



Becoming
BAILEY

NICOLE ABRAMS

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BECOMING BAILEY

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DEDICATION

To my sister. You are my soul mate.

Title Page

Becoming Bailey

By

Nicole Abrams

Synopsis

Boys my age don't do it for me... But my professor, who is all Man, does.

Uncomfortable in my skin since high school. I was waiting for the right person to help me out of my shell. Someone who saw me fully and not just something to look at. Then it happened, I fell for my professor.

Literally.

Right into his tattoo-covered arms.

Now, I want all of him. His looks. His words. Him.

He tries to stay away. Knows he's no good for me. But then strange things start to happen in my life.

The feeling of eyes on me, always watching. Books flying off the shelves when no one is seemingly around. And letters being left for me.

And when he finds out, he demands I stay close. At first, it seems like it's out of duty. Yet, when the stolen looks turn into fiery touches... It was only a matter of time before we gave in to the flames that burned inside us.

But the professor is holding back. He has a secret hidden behind his eyes from his past. And it looks to have come back

to haunt him and hunt me.

For as the closer we get, the more intense the threat becomes.

One thing is for sure, though, if I get out of this alive; I will make the professor mine.

Forever.

Becoming Bailey is book three of the *Coming Home* series. While it can be read as a stand alone I do suggest reading *Finding Caroline* and *Losing Ansley* to get more background on the characters.

This is a mature spicy contemporary romance (18+), and contains some situations that may trigger readers.

Trigger Warnings Include:

Attempted SA

Physical Assault

Age Gap (14 years)

Mention of child death

Some Violence

Stalker

Bullying

Exhibitionism

Domestic abuse (off page not FMC)

Survivors guilt

[Becoming Bailey playlist](#)

[\(available on Spotify\).](#)

CHAPTER ONE

BAILEY



SENIOR YEAR - High School

“Get your hands off me.” I seethe. Todd pushes me against the counter, and his hands wander up my thighs. I push his hands down as they sneak under my cheerleading skirt. There are people around us, but they aren’t paying us any attention, only caring about who they’re hooking up with tonight or getting their next buzz. They don’t realize or care that I don’t want this because who doesn’t want Todd?

“Come on, Bailey. You know you want it. You’re always walking around in these short skirts, just begging for attention.” Todd grunts in my ear. His breath smells like stale beer, and I force myself not to gag. Why the hell did I come to this party?

“It’s my cheerleading uniform and my only short skirt. I’m not begging for anything. I’ll say it one last time. *Get. Your. Hands. Off. Me.*” I warn him. Todd ignores me again and

presses into me, trying to push his hand between my legs. Growling, I shove at Todd's chest, but trying to move him is like trying to move a brick wall.

Angry at myself for getting put in this position, I glance at the counter, looking for a weapon. Assessing the situation, I think about the self-defense class I took. Seeing Todd's beer bottle, I bend my knees, causing him to lose his balance. Quickly grabbing the bottle, I ignore the slight shaking of my hand and the rock that has settled in the pit of my stomach.

Pushing him away, I slam the bottle against him. Everyone's attention is now on us, but I pay them no mind. Focusing on Todd and seeing the red-hot rage in his eyes makes me cautious.

"What the fuck?!?" He roars. His hand is covering a wound on his neck that is bleeding profusely. Dropping the broken bottle from my hand, I glance around the room and shove my shaking hands behind my back, ignoring the anxiousness in my chest. Tabitha runs to my side.

"What the hell, Bailey?" Turning to her, I scowl. Before I can respond, Tanner is at Todd's side, looking between him and me.

"Todd, come on, you need to go to the hospital." He implores. Todd's eyes zero in on me, and he moves toward me, so I step away from the counter to avoid getting cornered again.

"This isn't over." He threatens in a deadly whisper. Refusing to allow him to bully me, I arch an eyebrow.

"What the hell does that mean?" I ask loudly. Todd's face turns red, and his jaw tightens. Everyone glances between him and me.

"What did you expect, Todd? When you have your hands between my legs after I've told you repeatedly to remove them, I had to do what I had to do." Many girls around us gasp, and his eyes turn even harder. He takes a step toward me, but I refuse to be intimidated.

“It’s sad you can’t get it from someone willingly. Is it that small? Or are you that bad in bed?” I mock him. If he were a cartoon character, he’d have steam coming from his ears. My eyes skirt around the room; everyone looks at me like I need to be quiet. Tabitha pulls on my arm.

“Bailey!” She sneers. Turning, I see the same look on her face. The girl that’s supposed to be my best friend, who’s supposed to have my back. A lump forms in my throat, but I swallow it. Looking at each person one more time, I shake my head.

“All of you are a bunch of fucking cowards! Because he’s the quarterback, the star of the team. He had his hands on me, and I didn’t want them there! So, I protected myself.” I scorn them and glare at Todd taking a step toward him.

“Stay away from me, or you’ll regret it,” I promise him, leaving the kitchen. Fuck them all! Everyone in the rest of the house is unaware of what happened in the kitchen, but I’m sure they’ll all know by the end of the night. It wouldn’t surprise me if someone didn’t catch it on video and hasn’t already plastered it all over social media.

No one tries to stop me from leaving, which is very telling. I hate high school; the dramatics, immaturity, and constant need to one-up the next person and be the cool kid. I rarely go to the parties after the games, but tonight was the championship game, and we won, so I told Tabitha I’d go.

She ditched me when we got to the party, and Todd tried to get in my pants like he’s been doing for the past four years. Climbing in my car, I pull from the curb and head home. Grabbing my phone, I call Caroline.

“Hello?” She answers right away. Hearing the sadness in her voice makes me forget about what just happened.

“Hey, sis! We won tonight.” I tell her, trying to sound excited. Cheerleading was always more her thing than mine. I became a cheerleader hoping it would give me something to have in common with her. Still, our relationship is becoming

more and more strained. It's like she's slipping away, and there's nothing I can do about it.

"That's great!" She exclaims. "I should have come." She sighs, and I want to cut Brandon's balls off.

"No worries!" I change the subject. "Want to go to the fountains opening weekend? I think it's next weekend."

"Yes! I want to go, but Brandon...." She trails off.

"Brandon, what?" I'm going to kick his ass. My teeth clench as my hands tighten on the steering wheel.

"Nothing. It doesn't matter. I'd love to." She exclaims. Biting the inside of my lip, I force myself to stay positive. I hate this. She walks on eggshells because of her husband, and I walk on eggshells hoping she doesn't drift further away.

"Okay! I can't wait." We hang up, promising to grab lunch together soon. I never know with her if she'll follow through with plans. It's not her fault; it's that asshole husband of hers. He controls everything she does. She has the strength to stand up to him but must find it. Before she met Brandon, she was such a badass; she'll get there again. I know it.

Pulling into my driveway, I sit in my car and pull up social media. Sure enough, posts pop up about what happened tonight. All of them are construed to favor Todd. Groaning, my head hits the headrest. Great, one more thing I have to deal with at school. Climbing out of my car, I head into the house. The kitchen light is on, meaning mom stayed up for me. Smiling, I walk into the kitchen.

"Hey, mom." I greet her, and her head snaps up from where it is buried in whatever book she's reading.

"Hey, honey." She slides off the stool she was sitting on and hugs me. "Did you have fun at the party?" She asks, and I plaster on a smile.

"Yeah, it was great." I lie, and she tilts her head at me like she can tell but decides not to call me out on it.

“Where’s Tabitha?” She glances behind me, “I thought she was going to spend the night.”

Deciding to tell a half-truth, I shrug, “We got into an argument.” Mom frowns and pats me on the arm.

“It happens to everyone. I’m sure you two will work it out tomorrow.” She encourages. Not likely, but I don’t say that out loud. Instead, I smile and nod. “Want some hot chocolate?” She asks.

“Of course!” Climbing up on the kitchen stool, I lean against the kitchen island and watch as she makes the hot chocolate. Hot chocolate will always remind me of my mom. I can imagine years from now, I’ll smell it, and it’ll bring me back to moments like this sitting in the kitchen, her making it for me and us having one of our heart-to-heart conversations. “Mom?”

“Hmmm?” She glances at me over her shoulder as she mixes everything.

“Did you get a lot of grief about how much older dad was than you?” It’s something I’ve always wanted to ask her. That catches her attention, and she turns to me.

“No, not really. It bothered your grandpa a little, but he got over it once they got to know each other. Why do you ask?” She questions. Running my hands through my strawberry blonde hair, I look away from her curious eyes. I’ve always had a great relationship with my mom; she won’t judge me. She’ll be supportive and understanding like she always is.

“I can’t stand the high school guys. I’ve never had a boyfriend. So, I always wondered...” I trail off, and she smiles at me. Turning and grabbing the hot chocolate, she hands it to me.

“Sweetie, you’re still so young. I didn’t meet your dad until I was twenty-two. You are mature for your age, so you could go for the older guys. And that’s okay. You know I’ll always support you.” She smiles at me encouragingly and kisses me on the cheek. “I’m going to bed. Sweet dreams.”

“Good night,” I murmur and sip my hot chocolate thinking about what she said. At least I have her support. My dad was fifteen years older than my mom. I don’t remember much about my dad, who died when I was nine from prostate cancer, but my memories are good. He was a good husband and a great dad.

After seeing what my sister has faced with Brandon and all the shit, I’ve been through with Todd. That’s what I want. As much as I love Caroline, her situation is not happening to me. I want a man—a mature man who isn’t threatened by my independence and understands what the word no means.

CHAPTER TWO

BAILEY



THREE YEARS Later

I hate being late. I especially hate when other people are completely unaware of others around them. Noticing Tabitha and Todd right away, I roll my eyes. Figures they'd be in this class too and being disgusting as ever. Why did I choose to go to a local college and not go away for college? Having to still deal with these nitwits grates on my nerves. No one will say anything, so I push through the crowd ignoring the grumbles. Stopping before them, I cross my arms over my chest and tap my foot.

They don't stop making out. My lip curls in disgust. Why is there so much saliva? Is that really how a kiss is supposed to go? Todd makes a slurping noise, and I gag. Even that doesn't get their attention, putting my hands between them, I push them apart.

“What the hell?” Tabitha whines. Ignoring her, I open the door to the classroom. I didn’t realize high school would follow me to college. There’s shuffling and murmuring behind me, so those who were too afraid to say anything in the hall are entering the classroom. Someone pushes me from behind, causing me to stumble forward.

Two large hands grab my forearms, and I fall into a broad chest, my tooth hitting the button of his vest. I pull back, my eyes rising to meet a pair of gray eyes. *Holy shit!* My breath catches in my throat.

“Are you okay?” His deep voice asks. I can’t seem to find my voice, so I nod. Is he the professor? Because if he is, I am screwed. He’s still grasping my arms but releases me, and I step back.

“Thank you,” I murmur and turn to find a seat. Grabbing a seat in the front row and as far away from Tabitha and Todd as possible. The man who caught me stands at the front of the class with his hands in his pockets, his eyes still on me. He must be the professor unless he’s an older student. He wouldn’t be standing at the front of the class if that were the case, right?

He’s gorgeous, with his sandy brown hair styled perfectly. He’s wearing a white button-up shirt with a gray tie, vest, and dress pants. His shirt is rolled up to his elbows showing off a tattoo on one of his arms. I trace the branches of the trees on his tattoo with my eyes and wonder what it would feel like to trace them with my fingertips.

My eyes meet his again, and his brow cocks up at me, making me realize I was caught staring. I shrug one shoulder and cock an eyebrow back. He’s watching me just as closely. He smirks and turns toward the whiteboard giving me a perfect view of his ass. I am in trouble. Every other professor I’ve had up to this point has not looked like him. He has to be in his early to mid-thirties. Hearing snickering near me, I turn my head only to see Tabitha’s snarky gaze. I didn’t find a seat far enough.

“Are you going to call him daddy since yours is dead?” She snarks. The girl sitting next to me gasps, and her head turns toward Tabitha and then to me. I tilt my head and stare at Tabitha until she begins to squirm.

“At least I don’t go for someone’s sloppy seconds.” I flick my wrist toward Todd, leaning back in his seat with a smirk on his face. Todd and I were never a thing. Ever. But Tabitha believes we were, so I play on it. “And when I say sloppy seconds, I’m talking pig sty sloppy.” Todd sits forward and glares at me.

“You are such a fucking bitch.” He snarls. Giving him a tight smile, I shrug.

“Takes one to know one.” Turning toward the front of the class, I’m again met with intense gray eyes. Did he catch that entire interaction? Tearing my eyes away from his, I pull my laptop out of my bag to take notes. Taking a quick scan of the classroom, I’m surprised how many take this class during the summer. Turning my back to the front, I focus on Professor McMillan.

“Good morning, everyone. I’m Professor McMillan, and this is Introduction to Criminal Justice. For the next class, I’d appreciate it if everyone would not wait out in the hall until the last minute.” His eyes land on Tabitha and then Todd. “I’d also appreciate it if you’d leave your PDA sessions at home and not prevent my students from entering my classroom.” He says firmly.

My eyes widen, and a few snickers and giggles surround me.

“What the hell is his problem?” Todd mumbles.

“He’s just as tired of your shit as everyone else is, and he’s known you for five seconds,” I say under my breath. For the remainder of the class, it’s easy to ignore everyone else and focus on Professor McMillan. His voice is deep, smooth, and soothing. He talks about criminal justice with a passion. I’m looking forward to learning more from him.

After class, I pack my things slowly, avoiding another run-in with Tabitha and Todd. I sometimes wonder how Todd didn't make it to a big SEC college, playing football for them. As much of a prick as he is, he was a good football player. He blames me, and the night I hit him with the beer bottle, saying that it caused nerve damage or something.

He's been in almost every class of mine since starting college; I'm beginning to think it's not a coincidence. Throwing my bag over my shoulder, I rub my hands over the smooth tan leather and hold on to the handle. I love this bag, it was my dad's, but it's old and worn, so it slips off my shoulder a lot. I keep a grip on the handle so it doesn't fall to the ground, causing my laptop to break. I make my way toward the door.

"Ms. Rhodes?" Professor McMillan calls after me, and I swallow before turning around. Wanting to rub my hands down my jean-clad thighs, I ball one hand into a fist and clench the strap of my bag with the other hand instead.

"Yes, sir," I answer. His tongue darts out, licking his bottom lip, and I must focus too hard to stop myself from acknowledging it.

"You seem to have a history with those two." He states, and it takes me a moment to comprehend who he's referring to.

Running my fingers through my hair, I answer him. "Yeah. Tabitha used to be my best friend, and Todd used to think he was my boyfriend." I'm not sure why I'm telling him this, but for some reason, I trust him, and he makes me feel safe.

"He thought he was?" He questions as he steps closer, his hands going into his pockets. Adjusting the strap of my bag on my shoulder, I nod.

"Yeah. I was the head cheerleader. He was the quarterback. So, according to him, that made him my boyfriend. One night he became too pushy, so I proved to him he was, in fact, not my boyfriend." Adjusting my strap again, Professor McMillan

steps closer and takes my bag, surprising me. Unsure of what to do with my hands, I put them behind my back.

His eyes drop to my chest before meeting my gaze again. My heart beats wildly in my chest. He takes a step back like he realizes how close he got.

“What do you mean he got too pushy?” He asks. Eyeing him, I wonder if I should tell him.

“He put his hands on me after I repeatedly told him to remove them, so I grabbed a beer bottle and hit him with it,” I explain. His eyes widen.

“Hmm, interesting.” He hands me my bag back, placing it on my shoulder, his hand brushing my neck, causing butterflies to erupt in my stomach. “Sit further away from them next class, and if he causes you any issues let me know, okay?” He instructs.

“Okay,” I whisper. He walks me to the door and glances in the hallway. A few people hang around talking, but there’s no Todd or Tabitha. Giving him a small wave, I walk to my next class.



Mom and I are meeting Caroline at the pizzeria we always went to before she married Brandon. We met here a few times when they were married, but after the first year, we rarely saw her. What that asshole did to her breaks my heart, but she’s divorced and hopefully beginning to find herself again.

“You look amazing, sis!” I exclaim when we’ve all sat down. She dyed her hair blonde and cut it. Her arms look fantastic too.

“I started running, and I joined a gym.” She says, and I tilt my head at her confession. On the few phone calls we’d have, I remember her being adamant she would never join a gym

because Brandon was so pushy about it. Maybe because now it's her decision and not his.

"I'm sorry it took me so long to reach out to you. It's been months since the divorce. I don't have a good excuse; I needed time." Caroline murmurs. I wrap my arm around her shoulder and hug her while mom pats her hand.

"We understand." I kiss her on the cheek, and Caroline's smile brightens. I remove my arm from around her shoulder, but she still seems a little tense, so I decide to tell her about the professor.

"So, I've decided I'm in love with my professor. He's easily ten years older than me, but his ass is divine. I would happily bite it as well as any other body part of his." I exclaim. Caroline barks out a laugh, and mom shakes her head at me. I would do none of these things, but I can feel Caroline relaxing next to me, so I continue telling them all my fantasies as they laugh at my antics.

After eating, Caroline and I wait outside while mom pays for the check. Eyeing Caroline, I try to feel her out on if I can talk to her. It's been a while since we've had a heart-to-heart conversation.

"I really do like him," I whisper. Pulling my hair over my shoulder, I run my fingers through it. Caroline tilts her head at me.

"Your college professor?" She asks, and I glance back at the door wishing mom would hurry; this was a mistake.

"I know it's a huge age gap, and he's my professor, but he..." I trail off. *Please don't judge me. Please understand.*

"Will you have to take classes from him again?" She asks, and I huff.

"Yes. He's one of the main professors for my major. This is an introductory class. I'll have at least one class with him every semester, maybe more toward the end." I explain, and she nods. She bites her lip like she's trying to find something to say, but there's no judgment on her face.

“Does he like you?”

“I don’t know. I mean there are forty other people in the class. I don’t think he’s noticed me.” I pause; that’s not entirely true. “He knows my name. If he sees me in the hallway, he does speak to me. But he’s just being a nice guy. A nice, hot, sexy guy.” I say dreamily. I only have one class with him on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I didn’t have a class with him today, but I saw him in passing, and he did speak to me.

I was smooth and stumbled over my words. So cute.

“Be careful, Bailey. It could just be a crush.” Caroline says, and I give her a small smile, pushing down any hope I may have—a stupid schoolgirl crush.

“Yeah, of course. But I’m not saying no if he wants to take me up against the whiteboard.” I tell her confidently, even though I don’t feel it. She has no idea I’ve never done anything like that in my life. A burst of laughter exits her mouth, and I wiggle my eyebrows at her.



Caroline is right; it’s just a crush, which is so dumb. I’m his student. I wouldn’t mind him taking me up against his whiteboard if he were willing to teach me how to do that. He is a good teacher.

Waiting outside the classroom, I read the random flyers announcing a couple of campus summer activities. They’re even doing fireworks for the 4th of July. I didn’t take summer classes last year, so I didn’t realize they had so many activities during the summer.

“Good morning, Ms. Rhodes.” Jumping, I turn and find Professor McMillan standing close, looking at the flyer as well.

“Good morning, Professor McMillan.” I point over my shoulder. “Have they always done fireworks for the 4th of July?” I ask, and he shrugs.

“I wasn’t a professor here last year, so that I wouldn’t know.” He states, and that captures my attention.

“Really? What did you do?” I pause, realizing that might be too personal, “If you want to tell me.”

“I was a detective.” He rocks back on the balls of his feet, not elaborating further. I don’t ask any more questions.

“That makes sense,” I tell him, and he arches an eyebrow.

“What do you mean?” He asks. I grab my bag, which was between my feet, and put it on my shoulder.

“You’re very passionate about criminal justice. Now I understand why.” I explain. My strap slips off my shoulder, and he grabs it, his hand brushing the side of my breast as he does. Our eyes connect; his gray eyes are almost black. My tongue darts out to lick my lips, and his eyes flicker down to my mouth; he takes a step back.

“Please get another bag that stays on your shoulder.” He snaps, shoving the bag at me. He turns on his heel and walks into the classroom. I stare after him, my eyes wide. *Holy shit!* Is he attracted to me like I am to him? Glancing around, I realize we’re still alone. I’m always early for class; being a morning person has its perks when I get to spend time with him.

I walk into the classroom and sit as far away from where Todd and Tabitha were seated the first day of class, but still in the front row. Professor McMillan’s head snaps up from his laptop. His eyes are rigid, the friendliness that was there earlier gone.

“So, are you going to go to the fireworks?” I ask him as I take my laptop out of my bag. He arches an eyebrow.

“Do I look like someone who hangs out with my students outside the classroom?” He retorts. What crawled up his ass?

Leaning forward on my desk, I shrug a shoulder.

“Even if you did, I couldn’t imagine them wanting to hang out with an asshole. So…” I hiss. Professor McMillan places his hands on his desk and stands slowly, his eyes never leaving mine. Walking around his desk, he puts his hands in his pockets and leans against it—my heart races in my chest.

“Is that any way to speak to your professor, Ms. Rhodes?” He speaks so softly I have to strain to hear him. We’re in a stare-off, and I love it.

“When he’s being an asshole, yes,” I reply. He hums and pushes away from his desk, coming to stand in front of mine. He knocks on my desk once, never breaking eye contact with me.

“Well, this asshole is giving you an extra assignment for your rude behavior.” My mouth pops open, and I glance away in frustration.

“Whatever,” I mumble. He chuckles darkly. Other students begin shuffling in.

“See me after class, and I’ll tell you what it is.” He instructs. Turning toward him, I shake my head.

“I’d rather not have to speak to you any more than necessary, so please just email it to me, *Professor*.” I glare up at him. *Checkmate*. He nods once and returns to the front of the classroom. When Todd enters, he sits beside me, and I groan inwardly.

“Mr. Russell, return to the seat you chose on the first day of class.” Professor McMillan calls out. Todd releases an annoyed breath.

“She isn’t in the same seat,” Todd whines.

“I am not speaking to her. I am speaking to you. Now do as you are told.” He announces. I bite my lip, trying to hide the smile on my lips. Glancing up, I catch Professor McMillan’s eyes. They’re soft again. Fuck. I’m in trouble.

CHAPTER THREE

JULIAN



SO MS. Rhodes thinks I'm an asshole. I stack the quizzes from this morning's class and sort them so I can begin grading them later. I was not meant for this shit. Bringing my laptop in front of me, I pull up her student profile and assign her a five-page essay on the Criminal Justice System Fundamental Principles, giving her a few weeks to complete it. This will not be an easy assignment, but she's proving to be brilliant so far.

I swivel my chair to stare out the window in my office that overlooks the campus, spotting a shimmer of strawberry blonde hair; my gaze falls onto Ms. Rhodes walking by. She's wearing jeans and a baggy t-shirt, but she's still fucking beautiful.

When she fell into my arms on Monday, it took all I had to let her go. The strap from her bag falls off her shoulder yet again, but she holds tight to the handle on the flap, so it doesn't fall to the ground. My jaw tics; why she doesn't get another damn bag is beyond me. It's old and worn out.

Shaking my head, I turn away from the window. She's my student, and I shouldn't be having these thoughts. That won't stop me from keeping an eye on her, though. That asshole, Todd, seems to have a hard-on for her, and Tabitha is jealous.

I was impressed when she told me about hitting him with the bottle. That takes some balls. With some training, she could take care of herself and others. Shaking my head, I stop my thoughts from going in that direction.

Pulling up her student profile again, I stare at her picture. So gorgeous. Would it be creepy to print it and put it in my wallet? Shutting my laptop, I exhale. *You're her professor!*



My pulse beats in my neck as I walk to my classroom. Will she be waiting outside the classroom this week like she did last week? I love that she's always early. Not only is it an admirable quality, but I also get a few minutes alone with her. To look at her, admire her, and sometimes talk to her. My steps falter when I first see her.

She's not wearing jeans and a baggy t-shirt today. She's wearing shorts, a white t-shirt that shows her midriff, and a plaid short-sleeve shirt over it. She looks edible. She's looking at the flyers again, utterly oblivious to her surroundings. Scowling, I walk up behind her.

"You know, Ms. Rhodes." She jumps and turns around. "You really should be aware of your surroundings at all times. You never know who's lurking." I take a step closer to her, unable to control myself. She doesn't move, and I have to bite back a grin—this girl.

"Like asshole professors." She snaps back, arching her eyebrow. She turns around toward the flyers giving me a perfect view of her ass. *Shit.* Letting the asshole comment

slide this time, I step up beside her and stare at the flyers too. They haven't changed much since the first day of class. My eyes land on the 4th of July flyer.

“Are you going to go?” I ask her. It's my attempt at extending an olive branch. She glances at me out of the corner of her eye and shrugs.

“I don't know. My mom has to work, so I probably won't be doing anything.” She replies, and I watch her profile for a few minutes. Does she not have any friends she can go hang out with? Or siblings?

“Is this something you and your mom normally do together?” I question, and I need to stop. I don't need to know more about her. Ms. Rhodes turns and gives me her full attention.

“Why do you care?” She asks bluntly. I like that she doesn't play games, but I don't know how to answer her question.

“I don't know,” I answer her honestly. “You intrigue me.” I bring my finger up and run it down her forearm, and she swallows. Turning away from her, I unlock the classroom and enter. I need to control myself. She is my student. I am her professor. Nothing can happen with her.

Soft footsteps sound behind me as I write what we'll cover in today's class on the whiteboard. Other students should be showing up soon; until then, I'll ignore her.

“It used to be something my mom, sister, and I would do together. We'd go to the lake and make a day of it. But my sister married an asshole, and she stopped coming around. She's divorced now, and that's starting to change. We haven't done the 4th of July in a long time.” She explains, and I hear the detachment in her voice. This bothers her, but she's trying not to show emotion, so she doesn't get upset.

Turning around to face her, I study her. I know what it feels like to close yourself off. I wonder if this is why she's so sassy all the time. She puts up that badass front as a barrier.

Going to my bag, I rummage through it and pull out a flyer. Walking to her, I hand it over. She stares up at me before taking it.

“That’s where I go for the 4th of July. I’m there all day. You’re welcome to come.” I invite her like the idiot I am. Her face morphs into shock.

“I didn’t think you hung out with students outside the classroom.” She replies. I smirk at her.

“Who said we’d be hanging out?” I taunt her, and she grins at me. Knowing she’ll be there, I won’t be able to leave her alone.

“Guess you’re not an asshole all the time.” She murmurs, and I chuckle.

“Just give me five minutes,” I say, and she laughs. Students begin to enter the classroom, and I wink at her before walking to the front of the classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR

BAILEY



STARING AT myself in the mirror, I bite my lip. I love this dress. It hugs my figure, has a deep V-cut, and has a flirty hem. I kept eyeing it when Caroline and I went shopping. Every girl should have a little black dress. The fact she bought it for me surprised me. It's like the old Caroline is returning, and I'm so glad; I missed her so much.

I'm disappointed she hasn't brought up the 4th of July. I'm trying to give her time, maybe next year. Besides, Professor McMillan invited me to go to the sandbar at the lake. I wonder if he'll ignore me. If he does, I'll leave. Twirling in the mirror, I smirk, my decision made to wear it to class tomorrow.

Grabbing my phone, I snap a picture and send it to Caroline.

Me: What do you think?

Caroline: Hottie! Are you wearing it to class?

Me: Hell, yes!

Caroline: Your poor professor is going to have a heart attack. Make sure to give him CPR.

Chuckling, I shake my head and shimmy out of it hanging it up, so it doesn't get wrinkled. Picking my phone back up, I text her back.

Me: CPR sounds fun. Send me a picture of you before your date. I want to meet Sebastian!

Caroline: Okay! We can all do pizza one night!

Me: Perfect. Love you, sis!

Caroline: Love you more!

Anticipation swirls in my stomach, thinking about tomorrow. I'm playing with fire, but I've never felt this way. I ignore that I barely know him, and he's probably more than ten years older than me.



Sitting in the parking lot, I'm beginning to regret wearing the dress. I've always avoided wearing anything that brought attention to my body until recently. Even doing that, I still received unwanted attention. As soon as puberty hit, my curves came out; while I've never been self-conscious about them, they have been the main focus for everyone since I was thirteen.

After seeing what Caroline went through with Brandon, I refused to allow that to happen to me, so I kept myself covered and refused to let any guy touch or kiss me. Now I am attracted to this older man, my professor of all people, with no experience.

He's so hard to read. He seems interested in me for reasons other than my body. And he seemed bothered that I didn't have anyone to hang out with on the 4th of July. But then he'll shut

down and act like an asshole. Groaning, I bang my head against the headrest.

“You’re such an idiot. He’s not going to date his student. He was just being nice.” Sighing, I glance in the rearview mirror, ensuring my lipstick isn’t smeared. Taking a deep breath, I open the door. I can’t change it now; I might as well walk in with my head high. Lighting up my phone and seeing I’m thirty minutes early, I stop at the vending machine and grab a Diet Coke.

Walking to the classroom, I lean against the wall and sip my drink. Professor McMillan’s office is on the second floor, but he takes the stairs right down the hall. He should be here any minute. He likes to be early as well. I keep my eyes glued to my phone, aimlessly scrolling as I wait and ignoring my flight or fight response. I’m currently struggling with the need to run away. Why did I wear this dress?

Footsteps echo down the hallway, and my heart speeds up. What if he thinks I’m begging for attention? *Isn’t that what you’re doing?* I tell the voice in my head to shut up. Pushing away from the wall, I turn toward Professor McMillan. His eyes land on me, and he stops in his tracks, his eyes gliding over me.

His features harden, and his lips pinch together as he begins walking again. Anxiety clogs my throat, and my stomach churns. He gets to the classroom door and unlocks it, not looking at me again or greeting me. The burning in my throat makes me want to skip class today, but I lift my chin and walk into the classroom with confidence I’m not feeling.

Sitting at my desk and grabbing my laptop, I open my notes from the previous class. The extra assignment Professor McMillan gave me is complete, so I send the email while waiting for other students to arrive. He would assign me a five-page essay that took two weeks to complete. He’s still ignoring me, but I can’t help myself; my eyes wander up to him—his hand clenches, making me wonder if he received my email.

His eyes flick up to me, and I know. I cross my leg over my knee, and his eyes drop to my legs. Putting my elbow on the desk, I lean my chin into my hand, and his eyes return to me. His tongue darts out to wet his lips, and I inhale a shaky breath.

“When you worked on an investigation as a detective, did you use gut instinct or just the evidence?” I ask him. He stares at me for so long that I begin to wonder if he’s going to answer. Huffing, I look away and back at my laptop.

“I used both.” He answers, but I refuse to look back up from my laptop. I’m a stupid girl getting my feelings hurt easily by a man I barely know, my professor, of all people. Swallowing the lump that has formed in my throat, I pick my phone up and text Caroline.

Me: I can't wait to hear about your date!

Caroline: Did you wear your dress?

Me: Yes.

Caroline: Well?

I want to tell her, but I feel like such a fool. Laughter drifts into the classroom, and my stiff shoulders loosen a fraction. At least I won’t be in here by myself much longer. I won’t come early anymore, beginning next week; I’ll sit in my car until class starts. My laptop dings with a notification.

Professor McMillan replied to my email. *Excellent work. You have a brilliant mind.* Rolling my eyes, I finally bring my eyes up to him with a glare. He’s leaning back in his chair, eyes on me, and one of his hands resting on his mouth. Other students begin walking in, so I break off our eye contact. What is it with him and staring? It’s oddly erotic.

Someone sits beside me, glancing over to ensure it’s not Todd or Tabitha; relief washes over me. It’s been a couple of weeks, but those two are unpredictable. It’s a guy I’ve never met before. He gives me a small smile.

“Bailey, right?” He asks as he reaches into his bag and grabs his laptop.

“Yeah,” I respond, feeling guilty that I don’t know his name. Has he been sitting by me this entire time? I really do need to be more aware of my surroundings. It must show on my face because he chuckles.

“Josh. We were in a couple of classes together a few semesters ago.”

Smiling at him. “Sorry,” I mumble, and he shrugs.

“Nothing wrong with keeping your head down. You’re hard to miss, though.” Scowling, I look away from him. What the hell is wrong with guys my age?

“Shit. I didn’t mean it like that.” He sounds embarrassed, so I turn my attention back to him, raising my eyebrow and waiting for him to explain himself.

“Your hair and eyes. They caught my attention. They’re rare; less than eight percent of the population has strawberry-blonde hair and green eyes. Anyway, I was sitting across the room, but Todd took my seat, so here I am.” He explains. My mouth opens, but before I can respond, Professor McMillan stands.

“I need everyone to be quiet and pay attention, please.” He snaps, and we turn at the tone of his voice; his eyes volley between us. Squinting at him, I wonder why he seems so irritated.

“Today, we will discuss the best way to solve an investigation. We’ll look at the pros and cons of using evidence and the pros and cons of going with your gut instinct.” Professor McMillan announces.

Confusion settles in my chest. Is this his way of answering my question more in-depth? Why is he so hot and cold? How the hell am I going to be able to endure this for a whole semester?

CHAPTER FIVE

JULIAN



I'M NOT going to be able to survive this semester. Seeing Ms. Rhodes in that little black dress had me fighting a hard-on the entire class period. Walking down the hall and seeing her in that, I had to resist the urge to cancel the class and show her all the things I wanted to do to her. From the expression on her face, I'm sure I hurt her feelings when I didn't acknowledge her.

It was either ignore her or fuck her. And then, when she asked me that question, it caught me off, guard. It wasn't a question I was prepared to answer. After all the shit I've been through and especially after what happened. It reminded me why I'd never be good for her, even if she weren't my student.

Grabbing my tumbler, I walk onto my back deck and look at the creek in my backyard. If it weren't about to get dark, I'd go hiking to get rid of this pent-up energy. And her essay. Not only did she turn it in a week early, but it was perfect. I swear this girl is unlike anyone I've met before. She's brilliant, beautiful, and sassy.

Seeing her talk to that punk, Josh, made me want to claim her in front of everyone. It's what spurred me to answer her question. I hate talking about anything that reminds me of my past, but watching her face go from confusion to fascination was worth it. I can't fight this much longer.

I'm already trying to figure out how to make her mine one day. Throwing back the rest of my drink, I inhale. I'm going to hell.



I stare down at Ms. Rhode's quiz. I leave her little notes on each quiz and assignment. I know I shouldn't, but I can't help myself. She made a perfect score again. Putting pen to paper, I write her another note. I'm digging this grave deeper and deeper.

The invitation is still open for the 4th of July.

When I get to class, she's not outside the classroom. She shows up at the same time everyone else does. She hasn't been to class early since she showed up in the black dress, so this is the only way I can communicate with her. I have her number, but she doesn't know that.

She's ditched her baggy t-shirts but hasn't worn another dress again. Her little crop tops, though, show how great her tits look, and I have to force myself not to stare at them, how I'd love to lick them and suck them. Getting myself under control before I have another hard-on the entire class, I stand and begin to pass out the quiz.

Putting her's face down in front of her, she lifts it, and her eyes find mine.

I arch an eyebrow at her.

Are you going to go?

She pushes her hair behind her ear and bites her lip. She lifts one shoulder. I nod once; it's not up for debate.

She narrows her eyes at me and mouths. "We'll see."

For the rest of the class period, I give her all the hard questions, and she answers every single one perfectly.



I keep scanning the area for Ms. Rhodes, but she hasn't shown up yet. Connor was going to come, but he had an emergency with one of his construction sites. He and Bec might show up for the fireworks. I brought enough food to feed everyone here. I wasn't sure what Ms. Rhodes would like if she showed up, so I got hot dogs, hamburgers, and all the sides.

When I'm about to give up, she walks up the hill and scans the area. I take a minute to admire her before she notices me. She's wearing jean shorts that look like the American flag and a white tank top that has USA on it with a red bandana in her hair. She looks like the American dream. When her eyes find me, I stay where I am, seated on the picnic table with my feet on the seat, and watch as she hesitantly approaches me. She stops a few feet from me.

"Hi, Professor McMillan." She greets me, and I let her voice wash over me. This addiction is getting worse. I'm going to have to taste her soon.

"Hi, Ms. Rhodes." I greet her back. She crosses her arms, and my eyes travel down to her breasts and back to her eyes. She swallows and drops her arms.

"So, uh, is anyone else here?" She asks, and I tilt my head at her.

"Anyone else?"

“Yeah. From class?” She clarifies. Silly girl.

“I don’t hang out with my students outside my class,” I tell her, and she squints at me.

“But I’m your student.” She has to remind me.

“That’s true, and you just happened to run into me here at this place where a lot of other people are celebrating,” I explain to her, and she nods.

“Noted.”

I motion to my cooler. “I did bring a lot of food, though, so if you’d like to eat a hamburger or hot dog with me, you can do that. My brother and his friend were supposed to come, but something came up.”

She walks over to the cooler, opens it up, and turns to me with an arched eyebrow. “Is your brother and his friend the entire football team for Mississippi State?”

I laugh and shrug. “There’s no telling with him. He played baseball in high school. One night after a game, he showed up at the house for dinner with both teams. And my mom fed them all.” I chuckle at the memory.

She laughs. “I bet she fed them spaghetti.” She predicts, and I tilt my head at her as I put the hamburgers and hot dogs on the already warm grill.

“How’d you know?” I ask.

“It’s easy, cheap, and good.” She says, and I smile at her. She’s different outside the classroom. This feels different. This isn’t good.

“Do you have any other siblings besides your sister?” I ignore the check in my gut and continue our conversation.

“Nope. Just my older sister.” She replies, and I ponder that.

“Hmmm. I would have thought you were the oldest.”

She huffs. “Yeah, I feel that way sometimes. Ever since my dad died, I’ve been the one that handled things. She can stand

up for herself when pushed to do it, but it was me who usually pushed her. She was starting to come into her own and then married the horrible guy I told you about who treated her like shit. They're divorced now, thank god, and she's met someone that worships the ground she walks on. Hopefully, she'll find herself again."

I watch her intently as she tells her story. That explains her sassiness and why she refuses to take shit from anyone.

"What about you? I'm sure you're the oldest." She says as she watches me flip the hamburgers. I shake my head and smirk.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you're an..."

"Don't say asshole," I command, and she laughs.

"If the shoe fits, Professor."

Fuck. Being reminded I'm her professor is not what I need right now. I finish making the hamburgers, and we each make a plate to eat. I can't do this. This is wrong on so many levels. If one of my colleagues were to come up on us, what would they say? Do I care? I don't plan on doing this forever. This is just something to do until I figure out what's next. I feel her eyes on me, but I continue to ignore her.

"Did I say something?" She asks. Standing, I begin to pack things up.

"I have to go," I tell her, and she stands, watching as I put everything in the utility wagon I brought.

"You're not going to stay and watch the fireworks?" She questions.

"No," I reply, and she puts her hands in her back pockets as she watches me. She finally nods like she's come to a conclusion and takes her hands out of her back pockets.

"So, you are an asshole." She states before turning and walking away.

CHAPTER SIX

BAILEY



MOM IS making Caroline and my favorite dinner tonight, breakfast. We were all going to meet at the pizzeria we normally go to, but Caroline called and asked if we could have this instead. Maybe I can talk to her about the professor tonight. I need to speak to someone. I have no friends.

There's a light knock on my bedroom door, and I glance up from the textbook I was reading.

"Hey, honey." Mom steps in and smiles at me.

"Hey." Standing, I hug her. She's still in her scrubs from her shift at the hospital. "How was your day?" She smiles and sits on the edge of my bed as I return to my desk. Mom is a NICU nurse, she has the best and sometimes not-so-good stories, but she spares us those.

"It was good. Two babies got to go home today." Her eyes fill with tears, and I shake my head at her. I love my mom and her big heart; she always says she sees every child as her child.

And one day, she wants all the grandchildren. I wonder if Caroline has told her about Sebastian yet.

“How are your classes going? I feel like I haven’t talked to you since school started.” She implores. I bite my cheek and pull my legs into my chest.

“They’re okay. I’m getting into my major now, so they’re getting harder.” I skate around the truth. She tilts her head at me.

“And? What about the professor?” She asks, and I wince, hating I ever brought him up.

“He’s still sexy, but he’s just my professor.” I play with the frays on my shorts.

“Did something happen?” Mom asks. I drop my head and close my eyes.

“No,” I lie. “I was just a stupid girl with a dumb crush.” My ribs grow tight, and I remind myself how to breathe. Mom pats the bed, encouraging me to sit next to her. Standing from my chair, I cross over to the bed and sit beside her, laying my head on her shoulder. She wraps her arm around me and holds me close.

“I know I’m your mom, and you may not want to tell me certain things. But you can talk to me, and I will always listen. Sometimes I wonder if I had listened more with Caroline....” She trails off. “Anyway, maybe talking to Caroline will help.” She offers. Sighing dejectedly, I speak up.

“Tabitha and Todd are in my class. Professor McMillan makes sure Todd leaves me alone. He was being nice to me the first few weeks, but this last week....” I trail off. How do I tell my mom everything that’s happened? The black dress and the 4th of July. She’ll think I’m pathetic.

“Then I met this other guy, Josh. He’s nice, but it feels like Professor McMillan gets irritated whenever we chat. He’s so confusing.” I shrug and sit up to look at her. “It could also be all in my head because I have a stupid schoolgirl crush on my

professor,” I tell her. Mom sighs and kisses me on the side of my head.

“That’s tough, honey. Does he know about your tumultuous relationship with Todd?” I run my fingers through my hair and pull it over my shoulder, braiding pieces of it.

“Yeah. He noticed and asked me about it. I confided in him.” Inhaling, I release it. “He’s easy to talk to, but I’ve kept my distance since he started acting like a jackass.” Mom pats my leg and stands up.

“Everything will work out. It always does.” She encourages. She walks to the door. “Talk to Caroline tonight; she might have more profound wisdom than I do. When I met your father, I quite literally jumped him.” My mouth pops open at her admission.

“What?!?” I squeak. She chuckles and nods.

“That’s a conversation for when I’ve had several glasses of wine.” Sadness washes over her features, and my eyes burn. She tries to smile at me and shakes it off. “I’m going to shower, and then I’ll start cooking.” Before I can respond, she walks away. I hope one day she’ll tell me that story. I’d love to hear it.

Sitting back at my desk, I stare blankly at my laptop. What would Professor McMillan do if I jumped him? I wanted to do that at the lake last week and have thought about it through out the week, but I’ve ignored him instead. Taking a cleansing breath, I begin working on one of the assignments for his class. He’d probably give me an extra assignment anyway.



“That was so good, mom. I’ve been craving your pancakes.” Caroline exclaims. Mom beams at her and pats her hand as she stands, and begins to stack plates. Caroline and I

stand to help her. We walk to the dishwasher, rinse the dishes, and load them.

“Mom, I met someone.” Caroline blurts out. I bite my lip and give her an encouraging smile. Mom stops and gives Caroline her full attention.

“Really? Who?” She questions.

“Sebastian. He’s so different from anyone I’ve ever met.” She gushes. “I never knew someone like him could exist. Brandon used to go to his gym, but Sebastian kicked him out because he was an asshole to me. He’s just... Well, I want you two to meet him, so I thought we could all go to the pizzeria next week.” Mom claps her hands and wraps her arms around Caroline.

“Of course! I can’t wait to meet him. You’re glowing. That must be why.” Caroline’s eyes widen, and my eyes narrow. Her eyes meet mine, and she gives me a smile that doesn’t quite reach her eyes. I ignore it for now because she’s had a crazy couple of weeks at work. I hug her next.

“I’ll be there. I can’t wait to meet him!” I tell her. We finish cleaning up and sit on the back porch looking out over the creek. It’s a bit breezy tonight but still hot. I cock my head as I listen to the water flowing.

I remember spending hours out here walking along that creek. It’s one of my favorite memories from childhood. Sighing at the happy memory, I prop my feet on the table and study Caroline. She looks so tired.

“Are you okay, sis? You look tired.” She runs her hands through her hair and sighs.

“Well, we had the app launch at work. And you know Lincoln has been a complete asshole since Ansley gave her notice. I swear he has a thing for her or something; they have a weird relationship. And Sebastian’s ex showed up at his house; he had to file a restraining order.” She sighs, and my shoulders slump. Talking to her about Professor McMillan will have to

wait; she has too much going on right now. Her gaze turns to me.

“Sebastian handled it, but I’m ready to sleep for the next few days.” She grabs my hands and pulls me close. “You said you found the Halloween costume. I want you to try it on for me.” I put on a fake smile and motion for her to follow me to my room.

Caroline wore this in high school before she met Brandon. The night we went shopping, and she told me about Sebastian, I told her I found it and would wear it when Halloween came along. Now I’m beyond second-guessing it. I’m third, fourth, and fifth guessing it, especially after Professor McMillan’s response to my little black dress and especially after last week at the lake. What’s the point, really?

It’s a nineteen-twenties swing dress in black. Caroline settles on my bed while I change in my bathroom. Coming out into the bedroom, I do a quick Charleston dance step for her, and she claps.

“You look great, Bailey! Your professor isn’t going to know what to do with himself. How’d he react to the dress? You never told me.” Playing with the fringe of the dress, I sit on the edge of my bed next to her.

“He didn’t react. He’s my teacher.” I say. She plays with her necklace, her eyebrows furrowing.

“I’m sorry.” She whispers, and I shrug, giving her a megawatt smile.

“I did meet a guy, though. He’s nice. He’s my age and not my professor.” I utter. She motions for me to turn around, so I do. She begins to run her fingers through my hair, sighing. I shiver at the goosebumps that travel along my neck and arms. Growing up, we would play with each other’s hair for hours. She begins to braid my hair.

“You deserve to have what you want, Bailey. Don’t settle, okay?” She pleads. There’s fear in her voice. Turning around, I wrap my arms around her neck and hug her tight.

“I won’t,” I promise her.

“So, do you not like him anymore?” She questions. I turn back around so she can still play with my hair, and so I don’t have to look her in the eye.

“It was just a crush,” I murmur. She wraps her arms around me and hugs me from behind.

“Is this other guy cute?” She implores as she starts to braid my hair. It takes all I have not to snort. Josh doesn’t have a chance. I’m not sure about Professor McMillan, but one thing is for sure I’ll never go for someone my age.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BAILEY



I GET to class early today. It is the first time I've arrived early since I wore the black dress because I didn't want to attempt to make small talk with Professor McMillan. But after meeting Sebastian last night and him telling me his best friend's brother was a professor here, I wanted to look around and see if maybe I could find out who it is for next semester.

Since the black dress incident, I've decided to hell with everyone else's wandering eyes. I gradually went to wearing fitted shirts. I've worn shorts a few times. But today I'm wearing a yellow maxi sundress. The top is fitted, and the bottom flares, but it's breezy in this hot southern humidity. Unease crawls up my spine, and I glance behind me. I have felt like someone's been watching me for several days, but no one is ever there. Shaking it off, I focus on the task at hand.

Today is our last day of the summer semester; we get next week off, then the fall semester begins the following week. As silly as it sounds, the thought of not seeing Professor McMillan for a week makes me sad. Padding down the

hallway and up the stairs, I glance at each office to look for names I don't recognize.

I've already enrolled in my classes for next semester, and I'm in two of his classes, but if I could switch at least one, maybe that would make things easier. Reaching the end of the hallway, I sigh. Caroline invited me to Sebastian's best friend's house tomorrow. His brother is supposed to be there, so I'll meet him then.

Getting closer to Professor McMillan's office, I realize his door is open this time, and my steps falter. Shit. Holding my head high and focusing straight ahead, I force myself not to glance into his office. I came an hour early to snoop the hallway, but that took twenty minutes, and now I still have time to kill.

"Ms. Rhodes." He calls out as I pass by, causing me to stop in my tracks. I haven't spoken to him outside the classroom in weeks. I face him, and warm shivers race down my body and settle in my core. He's wearing a light blue button-up shirt tucked into khakis, and he has glasses on. He's like a sexy Clark Kent.

"Yes, sir," I answer and step into his doorway. He's standing at one of the many bookshelves in his office. His office is neat and orderly. There's a large wooden desk in the middle of the room with windows directly behind it overlooking the campus. On one side are bookshelves overflowing with books on a variety of subjects.

On the other side, he has a few filing cabinets, a couch that looks incredibly comfortable, and a television mounted in the corner. It's turned on to a news station, and I wonder how long he's been here. He has open office hours, but I've never taken advantage of them.

"Your office is beautiful." I compliment him and step further inside to inspect some of the books on his bookshelf. He clears his throat.

“Thank you.” He replies as he steps up next to me. I inhale, and his scent overwhelms me. Balling my hands into fists, I have to force myself not to reach out and touch him. God, I’ve missed him. Focusing on his bookshelf, I’m surprised. I expected all his books to be on criminal justice, but he has *Shakespeare*, *Frankenstein*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *The Great Gatsby*. Pulling out *The Great Gatsby* and flipping through the pages, he steps even closer to me.

“Do you like that book?” He asks. His breath tickles my cheek as he looks at it with me. Ignoring the galloping of my heart, I place it back on the shelf.

“Yes, it was very tragic.” He hums and finally getting the nerve, I glance at him. “Not something I’d ever want to go through myself.” There’s a ghost of a smile on his face, and I want to make him smile again. Like I did at the lake, he was so at ease there. Until he wasn’t. Turning toward one another, I realize how close he is, but he doesn’t step back.

“What’s your favorite book?” He questions as he pushes a piece of my hair behind my ear, his fingertips lingering on my neck. My tongue darts out to wet my lips, and his eyes follow the movement. I stare at him breathlessly. Swallowing, I force myself to focus on the question, and I’m unsure what to say. Will he judge me for what I read?

“I don’t have a favorite,” I admit. “I have books that stay with me for long stretches of time, but I can’t think of one that is my favorite.” He seems to contemplate that as he steps back and leans against his desk. I feel the absence of his closeness immediately. The strap of my bag falls off my shoulder, and he eyes it like it’s offended him somehow. Glowering at him, I slowly drop the bag between my legs.

“What’s the last book you read?” He continues with our conversation. He’s not going to give up.

“The textbook for your class,” I reply, not joking. He cracks a smile, and it transforms his face. He goes from this

broody, grumpy yet handsome man to this welcoming, good-natured, extremely hot male specimen.

“Me too, actually.” His smile stays in place as he watches me, and I find myself returning it.

“So, how many other classes do you teach?” I change the subject because I’m not ready to tell him the subject matter of the other books I read. And because I want to know more about him. He rarely talks about himself. He tilts his head at me like he notices but doesn’t mention it.

“Two during the summer. I’ll be teaching three next semester. I saw you’re in two of them.” He answers. Was he looking to see if I was, or he just happened to notice? “What’s your major?” He walks around his desk and closes his laptop. Glancing at the clock on his wall, I realize it’s almost time for class.

“I’m getting my bachelor’s in Criminal Justice. I’m pre-law and want to attend law school after this. My dad was a lawyer, but he did pre-law in History. I don’t like History. So, I decided on Criminal Justice.” I explain as he grabs his bag. I grab mine, but he takes it from me when the strap falls off my shoulder again, clearly frustrated.

“What do you have against my bag, Professor McMillan?” He turns on me and walks me back into his bookshelf. Eyes wide and heart beating erratically, I can only stare up at him.

“What do you have against a bag with a strap that won’t fall off your shoulder every two seconds?” He snaps, his breath causing my hair to move. Reaching my hand out, I snatch it from him.

“That bag belonged to my father. He used it in law school. I don’t give two fucks if it bothers you or not. I will not use another bag. Ever!” He takes a slight step back as his eyebrows cave in, and he scrubs a hand over his face. Who does he think he is? Sliding from between him and the bookshelf, I walk out of his office and don’t look back. I’m

buying him a permanent name tag with Asshole engraved on it; that's precisely what he is.

CHAPTER EIGHT

JULIAN



SITTING ON Connor’s couch, I rub my finger around the rim of my tumbler, waiting for everyone else to arrive. Connor walks into the living room carrying a vegetable tray. He sits it down and smirks at me.

“I have a question.” I start, and his smirk grows wider. He already knows what I’m going to say. Sometimes I wonder if he’s adopted or if I’m adopted. “Did you tell dad BDSM stands for Burgers, Drinks, and Salsa Music?” He throws his head back and starts laughing.

“Mom is pissed. He invited Carol and Bill over for a BDSM party. She told me to give you a strong talking to.” It goes in one ear and out the other because he laughs harder.

“Can you...” He gasps for air. “Can you imagine how that’s going to go?” He hits his thigh and laughs more as he walks into the kitchen for more food. Downing the rest of my drink, I pull out my phone.

Me: I tried.

Mom: That’s all you can do.

I imagine her shaking her head with a smile on her face. He didn't get enough discipline as a child. Connor walks back in, still laughing. As he's arranging food, there's a knock on the front door, and Bec walks in.

"Shortcake!" Connor opens his arms, and Bec practically tackles him. They've been best friends for years since Connor and Bass helped keep Bec off the streets. They caught her stealing their food, and instead of getting upset with her, they helped her out. Now, she works with Bass at his gym.

Connor kisses her on the top of her head, and she swoons. He's oblivious, though. I'd feel sorry for the girl, but she keeps putting herself through it, so I guess it's her fault. She glances at me out of the corner of her eye as Connor continues to fuss over the food he's putting out. She approaches me with that damn smirk on her face.

"Hey, Julian." She greets me, so I stand. I won't hug her; instead, I extend my hand, and she stares at it like it's a foreign object. Suddenly she has two arms wrapped around me, and I'm looking down at the top of her head, seeing her pink hair. I should have known. Patting her back twice, I disentangle myself and clear my throat. She chuckles.

"One day, a girl will come along and soften you up." Arching an eyebrow at her, I don't answer. Even after all the shit she's been through, her outlook on life remains positive. It's endearing. Kind of.

The doorbell rings, so Connor goes to answer it. Hearing voices from the foyer, Bec takes off in her usual bouncing-off-the-walls way. I remain where I'm at and wait. I ponder Bec's statement about a girl coming along to soften me up. There's a certain girl I can't stop thinking about. One I won't see for a week while we're between semesters.

I was a detective; I could easily find out where she lives and run into her at the grocery store near her house. I can be creative. I wanted to do dirty things to her in my office yesterday, but I wound up pissing her off. Like every other

time, we've been alone together. It's for the best. Exhaling, I try to dislodge thoughts of her from my brain.

Bass walks into the living room first, followed by a blonde, whom I'm assuming is his girlfriend. I haven't met her yet only heard about her from Connor and Bass. Tilting my head, I study her; she looks familiar, but I can't pinpoint why.

"Hey, Julian!" Bass greets me. He motions to Caroline.

"This is my girl, Caroline." She blushes and smiles at me meekly. Extending my hand out, she shakes it.

"Nice to meet you, Caroline." I greet her.

"You too." She says. Hearing giggling from behind her, she turns, and Bailey steps out. A rush of adrenaline courses through my veins like the addict I am when it comes to her. What the hell is she doing here? It's like she stepped out of my brain and materialized in front of me. Caroline motions to her.

"Julian, this is my sister Bailey." Bailey's eyes leave Bec, traveling in my direction; she stops, so suddenly, Bec runs into her.

"Hey!" Bec rubs her nose, but Bailey doesn't respond.

"What are you doing here?" Bailey asks accusingly, and before I can respond, Bass speaks up.

"This is Julian. He's Connor's brother, the professor I told you about." Caroline looks back and forth between Bailey and me, her eyes narrowing. Bass looks at me, but I don't take my eyes off Bailey. "She has a professor that's driving her nuts, so I recommended she meet you so she can take one of your classes. She went to the school yesterday to find your office, but couldn't find it. She wanted to drop one of his classes to take one of yours instead."

Bailey's eyes widen as realization dawns on her, and my blood boils. She was up at the school early yesterday looking for another professor. She was going to drop my class? When I can't get enough of her, she's looking for a way to escape me.

What. The. Fuck. I take three steps until I'm directly in front of her.

"Let's have a conversation, Ms. Rhodes." She glares up at me, and I silently dare her to deny me.

"How do you know her last name?" Bec asks, but I ignore it.

"Oh, shit," Caroline whispers.

"Ms. Rhodes," I warn. She rolls her eyes so hard I flex my hand, wanting to do something about her bratty attitude.

"Lead the way, Professor McMillan." She taunts. I want to grab her hand and drag her, but the moment I touch her, I won't stop. I'm almost at my limit with her. I lead her through the hallway to the guest bedroom at the back of the house, entering before her; my grip tightens on the door handle as I wait for her to enter. Once she clears the threshold, I close the door and walk her back into it; my eyes zone in on the pulse in her neck. She tries to look calm and collected, but she wants me.

I have shown extreme restraint, not fucking her on my desk in the classroom; the only thing that is holding me back is she is my student. And I'd probably lose my job unless having a relationship with one of my students is just frowned upon. That's something I need to look up. I honestly don't care; this is a temporary job, not something I plan to keep forever.

"Why were you going to drop one of my classes?" I question her. Taking a deep breath, I smell her sweet scent. She smells like cherries. I didn't think I'd see her again for another week. Such a treat.

"Because you hate me." She replies. Silly girl. I place a hand beside her head on the door.

"Not true." Bringing my nose down, I run it along her jawline, convincing myself it's one time. Her breathing picks up, and she plasters her hands on the door.

"Professor McMillan." She whispers.

“Don’t.” I cut her off. I only want one taste. Steeling myself, I step back from her. Denying myself yet again. She stares up at me in confusion and lust. I want to wrap her hair around my hand and show her the heights I can bring her to; ignoring all that, I put my hands in my pockets.

“You will not change classes. You will take my classes.” Her lips are parted as she continues to stare at me. “Understand?” She nods. “Good. Now let’s go join everyone else.” Her eyes change from lust to anger, and she yanks the door open, storming out and returning to the living room. Adjusting my hard cock, so I’m less conspicuous when I return, I realize I’m an addict for Bailey Rhodes.

CHAPTER NINE

BAILEY



I PICK at the vegetables on my plate, ignore Professor McMillan, and try to keep my emotions to myself. So, he's the professor Caroline and Bass have been telling me about. I don't understand him. I swear I thought he was going to kiss me. To have my first kiss by him-I pause that thought; he probably can tell I'm inexperienced and doesn't want that.

Putting my plate down, I run my fingers through my hair and glance at him across the room. His gray eyes are on me. I look away and ignore the fluttering of my stomach. I'm sure it's because I'm his student, but my ego has taken a beating the past few weeks, and I'm sick of it.

"Hey," Caroline whispers. Turning toward her, I arch an eyebrow. "Are you okay? I didn't realize he was the professor." Shrugging, I grab a carrot off my discarded plate and take a bite.

"It's not a big deal," I reassure her.

“What happened?” She asks. Staring at her for a long moment, I realize she’s not the same fragile person she was months ago, whom I couldn’t talk to; tilting my head, we walk out onto Connor’s back porch and sit down. I tell her everything about Todd, Tabitha, and Professor McMillan.

“I’m a virgin. I’ve never even kissed anyone.” I admit. “But there’s something about him.” Sighing, I pull my legs up and lean my chin on my knees.

“I’m so sorry I haven’t been there for you, Bailey. I’ve been a horrible sister.” Caroline says. Shaking my head, I reach out and grab her hand.

“Don’t you dare! You were surviving. I understand that.” Smiling at her. “I like Sebastian. He is so different.” She smiles at me in response and pushes her hair behind her ear.

“Can I tell you a secret?” She asks, and I smirk.

“Of course!” I lean in as she does.

“I might be pregnant.” She whispers, and my eyes widen, clapping my hand over my mouth to hold in my squeal.

“I might be an aunt?” I ask, and she nods. Leaning over, I hug her hard. “I am going to be the best aunt ever!” I promise her. She gives a watery chuckle.

“Anyway, how are you going to win the professor over?” She asks, and I shrug.

“Why do you like him?” She questions.

“He’s mature and mysterious. He protected me from Todd. I can have a normal conversation with him. He can be extremely nice, caring, and funny when he’s not being an asshole. And, holy shit, he’s hot.” We both start to giggle when Bec walks out and glances between us.

“Am I interrupting?” Shaking my head, I point at the other chair. She sits and makes herself comfortable. “Normally, it’s just me with those guys. It’s nice having girls over for once.” She explains. Even though I’ve only known Bec for a little while, I feel a connection with her; but still being cautiously

optimistic about it. I've never had a friend that cared about me outside what I could do for them.

"So, what's going on between you and Connor?" I ask her. Her face turns bright red, and she looks away.

"What do you mean?" She asks, and I know I said that the wrong way.

"Sorry. I just assumed you two were an item. You have chemistry." I try to explain. She turns back to me and stares for a long time before sighing.

"He and Bass saved me from living on the streets years ago. He makes me laugh and doesn't think I'm weird." She crosses her arms over her chest and looks away.

"I don't think you're weird," Caroline tells her. "I've always admired you." Bec glances at her and gives a small smile.

"I knew Bass was smart dating you," Bec tells her, and Caroline laughs. Bec turns her attention from Caroline to me and leans forward in her chair.

"So, what are we going to do about you and Julian?"



Bec and I hang out every day the week I'm out of school. My only friend was Tabitha, but she turned on me as soon as she could dig her nails into Todd. Bec wants to be an interior designer but refuses to work with Connor. Connor has his own construction business and has asked Bec to stage his homes when they're complete, but she's worried working so close to him will make it even harder for her.

"How long have you had feelings for him?" I ask her. She huffs as she runs my straightener through her hair.

“Pretty much from the moment, I laid eyes on him. Bass is more serious, but Connor is goofy and makes me laugh. One year, I dressed up as a penis for Halloween, and he dressed up as a condom.” She says matter of factly. I choke on my drink as I start cackling.

When I can finally breathe, I say, “That is the best thing I’ve ever heard!” Thinking for a moment. I ask her, “Do you still have that costume?”

She tilts her head at me. “Why?”

I roll my lips between my teeth and smirk, “I told Professor McMillan he was an asshole. But he’s also a dick, and it would be funny leaving that costume on his desk.” I can barely get the words out of my mouth before laughing. Bec laughs along with me.

“It’s weird to hear him referred to as Professor McMillan, but I still have that costume. I’ll bring it to you.” She finishes straightening her hair as I study my schedule again to ensure I know exactly where I’m going on Monday.



Sunday afternoon, I’m lying on my bed looking at my ceiling, bored out of my mind. Mom and Bec are working, and Caroline is on a date with Bass. I saw on Facebook there’s a movie being played at the big park downtown. I don’t know what movie it is, but I have to get out of this house. I change into leggings and a crop top, then head downstairs. I put on my shoes, grab my purse and keys, and head to the park.

I realize I didn’t bring a blanket or chair when I get to the park. Sighing, I decide I’ll sit on the ground. Heading to the concession stands, I get some M&Ms and a Diet Coke.

“Do you know what movie is playing tonight?” I ask the lady helping me, and she smiles.

“This month is nineties theme. I think tonight is *The Truman Show*.” She answers, and I press my lips together, wondering if I’ve ever heard of it.

“Thank you.” Turning to leave, I run straight into a hard chest and lose my balance.

“Shit. Sorry!” I apologize; taking a step back, I look up, and my heart stops in my chest. “Professor McMillan,” I whisper so low I’m unsure if he hears me.

“Ms. Rhodes.” He replies. I’ve missed seeing him every day this week. I want to wrap my arms around his neck and hold him tight.

“Are you here to watch the movie?” I ask dumbly. Of course, he’s here to watch the movie.

“Yep.” He replies. I gape at him, hoping he’ll say something else, but he doesn’t. A pit forms in my stomach, but I try again.

“They’re playing *The Truman Show*. I’ve never seen it. Have you?” My voice cracks, and I cringe.

“I have.” His voice is clipped, and I want to stomp my foot. How is he going to demand I take his classes and then give me clipped answers when we’re not even at school? I step around him and ignore the tightness in my chest.

“Alright, well, see you tomorrow,” I say in a low voice. He doesn’t reply, and I have to fight back the disappointment. There’s a rock no one is sitting on, so I sit on it and try my best to tune into the movie. Last weekend he had me pressed against the bedroom door in his brother’s house. This weekend he barely speaks to me. I don’t understand him.

The hair on the back of my neck stands up, and I glance over my shoulder, but I don’t see anything unusual. I feel like I’m being watched. Rolling my shoulders, I shake it off and try again to focus on the movie. Seeing movement to my side, I look in that direction and see Professor McMillan walking toward me. Was he watching me? He places a lawn chair next to me and motions to it.

“Sit.” He demands. I raise an eyebrow at him. He clears his throat. “I’ll sit on the rock.” He says more gently.

“So, you *do* know how to say more than one word at a time.” I snap, but he doesn’t respond. I should ignore him and stay where I am, but I don’t. I stand and sit in the chair while he sits on the rock. That’s when I realize how close the chair is to the rock. If I lean just so, my arm will graze his arm.

I look at him from the corner of my eye and see he’s watching me, not the movie. I take in a shuddering breath and turn, so I’m facing him more. His hands clench before reaching up and brushing my hair away from my shoulder. Then he turns his attention back to the movie. I face forward for the rest of the movie, but I’m so hyperaware of him that I wouldn’t be able to tell anyone what it was about.

CHAPTER TEN

BAILEY



OVER THE weekend, I went shopping with Bec, Caroline, and Liv, one of Caroline's friends. Caroline and Bec swear every outfit I bought will get Professor McMillan's attention. Stopping by the bathroom before class, I stare at myself in the mirror.

I want his attention, but I don't care if it's because of my outfits. Smoothing my hands down my blue plaid skirt again and ensuring my buttons are done correctly on my white shirt, I leave the bathroom. Today is the first day of classes. I'll see Professor McMillan every day. I have one class with him on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and the other on Tuesday and Thursday.

Putting the bag strap over my head, so it doesn't fall off my shoulder, I lean against the wall next to the classroom door. I always hold it by the handle so it doesn't fall to the ground, but that isn't good enough for the professor. I'm not sure why it offends him so much when the strap falls off my shoulder, but it's one of those battles I don't want to pick.

I suck in a deep breath when I hear his footsteps down the hall. I wonder how he'll act toward me today. I never know what to expect from him. He barely spoke to me last night when we were alone, so I wouldn't be surprised if he barely talked to me here, either. Standing taller but refusing to look in his direction, I focus on the wall before me. My pulse picks up when he stops at the door next to me.

"Ms. Rhodes, you're early." His voice is rough and delicious. Turning to him, I'm caught off guard by how close he is. By the look in his eyes, he enjoys that fact.

"I'm always early, Professor McMillan," I reply. He hums and turns to unlock the classroom. My scalp prickles, and unease skates up my spine. I turn to glance behind me, but no one is there. My eyebrows furrow.

"Everything okay?" He questions as he glances behind me. Turning to him, I stare at him in confusion and peek behind me again. Should I say something? "Bailey?" My head snaps up at him, saying my first name and the concern in his voice. Walking into the open door, he's holding, he follows me. Rubbing my hand on my neck to relieve the uneasiness, I glance at him. He's watching me intently.

"I've had this feeling someone's been watching me. I ummm..." I stare down at the floor in shame. I'm such an idiot. When his shoes come into view, I want to leave the classroom and never return.

"You what?" He asks quietly.

Closing my eyes and inhaling, I admit, "I thought it was you. But I just got the feeling, so I know it's not you." Forcing myself to open my eyes, I look at him and shrug my shoulders. He has a contemplative look on his face.

"When did you start having this feeling?" He asks. I don't know whether to feel relieved or offended that he ignored my confession.

"The last few weeks of summer classes," I reply, and he pulls out his cell phone. He pulls up a program and puts in the

information I gave him.

“If anything happens out of the ordinary, let me know. Okay? Promise me.” He demands. I nod without thinking.

“Why?” Before he can respond, other students trickle in.

“Sit close.” He whispers, and I don’t know if it’s because of what I told him or because he wants me near him. I want to believe it’s a bit of both, so I sit in the front row. He goes to the front of the classroom and begins writing information on the whiteboard. I watch as each student walks in. My blood runs cold when Todd and Tabitha walk in. Was he watching me? Is he still obsessed with me? I thought he had moved on.

Todd’s eyes find mine, and they darken. I expect him to sit next to me, but he stays on the other side of the classroom. He must have taken Professor McMillan seriously last semester.

“You don’t like him, huh?” My head snaps toward Josh’s voice to see him sitting next to me. He has a silly grin, and I smile at him.

“That obvious?” I ask as I pull my laptop out of my bag and open it.

“Just a little.” He teases, and I shrug.

“Are you majoring in Criminal Justice?” I ask him, and he nods as he prepares for class. “Guess we’ll be in several classes together,” I say and turn my attention to the front of the classroom. Professor McMillan’s eyes are on us, and guilt takes root in my stomach. I’m not sure why; something I’ll need to examine later. His eyes soften when they connect with mine but harden when he turns to Josh.

Glancing at Josh, I see him glaring at Professor McMillan as he turns toward the whiteboard. What’s that about?



The rest of the week is a blur. I am worn out by Friday because I have three other classes on top of Professor McMillan's. His class is the only one I have on Fridays. As soon as it's over, I head to the library to begin working on the assignments that are starting to pile up.

On my way to the library, I hear footsteps directly behind me, glancing back, but there isn't anyone there. Stopping in my tracks, I scan around me. There was someone behind me. I know it. Retracing my steps, I look around but don't see anyone. Am I being paranoid? Should I return to Professor McMillan's class and say something to him? He did tell me if something out of the ordinary happened to tell him.

Mustering up my courage, I decide against it and finish my trek to the library. Finding a corner on the third floor, I unpack my things and log in to my laptop. There are a few people scattered around, but not many. Starting on my first assignment, I begin working through each one. I'm almost done when I hear a noise coming from somewhere on the floor in the stacks. Standing, I look around and realize the few people that were here have left.

There isn't anyone here. I was so focused on getting my assignments completed I didn't notice them leaving. There's a loud bang; shrieking, I spin and try to find who the hell is playing games with me.

"Who the hell is in here?" I scream. Grabbing my bag, I hurriedly begin to shove my stuff in it. No one answers, and I could kick myself for not going to Professor McMillan when I felt uneasy earlier. "Hello!" I yell out, but still, there's no answer. My hands are clammy and shaking. Throwing my bag over my head and quickly making my way to the stairs, the lights begin to flicker. What the fuck? Grabbing my phone, I call Caroline.

"Hello?" Caroline answers on the first ring.

"Caroline?" I sound desperate.

"Bailey? What's wrong?"

“I’m at the library. Someone is flickering the lights and throwing things off the shelves.” I’m almost in tears.

“Are you alone?” She asks.

“Yes, I don’t know what to do!” I exclaim.

“Okay. Leave. Now. I’ll call you back.” She hangs up, and I make it to the stairs when the lights go out. Fuck! Slamming the exit door open, I run down the stairs until I’m on the library’s first floor. I may hyperventilate. I slam out of the stairwell and am met with shushes and glares, but I don’t care.

Making it to the exit, I push on the door at the same time Julian is pulling it open. Without thinking, I throw myself at him. The adrenaline pumping through my veins evaporates, and I begin to shake.

“Bailey? Are you okay?” Pushing my face into his neck, I can’t speak. He disengages. I understand why, but I hate it. His warmth and scent are comforting. Pushing me away, he inspects me before his eyes meet mine.

“Bass called me. He said you called Caroline freaking out. He told me to check on you. What happened?” He asks. Wiping away the tears and running my hands through my hair, I take a deep breath and tell him what happened. His face slowly morphs into rage.

“Stay here. I’m going to look around.” He commands, but immediately I shake my head.

“On the way here, I heard someone following me. I don’t know what the hell is going on, but I’m not staying here. I’m going with you.” I say. He glares at me but then motions for me to lead the way. We head back up to the third floor, using the stairs again.

“Stay by the stairs. If you see anyone yell at me.” He instructs. I nod, and he takes off into the library. He returns about fifteen minutes later, and I push away from the wall I’m leaning against, ready to see what he reports.

“Did you see anything?” I question. He shakes his head.

“The only thing I saw were some books thrown to the ground, probably the bang you heard.” He informs.

“I swear I’m not going crazy.” I implore. He steps up close and brings his hands to my forearms, rubbing them.

“I don’t think you’re going crazy, Bailey.” He whispers emphatically. I love hearing my name on his lips. I want to throw myself into his arms again. I want to be comforted by him, but I restrain myself.

“Do you think it’s Todd and Tabitha?” I ask, and he rubs his hand over his jaw.

“I’m not sure. It seems like something they would try to do, but not on a Friday when they’d rather be anywhere else but here.” He explains. Huh! That’s not something I would have thought of.

“Oh! Okay, well. I have no idea who else would do that.” Running my hands through my hair, I sigh.

“You can use my office to study if you’d like. I don’t have any other classes after our class on Fridays, but if you’re not in class when I’m in class, you can use it on the other days. You can use it on Fridays, too; you won’t bother me.” He offers. I stare at him in shock but find myself nodding.

“Okay. That freaked me out, so I’m not going to say no.” I admit. He chuckles and guides me toward the staircase again. His hand lands on my lower back leading me.

“I don’t want you to say no.” He says gruffly. My heart lodges in my throat, causing hope to take root. But I remind myself, again, I’m his student, and he’s my professor; this can’t go anywhere.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BAILEY



“BAILEY, OH my goodness, I’m so glad Julian was there!” Caroline exclaims. Giving Caroline a small smile, I take a sip of my wine. She insisted we have a girl’s night with Bec and Liv tonight. Bec hits her shoulder against mine.

“So, will you take his comfy couch for a test ride?” I chuckle and shake my head. She wiggles her eyebrows at me.

“I’d take his desk, chair, and damn bookshelves for test rides if he’d let me,” I tell them, only half kidding. Liv’s eyebrows raise as she looks back and forth between the two of us.

“Are you two... You know?” She asks, and I sigh, sharing a look with Caroline.

“No, but this week he’s been nice to me. I’ll see how long that lasts.” I exclaim—Caroline’s head tilts.

“He seemed upset at the idea of you dropping his class and looking for a different professor.” She reminds me. Tearing the

last garlic bread in half and taking a bite, I ponder that.

“Yeah. And then I saw him at the park, and he barely spoke to me.” I don’t mention 4th of July or the innocent touches because they don’t mean anything. Do they? “Nothing can happen. I’m his student. Besides, I’m twenty-one, and I’m guessing he’s in his early thirties....”

“Thirty-five.” Bec interrupts. Of course, she would know. Why didn’t I think to ask her sooner?

“Fourteen-year age gap, that’s a lot,” I whisper.

“It’s not,” Liv says, the words barely out of my mouth. Her crystal blue eyes are on mine like she’s trying to communicate something, but I’m unsure what it is. “It’s not a lot. Age is just a number. If you love someone, it doesn’t matter how much older they are. As long as you aren’t a minor and you aren’t. And he’s not forcing you to do something you don’t want.” She stops talking and gulps her wine.

I’ve only hung out with Liv a few times, but she’s the quiet one in the group, always taking in what everyone else is saying. Bec tips her glass toward Liv.

“I agree. Connor isn’t fourteen years older than me, but he is older than me, and I don’t care. If he ever decided he wanted me, I’d be all over that. And don’t forget Lincoln is six years older than Ansley, and we all know they’re freaky.” She takes a drink from her glass, and we all laugh. Ansley is another friend of Caroline’s that lives out of town. Leaning forward, I pat Liv’s hand.

“Thanks, Liv. I needed to hear that.” She gives me an encouraging smile and nods. Caroline wraps her arm around Liv’s shoulder and hugs her.

“You’re so wisdomous!” Caroline exclaims, and we break into a fit of giggles.



Walking out of one of my core classes and pushing my notes into my bag, I'm thankful this is the last class I have to take before I get to focus on my major. However, it is nice not having Tabitha and Todd in this class. Josh, too, he's become like an overzealous puppy, and it's starting to get on my nerves.

I glance up after getting my bag situated, and my eyes land on Josh leaning against the wall outside my classroom. He has a smile on his face, and I grimace.

"What are you doing here?" I don't try to hide my disdain, and his smile drops.

"I thought we could walk to class together." He says, pushing away from the wall. I tilt my head at him in confusion.

"Why?" I have never given him any reason to think I wanted to be friends with him. His eyes narrow, and he jerks his bag up on his shoulder.

"I was just trying to be nice." He snaps. Unease settles in my stomach.

"Well, I'm not going straight to class." I lie. "So, you can go on without me. I'll see you when I get there." I walk in the opposite direction to deter him from following me and turn down another hallway. I lean against the wall and exhale. That was weird. Does he have a crush on me? I have to put a stop to this. I am not interested at all.

Peeking out from the corner, I see he's not there, but still decide to take a different route avoiding him at all costs. Hopefully, he got the hint.



Over the next few weeks, I regularly go to Professor McMillan's office twice a week on Tuesdays during one of his classes and Fridays after our class. It's been a while since he's gone back to his stuffy persona, but he still doesn't talk much. Finishing up my last assignment, I start packing my bag.

"So, have you read all the books on your bookshelves?" I ask him. He glances up from the papers he is grading.

"Yes." He replies and returns to grading his papers. I stare at him and huff.

"That was a great conversation. Thanks!" Turning away from him, I begin walking toward his door to leave. My hand turns the doorknob, but before I can open the door, his hand lands beside my head, preventing me from opening it. How the hell did he get over here so fast? Feeling his body heat, my heart jumps into my throat, and my core clenches. He's not even touching me, but I can feel him everywhere.

"You know, Ms. Rhodes, I get sick of your bratty attitude." His breath ghosts across my cheek. I turn gingerly, so I don't touch him and lean against the door, but he still doesn't move. Instead, he brings his other hand up and cages me in further.

"Well, I don't like being ignored. I try to have a conversation with you, and I get stared at, or I get one-word sentences. It's rude, so if you don't want me to be a brat. Don't. Be. Rude." I punctuate each word by poking him in the chest. He doesn't react; instead, he tilts his head and studies me like I'm a problem he needs to solve. Dropping my hands, I press them to the door. I wish he'd do something. Anything.

"I think you need an extra assignment. Maybe that'd teach you some respect." He finally replies. I glare at him.

“Only if it’s oral.” I spit out, but as soon as I do, I realize how that could be taken, and my face heats up. I want him to talk to me, even for a stupid assignment. He leans closer to me, and I stop breathing altogether.

“You couldn’t handle my oral assignments.” He threatens, his breath gliding over my lips. I don’t know what possesses me to do it, but I lick my lips, and when I do, my tongue glides over his bottom lip. I’ve never done anything so bold in my life. I’ve never wanted to.

He stares at me for a fraction of a second before he hauls me into his arms. One arm wrapping around my waist and the other roaming up my back and into my hair. His lips land on mine. They’re firm and scorching as they command mine to do exactly as he pleases. Clinging to him, I wrap my arms around his neck and allow him to control the situation because I sure as hell have no idea what I’m doing. He either doesn’t notice, or he doesn’t care. He jerks me closer to him, so there isn’t any space between us.

When I gasp, his tongue touches mine, and euphoria envelopes me. Folding my elbows, I run my hands through his hair. His tongue massages mine, and it’s the most thrilling thing I’ve felt in my life. I hear the click of the lock on his door, and I’m being turned and pushed down on the couch I just vacated. He guides me down and lays on top of me, not putting his total weight on me, but I wish he would.

His kiss is electric, and I can’t get enough. His hard length presses against my stomach, and I want to do something about it. I want to drop to my knees and show him I can be a good girl. *His good girl*. He grabs my upper thigh and pulls it so it wraps around his waist, and he rubs his cock against me. Arching against him, I moan.

“Fuck, Bailey!” He groans, his lips latching onto the valley between my breasts. “You’re so fucking gorgeous. Those green eyes are constantly watching me. What I wouldn’t do to have you on your knees watching me as I come all over these

beautiful tits.” His hand massages my breast, his thumb running over my nipple.

“Professor...” I begin.

“Julian. Call me by my first name when my hands and lips are on you.” He proclaims. Before I can say his name, though, his mouth is on mine again. I could kiss him all day and never get tired of it. As far as first kisses go, this is the best there ever was. His hand lands on my thigh again and begins to trek up my inner thigh toward my center.

“These skirts you’ve been wearing. Taunting me, teasing me with each and every one. I love them, yet hate them.” He breathes against my lips before sucking my bottom lip between his. Then, his tongue touches mine again as his fingers tickle my thigh.

I begin to pant at the idea of him touching me. My panties are soaked, and I am throbbing. I need him to do something. When his thumb touches the edge of my panties, there’s a loud knock on his office door. His head snaps up, and I stare at the ceiling, unsure of what’s happening and disoriented. He takes a deep breath and disentangles himself from me.

When he stands, I want to grab him and tell him to ignore whoever it is. Instead, I take the hand he offers and sit up. I watch him go from the heated Julian to the cold Professor McMillan. He’s like Jekyll and Hyde. He adjusts himself and ensures he’s presentable, so I do the same, standing from the couch. I already know I have to leave because I can’t deal with Professor McMillan after having a taste of Julian.

He opens the door wide, but there isn’t anyone there. Stepping out into the hallway, he looks back and forth but doesn’t see anyone because he comes back into the office with a frustrated look.

“Get your things. I’ll walk you to your car.” He snaps. Trying to ignore the shattering of my heart, I grab my bag and put the strap over my head. Pulling my hair out from underneath it, I walk into the hallway and wait for him to grab

his things and lock up. Rubbing my fingers over my lips and wishing he was still kissing me, I take a deep shuddering breath.

“Ms. Rhodes, are you ready?” He asks. I don’t answer; I simply follow him out of the building. I’m unsure if I should worry about who was at his door. At the moment, I don’t care. I just need to make it to my car before I break down. Keeping my eyes glued to the ground, I refuse to look at Professor McMillan.

How can he flip a switch so fast? I’m still reeling, but he seems fine. He doesn’t try to speak to me, which is fine; I can’t talk right now anyway. I’ll either cry or scream; there will be no in-between. He opens the door for me when we make it to my car. Still not looking at him, I take my strap off, place my bag in the passenger seat, and climb in.

“Bailey—”

“See you Monday, Professor McMillan,” I say coldly and yank the door out of his hand, shutting it, effectively cutting him off. Fuck him!

CHAPTER TWELVE

JULIAN



SHE PULLS out of her parking spot with such calmness it's a little scary. I expected her to show some anger in her driving, but she didn't, which only makes me admire her more. Turning toward the teacher's parking lot, I take a calming breath. I would have fucked her on my couch if we weren't interrupted.

I'm sure that was her first kiss, and I ruined it by being a complete asshole because we were interrupted. Well, not just because we were interrupted. Because I realized she is my student and I am her professor, and I was about two seconds from sinking my fingers in her pussy. I was right, though. I know I won't be able to stop now. She's a drug to me. I've had a taste, and it will never be enough. I know if I don't get another hit again soon, I'll begin to have withdrawals.

Making my way to my BMW X5, I think about us being interrupted. Who would knock on the door and then leave? It didn't take us long to disentangle and answer it. Looking around the campus to see how many student cars are left, there

aren't many; it is Friday. My eyes narrow when I see Josh Simpson, his head is buried in his phone, but after a few seconds, his head pops up, and he catches me staring at him. He lifts his hand in a friendly wave.

"Hey, Professor McMillan!" He greets me.

"Afternoon Mr. Simpson." I don't intend to have a conversation with the punk constantly flirting with Bailey, but he stops when our paths intersect. I could be rude and keep walking, but I'm no longer Detective McMillan; I'm Professor McMillan. The thought infuriates and humbles me at the same time.

"Have big plans this weekend?" He asks, and I arch an eyebrow. If I did, I sure wouldn't tell him.

"Grading assignments," I reply. He stands and watches me for a few seconds, expecting me to continue this conversation, but it is not happening. "Alright, well, see you on Monday. Have a good weekend."

Finishing walking to my car and placing my bag in the passenger seat, I look over my shoulder and see Josh still watching me. He smiles and waves. Giving him a slight nod, I climb into my BMW. What a weird kid.



Leaning back in my office chair, I stare up at the ceiling. Bailey has ignored me all week, at least; she ignored me as much as she could get away with. I called on her more in class to hear her voice. She still comes to class early but sits out in the hallway until other students arrive instead of in the classroom. And she's not here today to study like she was last Friday when I acted like a complete asshole.

I hope she's not in the library. I'm tempted to go and search for her or even text Caroline, but I control myself. I've

already crossed so many lines looking up her phone number, inviting her to the lake, showing up at the movie, and kissing her in my office. My obsession with Bailey is becoming an addiction; I can't even think of her as Ms. Rhodes in my head anymore. Pushing away from my desk and packing my things, I grab my cell phone and call Connor.

“Hey, big bro!” He answers, and I roll my eyes.

“Hey! I need to work out.” I snap, and he chuckles.

“Alright. Want to go for a hike? Or do you want to go visit Bec and Bass?” I think about it for a moment and decide on the gym.

“The gym; maybe I'll go hiking tomorrow,” I reply. Connor whistles.

“What's got your boxers all twisted? Is it a girl?” He questions, and I know I shouldn't be surprised at how quickly he catches it, but I am.

“Nope. Just sick of dealing with punk ass kids all week.”

He scoffs, “Keep telling yourself that. Meet you in twenty.” He hangs up. If blowing off steam at the gym doesn't work, I guess I'll wind up parked on the street in front of her house again. Grabbing my things, I lock my office door and walk to the teacher's parking area. I never thought I'd end up here. I thought I could try this, but teaching is not my forte. Now, I need to start thinking about Plan B.

As soon as I pull into the parking lot at the gym, I spot her Mini Cooper. Ignoring the anticipation in my gut and grabbing my workout bag, I meet Connor at the door, and we walk in together. Bec is at the front counter laughing with Bailey. The tightness in my chest evaporates at the sight of her. Bailey is leaning over with her elbows on the counter, giving me a view of her perfect ass.

She's changed from the flowy skirt and top she wore earlier into tight workout shorts and a tank top.

“Hey, boys!” Bec calls out. Bailey pulls her hair up into a ponytail as she looks at who Bec is talking to. She freezes when her eyes connect with mine, then rolls them and finishes her ponytail. I don’t know what it is with her and rolling her eyes, but one day I’m going to spank her or choke her for it, and then, more than likely, I’m going to fuck her. Jesus, I’m in trouble. Connor rounds the counter and gives Bec a bear hug.

“Hey, Shortcake!” He exclaims. Bailey smiles at them and shakes her head. Walking up to her, I stand as close as possible without touching her. Her sweet scent assaults me; I only want to taste her.

“Still not talking to me?” I ask her, and she turns her head to glare at me. She’s beautiful when she’s angry.

“I always heard women mature faster than men, but I didn’t realize I’d still be more mature than someone fourteen years older than me.” She snaps, and I have to force my face to stay neutral. I love the fire in her, and I hope it never goes out. Even though I’m her professor and even though I’m older than her, she still speaks her mind, and I fucking love it. Taking a quick look to ensure Connor and Bec are still chatting and not paying us any attention, I step into her forcing her to back up. I trail my finger down her arm, enjoying watching the goosebumps break out on her skin.

“You are mature for your age; I’ll give you that.” My eyes roam over her, letting her know what I mean. “But there are some areas that you are not more mature than me, and one day I plan on showing you exactly how mature I am.” She releases a small gasp, and her hand comes to her throat. Let her think about that while she works out.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BAILEY



I WANT to keep ignoring him, but it's hard when he's my professor, and I see him every day in class. Today, I'm wearing wide-leg pants and a short sleeve crop top instead of a skirt. The feeling of being watched still hasn't gone away; if anything, it's increased. Since I'm not going to Professor McMillan's office to do my assignments, I've been going to a local coffee shop instead.

I should be looking at the assignments he handed us today, but instead, I'm searching for a part-time job during the holidays. It's probably going to be retail again. I hate retail. I'd rather do something where I'm outside. In high school, during the summer and holidays, I'd always work summer and winter camps, but when I started college and started taking classes during the summer, I couldn't do that anymore.

We do have hiking trails nearby. I wonder if I could get a job in the gift shop, clean the trails, or do guided hikes—something to consider for next year. Thankfully, mom pays for everything. She said she'd let me stay home as long as I didn't

get pregnant or married. But during the holidays and summer, I like to have money to buy gifts and do my own thing, so I still get a part-time job.

Putting in my application at a boutique that doesn't stay open until midnight and is closed on Sundays, I grab the graded assignments Professor McMillan gave us today that we turned in last week. He always makes small comments on mine that make me want to do even better. A small part of me also hopes I'm the only one he makes these comments on.

Brilliant mind.

Absolutely Perfect.

Intriguing.

I'm not sure where you're studying now; here's my number. Text me if you need me.

I pause as I stare at that comment. Professor McMillan gave me his number through an assignment anyone could have seen. Why? I think back to his statement at the gym.

There are some areas that you are not more mature than me, and one day I plan on showing you exactly how mature I am.

Pulling my phone out of my bag, I enter his contact information and debate whether to text him so he'll have my number too.

Does he want it? Does he care? Hearing obnoxious laughter, my head pops up, and I groan, seeing Tabitha's bleached blonde hair, and sure enough, Todd is right there. Quickly packing my things, I try to exit before they see me, but I'm not so lucky.

"Oh, Bailey!" Tabitha screeches, "Are you here all by yourself?" She asks mockingly. Todd wraps his arms around her shoulder and smirks between her and me.

"Yeah, I was studying. But then this awful smell came in, and I can't focus anymore." I sniff the air and arch an eyebrow. "Geez, Tab, you should really see a doctor." I know

I'm being catty and immature, but these two bring out the worst in me.

Tabitha scowls at me. "You are such a bitch!"

Shrugging, I do a little wave, "Takes one to know one." As I walk to my car, I swear I see Professor McMillan's BMW pull out of the parking lot, but I can't be sure. When I get to my car, I pull up his number.

Me: This is Bailey. I figured you should have my number too.

Throwing my phone in the passenger seat, I start my engine and run my hands through my hair. I swear if he comes back with I don't need your number or some shit, I'm going to slice his tires.

Asshole: Good girl.

My heart stops. What. The. Hell.

Asshole: Where have you been going?

I almost ignore him, but I can't. He's being Julian now, and I want more.

Me: The Coffee Bean, but that was ruined today when Dumb and Dumber showed up. I swear I saw your car just a minute ago.

Asshole: You can still come to my office. I don't have to be here.

He doesn't acknowledge my comment. And he hasn't acknowledged what happened between us. There's no way I'm going back to his office until he does.

Me: No, thank you. I'll come back to The Coffee Bean when they're not here.

My phone buzzes again, but I ignore it and leave my parking spot. I want to call Bec and hang out, but her grandpa has been sick lately, so she's been spending a lot of time with him. And Caroline and Liv are in Atlanta this weekend for

Ansley's birthday. So, I stop at the grocery store and grab a bottle of wine and some ice cream.

When I get home, I change into my PJs and turn on Netflix. Pouring a glass of wine, I give in and look at my phone.

Asshole: If I stay, will you come to my office?

It takes me a minute to understand what he's asking.

Me: What's the point? If someone comes knocking, you'll just be an asshole again. Which, by the way, is how you're labeled in my phone.

Asshole: You're probably right. At least you have my number if you need me.

I stare at the message for too long, hoping he'll say something else, but he doesn't. I'm such an idiot.



Julian has returned to his Professor McMillan persona, but I refuse to sit in the hallway and wait anymore. So, I'm sitting in my seat, scrolling through the assignments for another class to make sure I've turned everything in. I haven't greeted him, and he hasn't greeted me, but keeping my eyes from traveling to him is difficult.

He's wearing black slacks and a crisp white shirt today with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. Tracing his tattoo with my eyes, I wonder what it would be like to trace it with my fingers or lips. Flicking my eyes up to his, I'm caught in his gray stare. I don't care that I've been caught. Licking my bottom lip and pulling it between my teeth, I watch him, but his eyes drop to my mouth.

My breathing comes out in pants, and his eyes drop even lower to my chest. It used to bother me when guys would stare

at my curves, but with him, I love it. Closing my laptop, I hesitate before leaning forward on the desk to give him more of a view, and he takes it. He licks his lips and brings his thumb up to his lower lip. His eyes move up to mine again, and they are nearly black.

Gathering my courage, I lean back in my seat and slowly pull my skirt to my knees. His eyes fall to my legs, and he's leaning forward on his desk as he watches me. This game we're playing. It's dangerous but fun. I'm so turned on right now.

My heart beats wildly in my chest, and I glance toward the door to make sure no one is coming in. Looking back at him, I almost lose my courage, but he subtly motions with his hand for me to continue. Taking a deep breath, I spread my legs to give him a peak at the yellow panties I have on under my skirt, but other students begin filing in.

Dropping my skirt, I take a shuddering breath. Julian's eyes stay locked on me for a few more seconds before dropping them to his laptop. He remains seated, and it takes me a moment to realize he has to hide how turned on he is. Biting my lip, I can't stop the grin that spreads across my mouth. Josh sits next to me, as always.

"Hey, Bailey!" He gives me a megawatt smile, and I return a small smile. He is so over the top; it's becoming annoying. He chatters away about something that happened yesterday after class. I half listen just in case I have to respond to something, but I can't take my eyes off Julian, which is how I refer to him in my head now. When he finally stands, my eyes drop to his cock, but he's either hiding it well, or he got himself under control.

"Alright, everyone, let's get started. I'm assigning your first big assignment today. This assignment will be forty percent of your grade. It will require research. You'll have eight weeks to work on it. It will be due before Thanksgiving break. You will be required to use certain books in the library, so I have checked them out for the next eight weeks. You can

see me to check them out. You will only be allowed to have them for a certain amount of time; every day late you return them will lower your grade by five points. I have also checked out a room in the library to be available for assistance if you need it while you're doing your research. I've posted all of this online today." Julian explains the assignment in detail.

Even though he says it's posted, I still take notes. It helps me remember. I haven't been to the library since the day of the incident, but knowing he'll have a room there, I feel better. After class, Josh stops me in the hallway when I'm leaving.

"Want to work on the project together?" He asks. I keep a smile plastered on my face. *Not at all*. He really can't take a hint.

"Maybe. I'm about to start a new job, so I'll have to see how my schedule works out and when I can meet." Josh's smile falters, but he nods.

"Yeah, of course. What's the job?" He questions. I almost answer, but I see Julian behind him, and he shakes his head. Any other time I'd balk and tell Josh to prove I can do whatever the hell I want, but my gut is telling me to listen.

"It's not anywhere you'd know about. See you later!" Turning, I head toward Julian's office. Glancing at him out of the corner of my eye, hoping he realizes.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BAILEY



I WASN'T sure if his door would be unlocked, but it is when I try the knob. Smiling, I slide in and close it behind me. Teasing him is fun, but I don't know if I can keep doing this with this constant back and forth. Placing my bag on the floor next to his couch, I walk behind his desk and look out the windows over campus.

Seeing Josh, he's talking heatedly with someone on his phone. Like he can feel me watching him, his head turns toward Julian's office. I step back so he doesn't see me, but he's turned around and off before I can think. Wondering why he's so angry, I move on to watch the next person that passes below.

There's a click behind me, and I realize Julian just closed and locked his door. My heart thunders in my chest. Will he pick up where we left off in class? Or will he reprimand me for being so naughty? Keeping my back to the door, I listen as his footsteps reach me. His body heat hits me first, and then he

wraps one arm around my waist, pulling my back against his chest and wrapping his hand around my throat.

He tilts my head to the side, forcing me to look him in the eye. He rocks against me, and I feel his hard cock.

“Do you feel what you do to me, Bailey?” His lips latch onto a spot at the top of my spine. Goosebumps break out on my skin, and I grab his arm. Letting my head drop forward, I can only go so far because his hand is still around my throat. Moaning, I rock back against his cock, and his hand, splayed at my waist, moves under my crop top and begins to massage my breast.

“You’re so sweet.” He moans against my neck as he moves to a different spot. I know he’s marking me, but at the moment, I don’t care. “Going to make everyone know you’re taken.” He growls against my skin. I rub my thighs together, and I tremble against him.

“Julian, please,” I whisper.

“Fuck! Hearing my name on your lips.” He turns me in his arms and pulls me close. His hand grips my ass and begins to massage it. Looking at him under my eyelashes, I try to convey what I need. He smirks like he knows. His mouth drops a slight kiss at the corner of my mouth, and I want to stomp my foot in frustration.

“What do you want, baby girl?” He murmurs as he kisses the other corner of my mouth. “I’ll tell you what *I* want. I want you. I want my mouth all over you. I want you quivering and coming apart in my arms. Are you ready for that?” He whispers against my mouth. I open my mouth to tell him yes, but nothing comes out. My cheeks heat. I’ve never done this before. What if he notices? As if he senses my internal panic, he leans back to get a better look at me.

Gripping my hair in his fist, he pulls my head back; his mouth comes down on mine, but he doesn’t do anything else. He doesn’t lead the kiss like he did last time. He leaves his lips

against mine, and he waits. Inhaling, I open my lips and suck on his bottom lip before I lick the seam of his lips.

He hums, “That’s my girl.” He praises. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I pull him closer and flick my tongue again. This time his tongue meets mine, and he takes over. Guiding me to the couch, he sits down and guides me to straddle him.

“Please don’t stop this time,” I beg. His mouth meets mine again, and it’s exquisite. He sucks and licks, and I can’t get enough. His mouth trails down my neck to my cleavage. He pushes my crop top up, pulls one side of my bra down, and my nipple is in his mouth.

“Fuck, Julian!” I hiss. His eyes meet mine as I watch him.

“You have to be quiet, baby girl.” He reminds me, and I nod as he yanks the other side of my bra down and gives it equal attention. My hips buck against him, trying to find friction, and he doesn’t try to stop me.

“So fucking beautiful!” He whispers against my skin causing goose bumps to rise. I guess he’s a boob guy. His eyes flick back up to mine as his tongue swirls around my nipple; it’s obscene. I love it. “I’m going to make you feel so good.” He promises, and I squirm.

He begins to push my skirt up, and his hand lands on my thigh, adjusting me, so I’m how he wants me. His fingers trek up the inside of my thigh, and when they land at the apex of where my thigh meets my pussy he stops. My breath catches in my throat when he doesn’t move his hand any further. I want to scream at him to keep going, but all his attention is still on my breasts.

“Relax.” He whispers against my skin. My eyes find his, and I shake my head.

“I can’t,” I admit. Julian stops his assault on my breasts and leans back to push my skirt up more.

“Why?” He questions. Both of his thumbs are now teasing me. They’re so close to where I’m throbbing. I want more. But all my insecurities arise in me, and I want to push him away

and leave. Opening my eyes, I see him staring at me, waiting for an answer.

“I’ve never done this before,” I admit. “I had never even kissed until you.” Sighing, I move to get off him and push my skirt back down my legs. But his hands haven’t moved, and he grips my thighs keeping me in place. He leans up until his lips are grazing mine.

“I had a feeling you’ve never done this before. We’re not having sex. Not today, anyway, but I will make you feel good. But if you want to stop, say the word now because the moment I get my fingers in your tight little pussy, I won’t be able to stop.” My mouth opens at his vulgar words, but they make me squirm.

“You had a feeling?” I ask, stalling. He sits up until our chests are touching and runs his nose up my jaw until his mouth is at my ear.

“Yes. I’m showing you how mature I am.” He bites down on my earlobe, and I gasp. I give a slight nod letting him know I want this. I want it so much. His thumbs hook in my panties. He pushes me up to pull them down my legs, then pulls me back into his lap and brings my mouth to his.

The first touch of his fingers against my pussy makes me jump. His mouth trails from my mouth, up my cheek, and to my ear.

“You’re so fucking perfect. I knew you would be.” And then he’s gliding his middle finger between my pussy lips, and I’m shuddering. I close my eyes and focus on what he’s doing to my body. He rubs and massages as I grip his shoulders. “So beautiful. Do you feel good?” His finger touches my clit, and I arch against him.

“Yes! Julian, please. I don’t know....” If I had experimented. If I had done anything, I’d know what to do. Should I be touching him back? Should I be trying to please him too?

“Bailey, shut your brain off and enjoy how I’m making you feel.” He inserts one finger in my pussy and hooks it, and begins to rub. I run my hands through his hair and touch as much of him as possible. When he brings his thumb up and starts to rub my clit at the same time, I feel something building, and I have no idea where it’s going to lead, but I know it’s going to make me feel good like he promised.

“Julian, fuck. Oh my god!” He brings his mouth to mine, but I can’t kiss him back. I’m so focused on what his fingers are doing that everything explodes, and his mouth lands on mine to quiet my moans. He continues to rub until I come down from my high, and I’m pushing him away with how sensitive I am.

I open my eyes just in time to see him bring his fingers to his mouth and lick off my wetness. My chest is heaving as I try to catch my breath. I can’t believe how much that turns me on. He grins at me, a grin that’s not guarded. A grin I hope he only ever shares with me. Leaning up, he kisses me long and hard. I taste myself on him, but it doesn’t gross me out. It only makes me want more.

“You’re going to be my dirty girl, aren’t you?” He asks as he pulls me close, engulfing me in his arms.

“I think so,” I whisper, and he chuckles as he pushes my hair away from my shoulder. I adjust myself and feel his hardness against me, glancing at him.

“I can…” But he shakes his head. Disappointment settles in my stomach, and he notices.

“We will, but not today. Okay?” Staring at him, I nod. He runs his hand through my hair. I don’t know if I trust him. He’s hot today, but tomorrow he could be cold again.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BAILEY



ON THE way to class, I feel uneasy again in the pit of my stomach. I search around but don't see anyone as usual. Sighing in frustration, I grab my phone out of my bag just in case.

"Hey, Bailey!" Josh calls out, and I turn toward his voice. My shoulders remain tense, and I pick up the pace. I'm exhausted and not in the mood to deal with him. He has become more and more annoying. He's not deterred by me not greeting him; he falls into step with me, smiling.

"Have you started working on your project yet?" He asks.

"Not yet," I reply.

"My offer still stands. We could go after class and start working on it today if you'd like." His arm brushes mine, and I step away from him. I swear he's been trying to find ways to touch me, but it could be all in my head.

“No. I won’t be able to.” I reply. I stare straight ahead, but I feel his eyes on me.

“We could work on it next week. I could wait for you after class one day. I know you said you started a new job. You could tell me your schedule. We could work it out.” He sounds desperate.

“I already have a plan for the assignment. I won’t need help.” I don’t explain myself. I’m unsure how else to say it without coming right out and telling him I don’t want or need his help. I know one thing. I’ll never be late for class again.



Julian doesn’t become cold, but he’s not hot either; he’s lukewarm. We don’t have another make-out and groping session, but he does begin to open up more. It’s still exhausting. The only thing that’s giving me hope and doesn’t make me feel like he’s stringing me along is that I know this has to be difficult for him. I haven’t told anyone about the episode in his office. I’ve wanted to keep that just for me.

Bec: What are you doing after class?

Me: Nothing today. Why? Want to hang out?

She doesn’t answer, and I stare at my phone until Julian calls everyone’s attention. I’m trying to pay attention, but I keep zoning out. I didn’t sleep well last night. When I got to my car after work last night, I had a note on my windshield, and I couldn’t stop thinking about it. Nothing weird has happened since the library incident, but the note, it’s weird. I was running late this morning, so I didn’t get a chance to show it to Julian.

“Ms. Rhodes?” My eyes snap to Julian. Josh jabs me, and I scowl.

“Yes, Professor McMillan?” His eyes narrow, and he tilts his head. Glancing around, I realize everyone is looking at me. Tabitha snickers and makes some snide comment I don’t quite hear or care about. He must have asked me something.

“Are you feeling alright?” He questions, and I see the genuine concern in his eyes. Nodding, I glance away from his intense gaze.

“Yes. Sorry. What was the question?” He studies me for a second before asking the question again. I force myself to pay attention for the rest of the class period. Once the class is over, I pack my things. Josh keeps trying to talk to me, but I ignore him. I’m not in the mood today. You’d think he would have gotten the hint this morning. Jesus.

“Ms. Rhodes. A word, please.” Julian says from the front. Josh is standing by me like he is waiting for me. Sighing, I give a slight nod to Julian. Josh gives me a sympathetic look.

“Want me to wait for you?” He asks, and I glance up at him with a question in my eyes.

“Why?” His eyes flash with something like anger for a moment, but then he gives his megawatt smile and shakes his head.

“Wanted to offer my support if you were getting in trouble for not paying attention.” He bolsters.

“I can take care of myself, thanks.” I snap, not caring anymore if I hurt his feelings. He’s being so fucking pushy. His eyes narrow, but then he turns away. With a wave at Julian, he walks out of the classroom, leaving me and Julian alone. Julian walks to the door and closes it. Trekking to me, he rubs his hands up and down my arms.

“Are you okay?” He asks, and I sigh.

“I didn’t sleep well last night. I finally fell asleep and missed my alarm, so I was almost late for class.” I explain. His hand comes up and massages the back of my neck.

“Did something happen?” He inquires as my phone goes off in my hand. Glancing down, I see Bec’s name.

“Hold on a sec. She’s having a rough time, so I want to answer.” He nods as he goes to his desk and cleans up.

“Hello?” I answer.

“Hey! I’m outside your classroom.” Bec announces. My head snaps toward the door, and so does Julian’s. He must have heard her. Walking to the door, I open it, my mouth pops open, and I laugh hysterically. Julian stands beside me, and I glance at his scowling face causing me to laugh harder.

“I heard you’re being a dick!” Bec exclaims. And I have to wipe the tears from my eyes.

“I can’t believe you showed up in that.” I gasp out and then lean over, holding my stomach, laughing again. Bec winks at me and arches an eyebrow at Julian.

“What do you have to say for yourself?” She questions, and he scowls. He gives her a look like he’s going to make sure she pays for this. I snort, and he glances down at me with a slight smile and twinkle in his eye.

“Well, I’ll be in the library.” He shakes his head again at Bec and rubs his finger down my arm before leaving.

“Did he? Has there been a breakthrough?” Bec asks. I turn to her and wrap my arms around her. I don’t care if she is in a penis costume.

“I just love you!” I exclaim. Bec chuckles and returns my hug. Hooking my arm with hers, I drag her down the hall. “You made my day. Thank you!” Bec gives me a small smile.

“I was a little nervous showing up in this. I waited until I knew no one else was in the classroom. I wasn’t sure how you’d react.” She tells me, and I tilt my head at her.

“I told you I thought it was funny.” I remind her.

“Yeah, but girls have said that before. I usually wind up being too much for people.” The hurt in her voice is evident.

We've become close, but we're still learning about each other's insecurities, and I guess this is one of hers.

"Well, you're not too much for me. I absolutely love it. And you're not too much for Connor." I encourage her. She scoffs and stops in front of the bathroom at the end of the hallway.

"He thinks I'm funny, and we have fun together, but that's it." She replies. Opening the door to the bathroom, I lead the way, and she makes her way to the big stall so she can change.

"I disagree. One day his eyes are going to open, and he's going to see what was right in front of him all along." She comes out of the stall and hands me the costume, giving me a doubtful look. I smirk at it and put it in my bag. "And then you'll get married, and I'll marry Julian, and we'll be sisters-in-law." I declare.

She chuckles and follows me out of the bathroom, "You have it all figured out, huh?"

Shaking my head, I tell her. "Not even a little bit, but we're in this together, and all of our dreams will come true."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

JULIAN



THERE'S SOMETHING off with Bailey. She's been getting to class late, has difficulty paying attention, and looks tired. I tried to talk to her a couple of weeks ago, but we were interrupted when Bec showed up, and I haven't had a chance since. I know she has this new part-time job, but according to her, she's not working late nights, so I know something is up. They're taking a quiz, so I take a chance and grab my phone to text her.

Me: Meet me in the library today.

With this assignment due, I've spent most of my time in the room I checked out, so I'd be available if anyone needed assistance. Just about everyone has finished their research for the assignment except a couple of students and Bailey. Even Todd and Tabitha have finished theirs. Bailey turns her quiz in and gives me a slight nod letting me know she received my text.

I think after the incident she had in the library, she's been wary of going back, which seems unlike her. But she also got this part-time job around the same time I gave the assignment, so it could also be that. When everyone has turned their quizzes in, I remind them they don't have much longer until their assignment is due and remind them of my hours in the library. Then I dismiss them.

Bailey packs her things, and Josh hangs around waiting for her like he always does. You'd think he'd get a hint. The kid is grating on my nerves. Todd and Tabitha pretty much ignore Bailey now. Josh won't leave her alone. If I weren't her professor, I'd claim her publically. The day after I marked her, she wore her hair in a high ponytail showing off her marks and bringing out every possessive bone in my body. They've since disappeared, and I need to remedy that. But I'm still treading lightly. I want her like I've never wanted anyone, but she's still my student.

"Josh, will you please fucking leave me alone?" Bailey hisses. My head snaps up, and I find him scowling at her.

"I was just trying to be nice and wait for you." He whines.

"And I told you I don't need you to wait for me. Every day I tell you I can take care of myself. You're not taking the hint, so I'll be blunt. I don't want you waiting for me. Okay?" She snaps at him.

His eyes narrow, and he takes a threatening step toward her. "You really are a bitch." Flying around my desk, I put myself between her and him.

"That is enough, Mr. Spencer. If I ever hear you speak to her like that again, you will be expelled from this class." I don't raise my voice, but I get my point across. He stares at me, his hands tightening into fists.

"Just her or anyone in this class? What's so special about her?" He fires back, and I stand my ground. The punk isn't going to intimidate me.

“There isn’t anyone else around right now, so I’m talking specifically about her at the moment. But it applies to any student at this university.” It’s taking all I have not to knock the kid on his ass, but I restrain myself. He takes a step back and raises his hands.

“Sorry. I’m having a bad day. Didn’t mean to take it out on you, Bailey.” He steps around me and extends his hand to her. I want to put myself between them again, but I control myself. “Truce?” He asks. She stares at his hand and refuses to grasp it. This fucking girl. I love that she doesn’t take shit from anyone.

“Not today.” She states. Splotches appear on Josh’s neck and arms. I’m unsure if it’s from embarrassment or anger, but he doesn’t respond. He retracts his hand, spins on his heel, and exits the classroom. Before I can check on Bailey, she walks to the door, closes it, and turns to me. She runs her hands through her hair and bites her lip.

“I wonder if it’s him.” She says absentmindedly like she’s talking to herself. I eye her in confusion.

“What’s him?” I ask. She returns to her bag, pulls out some folded pieces of paper, and hands them to me.

Why do you ignore me? I’m so nice to you! Yet, you ignore me. I’m trying to save you.

Is it because I scared you in the library? It was a game! I promise.

Is there something going on with Professor McMillan? The way you look at him and the way he looks at you. He’s not who you think he is. I’ll prove it.

Stay away from him! Don’t make me do something I’ll regret.

I flip through each one becoming more and more agitated. After I read them all, I search Bailey’s eyes.

“How long have you been getting these?” I ask in a deadly whisper. Her hand comes up to play with her hair.

“I... The first was the night before Bec showed up in the penis costume. I was going to tell you, and she interrupted, and then I forgot.” She admits guiltily.

“You’ve had two weeks to tell me about the rest of these. Why haven’t you?”

She stares at me and shrugs, “I don’t have a reason, Julian. It was dumb. But I don’t know where we stand, so why would I?” Her eyes fill with tears. “I always take care of myself.” She whispers.

That’s when I see it. This constant back and forth is hurting her. She doesn’t know what she’s getting from me. Even though she’s the youngest, she always looks out for Caroline instead of the other way around. She’s always had to be the strong one.

Running my fingers through my hair, I exhale long and hard. “Fuck!” Grabbing the back of her neck, I pull her to me and hold her tight. “I’m sorry, baby girl. I’m sorry I didn’t make you feel you could come to me immediately.” Kissing the side of her forehead, I hold her until she relaxes, wraps her arms around me, and returns my embrace.

Since the day I fingered her on my couch, I’ve hardly touched her. Little touches here and there, but it’s probably making her wonder exactly where she stands with me. Pulling back, I stare down at her tipping her chin, so she looks at me.

“Text me your schedule,” I demand. “I’ll be there every night to walk you to your car.”

“Julian—”

Shaking my head, “No, I’ll be there. Do you close by yourself?” I question.

“Yes, sometimes.”

“I need to know what nights you’re by yourself. I’ll come to hang out.” I instruct. She sighs at my determination but finally nods.

“Yeah, okay.” She concedes. I kiss her neck.

“That’s my girl.” Wrapping my hand around her hair, I pull her head back so she’s looking at me. “And you are, my girl.” Her eyes widen, and her breathing picks up. “Be patient with me. We have to keep this quiet. Okay?” She swallows, and my eyes drop to her throat.

“Okay.” She whispers. I want to kiss her. I want to bend her over my desk and fuck her. I have fantasized about it since she fell into my arms, but I must be careful. I can’t lose my job. Releasing her, I take a step back.

“Let’s go to the library.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BAILEY



I WANT to shout from the rooftop that Julian claimed me as his girl, but I don't. I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop. He is becoming more open with me, but every time I think that he withdraws again. I gave him my work schedule, and every night he shows up and walks me to my car. He doesn't say much. He shows up about twenty minutes before closing, helps clean up, and walks me to my car.

He'll squeeze my neck or bring me in for a quick hug, but that's it. The great thing about this boutique is that the owner doesn't care if I have visitors as long as I finish my work. She's met Bec, Caroline, and Julian; of course, she likes Julian the most. I mean, who wouldn't?

Bec stops by the boutique the Saturday night before Halloween with some coffee.

"So, are you going to wear the costume?" She asks, and I smile at her as I take a sip. It's a little chilly today. I'm ready for the cooler weather, even though I love summer.

“Yeah. It’s not too revealing. Shorter than the skirts I normally wear, but I think it’ll get his attention.” Sighing, I place my coffee down and walk around the store, straightening items that don’t need to be straightened. It’s been a slow day for a Saturday.

“So, no more breakthroughs?” She asks. I still haven’t told anyone about Julian telling me I’m his girl. He said it needs to be a secret, but I’m not sure how much of a secret it needs to be. A secret at school or a secret even with our friends. And he hasn’t touched me since he made me come in his office.

“No, not really. He is nicer to me.” I think about telling her about the notes and Josh but decide to keep that to myself. We’re still unsure if it’s him, but Julian said we need to keep an eye on him.

“Sorry, Bailey. Julian can be hard to read, but I’m telling you he has a thing for you. The way he looks at you. It’s different. The only thing he’s ever been passionate about that I know of was his job. Being a detective was everything to him.” She says.

“Why’d he become a professor? What made him stop being a detective?” I question. Bec leans against the counter and sighs.

“That’s his story to tell. It’s not something he talks about, ever. I’m not even sure Connor knows the entire story.” Bec explains, which piques my curiosity. I’ve always wondered, but again he’s so closed off that it’s hard to get him to talk about anything.

“Well, maybe one day he’ll trust me enough to tell me some of his secrets,” I whisper. Bec comes over and hugs me.

“He will. Give him time.” She grabs her bag and smiles at me. “Alright, I have to go. I’m going to visit grandpa for a little while before I have to go to work.”

“Hey, Bec.” She pauses at the door. “Thanks for being such a good friend. I’ve never really had friends before.” I admit.

She gives me one of her bright smiles. “You’ll never get rid of me now. I’ve only ever had the guys. I’m glad Caroline came along; now I have you.” She winks at me, and I shake my head at her.

“Well, I think Connor will be yours eventually, too. I see how he looks at you. Even if he doesn’t realize why he looks at you like that, he will eventually.” I encourage her, and she sighs.

“I’m hoping.” We hug one more time before she leaves. Walking back to the counter, the door dings again, letting me know someone has come in. Turning, I gasp at the sight of Julian standing there looking at me.

“Hey.” He greets me. I give him a small wave and step around the counter.

“Hey yourself,” I reply. He runs his hand through his hair and takes a step toward me.

“Slow day?” He asks, and I nod.

“Yeah. There’s a big game on today. So, I’m guessing that’s why. Everyone’s at home watching.”

He takes a step toward me. “I was watching and grading papers. But I wanted to see you.” Butterflies erupt in my stomach, and my heart lurches in my throat.

“I’m glad. I’ll never say no to you visiting me.” I admit, and his gray eyes find mine and stay there. This was a lot for him to come in the middle of the day. He glances around.

“You’re here by yourself.” He states, and I shrug.

“Bec was here just a little while ago. She just left.” He steps closer until there are only a few inches between us.

“I told you when you’re by yourself to tell me.” He reminds me.

“I thought you meant at night.”

He wraps his hand around my hair and pulls, causing my head to tilt. “Do you think only bad things happen at night?”

The library incident happened in the middle of the day.” He was right. Of course, he was. But I couldn’t think straight like this.

Throwing caution to the wind, I wrap my arms around his neck and lean up on my toes. He doesn’t move away but keeps his eyes open, watching me.

“Sorry. I’ll make sure to tell you from now on.” Then I kiss him. Tentatively at first, but when his hand tightens in my hair, I hold him tighter and lick the seam of his lips. He wraps his other arm around me and hauls me against him, and his tongue meets mine. This man and the way he kisses. It makes me want to drop to my knees. Not something I’ve ever done before, but I’ve read about it. I’m sure I’d be good at it.

He pulls his lips from mine and begins to kiss along my neck and shoulder.

“I’ll never get enough of you, baby girl.” He moans. I gasp when he nips at the sensitive spot where my neck and shoulder meet.

“Then why do you go so long without kissing me?” I ask. He pauses and leans back to gaze at me.

“Because I have a hard time stopping at the kissing with you.” He replies. He runs his fingers through my hair, and I want to purr. I love when he does that.

“Who says I want you to?” I ask, and his eyes darken. His already hard cock twitches against my stomach.

“I want to make it good for you, and I don’t want you to be a secret. You deserve better.”

I stare at him. “First, I know you’ll make it good for me. Second, I don’t know how we will get around that. You’re my professor. We’ll have to keep it a secret at school, but is that the only place?” I ask. Fishing for more. He wraps his hand around my hair again and tilts my head back to expose my neck. He runs his mouth and teeth down the front of my neck to my cleavage and back up.

“We’ll figure it out. I promise.” He takes a step back and glances around the shop. “Need any help around here?”

I shake my head and return to the counter, realizing our kissing session is over. I’m disappointed he didn’t answer my question, but I’m more frustrated he stopped kissing me, and I don’t know how to express that.

“No. I was working on the assignment.” I motion to the books I have opened when he approaches the counter. I’m finally getting started after checking out two of the books from him. “I’ll return the books on Monday,” I inform him. He nods and sits in the chair I now call his. I found it the first night he came and have kept it there for him.

He pulls his phone out and begins to scroll, and I want to scream. This is what he does. He comes to hang out, but he doesn’t talk much. Pulling the books close, I lean over the counter and try to focus. A couple of girls come in, so I help them. They purchase some jewelry and a couple of dresses, which help me meet my daily quota. I wasn’t expecting that, so it is a pleasant surprise.

After they leave, I glance at Julian, and he doesn’t acknowledge my look. Slamming my book and grabbing the other, I open it roughly and pull it in front of me. I want to scream. I want his attention. I want something. His body heat hits my side, and his hand is between my thighs before I can think.

“What’s with the attitude, baby girl?” His hand rests on my inner thigh; his thumb rubs lazy circles, and I bite my lip.

“I’m sick of you ignoring me. You come in, sit in that chair, and ignore me.”

His hand moves up higher, and I gasp. He leans down until his mouth is against my ear.

“Is this what you want?” His thumb rubs against my panties. It’s just a tease, but I whimper.

“No.” He stills behind me. “Yes. But I want you to talk to me. I don’t know a lot about you. I don’t know why you’re a

professor and not a detective. I don't know why you'd find me the least bit interesting." I gasp when his thumb presses more firmly against me, and I fall against the counter. His mouth lands on the back of my neck. The exact spot he marked before.

"I'm not much of a talker." He moves my thong to the side and inserts his thumb into my pussy, and I groan. He's cupping me from behind, and I can't imagine it's a comfortable position, but he doesn't seem to care. "If you can come in the next two minutes, I'll talk more. I can't promise I'll answer all your questions, but I'll try to answer as many as I can."

He acts like he won't be able to make me come in two minutes. I'm already on edge.

"Grab your phone and start the timer." He instructs. Fumbling for my phone, I pull the timer up and glance at him to give me the signal when he wants me to start. He nods, and I hit start. Then he removes his thumb and inserts his middle finger. He takes his thumb and begins to rub my clit. I ride his hand shamelessly as my heart hammers in my chest.

His breath is hot against my neck. "That's it, baby girl, ride my hand. You're so fucking perfect. So fucking hot." The bell above the door jingles, and I whimper. My head snaps to it, and an older woman walks in. She walks to the back of the room. I begin to move away from Julian.

"Nuh-uh. You have one minute and thirty seconds." He reminds me. My mouth pops open. I glance down at the timer and watch as it counts down. I decide in three seconds. Surely she'll stay in the back for a minute and twenty seconds. I begin to ride his hand again. "That's my good girl."

I lay my head down on the counter and only feel. I ignore the lady because I know that will stop me. I feel it building. He inserts another finger, and it's tight.

"So fucking tight. I can't wait to get my cock inside you. You're going to feel so good wrapped around me. Even better

than you already feel wrapped around my fingers. Come on. I feel you.” He whispers in my ear.

I bite my lip hard, so I don’t make any noise as I come all over his hand.

“You did so well, baby girl.” He praises as the timer goes off. He removes his hand and steps away as the woman walks up the aisle toward the counter. He puts his fingers in his mouth and licks. I swear my pussy pulses again.

“Honey? Your phone is going off.” My eyes slide toward the woman in confusion and then realize what’s happening.

“Oh! Sorry.” Clumsily turning it off. I put the phone away and smile at her. I check her out, and she leaves. Leaning against the counter, I turn and stare at Julian. His gray eyes are on me. A drop of sweat trickles down my back, and hair sticks to my neck. I want more.

“What’s your first question?” He asks.

“Can you teach me how to suck your cock?”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

JULIAN



JESUS CHRIST, this girl. When I think I have her figured out, she asks me something I'm not expecting. My already hard cock gets even harder, and I unashamedly adjust myself. The smirk on her face makes me want to tell her to get on her knees right now. She walks over and stands in front of me. Bringing my hands to her hips, I pull her between my legs and let my lips fall to her midriff.

“That won't be a hardship, baby girl,” I murmur against her skin.

“Imagine me under your desk, and one of your colleagues or students walks in. You'd have to be quiet because I wouldn't stop.” Her hands fall to my hair, and she rakes her fingernails against my scalp causing goosebumps to break out. The visual she brings makes me want to give her lessons now.

“You are my dirty girl, aren't you?” I question as I motion for her to straddle me, not caring we're in her store. She

follows my lead. Her skirt rides up, and she rubs against my cock shamelessly.

“I want to be perfect for you. I want to be every desire you ever craved.” She whispers into my neck. I hold her tight and let her continue to rock against my cock.

“Fuck! You have no idea how much you are.” The bell dings again, and she climbs off my lap like she doesn’t care if we get caught. I’m almost at that point, so I have to be careful. I could easily lose my head where she’s concerned, we could get caught, and I’d lose my job.

She helps the customer and comes walking back. Her skirt swaying around her legs. She’s effortlessly beautiful. I almost got married once; it was nearly one of the biggest mistakes of my life. I was always committed to the job, but everyone else was settling down, too, so I thought I should. Thankfully it didn’t work out.

But now, life has slowed down; I realize how secluded I’ve allowed myself to become. And Bailey, she’s nothing like the woman I was going to marry. The customer she was helping leaves without making a purchase, so she turns her full attention back to me.

“So?” She pushes, and I lean back, putting my foot on my knee.

“I’m not going to say no to that. But I won’t teach you in my office or school.” Her green eyes watch me. “Come home with me after you close.” Surprise flashes across her face, but she nods.

“Okay. My mom has to work tonight, so I’ll text her to let her know I won’t be home.” She pauses. “I mean, I don’t have to stay the night. I can leave after.”

Standing, I walk to her and pull her into my arms. “I don’t want you to leave. I’ll follow you home after you get off so you can get some clothes for tomorrow. Okay?”

She wraps her arms around my neck and leans up to kiss me. “You don’t snore, do you?”

Chuckling, I pull her closer. “No. But I don’t plan on doing much sleeping anyway.” Kissing her hard, I release her and lean back against the counter.

“So, my second question. Do you like being a professor?”

I think about it for a moment. “There are certain things I enjoy. I like seeing you every day. As cliché as it sounds, I like watching when something I’m teaching clicks with someone. But I’d rather be doing than teaching.” I tell her.

“So, why aren’t you doing any more?”

Taking a deep breath, I push my hands in my pockets and let out a long exhale. “There was a case I didn’t solve in time. I didn’t trust my gut.” It’s not the entire story, but it’s all I can say now. Eventually, I’ll tell her everything. She steps in front of me, grabbing my hands.

“The question I asked you. About trusting your gut or the evidence. That bothered you?” She asks, but she realizes why I didn’t answer her.

“It hit close to home,” I explain.

“I was so upset that you refused to answer. I...” She trails off. “I’m sorry I took it so personally.” Pulling her to me again, I wrap her in my arms.

“Don’t apologize. You didn’t know. I’ll try to get better at expressing myself. I’m not very good at talking or sharing emotions, but I’ll try for you.”

She beams at me, and I want to keep that expression on her face forever. Leaning down, I kiss her soft and slow. I’ll never get tired of kissing her or touching her. I’ll never get enough of her. She calms me in ways I didn’t realize were possible, and now that I’ve had a taste, I’ll never be able to stop, no matter the consequences.



I talked Bailey into leaving her car at home and riding with me to my house. This is a big deal for me. I don't invite people to my house. Ever. I let her control the radio, and she entertains me the entire drive home. She knows every song and makes up dances to go along with them. From *Ice Ice Baby* to *Baby Got Back* to *Sweet Home Alabama* and *Shake It Off*.

She has me laughing until I pull into my driveway. Grabbing her bag from the backseat, I motion to my house.

“Welcome to my home.”

She stands beside me and looks up at my house with a slight smile. “I love it. The wrap-around porch is perfect.” She wraps her arms around my arm and lays her head against my shoulder.

“Connor built it. I wanted something homey and inviting. He found me this small piece of land with a small creek that leads to one of the trails I can hike.”

She gasps and looks up at me. “You like to hike? I used to volunteer at summer camps and lead hikes. I'd rather do that than work at the boutique.” Grabbing her hand, I pull her toward the front deck.

“Come on. We might be able to catch the sunset.” Unlocking the door and leading her through the house to the back, I enjoy watching her face as she gazes at the view.

“Wow, what a beautiful view!” She exclaims. I couldn't agree more.

“It is,” I whisper. She glances in my direction, and her eyes light up when she realizes I'm talking about her. Pulling her, so her back is against my chest, I rest my chin on her head as we watch the sunset.

“I'm jealous you get to live here. I'd love it sitting out here in the mornings and drinking a cup of coffee while reading. You should put up some hummingbird feeders. I bet you'd have so many!”

“What would you be reading?” I ask her, and she stills against me. When I asked her about what she read all those weeks ago in my office, and she evaded the question, I knew it was a sensitive topic, but I am determined to know.

“Probably a romance.” She replies. Leaning down, I rub my lips down her throat.

“What’s in those books?” I ask as I pull her snugly against me so she can feel how she affects me. She rocks against me as my hands go under her crop top.

“Let’s say even though I haven’t done many things. I’ve read about them in detail and could probably reenact specific scenes from my books.” I hum as I pull her bra down, cup her breasts, and pinch her nipples. She moans and leans her head against my chest.

“I fucking love that. Let me know anything you want to experience in those books, and I’ll be happy to accommodate.”

She turns in my arms. “Can we start now?”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

JULIAN



I PUT my hands under her arms and lift her. She lifts her legs to wrap around my waist without any guidance. Turning, I walk back into the house and up the stairs to my room.

“I’ll take you on a tour later,” I promise her as she runs her fingers through my hair. Who knew how much that simple action would turn me on? Her fingernails scraping against my scalp gets me every time. Dropping her on my bed, she stays at the edge and looks up at me under her eyelashes.

“Do you know how beautiful you are?” I ask her as I run my hands through her hair. Her hands come up to rest on my waist.

“I never thought I was ugly, but I love it when you tell me I’m beautiful.” She replies. Leaning down, I kiss her. My hands brush along her sides, and stopping at the bottom of her top, I pull back and look at her with a question in my eyes. Her arms go up, and I pull her top off.

Her hands go behind her back, and she unhooks her bra. She holds it to her chest before gathering the courage to let it fall. Stepping back, I stare at her.

“Gorgeous,” I growl. She leans back on her hands and gives me free access to do what I want. Bringing one hand up, I massage her breast and flick her nipple with my thumb.

“Are you a boob guy?” She whispers, causing me to chuckle.

“I’m a Bailey guy,” I respond, crawling onto the bed and forcing her to crawl backward. My tongue encircles her nipple, and she arches against me. “I want to touch, kiss and suck every part of your body, but your tits are exquisite,” I tell her. She cries out when I bite her gently, bringing my hand down to her skirt and sliding it up until I am stroking her thong. Kissing down her stomach, I get to the waistband of her skirt and unzip it. She lifts, and I push it down her hips, taking her thong with it. Leaning back, I admire her nakedness. Kissing her everywhere my lips can touch.

“I think I’ll tie you to my headboard so you’ll be here whenever I want you.” She moans when my lips touch the top of her pussy.

“No need. I’m never leaving. Tied up or not.” She groans when I push her legs apart and lick up her center. Her hands come to my head. “Oh god!”

“So sweet. Just like cherries.” I say against her, and then I enjoy the feast before me. Licking from her pussy to her clit over and over, she’s riding my tongue and chanting my name. Inserting one finger, she clinches around it.

“Fuck! Julian!” Her voice is hoarse, and I love how desperate she sounds. I insert another finger and hook them, rubbing against her spot. She wraps her legs around my shoulders, pulls at my hair, and then comes all over my tongue. She cries out, and I continue to lick and suck until she comes down from her high.

Crawling up her body, I kiss everything I can. Her hands come to the buttons of my shirt and begin to undo them, but they're shaking from her recent orgasm, so I push them aside and finish it for her. She stares at me as I remove my shirt and throw it on the floor.

“Holy shit! If I had known you were hiding that under your clothes, I would have undressed you a long time ago.” Her hands go to the waistband of my pants, brushing against my cock. I moan, and she smirks. Climbing off the bed, I remove my slacks and briefs. She sits up and moves to the edge of the bed.

Staring at me under her eyelashes, she licks her lips. “I’m ready for my lesson.” Fuck! Holding my hand out to her, I wait for her to take it. Helping her from the bed, I pull her to me and kiss her long and hard.

“Get on your knees, baby girl,” I instruct her. She does so immediately, making my cock jerk. “So perfect.” She glances up at me, waiting for my next instructions.

“Do what you’ve read in your books, and then I’ll tell you what I like,” I tell her. She hesitates before grasping me in her hand and rubbing my length. Wrapping my hand around her hair, I watch her. She sticks her tongue out and licks my length like a lollipop, and I shudder.

“Make sure to check your teeth,” I tell her. She nods and smiles before twirling her tongue around my tip. My abdomen jerks and I want to push her down on my cock, but I ignore that and allow her to explore. She sucks my tip into her mouth, and I grunt. Looking down at her, my tongue comes out to wet my dry lips.

“So fucking perfect. Look at you.” I praise her. She takes my length into her mouth, and I throw my head back, sucking in a breath.

“Yeah, baby, just like that.” She pulls her head back and swirls her tongue around my tip again, then brings her hand up

to massage my balls. For someone who's never done this before, she's doing a great job.

"Jesus." I unconsciously rock into her mouth, and she moans against me. Staring down at her, I know I won't be able to take this much longer, so I pull out of her mouth and help her to her feet. She pouts at me.

"I wasn't done."

"I don't want to finish in your mouth, baby," I explain to her, and her eyes widen, pulling her into my arms. "If you want to stop, say the word. We'll stop."

She shakes her head. "I don't want to stop. I am nervous, though." Leaning down, I kiss her slowly and deeply.

"That's normal, baby girl. I'll go slow. Okay?" She nods, and I lead her to the bed. She climbs on, and I guide her to lie down. Laying beside her, I rub my hands up and down her body. Leaning in, I kiss her as I massage her breasts and tweak her nipples with my fingers. She arches against me. Kissing down her body, when I get to her pussy I begin to lick and suck again.

She arches against me. "I didn't know it could feel like this." She moans as I insert two fingers. "Please, Julian." I rub against her spot.

"Relax, baby. I'm just loosening you up." I flick my tongue against her clit and suck it between my lips, and she explodes. I don't let her come down. Grabbing a condom out of the nightstand and rolling it on, I climb up her body.

"Are you ready?" I ask her. She looks up at me and nods. Lining myself up with her, I slowly push into her. Taking a deep breath at feeling her tight heat wrapped around me, I focus on her. When I feel resistance, I intertwine my fingers with hers and pull her hands above her head. Keeping eye contact with her, I push into her.

She winces, and her hands flex against mine. It takes all my control to stay still and let her get used to me.

“Are you okay?” I question between clenched teeth. She nods and wraps her leg around my hip.

“Move. Please.” She whimpers. I pull out and push back in and groan.

“Fuck! You feel so good.” My lips fall to her collarbone and trace the valley between her breasts. I roll my hips, trying not to hurt her but wanting to let loose.

“Julian, please. You’re not going to break me. I’m okay.” She whines. Leaning up, I glance down at her and see the flush on her chest. Her eyes plead with me. So, I pull out and push into her hard, and she hisses.

“Yes! Just like that!” She cries out. Leaning back further, I watch as my cock goes in and out of her pussy.

“Jesus! Look at that. You look so good taking my cock.” I move faster and lean down, taking her mouth with mine.

“Julian, it feels...” She trails off. Releasing her hands, I run my hands through her hair, and she wraps her arms around my back and rakes her nails down my back.

“What is it, baby girl?”

She clutches me harder. “It feels so good.” She moans as I adjust the angle, knowing I’m hitting her spot. I’m headed straight for an orgasm, and I know I won’t be able to make her come. Not this time. But I will. I’ll make sure she comes again tonight.

“It does. You feel so good.” Pumping into her, I groan long and hard as I come. “Fuck! So good!” I collapse atop her for a few minutes trying to catch my breath. Rolling off her, I dispose of the condom. When I see the small amount of blood, I grit my teeth at the possessiveness that moves through me. I’m her first, and if I have anything to do with it, I will be her only. I grab a washcloth from the bathroom and wet it with warm water; returning to her, I clean her and pull her into my arms.

She lays across my chest, and I rub my hands through her hair and down her back.

“How are you feeling?” I ask her. She props her chin on her hand and gazes up at me.

“A little sore, but that didn’t hurt as badly as I expected. It started feeling really good.” She admits, and I pull her up so I can kiss her.

“Thank you for letting me be a lot of your firsts,” I tell her, and she smiles at me.

“You’re the only person I’ve ever wanted to be my first anything.”

Whatever I did to deserve this girl, I need to figure out so I can do it over and over again. I never want to lose her. I’ll do whatever it takes to keep her forever.

CHAPTER TWENTY

BAILEY



I WAKE up, and it takes me a minute to realize where I'm at. I'm still lying across Julian's chest. I disengage myself so I don't wake him up. I climb off the bed and go to the door I'm sure is the bathroom. After I relieve myself, I grab a t-shirt he had hanging on the back of the door and throw it on. I quietly close the bathroom door and check on Julian. He's twitching, so I stop in my tracks.

“No! Take me instead. Take me.” He's saying it over and over again. My muscles tighten, and I focus on anything else he might say. But he keeps saying *take me*. Tip-toeing to his side of the bed, I run my fingers through his hair, debating whether to wake him up. After a few seconds, he stops twitching, and he stops talking. He begins breathing deeply, and I exhale.

I don't know how long I stand there staring at him and running my fingers through his hair, but I do it until my stomach growls, and I realize that's what woke me up. I haven't eaten anything since breakfast. Looking at Julian

again, I leave the room, tip-toe down the stairs, and go to his kitchen. I vaguely remember passing it when he guided me through the house to watch the sunset. Turning on a light, I smile at the sight of his kitchen. It's a farmhouse-style kitchen. Not small, but not huge, and very cozy.

Opening his fridge, I find some cheese and butter. Pulling those out, I glance around his counters and find a bread box. Looking inside it, I find some bread.

"Yes!" I whisper and grab a pan. Putting the pan on the stove to heat, I butter some bread, place it in the pan, then place two slices of cheese on the bread, and butter the other slice of bread and put it on top of the cheese.

"Grilled cheese?" I jump at Julian's gruff voice and turn around with the spatula in my hand pointed at him as a weapon.

"You scared the shit out of me!" I chastise him. He lifts his hands in surrender and walks around the island toward me, chuckling.

"Please don't hurt me with the spatula." Looking between him and it, I scowl.

"I should!" I exclaim. He smirks as he wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me to him, kissing my forehead.

"Hungry?" He asks.

"Yes. My growling stomach woke me up." I debate on bringing up what I witnessed but decide against it for now. Turning in his arms, he walks with me to the stove as I flip the sandwich. He leans down and nibbles on my ear.

"Sorry. I should have fed you."

Tilting my head, I give him better access to my ear and neck. "You fed me exactly what I wanted."

He pauses in his explorations. "Jesus, Bailey." He bites down on my shoulder, and I laugh.

"Want one?" I ask him.

“Yeah. It smells good.” He replies. He walks away and grabs a couple of plates from the cabinet. I place the one I made on a plate and cut it at a diagonal. Then go about making a second one. When they’re done, we walk over to the island to sit. He pulls a stool out to sit on, and I go to sit next to him, but he pulls me, so I’m between his legs.

I smirk at him over my shoulder, secretly pleased he wants me this close to him. We eat quickly, and he cleans up and puts everything away. Leaning back against the counter, I watch him move around in his briefs. Julian obviously works out. His arms are toned, but his legs and ass, damn! Knowing he hikes explains why his ass is so amazing.

He turns around and tilts his head at me, catching me checking him out. “Enjoying the view?” He asks, and I bite my lip, crossing my arms under my chest; his eyes drift down, and I smirk.

“Yep!” I reply, and he chuckles. Grabbing me, he pulls me into his chest; wrapping his arms around me, he rubs his hands down my back to cup my ass. He moans when he comes into contact with my skin.

“Bailey, what are you doing to me?” He kneads my ass a couple of times before taking one hand, gathering my hair in his fist, and wrapping it around his hand. He tugs my head, making it tilt back. Our eyes connect, and I swallow.

“Whatever I’m doing to you, you’re doing to me, too,” I tell him. His eyes travel down my body, stopping on my chest. He massages one of my breasts using his free hand and tweaks my nipple. Moaning, I rub my thighs together.

“I wonder if I could make you come from just doing this.” He murmurs. He pushes my shirt up and drops his head, taking my nipple in his mouth. I can’t move much because he still has my hair wrapped around his hand, and I love it. I love the control he takes; it requires me to have to think less.

“Oh god!” I whisper. Swaying on my feet, he pulls back and looks at me.

“Stand still.” He instructs. My mouth pops open. How am I supposed to be still? He smirks and brings his foot to nudge mine. “Spread your legs to control it better, and hold on to my arms.” His mouth comes to my ear. “And so I have easier access.”

Closing my eyes and swallowing, I widen my legs. Standing there and waiting, but he doesn't do anything. My eyes open, and he's staring at me. He arches an eyebrow.

“Better. I want your eyes on me when I make you come.”

My breath gets stuck in my throat, but before I can respond, he's pushing my shirt up, so it's sitting on top of my breasts. His hand slides down my abdomen, and he circles his middle finger around my clit.

“Julian!” I hiss, and he chuckles.

“You're so wet. I fucking love it!” His words make me even wetter, and he grins wickedly. “That's it, baby girl. Don't be ashamed. I love that you get this wet for me.”

I didn't realize there was a bit of shame at how much I respond to him, but he responds the same to me. He's straining against his briefs. The tip of his cock is peaking out. Reaching my hand down, I brush up against him, and he hisses.

He yanks on my hair, causing my chest to stick out further. He licks up one and swirls his tongue around my nipple as he inserts one finger into my pussy. I want to jack him off, but I can't. Clinging to his forearms, I ride the wave of pleasure he's taking me on.

He starts rubbing against my spot, and simultaneously, the palm of his hand hits my clit. I begin to move my hips.

“That's it, baby, ride my hand.” He inserts another finger, and I cry out.

“I need more. Please!” I don't know how to ask for what I need, but he pulls his fingers out and lifts me onto the counter. He sits on the stool and pulls my legs around his shoulders.

“Keep your legs on my shoulders.” He growls. Wrapping my legs around him, he leans down and swipes his tongue up my folds. “Jesus Christ! Bailey, you are so sweet.” He inserts one finger, then two, so he’s rubbing a spot deep within me, making my eyes roll back in my head.

I chant his name over and over again, and then I fall over the edge. “Julian! Holy shit!” He keeps licking and rubbing until my orgasm subsides, then pulls back. Looking at him, my eyes shoot to his hard cock.

“Now it’s your turn,” I state. His entire body is tense like he’s trying hard to control himself.

I push him away and drop to my knees. Grabbing him in my hand, I pump him several times before looking up at him and licking up his length. Taking him into my mouth, I swirl my tongue around his tip, and he shudders.

“Baby, I don’t know if I can be gentle like I was earlier.” He moans out, pulling off him.

“I don’t want you to be gentle. I told you I wanted to be every desire you’ve ever craved.” I remind him. Taking him in my mouth again, I guide his hand to my head, knowing he’ll take my hair. And he does. He grips my hair and allows me to suck and lick him, but when I grip his balls and massage them, all the control he was trying to hold onto slips.

“Pinch my thigh if I become too rough.” He instructs, and I nod. Then he’s guiding my head down his length. I let him take complete control by taking a deep breath through my nose and loosening my jaw. Keeping my eyes on his, he begins to thrust into my mouth.

“Look at you, on your knees, taking my cock so well. Fucking perfect.” His head drops back as he moans. If my mouth weren’t full of his cock I’d smile at his praise. I gag slightly when he hits the back of my throat, but I don’t want him to stop. Saliva is dripping from my mouth, but I ignore it. I focus on him.

“I’m about to come.” He warns. I don’t stop him, so he shoves himself into my throat and holds me there as he unloads, moaning as he comes. I try to swallow, but I feel some of it coming out of the side of my mouth. When he’s done, he pulls out immediately and lifts me to my feet. Engulfing me in his arms, he picks me up and drops me on the counter.

He grabs some paper towels, wets them, and turns to wipe the saliva and cum dripping down my mouth and neck. Wrapping his arms around me, he pulls me close and pushes his nose into my hair.

“That was perfect. You’re perfect. I’m never going to get enough of you.” He whispers into my hair. Wrapping my arms around his shoulder, I kiss his jaw. “You’re my drug.”

Goosebumps break out along my arms at his confession. “I feel the same way, Julian,” I admit. He pulls back and pushes my hair over my shoulder. Studying me, he takes a deep breath.

“We have to figure this out. As much as I don’t want you to be a secret, you have to be at school.” He explains.

“I understand,” I respond, and he sighs.

“Is this feasible, though? You have another year or so. Can we keep it a secret that long?” He questions, and I bite my lip. Can I? Even though the hiding and secrets are exciting right now, eventually, they will get old. How will we go on dates? We’ll have to go to a different town so we won’t be recognized.

“We won’t be able to go on dates,” I mumble, and he wraps his hand around my hair, pulling my head back to look at him.

“Your sister is dating my brother’s best friend. We can go on double dates. We can all hang out as a group. But you and me, we’d have to go out of town.”

I stare at him in shock, and he arches an eyebrow. “What?”

“You want to tell your brother and my sister?” I ask, and he pulls me to him again in a hug.

“Yes. The only place I want to keep it a secret is at school.”

Tears prick my eyes. I don’t know why it means so much to me, but it does. “Thank you,” I whisper. He leans down and kisses me.

“I’m not ashamed of you, baby girl. But we do have to be careful. Okay?”

I nod, and he kisses me again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

BAILEY



SITTING IN the library, I struggle to focus on the paper I need to write. I'm at a desk right outside Julian's room, but anxiety is crawling up my spine. Tabitha walks out of the room with Julian. The anxiousness that's been building for the past thirty minutes leaves my body. My shoulders and neck are sore from how stiff I was.

"I can't believe you're not finished writing your paper, Bailey. I thought you were a good student." She taunts me, and I arch an eyebrow.

"I'm an excellent student. Trust me." I reply and eye Julian over her shoulder. He leans against the door jam and watches.

Tabitha leans down and whispers. "I see how you look at him. It's never going to happen." I want to laugh in her face and tell her it has happened multiple times.

Instead, I roll my eyes. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

She scoffs. “You look at him like you used to look at Todd. Until he became mine.”

Gross! She is insane. I never looked at Todd in any sort of way.

“Well, you have Todd now. Good for you.” She needs to go before I lose my shit. She always pushes my buttons.

“I could have him too, you know.” Pushing away from the desk and standing.

“Unlike Todd, I think Professor McMillan has taste. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I think I’m late for my appointment.” Grabbing my things, I brush past her and walk into the room.

Tabitha asks him if he has more time to help her with her assignment, and I roll my eyes.

“No, Tabitha. We already had our session. If you need to schedule another one, you can do that online. I don’t have any other sessions available for today.” Julian tells her. I begin pacing. I want to go out there and snatch her by the hair. What is it with her and this fascination she has with me? Was she ever really my friend?

Julian doesn’t enter the room immediately, and I’m getting antsy. Walking to the doorway, I see he’s standing there watching her get on the elevator. When the doors close, he turns around and almost walks into me. Grabbing me by the back of my neck and pushing me into the room, he shuts the door, pulls the blind down on the window, and locks the door.

I don’t wait; I launch myself at him, and he’s there waiting. He lifts me, and I wrap my legs around his waist. Turning, he places me on the desk and pushes my dress up.

“I can’t believe you wore this costume today.” He growls against me. My hands land on his belt, unbuckle it, then unbutton his slacks and push them down.

“You should have worn the penis costume. Or at least the asshole label I left for you.” I breathe against his mouth.

He scoffs as his fingers push my thong aside. He inserts two fingers. Biting my lip, I stop myself from crying out. "So wet for me." He moans against my skin. I grab a condom out of his bag and put it on him. He lines himself up with me and thrusts in. We both let out shaky breaths, and he stays still for several seconds.

"I'll never get tired of how good this feels." He runs his lips up my jaw and then begins to move. Grabbing at him, I let my head fall back but keep my eyes on him.

"Tell me I'm the only one for you," I demand. Pulling the straps down on my dress, I give him what he wants. As a reward, he licks up my breast.

"You're the only one." He grunts as he takes my nipple in his mouth. "Rub your clit, baby, or I will come before you." Nerves lodge in my throat as my eyes connect with his again. "I want to see you." He encourages me, and I hesitantly put my hand between us and circle my finger around my clit.

Gasping at the extra pleasure, I fall back on the desk. He thrusts into me hard, and with that and the touch of my finger, I explode around him. His mouth lands on mine to stop my cry from being so loud.

"Oh my god, Julian," I whisper. He lays his body on top of mine and thrusts into me three more times before he's coming too.

"Fuck, Bailey, so good." He groans out, and I hold him tight. He mouths at my breast before pulling back and looking down at us. He's still inside me; part of me doesn't want it to end. I want to go another round.

He leans down and grips my chin. "Later. I promise." He says, reading my mind. Pulling out, he removes the condom and tucks himself back into his slacks. Rearranging my clothes, he helps me off the desk and kisses me long and soft.

"Do you work tonight? I can come to help you close, and then you can come to stay over again?" He asks, and I pause. I've stayed at his house every night for the past week. Mom

has been working extra shifts to save up for a girl's trip she has coming up after the holidays. She won't care, but I haven't been home much.

“Well, my mom will be home tonight. And we're meeting Caroline and Bass for dinner. Besides, our assignment is due tomorrow, so I need to finish it.” I tell him, and he nods. I want to invite him, but I'm scared he'll say no. He said he didn't want it to be a secret but didn't tell anyone when we were at Connor's this past weekend.

I made a complete fool of myself, trying to get his attention, and it did nothing. Next week, the day after Thanksgiving, we're going to Caroline's for Friendsgiving. It makes me wonder if he'll ignore me again.

“Okay.” He kisses the top of my head. “What about tomorrow?” He questions and I nod, disappointed that he doesn't mention the double date. We work through the research for my paper, and he gives me some tips and tells me things I need to update. When we finish, I stand and begin packing my things. Rubbing my hand along my neck, I try to massage the tension.

He comes up behind me and begins massaging my neck and shoulder. Letting my head fall, I moan at how good it feels.

“You have a lot of tension. Is everything okay?”

Sighing, I shrug. “Yeah. I've had a lot of assignments due this week and tests. Then we'll be prepping for finals when we return from Thanksgiving break.” I think for a moment before confessing. “I also feel like I'm still being watched, but Josh hasn't bothered me much since I told him to back off.”

Julian wraps his arms around me and pulls my back against his chest. “That doesn't mean he's not biding his time. Ensure you're always aware of your surroundings whenever I'm not with you. Even if I am with you, be aware, but you don't have to be as on guard if I'm with you.”

Tilting my head on his shoulder, I gaze up at him. “You make me feel safe,” I admit. He kisses me, his tongue licking the seam of my lips. He pulls back and raises an eyebrow at me.

“Ready for round two?”

“Already?” I tease.

“You wore this fucking costume. It’s not even Halloween.” He exclaims as he pulls me toward the chair and sits down.

“What did you expect?”

I laugh, “I had to catch you off guard.”

“Consider me caught off guard.” He motions to his lap and smirks at me. Now, ride me, baby girl.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

JULIAN



MY HAND flexes against the couch as Bailey leans her head against Dylan's leg. Dylan is Ansley's brother, and we're all at Bass and Caroline's house for Friendsgiving. I told her I didn't want to keep us a secret, but here I am keeping us a secret. I flirted with her in the kitchen in front of all the girls, but she needs me to claim her.

Standing from the couch, I walk back to the kitchen and pour myself a drink.

"Hey." My head snaps up at Lincoln's voice. Thinking he's coming in here to talk about the guy that's been bothering Ansley at her job in Atlanta, I give him my attention. Between him and Sebastian, I could start my own business.

"How's it going?" I ask him taking a sip from my tumbler.

"Alright. I came in here to give some unsolicited advice."

I arch an eyebrow at him. What the hell is he talking about?

“No one will care.” He waves his hand. “People at your work might care, but no one in there will care.”

Sucking in a breath at realizing what he’s talking about, I lean against the counter. “Am I that obvious?” I ask him, and he chuckles.

“No. I’ve been where you are, though, so I know what it looks like. And now I’m paying for my stupidity; the woman I’ve wanted for as long as I can remember lives in another state because I wouldn’t fight for her. And now we have to figure out the long-distance thing. Things could be different if I figured it out before she left.” He claps me on the shoulder. “Don’t make the same mistake I did.” He admonishes and walks back into the living room.

What do I do? Go out there and stake my claim in front of everyone or talk to her first. Connor walks into the kitchen and pauses when he sees me.

“Hey, man. What are you doing?” He grabs a beer out of the fridge and turns to me. I show him my tumbler, that’s almost empty. Inhaling and exhaling slowly, I confess.

“Bailey and I have a thing going on,” I admit to him. His beer bottle is halfway to his mouth. He pauses, then takes a long swallow before lowering it and staring at me. His face breaks out into a grin, and he walks over, wrapping his arm around my shoulder.

“I fucking called it! I knew I saw some chemistry between the two of you.” He kisses the side of my face, and I grimace. Pulling away, he leans against the counter across from me. “In all seriousness, I’m happy for you. You deserve to be happy.”

Connor doesn’t know everything that happened with my partner or the girl, but he knows it was hard for me. And the only other woman I ever thought I loved left me at the altar.

“Have you told her everything?” He asks, and I shake my head. “I know she has to be special because Bec likes her too. So, be honest with her. She may be young, but she’s got a

good head on her shoulders. And obviously, she can handle your grumpy ass.”

Shaking my head at him, I exhale. “You’re right. I’ve been closed off so long that it’s hard to open up. But I want to, for her.”

He pats me on the back. “Good for you.” With that, he walks into the living room. Standing in the kitchen for a few more minutes, I walk back into the living room and sit back in my spot. Bailey turns to me, her eyes following me. Tapping the armrest, I take a deep breath.

“Bailey?” Her eyes narrow at me, and she arches an eyebrow. Others turn and look at me.

“Yeah?” Her tongue comes out to wet her lips, and I follow it with my eyes.

“Why are you sitting over there?” I ask her. Bec chuckles, and I swear I hear Ansley say *oh shit*. Her eyebrows cave in, and she glances from me to Bec.

“This was the only place available.” She replies. Arching an eyebrow at her, I motion to Caroline and Ansley.

“They’re sitting on their men’s lap.” There are gasps around the room, but I focus on Bailey. Her mouth opens. “Get over here now,” I command. She doesn’t move for a few seconds but then rises slowly before walking across the room to me.

Spreading my legs, she stands between them and stares down at me with a question in her eyes. Wrapping my arm around her waist, I pull her onto my lap and allow her to adjust until she’s comfortable.

Kissing her neck, I murmur. “Much better.” Her hand finds mine on the armrest, and she intertwines our fingers.

“I knew it!” Bec says.

“I can’t believe you didn’t tell me!” Caroline mumbles. Bailey glances over at her with a grin.

“Later. Promise.” Bailey promises. Ansley and Liv look on with amused expressions. Connor gives me a grin and a wink. Dylan is oblivious, and Lincoln nods at me. Caroline leans over and pats Bailey on the thigh.

“I’m happy for you.” They grin at each other, and Bailey relaxes into my embrace.

Playing with her hair, I watch the rest of the football game in peace.



The following month is so busy Bailey, and I barely see each other unless it’s at class or me meeting her at the boutique. We’ve had lots of dresser-room sex, so I’m not complaining. She has finals and lots of assignments. Caroline also found out she’s having a girl, so she’s been helping her decorate the nursery during her free time.

But I miss her, so here I am, knocking on Bass’s front door. Caroline opens it. She’s wearing an oversized t-shirt with some sweats, and her hair is piled on her head. Bailey is right behind her.

“Julian?” They both say at the same time. Lifting my hand, I wave.

“I wanted to come over and help,” I explain. Caroline breaks out into a smile, and Bailey pushes her aside to hug me.

“Come on in.” Caroline motions for both of us to come in, and I follow them inside. Following them up the stairs, I stop in the doorway and glance around the room. The room is a light purple, and a mural is painted on two walls of a cherry blossom tree. Caroline turns to me, her hands rubbing over her belly.

“Sorry, I’ve kept Bailey away. She’s been doing this for me.” She motions to the room, and my eyes widen.

“You painted this?” I ask, glancing between her and the room. She smiles and rocks back on her heels.

“Yeah. Bec is now convinced we need to go into business together.” She tells me. Walking further into the room, I examine everything.

“This is beautiful, Bailey. I had no idea you could paint like this.”

She beams at me and shrugs. “It’s a hobby I’ve had since I was younger. I painted a few of the murals downtown in high school. But since being in college, I haven’t had time to do that anymore.”

Thinking about the murals downtown, I put two and two together. “You painted the hummingbird,” I state, and she smiles.

“How did you know that?”

“Your comment about getting a hummingbird feeder. I’ve always loved that painting. Now I love it even more.”

Caroline shakes her head and smiles at the two of us. “You two are so cute. She’s finished; we were cleaning up. Sebastian had to work late, but he’s bringing pizza home if you want to stay and eat.” She glances between the two of us. “Unless you two want to go hang out alone.” She bumps Bailey’s hip with hers. “I’m sure mom won’t care. She’s been working so much; she’s likely to pass out as soon as she gets home.”

Bailey blushes and pushes her hair behind her ear. Glancing at me, she arches an eyebrow.

“If it were up to me, you’d stay at my house all the time,” I tell her, and she bites her lip. She glances at Caroline and smirks.

“I’ll call mom and tell her.” She whispers as she looks at me with anticipation in her eyes. I can’t wait to get her alone.

Caroline hugs her. “Thank you for doing this. I love it!” She gushes.

I help Bailey clean up and tell Caroline to sit and rest. She huffs but sits. When we're done cleaning, we all walk downstairs just as Bass is coming inside. He walks over and kisses Caroline.

"Hey, Care Bear." He greets her first, then turns his attention to us.

"Hey, you two. I didn't know you'd be coming over, Julian."

I wrap my arm around Bailey and pull her into me. "I had to get my Bailey fix," I explain. Bass grunts and claps me on the shoulder.

"I understand, man." He winks at Caroline, and she smiles.

"Bailey finished the nursery. It's beautiful." She tells him. He leans against the counter and pulls Caroline into his arms.

"Oh yeah? I can't wait to see it. I guess I can tell Bec it's her turn next. Huh?"

Caroline nods. "Yeah. Thank you for letting me do this so fast." She murmurs.

"Uh uh. You don't have to thank me. If it makes you feel better getting this done, then, of course, we're going to get it done."

Bailey sighs. "I had fun doing this. I can't wait to spoil her." She says. Caroline smirks at her and pulls out of Bass's arms.

"I got something for you." She leaves the room, returns a few seconds later with a gift bag, and hands it to Bailey.

Bailey pulls out of my arms and digs into the bag. She pulls out a t-shirt and holds it in front of her. It says - *Love them. Spoil them. Give them back. Aunt life.*

"I love it!" Bailey exclaims and throws her arms around Caroline. Caroline returns her hug.

"You're going to make a great aunt, Bailey," Caroline whispers.

“And you’re going to be a great mom,” Bailey replies. They break apart, and Bailey looks at the shirt again.

“I can’t wait to wear this!” She folds it and puts it back in the bag. We all say our goodbyes, and I guide Bailey to her car. Opening her door, I wait for her to climb in, but she stops and turns to me.

“I have no clothes. Maybe I should run by my house and grab some things first. My mom might be there, but I’m not sure. It depends if her shift ended on time.”

“Okay. Do you want me to follow you? I know nothing has happened recently, but I can if you want me to.”

She bites her lip, thinking about it. “What if you go grab us some food? I’ll call and text you to let you know when I get there and when I leave.”

I run my hands through her hair and nod. “Okay. Be safe.” Kissing her. She climbs into her car and pulls out of the driveway. Climbing into my car, I’m tempted to follow her anyway, but I don’t. She’ll be okay.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

BAILEY



THIS PAST month has been challenging. I haven't seen Julian often, but I've wanted to help Caroline with the nursery. Going from a relationship where her husband wouldn't let her do anything she wanted to do to a relationship where he's willing to decorate and have the nursery ready months in advance makes my heart happy for her. Watching her transformation over the past several months has been great. Bass is good for her.

Pulling up into my driveway, I glance around the street to ensure there aren't any cars I don't recognize. Maybe I'm being paranoid, but I swear a car followed me to Caroline's neighborhood from school. I didn't see it on the way here, though. I should have told Julian. Why didn't I tell him?

Unlocking the door and getting inside, I lock the door and glance out the window. The car drives by that I saw on the way to Caroline's earlier.

"Shit!" Grabbing my phone, I call Julian.

“Hey, baby girl. Make it home?”

“Julian, I think someone is following me.” I blurt out.

“Fuck! Okay. I’m in the drive-thru. Shit! They have one of those walls where I can’t get out. Make sure your doors and windows are locked. I’ll be there soon.”

Staring out of my window, the car stops in front of the house. “Julian, they just stopped in front of the house,” I whisper like they can hear me.

“Jesus Christ!” I hear him talking to someone and then tires screeching. “Okay. I’m on my way. Stay on the phone with me.”

Squinting, I stare outside, trying to see who it is. The sun is setting, so it’s hard to see. The person flicks their head, and I gasp.

“What?!?” Julian cries out.

“It’s Tabitha! She must have gotten a new car. What the hell is she doing?” I go to unlock the door. “I’m going to find out.”

“No! Do not go out there. Wait until I get there.” Stopping, I put the lock back in place and stare out the window.

“She’s going to see you.” We don’t have a garage, just a carport, but she’ll see Julian’s car.

“I don’t care. I have to know you’re safe.” He tells me. “I’m about five minutes away.”

Mom pulls into the driveway as he says it, and my mouth opens. “My mom just got here.”

“Oh, thank god!” Julian exclaims. But when mom gets out of her car, she glances at the car and begins walking to it. Before she gets to it, they speed off.

“She tried to go to their car, and they sped off,” I tell him.

“What color was the car?” He asks.

“A green sedan.”

“They just passed me. It did look like Tabitha was driving.”

Sighing, I prepare myself for mom to come in. I come in through the front door, but she comes in through the side door. She takes her shoes off outside when she works at the hospital because of hospital germs, and it’s part of her routine now.

“Bailey!?!” She calls out.

“Stay outside until I text you to come in,” I tell him.

“Okay.” Telling him bye, I hang up and greet my mom in the kitchen. I haven’t informed mom about my and Julian’s relationship progression. I guess it’s time to do that. Usually, when I stay at his house, she’s working nights. She’s never questioned it. I’m an adult, and she trusts me, but it’s time.

“Hey! Caroline texted me and said you finished the mural. I can’t wait to see it.” She exclaims as she pulls stuff out to make hot chocolate.

“Yeah, it was fun doing it,” I tell her. Nerves settle in my stomach, and I take the plunge.

“Mom—” I begin at the same time she starts talking.

“Did you see that car in front of the house? I went down to see who it was, and they drove off.”

I’m not sure what to tell her. I don’t want to scare her. “Yeah. Maybe they were lost and trying to get their directions.” I tell her feeling guilty for lying.

“Mom, I need to tell you something.”

Sensing the seriousness in my tone, she turns toward me and tilts her head. “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah. I, um...” Taking a deep breath, I gather my courage. “I’m staying at a friend’s house tonight,” I tell her. She leans against the counter and eyes me.

“Okay. Who is the friend?”

Playing with the hem of my sweatshirt, I look her in the eye and tell her. “Julian.”

“Who’s Julian?”

Running my fingers through my hair, I swallow down my nerves. “He’s my professor.”

Mom gasps, and she covers her mouth with her hand. I’m unsure what else to say, so I wait for her to say something. When she moves her hand from her mouth, she’s grinning.

“Did you finally jump him?” She asks, and my mouth pops open.

“Mom!” I exclaim, covering my face. She chuckles, and I glance at her through my fingers. She walks over and pulls me into a hug.

“Does he treat you right?” She questions.

“Yes. We’re still getting to know each other, but he’s....” I trail off. “He’s everything I ever thought I wanted and more.”

“When do I get to meet him?”

“Well, he’s outside.” Her head looks toward the door.

“Invite him inside. I want to meet him.”

Taking a deep breath, I walk outside and down to Julian, where he’s still waiting for me. He’s sexy as hell leaning against his car in his gray slacks and light blue button-up shirt that’s rolled up to his elbows. He stands and glances between me and the house as I approach him.

“Want to meet my mom?” I ask and bite my lip, nerves settling deep in my stomach. What if this doesn’t mean as much to him as it means to me? He grabs my hand and interlaces our fingers pulling me closer to him. Tilting my head up, I watch him for any signs of hesitancy or regret.

“Of course, I want to meet your mom. She’s not going to shoot me, is she?” He brings our interlaced fingers up to his mouth and kisses my knuckles as his other hand comes up and

pushes my hair back from my face. Chuckling, I shake my head.

“I don’t think so. My dad was a lot older than her. Apparently, she jumped him when they first started dating. When I just told her about you, she asked me if I finally jumped you.”

He smirks and pulls me even closer. “Have you been talking about me to your mom?”

“Here and there. I told her about you when I first started taking your class and how much of an asshole you were.” I tease, and he bares his teeth at me before kissing me.

“I had to be an asshole, or I was going to lay you out on the desk in my classroom and do bad things to you.” His voice comes out gruff, and I hum.

“There’s still time for that.”

I slip out of his embrace and pull him up the sidewalk leading to the front door with him right on my heels.

“You really shouldn’t have said that, baby girl.”

Turning to face him before we go inside, I arch an eyebrow.

“Why’s that?”

His eyes rake over my face, and down my body making me feel on fire. “Because I have a very active imagination when it comes to you, and there are certain things I’ve wanted to do since you fell in my arms all those months ago.”

Tilting my head, I study him. “What kind of things?”

He leans down and kisses my nose. “You’ll have to wait and find out. Now, let’s meet your mom. I’m going to need you to stay in front of me, though, because I don’t need her to see how much I want her daughter the very first time I meet her.”

Cackling, I pull him inside. Here goes nothing!

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

JULIAN



ME: COME to my office before going to class today.

Bailey: Why?

Me: I have a surprise for you.

Bailey: What is it?!?

I leave her on read, knowing it will drive her crazy. I know I'm playing with fire, but this is a fantasy I've had since the day she taunted me by raising her skirt. On Monday and Wednesday, I'm her first class of the day. But on Tuesdays and Thursdays I'm her last class and Fridays I'm her only class. Today is Thursday, and I'm ready to play. Hopefully, she is too.

There's a knock on my door, so I lean back in my chair and prepare myself. "Come in."

Bailey walks in and closes the door. She raises her eyebrow at me.

“You wanted to see me, Professor McMillan.” There’s a slight smile on her face, and I chuckle. She’s ready to play too.

“Yes, Ms. Rhodes. Can you lock the door and come here, please?” I crook my finger at her. She bites her lip, trying to hide a smile. Locking the door, she drops her bag in one of the chairs in front of my desk and walks around it. Turning, so I’m facing her, she stops in front of me, and I stare up at her. What she’s wearing is perfect for this. She has a long flowy navy skirt and a long sleeve white top. She stayed home with her mom last night, so I wasn’t sure what she was wearing.

Spreading my legs, I motion for her to stand between them. She takes a few extra steps to do that.

“You look lovely today.” Bringing my hand up, I run my thumb over her hardened nipple, and she gasps.

“Thank you.” She whispers as I continue to circle her nipple with my thumb.

“Pull your skirt up and straddle me,” I command, and her eyes widen, but she gathers her skirt up, puts her legs over mine, and sits down.

“Look at you following instructions so well.”

Her pupils dilate at my praise, and I smirk. She loves being told how good she is. And she is. Always. Wrapping my hand around her hair, I pull it forcing her to lift her head and arch her back. She knows what I want. She always wore baggy shirts and jeans when she first started in my classes. Now she wears these tight shirts showing me what I want to see, and when she wears one that shows cleavage. Fuck! I love it even more.

“Lift your shirt,” I instruct her further, and she does so immediately. She touches her bra and gazes at me.

“Should I lift my bra as well?” She asks, making my already hard cock even harder. She aims to please, and she does it so well.

“Yes, baby girl.”

She does, and I lean forward, sucking her nipple into my mouth hard. She shudders against me and bucks, trying to find something to release the pressure. I go back and forth between her breasts, sucking, licking, and nipping until she squirms in my lap.

“Julian, please.” She moans, and I smirk. Pulling back, I gaze at her. She’s so beautiful, with a flush across her chest and cheeks. She’s breathing hard and staring at me like she wants me to eat her or she wants to eat me. One day I’m going to make her come just from that alone.

“Need some relief?” I question, and she nods. “We’re going to play a game,” I inform her, open a drawer on my desk, and pull out my surprise for her. Turning it on, I rub it along the inside of her thigh. She jumps, and her mouth falls open.

“What kind of game?” Her voice quivers, and the anticipation of doing this builds. I show her the vibrator, and she swallows.

“I’d like for you to wear this in class, and let’s see how long you can last.”

She eyes the vibrator and then me. “Okay.” She whispers, and I study her.

“You can say no.” I remind her. As much as I want to do this with her, I don’t want her to feel pressured.

“I want to, but what if I come in your class? How am I going to hide that?”

“I’ll create a distraction. If you want me to stop, tap on the desk three times, and I’ll stop.” I explain to her, and she nods.

“Okay.”

Leaning forward, I kiss her, and she responds instantly. When her tongue meets mine, I suck on it and pull her close, letting her grind on my hard dick a couple of times before stopping her. I can’t go into class with her wetness coating the front of my slacks as much as that would turn me on.

Pulling back. I keep my forehead against hers. “Lift your skirt out of the way and move your thong to the side.”

Leaning back, I watch as she gathers her skirt in one hand, showing me her pink panties, and then she moves them aside, so I see her pink pussy. She’s swollen, wet, and quivering to come. Bringing the vibrator to her, I slide it along her slit, and she throws her head back. It’s not even on. Curiosity getting the best of me, I flip the switch on and run it up her slit again and rest it against her clit.

“Oh my god!” Her hips begin to rock. “Julian...” She drops her skirt and wraps her hand around my neck. Sitting up, I pull her in close and watch as she unravels. Licking up her neck, she comes in my arms. I don’t turn the vibrator off, though. I insert it and adjust the clit stimulator, so it’s touching her exactly where she needs it.

My cock is so hard, and I want to bury it inside her tight pussy but watching her ride this pleasure is almost as good.

“Julian. I can’t...” She bites her lip and holds on to me tight as I increase the speed of the vibrator. I place my hand over her mouth to muffle her, chanting my name as she comes again. Having mercy on her, I turn it off, and she lays against me, spent, heaving in breaths of air. When she catches her breath, she leans back and stares at me wide-eyed.

Running my fingers through her hair, I stare at her in awe. “You look so beautiful when you come, baby girl.”

“It’s going to be hard not to react like that in class.” She remarks, and I chuckle.

“I won’t let it get that far.” I kiss her. “But even if I do, you have to learn to control it. And remember, you can stop it at any time. Understand?”

She takes a deep breath. “Yes, I understand.”

Pulling her close, I kiss her. “That’s my good girl.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

BAILEY



THIS IS a dangerous game we're playing. He said we had to pretend at school. This is not pretending. We are crossing so many lines. But I can't find it in me to care. The way he makes me feel, the way he pushes me. Walking with the vibrator in me feels strange, but that thought evaporates when I notice Josh pacing back and forth in front of the classroom.

He's usually not this early, so I'm surprised. He turns, and his eyes land on me. He smiles and waves his hand. Looking behind me, I wonder where Julian is. When I left his office, I went around the building to enter the door I always come in, so I didn't raise suspicions.

"Hey, Bailey." Josh greets me as I get closer. He gives me the creeps.

"Hey, Josh," I reply and grab my phone to text Julian, but I hear his footsteps down the hall before I can get my message typed out and sent. Josh turns and scowls at Julian.

“What do you see in him?” Josh snarls, and my head snaps in his direction.

“What?” I exclaim.

“I see how you look at him. You know he’s a killer?”

I stare at Josh in shock. What the hell is he talking about?

He walks up and stands too close to me, so I step back.

“Watch yourself. He’ll wind up getting you killed too.”

Looking between him and Julian, I don’t know what to say or think.

“Josh, I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I take another step away from him, trying to create distance, but he only steps closer. What the hell?

“Ask him.” He snaps. “Ask him to tell you about his past.” He seethes.

“Everything okay, Ms. Rhodes and Mr. Spencer?” Julian calls out as he unlocks the classroom door. Looking up, I catch his eye over Josh’s shoulder. I didn’t realize how far we had walked away from the classroom. Stepping around Josh, I walk to the door.

“Yes, everything is fine,” I tell him, but I’m sure my eyes are saying something else. I clutch my bag as I walk to my seat and sit down. When Josh comes into the classroom, I cringe. I don’t want him sitting next to me. What the hell did he mean by everything he just said? Julian’s not a killer. No way. He’s helped, Caroline and Ansley. He’s gone out of his way to make sure I’m safe. There’s no way.

Josh doesn’t sit next to me; he sits where Tabitha and Todd sit. My shoulders relax a little, and I exhale a breath I didn’t realize I was holding. When they walk in, Todd glares at him.

“What the hell are you doing over here?”

Josh motions to Tabitha. “Tabitha said I could sit with you two from now on.”

Todd looks between Tabitha and Josh and rolls his eyes. “Moving on to someone more gullible, are we?”

Tabitha’s eyes narrow. “I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about.”

Todd scoffs and walks past their usual seats to the back.

“Todd!” Tabitha seethes and stomps her foot. Todd throws his bag on the floor and sits down, giving her a bored look.

“I’m done, Tabitha. We’re done.” He leans forward. “I may have made a stupid mistake and am paying for it now, but I won’t be making the dumb mistake of staying with you.”

Tabitha’s eyes dart around the room. She screeches when they land on me and sees I’ve heard the entire conversation.

“You!”

“Enough!” Julian calls out. “Tabitha, sit down or leave my classroom now.”

I glance back at Todd to see his reaction. He arches an eyebrow at her, runs his hand through his hair, and leans back in his chair. Tabitha sits down, her back ramrod straight, and drums her fingers on her desk. Josh sits there quietly, pulling his laptop out to take notes.

Turning my eyes to the front of the room, I try to focus. I cross my legs, and I’m reminded the vibrator is still there. Gasping, I uncross my legs. What if people hear?

“You won’t need your laptops. Today is your last exam. It is oral. If I do not call on you, do not answer. If you call out the answer and I’ve called on someone else, you will get points taken away. Does everyone understand?” Julian explains. We all answer, and he pulls out a clipboard with what I’m assuming are the questions and his pen.

“Mr. Spencer, tell me the four principles of effective intervention in criminal justice in sequential order. Make sure to speak loudly so everyone can hear you.”

I begin to list the items in my head, but before I hear Josh's answer, the vibrator turns on. Clamping my mouth shut so I don't make a sound, I grip my seat. My eyes dart around the room. Josh stands and speaks loudly, and everyone focuses on him.

My entire body is tense as I try to ignore the pleasure coursing through me. Julian's eyes catch mine; there's a slight grin on his face. Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath and let it out, focusing on that instead of the pleasure in my core. Just when I think I won't be able to take it anymore, Josh is done answering, and the vibrating stops.

Slumping in my seat, I wipe my sweaty hands on my skirt and swallow several times, trying to erase the dryness in my throat. Finally opening my eyes and coming to my senses, I realize someone else is answering another question. When they're done, Julian's eyes land on mine, and he arches an eyebrow as if to ask if I'm good—nodding slightly—the grin on his face returns.

I sit up straighter, realizing I'm fulfilling one of his fantasies. I'm everything he's ever craved and desired. *Me*. A sense of power and longing gather in the pit of my stomach, and I can't wait until we're alone.

“Ms. Rhodes, what are the two models of the criminal justice system?”

Taking one more deep breath and shaking off the need to come right now, I answer. “The crime control model and the due process model.”

He nods. “Very good.” He says gruffly, and I know it has a double meaning. I'm his good girl. I'll always be his good girl.

“Ms. Winston, what is the crime control model? Remember to speak loudly.” He reminds her, and I know.

Tabitha begins to answer, but again my focus centers on my clit and the vibrations that just started again. I clutch at the seat and try not to rock my hips back and forth. I feel sweat

forming over my upper lip, and I quickly wipe it away, trying to get rid of the effect this is having on me.

“Are you feeling okay?” The girl next to me asks, and I swallow.

“Yes,” I say a little too loudly, and the vibrations stop.

“Please pay attention to Ms. Winston,” Julian calls out, and the girl turns her attention to Tabitha. I, however, turn my attention to Julian; he’s calm, cool, and collected, but he’s standing behind his podium and never does that.

He’s not one for standing still, so this must be affecting him just as much. He winks at me when he catches me staring at him, and my mouth opens. Scowling at him, I cross my arms under my chest.

His eyes travel down to my chest. I’m sure he can see my pebbled nipples, but at this point, I don’t care. My phone vibrates, causing me to jump because I expected to feel that vibration somewhere else. Glancing at the message, I have to read it twice before I understand it’s from Julian.

Julian: Do you want everyone in the classroom to know the professor turns you on? Because we can make that happen.

I don’t know how to respond. He’s getting bold. Is it because it’s the last day of class? Or is he tired of hiding? Glancing at him under my eyelashes, he tilts his head at me.

Me: Bring it on.

He smirks, and I bite down on my tongue in preparation.

“Mr. Russell.” Everyone’s attention turns to Todd, but I don’t hear the question because the vibrator starts back up, and he turns the speed up a notch.

He said he’d stop it in his office, but now that the challenge has been extended, I’m not so sure. I know if I tap the desk, he’ll stop. But do I want him to? I feel myself barreling toward an orgasm. Deciding against it, I take a deep breath and decide I’ll just ride it out and try my best not to scream his name when I do.

Just before I'm about to go over the edge, it stops. And I want to scream. My heart is beating hard in my chest. I need to come so badly. My eyes flash up to his, and if everyone in this classroom didn't surround us, I'd jump him right the fuck now. I'm sure there's a wet spot on my seat. I've probably seeped through my panties and skirt.

For the rest of the class, he asks questions, and people answer, and he doesn't turn the vibrator back on. I want him so badly. I'm ready to claw my skin off.

"Alright, everyone, you did great. Grades will be posted by midnight tomorrow. See you all next semester." Julian calls out.

I didn't even realize class was over. I answered the questions he asked me and then would check out when he moved on to someone else. Staying in my seat, I refuse to move because I'm still unsure if there's a wet spot. Of course, that doesn't stop Tabitha.

She walks over to me and stops. "You can look at him with that dazed expression all you want. He'll never go for you."

"What the hell is your problem, Tabitha?" I growl. "You're so focused on me. Have you forgotten you just got dumped in front of the classroom by your boyfriend? Or should I say, ex-boyfriend?"

She scowls at me and grabs my desk. "I hate you! Why does everyone always want you? I'm going to ruin you and your perfect professor." She storms out of the classroom, and I glance at Julian to see if he saw that, but he's talking to Josh. When Josh sees Tabitha leave, he ends his conversation and exits the room. What a bunch of scheming little shits.

"Watch out for them. They've been hanging out a lot lately, and I don't trust whatever they have going on." Todd says as he sits down next to me. I gape at him, wondering why he's talking to me and being friendly.

Grabbing my bag, I begin to put my things in it. "Okay," I say cautiously.

“Hey, look. Maybe this isn’t the best place to do this, but I figured I’d just go for it.” He sounds nervous, and my heart plummets to my stomach. “I’m sorry for how I treated you in high school.”

My head whips toward him so fast I think I’ve given myself whiplash. “What?!?” I exclaim.

He shrugs sheepishly, and my mouth falls open. “I was an asshole and deserved what you did that night.”

I stare at him in shock. “I don’t know what to say. You’ve been an asshole to me since then too. What’s changed?”

He rolls his lips between his teeth and rubs the back of his neck. “I made another dumb mistake the summer after senior year. I don’t want to get into it here. Maybe another time, but it required me to go to counseling. I didn’t start taking it seriously until this year. It’s helped. A lot.”

I’m flabbergasted at his admission, but I pat his forearm. “That’s great, Todd. And thank you for apologizing.”

He nods, taps my desk, and walks out. That was weird. Glancing around the classroom, I realize Julian is leaning against his desk, watching me.

“What was that about?” He asks. Getting the courage to stand, I glance down at my seat and see it has a wet spot. Putting my bag over my head, I adjust it to cover my backside and the damp spot on my skirt.

Pointing at it, I smirk at Julian. “I need to clean this up.”

He chuckles and walks over to look down. He slides his finger down my arm. “You were so beautiful holding on for dear life.”

Pouting, I turn to him. I want to kiss him. I want to push him back on his desk and ride him. “I need your cock inside me, not a vibrator,” I state.

He takes two steps until he’s directly in front of me and grabs my hair, pulling my head back. “I want you to go to my office and wait until my next class ends. I will bend you over

my desk and fuck you from behind. So hard.” He steps in closer to me and bites down on my ear. “Be prepared.”

I take a shaky breath, frustrated that I still haven’t come. “I don’t know if I can wait.” My voice trembles, and his breath ghosts across my lips.

“You can. I promise it will be worth it if you do.” He steps closer, rubbing his hard cock against me, and I swallow.

“What?” I don’t know what to ask. “Do you like this?”

“It’s called edging.” He states. “And, yes, it’s amazing. I promise.” Tilting my head, I study him. I trust him, so I nod. Other students start coming in for his next class, so he moves away from me. Giving him a small wave, I make my way to his office. With every step I take, I feel the vibrator, and I can’t wait to remove it.

My phone vibrates in my hand, and I glance down.

Julian: Don’t take it out.

I stare at the text for too long before groaning. I can take it out. I know I can, but what would be the fun in that? Slipping into his office, I lock his door and lie on his couch. I’ll take a small nap while I wait for him. Maybe that will help.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

JULIAN



STARING UP at my ceiling, I run my fingers up and down Bailey's spine as she sleeps. I crossed a line today, and I couldn't stop myself. I used to be straight-laced, but Bailey makes me want to break out of the mold I've had for myself for the past decade. Disentangling myself from her, I climb out of bed and pull on some pajama pants.

Padding down the stairs, I walk to the back door and step outside. Even though we're about a week from Christmas, it's not that cold outside. You never know what you'll get with the weather this time of year in Mississippi. Sometimes we'll experience all four seasons in one day. Leaning my arms against the railing, I listen to the creek behind my house and think through everything I need to tell her.

I usually sleep great when she's over. I used to go on hikes or work out for hours in order to fall asleep. Even then, I'd still wake up from the nightmares. When she's here, I rarely have nightmares. Tonight, though, I can't get my mind to shut off.

What will she think of me? My ribs tighten at the thought of her walking away when she finds out. She's been a fresh breath of air after the hell I've lived—the thought of losing her. I rub at the unease and the tightness in my chest. I've done nothing to deserve her, but I'm a selfish son of a bitch. I'm going to keep her. Whatever it takes.

The door slides open behind me, and two arms wrap around my waist. Bailey pushes her cheek into my back. The tightness in my chest loosens, and I can breathe normally again. This girl. She's everything.

“I woke up, and you weren't there. Is everything okay?” She mumbles against my skin. Turning, I pull her into my arms and kiss the top of her head.

“Yeah. Couldn't sleep.” I tell her and pull her over to the swing. I sit down and pull her into my lap. She has no idea the comfort she brings me. Her sweet smell engulfs me as she wraps her arms around my neck and lays her head on my chest.

“Is something bothering you?” She questions, and I take a deep breath.

“There are some things I need to tell you. But I was curious, what was Todd talking to you about after class today?”

She sits up and runs her hand along my jaw. “I'll tell you, but you have to promise to tell me what's bothering you after. Deal?”

Running my fingers through her hair, I give her a small smile. “Deal.”

She begins to run her fingers along my tattoo. “He apologized for being an asshole to me in high school and said he deserved what I did to him the night I hit him with the bottle.” She shrugs. “Apparently, he made a mistake and is now required to go to counseling about it, but he didn't start taking it seriously until recently.”

I nod. “Yeah. He got in trouble for driving under the influence.” I tell her. She gasps and sits up.

“How did you know that?”

“When he gave you shit at the beginning of the semester, I may have looked into his record. He ran a stop sign and crashed into a parked car. When it happened, the person was about to step off the curb to get into their car. He would have killed them if it had happened a split second later.”

She claps her hand over her mouth. “Oh my goodness! I’m glad he’s getting the help he needs, then.”

She wraps her hands around my neck and kisses my jaw. I know it’s in encouragement, so I muster up my courage. I’ll start small.

“I almost got married once,” I tell her, and she sits up to look at me. She doesn’t say anything; she waits for me to continue. “I met her when I first became a detective and thought I loved her. We dated for almost a year, and I asked her to marry me. She said yes and moved in with me.”

I hate talking about this part of my life. I try to forget it happened, but Bailey deserves to know about my past. Her fingers run over my tattoo again.

“We argued all the time. She hated that I was a detective. She said she kept waiting for that phone call. Before moving here, I lived in the city and fought dangerous cases. But she knew that when she met me, and I kept trying to explain, I wouldn’t quit. She kept telling me it would be different when we got married. So, the night after our rehearsal dinner, I sat her down and explained that it wouldn’t be different. I would still be a detective, and my job would still be dangerous. She didn’t show up at the wedding the next day.”

Bailey gasps. “Oh my goodness, Julian! I’m so sorry.” She holds me close, and I wrap my arms around her. After a few moments, she leans back. “Have you seen her since then?”

Running my fingers through her hair, I sigh. “Once. At a grocery store. It was awkward. She said hi, I said hi, and then

she introduced me to her husband.”

“How long was it after she left you?”

“Three months.”

“Oh my god! Was she cheating? Or... I don't understand. How in the world could she leave you at the altar, to begin with?”

Chuckling, I pull her in closer. “It didn't bother me. When she didn't show up for the wedding, I was relieved. I realized I didn't love her. I was doing what everyone else around me was doing, settling down. But I always felt like I was settling with her. She did me a favor by not showing up. We'd probably be married with two kids and ignoring each other. Or divorced.”

She leans up and kisses me softly. “Well, I, for one, am glad you didn't get married. How long ago was that?”

“Ten years ago.”

“So I was eleven.” She states matter of factly, and I groan. She tilts her head back and laughs. Kissing up her neck, I bite her gently just behind her earlobe. She squirms away, but I lift my hands under her arms, so she straddles me.

“Does it bother you that I'm so much younger than you?” She asks, and I hear the uncertainty in her voice for the first time. Leaning forward, I push on her lower back, forcing her to grind into me, making her breasts easier for me to get to.

“I've never thought of your age. The only thing I think of is that I'm your professor, and you're my student, so I have to be careful. I'd flaunt you to the entire world if it were up to me.”

She rocks against me, and I moan. I still need to tell her about my partner and the girl, but her grinding on me pushes all those thoughts out of my mind. Reaching between us, I move my pajama pants down enough for my cock to pop out.

“Ride me, baby girl.” She lifts on her knees, causing the swing to rock a little, so I place my feet on the ground to keep us in place. She takes hold of my cock and rubs it along her

slit a few times, causing us both to moan before she sinks down and engulfs me in her wet heat. I love that she only wears a t-shirt when she's here.

"I love it when you say that to me." She whispers as she begins to rock against me. Pushing her hair over her shoulder, I wrap my hand around it and hold tight.

"What's that?"

She places her hands on my shoulders and lifts herself up and down. Feeling her tight pussy wrapped around me is heaven, and I never want it to end.

"When you call me baby girl." She cries out as I thrust into her as she comes down. "Yes! Keep doing that."

"Lift your shirt. You know what I need." I demand. She pulls her shirt over her head, and my mouth latches onto her nipple. The swing is creaking, and I know we will break it if we keep going with this force, but I can't bring myself to care.

"Fuck! Julian. I'm going to come." She cries out and begins to clench around me. I push up into her chasing my orgasm, and then I hear a snap, and we're both falling to the ground. I wrap my arms around her head and roll, breaking her fall.

"Are you okay?" I ask her, and she starts laughing hysterically.

"We broke the swing." She sits up and rolls away, causing me to slip from her. I moan, and her eyes dart to me.

"Are you okay? You broke my fall." She climbs over me and pats me, her beautiful tits swaying back and forth in front of me. "Are you in pain?" She questions. Then she snorts. "You didn't come."

Narrowing my eyes at her, she snickers, and I growl. Grabbing her, I pull her, so she's draped across me and kiss her long and hard. When I let her go, she straddles me again. "Do you need to come?" She taunts.

Shaking my head, I grunt. “It’s for the best. I don’t have a condom down here.” She ignores me and slides down on me again, and I clutch at her hips. “Bailey,” I warn.

She leans forward and nips at my jaw as she rides my cock hard. “I started taking birth control a month ago. I haven’t said anything because I thought maybe it had to get in my system.” She pauses and sits on me, engulfing me in her wet heat. I feel my orgasm building again at the base of my spine. “But we can go upstairs and finish this if you want to use a condom. I’m not trying to pressure you either way. I did want you to know, though.”

Gripping her hips, I’m sure she will have fingerprint bruises tomorrow. “I’m clean,” I tell her as I pump into her. Her head falls back as she moans, gasps, and lets me use her body to get off.

“Me too, obviously.”

Being reminded again that I’m her first and only pushes me over the edge, and I spill into her. I massage her breast as I continue to thrust into her prolonging my orgasm. “God, you feel so good, baby girl.”

She falls onto my chest. “I love riding you.” She whispers into my chest, and I wrap my arms around her holding her tight.

“I love it too. Seeing your tits bounce as you come undone. It’s one of my favorite things.” I admit, and she snuggles in closer to me if that’s possible. After a few minutes, I notice my discomfort on this deck. Groaning, I push her up, and she chuckles.

“Feeling your age, old man?” She teases, and I lean up, nipping at her jaw. She giggles and climbs off me. I can’t help but watch as my cum runs down her thigh. She glances down, looks at me, and shakes her head. “That’s different.”

Chuckling, I get to my feet and pull up my pajama pants. Looking at the swing, I sigh. “Well, I’ll be fixing that tomorrow.”

She giggles, grabs her shirt and pulls it over her head. “That’s a great story to tell the grandkids.” She blurts out as I guide her inside but stops suddenly, turning to me; her mouth opens and closes. “Sorry. I didn’t mean anything by that. It’s just a saying.”

Tilting my head at her, I sigh. Grabbing her, I pull her to me and kiss her. “It’s definitely a story to tell the grandkids,” I whisper against her lips, and she relaxes against me. Doesn’t she know yet that she’s it for me? I’m hers, and she’s mine. This obsession has slowly turned into love, and there’s not a damn thing I want to do to stop it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

BAILEY



STRETCHING, I open my eyes and glance at the clock on Julian's nightstand. Winter break is over, and this cocoon we've been in has to end. He's not on his side of the bed, so I push myself up and look at the bathroom door. The light isn't on, so he must be downstairs. He woke me up again last night. He was twitching, and he kept saying *take me* over and over again.

I need to talk to him, but things are so good right now. I thought he was going to talk to me the night we broke the swing. Maybe he needs time. Whenever he tells me, I'll be there for him.

Padding down the stairs, the smell of coffee hits me. I stop in the doorway of the kitchen and watch him move around.

He's in workout shorts and no shirt. His chest glistens with sweat, making me want to lick him. Crossing my arms under my chest, I lick my lips. He's so handsome.

“Morning.” I greet him. His head pops up from stirring his coffee, and he smirks at me.

“Morning.” He walks around the island and stops in front of me. Leaning down, he kisses me. “How’d you sleep?”

“Good. How long have you been awake?” I ask as I wrap my arms around his neck.

“A while.” He replies. He always tries not to get me sweaty when he’s sweaty, but I don’t care. I pull him closer. He shakes his head with a smile playing on his lips, wraps his arms around my waist, and lifts me.

Wrapping my legs around his waist, he walks to the counter and places me on it as he kisses my jaw and neck. He wants me to tilt my head back, so he has free access to my breasts, but I resist. He growls and begins nipping harder. Laughing, I finally give in, tilting my head and arching my back.

He immediately pushes my shirt up, his mouth descends to my breast, and he swirls his tongue around my nipple. Too quickly, he pulls back and pushes my shirt down, and I pout. He kisses my nose.

“I know, baby girl. But we have to get back into a routine.” He tells me as he grabs a coffee cup, begins to pour me a cup, and makes it exactly how I like it. Handing me my cup, he picks it up and gazes at me.

“I’m sad I don’t have a class with you every day like last semester,” I admit as I blow on my coffee. He leans next to me and takes a sip from his cup.

“Me too, but you have a key to my office now, so you can go in there anytime you need to. I’ll let you know if I have an appointment with a student or another professor.”

Taking a sip of my coffee, I wonder about Josh and Tabitha. “I still don’t trust Josh and Tabitha. I never thought I’d hope Todd would be in one of my classes before, but I kind of am now.” I tell him.

“I looked into Josh, and nothing came back. He lived in several foster homes growing up but has no criminal history. In the last foster home he lived in, he stayed the longest. I tried to get that foster family’s records, but they are locked down for some reason. I will look into them as soon as I can get my hands on them. Stay vigilant around him. I still don’t trust him; if you feel nervous, text me. And keep that pepper spray in your hand when you’re walking by yourself.”

I nod in agreement and take another sip from my coffee. “I am excited we’re going hiking this weekend! That’s something to look forward to.” I tell him, and he smiles. He leans forward and kisses me.

“I love that you’re so excited about this. It’s supposed to be pretty chilly this weekend. Are you sure you still want to go?”

I arch an eyebrow at him and scoff. “Hell, yes! I’m not one of those girls that can’t handle a little cold.”

He chuckles and steps between my legs. “Well, if you get cold, I’ll keep you warm.” He wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me to the counter’s edge. My pussy rubs against his hard abs, and I groan.

“You’re not playing fair,” I complain as he grabs my ass and rocks me against his abs again.

“What do you expect when you always walk around here in a t-shirt and no panties?” He asks as he steps back and pushes me back until I’m lying across the island.

“Julian, what are you doing?” I ask as he lifts my legs and wraps them around his shoulders.

He looks up at me, his face between my legs, and takes one swipe up my center, and I moan. “Eating breakfast.” He says simply before he begins sucking and licking.

“Oh god!” I whisper as he licks from my pussy up to my clit over and over again. I rock my hips looking for more, and he inserts a finger. “Julian! I want your cock.” I moan out. Tingles erupt over my entire body.

“Later, right now, I want you to come on my tongue.” He says before he begins to feast on me again. Glancing down my body at him, it’s unnerving when I see his eyes are on me. The look in his eyes tells me to lift my shirt, so I do and knead my breast. My other hand comes to his head, and I run my fingers through his hair.

He moans in praise, then takes my clit between his teeth and flicks it over and over with his tongue. I hit my climax with such intensity I clamp my legs around his head and cry out so loud I’m sure everyone within a ten-mile radius hears me.

When I come down from my high, I release my death grip on his head. He chuckles; standing, he wipes his hand across his mouth and pulls me up, kissing me long and hard before releasing me. I let out a deep, gratifying sigh and bite my lip. I want more.

“I need to take a shower and get ready for class.” He tells me, and I frown. “You can join me if you’d like, but we’ll only be showering.”

I glance up at him, and he smirks. “It’s not because I don’t want your tight pussy around my cock, but I don’t want to be late for class. And I look forward to having fun with you in my office later.” He winks at me, and I squint at him.

“Fine.” I still pout for good measure as he helps me off the counter.

“That’s my good girl.” He praises me as I begin my walk up the stairs. Smirking at him over my shoulder, he gently slaps my butt. I’m already looking forward to what will happen in his office later.



Sitting in my first class of the day, my stomach has an empty feeling. I twist the fabric of my skirt in my fingers. I didn't realize how much I depended on Julian's presence last semester. Knowing he was there calmed me. I knew if Josh, Tabitha, or Todd got out of hand, he'd protect me. They weren't in my other classes, so I didn't have to worry about them. But this class goes toward our degree, so they'll probably be here.

Raucous laughter drifts in from the hallway, and I brace myself as Tabitha walks in. I sit up straighter, refusing to give in to the nerves and letting her see how she affects me. More than I thought she did, apparently. Her laughter stops, and I know she's spotted me, but I ignore her. Of course, her ignoring me isn't going to happen.

"Oh, look!" She walks over and leans down. "Daddy isn't here to protect you in this class, is he?"

Glaring up at her, Josh hovers behind her, and I want to punch them both. What is their deal?

Refusing to cower, I stand and step into her space, making her stumble back into Josh. "Why are you so obsessed with me? What the hell have I done to you?"

She regains her stability and stands up straighter but stays where she's at. "I don't like you. Not everyone has to like you. I know that's a shocker!" She seethes.

Rolling my eyes, I huff. "Is that why you don't like me? Because everyone else does? You are pathetic. Maybe stop being a bitch, and people will like you."

Her eyes blaze in anger, and she opens her mouth to spew her hatred, but Todd walks between us and sits beside me. Tabitha glances between him and me in disbelief.

"You're going to sit with her, Todd?"

He grabs his laptop from his bag and places it on the table before him. "Yep!" He replies, not looking at her. He leans back in his chair and turns to me. "How was your holiday?"

Tabitha stomps her foot and screeches. “Come on, Josh!”

Taking a glimpse at Josh, I see he is glaring at me. What is his deal? Tabitha must have gotten in his head like she does everyone else. Looking away, I sit down next to Todd and raise an eyebrow. He shrugs and motions at me with his hand like he’s waiting for me to answer his question. *Right.*

“It was good. How was yours?” I ask him feeling out of sorts having a normal conversation with him.

“It was alright. I had to do some community service hours, but it wasn’t so bad.”

Before I can respond, the professor walks in and gets the class started. She’s gorgeous with her caramel hair cut in a bob and her long legs accentuated by her heels.

“Good morning! I’m Professor McIntyre, but please call me Kate.”

Todd sits up next to me and hums. “She’s fucking hot!”

Glancing at him in amusement, he glances at me and rolls his eyes. “I’m just looking; I won’t touch.”

I lift my hands in surrender. “You’ll get no judgment from me if you do touch as long as you touch with permission.”

He breaks into a smile and laughs softly. “I deserve that.” He leans closer, and I have to fight the urge to lean away. “And your secret is safe with me.”

“What?” I ask, and he arches an eyebrow. Shit! He knows. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

He shrugs and leans back in his chair. “I have no idea what I’m talking about half the time either.”

I rub my skirt between my fingers again and ignore the rock that dropped in my stomach. Are we that obvious? I trust him not to say anything for whatever reason, but if he notices, I’m sure others also notice. Turning, I glance in the direction Tabitha and Josh went. Tabitha is staring at me with a devious smile on her face. Fuck!

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

BAILEY



“THE ONLY reason I’m trying this place again is that I love you, Liv!” Ansley exclaims as we walk into the pub.

Liv shakes her head. “He handled it last time. And I called for reservations this time since there are so many of us.”

I’m not sure exactly what they’re talking about, but Caroline, Ansley, and Liv have been here before and didn’t receive the best service. We make our way up to the hostess.

“Hi!” Liv greets her. “I made reservations earlier this week. Olivia Burch.”

Ansley slides up next to her and smirks. “Olivia? Huh?”

Liv gives her a mock glare. “Shut it, Ansley!”

My eyes widen. I don’t think I’ve ever seen Liv get feisty before. But I am still getting to know her. She’s more my sister’s friend than mine. Lincoln grabs Ansley and pulls her against him.

Bass stands behind Caroline, his hands rubbing over her growing stomach. I bite the inside of my lip, wishing Julian could be so bold when we were out. He intertwines our fingers and looks at me. Like he can read my mind, he sighs and pulls me into his side before releasing me. He walks over to Connor and starts up a conversation with him.

Bec comes to stand next to me. We intertwine our arms and lay our heads against each other. “Is it getting hard to keep the secret?” Bec asks, and I exhale.

“I’m okay when we’re alone or at someone’s house. Only when we go out, and I see how Bass is with Caroline, and Lincoln is with Ansley. Of course, I understand we could run into any of his colleagues or a student, but it still sucks.”

“Just a little bit longer, and you won’t have to do this anymore.” Bec encourages, and I smile at her.

“What about you? Connor still completely oblivious?”

She huffs. “I swear if I wore a t-shirt that said I love you, Connor McMillan, he’d still not get it.” She pauses for a moment. “I’m thinking about signing up for the dating app Lincoln just launched. Maybe I latched onto Connor because he saved me. Maybe I need new prospects.”

I rub Bec’s arm and hug her. “Maybe.” I agree. She’s been saying this for a few weeks now. I don’t know if something happened or if she’s tired of waiting. “Maybe you going out with someone else will open his eyes. I see how he looks at you, Bec; he adores you; he doesn’t realize it yet.”

Before she can respond, Liv turns and motions for us to follow her. Glancing around the pub, I notice the place is packed. Whatever service issues they were having must have been fixed, or it wouldn’t be.

We all get seated. Julian sits next to me, and Connor sits next to Bec. The hostess hands us all a drink and food menu.

“Your server will be here soon.” She tells us and walks away.

Glancing around the table, I shake my head. I never thought I'd have friends like I do now. Finding my tribe is comforting; although we're all different, we mesh well. Ansley with her ballsy attitude, Liv with her quiet demeanor, Caroline with her glass-always-half-full attitude, and Bec with her sense of humor.

Add the guys to that; it's a lot of fun to watch. Ansley and Lincoln are bickering about something, while Bass probably whispers sweet nothings in Caroline's ear. Connor and Bec are laughing at some story Connor is telling her. Julian drapes his arm across the back of my chair and begins to run his fingers through my hair, and I relax.

Lincoln grabs Ansley by the back of the neck and kisses her. Julian chuckles next to me. "Our group is interesting." He whispers in my ear, making me realize how close he is.

"Yeah." I breathe out a laugh.

"Just wait until we get home, sweetheart," Lincoln says to Ansley for whatever she's mouthing off about. She looks up, sees me watching their interaction, and winks at me.

I snort, remembering our Thanksgiving conversation about how getting under his skin is fun because of the consequences. Glancing up at Julian, I wonder how he'd be with me. I was a brat initially because he was so hot and cold with me, but I haven't been so much since he's been hot. Thinking through a plan in my head, I glance at the menu. I shouldn't drink too much because we're going hiking tomorrow, and I don't want to do that hungover.

An older gentleman in jeans and a black button-up shirt walks up to the table and stands behind Liv's chair. Who is he? He is a sexy silver fox of a man. He leans down and whispers something in Liv's ear, and she nods. No one else seems to be paying attention, but I can't stop staring at their interaction.

"What can I get you all to drink?" He questions, and everyone's eyes fall on him. Julian leans forward and

exchanges a look with Connor, which makes me wonder. I make a mental note to ask Julian about it later.

Lincoln stands and shakes his hand. “It’s good to see you, Victor.”

So his name is Victor. He doesn’t move from behind Liv’s chair, but he does shake Lincoln’s hand and greets him.

After everyone orders drinks, Victor tells us the server will arrive in a minute to get our food order. He runs his finger over Liv’s shoulder, turns, and leaves. He has to be at least twenty years older than Liv. Her admonishment of age not mattering makes a lot more sense. It takes her a few moments to fall into conversation with Caroline, so I know he affects her. And he obviously likes her too. Maybe they have a secret relationship. Who knows?

Turning my attention to Julian, I catch his eyes on my breasts and chuckle. His eyes jump up to mine, and he grins at being caught. “What do you have to say for yourself?” I ask, moving my hand to his knee under the table and rubbing it up his thigh.

“What are you doing, baby girl?” He asks as I brush my hand against his cock. His abs jump, but he doesn’t stop me, so I grip him through his slacks and enjoy the feeling of his hard length in my hand.

Leaning over, I brush my breasts against his arm, and he tenses. “Claiming what’s mine,” I whisper in his ear as I squeeze him.

He tilts his head, so he’s looking down at me. “You claimed it a while ago.” He states, but he still doesn’t move my hand. Instead, he spreads his legs wider. My hand brushes his zipper, and I arch an eyebrow.

“Not publically,” I reply. My fingers find his zipper, and I pull it down, giving him time to stop me if he wants, but he doesn’t. He watches me. He grabs the napkin off the table and places it in his lap, and I bite my lip at the possibility.

Bringing my hand to my mouth, I lick it discreetly, and his gray eyes go black. Taking him out of his boxers, I begin to rub up and down his length. His breath whooshes out of him.

“Bailey?” Caroline calls out to me, and I turn my attention to her but keep my hand moving, focusing on not moving my arm and only my wrist.

“Yeah?” I reply.

Caroline glances between Julian and me, and I tighten my grip on him. His abs contract, but that’s the only reaction he has.

“How’s your first week back at school?” She asks. I work my hand up to his tip, swirl my thumb around the sensitive skin, gather the moisture leaking out, and then run my hand back down to the root.

“It’s okay. I’m taking four classes, so not quite the load as I had last semester.”

“Have you had any other issues like the library thing again?” Bass asks as I tighten my grip and rub up and down Julian’s cock quickly a few times. His hand comes down to grip his chair, and I know I’m starting to get to him. Everyone is looking at us now, so I slow my movements. Everyone knows about the library incident, but I haven’t told them anything else, especially after what happened to Ansley. It bothered Liv, so I’ve kept it to myself.

Glancing up at Julian. His face is calm and collected, and it pisses me off a little. I know the day he had me wear the vibrator in his class, I was not this calm.

“You can tell them what you want.” He whispers, and I run my thumb over his tip. His tongue comes out to lick his lip, and he inhales.

“I’ve had some letters put on my car,” I admit.

All of the girls sit forward in concern. It’d be comical if the subject weren’t so serious.

“What do you mean?” Ansley asks.

So, I come clean. I tell them about the letters, my suspicions about Josh, and how Tabitha has acted.

Caroline's hand comes down on the table in frustration. "I can't believe you didn't tell me, Bailey!"

"I didn't want to worry you. Julian knew, and he's been watching out for me. He comes to the boutique every night I close, and I've been staying with him. I practically live with him." I say defensively.

Caroline's mouth drops open. "I'm your sister, though."

Bass leans over to console her. I've obviously hurt her feelings, and I didn't mean to. But she hasn't always been there for me. I had to learn to take care of myself because she wasn't available. Removing my hand from Julian, I look between her and everyone else. Julian readjusts himself discreetly beside me and runs his fingers through my hair.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings," I tell her, and she shakes her head.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

Frustration and anger rise in my gut. "Because I don't tell you my problems."

A flush rises on her cheeks, and she starts playing with her necklace. "What do you mean?"

"You ignored me for years, Caroline. And I know it's because of your abusive ex-husband, but it still hurt to be completely cut out of your life. Whenever I tried to reach out to or talk to you, I had to feel around and make sure you were okay first. I never knew when we made plans if you would show up or cancel on me. I knew what you were dealing with, so I didn't want to add to what you were already going through. Just because you're healing and no longer in that relationship doesn't just make everything perfect. I'm learning to talk to you again, so please give me a break."

Pushing away from the table, I get up and walk outside. Pacing back and forth in front of the pub, I groan in

frustration. My eyes are watering, and I blink until they stop. I can't believe I just did that in front of everyone. She was just concerned, and I lost it granted; it needed to be said, but maybe not in front of everyone at a pub.

Running my fingers through my hair, I take a deep breath and turn to go back in, but I run into Julian. It reminds me of the day I met him. Running into his chest and him holding onto me so I don't fall. This time instead of releasing me, he pulls me closer.

"Are you okay?" He asks, and the tears I was trying to hold back begin to fall. I lay my forehead against his chest and shake my head as he rubs his hands up and down my back.

"I didn't realize how angry I was at her. She's my big sister, and I feel like she abandoned me." Leaning back, I glance up at him. "But it wasn't her fault. Her ex manipulated her so badly that she always walked on eggshells."

"It's okay to be angry and still understand," Julian replies. "But you also have to work on getting past it and not allow it to affect your relationship anymore."

Inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly, I nod. He gathers me in his arms and puts his fingers under my chin, lifting my face to his. He leans down and kisses me. "You'll both get through this. You both love big and hard."

Wrapping my arms around his waist, I hold him tight, and he lets me. It's the first time we've ever been in public and shown affection, but at this moment, I don't care.

"Bailey?" Caroline's voice drifts to me, and I push away from Julian. Glancing up at him, he gives me an encouraging smile and walks back into the pub, leaving us alone. We stare at each other awkwardly. She walks closer to me and gives me a small smile.

"I'm so sorry. You were right. You're learning to trust me again, just like I'm learning not to walk on eggshells around people." She steps closer to me and grabs my hands. "I wish I could go back and change a lot of things, but the effect it had

on my relationship with you and mom, that I wish I could change the most. You have no idea how much I missed you both. There were so many times I'd be lonely at home, wishing I was with you two." She sighs, and her fingers come up to her necklace.

"I'm sorry for the outburst. It wasn't the best place to say that." I tell her.

She pulls me into a hug, and I have to be careful not to squish her belly, but she holds me tighter, so I hug her just as tight.

"But it needed to be said. I'm so sorry, Bailey Bug. I promise I'm trying." She whispers the nickname she called me when we were younger. I let out a watery laugh.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you what was happening."

She shakes her head against my shoulder. "It's okay. I know Julian will protect you. He helped with Sebastian's crazy ex and Ansley's crazy co-worker. Just be safe. Okay?"

"Okay." I begin to pull back, but I feel something flutter across my stomach and gasp. We both pull apart, and I stare at her wide-eyed. "Was that the baby?" I screech, and she nods her head.

"Oh my goodness!" I rub my hands along her stomach and start talking to it. "Hey, sweet Mia! I'm your Aunt Bailey." There's another soft flutter, and I squeal.

"Sebastian is going to be so jealous you felt it first!" She exclaims, and I stand upright in excitement.

"I'm the first one to feel it?!?"

She nods, her eyes glimmering. I jump and clap my hands. She grabs my hand and pulls me into the restaurant.

"Come on, let's go break the news."

Laughing, I can't help the satisfaction of being the first person to feel the baby move. As we walk into the pub, I glance to the left and almost stop when I see Tabitha and Josh.

Josh looks angry, but Tabitha looks smug. She shakes her phone at me and mouths *I got you*.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

JULIAN



I AM ready to take Bailey on any surface in my house as soon as we walk in with her teasing at the pub, but she's been unusually quiet since we left. Unlocking the door, I let her in, and I'm about to tell her to take her clothes off when she turns to me.

"We need to talk!" She exclaims.

Closing and locking the door, I lead her further into the house. "Okay. What's going on?"

Sitting on the couch, I motion for her to sit with me, but she stays standing and begins to pace. "Tabitha and Josh were at the pub. After you went inside and Caroline and I talked. We walked inside to tell everyone about the baby moving. I saw them."

I watch as she paces and try to follow along. "Okay," I say again.

“When I saw them, Tabitha shook her phone at me and mouthed *I got you.*”

“I’m not following.”

She stops pacing and turns to me, slapping her hands against her thighs. “She saw us. She recorded our exchange outside. She recorded us kissing.”

Leaning further back into the couch, I bring my thumb up to my lip and rub it.

“Come here, baby.” I extend my hand to her, and she takes it, allowing me to pull her into my lap.

She pushes her face into the crook of my neck. “I may have cost you your job.” She whispers.

“No. I came outside looking for you. I held you. I kissed you. This isn’t your fault.” I know I should have been more careful. Jesus, I let her jack me off at a table with our friends. I have completely dropped my guard, and I don’t care.

She leans back and glances at me. “You’re not mad?” She asks, and I tilt my head at her.

“When have I ever been mad at you?” I question.

“When we first met, you were kind of an asshole.” She reminds me, and I laugh.

“It was my attempt to resist you. It didn’t work.”

She straddles me and smirks. “Oh yeah? What’s so irresistible about me?”

Bringing my hands around and massaging her breasts. “You have great tits,” I tell her, and her mouth falls open in surprise then she snorts.

“You know it used to bother me when guys would drool over my curves, but I love it when you do it.”

I stop massaging her breasts and give her my full attention. “You’ve never told me that.”

She puckers her lips and wrinkles her nose. “It’s never come up. But that’s why I waited. I wouldn’t let someone use my body to get off just because of how I looked. It’d be one and done. I knew my heart couldn’t handle that. So, I wore baggy t-shirts and jeans until I met you.” She looks away like she’s embarrassed.

“You helped me become more confident and appreciate what I have, and you weren’t even trying. I love it when you tell me I’m beautiful or call me your good girl. Every time it brings me to a higher level of confidence.”

Leaning forward, I kiss her along her jaw and gather her hair in my hand. “Well, you are beautiful. And you’re definitely my good girl and my dirty girl.” Grabbing her around the waist, I maneuver her, so she’s lying flat on her back, and I’m hovering over her. “You got me hard as a rock at the restaurant and left me hanging.”

She glances down toward my cock and then back up to me, raising an eyebrow. “You are not hanging right now. More like saluting.”

I growl at her, and she leans her head back, laughing. I love to hear her laugh. I love it almost as much as I love to listen to her come. Which she’s about to do in a few minutes. Reaching underneath her skirt, I pull her thong down her legs, quickly unbuckle my belt and unbutton my pants.

“Touch yourself, baby; make sure you’re nice and wet for me.” Her finger trails down between her legs, and she strokes herself. I remember the first time she did this and how hesitant she was. Look at her now. I kick my pants and boxers off and watch her face intently as she strokes over her clit.

“Are you wet?” I ask her, and she nods at me. Grabbing her under her knees, I pull her closer, line myself up, and sink into her. Both of us moan together. Clasp her hands, I bring them above her head and move my hips. Keeping her wrists secured in one hand, I grab a throw pillow.

“Lift your hips,” I demand as I grit my teeth. She does it, and I push it under her hips. She throws her head back at the new angle.

“Oh god! Julian...” I feel my orgasm about to hit me, and hers is about to hit too. I pull out of her, and her eyes fly open. “What the hell?!?”

Gritting my teeth, I stare down at her and say one word. “Edging.”

She stares up at me. “Like in the classroom?”

I nod. “Only if you want to.” I remind her. She whines and arches against me.

“I want to come.” She trembles under me.

I run my nose up her jaw and bite down on her ear. “You will. Trust me, baby girl. It’s so good. I promise.”

The pulse in her neck quickens, and she pants against me. “Okay.” Leaning down, I kiss her until she begins to grind against me. I sink into her again and groan. I move, and she tries to snatch her wrists out of my grip. “Julian, please, I need to touch you.”

Releasing her wrists, I quickly discard my clothing and hers, and she clutches at me, scratching down my back.

“Fuck! Bailey.” Her tight heat engulfs me, and I know if I don’t stop in the next second or two, I’m going to come.

“Julian! Oh god!” Her pussy flutters, and I yank myself from her. She whimpers and clings to me. “It’s so good. I’m so close.” Her voice cracks, and I don’t think I’ll be able to stop again.

I kiss her neck to her collarbone and try to soothe her. She’s feverish and staring up at me in desperation.

“You ready?” I ask her, and she nods. Leaning back on my shins, I pull her up. She gazes at me in confusion. “Ride me, baby girl.”

She smiles at me; I know she's everything I've been craving all my life. I have to make her mine. She situates herself and sinks down on me. We both throw our heads back as she begins to ride me.

"Oh god! Julian..." She pants and holds onto my shoulders as I watch as she engulfs my cock over and over again.

"You're doing so well, baby. You're so perfect." Clenching my jaw, I hold off my orgasm until she cries out and clenches around me. Her head falls into the crook of my neck, and I quickly move her to her back, chasing my orgasm. Tensing, I release into her and shout out her name.

She rubs her hands up and down my back as I slump onto her. She doesn't complain about my weight but holds me close. After a few minutes, I lean up and look down at her pushing her hair off her face.

"What did you think?"

She laughs and shakes her head. "That was..." She trails off. "Amazing." I lean down and kiss her.

"It was." I agree when I pull back.

"It was different than the classroom. That was great too, but..." She shrugs and gazes up at me with uncertainty. I push her hair away from her face.

"That was fun. We were playing. This was connecting on a different level." I explain, and she softens under me. She brings her hand up to rub along my jaw.

"I'm glad I waited for you." She breathes out, and my heart beats heavily in my chest. I lean down until my forehead is leaning against hers.

"I'm honored to be all of your firsts, baby girl. Trust me when I say we aren't done experiencing firsts. My greatest desire is to ensure you know how much I want you. That's never going away." I promise her. She shivers and arches against me. I lean down and kiss her.

Our tongues tangle together, and my cock begins to get hard again. She wraps her legs around my legs, and my balls tingle. Pulling back, I lean down and take her nipple, swirling my tongue around it. She rocks against me, and pleasure skirts up my spine.

I want to tell her she's mine. I'm obsessed with her. I love her, but I keep it all to myself. She deserves something different. Something better. But I'm taking full advantage of what I have right now.

"Julian." She stutters as my hips rock into hers again.

"You make me so weak, baby girl. I can't get enough." I murmur against her breast.

"Tell me I'm the only one for you." She gasps as I move harder and faster.

"The. Only. One." I grunt. "Always." I proclaim as we both fall apart.

CHAPTER THIRTY

BAILEY



“THIS IS beautiful!” I say for the twentieth time. Julian chuckles. Turning to him, I smile. “How did I not know this was here?”

He shrugs. “It’s on private property, so people don’t come here. Every once in a while, I’ll come across fishers.”

Julian took me hiking from his backyard, following the creek to this reservoir. He begins to unpack his bookbag. He packed some sandwiches and drinks. He gestures for me to sit between his legs, so I do.

“How are your classes going?”

“Alright,” I mutter.

“What’s going on?”

Turning so I can see him; I bite my lip. “Tabitha gives me shit in every class, and I’m pretty sure Todd knows about us. But he said our secret was safe with him. And Josh has become Tabitha’s lap dog, pretty much. What will happen if

everyone finds out about us? Especially if Tabitha did record us last night?”

He runs his fingers through my hair and pulls me close. “I’ve been thinking about that.” He replies, and I lay my head on his shoulder to listen to what he has to say. “While there are some parts of teaching I like. It is not something I want to keep doing.” He runs his fingers down my arm with one hand and rests his other arm in my lap.

“Yeah. You mentioned that before. So, what do you want to do? Do you want to be a detective again?” I run my fingers along his tattoo.

“No. I want to start my own private investigator business. I was talking to Connor, Bass, and Lincoln. They all have businesses and told me what I needed to start. So, I’m getting things in order, so this will be my last semester.”

Sitting up, I smile at him. “That’s amazing! You would do so well at that. Our friends have already used you. My sister told me Liv could build websites, and Caroline could help build you an app. Maybe I could help you? That would be a dream!” I ramble. I bounce in his lap at the possibility.

He stares at me in amusement. “I love how supportive you are. But I thought you wanted to become a lawyer.”

“Yeah. I’m not so sure anymore. I always wanted to be a lawyer because of my dad and because I was good at school. But I realize I was doing it just because, not because I wanted it.”

He tilts his head at me and grins. “I’d love for you to join me. You’d have to get your bachelor’s degree. But us working together would be a lot of fun.”

I sit up and clap my hands. “We could schedule meetings just to have sex.”

He throws his head back and laughs. “Baby girl, we’ll have to schedule meetings not to have sex. You won’t be able to keep me off you.”

I chuckle and kiss him on the jaw. “Have you found anything else about Josh? Or his foster family?” I haven’t received any more notes, but he always watches me, and I hate it.

“I sent a message to someone I used to work with asking for information. I was trying to be low-key, but his foster family lived in a town just a few miles from the city I worked in, and that isn’t sitting well with me.” He hands me my sandwich and leans forward, giving me a comforting kiss. A rock sits in the pit of my stomach.

“It could be just a coincidence, but I still want to check.” He wraps his hand around my neck and brings me close. “I have to make sure you’re safe.” He kisses me hard. Swallowing the lump in my throat, I take a deep breath.

“I’ve never had anyone look out for me. It’s nice not feeling alone anymore.” I murmur. A gush of breath hits my cheek, and he’s pulling me into his chest.

“Oh, baby girl. I cherish you. I will do everything within my power to always protect you.” He professes, and I believe him.



The following week in class, I realize I won’t have his protection if this is Julian’s last semester of teaching. Todd and I are talking about our weekends when Tabitha walks up with Josh on her heels.

“Do you know what I have edited and am ready to upload?” She asks. I glare at her and refuse to answer. She smirks. “I wonder if Professor McMillan will drop your skanky ass and date me instead to stop this video from leaking.”

I refuse to say anything because, for all I know, she could be lying. I won't be giving her any ammunition.

"What the hell are you talking about, Tabitha?" Todd asks

Tabitha tilts her head. Looking every bit as crazy as she is. "Don't you know Todd? Your girl here is sleeping with Professor McMillan."

I bite my tongue, trying my hardest not to react.

"You're crazy, Tabitha. There you go trying to start rumors again."

Tabitha stomps her foot. "I have proof!"

Todd scoffs and leans forward. "So, you have a sex tape?"

I have to stop the gasp that forms in my throat as I watch Tabitha's reaction.

"Well, no," Tabitha responds, grimacing.

"What do you have then?" Todd asks as he extends his hand, asking for her phone. But Tabitha holds it close to her chest.

"It's none of your business! I do have something, and I'll use it when I'm ready." With that, she walks away and sits across the room. Josh follows after her, but not before he glares at me. I sit back, not knowing what to say or think.

"She doesn't have anything," Todd whispers out of the side of his mouth. "Don't trust anything she says. She exaggerates everything. She may have you two hugging or kissing, but I wouldn't stress."

"A kissing video could still hurt Professor McMillan's career," I say under my breath.

"Talk to him. See what he says. I don't think she has the guts to do anything. But I wouldn't put it past Josh. You need to watch him more than you need to watch her. She's vindictive. He's planning something, and for some reason, he hates Professor McMillan."

My mouth drops open at his revelation, but before I can say anything, Professor McIntyre, or Kate, comes in and starts class. I pull my phone out and text Julian.

Me: I'm going to your office after my class. I need to talk to you.

Julian: I have a meeting with some colleagues. I can meet you in the hallway. It'll be okay if I'm a few minutes late.

I think about it for a moment. I don't want him to be late; we're already so close to getting caught.

Me: No, it's okay. It can wait. I have to go by my house to water the plants since mom is gone, but I'll come over after. We can talk then.

Julian: Okay. Be safe.

For the rest of the class, I'm barely listening. What did Todd mean when he said Josh was planning something? And then Julian said he was waiting to get the rest of the records on his foster family. Something isn't right. I haven't received any more notes, but he's always watching me.

Stealing a glance over at him, I catch him staring again, but he turns away. My stomach somersaults, and I know I have to find out what the hell his deal is.



I get home and check the mail first. The sun is already setting, and it'll be dark in just a few minutes. The one thing I hate about winter is how it gets dark so early. After I get inside, I lock the door and walk to the kitchen to begin separating the mail so that I can lay it out on the kitchen island.

Mom went on a two-week cruise with some of her girlfriends. They've been planning this for almost a year.

When she first told me about it, I was a nervous wreck. The thought of them crashing like the Titanic often crossed my mind. But she assured me she'd be fine. On the kitchen island, there's a note from mom.

Hey Honey - Be safe while I'm gone. I know you'll stay with Julian most of the time, but please don't let my plants die. I'll call you when I can. A package came for you. I put it in your room. Love, Mom

A package? I didn't order anything. Climbing the stairs, I enter my room and see the long rectangular package on my bed. Walking over to it, I look to see if it has a delivery date, but it doesn't. The package is black and has a light gray bow around it. Pulling at the bow, I open the top of the box and stare at the contents.

What the hell? Looking through the package, I try to find a card or something and finally see one poking out. Grabbing it, I read the card out of the envelope.

Twenty-one black-stem roses for how many years you've been alive. More years than my sister was alive. I will take the thing that means the most from him since he couldn't save what meant the most to me.

Gasping, I drop the card. What the hell does that mean? I grab my phone; it almost drops from my hand, but I catch it in time and call Julian.

"Hello?"

"Julian?!?" I cry out.

"Bailey? What is it?"

Deciding I'll come back and water the plants, I turn around to get out of the house and walk into the hallway. As soon as I turn the corner out of my room, I run into Josh.

"Oh my god!" Thinking quickly, I put my phone in my back pocket so Julian could hear. "What are you doing here, Josh?" My legs are shaking, and I feel like I might throw up.

His eyes are crazed. He walks past me and looks into my room. “I see you got my flowers. I sent them yesterday, but of course, you’ve been whoring around, and you weren’t here to get them. I thought about grabbing your mom, but she’s not who I wanted, so I bided my time, and look who showed up tonight.”

“How’d you get in?” I ask. I locked the door. Didn’t I? He steps out into the hallway again, and I back away.

“Your mom leaves a spare key under a rock.”

How the hell does he know that? Has he been watching my mom?

“What do you want?” My voice quivers. I have to get out of here.

He begins to stalk toward me. “You read my note, didn’t you?”

“From the flowers? Yeah...” How the hell am I going to get out of this?

“Told you she wasn’t as smart as everyone thinks she is.”

Turning around at Tabitha’s voice, I stare at her in shock and sweep a hand across my sweaty forehead.

“Surprise! Bitch!”

Then everything goes black.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

JULIAN



LEANING BACK in my chair, I tap my fingers as we wait for the head of the department and one more professor to show up. We're meeting in my classroom. I hope to hear from Lieutenant Carl today about Josh's foster family. It is strange to me that their files are closed. I wouldn't have to go through all the red tape if I were still a detective.

"How's your semester going, Julian?" Kate interrupts my thoughts.

"Good. Busy. How about yours?" I make conversation with her.

"Alright. I have this one girl, Tabitha. She drives me crazy. And that Josh that follows her around everywhere. I swear they were up to something today. They would not be quiet in class."

Chuckling, I nod in understanding. "I know you're not supposed to have favorites, but it's bound to happen."

She arches an eyebrow. “I’ve never heard that. I already have two favorites.”

“Oh yeah? Who’s that?” I ask her leaning forward.

“Todd and Bailey.” She states I have to force myself not to react.

“They are good students. I wasn’t too crazy about Todd initially, but he’s grown on me.”

Matthew and Dean walk in, stopping our conversation. Matthew is the head of the department, and Dean is another professor.

“Hey! Thanks for meeting last minute.” Matthew greets us as he takes a seat at one of the desks. He’s younger and more laid back than I am, but I like him.

“So, I know we’ve all had concerns about Tabitha. I have a meeting with her in the morning to discuss her behavior.” He informs everyone.

My phone buzzes, and I glance down at it.

Lieutenant Carl: The foster family’s records were closed because they requested it. Josh’s foster sister was murdered. It was the last case you worked on.

There’s ringing in my ears, and my body freezes. Fuck.
Fuck!

“Julian?” Matthew tries to get my attention, and my eyes begin to focus.

“Yeah?” It’s all I can say. My mind is whirling a mile a minute. Where is Bailey? Where is Josh? I promised her I’d keep her safe.

“I wanted to bring everyone’s attention to Josh.”

I tilt my head at the words coming out of Matthew’s mouth. They don’t make sense. Glancing back at my phone, I realize I didn’t finish reading the rest of the text.

Lieutenant Carl: I sent the information to the head of your department. They need to be aware of Josh's past, especially if he's possibly stalking this girl.

I didn't tell him the girl was my girl. I half listen to the rest of what Matthew is saying. I need to find Bailey.

"The rest of his files came in, and I learned his foster sister was murdered."

Kate gasps. "Oh! How awful!"

Sitting forward, I rub at the tingling in my chest.

"Yeah." Matthew agrees. "This is personal and not something I'd normally share, but Julian, you worked on her case when you were a detective."

Everyone's eyes turn to me. I'm still having a hard time focusing. Shaking my head, I force myself to snap out of it.

Turning to Kate. "You said you think Tabitha and Josh were up to something today?" I ask as I stand to my feet, dizzy but ignoring it.

Everyone stares at me in confusion.

"Yeah?" Kate responds.

Grabbing my bag. "I have to go."

"Julian! What is going on?" Matthew yells after me.

"I'm sorry, Matthew! I'll call you later."

Grabbing my phone, I pull up Bailey's name to call her, but just as I'm about to call her, she's calling me. Thank god!

"Hello?"

"Julian?!?" She cries out, and the small amount of relief I felt disappears.

"Bailey? What is it?" I begin jogging to my car. She went to her mom's house to water her plants. I should have had her wait in my office until after the meeting and gone with her after.

“Oh my god! What are you doing here, Josh?” I hear her say, but it comes out muffled. Josh is there in her house. I begin running at full speed now.

“I see you got my flowers. I sent them yesterday, but of course, you’ve been whoring around, and you weren’t here to get them. I thought about grabbing your mom, but she’s not who I wanted, so I bided my time, and look who showed up tonight.” Josh says, sounding manic.

“How’d you get in?” Bailey questions.

Keep stalling him, baby. I’m on the way. I climb into my car and connect to Bluetooth. Grabbing the detective bag, which I haven’t used in months, out of the back seat, I grab the recorder and start it before taking off.

“Your mom leaves a spare key under a rock.”

I let my guard down. I should have been watching him more closely. I knew something was off about him, but I allowed my obsession with Bailey to get in the way of my training.

“What do you want?” Her voice quivers, and my heart breaks. Dammit! I’m supposed to be there to protect her.

“You read my note, didn’t you?”

Note? What note?

“From the flowers? Yeah...”

I have to force myself not to panic. I have to get to her. I have to.

“Told you she wasn’t as smart as everyone thinks she is.”

Is Tabitha there too?

“Surprise! Bitch!”

There’s a loud crack, and I don’t hear Bailey anymore. I want to scream but don’t because I don’t want them to hear me. Bailey did the right thing.

“Josh! You said you weren’t going to hurt her!” Tabitha yells. “Oh my god! I’m going to jail. I’m so stupid!”

“Shut up, Tabitha, and help me get her to my car!” Josh screams.

“What? No!”

“You stupid bitch!”

There’s a scuffle and another crack. I floor it; I’m only a mile away.

“Fuck!” Josh yells. “Hello?”

He found the phone. I don’t say anything hoping against hope he thinks I’m not here.

“I know you’re there, Professor McMillan. I will kill her, and you won’t be able to save her. Just like you couldn’t save my sister.”

“Josh! I tried! I tried to save your sister.” I plead with him, but he scoffs.

“You didn’t try hard enough. She was the only family I had. The only person that ever loved me, and you didn’t save her. Now you’re going to know what it feels like.”

And the line goes blank. I slam my palm against the steering wheel.

“Fuck!”

Picking my phone up again, I call 911, tell them what’s happening, and then call Connor.

“Hey, man!”

“Get to Bailey’s house now! Call Bass and Lincoln, everyone!” My voice is desperate; he must hear it because he doesn’t question anything.

“Be there in fifteen.” And he hangs up. I’m hopeful when I pull up outside her house because Josh’s car and Tabitha’s are outside. The police have not arrived yet, and I’m not waiting. I

pull on every ounce of training I've been in, so I don't allow my emotions to take over. I will save her.

Grabbing my gun out of my bag, I park under the carport and look in the side door. He has Tabitha and Bailey tied up, from what I can tell. Trying the handle, but it's locked. He'll see if I try to enter this way or through the front.

They have a wooden gate leading to the backyard. Bailey told me her mom was terrible about keeping the back sliding door unlocked. Opening the gate, I stay low in case he looks out the kitchen windows. I reach a spot where I can stand up between a window and the sliding glass door and glance inside.

He has her and Tabitha tied to a kitchen chair facing the front of the house. I see blood on the back of Bailey's head, making me nauseous. He's pacing back and forth in front of them with what looks like a lead pipe in his hand. If I could open the door and shoot his arm, if that's all he has, this could be over.

Tabitha begins to stir, and Josh turns around. With his attention on her, I try the door to see if it's unlocked. It is, so I slide it a little.

"Josh?" She mutters. "I can't believe you did that."

I glance up in time to see him raise his other hand, which was hidden from my view. He has a gun. He points it at Tabitha.

"Josh? What are you doing?" Her voice shakes.

"You shouldn't have turned against me. Now you're a loose end." Josh says very calmly.

"No! I won't say anything. I promise!" Tabitha screams. I push the door open and raise my gun. I won't allow someone to get hurt again on my watch. His eyes lift to mine. He moves his aim; at first, I think he's moving it toward me, but he's moving it toward Bailey.

A lot happens at once my gun goes off, his gun goes off, and someone comes slamming through the side door in the kitchen and into the line of fire. Josh falls to the ground, but so does the person who came slamming through the door. My bullet hit Josh. Josh's bullet that was meant for Bailey hit the person who slammed through the door.

“No!” Bec's scream is unlike anything I've heard. That's when it hits me. The person who took the bullet meant for Bailey was Connor.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

BAILEY



MY EYES flutter open. The first thing I notice is the dull pain in my head, and the second is the tight grip on my hand. Moaning, I turn my head, and Julian’s head pops up from where it lies on the bed beside my arm. Relief washes over his face, and my eyebrows cave in.

“Bailey? You’re awake.” He says, leaning over and kissing me on the forehead. I try to speak, but my mouth feels like cotton. He grabs a cup with a straw and holds it to my mouth so I can take a sip.

“What happened?” I ask. He runs his hand through his hair and brings my hand up to his lips.

“Josh attacked you. He hit you on the head with a lead pipe and knocked you out.” He explains.

“That explains the pain in my head.”

He kisses my fingers. “I’m going to buzz the nurse and tell her you’re awake.” He pushes the button, and I try to

remember everything.

“What about Tabitha? She showed up.” Everything is so fuzzy, but I remember her being there.

“She’s in a regular room. She freaked out when he hit you. I think she thought he was going to scare you. I don’t think she realized he was going to hurt you. So, he hit her with the lead pipe too.”

I gasp, wincing at the pain that causes. He leans over me, fussing.

“We can talk more later, okay? I’ll answer more questions when you’re feeling a little better.” He promises, but I put my hand on his arm.

“Wait. You said she’s in a regular room. Where am I?” I question. He tilts his head. He averts his gaze and grimaces.

“You’re in the ICU.”

Before I can respond, the nurse walks in and looks between us.

“Hi, honey! It’s good to see you’re awake.”

Squinting my eyes at her, I swallow. “How long have I been out?”

She looks at my chart and gives me a gentle smile. “Almost two days.”

My mouth pops open. “What?!? Where’s Caroline?” I ask Julian. His mouth thins. It is dark outside; maybe she went home to get some rest. “Or Bec? Is she okay? Have you been able to get in touch with my mom?” Julian doesn’t answer any of my questions. He has a distant look in his eyes, but before I can ask why, the nurse interrupts.

“That’s a good sign that you remember all of those people. Do you remember your name?”

“Bailey,” I tell her.

“When’s your birthday?”

“January 11th.”

“What year is it?”

I scowl. Tired of all the questions. “2023.”

“Good. I need to check the back of your head, and I’ll leave you alone.” She says. I glance at her name tag and see her name is Lily. Julian hovers, but she shoos him away and helps me sit up.

“Did you have to shave any of my hair?” I ask. Praying they didn’t. I have no idea if I had to have stitches or not.

“No. You didn’t need stitches. Head wounds always look worse than they are. You did have a concussion, so we closely watched you.” She touches around the wound, and I wince. “It will be tender for several weeks, but it will heal nicely.”

“Why did I stay passed out for two days?” I ask her. She helps me lie back again.

“There’s no telling. Everyone responds to trauma differently. You’ve had a lot of people concerned about you, so I know they’ll all be happy to see you’re awake.” She encourages.

“Will they be able to visit?” I’m not sure with it being the ICU. She gives me a soft smile.

“Yes, on this side of the ICU.” She shares a look with Julian, and he presses his lips together and looks away.

“Is everything okay?” I ask. But before he can answer, there’s a knock on the door, and everyone is filing in.

“Oh my god! You’re awake!” Caroline cries out.

“Speaking of,” Lily says. “Be careful with her.” She warns. “Her head is still tender.”

Caroline comes over, hugs me, and begins to cry. Bass stands behind her, looking exhausted.

“I’m so glad you’re okay.”

I hug her back with one arm because the other is hooked up to an IV, and it's hard to bend. Caroline finally lets me go, and everyone else comes to hug me one by one. Ansley, Lincoln, then Liv, and they look just as exhausted. Have they all been up here the past two days waiting for me to wake up? Bec is the last one to hug me. Her eyes are red, and she has bags under them. Glancing around, I pause.

“Where's Connor?”

Caroline wraps her arms around Bass, and Liv pulls Bec close. Lincoln slaps Julian on the back, and I study him, confused.

“Julian? What happened?”

He runs his hands through his hair. There are tears in his eyes. I motion for him to come closer. He walks over and sits on the bed, picking up my hand and holding it.

“I don't know how much you remember. You called me. I was at school. So, I called the police, then called Connor and told him to get Bass and Lincoln. I wasn't sure if I'd get there first or need help. I did get there first. I was at the back of the house. Josh had you and Tabitha tied to kitchen chairs. Tabitha came too, and he was going to shoot her.” He takes a deep breath.

“I couldn't let him do that. So, I stepped into the kitchen and was going to shoot him. He saw me and was moving to shoot you. He wanted to punish me. Connor came in the side door. He thought Josh was about to shoot me, so he was going to tackle him. Instead, Josh shot him.”

My hand comes up to cover my mouth, and my eyes burn. “Oh, my god.” I look over at Bec, and she's crying. “Is he?” I can't even say it. Julian shakes his head.

“He's alive, but he's not doing good. He was shot in the stomach. He had a lot of internal bleeding. He's had two surgeries. He might have to have another surgery. He's on the other side of the ICU and being monitored closely.”

My eyes flit around the room, taking in everyone's somber expressions. I want to hug Bec again so tight. I know this has to be killing her. I bring Julian's hand to my mouth and kiss it.

"I'm so sorry, Julian."

The nurse comes in and claps her hands. "Alright, everyone visiting hours are over. I know I won't be able to get rid of the boyfriend, but everyone else has to go."

Everyone comes over and gives me hugs again.

Caroline leans over and kisses the top of my head. "I'll be up here as soon as I get off work. I called and left mom a voicemail to give me a call as soon as she could, but I didn't give her any details because I didn't want her to freak out." She promises.

"Caroline, you do not have to come to work." Lincoln scolds her, and she sighs.

"We have another launch coming up." She replies, and he tilts his head at her and raises an eyebrow. "Alright. Well, I'll be up here sometime tomorrow." She tells me.

"Okay. Love you, sis."

She hugs me again. "I love you too. So much!"

Bec walks over, and I grab her hand. Looking to the nurse and then at Julian. "Can we get a minute?"

The nurse sighs but nods and walks out. Julian leans over and kisses me on the forehead before walking out.

Pulling Bec down, she sits next to me. I hold onto her hand. "I'm so sorry, Bec. How are you doing?" Tears gather in my eyes and fall down my cheeks at the pain on her face.

She begins to cry as she wipes frantically at her cheeks. "I can't stop crying. I try, but then I'll think, what if I never hear one of his stupid dad jokes again, and I'll start all over again."

Opening my arms, I motion for her, and she lays her head on my chest as I wrap my arms around her and stroke her hair, ignoring the pull of the IV.

“He’s strong, Bec. He’s going to make it through this.” I’m saying it as much for me as I am for her, but I believe it wholeheartedly.

“I know.” She croaks. “I’m so scared. I lost my grandpa. I can’t lose him too.”

I kiss the top of her head and stroke her hair again. “You won’t. If you need to cry, you can cry with me. Okay?”

She sits up and wipes at her cheeks again. “Okay. I hate crying. But I haven’t been able to stop.”

“There’s nothing wrong with that. Sometimes that’s the only way to let it out. No one is going to think any less of you.”

She grabs a tissue from the box next to my bed and snorts. “I love you. You know that?”

“I love you too.”

She gives me one more hug. “I’ll get Julian so he can come back in before he has a fit.” She gives me a small wave before leaving.

I chuckle and close my eyes as I wait. All of that left me exhausted. Thinking back to what led me to be in the hospital, I remember the roses and the note Josh sent me.

Twenty-one black-stem roses for how many years you’ve been alive. More years than my sister was alive. I will take the thing that means the most from him since he couldn’t save what meant the most to me.

Julian walks back into my room and gives me a tired smile.

“Did you know Josh had a sister?”

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

BAILEY



JULIAN CLOSES the door and cants his head at my question. I'm exhausted but determined. I want, no, I need, to know what's going on. I've been kept in the dark long enough. He walks over to the bed, looking just as exhausted as I feel, and I think about all he's been through the past two days. He sits down, and I put my finger up.

"Before you answer that. How are you doing?" I place my hand on his knee, and he puts his on top of mine, intertwining our fingers. His hand trembles in mine, and I hold it tighter.

"It's my fault. I shouldn't have called him. I would have shot Josh before Connor got in the way. And I should have asked Lieutenant Carl about Josh sooner. I knew there wasn't something right about him. But I've been trying to step back from that life, even if our friends won't let me." He sighs, sounding tired and defeated.

"You could have said no when they asked," I tell him. "Maybe you didn't want to. And we just talked about you

starting a private investigation company the other night. Don't let this one incident get in your head." I say softly.

He stands from the chair and begins to pace. "Look at where you are, Bailey. Look at where Connor is. It's my fault!" He cries out. "And this isn't the first incident."

Tears gather in my eyes at his distress, but I hold them back. "Come here," I whisper. He stares at me momentarily before returning to the chair to sit down.

"No." I pat the bed. He hesitates a moment but sits next to me. Holding my arms out to him like I did Bec, I silently hope he doesn't reject me. It's the first time I've felt this way since we became official. He doesn't; he leans forward, wraps his arms around my back, and lays his head in the crook of my neck.

I can only rub his back with one hand because of the IV in my other hand, but I hold on to him tight. This strong, amazing man can't let go of his guilt.

"I tried to save them. I did." He whispers. "I was too late."

I don't know who he's talking about, but that doesn't matter. What matters is he needs me to comfort him. Turning my head, I kiss his forehead.

"I know you did everything within your power. That's who you are." I tell him, and he leans back to stare at me. His thumbs come up and gently wipe away the tears I'm crying for him, Bec, and Connor.

"What did I do to deserve you, baby girl?"

Tilting my head at him and ignoring the dull ache in my head, I ponder his question. This isn't the first time he's said this to me. Bringing my hand up to rub his jaw, I run my finger over his bottom lip.

"You deserve to be loved, Julian. You know that, right?" As soon as the words are out of my mouth, I flinch. We haven't said the "L" word, but that's how I feel, and I'm not backing down. He stares at me in shock.

“You love me?” He questions like he can’t believe it.

“I do. You’re everything to me and so much more. Even though we weren’t on the best terms, you still came and found me in the library that day. You helped me close at the boutique and made sure I was safe. You didn’t treat my virginity like it was some trophy. You made my first kiss the best first kiss in the history of first kisses. And you did save me. If you hadn’t shown up, I wouldn’t be here. You’re an amazing man. So, of course, I love you.”

He leans down and kisses me. “I love you, baby girl. I’ve loved you for a while, but I thought maybe I was just a phase for you.”

I huff and feel tears gather in my eyes again. “Definitely not. I was waiting for you. I didn’t know it.”

“I’m never letting you go now.” He says against my mouth, and I smirk.

“Good. I’m never letting you go either.” I reply, and he kisses me. He sits back and plays with my fingers for a few seconds.

“Please tell me what happened. First, what happened when Josh attacked me, and then tell me about Josh’s sister.”

He intertwines our fingers and inhales. “The person I messaged to get more information about Josh’s foster family replied to me. He replied in the middle of the meeting, I told you about that Matthew called. Apparently, everyone has been experiencing issues with Tabitha, so he was supposed to have an appointment with her yesterday to discuss her behavior. Anyway.”

His palm gets sweaty in mine, and he tries to pull it back, but I hold fast. He stares at me, and I begin to trace his tattoo, knowing it comforts him.

“When I found out Josh lived close to the city I used to live in, it started bothering me. I’ve dug into his records and knew he grew up in several foster homes, but when he was fifteen, that was the last one. It stuck. I didn’t see anything out

of the ordinary. When things started happening with you, I did try to get records on his foster family, but they weren't easy to get. So, I asked my old lieutenant."

He pauses and takes a deep, shaky breath. "Anyway, he texted me in the middle of the meeting and said his foster sister was murdered. Everything clicked for me. Where he was from, him possibly stalking you, becoming friends with your childhood friend turned nemesis and his hatred for me. He was targeting you because he knew I loved you and wanted to hurt me."

I gasp. "The note. It makes sense now." I whisper, and Julian nods. "You saw the note?" I ask.

"Yeah. After everything..." He pauses and swallows. "The police showed me. It confirmed for me why he did what he did."

"Is Josh dead?" I mumble, and Julian nods.

"Yes. I shot him." He takes another deep breath. "The lieutenant also sent the information to Matthew, who announced it at the meeting. Kate was saying Josh and Tabitha were disrupting her class that day because they were planning something, so I kept asking questions, and I knew. So I left and was about to call you. But you were calling me. You did so well, baby girl putting your phone in your back pocket. I was able to record a lot of the conversation. Tabitha is in some serious trouble. She's probably going to jail for some time, too, unless you don't press charges against her."

I tuck that information aside, wanting to hear the rest.

"I heard him hit you over the head, and Tabitha freaked out. She thought he was just there to scare you. She didn't want to hurt you. So, since she was no longer on his side, he hit her over the head and knocked her out too. He found your phone and told me he would kill you, and I wouldn't be able to save you just like I couldn't save his sister."

My stomach drops at his revelation, but I ignore that for now.

“So, I called 911, and then I called Connor and told him to get to your house and bring everyone. I was desperate and acting on pure emotion instead of my training. I got there before anyone. I could see you and Tabitha and knew he’d see me if I tried to enter through the front or side door. So I went around back and hoped your mom didn’t lock it.

Thankfully she hadn’t. Josh was distracted, and I was trying to open the sliding door without drawing attention when Tabitha woke up. He was about to shoot her, so I raised my gun to stop him.”

He closes his eyes and tilts his head back; the muscles in his neck are corded. His fists are so tight his knuckles are white.

“Hey. Look at me.” I admonish him, and he does. “It’s over. Everyone is going to be okay. Even Connor. I know it.”

He nods slightly and exhales before continuing. “When I called Connor, he and Bec were at Caroline and Bass’ house helping them with the nursery. So, they all rushed over. Caroline had a key they used to come in the side door. When Josh saw me, he wasn’t interested in shooting Tabitha; he was moving to shoot you.

I aimed my gun between his eyes and shot him. At the same time, Connor saw his movement, and I think he thought he was about to shoot me, but either way, Connor would have done it. Connor rushed Josh and took a bullet to the stomach. Bec went ballistic. Bass had to hold her back.”

Some of the tension in Julian’s body releases. Talking it through probably helps him. Hearing the story makes me want to call Caroline and Bec and tell them how much I love them. I want to see Connor and tell him thank you. He saved my life. Scooting over in the bed, I motion for him to lay beside me.

“No, Bailey. I’ll hurt you.” He states, and I huff.

“Julian, I’m okay. My head hurts a little. You could call the nurse and ask if I can have some Tylenol, but then I want you

to lie down and sleep with me. I need to feel you against me. Okay?"

He stares at me, searching my eyes before nodding and pressing the button for the nurse. Leaning down, he kisses me.

"I love you, baby girl." He whispers against me.

"I love you too, so much."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

JULIAN



I WAKE up to someone clearing their throat. Moaning at the crick in my neck and the pain in my back, I'm careful, so I don't hurt Bailey. Sitting up slowly, I focus on where the noise came from and come face to face with the daytime nurse. She's not as friendly as Lily; she's kind of scary.

"What do you think you're doing?" She asks, and I have to force myself not to shrink away. Seriously, she's scary.

"She didn't want to sleep alone last night," I tell her, and she scowls but says nothing else. Bailey stirs next to me.

"Julian?" She calls for me, and my heart beats rapidly in my chest.

"Morning, baby girl. I'm here." I lean down and kiss her forehead as her eyes open. Seeing those beautiful green eyes after her being out for two days is a punch in the gut. I've never been so scared in my life.

“Alright, I need to get your vitals.” The nurse interrupts us. Bailey turns her head toward the mean nurse, that I’ve never learned the name of, and frowns.

“Ummm... I need to go to the bathroom.” They have a stare down for a moment before the nurse sighs.

“You have a catheter, so you can just go.” The nurse, I glance at her badge, Brenda, explains.

“I want to go to the bathroom,” Bailey tells her stubbornly, and I smirk, proud of her for standing up for herself.

The nurse nods. “Okay. We need to get you up and walking today anyway. Let me get another nurse to help me take it out, and we’ll help you go to the bathroom. Then, I’ll take your vitals. You’ll be moving out of the ICU today as well.”

After Bailey has gone to the bathroom and the nurse has taken her vitals, she’s sitting in bed looking much better. Some color has returned to her face, and her eyes aren’t as dull. She’s eating some Jello right now, like it’s the best meal on earth.

She licks her spoon and moans. I try to ignore its effect on my body, even as tired as I am. “I forgot how good Jello was.” She holds her spoon out to me. “Want some?”

I shake my head. “No, baby. You haven’t eaten real food in almost three days. So, I can imagine it’s probably really good.”

She starts to nod but winces and stops. I want to jump up and check on her, but I did that about thirty minutes ago, and she freaked out a little. My jumping at her affected her more than she realized. So, until we can talk through this, I will be careful with any sudden movements around her.

“You okay?” I ask instead.

She sighs and touches the back of her head gingerly. “Yeah. It’s sore.” Standing slowly and walking to sit beside her on the bed, I rub her arm.

“The doctor said it would take several weeks to heal.” I remind her.

“I know.” She places her empty Jello cup on the tray in front of her. “Could we go for another walk around the floor?” She asks.

“Of course.” I move the tray out of the way and help her move to the edge of the bed. She’s still hooked up to the IV, so I move the bag from above her bed to the pole like the nurse showed me earlier when they moved her from the ICU to her new room and help her stand to her feet.

She’s no longer in a hospital gown. Caroline brought her a bag of clothes, so she changed into leggings and a cropped t-shirt. She’s mouth-watering, and I feel like a complete ass checking her out when she’s in so much pain. We get out into the hallway and begin the slow walk. We’re passing the room next to hers when the door opens, and Tabitha and her mom step out.

“Why are you still here?” Bailey blurts out as she steps into me. I wrap my arm around her waist, holding her close. Tabitha has a bandage across her forehead covering the gash where she was hit.

“I, uh...” Tabitha glances back and forth between us and bites her lip before looking down at the ground. My hand balls into a fist at her cowardice. The nerve of this girl. Tabitha’s mom is the first to speak.

“She had some issues and had to stay longer.” Her mom answers for her. “But, it’s so good to see you walking around. How are you feeling?”

Bailey’s eyes keep flitting back to Tabitha. It’s the first time they’ve seen each other since the incident. “I’m okay. Still sore, but I’ll be okay.”

Tabitha steps forward, but Bailey moves back. I put myself behind her and wrap my arms around her, careful not to touch the back of her head. It’s out in the open now; even Matthew

knows about my relationship with Bailey, so there's no point hiding it.

"Sorry," Tabitha whispers. "I just wanted to say thank you for not pressing charges. And I'm so sorry. For everything. I know it doesn't even begin to cover the damage, but I'm getting help." She looks at her mom and wipes the tears that are falling. "I just wanted you to know that."

"Okay," Bailey replies. "I am going to get a restraining order against you, though. I never want to see you again, Tabitha."

Tabitha stares at her for a long moment before nodding. "Of course. I wish you the best."

Tabitha's mom pats Bailey on the arm and then guides Tabitha down the hallway. We both watch as they get on the elevator and disappear.

"To think, I used to make mud pies with her when we were little," Bailey says sadly. I walk around to stand in front of her and pull her into a hug.

"I know this isn't easy, baby. The judge will approve the restraining order, and hopefully, she will get the help she needs."

"I hope so." She says softly. We walk around the floor once before she's tired and needs to rest. When we enter the room, Caroline is staring out the window.

"Caroline?" Bailey whispers. Caroline whips around, and her face lights up.

"Look at you!" She hugs Bailey before stepping back and holding her at arm's length. "You look great, Bailey Bug."

I smirk at the nickname. Cute.

"Did you wind up going to work today?" Bailey asks as she walks back over to the bed and gets in. I help get her situated and move her IV while Caroline watches us with a grin.

“Yeah, but I was getting on Lincoln’s nerves, so he told me to leave early.” She says, and Bailey rolls her eyes.

“Imagine that.” Bailey deadpans, and Caroline chuckles.

“That’s alright. I called Ansley, and she put him in his place real quick. Perks of being best friends with the boss’s girlfriend.”

We all chuckle, and Caroline smiles wide. She walks over and sits on the bed beside Bailey, so I sit in the chair.

“Mom called, and I told her what happened,” Caroline says. Bailey’s eyes widen.

“What did she say?”

“She’s on her way home, of course. She’s taking a red eye out of the Bahamas and should be home sometime in the morning. She said you’re going to need to be taken care of.” Caroline looks over at me and chuckles. “I told her you were in pretty good hands already.”

My heart drops. Is her mom going to take her away from me? Or try to stop us from seeing each other?

“Sis, she’s not going to try to make me stay home, is she?” Bailey asks, wringing her hands, and Caroline shakes her head.

“No. When I reminded her about Julian, her sails deflated pretty quickly. I also reminded her that her house had been the scene of a crime. It’s all cleaned up now, but I wasn’t sure how being there would affect you.” She sighs and glances between the two of us. “She did ask how big your house is, Julian, and if she could stay with you the first couple of nights, Bailey is released from the hospital. She’s going to ask you herself, but I figured I’d warn you.”

I lean forward in the chair and nod. “Of course, she can. I know she’s worried about Bailey, and her not being here when it happened is probably hard for her.”

Caroline smiles wide. “She is going to love you. I think she already does, but this will seal the deal.”

Chuckling, I shake my head. Caroline stands, walks over to her purse, pulls out a white bag, and hands it to Bailey.

“I brought you a cookie.”

Bailey stares at it with wide eyes. “From Crumbl?”

Caroline nods, and Bailey tears into the bag.

“Oh my goodness! Chocolate-covered strawberry.” She makes even louder moaning sounds than she did with the Jello. I will have a special date with my hand later at the rate this is going.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

JULIAN



I STARE down at Connor. We just got word he's going to be okay. Bec has been an absolute mess until we got the news. I've never seen her like this. She's always the one who is goofy and laughing. She's the one who shows up at my class wearing a penis costume. This past week has been hard on her, it's been hard on all of us, and I hate it.

When he wakes up, I hope he realizes how amazing Bec is and stops ignoring what's right in front of him. Only time will tell, I guess. They've kept him under all week, but he had his last surgery and has reduced his meds, so he should wake up any moment now.

Mom and Dad are outside waiting, along with everyone else. Only one person can be in the ICU at a time, and Mom said she thought I should be here when he wakes up. She wasn't sure if he'd remember what happened, but he'll want to know I was okay.

His eyes begin to flutter, and I prepare myself. What if he's angry? What if he hates me forever? I glance at the nurse, and she gives me an encouraging smile. He slowly opens his eyes.

"Connor?" She calls out to him, and he groans, his eyes falling closed again. My heart rate picks up, and I step forward, but she puts her hand up, stopping me. "It's okay. Everyone comes out of anesthesia differently. Give him just a moment." He opens his eyes again and blinks rapidly.

"Connor? I'm Claire. Your brother is here." His head moves toward her voice, and his eyes find her. "That's good." He tries to speak, but nothing comes out. "Want some ice chips?" She asks, and he nods. She scoops a piece of ice onto a spoon and puts it in his mouth. He sucks it and scowls at her.

"More?" She asks, and he nods again. So she gives him one more, and his scowl deepens.

"Jesus, woman. It's like trying to throw a cup of water on a blazing fire. Can you give me the whole cup?"

I chuckle, and his head snaps to me. "Julian? You're okay!" He tries to sit up but groans in pain. The nurse and I move toward him, but he shakes his head. "I'm fine." He glances up at me. "I hope that son of a bitch is dead."

The nurse's mouth pops open, and I take a deep breath. Connor is carefree and funny, but you don't mess with his family or friends. He's like a golden retriever, as loyal as they come but will snap your head off if you hurt anyone close to him.

"He is," I state.

"Good." His eyes turn toward the nurse. "Now, about that ice."

"You can't have the whole cup. You might throw up." She tells him, and he moans in frustration. "I'll give you more than one chip this time, though."

"Fine!" He snaps as he opens his mouth for more ice chips. Connor is also a bear when he's hurt. He broke his leg once

when he was a teenager, and I swear I wanted to break his other leg after being stuck in the house for six weeks. The only thing that stopped me was that I'd have to be stuck with him for another six weeks.

“Alright, well, mom and dad are waiting to see you outside. So is everyone else.” I turn around to leave.

“Wait!” he calls after me, so I turn back around. “Is Bailey okay? And the other girl? Bec and Caroline were losing their minds on the ride over.”

“Yeah. She got released yesterday. The other girl got released a few days ago.” I tell him.

“Good. I know she means a lot to you, Julian.” He tells me, and I nod.

“Yeah, she does,” I admit.

“Can you send in Bec first?” He asks, and I smirk.

“Of course. Prepare yourself. She's been losing her mind for the past week and a half.”

His eyes widen. “It's been a week and a half. Has anyone notified my employees? Or my clients?”

I walk forward and pat his shoulder. “Yes. Everything is taken care of. Surprisingly, Victor has helped a lot.”

Connor's eyes widen. “Victor? Victor Valentine?”

“Yeah. Lincoln knows him. Well, kind of. He doesn't know him like you know him. So, he reached out to him, and Victor said he was happy to help.”

Connor doesn't look convinced. “I swear if that man has done anything...” He trails off, and I shake my head.

“I think he's turned a new leaf. I do. We all know who the evil one was, and it wasn't him. From what I've heard, they are no longer friends. Victor has cut all ties with him.” Connor's eyes begin to droop, so I stop talking. “Okay. I'll grab Bec. I'll come to visit you later.”

He nods, and I turn to leave again, thankful my brother is still alive and well and here to drive me crazy another day.



Walking into the house, I smell something fantastic. Bailey's mom, Melissa, will stay for a week and then go home. Although, she admitted to me last night she wasn't sure if she could stay there after knowing her daughter was attacked even if her attacker was dead.

Making my way into the living room, Bailey's mom sits on the couch reading. That's where Bailey got her love of reading. I wonder if they read the same type of books but immediately dismiss it from my head because I do not want to think about that.

"What smells so good?" I ask her, and her head pops up.

"Oh! I'm making some soup. It's Bailey's favorite. We could have it for dinner tonight. I hope you don't mind."

I shake my head. "No. I don't mind at all. I can't wait to try it. Where is Bailey?" I ask her.

"She's upstairs laying down. Her head was bothering her, and she couldn't get comfortable on the couch."

"Okay. I will check on her and give her an update on Connor." I tell her.

"How is he?" She calls out after me.

"He's awake and grumpy as hell. But he's alive, so that's what matters."

She chuckles and nods. Turning, I take the stairs two at a time. My bedroom door is open, but I still try to be quiet when I walk in because if Bailey's asleep, I don't want to wake her. She's turned away from me, so I zone in on the back of her

head. It's beginning to heal and scab over. I hear her sniff, and her hand wipes at her cheek.

"Bailey?" I whisper, and she stiffens. Walking to the bed quickly, I sit down and rub her arm. "Are you crying?" I ask her.

She doesn't respond, and I hate it. I want her to tell me what's wrong, but I kick my shoes off and lay beside her. Wrapping my arm around her waist, I kiss her shoulder.

"I'm here," I tell her. She rolls away from me and sits up. She wipes at her face again and stares down at me.

"Julian, do you trust me?" She asks, and my eyebrows cave in. I push up to a sitting position and lean against the headboard.

"Of course I do. Why?"

She sighs and looks up at the ceiling. "You keep saying you'll tell me about Josh's sister, but you don't."

Now it's my turn to stiffen. She leans forward and grabs my hand turning it over in hers; she begins to trace the lines on my palm.

"I know it was traumatic. Whatever happened. But I know you're having nightmares, and I think talking about it might help. Maybe you don't want to talk to just me, that's fine. I could go with you to a therapist, or you could go by yourself." She pauses like she's trying to say the right words. "I don't want to push you, but I want to help you. I love you, and seeing its effect on you breaks my heart."

She knows about the nightmares. She starts to cry again, and I pull her onto my lap and hold her as tight as I can without hurting her.

"Oh, baby. I love you so much." I kiss her forehead and hold her against my chest, resting my chin on her head.

"It has nothing to do with me not trusting you. I have kept this inside for years, and the thought of talking about it scares me, to be honest. When it happened, the lieutenant told me I

had to see the counselor we had at the station, or he was taking me off the street. I refused, so he took me off the street. I put in my notice and wound up here being a professor.” I explain to her. She’s started tracing my tattoo as she listens to me, and it’s calming.

When I used to think about that, I was angry that the lieutenant didn’t understand I couldn’t talk about it. He didn’t give an inch, though.

“I don’t want to force you to talk about it.” She whispers. “Just know when you’re ready. I’m here. Okay?”

I sit and think for a moment. Not telling is what got us in this mess, to begin with. Well, not really; what got us into this mess was my not finding out about Josh’s foster family sooner. But when Josh first showed up and tried to get close to Bailey, if I had told her, maybe he would have slipped with some information, and she would have recognized it. Who knows?

Keeping it to myself isn’t working anymore. Being closed off isn’t working anymore. I almost lost the love of my love and my brother. I need to talk to someone, and she’s the only person in the world I trust with my soul.

“How long have you known about the nightmares?” I ask her. She stops tracing my tattoo and glances at me with guilt in her eyes.

“It happened the first night I stayed over. It’s not every time, but you’ll twitch, and you keep saying *take me* over and over again. Usually, if I start combing my fingers through your hair or get close to you, it stops. I’ve been selfish. Things were going so well; I was scared that things would change again if I asked about them.” She whispers the last sentence, and I sigh.

“I’m hooked on you now, baby girl. I’m never letting you go. We’ll work through this. Starting by me telling you my story.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

JULIAN



FOUR YEARS Earlier

The fingerprints came back from the murder weapon, and they belonged to Cory Hastings. Finally! We have been searching for this guy for the past five years, and we have him. Walking to my partner's desk, I tap on it once.

"We got him!" I exclaim. Brooks looks up at me with excitement in his eyes. I show him a picture of the guy. We run his background; he has a few misdemeanors but nothing major.

"We'll have to watch him. See if his routine gives him away." Brooks says, and I nod in agreement. Over the next month, we take turns watching him, but he doesn't do anything out of the ordinary. It doesn't raise any red flags because our guy only strikes every few months, sometimes every six months.

Hopefully, this time we're onto him before he can strike again. He has a thing for younger girls, and every time one comes up missing, it guts me, and then if we find their body, because sometimes we don't, I don't sleep for days.

A nineteen-year-old girl came up missing recently, so Brooks and I have been working overtime trying to bring him down, but he hasn't done anything out of the ordinary. Brooks is out watching him now while I pour over evidence and statements. Something hasn't been sitting right with me the past few days, and I can't put my finger on it.

My phone rings, so I grab it. "Hey, Brooks! How's it going?"

"You've been watching the wrong person Julian." A sinister voice comes through on the other end. "And now your partner and the girl are going to die."

Standing up in my chair, it falls to the ground causing everyone to turn and look at me. A pit forms in my stomach as I get my lieutenant's attention and write on paper.

He has Brooks and the girl.

The lieutenant jumps into action and tells someone to begin tracking the location of Brooks's phone.

"Got him, sir!"

"I'm going to find you, and I'm going to kill you." I seethe, and he chuckles.

"Good luck." He hangs up, and I run my hand through my hair.

"Where do I need to go?"

"I don't think you need to go. You're too tied to this emotionally." Lieutenant Carl says, and I stare at him in shock.

"I'm going. That's my partner. We've been going after this asshole for years! Where am I going?" I ask again.

“Fine. But you’re not going by yourself. His phone was tracked near the basketball arena, but he probably knows it’s being tracked, so he’ll get rid of it.” With that, I take off.

Thinking back to everything I’ve studied about this guy, I know he’ll take them somewhere in the city that’s secluded but is also easily accessible. He never does it at the same place twice; eventually, he’ll run out of locations. At least, that’s what I keep telling myself.

When I get to the basketball arena, I pull up the area map on my laptop, looking within a three to five-mile radius. The girl was reported missing three weeks ago, so he’s kept her alive longer than the other girls. Why? Was it to lure us into a false sense of security?

Other police officers begin arriving, and one approaches me. “Do you know where you’d like us to look?” She asks. I glance at her name tag, Cortez. She’s new. The other police officers don’t approach me often.

But I know I need help, so I answer her. “He likes for his victims to be found quickly. So, he usually does it somewhere they’ll be found the next day or two. He did it in a janitor’s closet once.” I tell her, and her eyes widen.

“We’re looking at storage units, warehouses, places under construction, closets, anywhere,” I state, trying not to sound defeated. How are we going to look in every possible place? He’ll never run out of locations. We have to find him.

We’ve been searching for an hour and found nothing. “Fuck!” I yell as I walk out of the warehouse. I was so sure they were going to be in there. Someone called the station saying they saw someone being suspicious. It was me holding on to the last shred of hope I had.

My phone rings, and I answer it without looking. “Yeah?”

“You’re so close.”

My heart stops, and I begin to glance around. Getting the attention of the other police officers, I point to my phone and mouth it’s him.

“You’re not going to get here in time.” He says.

“Let me talk to Brooks,” I demand, and the guy chuckles.

“Why would I do that?”

I run my hand through my hair. “He has a family, man. His wife just had a baby. Take me instead.” I plead.

“What about the girl? Who’s going to take her place?” He asks, and I want to scream.

There’s shuffling on his end, so I listen. “Say bye, Brooks.” He states.

“No!” I exclaim.

“Julian! Tell Mona I love her. Okay?” Brooks cries out.

“I’m going to find you! You’ll tell her yourself.” I cry out. And then I hear gurgling and silence.

“Tsk tsk, Julian. You should have assured him you’d tell her. Maybe I’ll find her and tell her myself.”

“Listen here, you son of a bitch! I will find you and kill you with my bare hands. I will enjoy watching the life drain out of your eyes.” I exclaim.

“Hm... You’re beginning to sound like me.” And he hangs up.

“Dammit, all to hell!” I scream. My partner is dead, and I didn’t listen to his last promise. What kind of sick son of a bitch am I? Shoving my phone back into my pocket, I ignore my hand shaking. Get your shit together.

“Julian?” Cortez calls out to me. “We heard something coming from the back of the warehouse.”

“I searched back there,” I tell her.

“No. It sounds like it’s coming from inside the walls.” She replies. We all take off to the back of the warehouse and look at the walls to see if there’s anything out of the ordinary.

“Detective! There’s a seam here.” One of the officers calls out. I run over to inspect it, and it does look out of the

ordinary. There is an exit leading outside next to the seam.

“Go outside and look around. See if you can see anything out of the ordinary. Try to be quiet. If he is in there and knows we’re on to his location, he could kill the girl if he hasn’t already.” I tell them.

I didn’t hear her scream or anything over the phone. She could be knocked out. That’s the best-case scenario. Everything in me is praying she isn’t dead. One of the officers comes back in and motions for us to follow him outside. He points out a spot in the corner of the warehouse. He pulls back the siding, and it takes a moment for my eyes to take in what I’m seeing.

He’s not holding them here. This is where he stores his things. There are shelves with jars of body parts on one side of the wall; on the other side, there are shelves with tools, and he has a desk with a computer.

“Someone stay out here and keep watch. And someone call the lieutenant.” I command as a few other officers, and I slide into the room.

The computer is turned on, and the video on it is horrific. The first thing I see is Brooks strung up to a pipe. His throat was cut, and he bled out. I grimace at the sight. What am I going to tell Mona? Next to him is the girl. Her head is bobbing against her chest, but it looks like she’s breathing. He records himself killing his victims. That must have been the noise we heard.

One of the officers steps up next to me. “They’re at the basketball arena.”

My head snaps to him. “What?!?”

“I’ve done security there several times. That is definitely the basketball arena.”

“We searched the basketball arena,” I tell him.

“Maybe he took them there after we searched, but that is the basketball arena.” He states adamantly.

“We need to go!” I motion for him to leave the room, and we meet the other officers outside. Cortez is on the phone with the lieutenant, and I grab the phone from her.

“He’s at the basketball arena,” I tell him. “One of the other officers.” I glance at his name tag. “Rex says he’s done security there a lot and recognizes it from the video in the room we found,” I explain.

“Alright. We’ll send officers and Swat down there. But officers need to stay behind in the room just in case he goes back. We have to catch this guy.” He replies.

“Agreed.” I hang up.

“Rex, you’re coming with us since you’re familiar with the arena. Do you know what room they’re in?” I ask him.

“Not the exact room, but I know about where they are. So, it won’t take long to find them.”

“Good. Cortez, you stay behind.” I grab two other officers to stay with her, and the rest of us take off.

We get to the arena, and Rex leads us to the basement. Swat is already there. They get in line on one side of the hallway. While Rex, the Lieutenant, a couple of officers, and I get in a line on the other side.

We check each room and come up empty, but when we get to the last one in the hall, I know it’s the one. Swat is about to breach the door, and my phone vibrates. I want to ignore it, but something in me tells me not to. So, I grab it. It’s a restricted number.

“Hello?” I answer, and everyone turns to me.

“I see your officers found my room. They’re about to die.” He states.

My eyes fly to the lieutenant. “Tell Cortez to get out of the room,” I whisper.

“No need to whisper, Julian. I know you’re here. Haven’t you realized yet I coordinated this entire thing.”

I glance at Swat and motion for them to enter the room.

*“You’re about to find out exactly what being me is like.”
He hangs up.*

I watch Swat get into position and try to process what he just said. They try the doorknob first, but it doesn’t open. They get into position to kick it open.

His words hit me. He has the door rigged.

“Don’t!” I scream at the same time they kick the door open.

There’s a blood-curdling scream from the girl in the room and then silence, and then there’s a small blast that knocks those close to the door off their feet and makes those of us further away hear ringing in our ears.

I rush forward into the room and see Brooks hanging there, lifeless. And the girl, she’s dead too.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

BAILEY



I STARE at Julian in horror. “Did you ever find him?” I ask.

He shakes his head. “I didn’t, but he was found. Cortez was smart. She felt something wasn’t right in that room, so she grabbed as many videos as possible. She also grabbed the computer. They were waiting outside when the bomb went off. She’s a detective now. She probably would have been my new partner, but I resigned because I refused the counseling.”

I climb back into Julian’s lap. While he told me the story, I moved to see him. Holding him close, I kiss him all over his face. He gives me a small smile and wraps his arms around my waist.

“I’m so sorry you had to go through that. I can’t imagine what it was like losing your partner and the girl. How are his wife and son?” I ask.

He sighs. “The last I heard, they were doing well. I haven’t kept in touch with her. I was the one that broke the news to

her. The last time I saw her was at his funeral. I will never forget that day for as long as I live. I do send them birthday and Christmas cards. I know that's not a lot, but it's all I've been able to bring myself to do."

Wrapping my arms around him, I hug him tight. "I wish I had the right words to say. This may take years to get over. You may never get over it. But I want you to know I'll always be here, and you can always talk to me or not talk to me if you need to go for a hike or sit quietly. I'll be here. Always."

He runs his nose up my jaw and hums. "I like the sound of that, baby girl." He tilts my head, careful not to touch the back of my head, and kisses me deeply. I will never get enough of this man.



The next few weeks are rough. Julian gets in trouble at work for dating me. I was brought into Professor Cooper's office, he's the head of the department, and asked what felt like a hundred questions. I had to explain multiple times that I did not feel pressured to be in a relationship with Julian to get a good grade.

I explained he made me feel safe and that he probably kept Josh at bay longer than he would have. Although, Julian doesn't believe that. When Julian tells Professor Cooper this is his last semester, he's starting his own business. They do a write-up and let him stay the rest of the semester.

It also took me a couple of weeks to catch up on my missed work. Of course, my professors understood everything I went through. Still, I was determined to get caught up and not allow it to affect my grades or graduation date.

Walking into Kate's classroom, I sit and slump in my chair. I'm exhausted, and my head is throbbing. Not from where I

was hit, just from the stress of the past few days. I touch the back of my head gingerly. It's still healing, and I try not to feel self-conscious about it. I wish I could wear a hat to cover it, but it irritates me.

Julian swears it doesn't look bad, and my hair covers it, but I've looked in the mirror it can be seen. Not as much as when it first happened, but it's still noticeable.

Todd sits down next to me. "Hey, how are you doing?"

Sighing, I shrug. "I'm living day to day right now," I tell him honestly.

He pats me on the shoulder awkwardly. "Sometimes, that's all you can do. I still can't believe that guy was crazy like that, and Tabitha got caught up in it."

"Yeah. It feels surreal to me too. Like it happened to someone else, and then some days I have to remind myself he's gone, and it will never happen again." I don't know why I'm telling him this other than it's been a rough day; I want nothing more than to curl up on the couch with Julian and watch some mindless forensic documentary.

"So, I hear they're taking your relationship with Professor McMillan seriously." He changes the subject, and I'm glad about it.

"Yeah. But this was going to be his last semester teaching anyway." I reply as I grab my things out of my bag, so I'm ready for class.

"That sucks."

I eye him. "Why's that?" I ask as Kate walks into the classroom.

"Because of that right there." He states, and my mouth pops open.

"What?!?"

He glances at me and arches an eyebrow. "What? She's hot!"

Shaking my head, I roll my eyes. “You said you were just going to look.”

He shrugs. “I may have changed my mind.”

I give him a sideways glance. “As long as it’s mutual.” I remind him.

He chuckles and pulls his laptop out of his bag. “Of course, it will be.”



I wake up and feel a warm body behind me. I stiffen until his hand comes up to my hip and rubs me.

“It’s me, baby girl.” He whispers.

I release a slow breath and roll over to face him. “Hey.” I greet him.

“Hey. I didn’t mean to scare you.” He tells me, and I shake my head. Bringing my finger up, I begin to run it along his forehead.

“No. It’s a reaction I’ll get over eventually. It’s been a while since I’ve had a bad dream, so that’s good.” I shrug.

He wraps his hand around my thigh and lifts my legs, so it’s wrapped around his hip. I try to ignore the frantic beat of my heart that causes. It’s been weeks since he’s done anything besides kiss me, and I’m getting frustrated.

“Are you hungry?” He asks.

“A little,” I reply. I push his shoulder so he rolls onto his back and straddle him. His hands come up to my hips, and he massages them.

“I stopped and grabbed a pizza from where you, your mom, and your sister always go. Caroline told me what your favorite was.” He says.

“Okay. That was very considerate.” I reply as I bring my hands down to the buttons of his shirt and begin to undo them.

He arches an eyebrow but doesn't stop me. “What are you doing?”

“You're wearing too many clothes to be in bed,” I tell him.

His eyes peruse my body. “You're wearing a lot of clothes too.”

Scoffing, I finish unbuttoning his shirt. “I'm wearing shorts and a t-shirt.” I pull on his sleeve, and he snorts as he sits up to pull his shirt off and throw it on the floor before lying back down. I look at his chest and abs taking in how gorgeous he is.

Leaning forward, I rake my fingernails down his chest, causing him to shudder. When I get to his belt, I unbuckle it, then unbutton his pants and unzip them. I can feel him growing hard, so I press my hand against him and grip him.

He hisses. “Bailey.”

Leaning forward, I kiss him, and he wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me tight against him. I miss him wrapping his hands around my hair and pulling it. I lick into his mouth, and he responds in kind. We get lost in each other as the world fades away.

His hands push my shirt up, and I raise my hands. We break apart as he gently pulls it over my head and tosses it somewhere in the room with his shirt.

“Bailey, we have to be careful.” He tells me.

“I don't want to be careful. I miss you. I miss this.” I tell him.

He pulls back and watches me. “I miss you too, and I've missed this, but we still have to be careful. Okay?”

“Okay,” I reply. I know he's right. I'll be healed in a few more weeks, and we can go back to the way things used to be.

“That’s my good girl.” He praises me, and I melt into him. “Now, finish taking my pants off.” He commands.

I smirk and scoot down the bed to pull his pants off. He lifts himself to help, and I pull his boxer briefs off. His cock is hard and red, and I want to lick it.

“Now, take your shorts off.”

I immediately shimmy out of my shorts and crawl up the bed toward him, straddling him again. He wraps his hands around my waist and pulls me against him trapping his cock between us.

“You’re so fucking beautiful.” His mouth lands on mine, and I kiss him back with everything in me. Before long, I rock against him, and he pulls back, loosening his grip on me.

“Ride me, baby girl.”

Smirking, I grab him and lift myself, then lower down onto his hard cock, both of us moaning together. “God, I love it when you say that to me,” I tell him.

He groans as he grabs my hips and guides me. “That’s why I say it.” He responds.

I ride him slowly and feel every inch of him. “I missed this so much.” I moan.

“Put your hands behind your back.” He instructs. Placing my hands behind my back. He takes one of his hands and grips my wrists, pulling them until my back is arched, causing my breasts to be out just how he likes them.

“Perfect.” He leans down and takes one of my nipples in his mouth, and I moan. I love how much he loves my breasts. He took something I was so self-conscious about and turned it around. I ride him harder, and he hits all the right places inside me.

“Oh god, Julian! I’m going to come.” I tell him. He sucks on my nipple harder, pushing me over the edge. I come with a shout. He lets go of my wrists, so I wrap my arms around his

neck. He grabs my hips and thrusts into me, chasing his orgasm.

“Fuck!” He cries out as he comes. He holds me close, and I sigh against his neck.

After a few seconds, I pull back and glance at him, but he still holds me close. “Everything is going to be okay.” He promises me.

I lean my forehead against his. “I know. I’m glad I have you to get me through the rough days.”

He kisses me. “Always, baby girl. Always.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

BAILEY



STANDING IN front of my mom's house, I close my eyes and try not to think about what happened inside those walls. This is my childhood home; I have so many good memories here. Though traumatic, I can't allow one incident to stop me from ever stepping foot in it again.

Julian's home has become my home. I've pretty much moved in with him, even though we haven't discussed it. Whenever I want to see my mom, she comes to Julian's, or we go to Caroline and Bass's house. I haven't been able to come back here in four weeks. I know it's breaking mom's heart, so I will try today. She'd move if it proved too difficult for me, but this is the house she and dad bought together.

I can't do that to her. I won't let Josh do that to her. This past month I've felt like I've been floating in the wind. Still, Julian and I have been attending therapy individually, and we've attended together once to work through our trauma. It's been liberating and has brought us even closer together.

“You ready?” Julian asks as he intertwines our fingers. I nod, and we trek up the sidewalk and to the front door. Mom opens the door as soon as our feet hit the porch.

“Honey, you’re here!” She exclaims and opens her arms. I walk into them and hug her tight.

“Hi, mom.” I greet her. She pulls back and hugs Julian next.

“Hi, Julian.” She opens the door and motions for us to follow her.

“Hi, Melissa.” He returns her greeting and eyes me. I steel myself and follow her inside. I stop in the entryway and look around.

“Mom, what did you do?” I ask her.

“I redecorated.” She states. I stare wide-eyed, trying to take everything in. She redid the floors, removed the wall between the living room and kitchen, painted the walls, and got all new furniture. Tears come to my eyes because I know she did this for me.

“I didn’t.” She says, reading my mind. “I did this because I’ve been thinking about doing it for years. What happened pushed me to finally follow through.”

Before I can respond, there are voices behind me. Turning, I watch as Caroline, Bass, Connor, Bec, Lincoln, Ansley, Liv, and the older guy from the pub. I think his name is Victor. They all come in carrying food of some kind, and my heart grows three sizes like the Grinches, except I was never a Grinch; that’s how much I love these people.

“What are you all doing here?” I ask. Caroline comes forward and hugs me tight.

“You didn’t think we would let you come back alone, did you?” She admonishes me as we break apart, and I’m this close to breaking down in tears.

“I don’t know what to say.” I look around. “I know this can’t be easy for you either,” I tell Connor, and he waves me

off.

“I’m fine. I barely remember anything.” He states. I turn to Bec and hug her.

“How are you?” I ask her, and she smiles.

“Fine. This is nice getting out of the house. He’s just now getting around.” She tells me, and I smirk. I know she loves it even if she doesn’t admit it.

“So, the silver fox, who’s that again?” I inquire, and Bec chuckles.

“That’s Victor. Connor is not fond of him.”

I eye her and want to ask more, but we’re interrupted when Ansley and Liv walk over. I give them both a hug. The guys walk away and begin chatting while we all stand around.

“Want to go upstairs and see what was done up there?” Mom asks, bringing my attention back to the redecoration. I hesitate. Being down here hasn’t been so bad because I don’t remember anything, but I got attacked upstairs. Mom rubs my arms.

“You don’t have to.” She tells me, but I take a deep breath and nod.

“I can do it. If it starts to bother me, I’ll come back downstairs right away.” I tell her. Everyone else nods in agreement.

We walk up the stairs, and I can already tell the difference. The walls aren’t the light gray they’ve been for years. They’re now a dusty blue, and the carpet has been removed. There are area rugs, but it’s a wooden floor now.

Stepping into my bedroom, I see the carpet has been removed in here, the walls have been painted a pale yellow, and the windows have gray curtains.

“Mom, it’s beautiful!” I tell her. It used to be gray, too, and I was beginning to hate it. Now, it’s stunning.

Caroline walks in and gasps. “Wow! Connor’s guys did great.”

“Connor’s guys did this?” I ask, looking from mom to Caroline, then to Bec.

“Yeah. Connor still hasn’t been released to do manual labor, so he got his guys to do this.” Bec explains as she nudges me.

“Wow! I knew he could do great work. I’ve seen Caroline and Sebastian’s house and then Julian’s.” I exclaim.

“Bec decorated your bedroom.” Mom states, and my head snaps to Bec.

“What?” I throw my arms around her in a hug. “Were you not going to tell me?”

Bec shrugs. “It’s not something I talk about a lot. It was fun to do, though.”

“I know you may not stay here often anymore. You may never stay here again because it seems serious with Julian. But I wanted you to have somewhere that you felt comfortable.” Mom says. I turn and hug her tight.

“I love you, mom. Thank you.” I whisper.

“I love you too, sweetie.” She replies. Caroline steps in and hugs us, then Bec.

“Oh, this is so sweet!” Ansley exclaims. So, she grabs Liv, and we’re all in a group hug.

“It looks like you’ve officially become the group mom,” I tell her, and she chuckles.

“Well, I’m here for any of you girls at any time. I can promise you that.” She tells us all. I’m so thankful for her and this great group of friends I’ve found that I never thought I’d have.

We all make our way downstairs. We stand around and chat. Ansley walks up to me and gives me a small smile.

“How are you doing?” Ansley asks.

“I’m okay. My head is finally healed. I can brush my hair now.” I sigh, and Ansley cocks her eyebrow.

“What is it?”

I glance over at Julian and see all the guys surrounding him. Caroline walks over, and we all form a circle.

“Bailey?” Ansley prompts me, and I moan in frustration.

“He won’t have sex with me.” I blurt out. “I assume it’s because he doesn’t want to hurt me. We’ve had sex once since everything, and that’s because I didn’t give him much choice. He probably didn’t want to hurt my feelings by rejecting me.”

“What worked the first time you two finally had sex?” Liv asks. I bite my lip as my cheeks heat up.

“I asked him to teach me how to suck his cock.” I respond. There’s a collection of gasps, oh my gods, whats, and one hell yeah. Combing my fingers through my hair, I sigh. “I was a virgin before Julian, so....”

Liv links her arm with mine. “There’s nothing wrong with that.”

Everyone else agrees with her.

“Be a brat,” Ansley says.

I arch an eyebrow at her. “What?”

“I saw you two at Thanksgiving. He loved it. Be a brat.” She says again. I think back to Thanksgiving when things were still unsure between us, so I was doing everything I could to get his attention.

“If it makes you feel any better, the way he’s looking at you right now says he wouldn’t mind if you sucked his cock this moment,” Caroline states.

“What?!?” I exclaim. Hearing my sister talk like that is shocking, but I am proud of how far she’s come.

“Look.” She encourages me. Turning, my eyes catch with Julians, and heat settles in my stomach. “Told you.”

Julian is nodding at something Connor is saying, but his eyes are on me. He smirks at me, and I bite my lip. Glancing at Ansley, she arches an eyebrow at me. Looking back at Julian; his eyes are still on me. I drop my napkin on the floor.

Looking at him under my eyelashes, he turns more fully to me. I lean down to pick the napkin up and, putting my arm under my breasts, push them up. Standing, I wink at him. His tongue wet his lips as his eyes latch onto my chest. I turn my back to him and grin at the girls.

“He’s salivating now,” Ansley states.

“What did you do?” Liv asks.

I glance down at the extra cleavage showing from my top, and her mouth forms an O. She glances down at her chest.

“I, unfortunately, don’t have that problem.” She sighs, and we all chuckle. Caroline wraps her arms around Liv’s shoulder.

“I don’t think it matters,” Caroline whispers, and Liv’s cheeks turn pink.

Mom walks over to us, holding a bottle of wine.

“Anyone need refills?” She asks. Ansley holds up her glass, and Caroline pouts.

“We’re going to go outside to grill and do manly things,” Connor tells us. I catch Julian’s eye again, and he shrugs as he follows the guys to the back porch. He looks so good in his jeans and navy polo.

I sigh. We talked about sex in our therapy session last week, and he said he would try. But he hasn’t. Does he not want me anymore? Ansley stands next to me and wraps her arm around my back.

“He wants you. What happened was traumatic for him too; sometimes men need that extra push.” She encourages. I stare

at her and give her a small smile.

“I’m still new at this,” I whisper.

“That’s what I’m here for, darling. I promise you’re getting laid tonight.” She declares, and I laugh.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

BAILEY



WE HAVE hamburgers for lunch, so I'm helping cut some tomatoes for those who want that on their burger. Ansley walks over and hands me a beer.

"I think Julian looks thirsty, don't you?" She asks. I glance outside and back at Ansley. I shake my head and chuckle.

"You really should give lessons, you know that?" I tell her.

"Next time you need part-time work, come work at my boutique, and during our spare time, I'll give them to you." She replies, and I laugh.

"Deal." I walk to the back door and slip it open quietly. The guys are talking about baseball season starting soon. I slide up beside Julian, brushing my breasts against his arm. He breathes in and gazes at me, his gray eyes turning dark.

"I brought you another beer. I thought you might be thirsty." I say and hand the bottle over to him, making sure our fingers brush when he takes it.

“Thank you, baby girl.” He replies, his fingers lingering on mine, and my heart melts at being called that in front of the guys. Julian isn’t as public with his affection as Sebastian or even Lincoln. I hope that’s because of his personality and not because he’s still unsure about our age difference. I step in front of him and lean into him, giving him a chaste kiss. All the while making sure my breasts touch him the entire time.

“You’re welcome,” I whisper and turn to walk back inside. Hoping he’s still watching me, I grab my hair into a ponytail, tug slightly, then run my fingers through it, letting it cascade around my shoulders again. As I open the door and walk back inside, I glance back at him and see he’s watching me intently. As I’m closing the door, I hear Lincoln chuckle.

“Your night just got a lot better.” Lincoln claps him on the back, and Bass laughs. However, Julian’s eyes never leave mine, and he doesn’t respond to their comments. I arch an eyebrow at him. One side of his mouth tips up as his eyes travel over me. He raises his bottle to me, then takes a long pull from it, his eyes never leaving mine. I bite my lip and smile as I return to cutting the tomatoes.

We all sit down to eat and begin to load our plates. Julian sits to one side and Ansley to the other. Julian has his arm propped up on the table, his hand wrapped around his beer bottle. I lean over and grab the platter in front of him with the lettuce, onions, and tomatoes, making sure to rub them against him. He sucks in a breath, and I feel his eyes on me, but I don’t look at him.

After I’ve made up my burger, I turn to him and see he’s still watching me. “Do you need any?” I ask him innocently, and he smirks.

“Why don’t you put it on my burger for me?” He tells me, and I bite my cheek, trying not to smile.

“Sure.” I lean forward, rubbing against his arm again. I make up his burger and glance at him.

“Is that okay?”

He hums and pulls his arm back, grazing my breasts. His gray eyes are now entirely black. He runs his thumb over my nipple, and I have to swallow to keep myself from gasping.

“It’s perfect, baby girl.” His voice is gravelly, and I know I’m getting to him.

I try to join in on the conversation, but I’m so aware of him. Every time he moves and shifts, I wonder if he’ll break and take me upstairs or home. I take a few bites of my hamburger and sip on my drink, but the rollercoaster in my stomach won’t allow for much more. The longer I sit and wait, the more I realize he won’t do anything.

I don’t know whether to stomp my foot in frustration, cry, or do both. Playing with the napkin in my lap, I glance at him out of the corner of my eye and see him talking to Connor, sitting on his other side. His arm rests on my chair, and I only want him to touch me. For him to run his fingers through my hair. Something. Anything.

I glance at Ansley, and I realize she’s watching me. She sighs and leans closer.

“He’ll come around.” She says it like a promise, but I’m beginning to doubt it. My stomach feels like lead, and my eyes sting with unshed tears. Her hand falls on mine. “Do something that he can’t ignore.”

My mouth drops open. “I’ve been rubbing all over him like a cat in heat,” I whisper. She leans even closer.

“Sometimes you have to grab a man by the balls. Literally.” She tilts her head at me like she’s daring me. Turning away from her, I stare at my plate. I take a deep breath and decide this will be my last attempt. If this doesn’t work, I’ll take a page from my mom’s book and jump him.

I grab my glass and take a sip of wine, then slide my hands along the table, intentionally knocking my fork on the floor. Leaning down, I grab it and then place my empty hand on Julian’s shin. He tenses under me, and I smirk. As I pull myself up from under the table, I rub my hand up his shin,

over his knee, and between his legs, and I brush my hand up his hard cock.

When my eyes connect with him, I can't tell if he's turned on or angry. I go to move my hand, but he puts his hand under the table and grabs me, keeping it where it's at. I glance around the table, but no one is paying any attention to us. He leans forward until his lips are at my ear.

"Are you looking for another oral assignment, Ms. Rhodes?" He whispers, and my heart hammers in my chest. My tongue comes out to wet my lips.

"Yes, Professor McMillan." I choke out, and he squeezes his hand around mine, making me grasp him tighter.

"Excuse yourself and go to the bathroom. Now." He demands. I nod once, and he releases me. Sitting up, I run my hands down my skirt and then stand. Ansley glances up at me.

"Bathroom," I tell her, and she smirks. I leave the dining room and make a beeline for the stairs walking up them quickly. I walk into the bathroom in the hallway. I want to go to my bedroom, but he said to go to the bathroom. I pace back and forth several times before the doorknob twists, and he walks in. He closes the door and locks it.

"On your knees." He instructs, and I drop to my knees immediately. Fucking finally! He stops in front of me, undoing his jeans and pushing them down. He pulls his cock out and strokes it. I lick my lips as I watch him. Looking up at him, he tilts his head.

"Is this what you wanted?" He asks.

"Yes," I respond.

"I'm not going to be gentle, and I will be fast." He warns, and I nod. He guides his cock to my mouth, and I open for him. He removes his hand, allowing me to wrap mine around him. I suck his tip, swirling my tongue around the head, and he grunts. I lower my mouth almost to the base and back up a few times. He throws his head back and flexes his hands against his thighs. Pulling off him causes him to glance down at me.

“I thought you said you weren’t going to be gentle.”

His eyes narrow. “You’re testing me, baby girl.”

Sighing, I stand. “I’m not made of glass. We’ve talked about this. You said you were going to try.” I whisper and step around him. Unlocking the bathroom door, I turn sideways to look at him. “Don’t let him take this from us.” I plead and walk out the door, leaving him with his dick hanging out.

CHAPTER FORTY

JULIAN



I UNLOCK the door and open it so Bailey can enter. She walks past me, through the living room, and to the back porch. She hasn't talked to me since she left me in the bathroom. She went from being all over me to not speaking to me. I am an asshole.

Leaving her alone, I walk to the kitchen and pour myself some whiskey. I lean against the counter and think through what's causing me to hold back. We've had sex once since the incident, and that's only because she initiated. It's not that I don't want her; I do. But the thought of hurting her makes me sick to my stomach.

It took all I had not to pull her hair the last time we had sex, the thought of me losing my grip and doing something to cause her pain. But she's right; we attended that couples therapy session and discussed this. I told her I would try, and while we have cuddled and kissed, that's all I've done. I need to get past this.

I take a deep breath and gulp down my drink. Pushing away from the counter, I start toward the back door but stop when she walks by like she's on a mission.

"Bailey?" I call after her, but she doesn't answer. I hear her take the stairs. I have to fix this. Following her, I walk up the stairs and to the bedroom. When I reach the door, I stop in my tracks, and my cock swells in my pants.

"What the hell are you doing?" I ask her. Her head pops up from where it's lying against the headboard of our bed. She has stripped and is lying naked on our bed. One hand is on her breast, and the other is rubbing her inner thigh.

"I'm horny, Julian. So, I'm going to take care of myself." She snaps. I want to tie her up and edge her for the rest of the night for teasing me all day like she has.

"The hell you are!" I walk across the room and stop at the end of our bed. She arches an eyebrow at me as her finger reaches its destination and touches her clit.

"Who else is going to do it?" She questions as she spreads her legs further apart, giving me a perfect view of her pretty pussy. I moan as I watch her finger disappear into her pussy and then back up her slit to circle her clit again. This is so much better than that day in my classroom. Her other hand massages her breast and pinches her perk nipple. She gasps, bringing my attention back to her pussy, and I snap.

Climbing onto the bed, I lay between her legs and move her hand away.

"Julian!" She whines, but it becomes a moan when I lick up her center. Fuck, I missed this. Her taste. I'll never get enough. Flattening my tongue, I lick up her slit over and over until she's grasping my head and chanting my name.

Wrapping my arms around her hips, I pull her tighter against my tongue as I thrust it into her pussy. She tries to move her hips, but I hold her steady, so I'm in control. I thrust then lick but stop short of her clit each time.

“Please. Julian!” She cries out. I take her clit between my teeth and flick it with the tip of my tongue over and over again until she’s screaming and coming all over my face. When she comes down from her high, I climb off the bed and tear my clothes off.

She has a triumphant smile, and I’m not even mad. When I climb back on, she opens her legs and arms to welcome me, but I shake my head.

“Get on all fours,” I command. She hesitates for a moment but does as she’s told. I walk on my knees until I’m right behind her. Glancing at the back of her head, I see she’s completely healed. She’s been healed for a couple of weeks, but I’ve allowed nerves and my fear of hurting her to hold me back.

I lean over her back and let every inch of my chest touch her, and my cock tease her. She arches into me.

“Tell me if I hurt you. Do you understand?” I instruct, and she nods. “Say it out loud.”

“I understand. I’ll tell you if it hurts.” She promises.

Leaning back up, I gather her hair in my hand and tug. She groans, and I pull it tighter, causing her head to lift and her back to arch.

“So fucking gorgeous.” I run my other hand down her back to her ass, massaging it before lining up with her and pushing in. Feeling her tight wet heat around me after weeks of going without is like Nirvana.

“Oh, my god.” She whispers over and over. When my hips hit her hips, I stay still and don’t move to enjoy her engulfing me. “Please move.” She begs, but I don’t. Her hands grip the sheets, and she arches her back more. Wrapping my hand around her hair, I pull tighter, and she moans.

Sliding my hand around her waist and up to her breast, I massage it and pluck her nipple. She hisses and rocks back against me. I clench my teeth, forcing myself to stay still as I play her body like an instrument. Running my hand down her

stomach, I stretch my fingers and press against her clit. She cries out and clenches around me. She's so close. I pinch her clit, and she loses it.

She pulses around me, and I bite my lip to stop myself from coming. "Julian! Oh." Her head jerks against my hand, and I know she'd be lying on the bed if I weren't holding onto her hair. Instead, I wrap my arm around her waist and pull on her hair, forcing her to sit up, so her back is against my front. I release her hair to massage her breast and thumb her nipples.

I begin to rut into her, and she clutches at my arm. "You feel so good, baby girl. I'll never get enough. You will always be mine."

"Yes. Always." She responds, and I pound into her harder.

"Can you come one more time?" I ask her, and she begins to shake her head no, but it turns into a yes when my fingers drift down to her clit again and circles it.

"More. I need more." She cries out as I lightly touch her. Pressing more firmly, she cries out, and I feel her grip me like a vise. "Don't stop. Please don't stop."

"Never, baby girl," I answer as I push her over the edge. She claws at my arm as she comes, and I thrust in and out of her until I'm coming too. It's like my entire body pulses as I release into her. When I come to, I realize we've fallen forward, and I'm lying on top of her. Slowly rolling off, I wrap my arm around her and pull her close. Kissing her shoulders and neck, everywhere my lips can touch.

"You are so perfect," I whisper. She turns over in my arms and gazes at me. I lean close and kiss her slowly and deeply. Pulling back, I rest my forehead against hers. "Was I too rough?"

She shakes her head and brings her hand to the back of my head, massaging the nape of my neck.

"It was perfect. Everything I needed." She responds, and I pull her even closer.

“I wasn’t rejecting you. I wanted you. So bad. But seeing you go through that was not easy, and the thought of hurting you....” I trail off. Her fingers continue to stroke me, and I feel myself relax. “I can’t bear the thought of ever hurting you.”

She wraps her leg around my waist, and I feel myself getting hard again. Wrapping my hand around her thigh, I hike her leg up higher.

“I understand. I do. And I appreciate how much you care about me and want to protect me. But I know you will never hurt me. I know it.” She says confidently, and my heart swells in my chest. I’m enthralled with her. She pushes on my chest, forcing me to roll over onto my back, and then she’s straddling me. Her hand wraps around me, and I grit my teeth.

She rises and guides me to her entrance, then sinks on me. We both moan. My hands drift to cup her breasts, and I flick my thumbs over her nipples. She lets out a satisfied sigh and gazes down at me.

“I love you, Julian.” She tells me as she begins to ride my dick.

“I love you too, baby girl,” I reply as I bring my hands back to her hips and help guide her movements. I’ll never get enough of this or her. Never.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

BAILEY



“THIS COULD be your office. There’s a kitchen here. Once Bailey graduates, if she decides to work with you, this could be her office.” Connor says as he takes us on a tour of a place he found for Julian. A rock sits in my stomach at the idea I won’t see Julian every day at school. Four more weeks are left in the semester, and then he’s done. Julian wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me close to his side.

“I like it.” He looks at me. “What do you think?”

“It’s perfect,” I reply. And I mean it. Some minor updates need to be done, but Connor says his guys can do them in time. Julian has asked me to paint a mural on the wall for everyone to see as soon as they walk in. He even asked me to paint something on the brick outside.

“I think it’s perfect too.” He looks at Connor. “This one is my favorite. I like that I’m at the end and not in the middle of the building.” He says.

“I thought you’d feel that way. That’s why I saved this one for last.” Connor replies. “Alright, well, I’ll talk to the real estate agent I work with, and we’ll get this started.” He heads for the door but turns around. “You two want to come over this weekend? I’m grilling, and Bec said she will make her famous cheesecake.”

Julian nods in agreement, but I narrow my eyes. “I thought Bec was going on a date with someone,” I reply. “The guy she went out with two weekends ago,” I state.

Connor shrugs. “I guess it didn’t work out.” With that, he walks out, and I tilt my head. Bec didn’t say anything about it not working out. Julian comes up behind me and wraps his arms around my waist.

“Next semester is your last semester?” He asks again, and I chuckle.

“Yes.” I turn in his arms and wrap mine around his neck. “I’m so excited for you, but the thought of you not being my professor anymore makes me sad,” I admit. He hums.

“Well, just think. This time next year, I’ll be your boss.” His hands tighten around my waist like he’s excited at the idea, giving me pause.

“So, I can tell people one day I fucked my professor and my boss.” I tease, and he laughs.

“Sure. If you want to tell people that.” He pulls me closer, and I lean to kiss him along his jaw.

“That’s so hot.” I rake my fingers along the back of his head and down to the nape of his neck. He wraps his hand around my hair and pulls it, causing me to expose my neck. He leans down and sucks at the sensitive area below my ear.

“So, what are you going to paint in here?” He asks as he pulls back to gaze at me.

“I want to paint the creek in your backyard and the trail we’ve gone hiking on,” I tell him. I hold my breath waiting for

his reaction. His eyes gleam, and he smiles big, showing his teeth.

“That’s perfect, baby girl.” He kisses me on the forehead. “What about outside?” He asks.

“A phoenix rising from the ashes,” I tell him without hesitating.

“Wow! I can’t wait to see that. What made you think to do that?” He runs his fingers through my hair absentmindedly.

“We’ve both been through a lot to become who we are today. I think a phoenix rising from the ashes perfectly represents that.” I explain.

“It’s perfect.” He agrees, kissing me slowly and sweetly.



It’s the last week of the semester, and there are two fantasies I haven’t had the chance to play out with Julian yet. Today, I’m surprising him. I have a feeling if I were to warn him, he would discourage me. So, that’s why I’m sitting under his desk, in his office, waiting for him.

His office is much emptier; he’s almost finished packing all his books. I told him I’d help him finish after his meeting today. Hopefully, he won’t be too angry with me. My heart begins to pound when I hear voices outside his office. There’s no turning back now.

“Why are Matthew and Dean always late?” I hear Kate ask as Julian opens the door. I take a deep breath and hold it as I listen to Julian’s footsteps. He comes around his desk and pulls his chair out. There’s a soft thud on the other side of the desk, I’m assuming from where Kate sits down.

“So, how’s Bailey doing? I know everything that happened with Josh wasn’t easy.” Kate asks.

Julian pulls his chair under the desk after he sits down, and his knee hits my shoulder. He tenses for a moment but answers her question.

“She’s doing good. She’s strong and hasn’t allowed it to slow her down. Her head is healed completely now too.”

I place my hand lightly on the front of his shin, so he doesn’t jump. His entire body goes still, but he doesn’t say anything. I run my hand up his shin and settle more comfortably between his legs as quietly as possible. I bring both hands to his thighs, and he widens them.

“Julian, Kate. Sorry, we’re late.” Matthew greets them. Julian leans forward like he’s shaking their hand, allowing me to put my hands on the waist of his pants.

“No problem,” Julian replies.

“Alright, well, I’ll get right to it. We found a replacement for Julian.” Matthew begins, and I tune them out.

Slowly undoing Julian’s belt, so I don’t make any noise, his hand comes down to my hands, and I’m afraid he’s going to stop me, but he runs his fingers from my wrist to my elbow and back up before putting it back on the arm of his chair. I smirk. He’s growing hard under my hands, and I can’t wait to get my mouth on him.

After undoing his belt, I unbutton and unzip his pants. I reach inside his pants and try to bring his cock out as much as possible, but it’s hard because his pants are still in the way. He adjusts his hips slightly, allowing me to tug them down and free him from the confines of his pants and boxers.

“Julian, we’ll need you to provide your lessons to him to help him get started. He’ll, of course, come up with his own lessons, but it will help him get acclimated.”

I lean up on my knees, being careful not to hit my head on his desk, and take the tip of his cock into my mouth. Julian was about to speak, but he coughs to cover a moan.

“Of course.” He says as I drop down on him, and I see him clutch the arms of his chair out of the corner of my eye. “I’ll save all my files and email them to him. Or to you.” He stutters over his words as I flatten my tongue and suck.

“That’s good. Thank you.” Matthew replies.

I bob my head up and down, not fast, because I don’t want to bring attention to myself or make any noise. Julian’s hand comes to the back of my head, runs his hand through my hair, and grips it. His hips shift like he wants to fuck my mouth, but he’s holding himself back. If my mouth weren’t full of his cock I would smile.

So, I try to take mercy on him and drop down on him until he’s hitting the back of my throat and swallow. Julian’s entire body tenses and he leans forward like he’s trying to control himself. When I can’t hold my breath any longer, I pull off him and run my tongue around his tip.

Kate asks something, but I’m so focused on what I’m doing I don’t catch it. My knees are beginning to ache, and my neck is sore, but I don’t focus on it, only on Julian’s pleasure. Julian pushes his chair under the desk more, almost making me fall back, but his hand wrapped in my hair helps steady me.

“This paper is excellent, Julian. I am impressed with both of them.” Kate says, and I realize why Julian pushes closer to his desk. Kate is standing next to him. I’m assuming she’s showing him whatever paper she’s talking about. I double my efforts dropping down on him again. Julian jerks and hisses.

“You okay?” Kate asks.

Julian clears his throat. “Yes. My foot fell asleep.” He says in that deep gruff voice he gets right before he comes.

“I hate it when that happens,” Kate replies and taps his desk. “So, what do you think?” She questions, and Julian’s hips shift again. His hand tightens in my hair, and he begins to guide my head like he can’t take it anymore.

“Ummm... Yeah, it looks good.” Julian replies. “I can read it more in-depth tonight if you’d like me to.” Julian holds me down on him, and I swallow around him, breathing through my nose.

“Sure. I’ll get it from you tomorrow.” She says as her voice drifts away. I realize I haven’t heard Matthew’s voice for a few minutes, so he must already be gone. Dean never spoke at all; I’m assuming he left too.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” Kate says goodbye. Julian lets out a small moan.

“Can you close the door behind you? I need to finish something before I leave.”

“Sure.” She replies, and I hear the door click shut.

Julian pushes back from the desk and drags me with him, not letting me pop off him. When I glance up at him from under my eyelashes, his face is thunderous, and his eyes are nearly black.

“Fuck, Bailey.” He growls, then lets me come off him a little before pushing back into my mouth. He fucks into my mouth, his eyes never leaving mine. He lets out a long groan before throwing his head back and coming into my mouth. I swallow him down.

When he’s finished, he lets go of my hair and massages the back of my scalp before bringing his hands under my arms and lifting me onto his desk.

“You are my naughty girl. Aren’t you?” He states as his hands push my skirt up and find my panties yanking them down.

“Yes.” I’m unsure if I’m answering his question or responding to his wandering hands. He glances up at me as he brings my feet up to rest on the armrests of his chair and spreads my legs.

“Look at you. Exquisite.” He murmurs against my thigh as he kisses me until he reaches my center. “Going to make you

feel so good.” He says right before licking up my center. I purr at his attention. He is so good at this. I have nothing to compare it to, but I’m sure he’s the best. His tongue swirls around my clit so softly. I jerk my hips needing more.

“Please. More.” I beg. He inserts one finger into my pussy and curls it rubbing it against my sweet spot, and my thighs come off his desk. “Please. Please.” I chant over and over again. His other hand comes up, pushing my shirt and bra up and feathers along my breast, his forefinger and thumb pinching my nipple. But it’s still not enough.

“Julian!” I cry out in frustration. Anyone could walk in here. Kate closed the door, but she didn’t lock it. He still doesn’t give in. His finger rubs lightly against my g-spot, and his tongue circles my clit softly. The only thing stopping me from knocking him out of the way and finishing myself is that every time he does this, I have a spectacular orgasm. And who wants to miss out on that?

Grabbing his head, I try to force him to turn his licks firmer, but he only chuckles as his hand trails to my other breast and begins to massage it. Leaning back, I begin to beg and speak nonsense. At this point, I have no idea what’s coming out of my mouth. I’m just hoping something will spur him to let me finish.

Suddenly, I’m right there from the light touches and the constant pressure on my g-spot and attention to my clit. I feel an orgasm coming, but I’m still unsure if it’s enough to push me over the edge. My legs begin to shake, and my abs contract. It’s right there. It’s this elusive thing I can’t quite catch.

He wraps his lips around my clit, and he sucks and begins to rub my g-spot vigorously, and I let out a silent scream. His hand that was massaging my breast comes up to cover my mouth just in case my silent scream turns loud. When the orgasm subsides, and I come back down to earth, I realize I’m sitting in his lap, and he’s running his fingers through my hair.

“How are you feeling?” He asks, and I chuckle.

“That was amazing,” I respond, and he smiles against my neck.

“It was.” He agrees. “I’m still in shock.” He tells me, and I giggle against his neck.

“It’s been a fantasy of mine since the day I fell into your arms. Since this is your last week, I had to make it a reality.” I explain. He hums.

“What other fantasies do you have?” He asks. I bite my lip to keep my smile at bay.

“Do you promise we can try it if I tell you?”

His fingers trail down my arm and intertwine with mine, bringing them to his mouth as he kisses my hand.

“Sure.” He responds easily. Butterflies erupt in my stomach, and I bite the inside of my lip.

“I want you to fuck me over your desk in your classroom,” I tell him, and he stills. He’s going to say no.

“I can’t wait.” He responds, surprising me.

“Tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow.” He promises.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

BAILEY



I JUMP on his back as soon as Julian drops his bag on the ground. His hands grab my thighs holding me up as I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss his cheek. He chuckles.

“We just hiked three miles, and you’re jumping on me.” He chastises me. I kiss his cheek again.

“Ah! Is the age starting to get to you, old man?” I tease him, and he growls. He maneuvers me so I’m now wrapped around him from the front. He grabs my hair and pulls it making me arch my back like I know he wants.

“How’s that for an old man?” He pants against my lips, and I stick my tongue out to lick them. He goes incredibly still, and then his mouth is on mine, sucking and licking. I rake my fingers along the back of his scalp, causing him to shudder against me.

“Bailey.” He whispers. His forehead leans against mine, and we close our eyes, lost in our own world. I slide down his body as he releases me. Who would have thought I’d wind up

with this amazing man nine months ago? He kisses me again before grabbing his bag and pulling out the blanket he brought.

He spreads it out, and I grab my bag pulling out our lunch. He sits down, and I sit down between his legs. He pushes my hair over one shoulder and rests his chin on the other.

“What kind of sandwiches did you make?” He asks, and I snort.

“You ask that every time. And every time, they’re peanut butter and jelly.”

He chuckles. “Feels like something I need to ask now.”

I hand him his sandwich and a bag of chips.

“So, you have your first client?” I ask him, and he sighs.

“Yeah. This is not going to be an easy case.” He replies. I turn so I can see him better. He leans back and takes a bite of his sandwich.

“I’m nervous,” I admit, and he gives me a small smile.

“I am too, but I have to do this for Liv.”

I swallow the lump in my throat. Turning my face to the sky, I silently pray that everything goes smoothly. He leans forward and kisses my jaw.

“Everything will be okay. I promise.” He tells me, and I nod. Liv deserves closure.

“I’m proud of you,” I whisper, and one side of his mouth tips up. He’s overcome his past and moved on to do something he loves.

“I can’t wait for you to join me.”

“Only two more semesters,” I say.

“You’re out for two weeks before the summer semester starts?” He questions.

“Yes, so I’ll help you set up things and hopefully finish the mural outside the building. As long as it doesn’t rain.” I take a

bite from my sandwich, and he leans forward, kissing me just below my ear.

“That’s fine. I was just wondering if you’d wind up under my desk again.” He whispers, and I almost choke on my sandwich. He throws his head back, laughing, and I hit his arm.

“Sure, as long as you take me over your desk again. That was fucking hot.”

He chuckles. “I can make that happen again.” He winks at me as he takes a swig from his water bottle. After we get done eating, I throw the trash in my bag, and Julian wraps his arms around me as we look out over the water. Leaning my head back on his shoulder, I’m content at this moment.

“I didn’t realize it was possible to be this happy,” I murmur, and he turns his head, resting his lips against my jaw.

“Me either, baby girl.” His hand tilts my head, then slips his lips over mine. His tongue massages mine, and our breath mingles. When he pulls back, he keeps his forehead resting against mine. “Say you’ll always be mine.” He demands. I turn in his arms and face him, kneeling before him.

“I’ll always be yours,” I promise. He leans up and kisses me.

“Good, because I’m never letting you go.”

Leaning back, I arch an eyebrow at him, and he tilts his head.

“What’s that look?” He asks, and I push up to my feet, whipping my tank top and sports bra off; his mouth drops open. “What the hell are you doing?” He jumps to his feet as I quickly take my shoes and socks off, then push my shorts and panties down. I dodge his arms as they grab for me and run toward the water.

“Bailey!” He calls out after me.

“Come on, Professor McMillan. Go skinny dipping with me.” I yell at him over my shoulder. I jump in the water

gasping at the coldness. It'll be a few more weeks before the water warms up, but it still feels good to my skin after our hike.

When I come up, I turn toward the shore just in time to see Julian jumping into the water in all his naked glory. He swims to me quickly, and I don't even fake trying to evade him. He wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me to him. I wrap my legs around his waist and grin at him. He shakes his head at me.

“What am I going to do with you?”

I tilt my head and purse my lips. “There are lots of things you could do with me. You're creative; I'm sure you'll think of something.” I quip back. He lifts me in his arms and bites down on my nipple, making me cry out in surprise.

“Just remember I'm really good at not letting you come.” He reminds me, and I bark out a laugh.

“Oh, but when you let me.” I sigh, remembering all the times he's done that to me. He laughs and brings my mouth to his. His cock teases my entrance, and my breath catches in my throat.

“You just wait until we get home.” He says as a promise. He slips inside me a fraction of an inch.

“Mmmm... I like the sound of that.” I reply as I sink further on to him. His mouth comes down to my collarbone as he kisses and sucks. He pulls me completely on him, and I purr. It's always so good.

“The sound of what?” He questions as he grasps my hips and begins to control our rhythm.

“The sound of your home being my home,” I reply as I ride the wave of euphoria I'm on. His lips run over the top of my breasts before he leans up and looks at me. He pulls me close, stopping our movement.

“Wherever you are is my home, baby girl.” He whispers against my mouth, and my heart fills. I wrap my arms around

him tighter. I've never felt so loved in my life.

"You're my home too. You'll always be my home." I tell him, and he kisses me deeply.

"And you'll always be mine." He says between kisses.
"Forever."

Julian



Epilogue

Three Years Later

Connor is giving me his goofy smile, and I'm trying to ignore him and the nerves in my stomach. The coordinator comes to our room and ushers us into our place. I tug on my jacket one more time before taking a deep breath.

"You look great," Connor whispers, and I want to skip past this part. The part where I'm waiting. This time is different, but it's still nerve-wracking. What if she doesn't show up? What if she's decided fourteen years is too big of an age gap, and she doesn't want to spend the rest of her life with me?

Just as I think that thought, the music begins, the doors open, and Bailey walks toward me.

"Holy shit," I mumble under my breath. She looks phenomenal in her white dress. Her eyes meet mine, and I can't stop the smile from forming on my face or the tears in my eyes. I know she picked this dress just for me. It's low cut and gives a perfect view of her amazing tits.

I can't wait to peel that off her later. She smiles at me when she makes it to me, and I don't want to wait to kiss her. I want to kiss her now. She sees it in my eyes and smirks. She hands off her bouquet to Caroline, and now we're facing each other, holding hands.

We make it through the ceremony. It's all a blur; the best part was dipping her and kissing her in front of everyone.

Making it known she's mine and will always be mine.

When we're announced, we go to the dance floor and begin our first dance as a married couple. I pull her close to me and rest my forehead against hers.

"You look exquisite today, Mrs. McMillan." I compliment her, and she purrs in my arms.

"You do too, Mr. McMillan." She murmurs against my lips. I press my lips firmly against hers and kiss her, reminding myself we're surrounded by a room full of people.

"I can't wait to get you to the hotel," I say as a promise.

"Well, seeing as this is our wedding, we can leave whenever we want to." She reminds me, and I chuckle. As much as I'd love to drag her out of here like a caveman, I also want us to enjoy this day. It's the best day of our lives.



I'm standing behind Bailey as I scan the key card to our hotel room. I have one arm wrapped around her waist, pulled tight against me, my lips are on her neck, and I'm trying to open the damn door.

"If this damn door doesn't open in two seconds, I will fuck you against it," I growl in her ear. She cackles and takes the key card out of my hand.

"You're trying to do too many things at once." She reprimands me, and I latch onto her neck again.

"I'm trying to do you," I emphasize my words by rocking my hard cock against her. She manages to get the door open like some wizard. She hoots in triumph, and I usher her inside. When we make it into the room, she stops with a gasp.

"How did you do this?" She asks as she glances around at the flameless candles, the rose petals on the bed, and the bottle

of champagne chilling on the table beside the bed. I still have my arms wrapped around her as I glance around the room with her.

“I paid the hotel to do it,” I answer her, and she melts against me. We got a nice hotel room for the night because we leave for the airport early in the morning for our honeymoon. The hotel is closer to the airport than our house.

“It’s beautiful and so thoughtful.” She turns and wraps her arms around my neck, leaning up to give me a kiss that she meant to be innocent, but I turn dirty. My fingers go to the zipper on the back of her dress, and she pulls back. “I have lingerie.”

I pull the zipper down and smirk at her. “And I can’t wait to see that lingerie.”

She begins pulling away from me, but I pull her back. “Tomorrow,” I demand as I push the straps of her dress over her shoulders. She snorts and allows the dress to fall away and down to her feet. I step back and admire her.

She’s not wearing a bra, which I figured considering how her dress is made, but she’s wearing a white thong. I bring my thumb up to my lip and rub it.

“This is better than lingerie,” I promise her. She shakes her head at me and steps out of her dress. Grabbing it, she lays it across a chair and walks back to me, confident in her skin. She begins to unbutton my shirt, and when she’s done, I shake it off. Her hands land on my belt, and she undoes it; unbuttoning my pants and pulling down my zipper, she pushes my pants down over my hips. I step out of my shoes and then my pants. She pushes my boxers down, so I’m standing naked in front of her.

She steps back, and her eyes travel down my body, causing my hard cock to harden more.

“I will never get tired of looking at you.” She promises me, and I step into her, pulling her against me. It’s sweet torture when my cock gets squished between us.

“I’ll never get tired of looking at you.” I hook my thumbs in her thong and push it down. Climbing on the bed, I put my back against the headboard and gesture for her.

“Lean against me,” I instruct her, and she does as I say. I widen my legs to give her space, and she leans against my chest resting her head on my shoulder.

“Perfect,” I murmur in her ear, watching as her nipples harden at that simple word of praise. “Put your legs on the outside of my legs, bend your knees, and place your feet on the mattress.” Again she follows the instructions perfectly.

“So good.” I proclaim as I run my fingers through her hair. She shudders against me, and everything in me wants to stick my fingers in her pussy to see how wet she is, but I hold back. Instead, I wrap my arms around her waist and lay my hands against her stomach. Slowly I begin the trek up to her breasts.

She sucks in a breath in anticipation right before I cup them in my hands and gently massage them.

“Julian.” She whispers, and I hum. Biting down on her ear, I flick my tongue over her earlobe, and she rocks her hips like she imagines my tongue somewhere else.

I take her nipples between my thumb and forefinger and pluck each one. She pushes her breasts into my hands, and I continue to kiss, suck and lick at her neck. Her hands come to my thighs, and she digs her fingernails, making tiny crescents.

“Please, Julian.” She begs desperately.

Putting my lips right next to her ear, so she hears me clearly. “I’m going to make you come like this,” I promise her, and she goes completely still.

“What?” She croaks out.

“You know how hot it makes me when you come for me like this.” I remind her. I increase the pressure on her nipples. Her head lolls against my shoulder, and her breathing increases.

“Oh god.” She cries out, and her hips jerk again.

Grabbing a pillow, I put it beside my hips and push her, so she's draped over my arm—her back arching and offering her beautiful tits to me. I lean down and circle my tongue around her nipple, and her stomach ripples with need. I continue to massage and pinch the nipple of her other breast as I kiss, suck, and bite. Then I alternate, lifting her. I bring her other breast to my mouth, but I can't play with the one I abandoned, so I kiss, suck, and bite it more.

Her hips are constantly moving now, needing friction but finding none.

“Julian, I can't take it. Please.”

I ignore her pleas and continue my torturous make-out session with her breasts. Her hands have moved to her thighs now, and I know she'll put her fingers on herself if I don't stop her.

Letting her nipple go, I glance at her face. Her eyes are squeezed shut, and she's panting. “Put your arms around my neck,” I instruct her, and her eyes pop open.

Her hands stop moving up her thighs, and she looks at me in frustration. I can't stop the small smile that comes to my mouth. She glares at me but does as I tell her. Leaning back down, I lick up the side of her breast, and she arches against me.

“Don't move your arms,” I demand before my lips are around her nipple again.

“Julian, if you don't do something soon.” She warns but stops when my hand begins to trail down her stomach. “Yes. Please.” She begs, and I move my mouth back to the other breast. I stop my hand at the top of her pussy, and she groans in frustration.

“How close are you?” I ask her.

“I will come the second you put your fingers on me.” She cries out.

“Good,” I state, and without warning, I take my middle finger and press down on her clit hard. I don’t rub; I don’t move my finger anywhere else. I press down, and she detonates.

“Fuck!” She cries out as her entire body tenses and throws her head back, riding out her orgasm. When she comes to, she stares at me with her mouth open.

“That was... Wow!” She doesn’t say anything else, and I smirk. Moving out from under her, I position her, so her hips are supported by a pillow and sink into her. We both groan at the feeling. Her eyes are open, and she’s watching me.

“I love you,” I tell her.

“I love you, too.” She replies.

And then I begin to thrust into her. God, I will never get tired of this. Of her. The feeling of her wrapped around me. I will never get enough. I lean back onto my shins and watch as I push in and out of her. She clutches at my forearm, and I feel her begin to clench around me.

I bring my thumb down to her clit and massage it. Her back arches off the bed, and she’s coming again, clamping down on my cock. When her orgasm subsides, I lean over her and pound into her chasing my orgasm. She clutches me tight, and I’m filling her up.

When my muscles finally relax, I roll off her and hug her close, then grab her hand and guide her to the shower. After the water is warm, I lead her into the shower, and we wash each other. Once we’re done showering, I lead her to the table with the chilled champagne. I open the bottle and pour us both a glass.

Sitting, I pull her into my lap. We sip on champagne and bask in each other’s presence.

“Today was the best day of my life,” Bailey states with a kiss on my neck. I turn my head so that I can see her better.

“Mine too,” I respond, and she beams at me.

“What was your favorite part?” She asks me, and I smirk.

“Kissing you in front of everyone and claiming you as mine,” I say, and she shakes her head.

“Such a caveman.” She smiles at me and runs her fingers through my hair.

“Only for you.”

“Hmmm... I like that.” She smirks and leans up to kiss me. I kiss her back softly.

“I’m looking forward to spending the rest of my life with you, Mrs. McMillan,” I murmur against her skin. She leans her head back and chuckles. She grabs the champagne that is still sitting on the table. She hands me my glass and then clinks hers against mine.

“To come home to each other for the rest of our lives.” She whispers. We take a sip, and I kiss her. Pulling back, I look at my entire world. She’s everything I never knew I needed.

“Sounds like heaven.”

The End

Read Caroline and Sebastian's story: [Finding Caroline](#)

Read Ansley and Lincoln's story: [Losing Ansley](#).

Note from the author

Don't you just love a sassy heroine and the hero who doesn't want to change a thing about her? I hope you loved Bailey and Julian as much as I loved telling their story. They are both strong individuals, but together they helped each other become stronger. Julian helped Bailey overcome her insecurities and Bailey helped Julian face the traumas of his past.

XOXO,
Nicole



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And lastly, to the readers!! Thank you for reading *Becoming Bailey*. I hope you fell in love with Bailey and Julian as much as I did!

About the Author

Nicole Abrams is best known for her debut contemporary romance novel, *Finding Caroline*. Born in Georgia, she moved frequently with her military family, finally settling back into her home state as an adult. Always an avid reader, she eventually started journaling and writing short stories, which led to the creation of her first book. Nicole is a breast cancer survivor, beating her diagnosis in 2021 after undergoing surgery and radiation. She has an unhealthy obsession with the TV show *Friends* and when she is not writing you can find her spending time with the man of her dreams and their son.