

DIRTY *LOVE*
DUET

Dirty
CALLS

SADE RENA

CONTENTS

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Dirty Endeavors: Dirty Love Duet #2](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[More books by Sade Rena](#)

Dirty Calls: Dirty Love Duet

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CHAPTER ONE

JESSICA

I don't know why I insist on coming home every night with more shit than I had when I left the house. With my hands full, I struggle to open the heavy door to my apartment. I unload the bags on the counter, letting my keys fall from my grasp, sending a thump and jingle through the air. After putting everything in its place, I retrieve a plate and wineglass from the cupboard and prepare for dinner. I rush into my bedroom, where I remove my bra and change into my lounge wear: a pair of satin shorts and an old wifebeater. After wrapping my hair with my silk scarf, I peel away my contacts, replacing them with my glasses before returning to the kitchen.

The Indian food I ordered has gone cold, so I pop it in the microwave. I reach for my wine, and take a sip, savoring the taste, and silently thanking Jesus for such a gift. Lord knows I need several glasses after the week I've had. Remembering the deadline I have for tomorrow, I gather my laptop bag and carry both it and my glass into the living room. The microwave dings, signaling my food is ready.

I grab the plate and a fork, stealing a bite on the way back to the couch. With one leg folded underneath me, I sit, burying myself in to the plush cushion and devouring my dinner. Once done, I unzip my bag, remove my computer, notepad, and favorite pen. I power on the device and click on the TV for a bit of white noise. It doesn't matter what's on, soon I'll be lost in my work and will tune it out completely.

We have a big presentation in the morning, and it's important I make a good impression and seal the deal with our clients. I've been in Arlington, VA, for six months and while I'm more than qualified, it's my first solo project. I've developed many training programs during my internship in New York, but the client called with last-minute changes that undoes all the work I've already completed. It's going to be a long night, but I do well under pressure, and tonight will be no different. Tiring, but a challenge I'll overcome—if I don't get drunk first.

The TV flickers, drawing my attention to the beginning of a sex scene, and my body instantly reacts. The hero rips open the heroine's blouse and pulls her close, devouring her mouth in his. Their passion stirs through me, warming the sensitive parts of my body. I sigh, realizing how long it's been since I've been touched like that. Then I think of the ways I could be touched if I hadn't accepted this job, if my ex hadn't dumped me over it. I could be getting fucked right now, letting out all the stress yesterday brought me. *This is pathetic*. To clear the thoughts from my mind, I shake my head. I've been at this for hours and have almost finished the assignment. My shoulders tense when I notice the time: *three-fifteen in the morning*. My eyes are heavy, and I've emptied the first bottle of Merlot, and now, thanks to that one little kissing scene, I'm horny as hell.

I sit up, flexing my muscles and tilting my head from left to right. With my fingers back on the keyboard, I prepare to type while struggling not to look up at the television. Now distracted, I hear every word pouring from the speaker, even at the low volume setting.

“Let me make love to your body and your mind,” he says to the heroine.

I take a deep breath, diverting my eyes between the two screens, willing my desires to settle.

“Finish this project, Jessica,” I demand of myself, but who am I kidding? Once you’ve gone down the road of lust, sexual release is often pretty hard to ignore. Another deep breath, and I continue my task only to stop mid-sentence. I press my lips together, and glance at the TV, thankful the scene switched to something more wholesome. But—it’s too late now. *Fuck it!* I sit the computer on the table and push myself off the couch with my wineglass in tow. When I reach the kitchen, I pour myself another drink, downing it before making it the few feet to my dining table. I look to my bedroom and subconsciously find myself pushing the door open and walking over to my nightstand.

Pulling the drawer open, I grab the pink satin drawstring bag that houses my best friend for the last six months—BOB. The MF that gets the job done—E-V-E-R-Y fucking time. “Hey, good friend,” I say, while making my way back into the living room.

I flop down in the middle of the sofa, slightly slouched, and reach for my phone. I thumb to the internet browser and eagerly type in the URL to a porn site. Explicit images bounce off the screen, jolting my vision as I skim them in search of the perfect one. The hardest part about masturbating is finding the right video. My body comes alive pretty easily at the thought of a nearing orgasm but watching a good flick can make the process more...exhilarating. At least for me. Sometimes, I picture myself as the girl, getting stretched out so deliciously.

After searching through a few pages, I settle on a—I was caught by my stepbrother skit. Yes, I like the corny role plays where they pretend there’s some sort of forbidden connection that makes the sex...wrong. It takes the scene a couple of minutes to get started, and if I’m sure I wouldn’t face the dreaded buffering fiasco, I would skip ahead to the good parts. Thankfully, the wait isn’t too long, and as soon as I see the brother spying on the sister with his dick in hand, my body lights up.

I touch my breasts, tugging at my nipples and shiver through the tingles it brings. The camera zooms in on the

brother's stroke, and my arousal stirs, coating my folds. The sister finally notices him jacking off to her, and the reaction is...*stupid*, but it's the part I've been waiting for. They share a few poorly written lines about how it's wrong, then the scene cuts to him lapping away at her pussy.

My kitty purrs as I reach for BOB and with one hand slide him out of the pink satchel and position him just right. My clit throbs when the cool silicone touches it, and aches with desire as I circle the tip. I need this release so bad, and I want more than nothing to drive it into my walls, but instead, I take my time, teasing myself so I can come when the actor does. In the next scene, he enters her, and as if on cue, BOB makes his way into my pussy. I click the side, turning the motor to a low speed. It's late, and I need to sleep, but I don't want to rush my orgasm. I pleasure myself, slowly coming undone right here in my living room with the shades wide open. The thought of someone watching me through my window aids in my pleasure. He increases his stroke, and I do the same, raising the speed on my vibrator one notch. *And boy does it feel amazing.*

The camera flashes in again, and I arch my back, imagining myself in her place. My eyes roll shut as I pump against my thrusts, reveling in the bliss. He groans, forcing one of my own, but instantly his voice goes quiet, snapping me out of my trance. I peek one eye open to see my solo sexcapade is being interrupted by a call. Not recognizing the number, I decline it, closing my eyes when the step brother's voice roars through my ear again.

Not even sixty seconds later, my video pauses once more, and the same number stares at me from the screen. I shut off my vibrator but leave it in place. I don't want to answer, but for this person to call back to back, it may be important. Pressing the accept call button, I sit upright, preparing myself to speak.

"I'm imagining how good your pussy would feel wrapped around my dick, Candace. Your sweet sticky juices coating me," a deep voice pours through the speakers before I can get out a word.

It's not important after all, and whoever Candace is, she's a lucky bitch. I'm about to tell him he's got the wrong number, but what he says next sends pulses to my pussy, reminding me that BOB is still there waiting for me. *Fuck it*, I think to myself. It would be a shame to let this go to waste. He's obviously already into this, and I'm so close to getting my nut. What would it hurt to let this man's zaddy voice coax me through to my orgasm?

"Can you picture my dick inside you, Candace?" he growls.

I flip on the motor and press my dildo deeper inside my throbbing fortress. "Um," is all I can muster.

"That's a good girl. Play with your pretty pussy for me. Picture me inside you, stretching you out, while trailing kisses along your neck."

I do as instructed, using his voice and direction as my muse. My imagination runs wild with the envisioning of his strong hands touching my body in places I've longed to be touched for some time. His words send me over the edge, forcing me to crave more of whatever it is he has to offer. This stranger opens me up, lighting a fire I didn't know I had. Phone sex has never been my thing, Justin and I didn't do things like this. Missionary was the best it got for us, and I honestly thought that was enough. I listen to all the dirty things this man wants to do to—Candace—and realize I've been missing out.

It isn't long before my toes curl and my back arches in preparation for my nearing orgasm. My breath quickens, and I tune out his voice, focusing only on the steady humming coming from my vibrator. I clench my muscles around the stiff silicone and angle my wrist to hit my G-spot. A rush of sweet, erotic bliss pours through me, sending my pelvis and every nerve ending into a convulsing frenzy.

"Uh, Uh. AHHH, I'm cumming."

"Damn, baby. You sound so fucking amazing. Put the phone to your pussy, I wanna hear you come."

Why the fuck did he say that? Meeting his request hesitantly, I place the phone on speaker and position it between my thighs, the buzz of my toy seemingly exciting him more. He moans, and I can tell he's enjoying himself. Our breaths race at the same pace, and I know my release is near.

“Fuck yourself good, sweets. I want to know how it sounds when your cum is pouring out of you.”

Those are the words my body needs, and soon my pleasure seeps out, soaking my leather cushions. I moan loudly, my chest pumping rapidly, and I will my heartbeat to a steady pace. The line goes quiet for a moment while I gather my thoughts and prepare to clean up the mess we've made.

“Thank you!” I say hastily.

“Damn! You're welcome. That was—”

“By the way, my name's not Candace.”

Click. I end the call, tossing my phone onto the coffee table, leaving it and everything else right where it is until morning.

CHAPTER TWO

JESSICA

My cell phone rings, interrupting the meeting I'm having with my assistant. In approximately forty minutes, I'll be presenting last night's assignment to my clients. After staying up till the wee hours of the morning, and my unexpected moment of pleasure, I crammed the last remaining agenda items in as soon as I reached work. It's perfect—my projects always are—but still I'm nervous. I've done everything to prove myself, and this is my chance to let my boss know I'm exactly who she hired. That I will be an asset to this company by securing and producing the best training programs on the market.

"Do you need anything before I head out?" Erin, my assistant, asks placing a folder on my desk.

Picking up my phone, I accept the incoming call. "No, I think that's all. I'll do one more run through to be ready for the presentation this evening. Thank you!" I place the receiver to my ear.

"You hung up on me before I could get off last night. Doesn't seem fair," a deep voice pours out at me.

It's the guy from last night. The rattle in his tone sends an oh-so-familiar shiver down my spine. I contemplate my response, toying with the thought of obliging, giving him an answer I'm sure he wants. Then I consider how crazy it all is, how loony I am for being turned on by his calls. *What does*

that say about me if I give in to his request? Will he continue to call if I do?

“Are you there, beautiful?”

“How do you know I’m beautiful?” I ask after a moment of silence.

“You’ve gotta be! Only a goddess can make those delicious fucking sounds you made last night. Now, are you going to be a good girl and let me get off?”

My nipples harden at his request, pushing against the fabric of my bra. The line goes quiet and I struggle over what to say next. This is insane, borderline obsessive even. I should definitely hang up, but curiosity wins every time. “I’m in the middle of work.”

“Perfect,” he growls. “Do you have an office or a cubicle?” he continues with bated breath.

I sense he’s already started, not really caring to wait for permission. The thought instantly arouses me as I’m making my way to the door. “I have an office,” I add, closing it lightly before locking it and flipping the blinds closed.

“Then shut the door, sit that pretty ass of yours down at your desk, and wait for me to come.”

“If I do this, will you stop calling?” I ask, secretly pleading for him to say no.

“I don’t think you want that, sweets.”

“What makes you so sure?”

“The way you fucked yourself to the sound of my voice last night tells me otherwise. And I doubt you’d be preparing to phone bone me.”

I go quiet again, and he chuckles.

“Is the door closed?”

“Yes,” I whimper.

“Good girl! Now, spread your legs.” His voice lowers a few octaves. “I want you touching yourself, sweets.”

I do as I'm told, hiking my skirt up around my ass and taking a seat behind my desk. Reaching inside the drawer to my left, I pull my earphones from my purse. Nervously, I plug the headset into the port and set the phone down on the desk. The last thing I want is to be caught with my hands inside my pussy, so I scoot close, leaving enough room to comfortably fondle myself. Yes, the door is locked, but one could never be too sure.

Gently, I slide my panties to the side and press my fingers against my clit. A chill runs through me as I dip my hand low, surprised by how wet I am. *What is this guy doing to me?* I wonder. Never have I ever been so horny and eager to touch myself, let alone to do so by the demand of a stranger.

“Are you touching yourself, sweets? Is your pussy wet for me?” he questions, the rattle in his voice sending shivers down my spine.

“Yes!”

“Good. Imagine me there with you. Watching from across the room while you play in your dripping pussy. She looks so pretty from over here.”

“Um.” I moan, dipping my fingers in and out of my wetness.

“Do you like me watching you?”

I don't respond. Verbal communication during any type of sex has never been my thing. I like to focus and enjoy the bliss I'm in. But I sense he needs more.

“Do you?” he demands, his tone deeper and for some reason sexier than before.

“Yes, I love you watching me.”

“Um. You've got me so hard, sweets. I'm going to approach you now. Open your legs for me. I need to see all of you as I stroke my dick through my pants.”

Instinctively, I push back in my chair, spreading my legs wide like he's really here with me. I picture him—well, the

image I've conjured up of him—standing in front of me, biting his lips and reaching out to me.

“I'm in front of you now. Damn, I want to touch you, taste you, smell you.”

“Then do it. Do all those things.”

“I know you'd want that, but not yet, beautiful. I need you to crave my dick.”

“Um... I do, I have since last night.”

He groans, and the line goes quiet for a moment. The only noise to be heard is his heavy panting. Damn, even his sex breath sounds good to me.

“What do you want? Tell me how you want me to fuck you.”

“Um... Hard! Nice and hard.”

“Yeah. What else?” He moans in my ear.

“I want to feel your dick in the pit of my stomach, stretching me out with each stroke.”

“I want that, too, beautiful. You don't even know how bad.”

“I can imagine.”

“I'm going to release my dick now. Play with your pussy for me. I wanna hear how she sounds without that fucking vibrator.”

“I thought you liked the sound of it. It at least seemed like it.”

“Oh, I did, baby. But there's nothing better than the pleasing cries of a hungry pussy. Is yours hungry?”

“She is.”

“Good. Finger yourself. The way you imagine me fucking you. Picture me knelt in front of you, jerking myself, waiting for you to make yourself come.”

I pump my wrist, working myself into a frenzy. Thinking of how hot it would be if he was here. How turned on I would

be to see him jack off to me masturbating at my desk. To know my assistant and coworkers are on the other side of these four walls, clueless of the things he's asking me to do. Damn, it feels so good to be...nasty and kinky. I don't even know his name, yet I desire to please him. To make him come just as he asked. I focus on him and what his face must look like in this moment. Does he have hair? What would it be like to run my hands through it, to grip it and pull his face between my thighs?

Moans escape him, letting me know he's enjoying it also. Ensuring me I've succeeded in turning him on and soon getting him off. The thought fuels me, sending a rush of confidence through me, and I want nothing more than to revel in it.

“My pussy is so wet for you.”

“Hmm. I can hear her, sweets. So fucking wet. Pump your fingers harder for me.”

I bite back a moan and speed up my strokes, hitting my G-spot just right. “Uh,” I let out.

“Atta girl. I'm about to cum, baby, let me hear those cries.”

I poke my spot again. “Uh. Oh my...”

“Faster!” He groans.

“Fuck! Yes...uh...uh. I'm—”

“Cumming... Fuck, fuck. Uhhhh,” he blurts out.

A few seconds later, I, too, find my release. I stay still, letting my mind settle around what just happened. I chuckle and shake my head.

“What's funny?”

“I can't believe I did that.”

“You mean *we*, and it was fucking amazing.”

“It was really good.” I stand to pull my skirt back into place before reaching for a wet wipe from my purse to clean my hands. My blouse is a little disheveled, so I take time to straighten it as well.

“I’d love—”

Checking my watch, I notice I have only ten minutes until my presentation. “Listen, this was great, but I need to go.” I quickly gather my materials.

“Wait! At least tell me your name.”

I pick the phone up, staring at it longer than I intend to. It completely slipped my mind that I never gave him a name. A part of me wants to leave it this way, keep the mystery of this whole thing. But it’s the least I can do after having phone sex with him—twice now.

“Jessica.” I say slyly.

“Beautiful. Have a great day, sweets.”

KADE

“Fuck, that was hot.” I reach for a tissue from my desk. Sweet little Jessica surely made a mess of me today. I glance down to find my seed is all over the front of my pants. With the thin material wrapped around my index finger, I pat at the white substance, hoping it doesn’t leave a stain. My efforts aren’t successful when I see little balls of lint collecting on the fabric.

I stand, letting my slacks fall to my feet before picking them up to place them in the dirty clothes hamper. When I reach my closet, I flip on the light, drop them in the bin, and snag a fresh pair from a hanger. Shaking my head, I replay the morning and night before in my mind. I dialed Candace’s number as I have many times before, not for a second thinking I would misdial it, but I did, and boy am I glad about it. Best fucking accident ever. Maybe it was the adrenaline rushing to my dick that hadn’t allowed me to pick up on that mistake or the fact Jessica sounds nothing like Candace. Her voice is much sweeter. Not that there needs to be a comparison, they’re two completely different beings, but damn am I intrigued.

In the years I've dealt with Candace, I've never been this turned on. Now, don't get me wrong, she's amazing in bed, but there's something about Jessica that hooks me, almost hypnotizing me. When I dialed her number again, I hadn't expected her to pick up. I figured last night was pure luck but I needed to know why she hadn't disconnected the call. And it was my intention to ask, but as the phone rang and I waited for her to pick up, I thought back to the way she'd sounded. One thing led to another, and before I knew it, I was demanding she let me finish.

I know, this all started out on the wrong foot as my mom would say, but damn if I don't give a shit. Call me crazy, and hell, I might be, but the way she responded to me has me wanting to explore every facet of her being. I want to figure out what makes her tick, what makes her laugh, and most of all, what buttons I'll need to press to have her calling my name.

My phone buzzes, pulling me from the pits of my mind, reminding me of a pending meeting. I button my slacks then slip on my Berluti Oxfords and shutting the closet door behind me. On my way out, I snatch up my phone, keys, and wallet before slipping my arms into my custom-tailored blazer. With one last glance around the room, I head out to make my meeting in downtown LA.

Unlocking my car, I climb in and press the push-to-start button, all while smiling as Jessica occupies my conscience, and I wonder if she's still thinking of me, too. Quickly, I scroll my call log and program her number as *Sweet Jessica*, then toss it in the passenger seat. I shift my vehicle into gear, making a promise to myself that today won't be the last time she hears from me.

CHAPTER THREE

JESSICA

I rush along the crowded sidewalk, sliding my way through the sea of people heading to my destination. I'm more than twenty minutes late and do not look forward to hearing the girls' mouths. When I step into the restaurant, I scan the crowd looking for my friends, spotting them in the middle of the room at a table for four. Ariel waves me over with a smile, and I dash toward them.

"Sorry I'm late." I drop my purse to the floor and take my seat.

"You made it," Ariel proclaims.

"Finally, bitch, we're starving," Chante adds.

"Exactly," Lee chimes in.

"I know, I know. I had to send off an email to my boss before I left out. That, and I overslept."

"Email? It's Saturday." Chante frowns.

"Now you know damn well she works around the clock," Lee teases.

"Oh hush. Have you ordered mimosas yet?" I reply while peeling my jacket off.

"We haven't ordered anything. Was waiting on you."

I flag down a waiter. "Excuse me, can we get a pitcher of mimosas, please."

He nods and sprints toward the kitchen. After several minutes, he returns with two full pitchers for the table and proceeds to take our orders. We've had a standing reservation here every Saturday since I moved to town. It's a surprise to me they don't know what our order is, considering we get the same thing every time.

"How did the presentation go yesterday?" Lee asks, pouring the sweet elixir into each of our glasses.

"Amazing! We got the contract, and I will be running point."

They cheer me on, each with their own expression of congratulations.

"Thank you. The client loved it and has hired us for the next six trainings."

"Amazing! But why do you sound so surprised? You know you're good as shit, J," Chante adds.

"I know, but this was my first solo demo, so I was on edge."

The server approaches, carrying trays filled with all our favorites. Each week, we order separate items but request four extra plates to share from every dish. Ariel digs in, passing the plates around the table while we continue to talk. The topic has since shifted from my work, to the latest news on Lee's dating life. Of the four of us, Lee and I are the single ones, except Lee enjoys exploring the dating scene, while I...well, I use my vibrator.

"Are you going to see him again?" I ask, taking a bite of eggs.

"I think so. I mean, he was a little too touchy-feely for me, but other than that he was a total gentleman. And you know how hard it is to find those."

We laugh at the honesty in her statement. My ex was not a gentleman in any form, but he wasn't a bad guy either—chivalry just wasn't his strong suit. Ariel's husband and Chante's fiancé are really great guys, and before them, they, too, suffered their fair share of tactless men.

“What about you, Jess? Been on any dates?” Chante taps me from under the table.

My mind instantly trails to my calls with—*shit, I don't even know his name.* “No, I haven't had the time.”

“Ugh,” they say in unison.

“You need to make time, bitch,” Chante demands in an agitated tone. “You can't keep spending all your time working on these projects. You came to Arlington—”

“To work! That's what I'm doing,” I answer defensively.

“You came to live your life. To start over. Work is only a piece of the puzzle. You know what, we're going out tonight.”

“Come on, Tay—”

“Don't 'come on, Tay' me. We're going out! You need to have some fun.”

“Yes, let's! I need to shake my ass.” Lee dances in her seat.

“Well, let me call Larry and let him know,” Ariel adds, cosigning Chante's foolery.

There's no sense in fighting with them, because I'll never win. Once Chante's made up her mind, it's solid, nothing will change it. And unless I want the bitch bugging me all day and night and maybe through to next week, it's best I suck it up and get excited. My phone rings, vibrating against my foot on the floor. The girls are so busy chatting, I take the moment to see who it is. I recognize the number from yesterday and cross my legs to still the pulsing his call sends to my pussy. Declining it, I work to hide my smile and place the phone face-down on the table.

“Jess, you should wear the little red number you got a couple of weeks ago. The short one,” Lee says when I return my attention to my friends.

I nod and take another forkful of my food. My phone chimes to life again, rattling the table and clinking against my plate. Flipping it over, I see it's him again and quickly hit ignore. But only a second later it goes off once more, this time alerting me of a text. I lean forward onto my forearms, using

my left hand to tap open his message while trying to keep one ear on the conversation.

What are you doing? his message reads.

I smile and thumb my response: *Having brunch with my girls. How can I help you?*

Brunch sounds nice! What are you having?

His reply is tasteful, polite, but I must admit a little disappointing. A part of me was expecting some kinky shit to pop up on my screen. The thought of reading all the freaky things he wants me to do to myself whilst my friends sit clueless next to me is exciting. But he presents me with *decency. What the fuck? What's gotten into me?*

Instead of responding, I lift my phone and snap a picture of our half-eaten food. Pressing send, I sit it down and toss a piece of bacon in my mouth.

“How are you going to take a photo of the food *after* we've eaten it?” Lee asks in between chews.

“So, where are we going tonight?” I ask, avoiding her question. My text alert chimes, stealing my focus, causing me to miss the location announcement.

A woman who loves to eat. I love it! It all looks delicious.

It is! Would you like some? I reply.

I'll happily take whatever you're offering me, sweets.

Be careful what you wish for, I joke.

I'm not worried!

Maybe you should be.

Why is that?

Not expecting him to respond so quickly, I stare at the messages blankly. I have no witty comeback for him, and the evidence of that must show on my face. Chante taps my foot, and I look at her.

“What are you concentrating so hard on over there?” She nods to my hands.

“Uh...nothing. Was replying to my boss,” I lie and sit my phone face-down, deciding to leave the conversation where it is for now. Maybe I’ll come up with something flirty to say.

“I’ma take your damn phone,” Lee barks. “It’s girls’ time, no work. Now come on so we can make this pedicure appointment. I’m sure you’ve been neglecting them dogs with all this work you’re doing.”

Wiggling my toes through my flats, I try to hold in my laugh. I swear, I love my friends, but it irks my nerves when they’re right. My feet are begging to be pampered, and it’s not even funny.

Music blares as we squirm through the ocean of people. After our pedicures, I’d hoped Chante would’ve changed her mind about going out tonight, but luck wasn’t on my side. For the last ten minutes, the girls and I struggled to push our way into the club in search of a spot that’s a little less crowded. We find one near the corner of the bar. The floor is sticky under my shoes, and the scent of booze and bad cologne fills the air.

“What can I get you, ladies?” the bartender questions.

“A round of shots, please. Also, two cranberry and vodkas, one Hennessy, and a pineapple and vodka”. Knowing exactly what my friends like, I place the order and direct my attention to the girls.

Chante is already dancing, and Lee is warming up. Ariel stays close to me while I wait for the drinks. Like me, she isn’t much into the scene—crowds of people rubbing against each other in an attempt at some fun and maybe the occasional hookup. Liquid courage is definitely needed if we’re to be living it up and enjoying the night. The bartender places eight glasses in front of me, and I thank him by handing him my credit card to open a tab. Ariel takes the four tiny glasses into both hands, passing us each one for ourselves. As she does this, I pick up the small plate of limes, holding it out for them to snag a slice.

“Ready?” Lee asks when I set the dish back on the counter.

“Yup,” I add, clutching my purse under my arm.

On the count of three, we lick the salted rim, toss the glasses back, swallowing the contents in one swoop before sucking on the lime wedges. My throat tingles from the concoction, and I wince, letting out a loud breath. In unison, we each grab the taller glasses in a rush to wash away the aftertaste of the tequila.

It isn't long before I'm feeling the effects of both drinks and begin to loosen up. Allowing the music to take over, I sway to the lyrics of Cardi B, singing along with my girls. One thing to know about me, I'm as conservative as they come, but Cardi is my spirit animal, person, or whatever you want to call it. Her words ignite things in me, which isn't necessarily a good thing for a tipsy Jessica. A few guys approach us from the other side of the bar, squeezing their way between our circle.

“Hey, I'm Chris!” a tall, broody-looking fellow with deep-brown eyes says to me.

I accept his hand shake and introduce myself. “I'm Jessica,” I add, speaking in his ear.

“Nice to meet you! Can I get you another drink?” he yells over the music.

“Yeah. Two cran and vodkas, one Hennessy, and one pineapple and vodka,” I say, instantly realizing from the look on his face that he wasn't offering to buy four drinks. *That damn Cardi B*, I think to myself. I'm about to rescind my order, but he leans for the bar.

“Five Hennessey's, two cran- vodkas, and a pineapple vodka. Tab's under West,” Chris says to the bartender.

Well, shit, thank you, Cardi, I say internally and turn away slightly with my brows raised. “Thank you!”

“No problem!” He finishes the last of his drink and places both my empty glass and his on the bar top. “Which ones yours?” He points to the freshly made cocktails.

“Pineapple.”

Chris hands me a glass, then grabs the attention of his friends who take turns passing out the remainder of the drinks. The music switches to Drake, and the volume rises as we all sing the words and dance in place. Chris wraps an arm around my waist, pulling me close. After a few more songs, I pause to catch my breath. Not once does my new friend skip a beat, he’s right there next to me smiling—*hard*.

I ignore his glances and take a peek at my friends. Catching Lee’s eyes, I tilt my glass, silently asking if they’d like another round. She checks with Ariel and Chante before nodding yes. Switching my purse from one hand to the other, I call our mixologist over. Before I can tell him what I’d like, Chris steps in, ordering another round for me and my friends. I protest, but he insists on doing so. One drink is fine, but I’ve always had this weird inkling that if a guy buys you more than one drink, he definitely expects to get laid at the end of the night. Lee’s voice plays in my head: *If a man wants to buy your drinks, you fucking let him, and if you want to fuck him at the end of the night, do that, too*. There won’t be any of the latter happening, but I guess the drinks will be okay.

As I nurse the next round, I force myself to engage in conversation. It’s not that this guy is boring, but my mind is just not here. The point of tonight was to let loose, and I did, but now drunk, all I can think about is my mystery caller. I realize I never responded to his message earlier and wonder what he’s thinking. Chris taps me on the shoulder, pulling me from my thoughts, asking me to dance. I decline and suggest he goes and has fun with Lee, because seriously, the girl has yet to slow down. Removing my phone from my purse, I open my texts and scroll to the unsaved number.

What are you wearing? I type, smiling at the nerve of myself. Almost instantly, my phone buzzes and his reply pops across the screen.

I feel like the right answer would be, nothing. But, unfortunately, I’m fully dressed.

Shame! I was finally going to tell you why you should be worried. I bite down on my lip to hold back the giddy feeling I have inside.

Oh really? Why is that?

I can't tell you now. You needed to be naked for that.

Okay, so I don't really have a reason for why he should be worried or be careful of what he wished for. This just seems like the thing to say. Before I can second guess myself, I hit send and shove my device back into my purse. In a few seconds, my bag vibrates under my arms, but I will myself to ignore it. A part of me likes how quickly he responds, and while I am eager to know what the message says, I think I'll wait it out. Besides, there's a hell of a chance he's sent me something dirty, and I'll need to be in the confines of my home to fully explore that possibility.

CHAPTER FOUR

JESSICA

I stumble inside my apartment. Still tipsy from the liquor, I opt to slide to the floor, using my back to slowly close the door. The walk from my Uber to my home proved to be a feat, and all I want to do is get these evil strappy open-toe heels off. I unhook the sides, kick them off and crawling the rest of the way through my foyer. The only light comes shining in from the large window that I've yet to apply curtains to. Looking up at it now, I wonder why I've never done that. I'm sure it all makes sense to a sober me, but right now, all I hear are my mother's words about serial killers and stalkers.

My purse buzzes on the floor, and I back track to retrieve it. With my back against the wall, I pull my iPhone from inside and let the bag fall back to where it previously sat. I fumble around for a bit, trying to get a good grip before answering.

"Hey, babe... Making sure you made it home," Ariel's voice calls out at me.

"I did. Just crawled in."

"What?"

"Don't ask. How many drinks did we have? I've never been this drunk. I think I may have hit on my Uber driver," I say as I lay down on my side.

"I stopped at three, but that guy you were chatting it up with brought you at least four, plus the one we had before they showed up."

“Damn! Don’t let me do that again. I’m sure I’ll feel it in the morning.”

“Yup! But you needed it, though. You work too hard. Get some rest, I’ll check on you tomorrow.”

We say our goodbyes and end the call. I know I should get up and head into my room, but this floor feels like where I’m meant to be for the night. Not one to fight against fate, I close my eyes for a moment to collect myself.

A loud rattle snaps me from my daze, a bright light blinding me as my phone dances on my hardwood tiles. The time reads four-fifteen in the morning, and I realize I’ve been asleep for at least twenty minutes. Refusing to move, I accept the call and place the receiver to my ear while the other is pressed into the cold surface.

“Hello,” I say, groggily.

“Are you asleep, sweets?”

His voice flows through the speakers, instantly snapping me out of my sleep-filled haze. I grip the phone and sit up. His tone is low, sensual even, and if memory serves, this is his bedroom voice. I’m way too drunk to consider phone sex right now, but I’m not certain I want to tell him that. We’ve only spoken a couple of times, and neither of those instances held any real substance. Actually, the most normal conversation we’ve had was our texts from earlier.

“I was,” I finally answer.

“Should I call another time?”

“No! You’re fine. I need to get up off this floor anyway,” I add while grunting and lifting myself to my feet.

“Floor? Do I even want to know?” There’s a slight chuckle in his voice.

“Are you teasing me, sir?” I twist my back, stretching out my cramped muscles.

“Kade!”

Picking my clutch and heels up from in front of the door, I head toward my bedroom. “Excuse me?” I flop down on the mattress.

“That’s my name. Figured after our last few conversations, you’d at least want to know it.”

“It’s nice...different.”

“Thank you!”

“No problem. So, did you have a specific reason for calling me at this hour?” I flirt, laying back and resting my head on a pillow.

“Just curiosity.”

“For what?”

“I wanted to hear what your normal voice sounds like. As for the hour, well, it was around this time when I first called, so I took a gamble.”

“Are you a gambling man, Kade?” I smile and I swear he does, too.

“Only when something—someone—is of interest to me.”

“Um. Good to know.” The line is silent for several seconds. I’m not sure what to say next, and I get the feeling neither does he. The only sound emanating from the other end is his breath, which is almost in sync with my own.

“What are you thinking, sweets?”

“Who’s Candace?” I blurt with more force than intended.

“Right to it, huh? Candace is a young woman I would see during my occasional visits to Virginia.”

“Your occasional girlfriend?” I pry, not sure I appreciate his response. It shouldn’t really matter to me who this woman is to him. I only learned his name a second ago, but deep down I need to know, because even though I enjoy all the sensual things he says to me, there’s this probing sense of guilt.

“No. Not a girlfriend. I actually haven’t had one of those in a very long time. Candace and I dated for a brief stint a few

years ago, but things never became serious.”

“What stopped it from doing so?” I ask, sinking myself deeper into my pillow and propping one foot on my knee.

He takes a deep breath. “Distance for one—while I do come to that area a few times a year for work, I travel for the rest of it. Another reason is a relationship wasn’t a thing either of us thought about. I’m picky with the company I keep, and while things were fun, Candace and I just didn’t fit the *serious* mode.”

“You said *were* and *didn’t*, but you were calling her a few days ago.” I squeeze my eyes shut, unable to keep from feeling regret in my line of questioning. *This man doesn’t owe any explanations about his love life.*

“You’re attentive and analytical. Let me guess. You work in either finance or programming of sorts?”

“Programming of sorts.” I smile, but it isn’t lost on me that he dodged answering my question. Not that it matters at all, but *red flag*.

“Maybe you can tell me all about it one day. But to address your concerns, I finally reached Candace—”

Okay, so he wasn’t dodging. “What happened, did she used to have this number?” I interrupt.

“No, her number is still the same, I just misdialed. Don’t ask why I didn’t scroll through my contacts and press her name.”

He chuckles, and I’m surprised to find that I like it.

“But I called the correct number later after my um... discussion with you that day in your office. Turns out, she’s met someone.”

“Oh. Well, okay...sorry?” I add, unsure of how to respond or if he’s affected by the whole thing. “Is this new? The thing with the guy?”

“I didn’t ask the details. It’s not my place. I made things very clear about my expectations, so she is well within her rights.”

“I get that, but you did have some sort of something. I mean, I don’t know you, but you don’t strike me as the type to call for phone sex without knowing if she’s expecting it.”

He laughs. “But isn’t that sort of what happened with you?”

I don’t try to hold back my laugh. He’s right. “Yes! But in your defense, you thought you were calling Candace.”

“Well, then, Jessica. What’s your excuse? You didn’t exactly protest my calls.”

“Ahhh.” I clasp my hand around my face, letting out a low grunt, embarrassed at myself. “I knew you were going to ask.” I laugh, and so does he. *Damn, even his laugh is sexy.*

“Well, share!” he encourages.

“I...was...masturbating when you interrupted.”

“You say that like you’re ashamed. Don’t be!” His tone lowers a few octaves, sending tingles through my body. “You should find confidence in pleasing yourself. When a woman knows exactly what it takes to get herself off, she releases a sexual energy that can be ravenous. And such energy can ooze out into her encounters with a partner. When she doesn’t know herself, it shows, and she allows him to dominate her body.”

“Is that a bad thing?”

“No! Not at all. Don’t get me wrong, I’m a dominant man, but there’s nothing sexier than when a woman can open up and enjoy whatever pleasure she’s receiving. If she doesn’t know herself that way, she’s just there in the moment, and yes, the guy will most likely come. But when she’s truly aroused, his orgasm will be ten times better.”

“How old are you, Kade?”

“Why? Does my age matter to you?”

His tone shifts, feeding me a sense of concern, maybe disappointment in my question. Not that age is a big factor, but it does matter some. And now, he’s probably thinking I’m judging or about to brush him off.

“You seem like you’ve had a lot of experience with the female body.”

“Ah. Fair enough. I’m thirty-three. And I’m not married, nor do I have any baby mommas,” he adds jokingly.

“I didn’t ask about—”

“I know, but thought I should tell you. But I’ve had some *experience*. Does that bother you?”

“No, it doesn’t! I guess you just don’t hear men say things like that, at least not men my age. They usually don’t care too much about how confident a girl feels. They have their agenda and that’s usually what they focus on.”

“Then you’ve let all the wrong men have access to your body.”

“It’s not been—”

“I don’t care! However many men it was or wasn’t, they were the wrong ones.”

I gulp.

“But I will honestly say I was once one of those wrong guys,” he says playfully.

I’m thankful for the change in pace. My body is betraying me in so many ways it’s not even funny. I like that we are having an actual conversation, but Lord knows I can’t stop thinking about the sexual aspect of it. He’s so wise and confident, and my body seems to like him for it.

“So, what changed? At which point did you go from the wrong guy to the right one?”

“I grew up and dated older women who showed me exactly the kind of power a woman possesses. And excuse me for being so blunt with you, sweets, but I think you possess that power.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I do. You not hanging up on me that first night told me just that.”

“That’s why you called me back?”

“Partly, but mostly because you didn’t let me finish. You hung up on me once you used me for what I was worth.” A smile can be heard through his words.

“I didn’t use you up,” I squeal.

“Oh yes, you did. Made me feel like a cheap piece of meat.” He laughs.

“You must like that?”

“I might.”

There’s that sexual tension again. I chuckle to break the looming awkwardness, and he joins in. It’s nostalgic to be up at this hour, blushing and talking to a man I’ve never seen.

“So.” He clears his throat. “What sort of things are you interested in?”

I smile. “A lot actually. Movies, reading, gaming.”

“Gaming? Really, what do you play?”

“Fortnite and a few others.”

“Wow, I’m honestly surprised.”

“Don’t be. I haven’t played in a few weeks. Work has pretty much consumed my days and nights.”

“Is that why you were up the other night?”

“Yes, it was. It was long hours of me trying to finalize the details on a project for a client.”

“Do you work late a lot?”

“Mostly, yes. It’s rare that I get any true rest time. I’ve been at my company for only six months, so I’m trying to make a good impression.”

“I’m sure your boss doesn’t need you around the clock to prove that. You should really consider leaving as much of your work at work as possible.”

“You know, my friends said the exact same thing during brunch. Even forced me to a club tonight.”

“I’m certain you turned many heads,” he coos.

“A few.”

We both laugh.

“Well, Ms. Jessica, it’s late over there where you are, so I’m going to let you get some rest.”

“Thank you for calling!”

“No, sweets. Thank you for answering!”

We say our goodbyes and end the call. A smile a mile long stretches my face as I place the phone on the bed. Relaxing my legs, I yawn through a smile and peel myself off the mattress. I undress and head into my bathroom for a quick shower. The night has been long, and sleep calls my name, so a hot bath is the perfect ending to my day.

KADE

I sit my phone on the table in front of me and rub my hand over my beard. It took everything in me to hold my composure and not let my imagination run wild. Talking to her is refreshing, and the conversation seems to flow. I’ve never had issues with words. As the CEO of TrainX, an international workplace development training company, talking is my specialty. But with her it’s natural, not rehearsed like some of the pitches I’ve made over the course of my career.

It’s late, and I have a big day ahead of me tomorrow, but I wanted to stay up and hear her voice. She left me hanging twice earlier, and I found myself watching my phone screen like an eager teenager, hoping she’d text me back. After a while, I said fuck it and tried my luck. So glad I did, because I get the sense she’s feeling me, too. The way she giggled and perked right up even though she was sleeping told me most of what I needed to know. She’s adventurous but most likely doesn’t trust herself to explore that side of her. The concern for Candace, not mentioning her new relationship, tells me she’s a

sweetheart. And her attention to the words I chose tells me she's a very careful and purposeful girl.

Heading for the shower, I grab my Bluetooth speaker, setting it up on the sink. The day was long, tense, and thanks to Jessica, sexually charged. Just replaying the sound of her laugh makes my muscles tighten—all in a good way. Throughout my meeting, I found myself distracted waiting for her to respond. When her little flirts came across the screen, I willed myself to remain somewhat subtle. All I wanted to do was ask her to send me pictures, and after tonight, I want that even more. I need to put a face to the name and sultry voice.

I allow the stream of water to pour over my head, the temperature is a little too much for my cleanly shaved scalp but doesn't bother me too much. I close my eyes, letting the day flow down the drain. This is usually the time of night where I begin meditating to relax my brain so that I can start fresh the next day. Like always, I take deep breaths, concentrating on the rise and fall of my chest while thinking positive things. This goes on for about three minutes—I know because I time my repetitions with the melodic tunes coming through the speaker.

I open my eyes and reach for the soap and a clean washcloth from the styled stack next to my sink. Dipping it under the stream, I lather it up and proceed to cleanse my body. Once done, I rub my hands along my skin, aiding the water in washing the suds away.

Jessica's giggle echoes through my subconscious again, and me to smile. Pressure pools in my gut, making its way down to my forming erection. I groan as I think back to our foreplay the other day and imagine what she would look like standing naked in front of me. Droplets of water cascading over her flesh, her nipples pert and ready to be touched. I grab the soap again, filling my hand with suds before gripping myself at the base of my dick. I moan as I jerk myself hard and fast to the thought of her.

CHAPTER FIVE

JESSICA

After getting shit-faced drunk on Saturday, I spent Sunday laid up fighting through a hangover. The throbbing in my head and the upset bowels reminded me exactly why I limit myself to glasses of wine. Me and liquor haven't ever been the best of friends. I drink entirely too much of it, and she thanks me by knocking me on my ass for a day. But this morning, I feel refreshed and ready to start my week. There are a few new contracts for me to review, and I'm excited to finally have my own personal workload.

They were so impressed with my presentation on Friday that my boss emailed me last night asking me if I could run two additional projects. Of course, I eagerly accepted. These are smaller than the one I turned in last week, but I don't mind at all. Work is work, and I'll knock it out of the park as always.

"Good Morning, Erin, can you meet me in my office in about five minutes? Lauren sent over a few contracts for me to review."

"Sure thing. Need me to grab you a coffee before I come in?"

"Nope, I already got it. But bring yourself one," I say when I reach my office door.

Erin smiles and scurries off to the kitchen while I set my things down. I remove my jacket and hang it on the back of the door before walking to my desk and retrieving my laptop

from my bag. I start it up and take a seat, sipping my coffee, being careful not to burn my lip. Sitting the cup on the coaster to my left, I scroll to my Outlook account to open the files from Lauren.

While I wait for the documents to load on the screen, my phone buzzes, and I see it's a note from Kade. I smile instantly, letting my cheeks touch my eyes as I open it. We texted on and off throughout the day yesterday, sharing a lot about each other. We talked about my last relationship, and he talked about his, including the not-so-exclusive ordeal he had with Candace. I've learned his favorite color and exactly how he likes his coffee: black with one sugar. He teased me for the copious amounts of additives I place in mine and shared some childhood memories with me. To say this thing I have with him is unexpected is an understatement, but it's fun and daring. I try to tell myself not to have any expectations, because frankly, I have no idea what this is.

Good morning, sweets!

Hey, you! How'd you sleep?

Like a log. Hope you got some rest? Finally over that hangover?

I am actually. Your little remedy helped. Where'd you learn it?

*I'm ashamed to say. *Facepalm emoji**

**Smiley face emoji* Were you a bit of a party animal?*

I was. Don't hold it against me, though.

Too late...

I stare at the three dots that indicate he's typing his response when Erin comes strolling in. Tearing my eyes from my phone, I flip it over as she closes the door and hurries over to my desk. Her arms are filled with her laptop, cellular device, notebook, and coffee, making it a little challenging for her. Quickly, I stand to take the cup so she doesn't spill it all over the place.

"Thank you, Jessica!"

“No problem.” I sit the piping-hot beverage down beside her. Back in my chair, I cross my legs and grab my favorite ink pen with the diamond on the end.

“I still love that pen,” Erin adds, sipping her drink.

I smile. “I’m about to send you the files from Lauren. There are two contracts both due in a couple of weeks. I’d like to be able to present the demos in approximately five days. I figured we can tag team the research to move things along, but I will need you to run point on data collections.”

As I talk, Erin scribbles away in her notepad, jotting down my instructions. “Will they need a data mastery report?” She looks up at me over the brim of her glasses.

“Let’s see.” I glance to my screen, skimming the pages. “No, it doesn’t look like they are requesting one, but let’s put one together anyway. It wouldn’t hurt to have it readily available in case they ask later.”

“Sure thing. Do we know what presentation style they are asking for?”

“These are both for hospitality management companies. Their styles are more fitting to a strategical imagery.”

Erin nods and continues to take notes before opening her laptop. Meanwhile, I’m distracted by the incoming text on my phone. Picking it up, I relax my shoulders and lean back into my seat. A smile spreads across my face, and I completely forget that I’m not alone.

No fair, sweets. We shouldn’t hold one’s past against them.

You’re right! But that doesn’t stop me from being curious of your possible bad-boy days.

Haha. I’m not entirely sure those days are behind me. I’m smarter now, though.

*LOL. I’m betting he’s still lingering around. You have that big meeting soon, right? Shouldn’t you get to focusing on that?
*winky face emoji**

Are you brushing me off, Jessica?

*“No. Gosh! Sorry, that was my awkward attempting at flirting. *facepalm emoji**

It’s fine. I’m messing with you. I do have a meeting, but I don’t need to prepare for it. I run the company, so I’m really just there to look pretty and review data.

Must be nice! I’m usually the person presenting.

What are you doing this evening? I want to call you tonight.

I’ll be working on some stuff from work, but feel free to call away.

Awesome. Enjoy your day, sweets! I’m going to get going.

You, too.

I set the phone down and return my attention to my computer. When I look up, Erin is staring at me inquisitively. “What?”

“Are you seeing someone?” she pries playfully.

“Uh, no, ma’am. Why would you ask that?”

“Maybe because you’ve been smiling at your phone for the last several minutes.”

“Oh, no! That was just a friend.” I wave her off and pull my chair forward.

“Sure! Well, Jessica, I think a smile looks good on you.”

“Thanks.” My cheeks heat up, and I hope she doesn’t sense my embarrassment. Not that there’s something to be ashamed about, because I’m not even sure what’s there. Yes, we’ve texted often and shared a few laughs with each other since that first call. But it’s all still so new, and we’ve never even seen each other. Now, don’t get me wrong, while I’ve dreamed about what he looks like, part of me is afraid this could be a catfish situation.

Erin and I move forward with our meeting, knocking out a lot of key factors to include in the training designs for each client. Once we’ve finalized those thoughts, I excuse her and focus my attention on some other projects. The day goes by

pretty fast, and soon it's time to head home for the day. Earlier, Kade mentioned he wanted to call me tonight, so the first thing I do was rush to the store for my necessities so I can be settled in by the time he calls.

My phone rings from across the room, forcing me to press pause on my TV show. Groaning, I lift myself up from the couch and strut to answer it.

“Hey, you!” I say when I realize that it's finally him. We never discussed what time he'd call, so I chose to watch some shows to distract myself from waiting around.

“There's that sweet voice. Sorry for calling so late. I meant to call in earlier, but a couple of my meetings ran long today,” he proclaims.

“You sure have a lot of meetings,” I say playfully.

“I do. So ready for a quick vacation. How was your day?”

I walk back to the sofa and sit. “It was pretty good. Got a lot done at work, prepared dinner, watched television, drank a glass of wine.”

“Nice. Again, I'm sorry for the delay. Hope you weren't waiting and starting to think I'd lost interest?”

“It's okay.” I purposely skip over his comment on being interested. It has crossed my mind at least once, but I'm not going to ask or get my hopes up. These sorts of things have unusual outcomes, and it would be desperate to expect anything too soon.

“What was for dinner?” he asks, breaking our brief silence.

“Shrimp pasta. Aside from the long meetings, how was your day?”

“I'd rather talk about you.”

“That bad, huh?” I pry.

“No, not bad. But you’ve been on my mind all day, and now that I’m talking to you, I want to focus on that.”

I blush and tuck my bob behind my left ear. “I thought about you also.”

“I’m grateful. Would you like to know what was on my mind?”

“Only if you want to tell me.” I slouch in my seat, propping both feet on the coffee table, spreading my legs slightly. My core heats up, and I force myself to control my breathing. The conversation is just starting; I don’t want him to know he’s already turning me on with just the waves of his voice.

“One thing you will learn about me, is that I’m always upfront about what I want.”

“That’s a great way to be,” I say, running a hand over my thigh.

“It is. Are you open with your wants and desires?”

“Honestly, not all the time. I never really thought about why. I kinda do what’s necessary to get me to where I need to be.”

“That’s no fun, sweets. You can’t calculate every move you make. Well, you can, and you should make smart choices, but sometimes it’s best to live in the moment. To do the things that’ll bring you joy, fulfillment, happiness.”

“Is that what you do?”

“Yes, more so now than I did when I was launching my business. After a while, I realized that I can work my ass off, make all the money in the world, but none of it will matter if I don’t take time out to do what I want. And to be open with myself about what I want.”

“Manifestation.”

“Exactly.”

“Tell me about your work. How long have you been in business?”

“A long time. I am also a programmer of sorts. I started the company about ten years ago while in college. I developed a way for organizations to use software to edify and improve their bottom lines.”

“Something like a business coach?” I ask, curious if he’s referencing the new wave of coaching careers that have given many people the freedom to work from home.

“It’s a little more complex than that. In a way, it’s coaching, but what I do is more software and engagement focus.”

“Okay, that’s nice. Ten years is a long time. I take it you enjoy the work.”

“It’s good work that will keep you on your toes. Unfortunately, I’m not as hands-on as I once was. Most of my days consist of the more political side of the business. Each of my offices are managed by others; hell, my employees rarely see me to be honest.”

“Oh wow! I haven’t met the CEO of my company either. I guess that’s pretty common for that title.”

“It can be. Smaller corporations may not require much travel. But the larger the company grows, the more facetime the CEO will need to make to keep sponsors, donors, stakeholders et cetera informed and invested.”

“I couldn’t imagine that. Sounds like it can get kind of lonely.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Sorry if that was harsh. But based on what you’ve shared about your relationships or lack thereof, I’d imagine there’s no room for love.”

“It can be challenging for sure. But anything is possible with the right motivation.”

“I guess you’re right,” I say, lowering my head, trying not to showcase my disappointment.

“Is that a concern for you?” he asks sincerely.

I pause and take in a deep breath. “Should it be?”

He doesn’t respond right away, and I wonder what he’s thinking.

“I need to see you,” he pauses. “Allow me to take you out. I can fly in tomorrow. We can spend the day together, if you can spare the time away from work.”

My eyes fly open and the beating of my heart increases. Words are not my friend as I struggle to form a sentence. I can’t see him; I don’t even know him. Shit! But he’s been so fucking great. *What do I say?*

”Don’t like that idea?” I can hear the disappointment in his voice.

Now I feel like shit. Of course I want to know what he looks like, but oddly enough, I also *don’t* want to know what he looks like. We’ve shared some intimate and *nasty* things, things I would never say to anyone. Seeing him would make everything uncomfortable for me. I’m awkward enough as it is, so who knows what I’ll do in his presence. And I don’t even want to think about the possibility of him not finding me attractive at all. Or...that I will find him so attractive that I crave him more than I do based on the few conversations we’ve had. He’s made it clear that relationships aren’t feasible for him, and I’d have to tell my girls about it and... *No, I can’t.*

“Are you there, Jessica?”

KADE

Fuck! Did I freak her out? For the last several seconds, she’s done nothing but breathe into the phone, leaving my question unanswered. I hate to think that I misread the scenario here, but maybe I did. Our meeting has been nothing short of unorthodox, but I’m great at reading people, and I swear she showed me all the signs that she was as interested in me as I am her. I allow another minute to go by before deciding to accept that I was obviously wrong about her. There

are many women I can contact for some form of entertainment or another, so this shouldn't bother me—but it does. In the short five days we've spent sharing details about each other, I've grown to care for her. Faster than I have any other woman in my life. Her spirit, laughter, and curiosity are contagious, leaving me wanting more with her than a few dirty calls.

“Okay—”

“Yes, I'm here! And I don't *not* like the idea.”

I shut my eyes, letting my shoulders relax. “Thought I lost you there. What does ‘don't not like it’ mean? Did I overstep?”

“No! You're great. I'm...not ready for that yet.”

“Okay?” I say, my statement more of a question than anything.

“I don't want you to think that I'm not interested. This is all so...unbelievable. You know, with the way that we met and all. It's fun and surprisingly exhilarating, and I think... I think if we met, it'll get awkward, because I'm awkward. There are so many variables. I've never been this open with anyone before, and I know that's because we don't know what each other looks like. There are no expectations other than a little flirting and great conversation. Putting a face to all of this changes that. Call me crazy, but I want to enjoy this mystery and freedom a while longer. If you don't mind.”

I blink several times to wrap my mind around what she's said. One thing I've learned about her is that she's very reserved and calculated, so I imagine she's spent time with these thoughts. She probably hoped I'd never bring it up, and though she shut me down, I don't regret doing so. The reality of it is, her concerns are valid and make me want her that much more. It's been equally as long for me in terms of connecting with someone on this level. Even during the years Candace and I spent screwing on and off. And I've been with women before that, yet nothing was ever this...*this* fucking amazing. I don't know how to describe it or even feel there's a name for it. I only know that I want whatever this is.

“I understand. I can wait.”

She sighs. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me. The last thing I want is for you to feel pressured. I enjoy this thing we have, so if waiting is what you need, we’ll wait,” I say to reassure her.

“I appreciate that. I don’t want anything to change with us.”

“It won’t. You’ll have to treat me extra special now, though,” I joke.

She laughs and I do the same.

“Deal! How much more special would you like?”

“I want it all, sweets. Pull out all the stops.” I smirk. “Can I at least know your last name?”

She pauses. “That’ll take away the mystery. Plus, we’ve only talked for about what, five days—”

“Okay, I get it! How about a picture then?”

“Um, um.”

“Damn, woman, you run a hard bargain.” I laugh. “So I’m reserved to just the sexiness of your voice? *For now?*”

“Yes. Can that be enough?” she asks in almost a whisper, the soft vibrations sending a jolt right to my dick.

Damn, I hadn’t wanted this discussion to turn sexual, but I don’t think I can help myself. Especially with this whole *mystery lover* façade she’s requesting.

I rub my dick through my pants. “Why don’t you use that sweet voice and tell me something dirty?” I demand.

“It’ll be my pleasure.”

CHAPTER SIX

JESSICA

Thursdays are my favorite—usually. It’s one of my lightest days in terms of work, but today I’m presenting the final projects to both my clients. Erin and I completed those demos in four days instead of five. The customers were so pleased, they each wanted to move forward with little to no changes. This puts us ahead of schedule by two days, but that’s okay. I’d rather the work be completed early than to scrummage around on final details.

Picking up my phone, I type a response to Kade’s morning text. It’s been over a week, ten days—*but who’s counting*—since our chat about keeping things a mystery. At first, I wondered if maybe that was a mistake, and he would eventually stop texting and calling altogether, that hearing me wouldn’t be enough for him, but it’s been the complete opposite. If anything, our connection has deepened, and I find myself yearning his attention. His baritone vocals, the smooth words, that laugh, it’s all intoxicating. Over these three short weeks since our first call, we’ve gone from phone boning—as he would call it—to consistent and meaningful discussions on every topic one could think of.

Last night, though, Kade gave me the most intense orgasm of my life, and it’s partly the reason I can’t stop thinking about him this morning. I mean toe-curling, long-lasting ecstasy that I never knew was possible. One would wonder how that’s so without the penetration of a man, but, honey, let me say—*it’s real*. So fucking real that my panties are soaked by thinking

about it. We started off like always, telling each other all the nasty things we like. And it was good, but he did something different this time. He didn't touch himself—well, at least that's what he told me. He wanted last night to be all about me. Kade instructed every move and stroke I gave myself until I was nearing my release, then he made me stop. I was shocked, confused even, but he forced me to focus on his words, and the only thing I was allowed to do was flick my nipples. After a few, he had me return to playing with my pussy, only to stop me again before I could come. It went on like that for at least an hour, and eventually I was begging him to end the torture. Blissful fucking torture that brought me the most immense climax *ever*. It's because of that, that I want to do something special for him.

*Stop that *sexy face emoji*... I key in to the text box and hit send.*

The phone indicates he's read my message and is preparing his response. *Stop what?*

Distracting me at work...

*And how am I doing that, sweets? *sexy smirk emoji**

I can't stop thinking about...

About what?

*How good you made me feel last night *drooling face emoji*.*

You're welcome, sweets.

Why have we never done that before?

*I always save the good stuff for when I really like a person *winky face emoji*.*

*Well, what else do you have up your sleeve, mister? *curious face emoji*.*

You'll have to wait and find out.

Don't be a tease...

I don't think you want that...

You're right. After last night, tease me, baby!

**crying laughing emoji* My pleasure, sweets.*

His last message causes me to smile and be somewhat daring. I grip my phone while rushing over to the door of my office to close and lock it. Thankfully, no one is here yet. I arrived at the office early this morning to get a head start on my day and I'm glad I did. I stroll over to the full-length mirror I have to the left of my desk and undo the top five buttons of my tan blouse. Tucking the tail of it farther into my dark-gray pencil skirt, I stretch the material just a little for my breasts to be visible, yet still concealing my bra. I want this to be sexy but still classy, so I'm careful not to overdo it. I'm a curvy girl, so it doesn't take much to show off my assets. Once I am satisfied with my look, I strike a sexy, subtle pose and snap a few pictures in various angles. I survey them, and settle on one, cropping it to show him everything from the neck down.

I know I said no pictures, but I wanted to give him something. Before I lose my nerve, I hit send and fix my clothing back to a more appropriate styling for the office. Erin will be here any minute, and I'd hate for her to catch me with my titties nearly bursting out of my top. Unlocking the door, I crack it and head back to my desk to gather today's material while trying not to stare at my phone for his response. After a few minutes, she knocks before pushing herself through the threshold.

"Good morning. I'm headed to Cozi's for a coffee and bagel. Want to come with?" Erin asks gingerly.

"Actually, yes. Let me grab my coat." I snag my wallet from my side drawer, pick up my phone, and snatch my outerwear from the door hook on the way out.

"Are you excited for today's presentations?" she asks, fastening her wool jacket.

"Yes, I am. I think we knocked them out of the park, so breakfast is on me today," I answer as I slip my arms into my burgundy trench coat and stuff my phone in my pocket.

“You don’t—”

“Nonsense! I wouldn’t be able to get so much done without you. This is a thank you for all your hard work.”

“Thank you, Jessica! I enjoy working for you.”

We head to the elevator and down to the lobby that leads us out to Glebe Road. Cozi’s is a couple of blocks away near the Ballston Commons Metro station and have the best freshly baked bagels in the area. On the way back to the office, I check my phone to find no response from Kade. It doesn’t even show he’s read it. Erin is saying something to me, so I stuff it back in place and will myself to focus on the conversation. We make it upstairs, separating to enjoy our breakfast.

“I have all the notes for the Harrington Hotel presentation. I’m going to the conference room to get a head start on setting things up. Meet you in there?” Erin peeps her head in after a few minutes have passed.

“Yes, I’ll be right behind you.”

I stand, picking up my laptop, charger, and stopping to get my phone out of my coat pocket on the way. I smile to a few passing colleagues as I take the short stretch to the meeting room. When I arrive, Erin and Lauren are chatting and laughing like old friends, but I’m not sure about what exactly. I smile and joke about missing out on the good conversation.

Once I’m certain all the equipment is up and running, I peek at my phone, noticing that Kade still hasn’t sent a reply. I’m sure he’s busy as he is most days, but I can’t really worry about that now. As I flip the device on its face, our receptionist, Melissa, escorts in two sharply dressed and equally attractive men. Similar in height, yet distinctive in their own right.

“Welcome, gentlemen,” I say, walking over to them and holding out a hand. “I’m Jessica Daly. I’ll be presenting for you this morning.” I move to shake the other’s hand before introducing my team. “This is Erin. She worked closely with me on this program, and I believe you know Lauren.”

“We do,” they say in unison.

“Mike, Johnny. It’s so good to see you both again.” Lauren gives them each a hug. “You’re in good hands with Jessica. She’s one of our top developers. You’ll love her work.”

“She’s already impressed us thus far,” Johnny says pleasantly.

“Shall we get started?” I ask, pointing them to their seats and make my way to the front of the room.

“In front of you, you’ll find a hard copy printout of today’s showing to follow along, if you’d like. At the end, we’ll discuss any potential changes. Once we’ve finalized it all, I’ll email the final program with instructions and suggestions on how to best implement it within your organization,” Erin goes through her normal spiel then turns it over to me.

“Thank you, Erin! Gentlemen, if you’ll take a look at the screen, I’ll begin,” I add using a remote cursor to control the slides and start my demonstration.

The training I designed for Harrington took nearly three hours to demonstrate, and that was the short version of it. Once I incorporate the small tweaks they’ve asked for, it’ll top out at a fully functional, self-paced course that can be completed in as little as two weeks. That’s if the student takes the slow track to finishing the program. Now in my office, I set my things down and quickly glance at my phone for the time. I have another showing in about an hour and want to prepare for it.

Clicking on my text messages, I see that Kade finally read the message. The time stamp shows he did so about two hours ago, but still there’s no response from him. Instantly, my nerves get the best of me, and I have to stop myself from outwardly panicking. *Fuck, I knew it was a bad idea.* I should have stuck to my rule. *No pictures!* Kade’s been so responsive to all my messages and calls, so I would think this sort of text would prompt me an immediate retort. With his desire to see

me, I felt he would love the picture and flood my cell with words of admiration. What if he doesn't adore my image? We never talked about our body types, features, or nationalities for that matter. What if I'm not what he was expecting? See, this is exactly why I said no in the first place.

"Jessica, sorry. Your next client wants to see if we can push the meeting up a few minutes. They're already in the conference room," Erin says, pulling me from my thoughts.

"Um. Yes, tell them I'll be ready in fifteen minutes," I say without looking up from my phone. From my peripheral, I see her nod and head down the hall.

Straightening my shoulders, I release a nervous breath and type a new message: *I'm sorry. Forget I sent that.*

Without waiting for a response, I drop the phone on the desk and rush out with my laptop in hand.

KADE

I wouldn't dare, I speedily type into the text field when I return from lunch with my mother. She surprised me with a visit to my LA office. Both she and my father are heading to New York to attend the Contrarian Gala organized by my cousin, Jackson Mitchells, and wanted to stop in for a chat.

Jessica's messages caught me off guard in more ways than one. I nearly dropped my phone in the sink when I saw her luscious breasts peering out at me through her blouse. Every curve of her frame is now etched in my memory, only strengthening the attraction I have for her. After her speech about autonomy, I forced myself to be content with not knowing what she looked like. But you can bet your ass it was a pleasant surprise to lay eyes on her rich caramel skin. And that ass to hip ratio—*fucking insane*. Even the little pudge I see through her skirt turns me on. I love my women thick and healthy, and sweet little Jessica doesn't disappoint.

If it wasn't for my mom's lunch request, I would have seen it a lot sooner and responded accordingly. But never one to be rude, I stilled my lust and focused until my mom left for the restroom. She returned too soon, stopping me before I could send a response. So I stuffed the phone in my pocket until now. Nearly two hours later, and the first thing I notice is a new message from Jessica apologizing.

I'm sure my delayed reaction caused some doubt, but I need her to know she has nothing to regret. Except maybe the fact I'm now hooked on her ass and will not stop until she's mine. Whatever or however long it takes for her to be ready for me, I'll be there to claim her. After a couple of hours with no word from her, I sent another text.

*I thought we weren't sending pictures *winky face emoji*. What changed?*

She begins typing but stops, the three bubbles immediately disappearing. It isn't for another ten minutes before she finally answers me.

*I still don't want to send face photos, but I wanted to show how much you...inspire me *smiley face emoji*.*

I'm glad you did. Your body is amazing, sweets. Next time, unbutton the shirt all the way.

Next time? That's a one-time deal.

Shame! I'd love to see and admire every crevice.

So you do like the curves?

Every fucking one. Is that why you asked me to forget you sent it? Worried I wouldn't like your body?

I wasn't sure what you liked.

Everything you've got, sweets. I just wish you'd let me see that face of yours, I plead.

We talked about that.

I know, but then you sent me that picture. Now all I can do is imagine if your face is as beautiful.

*Well, keep imagining *tongue out emoji*.*

*Ooo, you don't play fair *sad face emoji*.*

I learned it from you. Well, Kade, I need to wrap up some work. Call me later?

Sure thing!

A smile a mile long stretches my face as I pour myself a glass of scotch. I should be preparing to pack for my flight to New York, but all I want to do is gawk at her photo. Scrolling up our feed, I double tap the image so it opens to full size. My sights trail the crease of her neck, down between her breasts and over the rest of her body, resting at her pedicured toes. The fabric of my jeans tightens from my arousal, forcing me to adjust myself for comfort. I didn't let myself get off last night, so my dick is begging for it, precum seeping from me, soiling the denim. *Damn*, this woman is going to be the death of me.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JESSICA

It's six o'clock the next morning, and my phone has rung three times already. Which pisses me off a little because I have a routine: meditation, music, shower, and then I'll take calls. Everyone including my mother knows this, so I'm torn between worry and frustration. With a towel wrapped around my damp body, I rush to my nightstand to answer the call.

"Hello?" Confusion lines my tone when I see that it's Kade.

"Good morning. I was hoping to catch you before you started your day." The enthusiasm in his voice sets me on high alert.

"Why, what's going on?" I quiz.

"I spent all night thinking about you, how hard you work, and I wanted to do something for you."

"I'm a little confused. How are you going to do something for me way in California, and why are you up? Isn't it like three a.m. over there?"

"It's six here. I'm in New York for a gala my cousin is hosting. But don't try and change the subject."

"I'm not."

"Clear your schedule this evening. Go straight home after work, leave your laptop and anything related to your job in the office. It'll all be waiting for you when you return on Monday."

“Kade, what’s going on?”

“I’m going to send you the final details later today, but I need you to agree. Can you do that for me, sweets?”

I flop on my bed with a bottle of lotion and begin to moisturize my body, taking this brief moment to mull it over. “What are you up to?” I demand.

“Agree and I’ll tell you.”

I can hear his smile. I take a deep breath and move on to my other leg. “Yes, I’ll come straight home. Now tell me what’s going on.”

“You work too much, and since you won’t allow me to steal you away and show you a nice time—*in person*—I’ve planned you a self-care day of sorts. All you need to do is wait for my instructions.”

My heart skips a beat as I ponder my words. So much is running through my mind from curiosity to bewilderment, to pure admiration. A part of me wants to turn down his offer. I’m not his woman, so I can’t allow him to do something so... *sweet*. It crosses the borders of expectations I wanted to stay away from. But the conviction in his request tells me he’ll never accept no as an answer.

“I-I don’t know what to say,” I add after a long pause.

“You don’t need to say anything, and don’t even think of thanking me. I care for you, Jessica, and want to do this.”

“O-okay.” My voice trembles.

“I’m going to let you go. Have a great day and expect my text in few hours.”

The call ends before I can say goodbye, and I’m left naked and stunned. Thankfully, I don’t have any meetings on my schedule, because there’s no way I’d be able to focus on them after this. Unable to fight it any longer, I toss my phone on the bed and make two fists, shaking them silly while squealing like a lovestruck schoolgirl. My smile is so big, my damn cheeks ache. This man is like no one I’ve ever met.

Good morning, sweets! I hope your day is starting out all right. I know I probably threw you for a loop this morning, but I need you to be open-minded. I'll be busy all day and most of the weekend, and because of that I wanted to do this for you. To let you know I'm always thinking about you.

I blush at his message. You're sweet! But you really don't have to do anything. Knowing you're thinking about me is enough.

Those pending little bubbles stare back at me as he keys his next text. My heart races with anticipation, and I pace the floor to settle my nerves.

*I know this is going to be hard for you, *smiley face emoji*, but I need you to keep an open mind. ALL EVENING. If I thought I could convince you to take the day off, I would have suggested that, but this will have to do. After work, you'll be spending the night unwinding. No work, no distractions, no emails or pesky text messages from anyone but myself. Tonight, is all about Jessica. There's a day spa in the Courthouse area of Arlington. They specialize in couple's treatments. But since I'm not there—*winky face emoji*—I've asked them to put together a pamper kit. I don't know all that's in it, I'll leave that up to the woman to pick what you girls like. Lol. Afterwards, head a few blocks over to the Lebanese restaurant on Wilson Blvd. The hostess will hand you dinner for the evening as well as a bottle of wine. At five-thirty, there will be a driver waiting outside the shop to take you home. Don't worry, I haven't gone all stalker and found your address, I've informed him you'll give him those details. Hopefully this gives you a decent amount of time to make it home. Because this next piece is pivotal to the experience. At six o'clock on the dot, I want you to enjoy your dinner. It should still be relatively warm since I requested they use insulated bags. Consume a glass or two of wine, and once you're all nicely full and intoxicated, you'll take the spa kit into your bathroom.*

Run a hot bath and enjoy a nice long soak to top off your night and start the weekend refreshed.

I stare at the words on my screen in amazement. I mean, the man has the entire afternoon mapped out. I almost wonder how he knew where to look to make this possible. Then I remember telling him that I live in Arlington—that information alone is enough to make something happen.

Now that's as far as I've gotten. Hopefully tomorrow you'll want to keep to a relaxed day, maybe sleep in and read. But tonight, this is what I need you to focus on. I have to go now, but I'll call you tonight as you're sitting down for dinner. Talk to you later! he continues.

I don't even bother responding. Instead, I stare at his instructions for the next fifteen minutes. His call this morning was highly unexpected, and I still can't wrap my mind around the situation fully. All day, I drove myself borderline insane, checking my phone, waiting for him to finally send me those details. Now that I have them, I'm in awe. Things seem good with him. We've learned a lot about each other, and we recovered from the whole *no pictures* thing. But no matter how great he's been, or how sweet and sensual he is with me, I wasn't prepared for this kind of treatment.

I didn't know what would come of this thing we're building, but with every passing interaction, I grow more smitten with him. I mean, come on, the man remembered my love of ethnic food. Quickly, I check my watch, realizing if I want to be on time with Kade's plans, I have some planning to do myself. There is one quick pop-up meeting with Lauren in a few minutes, but other than that, not much else needs my immediate attention. If anything comes up, it can be handled by Erin. Grabbing my laptop, I head to the conference room while practicing a reason to ask to head out an hour early.

The follow-up with Lauren breezes by—there isn't much of an agenda, she wanted to touch base on feedback from the last two contracts. In the midst of that, I've been awarded lead on several new campaigns. Convincing Lauren to let me off is easy; she doesn't even hesitate.

With that, I rush to my office to put together a miniature to-do list for Erin. There isn't much time left in the day, an hour and a half max, so I won't mind her heading out early also. But knowing her, she'll want to start on research.

"Erin, can you meet me in my office, please?" I say when I pass her desk that sits directly in front of my door.

"Yeah, sure thing," she grabs her notepad and close the door behind her.

"I'm going to be heading out in a bit and wanted to extend an olive branch. You've been great with these last few projects, working on anything I need of you. Thank you! There isn't much that needs pressing attention, so if you'd like to head out, you can. Treat yourself to a drink or something. But if you want to stay through the end of your shift, we've been given a few new contracts today. You can review the files and start the research. It's up to you." I take my seat, packing my purse as I talk.

"I think I'll stay and work on the research. My friends are working, but if you're okay with it, I'd like to take that offer for Monday. My boyfriend's office Christmas party is that evening, and I'd love extra time to get ready."

"You know I've been so focused, it didn't even dawn on me that it's holiday season. Of course you can leave early on Monday."

Erin laughs. "What? Now, Jessica, you know I love you, but how did you forget it's Christmastime. There's lights and decor everywhere throughout the city."

"I know, I've been distracted. I'm not going home to visit my family this year, so I guess I pushed it to the back of my mind."

"You work too much." She smirks.

"We both do!"

"For sure, but at least TrainX sees that. I can't wait for next week's holiday party."

"Holiday party?"

“Jessica! You forgot about that, too?”

I shrug, frowning in mock embarrassment.

“Girl, we need to do better. Every year, they throw us this big bash. There’s an appreciation ceremony followed by a reception with all the bells and whistles. The CEO comes out to mingle with us, which is always fun because we only see him like twice a year. Once for the holidays and again over summer when we take our company retreat,” Erin gushes.

“Sounds fun.”

“You didn’t seem too enthusiastic just then.”

We laugh.

“I’m not really big on those sorts of things. I honestly don’t think I’ve ever participated in one with my previous employer.”

“Well, you have to get excited for this. It isn’t mandatory, but it’s mandatory. If not for the food and music then for Oliver Braxton. The man is seriously beautiful to look at and has the best personality.”

“Didn’t you just say something about a boyfriend?”

“Hey, ain’t nothing wrong with looking. Besides, we’ve never seen him with anyone. When I first started two years ago, a couple of girls rumored he might be into men.”

“All right, I’ll email you the file Lauren sent me. I’m on a time crunch, so I’ll need to leave. But we can talk about this awesome holiday party on Monday. Enjoy your weekend! Can you lock up my office when you leave?” I ask, ignoring the accusation she’s shared.

“Yes, of course. See you later!”

I gather my belongings and fasten my coat on the way out. As I ride the elevator down to the lobby, I call an Uber to take me from Ballston to Courthouse. I could easily take the train, but considering I’ve never been to either of these locations, I’d rather not risk getting lost. Kade did say it was imperative I be on time, and I wouldn’t want to disappoint.

Boing... Boing... Boing... At six on the dot my phone blares to life, singing the tone I saved to Kade's contact. "I'm coming, I'm coming," I say, rushing to answer it. "Hello."

"There she is. Did you get everything?"

"I did, I just plated my food and am sitting down now." I pull the chair out from the table and take a seat.

"Great... We're going to have dinner together," he says, his voice full of excitement.

"Are you serious?" I pause for clarity then pick up my fork to mix the meat and rice together. "What are you having?"

"I'm dead-ass serious and I'm having what you're having."

"Wow. I don't...know what to say. How?"

The words hadn't left my mouth for an entire thirty seconds before the phone beeps. I see he's attempting to FaceTime me. My eyes grow wide, and I quickly ignore it. Panic sets in, and I have to keep myself from accidentally ending the call altogether.

"Why did you video call me?" I say softly. The last thing I want to do is come off harshly, but it's a little upsetting he tried that without warning.

"How else are we going to have dinner together, sweets? Call me crazy, but I enjoy looking at the person I share my meals with," he jokes.

"But we talked about this. I'm not—"

"I know. You aren't ready to meet, which is why I resorted to this. I want you, Jessica, in every way possible. I want to take you out and show you things, and I know you want to pace yourself. But I was hoping I'd earn a bit of a compromise here. We've already visited the nastiest, most intimate parts of each other's minds, and you've already sent me that sexy-ass photo. What would it hurt to have a virtual call? We can even do this from the neck down. I want to see you while we eat."

I sigh, taking my time to decide on all he's said. He's right, we have done and shared things that people share in a normal dating scenario. *So why am I being so difficult with this?*

"Hey, you said you would be open-minded tonight." He chuckles.

With a deep breath, I stand and enter my bedroom to retrieve my iPad from the dresser. When I return to my dining table, I prop it up against the centerpiece then skate over to the living room for a throw pillow to sit on. If I'm going to agree to this, I'll need the height from the cushion to position the camera just right. Testing the placement, I add one more pillow before opening the device and calling him back. My phone goes dead as his chest comes into view on the screen in front of me. My palms grow sweaty, and I rub them on my skirt while trying to control my breaths.

"Much better," Kade says, resting his elbows on the table.

I run my gaze over his frame, taking in his broad shoulders, thick arms, and fully-grown beard. His collar is undone, teasing me with a peek of his strong, tanned neckline. He swallows, and I'm immediately distracted by the shifting of his Adam's Apple. Tattoos stare out underneath the folded cuffs of his sleeves and raise my brows in admiration.

"Thank you for planning this," I finally add. "This is so sweet. I still don't know what to say."

"Tell me about your day?" he asks, leaning closer to the camera, his muscles flexing under his shirt.

The sight opens the floodgates in between my legs. I bite my bottom lip, hoping he doesn't notice the sudden change in my body temperature. If I thought this man gave zaddy vibes over the phone, he's definitely serving it on a full-course platter right now.

I clear my throat and reach for my wineglass, taking a large sip. "My day was pretty good. It wasn't a busy day at all, really. So you kinda picked the perfect day to plan this. Speaking of, how did you decide on what to order?"

He picks up his fork and shoves a helping of the delicious-smelling Shawarma into his mouth. “You told me you loved ethnic foods, and I’d honestly never tried Lebanese before,” he adds after swallowing his first bite.

“Really?” I exclaim while preparing to take a bite of my own. “Well, you’ve tasted it at this point. What do you think?” I pause to chew my food.

“It’s pretty good. Very well-seasoned. I don’t know if it’s something I can eat every day. But the flavors are really nice.” He takes another helping.

“Oh, same. It’s very rich, and too much of anything can sometimes be a bad thing. So I switch it up.”

“Well, that’s debatable.” His jawline rises lightly, indicating a smile.

“What is?” I quiz.

“That too much of anything can be a bad thing. I can think of plenty of things I’ll never get tired of,” he flirts.

I laugh, using my hand to cover my mouth as I swallow my food. “Like what?”

“Your laugh, for one,” he declares.

I blush and stab another piece of beef to pop in my mouth. “How was your day? What brought you to the East Coast?”

He sips his wine. “My cousin, Jackson, is an investor and every year hosts this big gala. So my family and I show up to support him and the cause.”

“That sounds really nice. When is it?”

“Tonight, at nine.”

I hunch forward in surprise. “Shouldn’t you be getting dressed?”

“No, I’m right where I need to be, doing exactly what I want to be doing.” He takes a swig of his drink. “Besides, I’m staying in the host hotel, so it’ll take me no time to throw on my tux and head down to the ballroom.”

“You don’t strike me as the type to throw on anything,” I say nonchalantly.

“What do you mean?” He tilts his head sideways.

“You seem well organized and in control. Even your casual dress right now says a lot about you.”

“Oh yeah? What’s that?”

“That you’re a man who takes care of himself. Not in an obsessive way, just you like to be...clean. I guess.” *WTF was that, Jessica? You like to be clean, really!* I think to myself.

Kade laughs and sits back in his chair with his arms folded across his chest. This slight movement allows me a glance at parts of his face. The camera cuts off at the bottom of his top lip, showcasing how soft and pink they appear to be. When he smiles, a set of perfect white teeth greets me, stirring up that familiar tingle I get during our calls.

“I do like to be clean.” He wipes the corners of his mouth with his thumb and ring finger.

“You know what I mean,” I say, burying my face in my palm.

“You’re cute when you’re awkward. You know that?” He slouches a little.

“Whatever.” I take another bite. “Eat your food, sir.”

His smile widens, and I have to look away to keep myself from doing the same. This man definitely gives me all the feels. I spent so many years with my ex, I didn’t know where to begin to even start dating again. Maybe that’s why this thing with Kade has worked out so well. It’s been almost effortless and fun, and I’ve missed that companionship. My inhibitions fade with each passing chuckle, and soon my comfort level is through the roof.

Kade’s phone dings, and he takes a moment to look in its direction. “Sorry, do you mind if I check this?” He points to the phone. “I’m supposed to be meeting my parents downstairs tonight and I—”

“Yes, of course. Go ahead. I’ll get myself another glass of wine while you do that.” I push my chair back from the table and stand. “This was a great wine selection also. I didn’t know the restaurant sold wine. At least I didn’t see a bar,” I say, turning to head into my kitchen.

“Mm, damn,” he mumbles as I walk away from the camera.

“What?” I ask, pretending not to know he’s referencing my ass. There’s no way he missed it with the way my iPad is stationed, showing a full view of the breakfast bar that I’ll need to pass in order to reach the kitchen.

“Inside thought.” His phone buzzes once more and lets out a soft laugh. “But no, they don’t sell bottles of wine. I was able to convince the hostess to make a trip to Total Wine for the kind I wanted,” he finally says.

“No, you didn’t,” I say loudly, hoping he can hear me clearly through the short distance.

“Yes, sweets, I did. I enjoy a good bottle of wine and will do what’s necessary to indulge.”

“See, I’m the complete opposite. I’ll buy a cheap bottle of sweet wine in a minute.”

“And that shit probably gives you heartburn and headaches, too,” he teases while still looking at his phone. Another alert comes through, and he shakes his head.

Taking my seat, I smile curiously. “What’s funny?”

“My mom. She likes to send me these funny memes she finds on YouTube or Facebook.”

“Aww that’s so cute!” I exclaim.

“No...no, it’s not. My mother is sixty-four. She does not need to be on social media.”

We both laugh.

“Let Momma be great,” I joke.

“Here, let me send it to you. It is funny, though.”

Boing... Boing... Boing... My eyes shoot open, and I'm grateful he can't see my face.

"Wait. What was that?" He sits up, pressing himself closer to the screen as if it will make him hear clearer or something.

I ignore his question and pick up the phone to view the message. It's a clip of a woman cutting a dog cake in front of her dog, scaring it half to death. I snort. "I've seen that one before. It really is funny."

"No, ma'am, don't you try and skip over my question. What was that tone? *Boing... Boing... Boing...*" He shakes his body left to right in tune with the animated reenactment of my ringtone.

"I don't know what you're referring to." I sit back, folding one arm over my chest and picking up my drink with the other.

"Is that my ringtone?" He roars with laughter. "It is, isn't it?"

I lower my head, pressing the glass to my forehead to conceal myself from the embarrassment.

"This is fucking gold."

I see him shuffling around from the corner of my eye.

Boing... Boing... Boing... Boing... Boing... Boing!

"Seriously?" I screech while trying not to laugh when he sends two additional text messages.

"That's what I'm asking you." He belts out another throaty chuckle. "What does that even mean?"

I refuse to answer and instead finish off my wine.

"Come on, sweets. You've got to tell me."

He smiles, and I huff.

"You remember the cartoons we use to watch growing up. The ones where the male characters eyes would pop out of their heads and make that sound when the female characters stroll by?"

Kade lets out one big roar and hunches over, grabbing his stomach. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little embarrassed; he's now seen the full extent of my awkwardness. But I must admit, this is pretty funny. It is the reason I picked the damn tone in the first place. I just never expected the man to hear it.

"So is that what I do to you? Cause your eyes to pop out of their sockets? Shit, excuse my boldness, but the picture from the other day and now seeing you live on FaceTime, I need to make that my theme song for you."

"I'm changing it." I chuckle, picking up my phone.

"No, don't. I like it, it's cute." He smiles and plays with his beard.

"You're just going to stare?" I flirt.

"I like what I'm looking at, so yeah—I am."

"I like what I'm seeing also." I blush.

"This was fun."

"It really was. I've never had a *blind* virtual date before," I say matter-of-factly.

"We need to make the next one a live date." He leans into the camera. "It drives me crazy that you won't let me see your face."

I sigh. "I know, I'm challenging. It's just... I like you a lot, and I guess I'm nervous."

"Of what?"

"We won't live up to each other's expectations, or we could possibly change our connection or lose it altogether. There's not much we can control in the world."

"Does that mean you're more comfortable with us now?"

"I guess I'm getting there."

Kade checks his watch. "I really want to finish this conversation, but it's eight-thirty. My family will be waiting for me downstairs at nine. Let me get dressed and we'll talk later."

“Go, go.” I wave him off.

“Before I go, though... I’m going to ask you one more time to keep an open mind. I’ll be in Arlington next week on the thirtieth, for my company’s holiday celebration. It normally ends around ten or ten-thirty, but I can leave a little early. Meet me! In person, even if it’s for a few minutes. We can walk, talk, grab a drink, whatever you want. Just please agree to meet me?”

I run my hand over the back of my neck, taking a second to go over my thoughts. “Yes. I’ll meet you. Ironically, my job is hosting one on the same day. I don’t really want to participate, so I’ll gladly leave early to meet with you.”

“Awesome. Now I can enjoy the rest of my night. I’ll be busy this weekend, but I promise to text and call you as soon as I get a few minutes.”

The thrill coming from him transfers its way to me.

“Okay. I can’t wait.”

“Goodnight, babe. Now go take that hot bath.”

The call drops before I can say my goodbye, which is totally okay because I didn’t know what to say anyway. His last comment threw me off guard, and all I can do is sit here with my eyes wide. *Babe?* Have we reached that level in our relationship? I guess it makes sense. The man did go out of his way to give me such an unusual yet romantic evening. If that doesn’t say his interests are sincere, I don’t know what will.

I stand to clear the table and place my dirty dishes in the sink before picking up the basket Kade purchased from the day spa. Using the lighter that’s included, I burn the various candles, placing them around the tub and along the countertop. Next, I fill the tub with steaming water and drop in a couple of the fizzing bubble bars. I grab the cucumber face mask and begin to remove my clothes. Once the bubbles have formed, I step inside, sinking myself underneath the water and close my eyes on impact. It’s been forever and a day since I’ve taken a soak, and I can tell you, my body misses this. My muscle start

to relax, and the stress of the week leaves me with each exhale. I'm going to enjoy this, probably more than I should.

Opening the mask, I place it on my face. "Alexa, play my country playlist." The melody from Brett Young's *Makin' Me Say* pours through my Bluetooth speakers. Soon I'm singing along to the music and doing exactly what Kade wanted me to do. *Think about Jessica.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

JESSICA

Erin takes the seat next to me on my right with a smile plastered on her face. All week long she boasted about the holiday party that I even got a little excited about it myself. But my thrill for the evening is mainly focused around the fact I'm going to meet Kade at the end of all this. When he first asked me a week ago during our virtual date, and while I agreed, I admit I was hella nervous and nearly canceled on him a few days later. But he wasn't having it. Not in a possessive, *you belong to me* type of way, but in an *I'll do whatever it takes for you to be comfortable* kind of way.

"What are you so happy about?" I ask, shifting in my chair and crossing one leg over the other.

"Nothing. Melissa from accounting told me something funny," she answers and points to the front of the room.

Lauren is standing near the center, using the microphone to gather everyone's attention. We've been in the Westin Hotel conference room for most of the day. It started as an all staff meeting, and things are finally settling down. The crowd quiets, directing our sights up ahead.

"Good evening, everyone. Today's been a full day for sure, and I know we're all ready to get some food and drinks in us, but we have one last vital part of the evening. As most of you know, we like to use this time to appreciate, celebrate, and congratulate those staff members who have excelled

throughout the year. Oliver, would you like to do the honors?" Lauren says, stepping aside as a man takes the center.

"Of course, thank you, Lauren," Oliver speaks before giving her a friendly embrace. "What's going on, everybody? Welcome to our annual holiday party. Are we having fun?" Oliver speaks into the microphone.

As his vocals radiate through the space, my senses perk up. Erin said he was a sight for sore eyes, but this is not what I was expecting. I peek around the room to find just about every girl in here salivating over our CEO. Oliver Braxton, a mid-thirtysomething business mogul with a big heart for philanthropy—*or so the bio says*. The photos on the company's website don't do him any justice. I can't tell how tall he is, but he's got to be over six feet. He wears his hair clean shaven with a fully grown and noticeably well-groomed beard. There's an aura of confidence seeping from him, a vibe that is undeniable yet somewhat familiar.

"One thing that is important to our organization, to me, is we provide a place you all can enjoy coming to every day. A place that recognizes and promotes the accomplishments made throughout. We are grateful for the team we've found in each of you, and tonight I want to personally thank a few of you for all your hard work and efforts all year long. The names I will call have exceeded the expectations of their supervisors and have gone above standard limits to provide our customer base with the best sales strategy and negotiation training material on the market."

I shift in my chair, trying to shake the feeling that's come over me. I can't put my finger on it, but with each word spoken from Oliver's lips, a part of me tingles. I watch him closely, analyzing the way he moves, the way he licks his lips at the end of every sentence. I'm not too far away from where he stands, awarding me the perfect amount of distance to make out his features. Oliver calls off names, personally thanking each one with a sturdy handshake and a one-hundred-dollar Visa gift card.

"The next person, from what I'm told, hasn't been a member of the team very long but came in swinging. She's

managed to secure several solo accounts as well as encourage the devotion of multiple corporate benefactors. On behalf of myself and Lauren, we'd like to honor Jessica Daly as Engagement Consultant of the year."

Oliver says my name, and I lose my breath, completely tuning out everyone around me. Earlier, I had this feeling of familiarity when he spoke, but right now it's undisputable. That deep and husky rattle I've grown to love and yearn for gives it all away. There's only been one person to ever say my name and make my body betray me at even this most inopportune time. *Kade? No fucking way*, I think to myself.

"Jessica... Jessica. Are you okay?" Erin asks with her hand on my shoulder. "Oliver is calling you. Get up there."

I snap back in the moment but don't speak. When I look around the room, everyone is applauding and coaxing me to the front, but I'm unable to move. My mind is racing a mile a minute, and my brain has failed to tell my legs what to do next. *This can't be happening*. I don't know how to explain this feeling I have, but deep down I'm certain the man at the front of the room, my CEO, is the man I've spent the last month having phone sex with. *Fuck... Fuck... Fuck. Okay, Jessica, play it cool. Just breathe!*

"Jessica, if you don't want this two-hundred- and fifty-dollar gift card, I'll happily spend it." Oliver chuckles, and I choke.

That laugh. That is Kade's laugh.

"Sorry," I finally say. Shaking off my nerves, I uncross my legs and slowly make my way to accept my award. My knees are weak, and my palms are sweaty.

I reach Oliver's side, and he takes my hand into his, giving me a firm grip while pulling me into an innocent hug. I'm glad my face is pointed away from my colleagues because my eyes close instantly on contact. *He smells really nice.*

"Congrats," he whispers in my ear, and I have to stop myself from whimpering.

Though I'm able to control the moans that want to escape me, I'm not so strong when it comes to the reactions of my body. I involuntarily lean into him, inhaling his scent. He pulls back, looking me in the eye, making things more challenging.

"Th-thank you," I finally respond.

He places the trophy and gift card in my hand before encouraging the crowd to clap. As they do, I awkwardly bow and rush back to my table. I ignore all stares as best I can, not wanting anyone to get wind of how tense I've become.

"Are you okay?" Erin asks.

I nod *yes* to keep her from asking me any further questions. My world just possibly turned to shit. I don't want to believe it's him, it can't be. How in the hell is this supposed to work? He's my boss. I don't do office romances, because they only end up dysfunctional and drama-filled. If people knew we were together, they'd view me differently, making it much harder for me to establish a name for myself within this company. Everything I know about life was left behind in New York. I can't afford things blowing up in my face, I've worked too hard.

The more Oliver speaks, the more certain I am that he is who I think he is. How did I not figure that out? My skin prickles with sweat as I think about the fact that even the name he gave me isn't real. *What's his angle? Did he think if I knew who he was, I'd be some sort of gold digger or something? Does he make a habit out of meeting girls and lying to them?*

Curiosity gets me, and I pick up my phone to shoot him a text. *Can't wait to see you tonight.* If he checks his phone, then I'll know it's him.

Oliver goes on for a bit longer before finally excusing us all to the room next door where we'll be enjoying music, food, and drinks. Not once during his spiel did he acknowledge his phone, but that could mean he doesn't have it on him at the moment. He pulls his iPhone from his front pocket, and I watch to see what sort of reaction he'll have. If this is Kade, I expect him to smile or something when he sees my message. But Oliver doesn't. He doesn't even flinch and stuffs the

device back in his pocket before escorting Lauren into the other room.

After a few seconds to gather myself, I take a breath of relief and join my peers in the main ballroom. Everything is decorated splendidly. To my right, there's a buffet filled with mouth-watering options such as steak, shrimp, chicken, and a mixture of sides. On the far wall ahead of me is a dessert station, and next to that is our open bar. Yes! I point eagerly and dash over for some liquid courage. After receiving my drink, I go in search of Erin. I find her in a small circle of our colleagues chatting it up with Oliver. Choosing to avoid any awkward behaviors, I turn on my heels and find a seat at an empty table.

I down my drink in one gulp, telling myself to relax. Clearly, I am overreacting and there's nothing to shit my pants about. It's been quite a while since I texted Kade, and after seeing Oliver with his phone at least twice now, I'm starting to believe it's a coincidence. Plenty of people have similar voices and builds. My stomach growls, reminding me I haven't eaten since breakfast. I reach the buffet table and serve myself steak, shrimp, and a helping of cheesy risotto. As I enjoy my meal, I observe the room. Everyone seems to be having a great time. Some are dancing, while others engage in conversation. I spot Oliver talking to Lauren and our Vice President, Joe.

Oliver splits off from his friends and grabs himself a drink. I feel somewhat pervertish with the way I follow him around the room. I was so certain he was Kade earlier, that I'm positive I gave off weirdo vibes. Which fucking sucks, since this is the first time I'm meeting the founder of our company. Thinking on it now, I laugh at my paranoia and decide to try for a do-over. Now that I'm no longer a mess and have gotten a drink in my system, I'll reintroduce myself. I step forward, only to be cut off by Joe and one other gentleman who were walking in front of me toward the exit. On their way, Joe waves to Oliver, who's pulling his phone back out of his pocket.

"It was good seeing you again, Kade. We've gotta get that cigar the next time you're in town," Joe says, using his pointer

finger as he speaks.

I freeze right in my tracks. *Kade?*

KADE

“You, too, Joe. Have a nice night!” I respond without taking my eye off my iPhone.

Jessica texted me a few hours ago, and I wanted badly to respond. But with all the conversations with everyone, there wasn't time for me to get away and answer her. The day had been long and felt like torture when all I wanted to do was ditch this party and go meet my woman. To finally see her face, pull her curvaceous body close to me, breathe in her scent, and hopefully make her mine.

Hey there, sweets. Sorry for the delay. This holiday party has kept me busy. But I'm all yours in about an hour. I can't wait to see you either. I grin as I hit send and wait for her to respond.

Boing... Boing... Boing...

“The hell?” I snap my gaze around the room to be sure I'm not hearing things. I've had a few drinks, so maybe my mind is playing tricks on me, but I swear I heard that silly ringtone Jessica uses. What are the odds I'd find her here, of all places? It dawns on me we never talked about where she worked exactly, we didn't even share last names. I wanted to know, I want to know everything about her, but with her rules on autonomy, I figured she wouldn't be ready to share those details, so I never asked.

I text the number again to see if I'm hearing things. *Where would you like to meet?* I hit send.

The tune sounds off again but is silenced almost instantly. I frantically look around at anyone with a phone in their hand, hoping to find out who the ringing belongs to. Impatient, I click Jessica's name and place a call. *There it is again.* Straight ahead is a woman rushing for the exit while fumbling with

something. It's the young woman from before, the strange one who sniffed me when I presented her with the award and gift card. Erin stops her, trying to engage in conversation, but instead the girl waves her off and continues to leave. I hit redial and watch as she quickly ignores it.

No fucking way! I follow behind her, being careful not to look conspicuous in front of my employees. When I reach the hall, I see her turning the corner. Picking up speed, I hit the curve, catching up to her by a few feet.

"Jessica?" I blurt, slightly out of breath.

She stills for a moment before continuing her escape.

"Sweets?" I call out.

Jessica pauses, her shoulders rising and falling at a rapid pace. She doesn't need to say anything for me to know it's her. I've studied her picture a million and one times, and with the brief glance at her ass when she went to grab more wine during our virtual date, I'll know her body anywhere. How did I not notice her before when she walked to receive her gift? I search my memory of earlier, trying to place her face since she refuses to turn around.

"Jessica. Why did you run?" I stand directly behind her, so close I can feel the warmth coming from her skin. She still doesn't say anything, so I take my time walking around to face her.

"Why did you lie to me?" she asks, her voice shaky and hoarse.

"Wow. You're amazing!" Is all I can muster. I have no idea what she thinks I lied about, but I don't even care. This woman is fucking beautiful, more than I imagined. Her mid-cut black dress fits elegantly over her breasts yet firmly around her wide hips. She's sexy and classy all wrapped in one, and I have to admit I love it.

"Don't do that? You lied to me."

"I'm sorry, you're just gorgeous. I can't believe you're here, working for my company." I reach to stroke her cheek, but she pulls away. "What's wrong, sweets?"

“Don’t call me that,” she barks while holding her hands out to stop my touch.

“I’m confused. Why are you acting like this?”

“Why did you tell me your name is Kade?”

“Because that’s my name.”

“You’re Oliver Braxton and you failed to mention you own the company that I work for.”

“My name is Oliver Kade Braxton. I didn’t lie to you. I gave you the name my close friends call me. And I didn’t tell you the name of my company or ask you where you work because you wanted to keep things anonymous. You didn’t exactly jump to tell me anything either.”

Jessica looks away from me, but I follow her eyes, determined to keep her focus yet trying not to be distracted by her features. Her body is beautiful on camera but divine up close. The fluorescent lighting in the hall casts a radiant glow on her smooth brown skin.

“I would never lie to you. Can you please look at me?”

She does, and tears form in her eyes. I reach out only for her to pull away again. I don’t understand what’s happening. Things were great, we were excited to see each other, but now it’s as if she’s disgusted with me. She’s the one who wanted all the secrecy. We could have avoided this a long time ago, and now she’s acting as if I broke some golden rule.

“Can we go somewhere and talk?” I ask.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.” She lowers her head and grips her left elbow.

“Why isn’t it? That was the plan, right? To meet and talk?” I debate, staring her square in the eye.

“That was before I knew who you were.”

“What does that mean?”

“You’re my boss, Kade. The fucking CEO. You don’t think that’s a major factor in whatever this is?”

“No, it shouldn’t matter at all.”

“It does to me.” Her voice rises to a high pitch. She flinches before looking around to make sure no one’s near. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to shout. But it matters to me. I can’t date my boss. I’m trying to make a name for myself here and I can’t afford to search for a new job. I don’t want my coworkers thinking things about me.”

“It’s none of their business, Jessica. I don’t set fornication policies, because it’s not my place to dictate how and when someone finds love. As long as the relationship doesn’t interfere with work, it’s not a concern of ours. So we aren’t doing anything wrong here.”

“We may not be doing anything wrong, but what happens months down the line when I’m up for a promotion? Am I going to get the job because I’m the most qualified or will it be because I’ll be sleeping with the owner?”

“You’re thinking too much into this, sweets. The only thing either of us should be concerned about is whether or not we care for each other. All that other stuff is hypothetical, and I don’t run off theories. I’m as shocked by this as you are. Don’t let this ruin what we’ve built. I want you more now than I did this morning.”

I step forward, sealing the gap between us and hoping this time she doesn’t reject me. When she doesn’t, I grab her hand and pull it to my lips, placing a kiss on each knuckle. Her hand relaxes in my palm.

“I don’t—”

“You promised me you would have an open mind about us. Did your feelings change all of a sudden? I don’t believe they have. Mine surely haven’t.”

“Of course they haven’t changed.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“I know we hadn’t labeled this, and it’s probably presumptuous of me, but I can’t be with my boss. I want too much for myself here and doing...things with you takes that

away from me.” She slowly takes a step back, trying to distance herself from me.

Not having it, I move forward, stopping her from separating us. “I’m not your boss. You work for Lauren. I don’t even sign your checks, sweets. The CFO does,” I add, pressing her into the nearest wall.

“You know what I mean.” With nowhere to go, Jessica stares at me, the conviction showing in her eyes.

I know she wants me, but her stubborn, overanalytical ass is getting in the way. She needs to know I’m not letting her walk away this easily. Not after the month I’ve spent falling for her. I can’t say if it’s love, I’m pretty sure it’s not. But I want to explore every option. I shift my gaze to her quivering lips. *She’s cute when she’s conflicted.* I lick mine, thinking about the way hers would taste.

“I’m not letting you walk away from me, Jessica. You need to know I want you like no other. And not because you’ve let me into that sexy little mind of yours. But because you make me feel things I’ve longed to feel for a quite some time.” I cup her cheek while searching her face, my gaze landing on the little cluster of beauty marks around her left eye. Rubbing my thumb over them, I look at her, admiring the color of her irises, a warm honey brown that complements her beautiful skin.

The rapid heaving of her chest shows me she wants this more than she’s trying to let on. *Is it odd to feel like I know her?* Every pulsing nerve in my body tells me she belongs to me. The way our bodies react to each other is electrifying. Maybe it’s her reluctance, or maybe it’s been that damn long since I’ve desired the touch of a woman this badly. But I need to feel her, have her—taste her.

“God, you’re so beautiful!” I say, trailing the backs of my fingers down her collarbone before taking her necklace between them. As I do this, I study her features, noting how cute her nose is and loving the way her short, blunt bob frames her face.

Jessica melts against me, closing her eyes briefly then gazes up at me. We never talked about how tall she was, but she falls right under my chin. I press my forehead to hers and inhale her scent. It's sweet and stirs the arousal within me. The front of my pants stiffens, and I try to compose myself.

"I'm going to kiss you." I pause for permission, and when she doesn't protest, I lean in. I pull her close, I devour her mouth, enjoying the way our tongues dance against each other. "You taste so sweet." I moan without breaking our grasp.

She grabs my face, deepening our endearment, and I lose myself. Pressing her to the wall, I run my hands along her curves before moving my lips to her neckline where I nibble and suck her softly. My dick strains to be released, but I know I can't have her yet. Not here, not like this. I want her in my bed—or hers—naked and waiting for me. I groan thinking of all the kinky things we shared this past month.

"Say you'll give this a chance, sweets," I plead through hushed breaths but retain my hold on her waist.

Jessica's body straightens, and she looks away, letting out a disappointing sigh. With both hands, she gently pushes them onto my chest, forming a wedge between us. My muscles tense when I realize this isn't going the way I had hoped. That kiss, as passionate as it was, did nothing for her. The look of despair on her face crushes me.

"I'm sorry, Kade. I can't." Jessica tears from my grip and rushes down the hall to the exit.

"Sweets," I call out, wanting to chase after her, but my feet won't move. "Fuck," I yell as she disappears from view.

It takes a moment for me to fully register, and when I do, I race outside but I know she's probably long gone by now. I reach the exit to find a taxi cab pulling away from the hotel. I toss my hands in the air, letting out a frustrated roar, not caring who's around to witness my breakdown. It wasn't supposed to go like this. We should be enjoying each other and making promises for some sort of future together. Things were good, so why the fuck am I standing in the cold after begging the girl of my dreams to choose me?

Gathering my composure, I straighten my jacket and head up to my room for the night. Along the way, I take out my phone to speed dial Jessica, but each call goes unanswered. I meant everything I've said to her tonight. She's electrifying, addictive. Fuck, I can't explain it. This whole thing between us makes me feel alive. Jessica will be mine, and if she thinks for one second this is the last she's heard of me—she's crazy.

CHAPTER NINE

JESSICA

I board the elevator up to my office while declining the call coming through on my phone. Today is the first day back since the horrible holiday party three days ago. One would think they would have let us off until Monday. No sense in returning to work on a Friday, but hey, I don't make the rules. As the doors chime open, my phone buzzes again, singing that stupid ringtone I set for Kade. With a deep sigh, I ignore his call for the millionth time and drop it in my bag before making my way to my office.

I don't know why I didn't make this easy on myself and block his number, then I won't have to hear the tone. I fought with the thought of answering or returning his messages, but each time I stop myself. It kills me to do this to him after he basically poured his desires out to me. He really is a great guy; handsome, successful, extremely sweet and chivalrous. Everything a woman could want in a man, and he wanted me.

The news of him being my boss threw me for a loop. It would have been one thing to work in the same building or even for the same company. But he *owns* the company and many others on an international level. That's intimidating, and to think I've sent him sexy photos of me and practically promised him my waiting pussy. I panicked. It's that fucking simple. I saw him and instantly thought about what Erin or Lauren would say. To say I don't want to explore all he has to offer would be a lie. I miss him like crazy, but I just can't.

I fought tooth and nail to get this job and worked diligently to prove myself to Lauren. Nothing can stand in the way of that. She's one of the best in this field and the exact reason I wanted to work here. Kade is sexy and could probably give me the world, but I like what I've earned and don't want to ruin it.

"Hey, Jessica, there—"

"Hey, Erin. Hold that thought. I need five minutes to call my mom," I interrupt while turning the knob and walking into my office. Closing the door behind me, I strut over to my desk, not paying much attention to my surroundings. When I set my purse and keys on the surface in front of me, a voice calls out from behind, startling me. I jump, clutching my chest before the familiar rattle of his vocals registers.

"Sweets," Kade repeats, but I refuse to face him.

I hear him stand from the love seat stationed on the other side of the room behind the door. I curse myself for not moving its position like I'd planned many times in the past. If I had, I would have seen him immediately and been able to avoid this.

I drop my hands at my sides and toss my head back in surrender. Taking a second to gather myself, I turn to find him standing near the door. *God, he looks so good.* With all the emotions that ran through me the other night, I hadn't allowed myself to truly admire him. The way he's built, tall and... beefy. His tan bald head glistens under the bright lights and I blush as I think about how soft it would feel. He's dressed casually in a pair of khakis and an untucked button-up shirt. The sleeves are rolled to his elbows, showing off the many tattoos that adorn his forearms.

"Why are you here?" I ask.

He locks the door and takes several steps forward, pinning me between him and my desk. "You weren't answering my calls or messages, and I told you, I'm not letting you walk away from me. Not without a good reason."

"I've given you plenty—"

“No, you gave me theory. You panicked and jumped to the worst-case scenario before ever giving us a shot. Sorry, but I can’t accept that, sweets.”

Squeezing my eyes shut, I sigh. “Kade, I don’t really know what else to tell you.”

“Tell me why you’re getting in the way of this. We’re both single, and at least I thought are highly attracted to one another, and we aren’t breaking any rules, so what’s stopping you?”

I don’t answer his questions. Instead, I lower my head and twiddle with the hem of my skirt. The fact is, Kade is right in everything he’s said. We are free to be or not be with each other—I *checked*. This was never supposed to be anything more than a little sexual, over-the-phone fun. Now he’s standing here in my office, demanding I give him more.

“Are you afraid to see where this could go? I won’t hurt you if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“I don’t think you will,” I say in a hushed tone.

“I’m grasping at straws here, sweets. I don’t know what’s going on in your mind, why you’ve decided not to give us a chance.”

“It’s real,” I shout. “This was supposed to be fun. We weren’t supposed to fall for each other, meet each other, kiss each other.”

“Great things come when you least expect them. Don’t be afraid to fall, because I’ll be here to catch you every time. You’ve got to trust me.”

I gently push him aside. My mind is cluttered and standing in front of him isn’t helping. Wrapping my arms around myself, I walk to the window and stare down at the street. Deep breaths keep me calm as I scramble to figure this all out. One of my biggest flaws is overthinking. Nothing is ever simple with me, I know that. This thing we have makes me feel blindsided.

“This intimidates me, Kade. It was good when we didn’t see each other. Fun and freeing. I got to experience a side of

me no one's ever met. But that's what makes this so... challenging for me. You want to know the real Jessica Daly, and I thought I was okay with that. Then I realize not only do I not know you, I've been presented with two versions of you. There's Kade, my fun, caring and flirty guy from LA who makes me smile. Then there's Oliver, the CEO of my company."

"I'm one person. Oliver and Kade are just names, not who I am. I've shown you the real me, it's a matter of if you want to explore openly." He pauses. "I can't force you into anything, but I wish you'd consider giving this a real shot."

Kade is behind me now. His breath on the back of my neck sends a chill down my spine.

"Can you do that, sweets? Can you give us a real chance?"

He touches me, and I shiver. *Why does my body want to betray me?* So many feelings course through me. He runs his hands up and down both arms, making it hard for me to make sense of things. I lean into his chest, feeling the drumming of his heart against my back. Tingles surge through me, and I moan unexpectedly. Kade places a hand on my shoulder, kneading it then rubbing it up the back of my ear and down again. *Fuck it!* I turn toward him, taking his face between my palms and crashing our mouths together. Without hesitation, he kisses me back, pulling me into his arms. Kade takes a step backwards, allowing me to lead him over to my desk. We bump it hard, but that doesn't seem to matter to him.

He sits on the edge with me locked between his thighs. His hands roam my body, starting at the nape of my neck then down to my ass, where he squeezes and groans in my mouth. The hunger radiating from him fuels my own as I fumble to undo his button-up. For a split second, I think about ripping it open like they do in the movies but quickly decide against it. How would we explain him exiting my office with a buttonless shirt? When I reach the last piece of round plastic that holds the fabric together, I run my hands down his chest. I release a moan at the feel of hair beneath my fingertips and the thick yet smooth ridges of his abs.

I pull away, trailing the tattoos that lace his torso, storing each one in memory, nearly salivating over his form. It's obvious he works out and cares for his body, and God, do I appreciate it. Kade gazes at me through lust-filled eyes and reaches out to running his hands down my thighs to the hem of my pencil skirt. Without taking his eyes from me, he lifts it slowly, groaning when the tight bottom band gets stuck at my thighs. He bites his lips, giving me another sexy roar before yanking it up until it's propped up on top of my ass.

Kade takes my wrist and turns me so my back is to him. My derriere is between his thick legs, so close I feel the shaft of his semi hard erection. A finger toys with the thin strap of my black thong then pops it against my flesh. I flinch, surprised by the jolt it sends to my pussy.

"Sweets, your ass is so beautiful." He rubs my left cheek and smacks it softly. "Damn, look at that jiggle." He does it again, this time with a little more pressure.

I close my eyes, enjoying the sensation and pushing myself closer to him.

"Mmm. Bend over for me, let me see it spread." He places his grip at the base of my back, guiding me forward. "Fuck, sweets. You're going to do me in for sure. I can smell your arousal," he adds before kissing my rump.

He stands, pressing his pelvic to me, grinding ever so slightly, enough for me to feel his dick lengthening. Another smack to both sides pushes me closer to the edge. I want him so bad and don't even give a shit that my assistant is on the other side of the door. Kade grabs my shoulders, lifting me until his chest is against my back, the bottom of his beard resting atop my head. His hands move down past my collarbone and over my breasts. He pinches both nipples through the silky material of my bra, sending fire to the place between my thighs.

If he doesn't take me now, I'm sure I'm going to explode.

KADE

My God, this woman is a fucking goddess; so soft, luscious, and delectable. The way she reacts to my touch has my dick fighting to be freed. I've envisioned this moment for weeks, and here we are. Her tits are like clouds, and when I pinch her nipples, her body bucks, and I smile, loving that shit. Her temperature rises with every twist of my fingers. Jessica moans and arches her back, pushing her breasts further into my hands. I squeeze them softly at first, then firm and aggressively as I suckle at her neck.

Sliding my hands to her waist, I use my legs to push off the desk and turn us both around. With her back still to me, I run my hand up the back of her thick thighs, memorializing every delicious dimple and groove. I rub up one ass cheek then over to the other before continuing my way to the small of her back. It's like Jessica knows exactly what I want, because she leans forward, pressing her butt out at me and planting herself face down on the desk. I push her blouse up so I can feel her flesh as I slide her thong off with one hand. She helps me by stepping out of it and spreading her legs wide. "*Damn,*" I whisper. The heels she wears aids in positioning her body just right. I grab her leg and lift it onto the desk, exposing her sweet spot to me. I step back slightly to allow myself room to lean down and kiss her there.

I spread her folds to find her pussy pink and creaming for me. "Fuck, sweets, you're so wet," I say, tracing her center with my middle finger. When I reach her clit, I circle it while undoing my pants with my other hand. My shaft springs free with precum oozing out of me. I haven't been this turned on in so long it's insane. I want to see her body release and convulse from the intense orgasm I'm about to give her. My dick-head continues to drip, soiling my pants as I stand up, positioning myself to enter her.

"We need a condom," she says.

"Okay," I respond through heavy breaths, grabbing my wallet from my pocket. I'm so excited to finally be with her it completely slipped my mind to grab the rubber sheath before letting my pants hit the floor.

Still perched with one leg raised, Jessica reaches under herself and pats at her pussy. *Slap...slap* is what I hear before she pushes a finger inside herself. The whisper of moisture pooling at her hole calls to me. *Gahh*. I stroke myself fast while watching her, my vision focused on only that finger and that hole. She slides it out and uses the same hand to reach for me to replace her fingers with mine. She pushes back against my wrist, her ass bouncing with each motion, and I tighten the hold I have on myself. Continuing to finger-fuck her, I one-handedly break the wrapper on the condom and slide it on. As I do this, Jessica's pussy tightens, and she shutter. She's about to come, and I want to be inside her when it happens. I stroke myself once more then slowly press the head in.

"Fuck," I shout when I feel how tight she is. I shuffle a little closer and ease in deeper, nearly losing it when she gasp. *That fucking gasp!*

I guess I'm moving too slow for her, because she thrusts back, taking all of me inside her. We both moan, and my muscles tense. Man, she...feels...so good. My breath quickens and sweat forms over my brow.

"Fuck me, Kade," she mutters, throwing her ass back at me.

Gahhhhhh. Fuck, fuck, I say internally while sucking in deep breaths. *No, no, no, don't you dare clock out on me*, I mutter telepathically to my dick. *We've been ready for this; we're going to fuck the shit out of her so she knows why she can't leave us alone*. I press my lips together and exhale through my nose with my eyes closed. *What the fuck is happening right now?* Come on, I've got to get myself together. This is not something I have a problem with. In fact, I pride myself in never finishing before giving a woman at least two orgasms. But Jessica is doing something to me. I don't know if it's the excitement, but I *know* we've got a problem.

If I could, I would stay this way to give myself time to concentrate, but I don't want her to get suspicious. *How fucking embarrassing would it be after all the shit I talked to her?* I coax myself, drumming my fingers on her waist and

prepare to stroke her. Her walls wrapped around me, the sound of my dick going in and out of her, and the softness of her ass against my thighs is...going...to...fucking...kill me. *Shit, shit.* My ass tightens, and my shoulders go stiff as my cum shoots into the condom. I have to squeeze my eyes shut and fight to contain my moan, because I cannot go down like this. *Not today!*

In an attempt to save myself, I pull out of her and drop to my knees, instantly taking her pussy into my mouth. My dick might have failed me this morning, but my tongue has never let me down. It doesn't take long for Jessica to get in a groove, bucking herself against my mouth as I lick her hole and rub her clit. Placing two fingers inside, I poke her spot while using my free hand to still fondle her hood. Her body shudders again, letting me know she's close to cumming. I pick up speed, determined to get every last drop out of her. Jessica shivers, bucks, and falls flat on the desk, unable to keep her leg in position. She tries to drop it, but I hold it in place a little longer to lick the wetness from her dripping pussy. Only when I'm sure I've gotten it all do I allow her to stand, feeling confident that even though I couldn't fuck her like I wanted—*stupid dick*—I've left her satisfied.

I help to pull the skirt back down around her legs and re-tuck her blouse. Jessica's demeanor is different, not standoffish like before, but not as open as I want. Especially after what we just did. I wonder what's going on in her mind. *Did she notice I came quickly?* That would probably be bad. *Or is she still conflicted over us?* When I try to kiss her, I get my answer. She pulls away from me, leaving me here with my pants still down around my ankles. Jessica walks over to the mirror in the left corner of her office and toys with her hair.

Pulling the condom from my soft dick, I snatch a tissue from the box on her desk and wrap it to discard in the trash. Next, I lean forward to redress myself and pick her thong up off the floor. I fumble with the thin material and watch her closely, trying to gauge what the outcome will be. She looks beautiful over there, and I know in this moment, I could watch her like this all the time. I already want to see her again and I haven't even left yet. She feels right to me, and I'm not down

to lose the chance to show her how great we can be together. Stuffing her panties into my pocket, I stroll over to where she stands and touch her shoulders. She doesn't reject me this time but instead closes her eyes through several breaths.

“I can see you're still unsure about us.”

She slouches and drops her head.

I grip her shoulders lovingly. “This isn't our ending, sweets. I know what I want, and that's you. But I also know you're a woman who likes to move on her own terms. So I'll be patient. I just request one thing. Take it slow with me, as slow as you need this to be. See for yourself that we can have something real.”

I don't wait for her to respond and honestly don't expect her to. If this whole ordeal has taught me anything, it's to give her a little time to think it through. She's hard on herself, and I get it, but I need her to know I'm the one person she can let go with. Whatever it takes for her to be free of those inhibitions, I'm willing, because this is definitely not the last time she'll hear from me. Planting a kiss to the top of her head, I whisper goodbye, snag my jacket from the sofa, and head out, closing the door behind me.

Those dirty little calls turned out to be a lot more than what either of us bargained for, but I'm so fucking glad she didn't hang up that night. I may not be leaving here with her as my own, but either way one looks at it, I've won. Pushing my shoulders back, I cruise through the office to board the elevator, the nine-floor decline feeling like an eternity. With my eyes closed, I press my back into the far wall, trying to keep an open mind. It would have been great, to have a different ending to my day. To leave the DMV area, knowing I'll get the chance to be with the woman of my dreams. I blow out a rough breath just when the lift dings and the doors slide open. I step out into the lobby, pulling my jacket on. My phone buzzes in my pocket as I continue on my way. I remove the device and stare at the screen, a smile plasters on my face.

“Don't leave. I'm coming down,” Jessica calls out when I answer.

CHAPTER TEN

JESSICA

I step out of my office, trying to remain as coy as possible, but anticipation builds, taking over me, and I hurry to the elevator. Looking up at the digital display, I jab the button. *It's on the first floor.* I dart my gaze to the stairwell and back. *It hasn't moved.* The last thing I want is to be sweaty and out of breath, but I know it'll be faster to take the stairs.

Fuck it.

I rush to the door on my left, gripping the rail and being careful not to go tumbling down the steps. My heels slap against the marbled floors, and the impact sends a numbing pain through my ankles. Just four floors left, and as I turn to approach the next flight, my shoe snags on the anti-slip tread that rests on the edge of each step. I brace myself from falling but bump my knee on the newel. Gripping the handlebar for support, I snatch both shoes off and drop them before continuing to descend to the lower level.

Bursting through the exiting door, I frantically search the lobby for him. I scan the space, but he isn't here. My heart races, and I try not to let myself believe he's gone, even after I asked him not to leave. I push through the swiveling entrance, glancing in both directions only to find the streets free of him. My shoulders slump, and I toss my arms up in defeat. I clasp my hands together atop my head, still staring out at the sidewalk, just hoping I'll spot him walking in front of someone. After a minute, I give up and will myself to accept the fact I might have fucked this up.

I reenter the building, the cold tiles reminding me I'm barefoot. I look down and wiggle my toes. My chest rattles through a soft chuckle and then a deep sigh before I walk to the elevator. My heart aches that he left. But who am I to be upset? He opened himself to me, and I just... Ugh. I press the 'call' button and wait amongst other patrons, unfazed by the weird glances at my naked feet.

“Sweets.”

The doors are nearly closed, but I reach out, forcing them apart. To not hold anyone else up, I step back into the lobby. Maybe my mind is playing tricks on me, making me experience things it knows I want to hear. I could have sworn I heard his voice, or at least I hoped so, but as I scan the space for a second time, he's still not here. Tears threaten to escape, but I wipe them away and turn back toward the stairwell. I don't want to wait in line for the next ride up and with the regret I feel it may be best to have the solitude. Besides, I left my shoes on the fourth floor. I will need those if I want to appear professional today.

Rubbing my hands over my blouse, I stare straight ahead, freezing in my tracks. A man walks in front of me, blocking my view, forcing me to crane my neck to get a good look. I fight back a squeal but can't stop the urge to bounce on my tiptoes. He's there, behind the door of the staircase, perched against the wall. A smile a mile long stretches to my eyes, and I skip to him. Kade stands upright and walks to meet me halfway. I grab his hand between both of mine and lead him through the threshold of the stairway. He follows without hesitation, and as soon as we're alone, he pulls from my grasp and cups my face. Kade crashes his mouth to mine, his tongue parting my lips. I breathe into him, loving the way it feels to be this close to him, yet regretting that I almost messed this up.

I break our embrace and gaze up at him. “I'm awkward, and weird, and sometimes overthink things. I can be clumsy and clueless.” I take a breath.

“Breathe, sweets. I know what I'm getting myself into.” He smiles, brings me to his chest, and rubs his hands down my

spine.

“I’m crazy.” I huff.

“That’s okay. You’re a mess, I get that, but it’s beautiful to me.”

I smile softly and lay my head on his chest. “Do you have to fly back tonight?”

“Not if you’re giving me a reason to stay.” He kisses my head.

“I am. I need to get back upstairs. Well, I need to find my shoes first...” I back away.

“I was about to ask about that.” He laughs.

I chuckle. “I didn’t want to miss you, and they were kinda in the way.”

He holds his hands out as if he’s surrendering to me. “Hey, no judgement. I thought it was cute to see you running through the lobby barefoot. It let me know how much you care about me, considering I know you’re a bit of a germaphobe.”

I try not to laugh but fail. “Okay, I need to go, but don’t leave. I’ll text you my address. Have dinner with me tonight.”

“I’d love to.”

I lift on my toes to kiss him once more before saying a farewell and running up the stairs in search of my shoes.

When my shift is over, Kade is waiting for me in the lobby with his arms crossed and his back pressed firmly against the receptionist desk. I’d texted him earlier to let him know I’ll be an hour later than expected, and he didn’t seem to mind at all. Most of the staff has gone home already, leaving only me and a few others behind. They were still in their offices as I left, which is the only reason it doesn’t bother me he’s here in the lounge where those who work with us can see us together.

“Hey, you! You didn’t have to wait here for me.” I approach him and wave goodbye to the evening security officer.

Kade pushes off the counter, dropping his arms to his sides. “Yeah, I know, but I was just next door at the Westin Hotel and figured it made sense to wait for you instead of walking up to your apartment alone.”

“That makes sense,” I say, allowing him to wrap his arms around me.

“Ready to go?” He takes my laptop bag from me.

“I am. I’ve scheduled for the groceries to be delivered, so all I’ll have to do is prep and cook.”

He holds the door for me to exit. “We could have gone to a restaurant,” he adds, his voice filled with concern.

“Yeah, but I want to cook for you.”

Kade nods and signals for me to lead the way. It takes us all of ten minutes to walk the length of Glebe Road to my apartment. As we make our way through the front desk area and up the elevators on to my floor, I watch as he looks around, taking in our surroundings. I unlock my door, stepping in and to the side to allow him entry.

“Make yourself at home. I’m going to get out of my work clothes real quick.” I scurry past the kitchen to my room on the left, leaving the door slightly ajar. “If you’re thirsty, I have water, ginger ale, and that wine you ordered for me the last time. Help yourself,” I yell, hoping he can hear me.

I hear the fridge open before he calls out, “I’ll take a ginger ale.”

He’s removing his coat and resting it on the back of the dining chair when I step back into the common area. He lifts his glass from the table and glances around the place.

“I love this window.” He crosses into the living room to peer out of it.

“It’s the main reason I chose this place. I saw a bunch of locations, but all the natural lighting in here sold me,” I add

and stroll over to stand next to him.

“No curtains?” He points inquisitively.

“I should probably get some, eventually.” I chuckle. “But I just haven’t gotten around to it. My mom would die if she came here and saw I was exposed like this.”

“I think I’m with your mom. We should definitely see about getting you some drapes or blinds. I’ll feel a lot more comfortable to not have to worry about someone peeking in on you.”

“There’s nothing across from me but the gas station which is a single-level building, and I’m on the eighth floor.”

“Okay, I’ll give you that. But what about window washers?” He turns to face me, taking a sip from his soda.

Twirling on my heels, I take a seat on the sofa. “I’m never home when they’re out there cleaning.” I tuck one leg underneath me.

Kade follows, sitting beside me and placing his right arm over my shoulder. “So what you’re telling me is that you’ve thought long and hard about how to answer one’s concern over this?” He laughs.

Before I can respond, my phone dings, and I’m certain it’s the notification, alerting me that my groceries have arrived. I push off the couch and strut back over to the door, grabbing my phone from my purse along the way. Slipping my feet into the pair of old Nike slides that I use solely for walking about the building, I prepare to leave.

“Where are you going?”

“Downstairs. The groceries are here.”

He stands, adjusting his pants. “I’ll get it. Will they be meeting me in the lobby or outside?”

“Probably at the front entrance. You can’t get in the building without a key.”

“Okay.” He places his hands on both of my shoulders, giving them a squeeze. “I’ll go get the food. And will see you

in a bit.”

I respond with a smile, stepping out of his way. He’s a guest, so naturally my instinct is to just take care of it myself. But then again, he is a man... A man’s man. So, I don’t I know why I thought he’d let that fly.

When he returns, he sits the bags on the counter and stands behind me, wrapping his hands around my waist, pressing his body into my back. I breathe in deeply, allowing my muscles to relax and melt into his warm frame as I wash my hands.

“What are we having?” he asks, releasing me and heading back into the living room for his drink.

He sips it, and I watch him, nearly salivating over the rolling of his Adam’s apple.

“My famous stuffed shells.” I shut off the sink, shaking my hands to flick away moisture. “Wait. You don’t have any dairy allergies, do you?”

“Nope. I eat everything.”

I have to stop myself from being childish and responding with, *‘that’s what he said’*. Instead, I press my lips together and say, “Awesome! Because that would’ve been bad, and we would’ve been starving.” I laugh softly. “The dish is mostly cheese-based.”

Over the next twenty minutes, I spend the time required to prep our dinner. Starting with the chicken, after it’s been cleaned, I season and pan sear before adding in fresh spinach and cheese then stuffing the mixture inside jumbo pasta shells. For the last step, I pop it in the oven to bake for ten minutes. While I cook, Kade watches television. Well, more like barely watches. The TV is on, but we’ve spent more time talking.

He asks me about my day, and I inquire about his. We both try to avoid discussing our earlier rendezvous in my office. I’m grateful because just thinking about it has my chest doing somersaults and my undergarments wet.

He offers to help by putting together two place settings and pouring each of us a glass of wine. I carry the piping-hot glass dish and serving spoon to the table and leave them in the

center. Remembering the side salad I threw together, I race back to the kitchen.

“Sweets, this smells and looks amazing.” He pulls out a chair and takes a seat. “I can’t wait to dig in.”

I put the salad bowl next to the rest of our meal and sit. “Thank you. It’s my favorite thing to make. Most people love it.”

He waits for me to get fully situated then picks up his fork and chop into a shell. I watched as he pops a piece into his mouth and closes his eyes, showing he’s enjoying it.

“Girl,” he says with his head thrown back and his eyes wide. “If all your meals are this good, you’re going to find yourself stuck with me.”

I lift my chin and sigh in satisfaction. I’ve prepared this dish nearly a million times, so I have the recipe down pat. But, I’m always nervous when I make it for a new person. “That might not be such a bad idea,” I retort, taking a helping of my own.

Kade allows his fork to clink against the plate before sitting back. He rolls his shoulders, getting comfortable in his place. I furrow my brows in his direction, wondering why he’s stopped eating. But with my mouth full, I take the time to chew and swallow. He watches me with a snide, crooked grin.

“Is something wrong?” I quiz.

He sits forward to lean on his elbows. “Not at all. I just needed to look at you for a minute.”

I tuck my chin, trying my damndest to hide the smile threatening to escape. “What are you hoping to see?”

“I guess I’m just still shocked by you.” He lowers his gaze and toys with his food, using the fork to push it around.

I pause and straighten my posture. “Shocked?”

“Yeah, I mean, you’re fucking beautiful, sweets. More than I ever imagined. Then I think about how we met, and now we’re here. After weeks of trying to get you to see me, we’re here.”

A sly smile replaces the look of confusion I had a second ago. “I know. Face to face.” My voice is low and sultry. Not on purpose, he just does things to me I can’t control.

“So,” he blurts out and stabs his dinner to feed himself a helping of spinach and chicken. “What are your thoughts on making this work?”

“Honestly, I was hoping you had some sort of an idea.” I chuckle.

He does the same, rubs his beard and licks his lips. “I was thinking we could take turns visiting each other. I’m traveling most of the time, so I could easily make a detour on the way home or a few days before I need to get to my destination. I can also book flights for you to come out to LA.”

I nod at his plans, realizing he’s given this some serious thought. “What about our schedules? It’s more feasible for you, but I don’t think I can spend a lot of time away. Maybe once a month? If I’m coming to LA, I can do it over a weekend and could probably take a Friday or Monday as a remote day,” I suggest.

“That sounds fine. I wouldn’t expect you to travel out to me all the time. I’m more than happy to take the brunt of that. It’ll make more sense, as when I’m in town, I can work, and your schedule doesn’t have to change.”

“All right.” I breathe in deep. “Thanks for staying.”

“Thank you for coming after me and choosing to give us a shot.” He reaches across the table and rests his hand on top of mine.

I adjust myself so I can take his fingers in my palms and squeeze. “Let’s eat up before it gets cold.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

We spend the next few minutes devouring our food and engaging in conversation. It’s always been easy to talk to him and just lose myself in his words, and tonight is no different. Not once did I allow myself to overthink things, and it feels good. I was sure I ruined my chances, but honestly, I don’t even know why I would think so. He was clear from the very

beginning what he wanted and never gave me any reason to doubt him.

After dinner, Kade helps me load the empty dishes into the sink. It's getting late, but thankfully it's the weekend, and I don't have to be up early for work tomorrow. I turn to face him, pressing my back against the sink and drying my hands off with the dish towel. He takes a step forward, slipping his arms around my waist.

"I'm going to kiss you now, sweets." He peers down at me, licking his lips and throwing me that sexy grin.

My breath hitches, preventing me from speaking, but my body language welcomes him. I arch forward so that our bodies are molded together. He lowers himself, pulling my tongue between his teeth before letting it roam free.

KADE

She feels so good in my arms, pressed against my chest. Her body opens to me, calling and wanting for me to do with it whatever I choose. Damn it if I don't want to rip her leggings and top from her body and pleasure her right here, right now. But I won't. Yes, we've already crossed that threshold when we fucked in her office, but this is technically our first date. So I won't heed my desire to take her pussy into my mouth again. I want...no, I need her to see this, to see me as something serious. I haven't wanted a woman this bad in a long time, and it feels good to care for someone again. Jessica rocked my world that first night and blew my mind earlier today. I'm ready to spend however long it takes giving her the same.

I back away but don't break my hold on her hips. "Today was great. Thank you so much for dinner. I'll have to cook for you when you visit LA," I say in between kisses.

"I'd love that." She smiles into my mouth.

I sigh. "My flight leaves early, so I'm going to head back to the Westin."

Jessica pouts, letting her shoulders slump in disappointment. I smirk, narrowing my sights on her full lips and trace them with my thumb. They're wet and swollen from our kisses, and all I can think about is sucking on them to see just how plump they can get.

"I'll be back, I promise. I have some things to take care of over the next couple of weeks." I reach into my back pocket for my phone and scroll to my calendar. "But let's see. MLK weekend, I'm free. I can come back that Friday evening and stay with you through Monday. Or you can fly to see me?" I add, searching her face for confirmation.

"I've never been to LA," she proclaims.

I nod. "Then it's settled. I'll book your flight and send the itinerary." After shoving my phone back in my pocket, I cup her face for one more kiss.

We finally separate long enough for me to retrieve my coat from the back of the chair and slip it on. She helps me by zipping it up before walking me toward the door. I pull her in for another embrace, inhaling deeply, locking her scent to memory. I will need it for when I make it back to my room to take care of the hunger I've been fighting to control.

The door closes behind me, and I stand there for a moment with my palm pressed against it. Warmth spreads through my body as contentment and gratitude takes over me. My lip twitches, and I realize I'm hiding a smile. I worried about the way the day would turn out. Showing up at her office, forcing her to face me was a gamble and one that paid off in such a major way. I exit the building with more pep in my step than I've had in ages and decide to walk the ten minutes back to the hotel instead of calling an Uber.

Now settled in bed after showering and packing for my flight, I shut out the lights to force myself asleep. I have to be at Reagan National Airport by four a.m. for the five o'clock red eye. But as I lie here, staring at the ceiling, all that crosses

my mind is my sweet Jessica. Visions of her sprawled out on that desk sends blood rushing to my little head, and I know that if I'm to get any rest tonight, I'll need to relieve the pressure.

I reach for my phone and quickly dial her number, holding the device to my ear. She answers on the third ring, her voice pouring through the speaker exciting me even more.

"Hello," she says in a low tone.

I wet my lips. "I'm imagining how good your pussy would feel wrapped around my dick, sweets. Can you picture me inside you?" I growl, reciting the very first thing I ever said to her, but this time I'm certain I've dialed the correct number.

There's a brief pause then a low humming pours through the phone and I know she's invited her vibrator to the party. My gut tightens and I grip myself.

"Um," is all she musters.

"That's a good girl. Play with your pretty pussy for me."

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Kade

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Jessica

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sade Rena writes multi-cultural romances where the heroes are sweet on their ladies, dirty in the sheets but completely irresistible.

When she is not writing, you can find her dabbling in crafts or playing around in photoshop. She's originally from Washington DC, where she first found her love for books. That love followed her to Goldsboro, NC and then again to her home in Texas. She's addicted to The Vampire Diaries and all things Marvel. Where ever there's country music and good drinks, you'll probably spot her out on the floor cutting a rug.

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