enjoying the breathtaking view, my phone buzzes in my pocket. I pull it out, surprised to see a message from Aunt Orla.

Her: Spencer, just checking on you. Mr. Wagner came earlier today to check the roof. We need to move fast with this.

My chest tightens, and the weight of responsibility settles on my shoulders once more. I look back out the window, but the scenery doesn't hold the same magic it did moments ago. Instead, I find myself consumed by thoughts of our crumbling historic home in San Diego and the mountain of bills to pay that never seems to shrink.

"Everything okay?" Percival asks, his voice full of concern as he notices the shift in my mood.

I nod slightly before signing, "It's just... Aunt Orla reminded me of our bills and the repairs the house needs. It's hard to enjoy this trip knowing there's so much to take care of back home."

Percival's gaze softens as he takes in my words. "I get it, Spencer. But you deserve a break. I'm sure you'll figure something out when we get back, okay?"

My hands tremble as I sign, "I just feel so overwhelmed sometimes. I need to find a way to make more money, but I can't seem to catch a break."

“Hey,” he says gently, reaching over to squeeze my hand. “We’ll sort it out, alright?”

His words bring a small comfort, but the knot of anxiety remains lodged in my chest. I force a smile and try to focus on the present moment; the warm breeze, the fading sunlight, and the promise of whatever is waiting for us in Monterey. But the weight of my responsibilities refuses to be ignored, casting a shadow over even the brightest moments.

“Thanks,” I say quietly, hoping my gratitude reaches him despite my heavy heart. “I appreciate your support.”

“Always,” he replies, his eyes filled with sincerity. “Now, let’s enjoy this trip and make some memories we’ll never forget.”

I watch as Percival’s expression becomes tender, his eyes brimming with genuine concern for my well-being. “Spencer, I promise we’ll find a way to help you out with your home and the bills,” he says earnestly. “You don’t have to carry this burden alone.”

“Thank you, but that’s not necessary,” I sign with determination, reluctant to accept more help than he’s already given. “You’ve done so much for me already.”

“Hey,” Percival smiles, his eyes never leaving mine. “You saved my life, remember? It’s only fair I do something for you in return. You promised at least a few more days of fun, right?”

A grin pulls up my lips, feeling a flutter of excitement at the prospect of enjoying our road trip together. “Yeah, I guess I did.”

“Good. Let’s focus on having a great time now, and we’ll worry about the rest later.” He winks provocatively, adding, “Don’t tempt me, Spencer. I’ll fuck the worries out of you if that’s necessary.”

I blush furiously, unable to suppress a laugh at his boldness and nod in agreement. For now, I’ll try to set my concerns aside and enjoy whatever lies ahead.

As we drive along the scenic coastline, the sun begins to dip toward the horizon. Suddenly, Percival parks the luxury SUV in front of an enchanting garden, the sight of which takes my breath away. Rows of blooming flowers stretch out before us, their vibrant colors painting a vivid tapestry against the backdrop of the ocean.

“I need to make some calls,” he announces, leaving me curious about his intentions. As he steps out of the car, phone pressed to his ear, I take a moment to observe him. The way he effortlessly commands attention, even while simply standing there, never ceases to amaze me.

Intrigued by the garden, I unbuckle my seatbelt and step out of the SUV. The salty air fills my lungs as I wander closer, drawn in by the beauty before me and eager to explore its hidden secrets. What could have possibly brought Percival here? And why now?

I take a deep breath and shake off my lingering worries, determined to embrace the present moment and the sense of wonder it invokes. If Percival trusts that everything will work out, then perhaps I should, too.

As I wander deeper into the garden, I spot a charming little greenhouse nestled among the blooming flowers. My heart races with excitement as I approach the delicate structure, its glass walls shimmering in the sunlight.

My breath fogs up the glass as I press my face closer for a better look. Inside, rows of potted plants sit neatly on wooden shelves, their leaves stretching toward the sun in a silent plea for life-giving light.

I feel a sudden urge to explore the greenhouse, to immerse myself in its quiet beauty. Casting a glance over my shoulder to ensure that Percival is still preoccupied, I take a tentative step forward, my fingers reaching out to push open the creaky door.

*“Here goes nothing,”* I think to myself, and I’m immediately enveloped by the warm, humid air inside. The scent of damp soil and growing things fills my nostrils, grounding me in the here and now.

*“Is this what heaven smells like?”* I wonder.

As I explore the interior of the greenhouse, each new discovery fills me with childlike awe. Exotic flowers in every hue imaginable stretch out before me, their petals delicate works of art crafted by nature herself.

*“Who knew such beauty existed in this tiny corner of the world?”* I muse, completely captivated by my surroundings.

My fingertips brush against the velvety petals of a pristine white orchid, the sensation bringing forth an involuntary shiver. In that moment, I feel connected to this living, breathing world, and it’s as if time itself has ceased to exist.

Percival startles me out of my reverie, and I turn to find him standing in the doorway of the greenhouse, his eyes wide with surprise.

“Hey,” I say sheepishly, my cheeks flushing pink with embarrassment. “I couldn’t help myself. This place is incredible.”

He grins, stepping inside, and closing the door behind him. “You have quite the talent for finding hidden gems, Spencer O’Hagan.”

As we stand there, surrounded by nature’s beauty, a sense of hope blooming within me. And for the first time in a long while, I allow myself to believe that maybe, just maybe, everything will work out after all.

“You okay?”

“Better than okay,” I reply, offering him a genuine smile. “This place is magical. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything like it.”

“Neither have I,” he admits, joining me among the orchids. “I had no idea this was here when I picked this spot.”

“Serendipity,” I say, feeling the warmth of his presence beside me. “It’s like this place was just waiting for us to find it.”

“Maybe it was,” he agrees, his eyes alight with wonder as he takes in the mesmerizing beauty surrounding us. Together, we wander through the greenhouse, losing ourselves in the serene world of orchids, our troubles temporarily forgotten.

I continue to wander through the greenhouse, my fingers brushing against the petals of various orchids as I meander along the narrow pathways. The vibrant colors seem to dance in the filtered sunlight, casting a kaleidoscope of hues across the glass walls and floor. My heart swells with a newfound sense of hope, an inkling that perhaps there’s more to life than just trying to keep my head above water.

As we explore further, I find myself drawn to a particular orchid nestled among its peers. Its petals are a delicate shade of lilac, fading to white at the edges, and it seems to glow with an ethereal light. I feel a connection to this flower – a kinship born from our shared fragility and quiet strength.

“Look at this one,” I say, carefully cupping the bloom in my hand.

“Absolutely stunning,” Percival agrees, reaching out to touch the petals as well. Our fingers brush against each other, sending a jolt of electricity through me, a sensation both exhilarating and terrifying.

A warm feeling spreads through my chest, my earlier worries lessened by the weight of his words. In this moment,

surrounded by the enchanting beauty of the orchids, I realize that even in the face of adversity, there is still magic and wonder to be found. All it takes is the willingness to see it.

“Thank you,” I say, my eyes meeting his in a moment of shared understanding. “Thank you for helping me find this place...and for reminding me that there’s more to life than just surviving.”

“Anytime,” he replies, his gaze never leaving mine. “That’s what friends are for, after all.”

We stand there, surrounded by the marvel of nature, but in my mind the word friends feels heavier than ever. And I hate it.



# Chapter Twenty-Five

## Percival

**A**s I enter the greenhouse, a world of vibrant colors and intoxicating scents envelops me. The air is thick with moisture, and I can feel beads of sweat forming on my forehead. My eyes take a moment to adjust to the lush surroundings, but when they do, it's like stumbling upon a hidden treasure.

I find myself unable to tear my gaze away from her. She stands among the orchids, her green eyes reflecting their vivid hues. Her delicate hands cradle one of the blossoms as if it were the most precious thing in the world. In this moment, she looks ethereal, otherworldly even, and I'm captivated by her beauty and unique perspective.

The sun filters through the greenhouse glass, casting a warm glow over the countless orchids surrounding us. Spencer's green eyes sparkle like emeralds as she leans in to smell one of the flowers, and I'm struck by the intensity of my longing for her.

"Hey," she says, her voice pulling me out of my thoughts. "What's your favorite color?"

"Green," I reply without hesitation, unable to tear my gaze from her captivating eyes. She chuckles softly and shakes her head, clearly amused by my answer.

“Of course, it is,” she teases, a playful smirk dancing on her lips. “I bet you say that to all the girls.”

“Only the ones with stunning green eyes,” I counter, forcing myself to look away as heat rises to my cheeks. I’ve never been one for commitment, but there’s something about Spencer that makes me want to change, to be better. And it terrifies me.

“Alright, Casanova, let’s get serious for a minute,” she says, her tone shifting. “Tell me something real about yourself. Something you’ve never told anyone else.”

“Something real...” I hesitate, wrestling with the vulnerability her request demands. But as I glance back at her, her eyes warm and encouraging, I find myself yielding to the sincerity of the moment. “When I was younger, I wanted to be a hero. But not like Superman or Batman, I wanted to be a hero like Donnie Darko.” The admission feels both freeing and frightening, laying my heart bare before her.

“Donnie Darko, huh?” Spencer’s eyes light up with interest, and I feel a spark of hope ignite within me. “I have no idea what you are talking about. Is that DC or Marvel?”

“Don’t you know Donnie Darko? Spencer, you need to be educated in good movies.” I say, surprised to find that I actually mean it. Donnie saved so many lives, sacrificing everything for the people he loved. Spencer saved my life, and I’d give everything for her.

“What movie?” she signs back, looking a little bit offended. Thank goodness, my thoughts are too scary lately. “I have

great taste in movies.”

“I can’t believe you never have seen this one.”

“Ok,” she replies. “Tell me about this movie.”

“And spoil it for you? Wouldn’t dream of it. You must wait and see.”

“Tell me.” She insists, marking her words with her foot tapping on the ground.

“We have plans for tonight, but tomorrow...”

As we continue to explore the greenhouse, our conversation weaving from lighthearted banter to deeper revelations, I find myself torn between my lustful desires and the swelling of my heart whenever I look into Spencer’s eyes.

I grab her hand and take her out of there to lighten the weight of the moment. I’m navigating treacherous waters. It’s better to go back to sex, safe ground. There, I know how to move. Yes, in the most literal sense of the word.

The coastal scenery flies past us like an impressionist painting come to life, and I believe Spencer’s artistic soul will be captivated by the views awaiting us.

As we pull up to the house I rented for these days, its grandeur stuns even me—and trust me, I’m no stranger to opulence. Nestled atop sun-kissed cliffs overlooking the Pacific, the estate exudes sensuality and invites exploration.

“This place is amazing,” she sighs. “You didn’t have to do it, Percival. I would be perfectly fine with something less...”

opulent.”

“Wait until you see the view from the living room,” I say, guiding her towards the door, then to said room and its floor-to-ceiling windows. As if on cue, a whale breaches in the distance, its massive form silhouetted against the horizon. Spencer gasps, her hands pressed against the glass as she watches the majestic creature dive back beneath the waves.

She breathes as if wanting to say something, her face lit with wonder. I savor the sight of her happiness, knowing that this moment—however fleeting—is one I’ll cherish forever.

“Come on, there’s more to see,” I tell her, leading her down a hallway adorned with intricate moldings and elegant chandeliers. We pass several tastefully decorated rooms, each filled with exquisite furnishings and unique artwork. But it’s the final room that truly captures our attention.

Spencer gasps, her face a mix of surprise and intrigue as she takes in the opulent space before us. A crystal chandelier casts a warm glow over the plush carpet and richly upholstered furniture while a massive four-poster bed beckons from the far end of the room. But it’s the sex swing hanging from the ceiling that truly commands our attention.

“Is that...?” she trails off, her cheeks flushing as she glances at me for confirmation.

“Indeed, it is,” I reply, a mischievous grin tugging at my lips. “I thought it might add an extra element to our weekend.”

“Element?” Spencer raises an eyebrow, and I can see the wheels turning in her head as she considers the possibilities. The anticipation between us crackles like electricity, heightening our senses and drawing us together like magnets.

“Only if you’re comfortable, of course,” I add hastily, not wanting to push her too far too fast. My heart swells as I realize that, for once, my intentions aren’t driven solely by lust—they’re entwined with a genuine desire to make Spencer happy, to share new experiences with her, and to deepen our connection on every level.

“Let’s explore the rest of the *house* first,” she suggests, her eyes dancing with curiosity. “God only knows what other surprises you have planned.”

“My lips are sealed.” I take her hand as we continue our tour. As we wander through the sprawling estate, I find myself lost in thoughts of our future together. The secrets we’ll uncover. And, the thoughts terrify me while electrifying me at the same time.

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“Do you want to play with this?” I ask, my voice laced with anticipation as we stand on the threshold of the opulent sex swing room. The rich velvet curtains sway gently in the breeze from the open window, casting a seductive glow over the chamber.

She's trembling, her green eyes dancing with mischief as she steps into the room. I watch her explore, her fingers trailing delicately over the golden fixtures and plush cushions that surround the centerpiece—a luxurious, leather-clad swing suspended from the ceiling.

“Come here,” I say softly, pulling her towards me. Our lips meet in a kiss, our breathing becoming heavier and more urgent with each passing second while every stitch we are wearing hits the floor. As our bodies press together, I can feel the intensity of our connection surging like a tidal wave, threatening to overwhelm us both.

“Up you go,” I murmur, lifting Spencer onto the sex swing. She gasps in surprise at the sensation, her legs wrapping instinctively around my waist as I secure her in place. My hands roam her body hungrily, taking in every curve and contour as if committing them to memory.

Without any shame, she guides my hand to the warm, wet heat between her thighs. I oblige eagerly, my fingers exploring her pink pussy as my mouth finds her neck, leaving a trail of kisses in its wake. Her hips buck against my touch, a desperate moan escaping her lips as our eyes lock.

I planned to play with her for more time. To make her beg, but this will be fast and furious. My cock is harder than ever. I haven't fuck her in what seems days and this hunger is killing me, pushing me to move faster. Yeah, I've become addicted to my hands on her skin.

Slowly, I enter her, savoring the exquisite tightness enveloping me. We move together, lost in the rhythm, each thrust bringing us closer to the edge of sanity.

Her moans are urging me to go faster. Harder. Her nails digging into my back as her body quivers beneath me. I oblige, slamming into her with a primal fervor that sends us both hurtling towards oblivion.

“Spencer!” I cry out as we climax together, our bodies shaking and drenched in sweat. The room seems to spin around us, but in that moment, nothing exists but the two of us.

At last, the world comes back into focus, and I notice Spencer’s chest heaving with exhaustion. Her eyes, usually so bright and vibrant, are glazed over with the intensity of our encounter.

“Are you okay?” I ask, concern flooding my voice as I help her down from the swing.

“Never better,” she signs and then, her body leans against me for support. “That was... incredible.”

I wrap my arms around her, holding her close as we catch our breaths. Though our bodies ache with fatigue, the emotional weight of our connection remains etched on our faces.

As I scoop Spencer up in my arms, her body is limp and spent from our passionate tryst. Her breathing is heavy but steady – a testament to the intensity of our connection. I’m

careful not to jostle her too much as I carry her through the luxurious mansion towards the bedroom.

The room we've chosen for the night is awash in moonlight, casting a silver glow over the plush furnishings and soft linens. I gently lay Spencer down on the bed, tucking her in with a warm, cozy blanket. As I take a step back, I admire her beauty: those piercing green eyes now closed, her delicate features relaxed in slumber, and her chest rising and falling with each breath.

"Sweet dreams," I whisper before pressing a tender kiss to her forehead. With that, I retreat to the adjoining bathroom to clean up before joining her in bed.

I wake up with a start, my senses suddenly on high alert. Something feels... off. Turning to face Spencer, I find only an empty space where she should be. Panic surges through me, my heart pounding against my chest like a caged animal.

"Spencer?" I call out even if I know she can't hear me, hoping against hope that she's simply wandered off to grab a midnight snack or something equally innocent.

Casting aside the tangled sheets, I bolt upright and throw on a pair of pants before heading out to search for her. My mind races with doubt. Was she overwhelmed by the intensity of our encounter? Or worse, is she in danger?

The suspense is unbearable, gnawing at my insides like a ravenous beast. Determination courses through my veins as I continue my frantic search. I won't rest until I find her and ensure she's safe.

As I scour every inch of the sprawling estate, one thought remains at the forefront of my mind: I need Spencer to stay with me, not just for tonight, but for as long as we are together. And I'll do whatever it takes to convince her this has only just begun.

The luxurious rooms and opulent decorations blur together as I search for any sign of her. But even in my concern, the memories of how it felt to have her close—the electricity between us, the overwhelming passion... My heart aches with the intensity of it all.

I can't shake the feeling that she needs me just as much as I need her. My charm and confidence surge forward, pushing me to find her and reassure her that whatever doubts or fears she may have are unfounded. Determination etches itself into every fiber of my being—I won't lose her now, not when we've barely begun to explore what we could be together.

Suddenly, I catch sight of her standing near the living room window. The moonlight bathes her in an ethereal glow, making her look like an angel who has wandered too far from heaven. As I approach her, the pull between us is undeniable, magnetic. It's as if our souls recognize each other, drawn together by something greater than ourselves.

"Spencer," I breathe while touching her shoulder, relief washing over me at the sight of her safe and sound. "What happened? I woke up, and you were gone."

She hesitates, her green eyes flickering with emotion as they meet mine. "I couldn't sleep," she admits softly. "I needed

some air, and I just... I don't know, Percival. Everything feels so intense.”

“Hey,” I say gently, taking her hand and giving it a reassuring squeeze. “It’s okay to be scared. This is new territory for both of us, but I promise you, Spencer, I’m in this with you.”

She nods, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears.

“As we said, let’s take this one step at a time,” I suggest. My face just an inch from hers. Pulling her into my arms for a comforting embrace. “We’ll figure it out as we go, and if it gets too much, we can always pause and catch our breaths. Okay?”

As we stand there, wrapped up in each other’s warmth, I feel the weight of her fears beginning to dissolve. The irresistible pull between us is stronger than ever, binding us closer in our determination to face whatever challenges may lie ahead.

“Okay,” I feel her lips moving against my chest. The feeling is almost magical.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Spencer

I'm standing on the shore, staring at the horizon as the waves crash around me. I can feel the sand between my toes and the ocean breeze on my face, but all I can think about is Percival. The man has taken up residence not only on the other side of the bed but also in my thoughts. My heart races as I recall his charming smile and the confidence that seems to radiate from him.

“Spencer! You ready for this?” He touches my shoulder, interrupting my internal turmoil. He’s grinning like a little kid, excited to share his world with me. I shake my head slightly, trying to regain my focus. “Yeah, let’s do it,” I respond with forced enthusiasm.

We board the private yacht, prepared just for us, and my stomach churns. Not from seasickness, but from the uncertainty of what lies ahead. I remind myself to keep my distance, to protect my heart from someone so unpredictable.

“Trust me, you’re gonna love this!” Percival exclaims as we set sail. His expression is filled with excitement, but I wonder if there’s an ulterior motive behind his actions. I close my eyes, taking in a deep breath of salty air, and try to clear my thoughts.

“Look, Spencer!” Percival points towards the water. I move my eyes to see a pod of whales breaking the surface, their majestic tails flipping gracefully as they dive back into the

depths. For a moment, my worries are forgotten, replaced by the sheer awe of witnessing these magnificent creatures up close.

Percival is standing close enough that I can feel his warm breath on my cheek. I stay still, unable to find a way to deal with the emotions swelling inside me. We watch the whales continue their dance, their powerful bodies gliding effortlessly through the water.

“Thank you,” I sign, my hands as slow as the sway of the waves crashing on the yacht. Percival turns to face me, his eyes searching mine for something I can’t quite identify. “You’re welcome, Spencer,” he replies with a gentle smile, and my heart flutters involuntarily.

As we continue our private whale-seeing tour, Percival goes above and beyond to create an unforgettable sensory experience. He describes each species of whale we encounter, their unique behaviors and calls, painting a vivid picture that fills in the gaps left by my hearing loss. Each word he speaks sends a shiver down my spine, further blurring the line between caution and desire.

I turn away from him, trying to regain control of my emotions as we make our way back to shore. I’m grateful for this magical experience, but I’m feeling like I’m losing myself in the unknown depths of Percival Hills. And I’m not sure if I can trust myself to swim back to the surface.

We spend the rest of the morning whale-watching, but all too soon, Percival announces that it’s time to head back to shore.

As we approach the dock, a sense of loss invades me as the whales fade into the distance.

“Spencer,” Percival says once we’ve disembarked, “I have another surprise for you.”

“Another?” I reply, skeptical but secretly curious.

“Trust me, you’ll love it. I’m taking you for an evening out.”

“Really?” I ask, surprised by the extravagance of his plans. “That sounds... really fancy.”

“Only the best for you,” he replies with a warm smile, and I return it despite my lingering apprehensions about where this day might lead.

“Welcome back,” a woman greets us as we enter the luxurious rental home. She stands next to a gleaming rack of dresses that seem to shimmer with each subtle movement. Each one is more exquisite than the last, and I feel a little overwhelmed.

“Spencer, meet Marissa,” Percival introduces us. “She’ll help you choose the perfect dress for tonight.”

“What?” My fingers fly, trying to form the word. My plan was to wear the new jeans I bought during my expedition with Gianna. This is too much. Way too much.

“Nice to meet you, Spencer,” Marissa says warmly. “I’ve selected a variety of styles and colors for you to try on. Don’t be shy, and have fun with it!”

I hesitantly step towards the rack, my fingers trailing over the luxurious fabrics. Sequins, silk, velvet—they all beckon me with their opulence. But it's a black one-shoulder dress with a daringly high leg slit that catches my eye.

“I think it'll look stunning on you,” Marissa says.

My mind is reeling, and for a moment I even feel dizzy.

“Can I try it?” I ask, holding it up.

“Of course!” Marissa exclaims, clearly pleased with my choice.

As I change into the dress, I ah and oh at how perfectly it fits my body, accentuating my curves in all the right places. The hair and makeup artist, a young woman named Lily, works her magic on me, skillfully applying cosmetics and styling my hair into loose waves that cascade down my shoulders.

“Wow,” Percival breathes when he sees me, his eyes wide in admiration. “You look absolutely breathtaking, Spencer.”

“Thank you,” I blush, unsure of how to respond to such lavish praise.

“I'm not gonna lie,” he adds with a mischievous grin, “I'm going to be hard for you the entire night, and trust me, you're gonna pay for it later.”

I roll my eyes, trying to ignore the heat that flares at his words.

“Can't help it,” he shrugs unapologetically. “You're just too irresistible.”

As I take a final look in the mirror, I feel like a stranger is staring back at me. Gone is the girl who spends her days covered in paint and sawdust; in her place stands a woman with an air of elegance and sensuality that I never knew I possessed. I push away my doubts and insecurities, determined to embrace this new side of myself, if only for tonight. Despite my fear of the unknown, I can't deny the thrill coursing through my veins as I step out into the evening, ready to face whatever Percival has planned.

With a deep breath, I step into the opulent restaurant that Percival has chosen for our dinner. Nestled in the heart of Monterey, this culinary gem is a favorite among the rich and elite, a world far removed from my own. The delicate scent of roses and candle wax envelops us as we enter, and I marvel at the exquisite décor – glittering chandeliers suspended from the ceiling, crisp white tablecloths adorned with intricate silverware, and sparkling crystal glasses waiting to be filled with the finest wines.

“This place is amazing.” I'm unable to hide my awe.

“You deserve it,” he replies, his voice expression confident as he guides me towards our table.

The dim lighting casts an intimate glow over the room. I glance around at the impeccably dressed patrons, feeling a mixture of excitement and trepidation as I realize just how different my life has become since meeting Percival.

“Here's your menu,” the waiter says politely, placing it before me. “Our chef has prepared a special selection of dishes

for you tonight, focusing on local, seasonal ingredients.”

I thank him with a nod, scanning through the list of mouthwatering options. As much as I want to savor every bite, I feel slightly out of place in such luxurious surroundings, like a lost sea creature that has strayed too far from its familiar depths.

“Try the lobster bisque. It sounds delicious,” Percival suggests, flashing me a reassuring smile.

“Okay.” I nod, grateful for his guidance in this unfamiliar territory. “And maybe the filet mignon?”

“Excellent choices,” he approves, ordering for both of us with a casual ease that speaks to his familiarity with such extravagance.

As we wait for our food, I try to concentrate on the delicious aromas wafting through the air. But my thoughts keep drifting back to Percival’s earlier words about being hard for me all night and making me pay for it later. A shiver runs down my spine as I imagine what he might have planned, and I feel simultaneously intrigued and nervous at the prospect. What sort of adventure has he led me into this time?

“Spencer,” Percival breaks through my reverie, his eyes twinkling with mischief. “Are you with me? Or are you lost in your own little world again?”

“Sorry.” I blush, embarrassed at having been caught daydreaming. “I guess I’m just... overwhelmed by all of this.”

“Hey,” he says gently, reaching across the table to take my hand. “Just relax and enjoy the moment, okay? Tonight is all about you.”

“Okay,” I smile, feeling a warmth spread through me that has nothing to do with the flickering candles. As the first course arrives, steaming bowls of luxurious lobster bisque, I think that maybe, just maybe, I can handle whatever surprises Percival has in store for me.

As the evening progresses, I notice Percival’s attentive gestures becoming more and more pronounced. His fingers gently caress my hand as our conversation flows, making me feel both cherished and desired. He seems to be in his element here, like a conductor orchestrating a symphony of tastes and sensations for us to share.

“You have to try this wine,” he insists, pouring a deep burgundy liquid into my glass. “It’s one of my favorites.”

I take a sip, savoring the rich, velvety flavor that dances across my tongue, bringing forth images of vineyards. The sensation is intoxicating, and I find myself leaning into his touch, craving more of the connection our bodies seem to be forging on their own accord.

“See? I knew you’d love it,” he grins, clearly pleased with himself. Our eyes lock, and for a moment, I lose myself in the depths of his gaze, feeling as though I’ve been swept away by a powerful current. “Alright, let’s go,” he announces suddenly, rising from his chair and offering me his hand. “I’ve got another surprise for you.”

“Another one?” I ask, my curiosity piqued. It seems as if the night has been filled with one enchanting experience after another.

“Trust me,” he says with a wink, leading me out of the restaurant and into his black car, waiting outside.

As we drive through the city, I wonder what awaits us at our next destination. My mind races with possibilities, each more thrilling than the last. But nothing could have prepared me for the scene that greets us when we enter what appears to be an elegant private residence.

“Welcome to the party.”

The atmosphere is electric, charged with an undercurrent of energy that seems to vibrate through the air, making me feel a combination of fascination and trepidation as I take it all in.

My eyes widen as I glance around the room, trying to process what I’m seeing. “I never imagined something like this could exist.”

“Life is full of surprises, isn’t it?” Percival chuckles, his arm protectively encircling my waist. “Just remember, you don’t have to do anything you’re not comfortable with. Just enjoy the experience and let your senses guide you.”

As we explore the party, I find myself intrigued by the openness of the people around us, their uninhibited nature making me question my own boundaries and desires. And with every step, I feel Percival’s presence beside me, a constant reminder of the connection we share, one that has the potential

to grow even stronger if I'm willing to let go and embrace the unknown.

A wave of warmth washes over me as we step further into the party, a stark contrast to the cool Monterey evening outside. The sultry scent of perfume and cologne lingers in the air, mingling with the faint aroma of champagne and hors d'oeuvres. My eyes dart around the room, taking in the array of people – some clothed, others not so much—engaged in various forms of intimate interaction.

“Isn't it wild?” Percival grins, his eyes sparkling with mischief. “Just let yourself enjoy the experience.”

I nod hesitantly, my heart racing in my chest as we weave our way through the crowd. A tall blonde woman wearing nothing but a satin robe catches my eye, her body pressed against that of a well-muscled man. They share a passionate kiss, their hands roaming each other's bodies without restraint.

A gasp leaves my mouth, unable to tear my gaze away from the raw display of desire.

“Like what you see?” Percival teases, his breath hot on my ear.

“Maybe just a little,” I admit, feeling my cheeks flush with embarrassment. But before I can dwell on it, my attention is drawn to a nearby couch, where an uninhibited trio has captured the interest of several onlookers.

“Check that out,” Percival suggests, leaning in close as we observe the group. Two women, one with fiery red hair and the

other a brunette, lavish attention on a handsome older man who reclines confidently between them.

“Is this... normal?”

“Anything safe and consensual is normal, Spencer,” Percival replies, a wicked grin spreading across his face. “But remember, there’s no pressure to participate. We’re just here to have fun, right?”

“Right,” I agree, trying to keep my emotions at bay as I watch the trio.

As we stand there, Percival’s lips find the nape of my neck, leaving a trail of soft kisses that sends shivers down my spine. The sensation is both thrilling and intoxicating, causing me to lean into him for support.

“Are you okay?” he asks, concern lacing his gaze.

“I’m fine,” I assure him, my heart pounding in my chest. “This is just... new.”

“New can be good,” Percival whispers, pulling me closer. “Just let yourself feel it.”

“Maybe you’re right,” I reply, feeling an unfamiliar spark of desire ignite deep within me. And as we continue to explore the party, I wonder if this night will change everything.

“Would you like to try something?” Percival asks, his face a mix of curiosity and concern. “We don’t have to do anything you’re not comfortable with.”

I look at him, my heart racing, and consider my options. A small part of me is tempted—the thrill of the unknown, the excitement of stepping outside my comfort zone, but I know deep down that I can't go through with it. My boundaries are clear, and even though I'm drawn to Percival in ways I can't quite understand, I need to honor my own limits.

“Thank you for asking.” My hands are trembling while trying to convey my appreciation for his consideration. “But I think I'd rather just take a look for now.”

“Of course,” he replies, his smile warm and genuine. “It's important to respect your own boundaries. Do you want to keep exploring?”

“Sure,” I agree, feeling a wave of relief wash over me as we continue to navigate the dimly lit rooms filled with pleasure-seeking partygoers.

As we round a corner, we come across an intense scene: a woman, her arms tied above her head, is being flogged by a masked man. Her face betrays a mix of pain and ecstasy, and the surrounding crowd watches with rapt attention. The sound of leather against skin echoes throughout the room, punctuating the moans and gasps of the participants.

Unable to tear my eyes away from the spectacle before us, I ask Percival. “Is she... enjoying that?”

“Look at her face, Spencer,” Percival orders, his eyes locked on the scene. “Different people find pleasure in different things.”

The woman's reactions continue to fascinate me, and I speculate what sort of emotions she must be experiencing. Fear? Excitement? Thrill? Or perhaps a combination of all three?

"Does this interest you?" Percival inquires, his gaze turning gentle. He's attentive to my reactions, making sure I'm not overwhelmed by the intensity of the situation.

"I'm not sure," I confess, feeling a strange mix of intrigue and discomfort. "There's something... captivating about it, but I can't put my finger on why."

"Sometimes, our desires can be difficult to understand," he says thoughtfully, his eyes still focused on the woman and her tormentor. "But that doesn't make them any less valid."

As we continue to watch, a growing sense of unease fills my chest. We've entered a world so far beyond my own experiences, and I struggle to reconcile my curiosity with my discomfort. But even as I question my presence at this party, I find myself unwilling—or unable—to tear my gaze away from the scene unfolding before us.

"Enough," I signal, tugging Percival's arm. The room seems to close in on me as I feel a sudden need for air... for escape.

"Spencer?" Percival's concern is evident as he looks down at me, his dark eyes searching mine.

"Can we...talk? Alone?" I manage to say, my heart pounding in my chest. He nods without hesitation, his hand

finding mine and leading me away from the scene that had both intrigued and unnerved me.

We weave through the crowd of scantily clad bodies, and finally, we reach a secluded corner, just far enough removed from the chaos to allow some privacy.

“Are you alright?” Percival asks gently, his fingers still entwined with mine.

“Yeah,” I reply, steadying myself against the cool wall. “I just...needed a moment.”

“Of course.” His gaze never wavers from my face, his concern palpable. “Take as long as you need.”

Silence settles over us like a heavy blanket, and I find myself studying his handsome features, taking in the worry lines etched across his forehead. Despite his reputation as a party-loving womanizer, it’s clear that he genuinely cares about my well-being.

“Thank you. For understanding.”

“Always,” he replies. “You know you don’t have to stay here if you’re uncomfortable. We can leave whenever you want.”

“Actually...” I hesitate, unsure of how to broach the subject. “There’s something I’ve been wanting to tell you.”

“You can trust me,” he replies instantly.

“Promise you won’t...judge me?” I ask hesitantly, my heart pounding in my chest as I prepare to reveal a secret.

“Never,” he vows, a fierce determination in his gaze.

“Alright.” I exhale shakily, gathering my courage. “Here goes...”

As I get ready to share the truth that has haunted me for so long, the weight of my confession hangs heavy between us, casting a shadow over our newfound closeness. The anticipation is tangible, and for a brief moment, the world beyond our secluded corner ceases to exist.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Percival

“This is exciting and all, but it’s not my thing. I want to go.” Her hands are shaking and moving so fast I can barely read the words.

“Hey, don’t worry about the party,” I say, placing a hand on the wall, just over her shoulder, caging her with my body. “We’re just having a bit of fun, right? I can always indulge later.”

The moment those words leave my mouth, I can see the spark in Spencer’s green eyes dim, and it feels like a punch to the gut. I’ve screwed up, and I know it. A heavy silence fills the space between us, and I scramble to find the right words to fix what I’ve just broken.

“Spencer, I didn’t mean it like that,” I stammer, my heart racing. “I care about you, really. More than I thought I could.”

She looks away from me, her arms crossing over her chest. It’s clear she’s hurt, and I can’t bear the thought of being the one who caused her pain. My mind races with ways to make amends, to show her how much I truly care about her feelings.

“Come on, let’s get out of here,” I say, reaching for her hand. She hesitates, but eventually, her fingers intertwine with mine. “Let’s go back to our place, okay? We need to talk.”

The drive to the rental is filled with tension. Her body is rigid as she stares out the window. The quiet hum of the car’s

engine does little to drown out my own thoughts. I need to make this right. I have to.

Once we arrive at the mansion, nestled among the hills, I guide her inside. The soft scent of lavender and vanilla wafts through the air as we enter. It's calming, and I hope it'll help ease some of the tension between us.

"Sit down, please," I tell her, gesturing towards the plush couch. She complies, her eyes downcast, still avoiding my gaze. I take a deep breath, trying to gather my thoughts before I speak.

"First off, I'm sorry, Spencer," I begin, my voice thick with emotion. "I never should have said what I did. It was thoughtless and insensitive."

She finally looks at me, her green eyes filled with a mix of hurt and hope. I continue, my words tumbling out in a rush, determined to make her understand.

"Let me show you how much I care, Spencer."

After what feels like an eternity, she nods. "Okay. Show me."

I pull her close, my hands running down the curve of her spine, feeling the heat of her body against mine. Her green eyes lock onto mine, and I see a flicker of trust in them. I lean in, pressing my lips to hers in a slow, deliberate kiss that speaks of all the unspoken promises I intend to keep.

Our lips crash together once more, hungry, and desperate, as our hands begin to explore each other's bodies. The feel of her

fingers on my bare skin sends shivers down my spine, and I can tell by the way she sighs into our kiss that she's feeling the same fire that burns within me.

"God, Spencer," I groan, unable to contain my need any longer. "I want you so badly."

"Take me," she replies, her breath hot against my neck as her nails dig into my shoulders. "I want to feel you, too."

We waste no time, our clothes discarded quickly as we move towards the bed. Every touch, every caress is laced with the intensity of our connection, our passion spilling over like wildfire. There's nothing but the sound of our ragged breathing and the soft whispers of our names as we give ourselves over to each other completely.

"Spencer," I pant, sweat beading on my forehead as I hold myself above her. "Are you ready?"

"More than anything," she replies, her eyes shining with more than lust. I enter her slowly, savoring the sensation of her tight warmth engulfing me, and she moans softly, her muscles tensing around me.

She gasps for air while her fingers grip my arms.

"Me neither," I breathe, unable to hold back any longer as I begin to move within her, each thrust driving us both closer and closer to the edge. Our bodies merge into one, our shared rhythm a testament to the depth of our connection.

"Spencer," I choke out, feeling my climax approaching rapidly. "I'm so close."

She manages a nod, her face strained with pleasure.

“Come with me.”

The world narrows down to just the two of us, our hearts pounding in unison as we reach that peak together, our bodies shuddering with the force of our release. There is no greater intimacy than this moment, when all barriers between us have fallen away, and I know without a doubt that what we share is more than temporary.

The scent of our sweat lingers in the air like a testament to the passion that just unfolded. Spencer’s chest heaves gently, her breaths mingling with mine as our bodies lie entwined on the luxurious king-size bed. I stare at the luscious curves of her body, illuminated by the soft glow of the bedside lamp.

“Spencer,” I say, tracing my fingertips along the contours of her face, “I want to explore every inch of you.”

Her green eyes light up with excitement, and she nods in agreement.

Feeling a renewed surge of desire, I start by planting soft kisses along the nape of her neck, working my way down her collarbone and toward her chest. She shivers beneath my touch, and I can feel the heat radiating from her skin. The sensation is intoxicating, and it becomes clear that our first round of lovemaking was only the beginning.

“Tell me what you like, Spencer,” I murmur against her skin, seeking guidance while simultaneously wanting to drive her

wild. I'm determined to make her feel as cherished and adored as she deserves.

She says gasps, wrapping her fingers around my wrist and guiding my hand lower. "Your hands, I love the way they feel on my body."

"Like this?" I ask, cupping her breast and swirling my thumb across her sensitive nipple, causing her to moan softly.

"Exactly like that," she confirms, biting her lip. My heart swells with pride, knowing I've found a way to please her.

I continue to indulge on her body, driven by mutual desire and a fierce need to deepen our connection. Our hands roam freely, discovering each other's most sensitive areas and reveling in the pleasure we're able to provide one another.

"Come here," I whisper, pulling Spencer closer to me. Our bodies press against each other, the heat of our skin a reminder of the passion we've just shared.

"Thank you," she says slowly, her green eyes shimmering with emotion.

"Anytime," I reply, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face. It's an unspoken promise and one I fully intend to keep.

Lying beside her, I can feel the warmth of Spencer's body as we share in our intimate embrace. The rise and fall of her chest against mine synchronize our breaths, creating a rhythm that only we can understand. It's in this moment that I realize our connection has grown deeper than either of us could have known.

As the night fades into the early hours of the morning, we drift off to sleep, our bodies entwined and our hearts beating in unison. And as I hold Spencer close, feeling the rise and fall of her chest against mine, I think that this—whatever it means—is just beginning.

“Goodnight, beautiful,” I whisper, pressing one last kiss to her temple.

“Goodnight,” she sighs in response, her breath warm against my skin.



The warm sun streams through the curtains, casting a golden glow over our entwined bodies. My eyes flutter open as I feel Spencer shift against me, her delicate fingers tracing patterns on my chest.

“Morning, sunshine,” I murmur, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. Her green eyes sparkle with mischief as she grins up at me.

She replies, tracing patterns on my skin.

“Are you hungry?” I get a nod in response and a shy smile.

We untangle ourselves from the sheets, and I keep stealing glances at Spencer as she moves around the room, gathering clothes for the day. The way she carries herself—confident, yet soft—never fails to captivate me, casting a spell over me that scares me in the same way it pulls me to go for more.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Spencer

Later, after breakfast and a nap, the warmth of Percival's body envelopes me as I stir awake, his strong arms wrapped around me like a cocoon. My initial thoughts are clouded by the haze of sleep, but as they clear, I'm struck with the realization that this is no dream.

He gently turns me to face him, and our eyes lock. We're close, so close that I can see the flecks of gold in his irises, and I muse if he can see the same in mine.

Our lips meet in a languid kiss, a slow dance of passion and exploration. As our connection deepens, so does the urgency between us. Our bare skin brushes against each other, igniting a fire that consumes us both.

With a tender touch, Percival guides me onto my back, never breaking eye contact. He leans down, capturing my lips once more, and I wrap my arms around his neck, desperate to keep him close.

As our bodies move together in a dance of passion and desire, the intensity of the connection between us kicks the air out of me. It's as if we were always meant to find each other. Two lost souls navigating the chaos of life.

"Spencer," I can see him breathing my name. A smile pulls my lips up, my heart swelling at the knowledge that it's me who can bring him such ecstasy.

“Please don’t stop,” I beg. Percival is nothing like the party-loving womanizer I’d first met; beneath the surface lies a vulnerability that has drawn us together. And as our bodies continue their intimate dance, I know I’m falling deeper and deeper into uncharted territory.

“Never,” he promises, his eyes locked on mine as our world narrows to this moment, just Spencer and Percival, entwined in a passion that transcends time and space.

But just as our lips are about to meet, my phone vibrates beside my pillow, jolting me back to reality. With a groan, I reach for it, my fingers fumbling as I unlock the screen.

“Gianna?” Percival asks, propping himself up on one elbow to peer over my shoulder.

“Yes,” I say, scanning the text. “She wants to know when I’m coming back to the city.”

“Anything important?” He brushes a strand of hair from my face, his fingertips feather-light against my cheek.

“Something about an incident...” I frown, typing out a response.

Me: G, what’s this note you’re talking about?

Percival watches me intently, concern etching his brow as he waits for Gianna’s reply. The silence is palpable, our earlier flirtation forgotten as we both sense the gravity of this mysterious message.

My heart skips a beat as my phone buzzes again, Gianna’s reply flashing across the screen.

Her: Spencer, your aunts received a threatening note at their home.

They're really scared. You need to come back ASAP.

The words hit me like a tidal wave, and I can feel the panic rising in my chest.

My hands are trembling as I manage to sign the words. “Percival, my aunts... they got some sort of threat... I have to go back to the city. Now.”

“Whoa, slow down,” Percival says, concern etching his face. He places a gentle hand on my shoulder, trying to steady my nerves. “Tell me everything.”

I give him my phone to read the messages, my body shaking, remembering each word. As I finish, I look up to find Percival's eyes filled with worry. “We need to do something. I can't just sit here while my family is in danger. This is my fault.”

“This is not your fault.” The intensity of his response is so strong I can feel it. “If anything, this is on me. You did nothing wrong, do you understand?”

I watch as Percival paces back and forth, his shirtless torso glistening in the sunlight that filters through the windows. His concern for my safety is evident on his face.

“Spencer,” he finally says, stopping in his tracks and looking me straight in the eyes, “we can't go back to the city until the police have resolved this situation. It's too dangerous.”

“Are you kidding me?” I retort, my expression a mixture of frustration and disbelief. “This is my family we’re talking about, Percival! I need to be there for them.”

“Look,” he says, running a hand through his dark hair, making it stick up in all directions, “why don’t we wait it out here and work remotely? We can stay in touch with your aunts and the police, and we’ll go back as soon as it’s safe.”

“Safe? When will that be?” I demand, my hands flying through the air. My determination fuses with a burning sense of urgency, propelling me forward. “If we just sit here doing nothing, who knows what could happen to them? That people know where I live.”

“Spencer, I understand your concern, but we have to think about your safety too.” He pauses, searching my face for understanding. “If something happened to you because we rushed back into the city, I’d never forgive myself.”

“Then come with me,” I insist, my stance firm and assertive. “If you won’t take me back, I’ll go by myself. I’ll take the train or a bus if I must.”

“Spencer, please...” Percival begins, but I cut him off.

“No, Percival. This is non-negotiable. I’m going back to the city, one way or another.” My words are laced with steel, my resolve unwavering.

I can see the conflict in his eyes, weighing his concern for my safety against my determination to protect my family. I

know he's trying to protect me, but I also know I can't sit idly by while my aunts face this threat alone.

As I stand with my chin up, arms crossed, and eyes blazing with determination. Percival sighs, finally conceding to my request. "Fine, we'll go back to the city," he says, his gaze tinged with reluctance. "But on one condition: you have to stay at my home for your safety."

"What?" I blink, taken aback by his unexpected offer. The thought of staying in Percival's home sends a thrill down my spine but also leaves me feeling vulnerable. It's not something I ever imagined would happen.

"Look, Spencer, I'm worried about you, and I want to make sure you're safe," he explains, his charming smile softening the seriousness of his words. "At least at my place, I know you'll be protected."

I hesitate, my thoughts racing. The idea of being that close to Percival, sharing his personal space, is both exciting and terrifying. But more than anything, I need to ensure that my aunts are okay, and if this compromise gets me back in the city sooner, then maybe it's worth considering.

"Okay," I say slowly, the word feeling foreign on my lips. "I appreciate the offer, Percival. But promise me one thing: if we do this, you won't treat me like some fragile doll that needs constant protection. I can take care of myself, too."

"Deal," he agrees, his grin returning as he extends his hand for a handshake, sealing our agreement.

As we begin to make plans for our return to the city, my mind fills with images of the past days. This journey will be unlike any other I've experienced, and though uncertainty lingers, so does hope. Together with Percival, I'll face whatever challenges come my way—armed with courage and determination.

“Hey, are you okay?” Percival asks, noticing my hesitation. His concern warms me but also triggers my inner stubbornness.

“Of course, I am,” I snap, more sharply than intended. “Let's just get moving.”

“Okay, okay,” he replies, raising his hands in surrender. “We'll grab some takeout on the way back. My treat.”

“Fine by me,” I say, the prospect of food momentarily distracting me from the whirlwind of thoughts swirling through my head.

With that, we drive into the fading light, leaving behind the familiar in pursuit of the unknown. The future may be uncertain, but one thing remains clear: together, I'll confront whatever challenges lie ahead. And perhaps, in doing so, we'll find something even more valuable than safety or answers.

As the sun dips below the horizon, its final rays casting an ethereal glow over the world, my heart swells with anticipation. So much lies ahead, and although the way back home promises to be anything but smooth, the anxiety tugs my tummy. But no matter what trials await us, I'll face them.

No matter what.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Percival

The engine revs beneath me as I merge onto the freeway, leaving the cool ocean breeze of Monterey behind us. The faster route back to San Diego stretches out before us, a practical choice for two people with little time to waste.

I glance over at Spencer again, noticing the lines under her eyes and the way her hands grip her hoodie tightly. She's dressed casually, as always, in leggings and a t-shirt, but there's something endearing about her simple style. It's a stark contrast to my own preference for luxury.

"How are you feeling?"

"Fine," she insists, trying to sound convincing. But her yawn betrays her, and I chuckle.

"Fine, huh?" I tease, shaking my head.

Her lips curve into a small, reluctant smile, and she nods.

I return my focus to the road, feeling a strange mix of concern and affection for this woman who's somehow found her way into my life. I've always been one for adventure and excitement, but with Spencer, even a simple drive down the freeway feels like its own kind of journey.

As we continue southward, she drifts off to sleep, her breathing slow and steady. I think that maybe, just maybe, this trip will be the start of something different, not just for me but for both of us.

The sun dips low in the sky as I weave through traffic. Spencer's breathing has become more labored, her agitation growing with each mile we cover. My grip on the steering wheel tightens, and I can't shake this gnawing feeling in my gut.

"Hey," I say, glancing over at her. "How about we pull over for a bit? You know, stretch our legs and all that."

Spencer's emerald eyes flash with something close to defiance. "I told you already, Percival, I'm fine. We don't need to stop."

"Come on." I grin, trying to keep things light. "You look like you're about to pass out. I promise, it'll just be a quickie."

She huffs, crossing her arms over her chest. "We're making good time, and I don't want to ruin that."

"Fine, have it your way." I chuckle, shaking my head. "But if you don't calm down, I might just have to tie you up and toss you in the backseat."

She shoots me a playful glare, but there's no denying the hint of amusement that flickers in her eyes. "You wouldn't dare."

"Try me," I tease, winking at her.

As we continue driving, my thoughts spiral. The more time I spend with Spencer, the more I find myself drawn to her. She's unlike anyone I've ever met, strong, resilient, and so damn stubborn sometimes. But it's that very determination that makes her so irresistible. And yet, I worry about what lies ahead.

I've never been one to settle down, always preferring the thrill of the chase and the adrenaline rush of a new conquest. But with Spencer by my side, I'm starting to question everything I thought I knew about myself. My heart races as my palms grow clammy on the wheel.

As the hours tick by, I find my thoughts drifting back to our situation. It's been a wild ride, filled with highs and lows, laughter and tears. And yet, despite everything, I can't shake the feeling that there's something more between us, something deeper than friendship or lust.

But what does that mean? And where do we go from here? As much as I hate to admit it, I'm scared—not just for myself, but for her as well. What if I screw this up like I've screwed up everything else in my life?

Hours later, we finally pull up to my townhome in downtown San Diego. The sleek, modern structure stands tall against the darkening sky, a testament to the city's ever-evolving landscape.

Spencer breathes as she gazes up at the building. A chuckle escapes my throat as I jump out of the car to help her to go out. As we step through the front door, I think that maybe—just maybe—this could be the start of something extraordinary. And for once in my life, I'm not afraid to find out.

The moment we step into the open-concept living space, Spencer's eyes scan every corner of the room, taking in the high ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows, and ultra-modern furnishings. She wanders through the space, her fingers

brushing against the cool marble countertops and sleek leather seating.

As she moves around, I contemplate the way her gaze wanders around the place I call home. My townhome lacks the warmth and lived-in charm that fills my brother's home or her own home, the one where she spends hours painstakingly restoring furniture and creating art. The thought of her infusing that same warmth into my home sends a shiver down my spine, one that has nothing to do with the temperature.

“Hey, maybe you could help me to bring some color here,” I suggest, trying to sound casual. “You have amazing taste and skill when it comes to making a space feel more inviting. What do you say?”

Spencer bites her lip, considering my offer. “Well, I guess I could give it a shot. But only if you promise to let me paint something for your walls. They're practically screaming for some color.”

“Deal,” I agree without hesitation, grinning at the prospect of her artwork adorning my previously stark walls.

“Great!” she exclaims, clapping her hands together. “Now, why don't you show me where I'll be sleeping? I'm absolutely wiped.”

“Of course,” I reply, leading her down the hallway to the main room. As she makes herself at home, I stand in the doorway, watching her unpack her belongings and feeling an unfamiliar warmth begin to spread through my chest.

“Spencer,” I say, interrupting her rummaging. “I just wanted to say... thank you.”

“For what?” she asks, her green eyes looking up at me.

“For everything,” I admit, suddenly feeling vulnerable. “For saving my life, for staying here with me.”

She just nods, understanding the feeling, I keep watching her as if she were settling at the place where she belongs. I muse if this is how it would feel to have someone like Spencer around all the time. A part of me craves that warmth she brings, but another part of me recoils at the thought of settling down. I’m a player, after all—a man with a taste for adrenaline and no strings attached. And with my job requiring me to travel soon, I doubt I’d be able to maintain a steady relationship.

“All in place,” she says, closing a drawer.

I chuckle, but my mind is still racing with thoughts. It’s then that I remember the upcoming playoff match against the Los Angeles Stars—our archenemy team. I’ve had the balcony on hold for weeks, and I can’t think of anyone better to go with me than Spencer.

“Spencer,” I say, trying to look casual. “I’ve got a pair of tickets to the playoff match against the LA Stars next weekend. How would you feel about going with me?”

Her eyes light up with excitement, but she hesitates before answering. “That sounds like so much fun, Percival, but are you sure you want to take me? You could bring one of your friends or someone else.”

“Trust me,” I insist, my heart pounding in my chest. “They will be there. My brother and his wife, too, but I want you there with me. Come on, it will be fun.”

“Alright then,” she agrees, her lips curving into a shy smile. “It’s a date.”

As we smile together in celebration, something tugs inside my chest. Maybe things won’t be easy, and maybe I’ll have to make some changes, but at least for now, I’m willing to give this a shot.

Chapter Thirty

Spencer

I blink my eyes open, the morning sunlight filtering through the sheer curtains in Percival's townhome. My heart flutters with a mix of excitement and apprehension as memories of yesterday's events flood my mind. I'm lying in Percival's room, a warm sanctuary filled with soft linens and the faint scent of laundry soap.

Yawning, I stretch my limbs and slide out of bed, my bare feet touching the plush carpet. As I move to the full-length mirror, I can't help but smile at the reflection staring back at me. I'm wearing one of Percival's oversized hoodies, which engulfs my petite frame, my legs clad in leggings that have seen better days.

"A new day, a new beginning," I whisper to myself, feeling the vibrations of my voice on my fingertips pressed against my throat. It's been years since I could hear my own words, but that doesn't stop me from speaking them aloud when I'm alone.

I head to the ensuite bathroom, the cool tiles sending shivers up my spine. Turning on the shower, I let the hot water cascade down my body, washing away the sleepiness and lingering tension from yesterday's unexpected events. Steam swirls around me like a protective cocoon, and I close my eyes briefly, allowing myself a moment of tranquility before facing whatever awaits me beyond these walls.

Once I've finished showering, I dry off and slip into fresh clothes. Another pair of well-worn leggings, a plain white t-shirt, and a cozy hoodie. I brush my damp hair and tie it back into a messy bun, ready for the day ahead.

My thoughts drift to Percival as I apply minimal makeup, just enough to feel put together. He's charming, confident, and undeniably attractive, but there's also a hidden depth beneath that party-loving exterior. I ponder what secrets he keeps locked away in that heart of gold.

"Enough," I scold myself, focusing on the task at hand. *"You're here on a mission, not get lost in daydreams about your savior. This is just temporary, Spencer. Don't feel at home."*

With my makeup done and my thoughts firmly anchored in reality, I grab my phone and head down the stairs, ready to tackle the new day. Little do I know what surprises await me or how they'll entwine with Percival's life in ways I never could have anticipated.

I can't shake the tingling sensation in my stomach as I step into the living room, the remnants of yesterday's events still haunting me. The sleek furniture and modern decor remind me that I'm a guest in Percival's world, a fact that both thrills and terrifies me.

Despite the lingering nerves, I force myself to focus on the day ahead. I need to text my aunts and Gianna, but before I have the chance to move, something makes me jump. The door swings open, catching my attention.

My heart hammers in my chest, and I clutch the phone like a weapon. Who could it be? A break-in? One of Percival's friends? I hold my breath, waiting for the intruders to reveal themselves.

A woman looks around cautiously as I peek around the corner, my pulse racing. Two other women stand in the doorway, their eyes wide with surprise and curiosity.

"Hi," I manage to squeak out, my hand shaking slightly.

The trio is an eclectic mix of beauty and style. Two brunettes, one with stunning blue eyes and the other with dark, mysterious orbs that seem to pierce through me. The third woman sports vibrant purple hair that cascades down her shoulders, her grey eyes striking and fierce.

"Who are you?" I ask, trying to keep my body steady despite my pounding heart.

The blue-eyed brunette takes a step forward, her smile warm and inviting. "I'm sorry if we startled you. My name's Ariel, I'm Percival's sister-in-law."

"Rose," the blue-eyed beauty chimes in.

"Jordania," the third woman adds with a playful grin.

I nod, my body slowly relaxing as I realize they pose no threat, and then start writing on my new write-to-speech app. "I'm Spencer. Percival invited me to stay here for a while. He didn't mention any visitors."

Ariel laughs lightly. "We're family, sort of. It's not usual for us to drop by unannounced. But I promise, we come in peace."

“Good to know,” I reply, using the app again, a small smile tugging at my lips. The initial shock is wearing off, replaced by curiosity and a touch of amusement. They seem friendly enough, and if they’re close to Percival, perhaps they can offer insight into his enigmatic life.

“Looks like we’ve got ourselves a little mystery on our hands,” Jordania remarks, her eyes twinkling mischievously.

“Indeed,” Rose agrees, her fingers absently tracing the swell of her pregnant belly.

“Welcome home,” Ariel teases, her grin infectious.

As the women banter back and forth, I find myself swept up in their energy, my earlier trepidation fading away. This unexpected visit may have started with a fright but it seems that fate has once again thrown me into the path of adventure, bringing me closer to the lives of those who surround Percival.

“Come on,” I say, gesturing toward the living room. “Let’s get to know each other better.”

As we settle into the living room, it quickly becomes apparent that these three women share a tight-knit bond, each one playing a unique role in their dynamic. Ariel is the leader, strong-willed, and protective of those she cares about. She seems to hold a special place in her heart for Percival.

Rose, the brunette with blue eyes, exudes a gentle warmth, her maternal instincts shining through as she rubs her swollen belly. I can tell she’s experiencing morning sickness, but she remains engaged and attentive to the conversation. It’s

admirable how she manages to carry herself with grace and poise, even while navigating the challenges of pregnancy.

Jordania, on the other hand, is a firecracker. Her dark eyes sparkle with mischief, and it's clear she enjoys pushing her own boundaries. Between her quick wit and fearlessness, it's no wonder Jordania serves as the spark plug within their group.

"Can you believe Percival actually managed to bring someone home?" Jordania teases, laughing. "I mean, he's not exactly the settle-down type."

"Hey, give him some credit," Ariel chimes in, gently nudging Jordania. "He's got a heart of gold beneath all that swagger."

"True," I admit, my thoughts drifting to the charming smile and air of confidence that Percival carries so effortlessly. "He's been nothing but kind and supportive since we met."

"See?" Ariel grins, giving Jordania a triumphant look. "He's not all bad."

"Never said he was," Jordania retorts playfully, rolling her eyes. "Just...unexpected."

This city had always been a dream for me. A place where sunsets paint the sky with vibrant hues, palm trees line the streets, and the ocean's waves crash against the shore in an endless dance. And now, immersed in this newfound connection with Ariel, Rose, and Jordania, I realize that the

true beauty of this place lies not only in its breathtaking scenery but also in the people who make it come alive.

“Thanks for letting us barge in like this,” Rose says softly, interrupting my thoughts. “I know it must have been quite a shock.”

“Life is full of surprises,” I reply with a smile, genuinely grateful for the chance to get to know these women better. “And sometimes, those surprises lead to the most amazing moments.”

I feel a sense of surprise and curiosity at the sudden appearance of these women in Percival’s home. As much as I’m enjoying getting to know Ariel, Rose, and Jordania, I can’t shake the feeling that I need to text Percival for clarification. A part of me wonders if he even knew they were coming.

“Uh, did Percival know you ladies were popping by?”

Ariel chuckles, her grey eyes sparkling with mischief. “Well, not exactly,” she admits, leaning against the back of the couch. “We might have...heard through the grapevine that he brought a woman home. And we just had to see for ourselves.”

“Wait, so you’re telling me you all just barged in here because you wanted to check up on him?” My fingers fumble over the screen as I look at them, raising an eyebrow, trying to wrap my head around their boldness.

“Pretty much,” Jordania confirms, shrugging her shoulders nonchalantly. “He’s like our brother, you know? We can’t let him get into any trouble without us knowing about it.”

“Besides,” Rose chimes in, rubbing her pregnant belly, “it’s not every day that Percival brings someone home, especially someone like you. Can you blame us for being curious?”

“True,” I admit, chuckling at the thought of Percival blushing at their teasing. “I guess I should be flattered that I piqued your interest.”

“Absolutely,” Ariel agrees, grinning broadly. “And now that we’ve met you, I’d say our mission was a success.”

“Mission accomplished,” Jordania echoes, flashing me a warm smile.

The light of their smiles fills the room, creating a sense of belonging I haven’t felt in years. As we sit in the living room, our conversation is lively and animated, each woman sharing stories about Percival that unveil new layers of his personality.

“Did you know that Percival tried to start a rock band when he was a kid?” Ariel jokes, sipping her coffee. “He called it ‘Percival and the Passionate Pumas.’”

“Passionate Pumas?!” I write on my phone, trying to suppress a giggle. With every word they say, I feel more intrigued by this man I’ve only just begun to know.

“Yep,” Jordania chimes in, her dark eyes sparkling with mischief. “Morgan, his sister, told us he even insisted on wearing leather pants every day, despite the fact that he could barely move in them.”

“Leather pants don’t sound very... breathable,” I type quickly, my amusement growing.

“Trust me, they weren’t,” Rose adds, laughing at the memory. “But that’s just Percival for you—always aiming for the stars.”

“Speaking of which,” Rose mutters, placing a hand on her belly. “This little one has been giving me quite the run for my money lately.”

“Morning sickness?” I write, offering her a sympathetic smile.

“More like all-day sickness,” she sighs, rubbing her temples. “But it’ll be worth it in the end. I mean, look at what I have waiting for me.” She beams as she shows us a picture of Caleb, her adorable toddler.

“Aw, he’s gorgeous!” I write enthusiastically, admiring the photo. “You must be so excited to meet your new baby.”

“Absolutely,” Rose agrees with a weary smile. “It’s just... exhausting being pregnant, you know? But as long as I have my girls here for support, I know I’ll make it through.”

“Always,” Ariel and Jordania chime in unison, their bond evident in every word they speak.

With sunlight streaming in through the window, I catch a glimpse of Ariel playfully imitating Percival’s exaggerated swagger. Jordania and Rose join in, doubling over with laughter at the theatrics. The warmth of camaraderie fills the room, and it’s contagious—I find myself grinning ear to ear, my heart swelling with affection for these newfound friends.

“Your brother-in-law is a character,” I write, chuckling as Jordania gives her best impersonation of Percival’s signature wink. “It’s nice to see this side of him through all of you.”

“Trust me, Spencer, there’s never a dull moment with Percival around,” Ariel replies, her eyes twinkling with mischief. “He may be a bit of a flirt, but he’s got a heart of gold.”

“Speaking of Percival,” Rose interjects, cradling her pregnant belly, “I think we’ve thoroughly embarrassed him enough for one day. What do you say we stick around for lunch?”

“Great idea!” Jordania exclaims, her purple hair bouncing with enthusiasm. “Spencer, would you mind? We could order takeout.”

I pause for a moment, considering their request. My culinary skills leave much to be desired, but something about sharing a meal with these vibrant women feels like the perfect way to strengthen our blossoming bond.

“Of course!” I write, excitement bubbling up within me. “Let’s do it. I don’t cook, but I know a great Thai place nearby that delivers. How does that sound?”

“Delicious!” Ariel approves, her face lighting up at the suggestion. “I’ll grab the menu, and we can figure out what everyone wants.”

As the women excitedly discuss their favorite dishes, I take a moment to soak in the scene before me: the sun-drenched

living room, the unexpected company, so welcome in my quiet world; and the chance to learn more about the enigmatic Percival Hills, who brought us all together.

“Cheers to new friends,” I write on my phone, holding it up as a toast.

“Cheers!” They echo in unison, raising their glasses and clinking them together. And with that, we settle in for an afternoon of shared stories, delicious food, and the beginning of something truly special.

Chapter Thirty-One

Percival

The moment I open the door, a wave of laughter and the enticing aroma of food washes over me. It's a welcome change from the sterile air and tense atmosphere of work, making my heart swell with warmth. As I step inside, I spot Spencer in the kitchen, her green eyes sparkling.

"Hey, you," I greet her with a grin, feeling the exhaustion of the day dissipating with each step I take toward her.

"Hi!" she replies cheerfully, her lips curving into a wide smile that mirrors my own. "How was your day?"

"Long and tiring," I admit with a sigh as I drop a black bag onto the countertop, drawing Spencer's curious gaze. "But it's all better now that I'm here with you."

"Aw, you're such a charmer," she teases, rolling her eyes playfully before turning back to the oven, and placing something there. "I'm not alone, I hope you don't mind."

"Of course I don't. Are your aunts here?"

"No, your sister in law decided to come for a visit."

That sounds like Ariel, she didn't come just for a visit. She wanted the scoop. I'll deal with her later, but if Spencer is happy, I'm good with it.

"Are you hungry? We ordered take-out, I'm heating it up."

“Starving,” I confirm, leaning against the counter and watching her work with admiration. She moves gracefully, her every motion fluid and precise. It’s mesmerizing.

My thoughts drift toward the contents of the black bag, and a thrill of excitement runs through me. Inside are surprises for Spencer. I can hardly wait to see her reaction.

“By the way, what’s in the bag?” Spencer asks, curiosity getting the better of her.

“Ah, that,” I say with a sly smile, my fingers drumming on the countertop. “It’s a surprise for later tonight after we’ve had our fill of this amazing meal you’ve prepared.”

“Really?” she pouts, trying to peek inside the bag. I quickly snatch it away, laughing at her mock frustration.

“Patience, Butterfly,” I tease, wagging a finger at her. “All in due time.”

“Fine,” she sighs with a huff, though the corners of her mouth betray her with a smile. “I guess I can wait.”

“Trust me, it’ll be worth it,” I assure her, my voice dropping lower as I lean in close, feeling the heat rise between us. We share a charged moment, our eyes locked and breaths mingling, before the oven timer dings, breaking the spell.

“Saved by the bell,” Spencer says with a grin, turning to remove the tray from the oven.

“Indeed,” I agree, taking a deep breath and regaining my composure. The night is young, and there will be plenty of time for surprises and sensuality later on. For now, I’m content

to simply enjoy the laughter, the delicious food, and the company of the woman who has captured my heart.

I steal another glance at the black bag, still filled with mystery and anticipation. But for now, my attention is drawn to the lively group of women gathered in my living room. Ariel, Rose, and Jordania all welcome Spencer into their circle with open arms.

Spencer fits so well with the group, and it's evident that they genuinely care for her. As I watch her animatedly discussing her passion for art and sharing stories about her life, I can't help but feel a deep sense of gratitude for having found such an incredible woman to share my life with.

The laughter and camaraderie swirl around us like a warm embrace, and I know in my heart that this is just the beginning of many more memorable moments together.

As the evening progresses, Ariel, Rose, and Jordania become more animated, sharing stories of their own adventures and misadventures. I find myself feeling incredibly grateful for these strong, vibrant women who have taken Spencer under their wing so effortlessly. But as much as I'm enjoying their company, I can't ignore the growing desire to have some alone time with Spencer.

"Alright, ladies," I interject, my voice firm yet friendly. "I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but it's time for you all to head home. Spencer and I have plans for tonight, and I think it's about time we get started."

Their eyes widen, and a playful smirk appears on Jordania's face. "Well, well," she teases, raising her eyebrows suggestively. "I see how it is. Don't worry, Percival; we know when we're not wanted." She winks at me before turning to Spencer and giving her a warm hug. "You take care, sweetheart."

"Thank you for everything," Spencer says sincerely with the help of her new app, hugging each of them in turn. "I had a great time tonight."

"Us too," Ariel assures her. "We'll do this again soon, okay?"

"Definitely," Spencer agrees, smiling brightly.

Once they've left, I lock the door behind them and turn to face Spencer, taking in the sight of her flushed cheeks and sparkling green eyes. The anticipation for what lies ahead is nearly palpable between us.

"Spencer," I say, my voice low and husky, "why don't you go upstairs and wait for me in the room? I have a little surprise for us tonight."

Her eyes widen with curiosity and excitement, and she nods eagerly, making her way up the stairs. As I watch her disappear from sight, I can hardly contain my excitement for our upcoming playtime. The intimate moments we share are always intense and passionate, fueled by a connection that goes beyond the physical.

I head to the living room and retrieve the black bag I brought home earlier, filled with surprises meant to heighten our pleasure. With each step up the stairs, my heart races faster, knowing that tonight will be yet another unforgettable experience shared between Spencer and me.

In these moments of anticipation, I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey that has led us here. The love and support of our friends, the challenges we've faced together, and the undeniable bond that continues to grow stronger with every passing day. And as I reach the top of the stairs, I know without a doubt that whatever lies ahead for us, we'll face it head-on, side by side, and emerge stronger than ever before.

As I open the door to our bedroom, my senses are immediately enveloped by a warm, sensual atmosphere. Dimly lit by candles scattered throughout the room, their flickering glow casts dancing shadows on the walls, creating an inviting and intimate setting. The scent of jasmine and sandalwood fills the air, a soothing aroma that beckons me further into the space.

Her green eyes, locked onto mine, shimmer with a mix of vulnerability and excitement. She nods, wordlessly giving herself over to the experience I'm about to guide her through.

With deliberate tenderness, I begin to undress her. My fingers deftly unbutton her blouse, revealing the smooth skin beneath. I take my time, savoring each inch of bare flesh exposed to my touch, and feel the heat of her body radiating against my palms. As her blouse falls to the floor, I pause for a

moment, allowing both of us to revel in the anticipation building between us.

“Are you ready?” I ask, meeting her gaze once more. She gives a small, determined nod, and I continue my exploration, my hands sliding along her sides to slip off her leggings. I focus on every sensation, from the softness of her skin to the way her breath quickens at my touch.

“Your turn,” Spencer signs, reaching for the buttons of my shirt. Despite her eagerness, she imitates my slow, deliberate movements, heightening the anticipation within me as well. As the last button comes undone and my shirt joins hers on the floor, I can’t help but smile at the playful glint in her eyes.

“Patience is a virtue,” I tease, our shared laughter momentarily breaking the tension before it floods back in with renewed intensity.

With each piece of clothing discarded, the connection between us grows stronger, the anticipation building until it’s almost palpable. And as we finally stand before one another, bare and vulnerable, I know that tonight—like every night we share—will be an adventure of passion, connection, and love in this beautiful, quirky world we’ve created together.

The dim light from the flickering candles casts a warm glow over Spencer’s exposed skin, her emerald eyes inviting me to explore every inch of her. I can hardly believe she’s mine – this beautiful, strong, and amazing woman who has somehow graced my life with her presence.

“Come here,” I whisper, drawing her closer until our bodies are pressed tightly together, electricity coursing through us as we share in this intimate moment.

“Show me how much you want me,” she says, her eyes glitter in the shadows, filled with such power that it sends shivers down my spine.

I need no further invitation. My hands find their way to her waist, fingers digging into her soft flesh as I lift her onto the bed and lower her back against the silky sheets. The scent of jasmine fills the air, adding to the intoxicating atmosphere as I lean down and brush my lips against hers, a gentle prelude to the passion that is about to unfold.

“Spencer,” I breathe, our lips parting as I gaze into her eyes. “I want you more than anything.”

Her smile ignites something deep within me, fueling my already burning desire. Our mouths meet once more, this time with a fierce intensity that speaks to the depth of our connection. Our tongues dance together, exploring and teasing, as our hands roam freely over one another’s bodies.

She gasps, arching into my hand as I trace my fingers along the curve of her breast. Her skin is like silk beneath my touch, her breathy moans are music to my ears. I continue my journey southward, fingers sliding over the smooth expanse of her stomach before dipping lower still, brushing against the sensitive bundle of nerves that elicit a whimper of pleasure.

That’s all the permission I need. With a swift motion, I position myself at her entrance, pausing for just a moment to

savor the anticipation before pushing forward, joining our bodies together in the most intimate of ways.

“Spencer,” I groan, the sensation of her surrounding me sending waves of pleasure coursing through my body. We move together, each thrust bringing us closer to the edge of ecstasy as our connection deepens, our love manifesting in this physical act. The room is filled with the sounds of our passion, our breaths coming in short, gasping bursts as we race toward our climax.

“Let go, Spencer,” I urge, feeling my own release building within me. “Come with me.”

With a final, shuddering cry, she surrenders to the pleasure, her body trembling beneath mine as I follow suit, our souls entwined in the exquisite bliss of our shared climax.

As we come down from the high, I pull her close, wrapping my arms around her and holding her against my chest. Her head rests on my shoulder, and I can feel her heart beating rapidly against mine.

“Thank you,” I whisper into her hair, pressing a gentle kiss to her forehead. “For your trust.”

She looks up at me, her green eyes shining with unshed tears, and I know that no matter what life throws at us, we will face it together, hand in hand, hearts entwined.

As I hold Spencer close, her breathing slowly returns to normal, and our heartbeats synchronize in perfect harmony. I’ve never experienced anything as intense and passionate as

this, and I can't help but feel like we've transcended into some otherworldly connection. But even with this newfound euphoria, a nagging thought nips at the edges of my mind, threatening to shatter the delicate balance we've achieved.

"Spencer," I say, breaking the comfortable silence that has settled between us. "There's something I need to tell you."

She looks up at me, concern etching her beautiful features. "What is it?"

I take a deep breath, steeling myself for what I'm about to reveal. "I've hired a security detail to watch over you. I know it might seem intrusive, but after everything that's happened, I can't bear the thought of something happening to you."

Spencer's eyes widen in surprise, but before she can say anything, I continue. "And there's more. Detective Taylor told me earlier today that there are still people out there who want to hurt you, Spencer. They're not going to stop until they get what they want. You are a witness of what happened that night. You saw the guy who attacked me."

The room suddenly feels colder, the weight of our situation pressing down on both of us. Spencer bites her lip, clearly struggling with this new information.

"I don't want you to worry," I assure her, squeezing her hand gently. "We'll handle it together, I promise. But we have to be ready for anything. Our lives are going to change, and I can't guarantee that it'll be easy."

For a moment, she hesitates, and then she nods, determination shining in her eyes.

As we lay there, wrapped in each other's arms, the shadows of the challenges ahead loom over us like gathering storm clouds. But even as darkness threatens to consume our world, I know that Spencer and I will face it together. For now, though, I simply hold her close, cherishing this rare moment of peace before the storm descends upon us. Our love may be a tempestuous dance on the edge of a precipice, but it is one I am willing to give the last drop of my blood for the woman who has saved my life then gave me a real reason to live.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Percival

The moment we step onto Anastasio's private plane, I'm struck by the admiration swelling in my chest for Spencer. She's been a constant source of inspiration and intrigue since the day we met, and as we embark on this flight together, I'm reminded of why I'm so drawn to her.

Spencer gasps as she takes in the luxurious interior of the aircraft. Plush leather seats, polished wood paneling, and a fully stocked bar greet us upon entry. It's clear that no expense has been spared on Anastasio's flying palace.

"I'm happy if you're happy, Butterfly," I reply with a grin, pleased that I can share this experience with her. As a luxury seeker, I've become accustomed to the finer things in life, but it's a whole different level of pleasure when I can witness Spencer enjoying them for the first time. Making her happy fills me with joy and looking for a deeper reason scares me to death.

As the plane taxis down the runway and begins to ascend, Spencer grips the armrests tightly, her knuckles turning white. I reach over and place a reassuring hand on hers, feeling her relax slightly under my touch.

"Hey, it's okay. We're in good hands," I reassure her softly, hoping to ease some of the anxiety I sense in her grip. Of course, we are in good hands. When Anastasio bought the

plane a year ago, as his agent, I took care of hiring the personnel. The pilot is cream from the very top.”

She replies with a small smile, her green eyes meeting mine for a brief moment before returning to the window.

Once we’ve reached cruising altitude, Spencer’s initial apprehension melts away, replaced by pure wonderment as she gazes out at the sea of clouds beneath us. “It’s so beautiful up here like we’re floating above an ocean of cotton candy,” she muses, her eyes sparkling with delight.

“Isn’t it?” I agree, unable to tear my gaze away from her enchanting expression. Her enthusiasm is contagious, and I find myself falling even deeper under her spell. The thought that I can provide her with this breathtaking experience fills me with a sense of pride I’ve never known before.

“Come on, let’s have a toast to our first flight together,” I suggest, rising from my seat to pour each of us a glass of champagne.

“Cheers,” Spencer says, using one hand, clinking her glass against mine, her eyes brimming with excitement and anticipation for the journey ahead.

“Cheers,” I echo, taking a sip of the bubbling liquid and savoring the moment shared between us. This trip marks the beginning of a new chapter in our lives, one filled with adventure and passion, and I couldn’t be more thrilled to embark on it with Spencer by my side.

As Spencer's excitement radiates through the cabin, I'm filled with pride that I *am* the one who's able to provide this experience for her. She deserves the world, and if it were possible, I'd give it to her on a platter. My thoughts drift to everything I want to do for her, the places I want to take her, and the memories I want us to create together. This is just the beginning, but it's a start, and that alone brings a smile to my face.

The private plane finally touches down in LA, and soon we find ourselves at the stadium, standing on the balcony overlooking the field. The atmosphere is electric, the anticipation for the game palpable as the crowd buzzes with excitement.

Spencer gasps again, taking in the vast expanse of the stadium before us. "This is incredible, Percival."

"Wait 'til you see the game!" I grin, excited to share this experience with her. "You're going to love it."

"Hey, look who finally showed up!" Lancelot calls out, waving us over. Ariel, Adrik, Jordania, Chase, and Roselynn are all gathered around, drinks in hand and faces glow with joy.

"Spencer, welcome!" Ariel greets us warmly, hugging Spencer tightly. "We've been so excited to see you again!"

"Thank you," Spencer replies using the new app on her phone, taken aback by the warm reception but clearly touched by the sentiment.

“Let’s get settled in,” I suggest, guiding Spencer to a seat next to me. “The game’s about to start.”

As everyone takes their places and the anticipation builds, my time is well spent stealing glances at Spencer, her expression filled with wonder and excitement. It’s moments like these, shared with the people I care about most, that make life truly worth living. And with Spencer by my side, I can’t wait to see what other adventures await us.

The lights on the stadium are all on, glancing off the metallic surfaces and giving everything an ethereal shimmer. I soak in the grandeur surrounding us as the crowd roars around us, a cacophony of excitement and anticipation. I sneak a glance at Spencer, her green eyes wide with wonder as she takes in the scene unfolding before her. It’s exhilarating to witness her first experience with such an event, and I’m reminded once more of how much I want to show her everything life has to offer.

“Alright, everybody!” Lancelot calls out, clapping his hands together. “Time for some friendly wagers! Who’s in?”

“Count me in!” Adrik bellows, slapping a hand on the table and nearly knocking over a glass. He’s always been one for competition, even when it’s all in good fun.

As we place our bets and continue to banter playfully, I feel that this moment is perfect. Surrounded by family and friends, with Spencer by my side, everything seems to fall into place. The energy of the crowd, the anticipation of the game—it all serves as a reminder that life is meant to be lived to the fullest, and I’m grateful to have these people around me.

I give Spencer's hand a reassuring squeeze. Together, we'll conquer the world—one thrilling, exhilarating experience at a time.

The whistle blows, and the game kicks off in a frenzy of movement. We're all on our feet, clapping and cheering as our team charges down the field. I can feel the stadium vibrating beneath my feet, the energy of the crowd palpable.

"Come on, Rivera, you've got this!" Lancelot yells at the top of his lungs, waving a giant foam finger in the air. Ariel stands beside him, her purple hair bouncing as she jumps up and down with excitement.

Spencer claps, her eyes locked onto the action. She's completely caught up in the moment, her face flushed with anticipation. I admire her passion, and I'm thrilled to see her enjoying herself so much.

"Did you see that pass?" Adrik exclaims, grabbing my shoulder in his excitement. "That was incredible!"

"Absolutely amazing," I agree, my heart pounding in my chest as we exchange high-fives. Anastasio is the best soccer player in the world, as his agent, I couldn't be prouder.

As the game continues, we all stand united in our support for the team, our enjoyment only growing stronger with each play. The thrill of competition is electrifying, and I feel alive in a way that I haven't felt in a long time.

The referee blows the whistle, and it's half time, the first forty-five minutes flew by. A show is starting, music, dance,

and fireworks, as the team manager told me a couple of days ago. Ariel, Jordania, and Rose start dancing, taking Spencer with them, who follows with a shy expression on her face.

Suddenly, the sound system cuts out, leaving the stadium eerily quiet. The sudden silence is jarring, especially after the deafening noise of the crowd moments before. Confusion sweeps through the stands, and I can see people looking around, trying to figure out what's going on.

“Don't worry, this will be fixed in no time,” I say, sometimes the unexpected happens.

No sooner have the words left my lips than a high-pitched note shakes the stadium, and an ear-splitting blast reverberates through the stadium, causing everyone to freeze in terror. It's louder than anything I've ever experienced, and it feels as though my eardrums might burst from the sheer force of it. But it's not the chest-rattling volume that truly astonishes me, it's Spencer's reaction.

She cries out loud, clapping her hands over her ears. Her eyes well up with tears, and she winces in pain.

“Are you ok?” I ask in disbelief, my heart pounding with a mix of fear and elation. This would mean her hearing has somehow returned, at least partially. But how? “Spencer, can you hear that?”

She stays in her seat, trying to protect herself, still covering her ears. I know this is hurting her. I find a bottle of water, open it, and put it in her hands. Slowly, she starts sipping.

“Come on,” I say after a few minutes, my voice cracking with emotion as I wrap my arm around her protectively. “Let’s get out of here.”

As we navigate the chaotic crowd, my mind races with possibilities. Spencer’s newfound ability to hear, however painful it may be right now, could change everything for her... heck, this will change everything for us. I’ve never been one to dwell on the past or ponder the future, but this revelation forces me to reassess everything I thought I knew about our relationship.

“Spencer, we need to find you a doctor,” I say urgently, gripping her hand tightly as we move through the panicking masses. “There has to be someone who can help you, and I won’t rest until we find them.”

We finally break free from the chaos within the stadium and emerge into the open air, where the same chauffeur SUV that brought us here is waiting for us. I give the guy instructions to take us to the closest hospital.

“Thank you,” Spencer signs, her green eyes welling up with tears once more.

“Hey, you saved my life, remember?” I grin, trying to lighten the mood.

“Spencer,” I start, this conversation is important. If there is one more thing I can do for her, help her to change her life forever, I’ll do it in a blink. Money isn’t a problem for me. “I think we should find a doctor, someone who specializes in

hearing loss. There might be a chance your condition is reversible.”

Her eyes widen in surprise before narrowing in defiance. “Percival, I appreciate your concern, but years ago, I took a decision. I can live my life like this. I don’t have insurance, and my priorities are different. First, I need to help my aunts fix the house because it’s falling apart.”

Yes, I noticed that. That historical house needs a lot of money and TLC, but again, no problem. I can take care of the issue in a blink. But I need to convince this wonderful woman pride isn’t the way to go here.

“Look,” she starts. “I’m feeling better, and I want to go home.”

“We are going to the hospital. You need to see a doctor.”

The way she looks at me is pure fire. “No,” she says before crossing her arms over her chest. The movement makes her tits to push up, and hey, I’m a man... she catches me distracted for a moment and snaps her fingers in front of me.

I give her a smile before replying. “We are going to see a doctor,” I insist, we are on our way already.

“If you don’t take me back home.” Her hands move furiously. “I’ll take a bus or the train.”

“Spencer, you’re being unreasonable...” True. She’s not listening to me, or the reason.

“This is my life. Mine. I decide what to do with it.”

“Spencer...” She needs to listen, really listen. Living in that world of silence isn’t fair when she can have everything.

“Take me home now. To my own home.”

“It’s not safe, you know it.”

“Take me home, or I’ll find the way to go.” Stubborn woman.

“Charles,” I tell the driver, feeling defeated. “We are heading to San Diego.”

This is just a battle, the war isn’t over yet. I’m fighting for her, even if she doesn’t know it.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Spencer

The front door slams behind me, the vibration reverberating throughout the house. I'm fuming as I toss my bag onto the living room floor, a direct result of Percival's incessant meddling. He just can't seem to comprehend that I'm not some helpless damsel in distress who needs his constant intervention. I'm an independent woman, and I don't need anyone to hold my hand through life.

"Spencer, is everything alright?" Aunt Orla's stern figure appears at the kitchen threshold. I can see her graying hair tied up in a bun and her thick glasses perched on her nose. "What are you doing here?"

"Fine, just had a run-in with Percival," I sign, trying to look nonchalant about it. My agitation must be more evident than I thought as Aunt Fiona appears in the doorway, wiping her flour-covered hands on her apron.

"Sweetheart, what happened?" she asks, her warm eyes searching mine for answers.

I sigh, knowing I can't hide anything from these two. "Percival's been trying to force me to see a doctor about my hearing loss. He thinks he knows what's best for me, but I don't want his help. I just want to live my life independently and not rely on anyone else."

Orla and Fiona exchange worried glances before Orla speaks up. “We understand your desire for independence, Spencer, but sometimes it’s necessary to accept help when offered.”

“Especially when it comes from someone who genuinely cares about you,” Fiona adds, her expression gentle yet firm.

We had this conversation before. Several times, indeed. Feeling defensive, I start. “I don’t need his help or anyone else’s. I’ve managed just fine on my own all these years.”

“Nobody is saying you haven’t, dear child,” Fiona says soothingly, approaching me with open arms. “But life doesn’t have to be a one-woman show. There’s strength in allowing others to support you.”

“Besides,” Orla chimes in, “he probably feels indebted to you for saving his life. Letting him help might ease his conscience.”

“He has done enough,” I counter.

“You saved his life,” Aunt Orla insists. “Plus, I think the man has other reasons.” She remarks, moving her eyebrows.

Of course, Percival Hills has his reasons for doing that. I chew on my lip considering their words. Deep down, I know they’re right. But pride has always been one of my biggest hurdles, and it’s hard to let go of the need to prove myself.

“Alright,” I relent, “I’ll think about it. But I’m not making any promises.”

Aunt Fiona envelops me in a warm hug, her softness a comforting contrast to my stubborn resistance. As she pulls

away, she smiles at me with that twinkle in her eye that always seems to say, ‘things have a way of working themselves out.’

“Take your time, Spencer. And remember, accepting help doesn’t make you weak or dependent. It just means you’re surrounded by people who love you.”

With a deep breath, I nod. Perhaps it’s time to let my guard down, even if only a little.

Just as I’m about to respond, the front door swings open, and Gianna bursts in, her wild, curly hair bouncing with each step. Her infectious laugh fills the room as she spots me surrounded by my aunts. “Well, well, what’s all this? Family meeting without me?” she teases.

“Gianna, we were just discussing Spencer’s situation,” Fiona explains, her tone warm and welcoming.

“Ah, yes. The great debate on whether to accept help,” Gianna says, nodding sagely. She walks over to me and drapes an arm around my shoulders, her presence always exuding a sense of adventure. “You know, Spence, there’s no shame in needing a little assistance now and then. Even the most independent among us can’t do everything alone.”

I sigh, feeling slightly cornered but knowing they all have my best interests at heart. My mind races, weighing their words against my own stubbornness. “I get what you’re all saying. It’s just... it’s hard for me to let go and trust others to take care of things.”

“Nobody’s asking you to give up control completely,” Orla reassures me. “But sometimes, accepting help is a part of growing. And who knows? Maybe this doctor can truly make a difference in your life.”

“Maybe,” I concede, still feeling uncertain but willing to entertain the idea. “But I won’t compromise who I am. I’ll always be independent, with or without help from others.”

“Come on, Spence,” Gianna chimes in, her eyes twinkling mischievously. “You’re always the one taking care of everyone else. Maybe it’s time to let someone take care of you for a change.”

As she nudges me playfully with her elbow, I can’t suppress a smile. Gianna has a way of making everything seem lighter, even when life feels unbearably heavy. Her laughter, infectious and freeing, fills the room like a wild breeze, ruffling my hair and tickling my ears.

“Besides,” she continues, a teasing grin spreading across her face, “who could resist a little pampering from Mr. Tall, Dark, and Shirtless himself?”

My cheeks flush at the mention of Percival and memories of our nights together flood my mind. I picture his strong arms around me, the heat of his body pressed against mine, the taste of his lips, and the intensity of his gaze. The thought is both thrilling and terrifying, leaving me breathless and lightheaded.

“Trust us, Spencer,” Fiona says with a soft gaze, reaching out to squeeze my hand. “Accepting help doesn’t make you

weak. It just means you're strong enough to know when you need it."

As their words settle in my heart, I marvel if there's truth in their wisdom. Maybe it's time to take a leap of faith and see what happens when I trust someone else with my burdens. After all, isn't life meant to be an adventure?

A cool, salty breeze ruffles my hair as I stare out the window. In this moment, everything feels perfect, yet my mind is heavy with the weight of indecision.

"Spencer," Orla says gently, interrupting my thoughts. "I know you're worried about losing your independence, but have you considered seeing a doctor to explore options for your hearing loss? With Percival's assistance, you might be able to find a solution."

My chest tightens at the mention of my hearing loss—a constant reminder of my vulnerability and the one thing I can't control. I've always been determined not to let it define me, but the truth is, it's an inescapable part of who I am.

"I appreciate your concern, Aunt Orla, but I've made peace with my hearing loss," I reply, feeling defensive. "I've learned to live with it, and I don't want to waste time and energy chasing solutions that are impossible for me to afford."

As we disperse and go our separate ways, I feel torn. The warmth of their love and support is like a comforting embrace, but my desire for independence keeps pulling me in a different direction. My thoughts twist and turn, tangled in a web of conflicting emotions as I try to navigate this new terrain. But

even amidst the chaos, a glimmer of hope flickers within me—
the possibility of a brighter future without my limitations.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Percival

My phone buzzes, interrupting the half-hearted attempt to watch the news about what happened today at the stadium. The screen lights up with Spencer's name, and I feel a jolt of excitement in the pit of my stomach.

Her: Hey, Percival, can we talk?

Me: Absolutely.

I reply, my fingers flying over the screen.

Me: When and where?

Her: Your place? Now?

Me: Perfect. See you soon.

I hit send and scramble to tidy up myself. My heart races as I imagine all the possible reasons for her sudden need to talk. Mason, the security guy looking over her, will follow her here. I know she's in good hands, but thinking about her walking alone around the city...

Thankfully, fifteen minutes later, there is a knock at my door. Spencer arrives at my doorstep, her green eyes wide with vulnerability. The moment I open the door, she steps inside, closing it behind her. We stand close, the familiar scent of her shampoo filling my nostrils.

"Spencer, what's going on?" I ask, my voice barely above a whisper.

“Okay, deep breath,” she starts, taking a moment to collect herself. “Orla and Fiona... they’re not my real family.”

“What do you mean?” I question, confused by her revelation.

Fat tears are running down her beautiful face while she signs: “Remember when you asked about my hearing loss, how they haven’t taken me to the doctor? Well, they’re my mom’s friends, not my blood-related aunts. I was sick, and she felt overwhelmed with me. One day when I was twelve, she dropped me off at their door and never came back. I lost the ability to hear after that due a complicated respiratory infection. They tried to pay for the surgery before, but I refused. Orla and Fiona were doing too much already.”

“Spencer, why would you refuse?” I inquire, my concern growing.

“Because I felt guilty,” she admits, her gaze lowered. “I didn’t want to be a burden, and I was afraid of disappointing them if the treatments didn’t work.”

“Spencer,” I say, taking her hands in mine, feeling their warmth and strength. “You could never be a disappointment. You’re an incredible person, and they love you like family.”

“Thank you,” she responds, her voice trembling. “I know that.”

The weight of her revelation settles in my chest. I can’t stand by and let her continue to suffer in silence. She deserves to hear the world around her—the laughter of her friends, the

melodies of her favorite songs, even the annoying buzz of traffic outside.

“Spencer,” I say, my voice unsteady. “I’m sorry for earlier.”

She looks away, biting her lip. “Can I come in?”

Silently, I step aside, letting her into my home. The moment the door closes behind us, I can’t help myself any longer. I pull her into my arms and press my lips on hers, kissing her fiercely with pent-up passion. She responds just as ardently, her hands gripping my shirtless torso.

As our mouths explore each other, I slowly undress Spencer, peeling off her hoodie, leggings, and t-shirt underneath. Her soft skin feels like a dream under my fingertips, and I savor every inch I uncover. Our breathing grows heavier, and I can see the wild spark in her eyes, mirroring my own desire.

Guiding her back until the cool wall meets her warm flesh. She nods breathlessly, and we fuck like animals, our bodies moving together in perfect harmony, just the way we both like.

The intensity of our passion leaves us spent, and we collapse onto the floor, panting and sweaty. As we catch our breath, I wrap an arm around her, pulling her close. Our laughter fills the room, echoing off the walls.

“From now on,” I say, grinning, “this is how we’re going to end all our arguments.”

“Are you crazy?” Spencer laughs, shaking her head. “We can’t just... do that every time we disagree.”

“Maybe not,” I concede, pressing a tender kiss to her forehead. “But it was a hell of a way to make up, don’t you think?”

She smiles, tucking herself into my side. “Yeah, it was.”

As I hold her close, I feel a swell of gratitude for this woman who saved my life and changed it in ways I never could have imagined. The walls I’ve built around myself over the years have crumbled, leaving me exposed and vulnerable... and finally, I feel whole.

“Spencer,” I say, my voice suddenly serious. “About what happened earlier... I want you to know that I’m here for you, no matter what. And not just because I owe you. I care about you. More than I ever thought possible.”

She looks up at me, her eyes searching mine.

“Will you accept my help?” I ask before she can say a word about any doubts or fears. “Whatever you need, whatever you’re going through, I want to be there for you. Let me do this. For you, and for us.”

There’s a moment of silence as she considers my words, weighing the decision in her heart. Then, slowly, she nods.

“Alright,” she says slowly. “I’ll accept your help.”

I smile, feeling a surge of happiness and relief. We’ve still got a long road ahead of us, but this is the beginning.

“Good,” I say, pulling her even closer. “Now, let’s make the most of this moment, ok?”



The next morning, I race to my office, the warmth of my home and Spencer behind. My mission is clear: I must find the greatest medical minds on the West Coast to take care of her. My heart races as I sit at my desk, determined to find the best of the best.

“Alright, let’s do this,” I mutter, determination surging through me as I pull out my laptop and dive into researching hearing loss specialists. My fingers fly across the keyboard, clicking on every result that seems promising. Hours slip by as I read articles, reviews, and testimonials, seeking the perfect doctor for Spencer.

“Let’s see... Dr. Landon Whitmore, a top-rated audiologist in Southern California... Advanced cochlear implant procedures...” I murmur to myself, noting every detail that could make a difference in Spencer’s life. The room fills with the sound of my typing, the hum of the music my assistant is always playing, and the steady beat of my heart.

“Ah! This one looks perfect!” I exclaim, finding another expert who has helped countless patients regain their ability to hear. A glimmer of hope sparks within me, and I imagine the moment when Spencer hears my voice for the first time. That’ll be a day worth celebrating.

“Okay, Percival, focus,” I tell myself, shaking off the daydreams and returning to my research. I jot down the

contact information for the specialist, Dr. Elizabeth Palmer, before closing my laptop and grabbing my phone.

“Time to make this happen,” I say with a grin, dialing the doctor’s office. As I wait for someone to pick up, my heart races with excitement and anticipation. This could be the breakthrough Spencer needs – the chance to finally experience the world of sound.

“Palmer Audiology Clinic, how may I help you?” the receptionist answers in a friendly tone.

“Hi, I’m calling on behalf of Spencer O’Hagan. I’d like to schedule an appointment with Dr. Palmer regarding her hearing loss,” I explain, trying to keep my voice steady as adrenaline pumps through me.

“Of course! Let me check Dr. Palmer’s availability,” the receptionist replies, tapping away at her computer. “We have an opening next week. Would that work for you and Ms. O’Hagan?”

“Absolutely!” I exclaim, barely able to contain my enthusiasm. “Please, book it!”

“Great, you’re all set for next week. We look forward to seeing you both,” the receptionist says before hanging up.

I let out a triumphant whoop, clutching my phone tightly as if it were a precious gem. “Spencer, we’re going to do this. You’ll hear again, I promise.”

My mind races with images of our future together—sharing whispered secrets, listening to our favorite songs, and simply

enjoying the symphony of life. As much as I yearn to tell Spencer I love her, I know I must wait until she can truly hear the depth of emotion behind those words.

One thing's for sure: when that moment comes, it will be nothing short of magical.



As the day of Spencer's appointment approaches, we spend as much time together as possible surfing, cooking, and exploring hidden corners of this city. She's nervous, I can tell, but every time she starts to worry, I pull her close or fuck her hard.

"Spencer, you're stronger than you know," I remind her one evening as we sit on the couch, her head resting against my bare chest. "And no matter what happens, I'll be by your side, cheering you on."

Her green eyes shimmer with gratitude, and she reaches up to trace the outline of my lips with her fingertips. "Thank you, Percival," she mouths, her expression filled with resolve, but the silence kills me. I want to hear her saying my name. Fuck, I'm so whipped.



The next week, the sun is high in the sky as we walk hand in hand toward the doctor's office, anticipation and nervousness

tangling in my stomach like a ball of anxious energy. My grip on Spencer's hand tightens as we approach the entrance, and I feel her squeeze back gently, a silent reminder that we're in this together.

"Ready?" I ask, meeting her green eyes with a reassuring smile.

She nods, her lips pressed into a determined line. "As ready as I'll ever be."

We step through the glass door and into the cool, modern waiting room. The walls are adorned with calming nature scenes, and plush chairs beckon us to sit. But there's no time for relaxation; the receptionist waves us over, confirming Spencer's appointment before ushering us into one of the private rooms.

"Dr. Palmer will be with you shortly," she informs us with a practiced smile.

I can tell Spencer is growing more anxious by the second, so I pull her close, whispering words of encouragement. "You've got this, beautiful. Soon, your world might be filled with new sounds."

Her eyes meet mine, and she nods, determination shining brightly in her gaze.

Just then, Dr. Palmer enters the room, exuding professionalism and expertise. She's an older lady with silver hair and kind eyes that seem to hold years of wisdom. As she looks at Spencer's medical records, she expertly assesses her

hearing loss and begins discussing potential treatment options with us.

“Given the nature of your hearing loss, Spencer, I believe a cochlear implant may be the best course of action for you,” Dr. Palmer explains, her tone brimming with confidence. “It’s a small electronic device that can help provide a sense of sound to people who have severe hearing impairment. A cochlear implant device allows you to hear in a different way. This is called electrical stimulation. A surgically placed implant bypasses your inner ear. It translates acoustic sound into electrical signals. It sends the signals directly to the hearing nerve and then on to the brain.”

My heart swells with hope as I watch Spencer process the information. Her fingers trace the edge of the examination table, her eyes flicking between Dr. Palmer and me as she weighs the possibilities. I can almost see the gears turning in her head as she envisions a future in which her world is no longer bound by silence.

“Would I really be able to hear again?” Spencer asks hesitantly, her eyes sparkling with cautious optimism.

“Every case is unique,” Dr. Palmer replies gently, “but many patients have successfully regained some level of hearing with cochlear implants. The procedure has come a long way, and we’ll work closely with you throughout the entire process.”

Spencer’s fingers tighten around mine, and I give her hand an encouraging squeeze. She takes a deep breath, her expression resolute. “Let’s do it,” she says.

“Excellent,” Dr. Palmer beams, already making notes in her file. “We’ll schedule the surgery and begin preparing you for this new chapter in your life.”

Chapter Thirty-Five

Percival

The lights above my head cast a cold glow upon my face as I pace the sterile hospital hallway, each step echoing in the silence. Spencer's surgery looms like a storm on the horizon, and I feel my heart tighten with anticipation. We are so close, and she's been through so much, and it's hard for me to shake the feeling that I've let her down in some way.

My phone vibrates in my pocket, pulling me from my thoughts. Detective Taylor's name flashes across the screen, and I raise an eyebrow, curiosity piqued.

"Detective," I greet, trying to keep my voice steady despite my nerves. "What can I do for you?"

"Good news, Mr. Hills," he replies, his tone businesslike but laced with relief. "We're about to arrest the suspect, We're just waiting for the judge to sign the paperwork. It won't be long now before Spencer is safe."

"Finally!" I exhale, my shoulders dropping as some of the tension drains from my body. "That's... that's great news. Thank you."

"Of course. Just make sure she's protected until we get this guy in cuffs. We don't want any surprises."

"Absolutely. The security detail will take care of her until you make the arrest," I assure him, my mind already racing

with plans to ensure Spencer's safety. Detective Taylor and I exchange a few more words before I end the call.

As I lean against the cold wall, my thoughts drift back to Spencer. Her vibrant green eyes seem to hold untold secrets, and her gentle demeanor that belies the fierce spirit beneath. She's been a beacon of hope in my life since saving me, and I can't bear the thought of anything happening to her. I'll do whatever it takes to keep her safe, even if it means walking through fire.

"Spencer," I whisper her name as if saying it aloud will somehow anchor me to her, keep her close. "I won't let anything happen to you. I promise."

I push away from the wall and ease open the door, stepping into Spencer's dimly lit room. She lies asleep on the hospital bed, her chest rising and falling in a slow, steady rhythm. The sight of her brings a bittersweet ache to my heart—she looks so peaceful, yet I know that soon, she'll have to face the reality of her surgery. I wish I could take away her pain and fear.

"Sleep well, beautiful," I whisper, watching her for a moment longer before slipping back out into the hallway. As the door clicks shut behind me, I feel a strange mix of vulnerability and determination wash over me. This is my chance to make things right for Spencer, and I can't afford any mistakes.

I start down the aisle, lost in thought when I notice a man leaning against the wall a few feet away. He's casually

cleaning his mouth with a toothpick, seemingly oblivious to my presence. But it's not his nonchalance that catches my attention—it's the tattoo on his hand. A snake coiled around a dagger, its forked tongue flicking menacingly in the air. The image sends a shudder down my spine as memories come rushing back.

“Hey,” I call out, my voice firm despite the sudden pounding in my chest. “You work here?”

He glances up at me, a brief flash of surprise crossing his face before he composes himself. “Yeah,” he replies, tossing the toothpick aside.

“Nothing much,” I say, trying to keep the conversation casual as I rack my brain for any information about him. “I just saw your tattoo and thought it looked familiar.”

“Really?” He smirks, flexing his hand to display the ink more prominently. “Well, it's one of a kind, so I doubt you've seen anything quite like it before.”

“Maybe,” I concede, my heart hammering in my chest. “But the thing is, I've seen that same design on a man who attacked me some time ago. Just for money.”

The guy's smirk falters, and he shifts uncomfortably on his feet. “Look, buddy, I don't know what you're talking about. I'm just a nurse here, trying to make a living.”

“Right,” I say, fighting to keep my emotions in check. “A nurse with a hand tattoo that brings back memories of a violent encounter.” Inside, my thoughts are racing. What are the

chances this guy is connected to that attack? And if he is, what does it mean for Spencer's safety?

But as much as my instincts scream at me to confront him, I know I can't risk jeopardizing Spencer's well-being. Instead, I need to be patient, to play along until I can get him away from her room.

"Listen," I say, forcing a smile. "I didn't mean to pry. I'm sure it's just a coincidence. But if you ever need some extra cash, I might be able to help you out."

His eyes narrow, but he nods slowly, intrigued by my offer. "Alright," he agrees, clearly suspicious yet unable to resist the lure of money. "Let's talk."

"Perfect," I reply, my mind racing with possibilities as we begin to walk away from Spencer's room toward the elevator. In the midst of uncertainty and potential danger, one thing remains clear: I will do whatever it takes to protect her. And if that means dealing with this tattooed stranger, then so be it.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Percival

When the guy and I step into the elevator, the air thickens with tension. The sterile hospital walls seem to close in on us, and I try my best to keep my facade of cool confidence as we stand side by side. I can't help but notice the way he clenches his fists, the veins in his arms bulging against his skin. Every fiber of my being wants to confront him now, but I know I must wait.

“Nice weather we’re having, huh?” I say, trying to break the silence. My voice comes out more shaky than I would have liked, but I do my best to maintain eye contact with him. He merely grunts in response, keeping his gaze fixed on the elevator doors.

As the elevator descends to the first floor, my heart races like a thoroughbred at the final stretch of a race. I replay the confrontation in my mind, trying to prepare myself for what’s to come. In a way, I’m grateful to Spencer for saving my life because, without her, I wouldn’t be here now. She saw through me and found something worth saving, and for that, I owe her everything.

My fingers drum nervously against my expensive slacks—only the finest tailored threads for me, after all—and I take a deep breath, inhaling the scent of antiseptic that permeates the hospital. I glance over at Dylan, who remains stoic and unreadable. It’s hard to imagine what could be going through

his mind right now, knowing that his attack on me is about to catch up with him.

“Are you ready for this?” I ask, not sure if I’m asking the guy or myself. I think of all the times I’ve charmed my way through difficult situations, using my disarming smile and air of confidence to win people over. But this isn’t a party or a business deal—this is real life, and I need to face it head-on.

“Doesn’t matter if I am,” he replies, his voice low and gravelly. “What’s coming is coming.”

I nod, understanding that there’s no turning back now. As the elevator slows to a stop, my heart thumps like a bass drum in my chest. A mix of fear, anger, and determination swirls within me, and I know that I must see this through for Spencer and for myself.

“Here goes nothing,” I whisper under my breath as the elevator doors slide open, revealing the bustling hospital lobby beyond. And with that, I step out into the unknown, ready to confront the man who nearly ended my life.

The elevator doors open with a soft chime, and we step out into the hospital lobby. It’s a scene of organized chaos—nurses rush by with clipboards in hand while patients and their families navigate the maze of corridors and waiting areas. In this sea of people, one figure stands out: Detective Taylor, his weathered face and sharp instincts marking him as a man who has seen it all.

As we approach, he appears to be deep in conversation with another officer, but as soon as he spots us, he strides over with

purpose. Before the guy beside me can react, Detective Taylor places a firm hand on his shoulder, his grip like iron.

“Dylan Morris, you’re under arrest for the assault of Percival Hills,” he announces, his voice steady and authoritative. The tension in the air thickens, and I can’t help but notice how the bustling lobby seems to slow down, curious eyes turning our way.

“Wait, what?” Dylan exclaims, his stoic facade crumbling as surprise flickers across his face. He looks at me, confusion etched on his features. “You set me up?”

“Set you up?” I snort, my heart pounding with adrenaline. “You nearly killed me!” I pause, swallowing the lump in my throat. This is my chance to get some answers, to understand why this man decided to target me. “But why?”

He hesitates for a moment, his gaze darting between me and the detective. I can see the wheels turning in his head as he weighs his options. Finally, he sighs, seemingly resigned to his fate.

“Because... I wanted to,” he replies defiantly. My eyebrows shoot up in surprise, those words not being the explanation I expected.

Detective Taylor tightens his grip on Dylan’s shoulder, signaling that our conversation has come to an end. “That’s enough for now. Let’s get him booked.”

As they lead Dylan away, I’m left with more questions than answers. Was this all just a case of being in the wrong place at

the wrong time? Or is there more to it than meets the eye?

I shake my head, trying to clear these thoughts from my mind. For now, all I can do is trust in the detective's work and hope that justice will be served. With a deep breath, I turn back toward the elevator, my heart racing with anticipation as I prepare to reunite with Spencer.

I watch as Dylan is led away in cuffs, my pulse quickening with the knowledge that justice has been served. I turn to Detective Taylor, who stands beside me with a satisfied grin on his face.

“Alright,” I say, my curiosity piqued. “What made the difference? How'd we clinch this thing?”

He chuckles softly and replies cryptically, “I told you we were about to make it. Thank you for taking miss O'Hagan out of the city while we follow the leads.”

His words leave me wanting more, but the spark in his eyes tells me he won't be divulging any further details just yet. With a mix of emotions swirling inside me, I decide to focus on what truly matters: Spencer, the woman who saved my life and ignited the fire within my soul.

As I stride through the hospital corridors, anticipation courses through me like electricity, sending shivers down my spine. The stark white walls and sterile scent fade into the background, replaced by the vivid image of Spencer's green eyes, filled with equal parts curiosity and relief.

A nurse passes by, offering me a nod and a tight-lipped smile before continuing her rounds. My heart races faster with each step I take, the butterflies in my stomach threatening to burst free at any moment. I've never been one to shy away from excitement, but there's something about this particular adventure that feels different—more meaningful, more intense.

Finally, I reach the door to Spencer's room, pausing for a brief moment to collect myself. Gone are the days of carefree partying and endless flings; instead, I'm faced with a future brimming with potential, centered around a woman who's managed to break through my carefully constructed barriers and awaken something deep within me.

Epilogue

Spencer

A warm ray of sunlight tickles my nose, pulling me from the depths of sleep. I open my eyes and stretch, feeling the soft sheets enveloping me like a cocoon. It's been six months since I left the hospital, and waking up in Percival's luxurious home still feels surreal.

"Morning sunshine," Percival says, flashing me that charming smile while he leans against the bedroom doorframe. If there's one thing that hasn't changed, it's his lack of a shirt. His brother still teases him about it, but I can't say I mind the view.

"Good morning," I reply, my voice sounding a bit shy and quiet. I still find it hard to believe he insisted on me staying here with him after my surgery instead of going back to my aunt's place. He claimed it was because I belonged here with him—as if I could ever truly belong in this world of luxury and excess. But despite the vast difference between our lifestyles, I've come to feel more at home here than I ever did in my own family's house.

"Did you sleep well?" he asks, walking over to the bed and planting a tender kiss on my forehead.

"Like a baby," I confess, nestling into the crook of his arm as he joins me under the covers. "I can't remember the last time I felt this rested."

“Must be the magic of the Hills’ manor,” he teases, his fingers tracing circles on my arm. The sensation sends shivers down my spine, and I can’t help but giggle.

“Or it could be the company,” I suggest, looking up into his deep blue eyes. They hold a warmth that always manages to set my heart aflutter.

“Perhaps,” he concedes, pressing another soft kiss to my lips. “But I know for sure that having you here has made all the difference for me. You’ve brought life to this house, Spencer. I can’t imagine it without you now.”

“Neither can I,” I admit, my heart swelling with affection for the man who has managed to turn my world upside down in the most wonderful way possible. As we lay there, basking in each other’s presence, I can’t help but think about how far we’ve come and the incredible journey that lies ahead of us.

And although the future remains uncertain, one thing is clear: I am exactly where I’m meant to be – by Percy’s side, in the home we’ve built together.

I stand at the edge of our sunlit living room, my hand resting gently on the back of a wooden chair. This moment feels surreal—it’s been six months since I left the hospital, and my life has changed in ways I never imagined possible.

“Ready?” Percival asks, with that encouraging smile he’s become known for among the team of specialists aiding in my recovery.

“Ready,” I nod, taking a deep breath to steady myself.

“Alright, Spencer, let’s begin,” Dr. Hopkins, one of my audiologists, instructs through my cochlear implant. The sound is clear, crisp, and still somewhat foreign to me, but it’s a reminder of how far I’ve come.

Over these past months, I’ve made tremendous progress in learning to hear again. My days are filled with appointments and exercises designed to help me navigate the world with my newfound abilities. It’s been a challenging journey, often leaving me feeling exhausted and overwhelmed, but the support of my incredible team and Percival keeps me going.

“Focus on the different pitches and tones,” Dr. Hopkins continues as she plays a series of sounds for me to identify. As the beeps and hums fill my ears, I concentrate on distinguishing each one, building upon the auditory skills I’ve been developing.

The cochlear implant itself is an amazing piece of technology, allowing me to experience sound in a way that was once impossible. A small electronic device surgically implanted behind my ear. It works by bypassing the damaged parts of my inner ear and directly stimulating the auditory nerve. The signals then travel to my brain, where they’re interpreted as sound.

“Great job, Spencer!” Percival cheers me on from across the room, his enthusiasm infectious. “You’re doing so well.”

“Thanks,” I reply shyly, still getting used to speaking aloud. Before my surgery, I relied heavily on sign language and lip-reading to communicate, but now that I can hear my own

voice, I'm working on finding the right balance between my old and new worlds.

“Alright, let's move on to the next exercise,” Dr. Hopkins says, handing me a stack of cards with various words printed on them. My task is simple yet daunting—to read them aloud and attempt to match my speech with the sound of my own voice.

“Apple,” I say hesitantly, still feeling strange about hearing myself speak. But as I continue reading through the cards, my confidence grows. I glance over at Percival, who beams proudly at my progress. This journey may be difficult, but as long as I have him by my side, I know I can overcome any obstacle.

“Bravo, Spencer!” Dr. Hopkins exclaims, clapping her hands together. “You've come a long way in such a short time.”

“Thank you,” I respond, my cheeks flushed with pride and gratitude. As we wrap up our session for the day, I can't help but feel hopeful about what the future holds.

With each passing day, my world grows richer, filled with newfound sounds and experiences. And it's all thanks to the love and support of the man who has shown me what it truly means to belong.

A cool breeze brushes against my face as we step onto the sand, the ocean stretching out before us in a vast expanse of blue. The rhythmic crashing of waves fills my ears, and I can't help but feel a sense of wonder at the beauty of it all. The

ocean has always been a source of comfort for me, but its sound is something I never knew I needed until now.

“Isn’t it amazing, Spencer?” Percival asks, his voice filled with excitement as he watches my reaction to the symphony of sounds around us.

“Absolutely,” I reply, my green eyes sparkling with joy. “I can’t believe I get to experience this now.”

“Come on, let’s sit down,” he suggests, leading me to a spot on the sand where we can fully take in the view and the soothing sounds of the ocean.

As we settle into our spot, I pull out my phone and open up my playlist. Tina Turner’s powerful voice comes to life, her music has become one of my favorite discoveries since regaining my hearing. As “Simply the Best” plays, I can’t help but dance along, feeling the beat of the song resonate through my entire body.

Percival chuckles, watching me with an amused grin. “You know, I never pegged you as a Tina Turner kind of girl. But I have to say, it suits you.”

“Really?” I ask, trying not to blush at his teasing comment.

“Absolutely,” he replies, his tone playful. “There’s something about her strength and passion that reminds me of you.”

“Are you saying I’m simply the best?” I joke, wiggling my eyebrows.

“Of course!” Percival exclaims, joining me in an impromptu dance party on the beach. We laugh together, moving to the rhythm of the music, the waves providing a natural soundtrack for our moment of joy.

I look into Percival’s eyes, grateful for everything he’s brought into my life. In this moment, surrounded by the beauty of the ocean and the sound of Tina Turner, I know that I have found my true home—and it’s right here, by his side.



A few days later, I find myself sitting on the couch in Percival’s lavish living room. The sun streams through the large windows, casting a warm glow on everything it touches. Despite my newfound love for sound, I still find comfort in silence. My recovery hasn’t been easy, and I often feel overwhelmed by the cacophony of noises that surround me. In these quiet moments, I can take a deep breath and gather my thoughts.

“Hey, Spencer,” Percival calls out as he enters the room, his voice gentle and understanding. “How are you feeling today?”

“Good,” I reply softly, my shyness creeping back in when it comes to speaking. It feels like I’m relearning how to navigate the world, and sometimes, it’s just easier to retreat into my own little bubble. But I know I can’t stay there forever, especially not with Percival by my side, that includes driving

classes. We are going slow, but every step ahead means progress.

He sits down next to me, leaving enough space between us to give me some breathing room. “I was thinking we could go to the beach today. Get some fresh air and maybe even have a picnic. What do you say?”

“Count me in,” I respond, smiling at the thought of spending the day outside with him.

“Great! I’ll get everything ready then.” He hops up from the couch and heads toward the kitchen, his excitement contagious.

As I watch him go, the words I’ve been wanting to say for so long swirl around in my head. I love you. It’s such a simple phrase, yet it feels like an enormous mountain to climb. I know that I need to express my feelings, especially now that we’ve grown so much closer. But every time I try to speak those words, they stick in my throat, held captive by my anxiety.

“Spencer?” Percival asks, noticing my distant expression. “Are you okay?”

I blink, snapping back to reality. “Yes, I’m fine. Just lost in thought.”

“About anything in particular?” His gaze is warm and caring, inviting me to share my innermost thoughts.

“Actually...” I hesitate, biting my lip as I try to gather my courage. “There’s something I’ve been wanting to tell you.”

“Oh?” Percival raises an eyebrow, curious but not pressing me for details.

“Maybe later,” I say, feeling the weight of the words on my tongue. “At the beach?”

“Sure thing,” he agrees, giving me a reassuring smile. “No pressure.”

“Thank you.” I return his smile, relieved to have someone who understands and respects my need for time and space.

As we prepare for our picnic, I practice saying those three little words in my head, hoping that when the moment comes, I’ll be brave enough to let them fly. Little do I know, Percival has a surprise of his own. But for now, all that matters is the love we share and the journey we’re taking together.

My heart races as Percival, and I walk hand in hand toward the beach, the salty air filling my lungs while the sound of waves crashing against the shore fills the background. The sun is setting, casting a golden glow across the sand and making the ocean sparkle like a million tiny diamonds.

“Do you remember the first time we came here?”

Percival asks, his voice warm and nostalgic.

“Of course,” I reply, recalling the memory fondly. “My very first surfing lesson, how could I forget it.”

“Exactly. And I remember how your eyes lit up like a whole new world had opened up to you.” His fingers gently squeeze mine, and I feel a rush of affection for him.

“Speaking of new worlds...” I trail off, trying to muster the courage to say what I’ve been practicing all day. “There’s something I want to tell you.”

“Go ahead,” he encourages me, his gaze steady and supportive.

Taking a deep breath, I finally manage to say those three precious words: “I love you.”

Before I can even register his reaction, Percival grins from ear to ear and pulls me into a tight embrace. “I love you too, Spencer. More than anything.”

“Really?” I ask, surprised and elated at his confession.

“More than you could ever know.” He leans down and kisses me tenderly, our love coming alive in that shared moment.

As we break apart, I notice Percival has a mischievous glint in his eye. “What’s that look for?” I tease, suspecting he’s up to something.

“Spencer O’Hagan, you have made my life so much better ever since we met. And I want to spend the rest of my life making you happy.” With that, he gets down on one knee and produces a small velvet box from his pocket. My heart skips a beat as I realize what’s happening.

“Spencer, will you marry me?” Percival asks, opening the box to reveal a stunning diamond ring that catches the last rays of sunlight.

I’m speechless, tears welling up in my eyes as I process the enormity of this moment. The man I love is proposing to me

on the beach as the sun sets and the sounds of the ocean surround us, it's more than I ever could have dreamed of.

“Yes,” I whisper, my voice trembling with joy. “Yes, Percival Hills, I’ll marry you.”

As he slides the ring onto my finger, we embrace once more, our love has reached new heights in a single unforgettable moment. Unbeknownst to us, our journey together has only just begun, and our future, much like the ocean, is vast and filled with endless possibilities.

My heart races as if trying to outrun the crashing waves. I glance down at the ring on my finger, its diamond winking at me with each golden ray of sunset. The weight of Percival’s arms around me feels like a warm embrace from the universe itself.

“Spencer,” he whispers into my ear, his voice gentle and full of love. “I promise you, we’ll have the most amazing life together.”

“Are you sure?” I ask, unable to contain my own smile. “Even with my hearing issue?”

“Especially because of it,” he replies with a grin. “Life is never boring when you’re around.”

We share a laugh, the sound mixing with the music of the ocean and the wind. I can’t help but take in the beauty of this moment – the tangerine sky, the salty scent of the sea, and the taste of Percival’s love like honey on my lips.

“Thank you for saying yes,” he murmurs, pressing a tender kiss to my forehead. “You’ve made me the happiest man alive.”

“Thank you for asking,” I reply, my voice thick with emotion. “I can’t wait to be your wife.”

As we stand there, wrapped up in each other’s arms, I can’t help but feel that we’re on the precipice of something extraordinary. It’s as if the world is holding its breath, waiting for us to take the plunge into our future together.

“Hey,” Percy says suddenly, pulling back just enough to look into my eyes. “I have an idea. Why don’t we celebrate our engagement with a little adventure? There’s this beautiful cove not too far from here that I’ve always wanted to show you. It’ll be our first excursion as fiancés.”

He hasn’t changed... at all. He still the same wicked man I found that night. But now he’s all mine.

“An adventure?” I ponder, grinning at the thought. “Yes, I’d love that!”

“Great!” he exclaims, his eyes twinkling with excitement. “But there’s one catch...”

“Uh-oh,” I tease, raising an eyebrow. “What’s the catch?”

“Promise me you’ll be careful,” he says earnestly. “The cove is breathtaking, but it can be a bit treacherous if you don’t watch your step.”

“I promise,” I reply, feeling a shiver run down my spine. There’s something about the way he said that, something that

makes me feel as if we're on the edge of a mysterious adventure.

“Then let's go,” Percival grins, taking my hand and leading me away from the ocean toward the unknown.

As we walk hand in hand, our hearts beating in unison, I know this journey will lead to more than just a hidden cove, and as the sun dips below the horizon, casting shadows on the path before us, I'm ready to face whatever comes our way. Our story started as an adventure, and the ties around us will keep us... together.

Always together.

The End

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Sx

About the Author

Susana Mohel is a *USA Today* best-selling author whose stories sizzle like the sunshine in her Southern California mountains.

Her fast-paced, angsty contemporary romance novels transport readers to a world of spunky heroines and hunky heroes who find their way to a happily ever after... with plenty of spiced-up moments along the way.

When she's not writing, Susana can be found wandering the trails along with her husband or creating chaos in her garden.

www.susanamohel.com