



HIS  
*Stubborn*  
SUBMISSIVE  
OWNED BOOK 5

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
K. L. RAMSEY

# **HIS STUBBORN SUBMISSIVE**

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OWNED BOOK 5

K.L. RAMSEY



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His Stubborn Submissive (Owned Book 5)

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Cover Design: Taylor Dawn at Sweet 15 Designs

Formatting: Mr. KL

Imprint: Independently published

First Print Edition: January 2023

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## FORD

**F**ord Dixon watched as the sexy little brunette left the restaurant on the arm of some asshole and he wanted to get up and follow her the fuck out of there. Journey Ross had been his walking wet dream for as long as he could remember. Hell, he'd known her his whole life—she was his younger sister's best friend since they were all just kids, and that was exactly why she should be off-limits. The problem was his dick didn't get the memo that he needed to keep his hands off his sister's best friend.

The question was, who the fuck was the asshat she was having dinner with? Ford had spent the better part of his adult life asking Journey out. Every damn time he asked her to go to dinner or even just come over to his place for some drinks and to watch a movie, she turned him down flat. Once, he got up the nerve to ask her why and she told him that she just didn't have time for dating. She was a journalist for CNN and spent a lot of time traveling, chasing down the next story. He knew how busy she was, but he tried timing asking her out around her work schedule. He had even asked her out for tonight and she said that she had to work all weekend, to meet a deadline for an article, that was already past due. He was such a fool for believing her, but that was his own fault. He let his feelings cloud his assessment of Journey and she pulled one over on him once again.

Ford quickly paid his bar tab and followed her out into the parking lot, against his better judgment, to confront Journey. He stepped out into the cold evening air and quickly looked

around the half-empty parking lot. He spotted Journey standing next to her SUV, door open, and smiling her best, “Get the fuck away from me smile,” at the guy she had dinner with. Yeah—that pissed him off. He wanted to walk over to them and punch the asshole in the face, but he needed to remember that Journey made her choice to go out with the guy instead of him. She made her bed and now, she needed to figure her shit out. Keeping his nose out of her business was going to be difficult for two reasons though. One, she saw him across the parking lot and made eye contact with him. He saw the pleading in her dark eyes and knew he wouldn’t be able to walk away from her. The second reason had to do with the fact that his pick-up was parked right next to her SUV and there would be no possible way for him to avoid her.

Ford casually walked up to his truck; his heart felt about ready to beat out of his chest and nodded to Journey. That seemed to be the only recognition she needed. “Ford,” she almost squealed. “Good to see you.” Her fake smile was still in place and he could tell that something was up.

“Journey,” he breathed. “Good to see you too. I thought you were going to be working on an article all weekend,” he said. Letting her off the hook wasn’t something he was ready to do.

She nodded, and he knew she was going to ignore his snide comment. “Actually, I just had an impromptu meeting with my boss,” she said, pointing to the guy who was standing a little too close to her as if marking his territory. “This is Andrew Tinsley,” she said. “Andrew, this is one of my oldest friends, Ford Dixon.” The guy held out his hand but made no move toward Ford. He was being tested, and that was just fine with him. He was used to dealing with assholes who thought that he was beneath their station. In the military, he learned fast how to take orders and kiss ass when necessary. The thing was, he didn’t need to kiss Andrew Tinsley’s ass. Andrew dropped his arm back to his side when he realized that Ford wasn’t going to make a move to accept his hand.

“Good to meet you, Ford,” Andrew said.

“Likewise,” Ford lied.



“Um, I’m glad that I ran into you, Ford. Your sister just called me and that’s why I’ve had to cut our work dinner short. She needs me to run over to her place with some soup. Poor Lucinda said that she is not feeling well and I want to take her some chicken noodle soup. That always makes me feel better when I’m sick.” She smiled at him and subtly winked. Yeah, she was lying. He knew that his sister wasn’t ill. In fact, he stopped by her place on the way to the restaurant and he knew that Lucinda was just fine. She and Ty were planning a romantic night in, and he couldn’t get out of their place fast enough. The two of them grossed him out and made him long for stuff he never thought he wanted. He had a feeling that Journey was trying to get rid of her dinner date and for just a split second, he was thinking about letting her suffer on her own. But that would be cruel. Almost as cruel as she was to him every time he asked her out and she turned him down flat.

“I’d like to check on my sister too,” he said, playing along. “You want to ride with me?” he asked.

“Well, I have my car,” she said nodding to her SUV. And if she left in her car, her boss would probably follow her home and insist on a nightcap.

“Right, but this way you can run in and pick up the soup, from that little place that Lucinda likes, and you won’t have to fight for parking,” he insisted. He was hoping she’d catch on, but he could see that she was ready to give him a fight.

“Or I could just take you over to see your friend. We could take my car, and then finish our meeting back at your place,” Andrew offered. It was almost as if Ford could see the lightbulb go off in her head when she realized what he was trying to do.

“Oh no, that won’t be necessary,” Journey said. “I wouldn’t want to expose you to whatever Luci has. Besides, she’d kill me if I brought someone over when she’s not at her best.”

She turned her back to Andrew and mouthed, “Thank you,” to Ford. “I’d love a ride, Ford. Thank you,” she said. “I’ll see you at the office, Andrew,” she said, effectively

dismissing her boss. Ford noticed the flash of anger in the guy's eyes just before his easy smile was back in place.

“Not a big deal,” Andrew lied. “I hope your friend is feeling better soon. I’ll see you at the office on Monday,” he said. Andrew leaned in to kiss her cheek and she pulled away from him before he could pull her into his body for a hug. For a boss, the guy was pretty handsy and Ford wondered if there might be some history between Journey and her employer.

“See you Monday,” she said. Andrew crossed the parking lot and got into his very expensive, overly pretentious car. He made no move to start his car or leave the parking lot.

Journey looked back over her shoulder and back to Ford. “What now? He’s not going to leave while we’re standing here. I can’t just get into my car and leave because then he’ll know I was lying.”

“Are you sleeping with your boss, Journey?” Ford asked. Sure, it wasn’t any of his business but he just couldn’t help himself.

“What? No,” she spat. “I’ve never slept with him. How unprofessional would that make me?” she asked.

“Yeah—I have a feeling that your boss is an HR nightmare,” Ford said.

“So, you’re not with that guy?” he asked, nodding to where Andrew still sat, watching them.

“No,” she breathed as he took a few steps closer to Journey. He was so close to her that he could feel her breath on his face. God, he had wanted to kiss her his whole life, and he never just took a leap of faith and took what he wanted from her. He was a coward and playing the nice guy was getting him nowhere with her.

“Good,” Ford breathed. “Then, he won’t mind if I do this.” He pulled her up against his body and didn’t give her a chance to protest. He knew she would give him a fight, but that was part of what turned him on. Ford crushed his mouth to hers and took what he had wanted from her for so long. He kissed her with every ounce of the pent-up desire that he had felt for

her since they were just kids and she tasted like sunshine and honey. Journey tasted like home.

## JOURNEY

Journey wasn't sure how her night had ended with her standing in the parking lot of her favorite restaurant, kissing the man she had wanted her whole life. He had asked her out so many times and she turned him down each time, out of fear that if she told him yes, she'd lose her best friend. Lucinda and she had made a pact when they were nine that they'd never let a boy come between them and Journey was pretty sure that dating Luci's brother would fall under that pact.

And now, she was standing in the parking lot, kissing Ford Dixon. When she allowed herself to relax and wrapped her arms around his neck, he deepened the kiss and God, could he kiss. She felt as though she had been waiting her whole life for Ford to kiss her. The only reason he broke their kiss was because her asshole boss started his sports car and revved the engine. Ford ended their kiss, leaving her needy and breathless, panting for air.

"Wow," she breathed.

"Fucking right, wow," he agreed. "I've been waiting a damn long time to do that, Journey," he whispered. He looked back over her shoulder to where her boss still sat in his car, his smile was almost mean. "We need to get going. I don't think that our audience is too happy with our little show." She looked back at Andrew and could tell that he was pissed. She was going to have to deal with him on Monday and knowing her boss, he was going to give her a load of shit and a good bit of attitude.

Journey loved her job as a journalist for CNN. Sure, she got the shitty assignments, but everyone had to cut their teeth in the industry and she knew that sooner or later, her big break would come along and she'd be able to launch her career. Working for Andrew Tinsley was something that she hated though. He had a reputation in the industry for being a cad, but when she interviewed for the job, she decided to look past his past indiscretions and take the assignment. She wanted it and working for CNN, no matter how lowly the position, gave her bragging rights with all her old college friends. She had gone on numerous job interviews and was just about flat-broke when Andrew's office called to interview her. She was waiting tables at a local diner and just about ready to give up on her dreams. Journey had college bills about to come due and was out of money and options. She thought that Andrew's offer was a sign that things were looking up. Journey knew that believing the gossip she heard around the industry was never a good idea. People talked and most of the time the stories were just that—stories. She chose to believe that the stories about Andrew were made up by women who were scorned by him not assigning a story they wanted, but she quickly came to realize that he was everything the stories made him out to be and so much more. The first time Andrew came on to her, she thought about going to HR but then he sent her out on her first dream assignment. Looking back, he did it to shut her up about him cornering her in his office and running his hands up under her skirt. Like a fool, she forgave him for what he called, "His lapse in judgment," and he sent her on her way. Things were good for months until he tried the same shit with her again. The problem was, she couldn't go to HR now that so much time had passed and so many indiscretions had occurred. The time for complaining about his bad behavior had passed and she'd just have to learn how to figure out her shit on her own.

Ford was right, she needed to get out of there and come up with a good story for Monday morning. Luckily for her, she had the entire weekend ahead of her to come up with something good. Right now, she'd let Ford come to her rescue and get her out of there. Later, she'd find a ride back to the restaurant to get her SUV. Ford helped her up into his pick-up and shut the door. She watched as he rounded his truck and got

in on the driver's side. She always thought he was a good-looking guy, but his time in the military, and the twenty-five pounds of muscle he put on, made him hot as hell.

"I hate to tell you this, Honey," he breathed, "but, your boss looks pissed." She looked back at Andrew's car one last time and nodded. He did look pretty upset by their little display.

"Yeah—he's an ass," she whispered under her breath. She wasn't even sure that Ford had heard her until he chuckled. "He likes to get handsy and well, I'm pretty sure that he expected more from tonight's little working dinner. You rescued me," she admitted. "Thank you."

Ford reached across the center console and took her hand into his own. He always had a calming effect on her and even now, when she deserved his wrath, he was granting her his comfort. Even when they were kids, he was always taking care of her and his sister. They were a couple of years younger than he was and Ford could have treated them both like nuisances, but he didn't. He was always kind to her and when she was old enough to notice boys, he was one of the first she had a crush on.

"You never have to thank me for helping you out, Journey," he said.

"After all the hell I've put you through. All the times that you asked me out and I told you no, you should hate me, Ford," she whispered.

"Why did you lie to me about this weekend?" he asked. "You said you couldn't go out with me tonight because you were going to be working all weekend."

"I didn't lie," she defended. "I was working. I was supposed to be at the office late, working on my article, but then Andrew found me in my little cubicle and insisted that I go to dinner with him. He told me that he wanted to troubleshoot a few problem areas of my article and I was foolish enough to believe him again."

“Again?” he asked. “You mean that this has happened before?”

Journey almost didn’t want to admit that it had. Doing so would only make her look weak and foolish—two things she never wanted to be in front of Ford. “Yes,” she said. “Let’s just say that my boss is very persuasive and leave it at that.”

“Fuck,” Ford growled. “I want to turn around and beat the shit out of him now,” he admitted.

She put her hand on his forearm, noting the tension in his muscles. “That would do neither of us any good, Ford. He’ll press charges against you and he’ll have full access to me then. This way is for the best. I’ve gotten pretty good at dodging his advances. I just need a little more time to figure out how to handle him. Plus, I’m up for a promotion at work and if I get it, Andrew won’t be my boss any more. I’m just hoping for that to happen, so I won’t have to deal with him anymore.”

“Why don’t you tell anyone—you know, like HR?” he asked.

“Because it would only put a black mark on my file with HR and I’d become a problem. I’m just a lowly reporter, Ford. If I cause waves, they’ll take away my assignments and I’ll never get to where I want to be.” Ford ran his thumb over her hand and squeezed it into his own.

“I’m sorry that you have to deal with all that, Honey,” he said. “You know if there’s ever anything I can do; all you have to do is say the word.”

“I know that Ford, and I appreciate it. But I need to do this on my own. Thank you though,” she said.

“Again, you never have to thank me,” he said.

“I guess you can take me back to my car now. I think Andrew would have moved on as soon as we took off.” They had gotten about two miles down the road and Ford checked his rearview.

“Can’t,” he breathed. “He’s following us, and I’m betting he’s hoping I’ll take you back for your car. Andrew seems to

be a smart guy. He's probably worked out that we aren't going to Luci's with some soup."

Journey looked through the back window and saw his car trailing them a few links back. Her gasp filled the cabin, and he squeezed her hand into his own again. "What will we do then?" she asked.

"I can think of a few things I'd like to do with you, Journey. But for now, I'm going to drive for a bit and see if he stays on our tail. If he does, I'm going to take you back to my place. But there is no fucking way I'm going to take you back to your car or your house. I think we might have pissed your boss off more than we intended. I won't let him touch you again. You good with that?" Journey knew she should have told him no. She should have protested that their being together wouldn't ever work. That it wasn't fair to her best friend for them to even consider everything that Ford started in the parking lot of the restaurant. But she had no more fight left and telling Ford no; denying what she wanted for so long, wasn't something she was strong enough to do anymore.



## FORD

**T**hey had been driving around in circles for almost thirty minutes and her boss didn't seem to be the kind of guy to just give up. "He's still following us, isn't he?" Journey asked.

"He is," Ford admitted, "he's a persistent fucker, I'll give him that."

"You have no idea," she mumbled. Ford wanted to ask her what she meant by that, but he had a feeling that he didn't really want to know. He'd want to beat the hell out of the guy, and as Journey already pointed out, that wouldn't end well for him.

"Why do you work for that asshole?" Ford asked.

"Because I needed a job. I know this might shock you, but my landlord doesn't let me live in my apartment for free. He kind of likes to get paid and that means that I need a job." She shook her head at him and all he could do was smile like a loon at her. "Why the hell are you smiling at me?"

"Because you've always been a smart ass. It's nice to see that some things don't change," he said. When he enlisted in the Army, Journey, and his sister were just kids. They were still in high school and even though Journey followed him around like a puppy, he couldn't give in to his basic desires and ask her out. She was four years younger than he was and he was about to go away for years. Ford didn't know when he would be back, and Journey was still underage and off-limits, not that his cock got that memo.

“You’ve been gone for a long time, Ford,” she said. “You don’t really know who I am anymore.” She was right. He didn’t know her anymore, but he wanted to. That was why he kept asking her out and why he was so disappointed to find her out with her boss tonight. He just wanted his chance with her and now, he was hoping to finally get it.

“You’re right, Journey,” he agreed, “I don’t know you anymore. I’d like to get the chance to know you though. Say you’ll go on a date with me.”

She hesitated, looking out the passenger window at the passing scenery. He thought for sure that she was going to tell him no and he hated that she was going to turn him down again. “Just say yes, Journey,” he whispered.

“What about Lucinda?” she asked. “She’s my best friend and I don’t want to lose her.”

“Why would you lose my sister?” Ford asked. “You two have been inseparable since you were in the second grade.”

“Right, but you’re her brother and I’m betting she doesn’t want us to date. I mean, what if things go south between us and we end up hating each other? What am I supposed to do about being friends with Lucinda? It would be awkward.” Maybe she was right and it would be awkward, but he didn’t give a damn about any of that. He wanted his chance with her and hearing her excuses to turn him down again was only pissing him off.

“Why do things have to go south between the two of us?” he asked. “I mean, we haven’t even gotten together yet and you’re breaking us up already. At least give us a chance before you end us. We don’t have to tell my sister that we’re going out on a date if you’re worried about her. We can go on a date, see if we click, and then, you can decide when or if you want to tell her. I’ll leave that up to you.”

“You want me to lie to her?” Journey asked.

“Of course not,” Ford insisted, “I’m just saying that we don’t have to tell her right away about us. Let’s take some time and get to know each other again, and then, you can tell her.”

He was sure that she was going to turn him down completely, but she didn't and when she nodded her agreement, he felt like the luckiest man on the planet.

“Really?” he asked. “You’ll go out with me?”

“I will, as long as you’re really okay with not telling Lucinda,” she said. “I don’t want to upset her if there’s no reason to do so.” He wanted to insist that there would be a reason to tell his sister about the two of them because once he got Journey into his bed, he never planned on letting her back out again.

“You got it,” he agreed. “I won’t say a word to my sister until you’re ready to do so.”

“Thank you. So, when would you like to go on this date?” she asked.

He checked his rearview mirror again and looked back at her. “How about now?” he asked. “Your boss is still a few cars back and I’m betting he won’t give up following us tonight unless we give him a reason to. How about we drop by that little deli, that has my sister’s favorite soup, pick up some desserts, and take them back to my place? He’ll never know that we’re not taking it to my sister’s since he has no idea where either of us lives.”

“But how will I get my SUV and go home later?” she asked. He was honestly hoping to get her to agree to stick around and spend the night with him, but he wouldn’t push Journey into something that she might not be ready for.

“Once your boss gives up and goes home, I’ll run you back to your SUV and follow you back to your apartment,” he offered.

“Why would you follow me back to my place?” she asked. “I don’t need an escort.”

“I’m sure that you can handle yourself, but I’m also betting that your boss knows where you live. Do you honestly believe that he’d follow us around for the past thirty minutes to only give up once you’re in my place? He’ll probably check to make sure that you got home, and I’d bet he’d even want to

talk to you personally to see that you're okay and make his next move. He seems like the type of guy who doesn't like to take no for an answer."

"He's not the kind of guy who takes no for an answer. I think that's why he keeps trying to trick me into spending time with him. He's probably hoping that I'll eventually give in and give him what he wants." She shivered next to him, and he pulled her hand up into his own, running his lips over her knuckles.

"I won't let that happen, honey," he promised. There was no fucking way that Ford would ever let some asshole like Andrew Tinsley lay one finger on her. He didn't care who the guy was to her—she could find another job if necessary.



They ran downtown to the deli that was his sister's favorite, not that Journey's boss would know the difference. He loved that deli too, and Ford knew that they had fantastic desserts. All he could think about was eating chocolate cake off of Journey's naked body while she was in his bed, but he was pretty sure that wasn't something that she was ready for. He was still going to ask. Journey had to know how he felt about her. God, that kiss nearly set him on fire and he wanted more of that with her. He just hoped like hell that she felt the same way.

They ordered a few desserts and headed back out to his truck to find her asshole boss parked down the street watching them. He told her to pretend not to see him, but all Ford wanted to do was walk down the road, pull the guy out of his pretentious car, and beat the hell out of him. But that wouldn't do either of them any good. The guy would just press charges and he'd end up behind bars leaving Journey vulnerable for the night.

"He's not going to give up, is he?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not. I've known guys like your boss and I'm betting that he'll follow us back to your car and then show up

at your place,” Ford said.

“Shit, I can’t have that happen. I should have reported him when he tried to stick his hand up under my skirt the first time, but I was afraid that I’d lose my job. I’m such an idiot,” Journey groaned. The thought of that asshole touching her anywhere made him sick. Honestly, the thought of any man touching Journey filled him with rage that he hadn’t felt in a damn long time—since his time in the Army really.

“He touched you more than once?” Ford asked.

“Careful, Ford,” she spat, “you sound as if you are accusing me of wrongdoing here. I’m not the slimeball boss who’s made up fake meetings to get me in the corner. I told him to keep his hands to himself after that first time and he immediately apologized. And yeah, I was a fool to believe him and didn’t go to HR as I should have, but I was young and naive. I was so new to the business, I believed him.”

“Until he did it again,” Ford guessed.

“Yeah,” she breathed.

“For the record, I wasn’t blaming you for that asshole’s behavior. I’d never do that, Journey. I know you, even if we haven’t seen each other these past few years. You’re the same sweet girl who used to follow me around before I left for basic training.”

“Thank you for saying that,” she whispered. “I should have gone to HR after he pulled the same crap again, but I was ashamed of not reporting him the first time. I felt like an idiot, and I just didn’t want anyone to know what had happened, so I ignored his bad behavior, and look where that’s gotten me. I’m effectively trapped in a car with you, driving around town, pretending to be heading to my best friend’s house to deliver her soup. I’ve fucked everything up and now, I’ve gotten you involved in my mess. I’m so sorry.”

“I’m not and I’d gladly spend every evening trapped in my truck with you if it means getting to spend time with you, honey,” Ford said.

“You don’t have to be so nice to me, Ford. I’m sure that you had other things you wanted to do tonight besides babysitting me,” Journey insisted.

“Not a thing,” he assured. “In fact, I was going to ask you to spend the whole evening with me.”

“The whole evening?” she choked.

“Well, I can’t let you go home knowing that your boss will be waiting there for you to return. And first thing tomorrow, I’m driving you to work and you’re going to report that ass to HR. It’s never too late to do the right thing,” he said. “And reporting him is the right thing to do. What if he takes things too far with you or goes after another young woman in your office? Don’t you want to stop him?”

“Yes, but there’s one flaw with your plan,” she said. He thought over what he had just said and couldn’t see one thing wrong with his plan.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“Tomorrow is Saturday, and my office is closed for the weekend. Plus, you can’t babysit me for the whole weekend. I won’t take up your time that way, Ford,” she insisted. He wanted her to take up all of his time for the rest of his damn life, but there was no way that he’d admit that to her—not yet anyway. Ford had only just gotten her to agree to go on a date with him, and that took him months to do. He had only been home for six months now, and every damn week, he asked Journey out on a date, and she turned him down flat. Tonight was the first glimmer of hope that she had given him, and he wasn’t about to fuck that all up.

“First of all, please stop calling the two of us spending time together me babysitting you, Journey. I might be older than you, but you sure in hell don’t need a babysitter anymore. I want to spend time with you. Hell, you should have picked that up from me asking you out every damn week since I’ve been back. I want to spend the weekend with you, Journey. Say that you’ll stay with me,” he begged. He wasn’t above begging either. He’d beg her for everything if it meant that she’d continue to give him a chance.

“You can’t be serious,” she insisted.

“Sure I can be,” he said. “Spend the weekend with me, Journey,” he asked again.

“I don’t have any of my stuff,” she said.

“We can run by your place now and pack a bag for you. I’ll be with you the whole time, so I’m betting your boss won’t make a move. Hell, maybe he’ll even get the hint that we’re together and leave you the fuck alone,” Ford growled.

“But we’re not together,” she insisted.

“Give me the chance to prove you wrong,” he whispered. “Let me show you how good we can be together,” he asked. She looked out her window again and he was sure that she was going to turn him down—but she didn’t. Instead, she turned and smiled the most beautiful smile he’d ever seen and nodded her head. She was finally giving him the chance that he had wanted with her, and he wasn’t going to screw it up—not this time.

## JOURNEY

Journey couldn't remember a time when she didn't want Ford Dixon. God, the man was in her dreams every night and that made her life a living hell. When he joined the Army, she was just a kid—a freshman in high school. She spent most of her teen years moping around, wondering why she wasn't good enough for Ford. She shut herself off from other boys her age, even turning down going to her senior prom—something that Lucinda was still pissed at her about. She couldn't tell her best friend why she didn't want to go to the prom with Billy Yates. Hell, she knew that half of the senior class believed the rumors about her that she was a lesbian because she turned down every boy who had ever asked her out in hopes that Ford would return home and sweep her off her feet. That never happened, and when he finally returned a year after she finished college and moved back home, she knew that she had played the fool.

When he finally asked her out, she knew that saying yes to him could never happen because then, she'd have to tell Lucinda about her massive crush on her older brother. She could never tell her best friend that she had kept that from her all of those years—it would hurt Lucinda and she wouldn't do that to her.

The only problem now was trying to find a way forward and stop wanting Ford. Seeing him around town all the time again and having him ask her out every week was wearing down her defenses. Seeing her best friend happily married was making her want things she thought that she could live



without. Having Ford come to her rescue tonight was the final straw and honestly, telling him no anymore wasn't something that she wanted to do. When he asked her to spend the whole weekend with him, her head was telling her to say, no, but her heart nearly jumped out of her chest. She couldn't deny what he was asking her to do because she wanted it more than she wanted her next breath.

As promised, Ford had stopped at her apartment and waited for her to pack a bag. He looked around her living room while she painfully went through her closet analyzing everything in her wardrobe, trying to decide if she should bring it along or not. Trying to figure out if she should pack her good panties and bra or her old ones was the biggest hang-up for her. If she packed her good stuff, Ford would know that she was expecting to end up in his bed this weekend. And, if she packed her old stuff, he'd know that she wasn't hoping to end up in his bed, but she'd look raggedy when all she wanted from him was for Ford to find her sexy. Did he though? He did kiss her in the parking lot in front of her boss, and God that kiss scorched her soul. Did Ford want more from her? If he did, she wanted to be ready, so she tossed her good panties and bra into her bag, found her favorite t-shirt that she liked to sleep in, threw that in on top, and zipped up her bag. She was done second-guessing her every move when it came to Ford, and if things actually worked out with him, she'd find a way to admit to her best friend that she had been in love with her older brother for years now.

“Ready,” she said.

“Your place is nice,” he said. She looked around her dinky little apartment and laughed.

“You're an awful liar, but I can afford the rent and that's enough for me, for now,” she said. “I would have cleaned up a bit if I knew that I'd be having company,” she said.

“Well, I think that it's cozy. It feels like you, Journey,” he said. She wanted to remind him that he really didn't know her—not the grown-up woman she had become, but he seemed to hate every time she pointed that fact out to him.

“Thanks,” she said. She peeked out her kitchen window that looked down on the complex’s parking lot and saw that her boss’s car was still parked in the back.

“I take it from the look on your face that he’s still out there,” he said.

“Yeah, he’s just not going to stop, is he?” she asked.

“No, and that’s why it’s best for you to spend the weekend at my place,” he said. She wanted to ask him if that was the only reason he wanted her to spend the night—to protect her from her boss, but she was too much of a chicken to point blank ask him.

“Well, I appreciate you putting me up, Ford. I wouldn’t feel safe here with my boss circling the block out there. You’re a good friend.” She picked up her purse and jacket and Ford closed the distance between the two of them, tugging the bag, her purse, and jacket from her arms. He pulled her against his body and sealed his mouth over hers again without any warning. Journey felt as though her heart was going to beat out of her chest again and she was sure that kissing Ford Dixon was something that she’d never get tired of. He broke their kiss, leaving her breathless and feeling a bit weak in the knees. Geeze, when did she become such a cliché?

“What was that for?” she asked raising a shaky hand to her swollen, wet lips.

“That was to show you that I’m not putting you up, Journey. I didn’t ask you over to protect you from your boss—that’s just a bonus. I asked you to spend the weekend with me because I want you. I have for a damn long time now, and I don’t care if my sister finds out or not.” She was about to protest him telling Lucinda when he pressed his fingers to her lips. “I won’t tell her until you are ready, but I’m only keeping it a secret from her for you. I want you to spend the weekend with me—in my bed, preferably naked.”

Her gasp filled the room, and he threw back his head and laughed. God, he was beautiful. “Now you’re getting it, honey.”

“You want me to be naked?” she stuttered. Journey had hoped but hearing him say it made her crazy with lust.

“It’s all I’ve wanted for a long time now, Journey. If it’s not what you wanted from this weekend, tell me now. I will still take you home with me, but I’ll try harder to keep my hands to myself.”

“I don’t want you to do that,” she quickly admitted. The thought of his hands all over her body made her hot. “I want your hands on me.”

“Good to know,” he said. Ford released her and picked up her bag, handing her back her purse and jacket. “Ready?” he asked. She suddenly felt too hot and flustered to answer him. Instead, she just nodded and tried to paste on a smile.

“I’m just glad I decided to pack my good panties and bras,” she whispered.

Ford laughed, “So, you were thinking about getting naked and spending the weekend in my bed then?” he asked. All she could do was nod again. How did she admit that to him without sounding desperate? Maybe they were well past that and desperate was what Ford was into. Now, all she had to do was find a way to tell Ford that she was a virgin, but she had at least twenty minutes to figure that all out.



Ford drove like a crazy person back to his place. He nearly ran a red light until she shouted that the light was about to change. “What the hell is your hurry, Ford?” she asked. He shot her a sheepish grin and shrugged.

“Sorry,” he breathed. “I guess you finally giving me a chance has me a bit excited to get you back to my place. I’m worried that you might change your mind.”

“I’m not going to change my mind, Ford, but you might after I tell you what I need to say.” She worried that by spilling her guts and admitting that she was a twenty-three-year-old

virgin, he might turn his truck back around and take her straight back to her apartment.

“You’re scaring me,” he said. “What is it that you need to tell me, Journey?” He pulled into his townhome’s garage and cut the engine, waiting her out to tell him what she needed to. She was the one who started this. She should have at least kept her mouth shut until they got into his place. At least then, she’d have a fighting chance of him letting her stay the night until she could work out what to do about her boss. With the promise of sex looming over her, she had to tell Ford though. It was the right thing to do even if it made her completely uncomfortable. It wouldn’t be fair to let him find out on his own that she had been saving herself.

Journey took a deep breath and spilled her guts. “I’m a virgin,” she breathed. The words seemed to tumble out before she was really ready to give them, but at least she had that part over with. Poor Ford looked a bit confused and completely shocked by her news. “Oh, come on,” she grumbled. “It’s not that bad, right?”

“You’re twenty-three,” he insisted, “and, you went to college.”

“Right, both of which have nothing to do with me having sex. I mean, there really isn’t an age requirement, right? And I’m pretty sure that I didn’t have to have sex to get my degree, although, if that was the case, they gave it to me anyway.”

“That’s not what I mean,” Ford insisted. “Why haven’t you had sex yet?” he asked.

“Um, I was saving myself for you,” she said, “as stupid as that sounds. I guess it’s pretty lame. I mean, hearing the words come out of my own mouth makes me feel lame. I don’t know, I guess I just had this crazy notion that one day, you’d notice me, and I didn’t want any other boy.”

“You didn’t go out with anyone in high school?” he asked.

“I mean, I went on a few dates with a couple of guys, but that’s where it ended, really. Your sister was pretty pissed off at me when I turned down prom date offers from guys during

senior year. They all started spreading rumors about me that I was a lesbian, and honestly, I let them. Your poor sister got the bum wrap of that deal because everyone said that the two of us were dating, even though Lucinda dated guys in high school. They said that we were secretly in love because we were always together.”

“Kids are so cruel,” he said, “I’m sorry that you had to go through all of that.”

“I’m sorry that Lucinda had to endure any of that on my behalf,” she said. “I guess it’s why I became so protective of her and still am.”

“I get it—you and my sister were always close, but for the record, I don’t think you’re a secret lesbian,” he said.

“Gee, thanks,” she giggled. “Are you saying that because you don’t want it to be true?” she asked.

“Maybe,” he smirked. “Are you sure that you still want to do all of this?” he asked. “I mean, I don’t want to push you into something that you’re not ready for.”

“I’m ready,” she said, taking his hand into her own. “I’ve waited for you my whole life, Ford. The question is, are you still willing to do this? I mean, you probably don’t want a virgin,” she mumbled.

“Bullshit,” he shouted, “I want you, Journey. I don’t give a fuck if you are a virgin or not. I’m flattered that you waited all this time for me. But why did you turn me down every time I asked you out these past six months?”

“As I said, I’m protective of your sister. I didn’t want to hurt her, and I thought that being with you might do that to her. It’s why I asked you to keep this thing between us a secret.”

“Right, and you’re worried that we won’t work out—but I have to warn you, Journey, if we do this, I won’t want to let you go. If you agree to be with me, in my bed, I’ll want you in my life too. Are you going to be able to tell Lucinda about us eventually? I mean, sooner or later, she’ll figure it out.” He was right. Lucinda was a smart woman and she’d look at

Journey and know that she had been with her brother. But giving up her chance with Ford now that they had come so far wasn't a possibility for her.

"I'll have to come to terms with telling Lucinda at some point. Just give me this weekend to figure it out. I'm sure that we can come up with something if we put our heads together."

"I'm sure that we can," he agreed. "So, we're good?" he asked.

"We're good," she agreed. "Can I just ask you one favor?" she asked.

"Anything," he offered.

"Can we take tonight slowly? I've waited a long time for this—for you and I don't want to rush things."

"Honey, we can go as quickly or as slowly as you'd like. I'll leave that up to you, Journey," he promised. Hearing him make her any promises made her tummy feel as though it was full of butterflies. She felt like a giddy schoolgirl, and she just couldn't help it. She had waited so long for Ford, and she was finally getting her chance with him. Journey's inner schoolgirl was jumping up and down like a damn cheerleader.

## FORD

**H**earing Journey say that she had been saving herself all these years for him made him crazy with lust. He had spent the entire ride from her apartment hard, and that was probably why he had nearly run a red light to get her back to his place. But hearing that she was a virgin and wanted to give herself to him—well, it took all of his willpower not to jump her in his truck. Journey deserved more than that. She deserved the promise that he made her to take their time tonight, even if it might just kill him.

Ford helped her into his townhouse and dropped her bag by the steps. “I’ll give you a tour,” he offered, noting the smirk on her face.

“That would be great, but you don’t have to come up with activities for us to do instead of heading up to your bedroom—I mean, if that’s where you want to have sex.”

“I know, but I promised to take things slow. I thought you’d want to know your way around here for the weekend,” he said. “As for where I’d like to have sex, the bedroom is fine with me, if that’s where you’ll be comfortable.”

“I guess that’s fine. I mean, I don’t have much experience with where I like to have sex, since I never had it before,” she said. Ford bit back his groan and she giggled. “I can’t figure out if you’re mad that I’m a virgin or okay with it.” Ford took a chance and grabbed her hand into his own, tugging it down to his cock. He loved the way that Journey slyly ran her

fingers over his bulge. She had some idea of what to do with him and that completely turned him on.

“I’m more than okay with it,” Ford insisted. “The fact that you saved yourself for me turns me completely inside out with need. I want you so fucking bad right now, I’m going to split right out of my damn pants.”

“Ford,” she whispered. Journey groped his cock through his jeans and every caress made him want to push her against the wall and fuck her in his entryway. “Can I see you?” she asked.

“You’ll see all of me, honey, but first, I need to take care of you,” he said. “I want you ready to take me, Journey—all of me.” Her breath hitched and he knew that she was just as turned on by the whole scene as he was.

“How about we skip the tour for now, and you take me up to your bedroom, Ford? Maybe we could take things a little faster if you’re up for that.”

“I won’t rush you, Journey. I made you a promise,” he said.

“Please, Ford,” she whispered, “I want you.” He didn’t want her begging him for anything. He wanted to give Journey everything that she wanted and needed from him. Ford scooped her up into his arms and grabbed her bag on the way up his steps. He took them two at a time, causing her to giggle again. He always thought that her laugh was magical, but now, it turned him on.

He flicked on his bedroom light and carried her over to his bed, laying her across it. “You are so fucking beautiful,” he whispered. Ford looked her body over as if trying to decide what his first move should be. If she was any other woman, he’d have her naked and panting out his name by now, but Journey wasn’t like any other woman. If he had his way, she would be THE woman—the one he’d spend the rest of his life with. But he was getting ahead of himself and that wasn’t going to help with the nerves that he was suddenly feeling.



“Just love me, Ford,” she whispered, reaching for him as if picking up on all of his indecision.

“That’s all I want to do, I’m just worried that I’m going to blow it. I’ve waited for you too, Journey, in so many ways. I’ve wanted you for so long, even when it wasn’t right for me to want you.”

“You have?” she asked. He laid down next to her on the bed and she curled into his side. Ford knew that not giving her the whole truth after she told him hers, was something he couldn’t do.

“I have. I started noticing you when you were just a kid. God, that made me feel like a complete pervert, but I just couldn’t help myself. I was almost relieved when I joined the Army and went away so that I wouldn’t be hanging around here every day wishing for something that could never be. You were just a kid, Journey,” he said.

She framed his face with her hands and smiled, “I’m not a kid anymore, Ford. You’re only four years older than me. We both just needed to grow up a bit before this could happen,” she said.

“How did you get to be so wise?” he asked.

She giggled and pointed at herself, “College education at its finest,” she teased. “If it helps you to feel better, I wanted you back then too. When you left for the Army, all I could think about was you coming back for me. I had these fantasies that you’d come back to town, tell me that you couldn’t live without me, and take me away with you. How’s that for crazy?” she asked. It didn’t sound crazy to him at all. In fact, it sounded like a damn good plan right about now, especially with her boss stalking her the way that he was.

“It sounds perfect,” he breathed. “I just hope that’s something that you still want, honey because it’s exactly what I plan to do with you. I want you to be mine, Journey,” he admitted.

“Oh Ford, I’ve been yours for a long time now. I’m just done fighting with myself and ready to admit it,” she said.

Hearing her promise him made him realize that he had been worrying for nothing. Ford rolled her under his body and kissed her like a starving man and when he finally let her up for air, to work his way down her body, he was sure that a more perfect woman had never existed. She responded to him as if she was made for him.

It didn't take him long to get her naked and when he finally settled between her legs and looked up at her sexy body, he could tell that she was worried about what he was about to do to her next. Journey had closed her eyes so tightly that she looked like she was terrified.

“Open your eyes and look at me, baby,” he crooned. “I won't hurt you. We can slow down if that's what you need.” He hoped like hell that she didn't ask him to do that though. His cock was screaming to be released to get inside of her.

“I've just never,” she breathed. He kissed his way up the inside of her thigh, and she moaned. “I don't want you to stop, Ford,” she said, giving him the green light to move the rest of the way up her sexy curves. He settled between her legs and when he parted her wet folds to lick through them, Journey nearly bucked both of them off of the damn bed.

“Hold still, honey,” he said, holding her down with his body. “Can you be still for me?” he asked. Journey whimpered and nodded, and he was sure that it was the most adorable thing he'd ever seen in his life.

He loved watching her as she writhed on his bed for him, trying to hold still, as promised, but failing miserably. She was sexy as hell to watch and when she found her release, he nearly came in his damn pants. God, she was perfect, and all he wanted to do was make her his completely.

He stood from the bed, loving the way that she watched him through her sex-fueled haze as he stripped. Journey sat up and eagerly reached for his zipper and he backed away from her. “If I let you do that, this will be over before I even get started,” he admitted. She pouted and laid back on his bed, waiting him out. “Are you sure that you're ready?” he asked.

As soon as his cock sprang free from his jeans, her eyes roamed his body and he could see the uncertainty.

“Um, that’s going to fit inside of me?” she asked.

“We’ll fit,” he promised. They had to because giving her up now wasn’t an option. She nodded and held out her arms for him. Ford laid down on the bed next to her and pulled her on top of him. “I want you to be on top,” he said.

“Why?” she asked.

“So that we can take this at your pace,” he said. “I don’t want to rush you.” She nodded and covered his shaft with her drenched folds. Ford couldn’t help his moan or the way that his eager cock tried to push inside of her.

He felt as though he was holding his damn breath, waiting for her to make a move, and when she slowly inched down onto his cock, he found himself panting out her name. “Ford,” she moaned. “I need you to do it, please.”

“Are you sure?” he asked. She nodded and he rolled her back under his body. “I’m sorry,” he whispered against her neck as he quickly finished filling her. She cried out and Ford stilled inside of her.

“I’m okay,” she assured him before he could even ask. “I just need a second.”

“Just say when, honey.” He was trying for casual even though he felt anything but. They lay like that for what felt like an eternity, their hearts beating wildly while their ragged breaths filled the air, and Ford was sure that he had never felt so connected to another person in his life.

He peppered her face with kisses. “I’m ready,” she whispered. “Move, please, Ford,” she begged. He slowly pulled almost completely out of her pussy and slammed back into her, setting a pace that he was sure would have her sore in the morning. But the primal beast in him wanted to mark her, make her his so that she’d remember everything that he did to her the night before.

Ford knew that he wasn’t going to last and he wanted her with him. He snaked his hand down between where his and

Journey's bodies were joined and ran the pad of his thumb over her sensitive clit until she cried out his name again. The way that she felt while coming around his cock was all that he needed to finally lose himself inside of her. Journey was finally his and now, there would be no taking that back. She belonged to him and Ford's whole life finally felt right.



“Your phone is going crazy again,” Ford said holding it up for her to see. Journey was in his shower, and she wiped her eyes to peek out at it as if she didn't believe him or something.

“Is it your sister again?” she asked.

“Yes, it's your best friend,” he countered. It had been two weeks since Journey had spent the weekend with him. She really never left once their weekend was over. He was careful to drive her to work and back to her place to pick up more of her things, but always insisted on her spending the night with him. Her boss's advancements toward her made convincing her to stay with him easy.

The asshole had really stepped up his game since Ford persuaded Journey to go to HR and report her boss for sexual harassment. Of course, they took down her complaint and promised that there would be a thorough investigation, but Journey said that she wasn't holding her breath. She said that the HR representative told her that she should have come forward when it first happened, and he worried that might be a sticking point in her allegations against her boss.

The idea of Journey having to spend time with that asshole, in the same office space, made him sick. Ford found himself stopping by to check on her just about every day, making up some excuse for being in the area even if he wasn't. He had just started his new job across town, as head of security for a law firm, but he made sure to use his lunch break to check up on his girl.

He planned on enrolling in some college courses, and Journey told him that was a fantastic idea, but he couldn't live

on his money from his time in the Army forever. He had to get a job and something in security felt like it might be the right thing for him after spending so much time in the military.

“You do know that you’re going to have to talk to her sooner or later,” he warned.

“I know that,” she said, “just not now,” Journey insisted. She shut off the shower as the call went to voicemail and he held his breath waiting for Lucinda to call back. That was how she usually played things. His sister wasn’t a patient woman and the fact that she had let Journey avoid her for two weeks was a pretty impressive feat for her.

“I just haven’t figured out how to tell her about us yet,” Journey admitted. “All this stuff with my boss and me practically moving in here—it’s all so fast. I just need to let the dust settle and wrap my head around all of it.”

“Are you having second thoughts?” he asked, instantly regretting his question. If she was, he really didn’t want to know it.

“No, of course not,” she insisted. “The night that you asked me to be yours, I knew what I was getting into. I want you, Ford—all of you. I just haven’t figured out a way to tell your sister that I’ve been pining for her older brother my entire life.”

“Maybe it’s best that you leave that part out,” he offered. “I mean, just tell her that this thing between us kind of just happened.”

“Lucinda is smart enough to figure out when I’m lying,” she said. “She’ll see right through me and then what will I do?”

“I guess you tell the truth,” he said. “Is that really so hard? Just tell my sister that we’re together and that I’m in love with you and have been for a damn long time. Hell, let me tell her that and everything will be out in the open.”

Her gasp filled the bathroom, and he pulled Journey into his arms. He loved that he was able to take her by surprise and

telling her that he had fallen in love with her wasn't hard for him to do, since it was true. "You love me?"

"Yep, and don't forget the part where I said that I have for a long time. I don't want to play games with you, Journey. I've done enough of that. I left town, all those years ago, to avoid my feelings for you."

"Well, we also both needed some time to grow up. Don't forget that part," she said. How could he forget that part? It was agony waiting for Journey to come of age and then, he still wasted time, telling himself that she wasn't supposed to be his. Making Journey his was the best decision that he'd ever made, and one that he'd not regret—ever.

"So, you're good with me telling you that I'm in love with you?" he asked. Ford could tell by her beautiful smile that she was more than fine with his admission.

"I think that I can live with it," she teased, wrapping her arms around his neck. "Since I'm in love with you too and have been since I was just a girl."

"Good to know," he growled. "How about we figure out a way to tell my sister about us then, since I plan on never letting you go again, Journey."

"I'll figure out how to tell Lucinda," she promised. "Just give me a day or two to work up the nerve. She's my best friend and I can't lose her," she said.

"I don't think that you will. My sister might be hard-headed, but she's also reasonable. I'm betting that Lucinda will even surprise you," he assured.

"I hope so," Journey said.

"How about I help take your mind off of my sister for a while?" he asked.

"And just how will you do that?" she asked.

"Oh, I think that I can come up with a few ideas." Ford pulled her towel free from her curvy body, loving the giggles that filled the bathroom.

“You are very good at the art of distraction,” she teased. Ford planned to help her forget all of her troubles for the rest of the night, and if she’d allow it, for the rest of her life.

## JOURNEY

**J**ourney was sitting on Ford's back patio, sipping the coffee that he had brought her, and thinking about how she could get used to his pampering her when Lucinda came walking through the kitchen door and into the backyard. A part of her panicked, and she thought about running, but the jig was up, her best friend had finally found her.

"I can't believe that you've been avoiding me for two weeks now, and this is where I find you. Has my brother been covering for you this whole time?" Lucinda asked.

"Covering for me?" Journey asked. "Why would Ford cover for me?"

"Because for some reason, you're mad at me and you're avoiding me. I know that I haven't been around a lot since getting married, but I promise that I'll do better. I'll be a better friend, I swear," she promised. Oh God, Lucinda thought that she was mad at her because she was feeling neglected. She couldn't let her feel that way, but telling her the truth meant telling Lucinda everything—even the stuff about her sleeping with Ford.

"What's going on out here?" Ford asked, coming from inside the house. Shit—this was exactly what she didn't need before she could figure out what she was going to do about Lucinda. "I can hear you shouting from inside the house, Sis. You okay?" he looked at Journey but kept his distance and she



was thankful that Ford seemed to be taking her lead in all of this.

“I’ve been ghosted by my best friend,” she said.

“Don’t be so dramatic, Lucinda,” Journey said. “I haven’t ghosted you.”

“No, you feel as though I’ve ghosted you, and now, you’re angry with me. I can’t blame you, really. But you shouldn’t have to hang out with Ford just to get back at me. Why didn’t you just come over to my place and talk to me instead of turning to my brother?” Ford barked out his laugh and Journey shot him a dirty look. He grinned and shrugged and God, it was hard not to find him completely irresistible, but at this moment she had bigger fish to fry.

“I haven’t been hiding out over here or using Ford to get back at you. I’d never do that.” Journey took a deep breath and let it out. “I’ve been staying here with Ford for two weeks now.”

“You’ve been staying here? What’s wrong with your apartment?” Lucinda asked.

“Nothing’s wrong with it,” Journey said, “unless you count my crazy boss stalking it.”

“Wait, Andrew is stalking your apartment?” Lucinda asked.

“And me,” Journey said.

“Tell me that you finally went to HR about that slimeball,” Lucinda asked.

“You knew about her boss giving her trouble and you didn’t bother to offer that advice earlier?” Ford asked. Journey didn’t need him getting involved in this mess. He promised to let her handle things with Lucinda.

“Journey insisted that she could handle Andrew on her own, and she’s an adult, so I believed her,” Lucinda insisted.

“Thank you,” Journey said, “but, I kind of blew it. I thought that he wanted to go over my latest article, so I had dinner with him. That’s the night that Ford rescued me and

helped me to see that Andrew was stalking me. I went to HR the next Monday, but they said that my window to report him was when the incidents first happened.”

“Which is bullshit,” Ford growled.

“Right, so I’ve been staying here, laying low, and buying time until I can figure out what to do about him,” Journey said. Ford wanted her to quit her job, but that wasn’t going to happen. She had worked too hard to get a leg up in CNN. She wasn’t about to give all of that up now because her boss was a pig. No, there had to be another way around this mess—she just needed to find it.

“You could have come to me,” Lucinda insisted. “I would have loved for you to stay with me and Ty.”

“You two are disgustingly in love and I just didn’t want to be around all of that. Besides, Ford and I are doing just fine here on our own,” Journey said. Ford grumbled something about her being a giant chicken, and maybe she was, but she couldn’t seem to find the words to tell her best friend that she was in love with her older brother.

Lucinda looked from Ford to Journey and back again. “Something is going on here that you’re not telling me. Do I need to invoke the best friend rules and demand to know the truth, or do you just want to spill your guts?”

Honestly, Journey didn’t like either of those options. “Is there a third option?” she squeaked.

“No,” Ford barked. “It’s time to tell her, Journey.” He was right, but the way that Luci was staring her down intimidated the hell out of her. “Fine, I’ll be the one to tell you. Journey and I are together. We’re in love and she’s been not only hiding out here to avoid her boss’s stalking her, but also to avoid telling you about the two of us. I’ve been in love with her for a while now, and she made me promise not to tell you.”

“Yet, here you are telling her,” Journey grumbled. She really couldn’t blame him. Ford had granted her more than enough time to get up the nerve to tell Lucinda. In fact, he had kept up his end of the bargain, letting her live with him until

she could work up the nerve to come clean with her best friend. But he sure wasted no time spilling his guts to his sister about the two of them.

“Well, you weren’t going to tell her, were you?” he countered. She wasn’t. In fact, she was avoiding telling Luci at all costs.

“No, I wasn’t,” Journey said.

“Hold up here,” Lucinda shouted, “you’re with him?” she asked Journey, pointing at her brother as if accusing him of some wrongdoing.

“Yes,” Journey almost whispered. “I know that I should have told you.”

“How long have you liked my brother, Journey?” Lucinda asked.

She shrugged, “For as long as I can remember.”

“And you never thought to tell me? All those years that the kids in high school taunted the two of us for being lesbians. They thought that we were together because you never dated and that was because you were holding out hope that my brother would come home and declare his undying love for you?” Luci asked. She sounded pissed and the way she recounted their childhood was harsh.

“That about sums it up,” Journey said, “but, you have to believe that I never meant for you to get hurt in all of this. I never thought that the kids would think that we were together because you were always with some guy.”

“But they did think that we were together, and you just let them instead of telling me and everyone else the way you felt about Ford.”

“Go easy on her,” Ford said, “she was just a kid.”

“Right, and you were in love with her even back then? What kind of man does that make you, Ford?” Lucinda spat. Ford took two steps back from his sister as if she had just slapped him. This was what Journey was trying to avoid, but now, there would be no getting around it. Lucinda knew

everything and she wasn't going to let either of them off the hook for the way that they felt about each other.

"Don't say that to him," Journey defended. She stood and blocked Ford from Luci as if acting as his shield. "Ford would never do anything like that. It's why he left to join the Army. He was avoiding his feelings for me, and in the meantime, I've grown up," she said, holding her arms wide for her best friend to get a look. "He asked me to go on dates since coming home and I turned him down, believing that I couldn't date your older brother without hurting you, but that was just hurting me, Luci. I wasn't happy, but Ford makes me happy now. I just hope that someday, you'll be able to see that we're good together and be happy for the both of us. Until that time, I won't let you blame Ford for all of this. He's been nothing but a gentleman. I was the one who kept my feelings from you. I should have told you that I liked your brother, but I never thought that my feelings would matter."

"Why would you believe that I wouldn't take your feelings into consideration?" Lucinda asked.

"I guess a part of me never felt good enough to be considered a part of your family. I thought that wanting Ford would only end in heartache for me, so I resolved to squash my feelings and tell myself to stop hoping for something that would never happen. I'm done with that kind of self-doubt. I'm in love with your brother, Luci, and I hope that someday, you'll be able to accept that."

"I need some time," Lucinda muttered. "I have to go, Ty's meeting me for dinner."

"Can I call you later?" Journey asked.

"No, I think it's best if you let me call you when I'm ready," Luci insisted. She wanted to tell her friend that she was acting childish, but she also knew that giving Lucinda some time and space to think things through might be the best plan. All Journey could do was nod and watch her best friend leave Ford's house. She felt lost until his arms were around her, reminding her that she wasn't lost or alone anymore.

"She'll come around," he promised.

“I hope so,” was all she could say.

## FORD

Ford hadn't let Journey out of his sight for almost a month. The only time that he left her was when they both needed to go to work, and even that involved some strategically placed security cameras and an undercover guard. There was no way that he was going to let Journey be alone in a building with her boss, even if she assured him that she was completely safe. He had known slime balls like Journey's boss and the thought of him trying to touch her again made Ford want to kill the fucker.

HR had been no help to Journey. They told her that she should have reported her boss's behavior when it originally happened and that if she felt that they were being unfair, she could hire a lawyer. He thought that was a damn good idea, even if Journey didn't. She didn't want to lose her job at CNN and if that meant that she had to keep working for that asshole, she was going to. Ford had never felt so helpless in his life, and the one person whom he usually turned to for advice in situations like these, was not talking to him.

Lucinda had let all of his messages go unanswered and his calls go to voicemail, and it was really starting to piss him off. He wished that they could put all of the negativity behind them and move on. He wanted his sister to be happy not only for him but also for Journey. He saw the sadness in her eyes every time she checked her phone and realized that Lucinda hadn't called her.

"Hey," she shouted from the front door. "I'd really love some help. I stopped at the grocery store."

“You didn’t have to do that,” he said. “I could have gone.” She had been working nonstop at the office, trying to land some of the bigger stories with her boss constantly shooting her down. He was hoping to find a way to make her life easier, but that might require some begging and a whole lot of convincing on his part. He wanted Journey to move in with him. They had been going back and forth between her place and his, mostly spending nights at his townhome since it was bigger than her apartment. Ford could tell that all of the going back and forth was really beginning to take its toll on her.

“I know that I didn’t have to, but I’m practically living here, and I’d really love to help out as much as I can.” He took the two big bags from her and carried them into the kitchen. Journey scrunched up her nose and smiled, “There are two more in the trunk if you wouldn’t mind grabbing them.”

“Not at all,” he agreed. “You know,” he said, “instead of practically living here, why not actually live here?” he asked.

“Are you asking me to move in with you?” she asked.

He shrugged, trying for casual. “Sure,” he said. “I mean, you said it yourself, you are already practically living here. Why not just move in with me so we don’t have to keep killing ourselves going back and forth?”

“Gee, how romantic,” she drawled. “You want me to move in with you to make things easier on us?”

“Not exactly,” he said. “I want you to move in because I’m in love with you and I’m hoping that you’ll want to live with me.”

“Well, that’s better,” she teased. “I mean, more romantic and all that stuff.” She giggled and he couldn’t help his smile.

“I’m glad that you think so,” he teased. “So, how about it? Will you move in here with me and make this thing between us more official?”

“I’d love to,” she agreed. “But what do you think Lucinda will say about us living with each other?”

“I really don’t care what my sister thinks about us living together. Honestly, I’m pissed off at her for not calling us

back. It's been a month and she's acting like a child."

"I agree, but it still hurts," she admitted. "I thought that she'd come around before now." He did too, but he wasn't about to admit that to her.

"Well, when she does come around, we'll tell her our good news. Until then, I just want to concentrate on us. How does that sound?" Ford asked.

"It sounds perfect," Journey agreed. He was glad that she thought so because he thought it was a perfect plan too—even if he was the one who had come up with it. Having Journey in his life and his space felt right. His life felt right for the first time in a damn long time, and he wasn't about to let his sister or anyone else ruin that for him.



Ford was never one to borrow trouble, but after a few months of living with Journey, he was sure that he was going to have to stir up some shit if he wanted to get Lucinda back into their lives. His first step was to call Ty, his brother-in-law, to put their heads together and come up with a plan.

He called Ty and almost choked when he answered the phone saying, "It's about damn time."

"What the hell does that mean?" Ford asked.

"It means that our women haven't been talking for about four months and it's about damn time we put a stop to it. They're both being bullheaded," Ty said.

"My sister is the one who's not talking to Journey or me. You would think she'd be happy for us since we're both happy."

"Are you happy, man?" Ty asked.

"I am," Ford said. "I've loved Journey for a damn long time now, and she's moved in with me. I've never been this happy in my life, and it pisses me off that Lucinda can't accept that."



“I get it, but you have to put yourself in her shoes. She’s upset that you and Journey had feelings for each other this whole time and never told her how you felt.”

“That’s because we never admitted how we felt about each other. Hell, I joined the military before to avoid my feelings for Journey. We were both in denial and that had everything to do with not wanting to hurt Luci,” Ford admitted.

“And it probably had a bit to do with the fact that when you left for the Army, Journey was still underage,” Ty reminded.

“But we’re both adults now, and Luci should see that and be happy for us both. This not speaking to us thing is getting ridiculous.”

“I agree, and that’s why I’m glad you called me,” Ty said. “You have a plan?”

“Not really, other than getting Journey and Luci in a room together to talk things out. I’m betting that if we can do that, they’ll find a way to work everything out and then, we can get on with being a happy family, as we should be,” Ford said.

“Speaking of family,” Ty breathed, “I shouldn’t be the one to tell you this, but you’re going to be an uncle. Luci is pregnant.”

“Wow,” Ford said. “That’s fantastic. Congratulations.”

“Thanks, man,” Ty said. “So, it’s important that we patch things up before the little one gets here.”

“Agreed,” Ford said. The idea of being an uncle was one that had him thinking about his own future family. He wondered if Journey would be ready to discuss having kids and a future with him—the whole nine yards. He was really hoping that she would be ready to talk about everything that he wanted with her in the future because he had already wasted enough time with Journey. He was ready to start their future now.

“Give me a day or two to work out a place for us to meet and I’ll give you a callback,” Ford said. “We’ll get this worked out one way or another. I don’t care if we have to lock them in

a room together until they both come out hugging. I want my family back, man.”

“Agreed,” Ty said. “Talk soon.” He ended the call and Ford tossed his cell phone to the counter. All he had to do now was come up with a way to get his sister and his girlfriend in the same room to work out their differences—piece of cake.

## JOURNEY

Journey wasn't sure how Andrew had convinced the news department at CNN to send her on the assignment of a lifetime, but he had. It would be a life-changing story if she could land it and all she had to do was fly into a war zone and stay alive long enough to report back what she had witnessed. Her only problem was that Andrew had convinced CNN to send him along with her. Well, that wasn't her only problem. Her biggest was the tiny secret that was hidden deep inside of her—a secret that she planned on telling Ford about tonight.

She didn't mean to get pregnant, not that she expected Ford to believe her. Honestly, she was scared to death to tell him about the baby, but there would be no hiding it. She was about two months pregnant, according to her OBGYN. She wasn't ever regular, so when she missed a couple of periods, she thought nothing of it until she started getting sick every morning. She could tell that Ford was worried about her every time she ran to the bathroom to be sick. When he asked her to go to the doctor, she never imagined that she'd have to report back to him that she was pregnant with his baby. She was going to be a mom, and she wasn't sure how she felt about that fact. The question was, how would Ford take the news that he was going to be a dad? She texted to check if he was at home, and when he told her that he was making dinner for them, and to hurry home, her tummy did a little flip-flop. Journey was going to face the music at some point, might as well be tonight.

“Hey,” she breathed, walking into his kitchen. He pulled her in for a hug and quickly released her.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, reading her like an open book.

“I have news,” she said.

“Good or bad news?” Ford asked.

“It depends on how you look at it,” she said. Journey took a deep breath and let it out. “I got offered the biggest assignment of my career. It’s the break that I’ve always wanted.”

“That’s wonderful, honey,” he said. “I mean, I’m not sure how you’re looking at it, but I think it’s great news.”

She held up her hand, “Let me finish,” she said. “I would have to travel with Andrew,” she whispered. “And that’s not the worst of it. It’s in a war zone.”

“No fucking way,” Ford shouted. “There is no fucking way that you’re going anywhere with that asshole. Not after everything he’s done to you in the past four months, we’ve been together. Hell, we think that he broke into our home to try to get to you.” A week ago, someone had broken into the townhouse but left no trace of evidence behind. They were sure that it was Andrew and told the police so when they showed up to take their statements. Since nothing was missing, just tossed about the place, the cops said that there was nothing that they could really do, especially since they had caught nothing on the security cameras.

“Right, but with no proof, there’s no way to prove that he was the one in our home, Ford,” she reminded. She hated that Andrew was smart enough to bypass Ford’s security system and get into their home. It creeped her out knowing that he had gone through her things while they weren’t home. But there was no way to prove that it was him. He’d never confess to being in their place and that was the only way to put him behind bars.

“I know that, Journey. But you and I both know that it was him.” He had all but admitted it to her when she questioned him in his office. His smug smile in place as he told her that he

was disappointed in her for believing that he could do something like that. Her boss was a piece of work.

“Well, I’ve already turned down the job, if it makes you feel any better,” she spat.

“It doesn’t make me feel better,” he said. “I hate that you can’t take the assignment of a lifetime because of some asshole stalker. I want you to do what you love, but I can’t let that man anywhere near you, honey.”

She nodded and took another deep breath. “Are you going to ask me why I’m not taking the job?” she asked.

He shrugged, “I thought it was because you’d have to travel with your boss,” he said. “Was there another reason?”

“Yes,” she said, “I told you that it’s in a war zone, right?” she asked, trying to remember what she had already told him. Everything was starting to get jumbled up in her head, and she was having a hard time coming up with the words that she needed to tell him.

“You did,” he said, “but, that wouldn’t stop you, Journey. So, if it’s not about your boss, then why are you not taking the assignment?”

“Because it’s not safe for me and our baby,” she whispered. She couldn’t look up at him, her eyes fixated on the kitchen floor. She was afraid of what she’d see in his eyes if she looked up at him.

“Our baby,” he breathed. Ford hooked his finger under her chin, forcing her to look him in the eyes.

She nodded, “Yes, I’m so sorry, Ford. I didn’t mean to get pregnant. It wasn’t a part of my plan. You know how important my job is to me, and a baby isn’t really something that I’ve thought about. But he or she is in there, ready or not,” she said, pointing to her still flat tummy.

“How long have you known?” he asked.

“I went to the doctor this morning. You know that I’ve been getting sick in the morning and I decided to go get checked out. I missed two periods but never really gave it

much thought because I've never been very regular. I thought it was just a stomach bug, but I was wrong. I'm sorry."

"Why are you sorry?" Ford asked.

"Because I don't want you to think that I planned this or am trying to trap you," she admitted. That was the last thing she wanted him to think about her.

"I've already told you that I'm in love with you, honey. Hell, you even gave up your place to move in with me. Where did you think this was going?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I mean, I'd like to think that you want a future with me, but this whole thing with Lucinda has us both on edge. I guess I'm worried about what will happen to the two of us if she decides never to talk to either of us again."

"My sister is being an ass," he breathed. "And what happens between Luci and us has nothing to do with what's going on between you and me," Ford insisted.

"It doesn't?" she asked.

"No," he whispered, "I love you, Journey, and I love that you're pregnant with my baby." He pulled her against his body and gently kissed her forehead. She wasn't sure if she was relieved or wanted to burst into tears. Unfortunately, her new hormones chose the latter and she found herself crying uncontrollably all over Ford's t-shirt.

"Hey, why are you crying?" he crooned.

"Because I'm happy," she sobbed. "The doctor said that this could happen."

"I wish you would have told me that you were going to the doctor, I would have gone with you, honey," he said.

"Again," she said, wiping her nose on her sleeve, "I thought that I had a stomach virus. I thought that they'd tell me to take a pill or something and I'd be fine. I had no idea I'd be hearing news that would forever change both of our lives. If it makes you feel any better, I have another appointment in three weeks. You can go with me to that," she said.

“I’d love to,” he agreed. “I guess we’re going to have to figure out what to do with a baby next,” he said. Her tears started again, and this time, she wasn’t sure that she’d be able to make them stop.

“Ugg, why are you crying again, honey?” he asked.

“Because I have no clue what to do with a baby. I’m an only child and my parents are both gone. Who do I ask about these things? I wish I could tell Lucinda, but she won’t take my calls.”

“Yeah, well, that’s going to stop,” Ford insisted.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“I didn’t want to get your hopes up, but I talked to Tyler yesterday. We’ve come up with a plan to get Lucinda over this stubborn stand she’s taking against you and me being together. I didn’t want to be the one to tell you this, but Luci’s pregnant too. They just found out a few weeks ago. I’m betting that our news will have my sister turning into a slobbery mess, just like you, and she’ll want to talk to us both.”

“She’s pregnant and she hasn’t called to tell me?” Journey asked. She pulled free from his arms to sit down at the table, needing some space. “How could she do that? We’ve always told each other everything.”

“You did keep your feelings about me from her,” he reminded. “And as I’ve already pointed out, my sister can be quite stubborn.” Ford was right. She did keep her best friend in the dark about how she felt about her brother. It wasn’t fair of Journey to do that. Luci and she were best friends and were supposed to tell each other everything. She broke her best friend’s trust and now, she was going to have to get over her own hurt and make amends with Luci.

“Don’t tell her about the baby,” Journey said. “I think that I should be the one to tell her our news, right after I apologize to her for keeping my feelings for you a secret.”

“Are you sure?” Ford asked. “Tyler and I had this whole plan hatched to get you both in the same room. We want our kids growing up together and you and my sister not talking is

kind of ruining that plan, now that you're pregnant." She couldn't help her smile. Luci and she had always dreamed of raising their kids together and Ford was right, now that they were both pregnant, there was no time to waste to reconcile.

"How about you and Tyler get us in the same room together, and I'll take it from there. I have a lot to tell your sister and after I'm done begging her to forgive me, we can tell her about the baby together."

"I'd like that," he said, pulling her up from her seat. "So, you're going to be a mom," he breathed, pressing his forehead to hers.

"Yep, and you're going to be a dad," she said. "Are you really happy about the baby?" she asked.

"I am," he admitted. "I know that everything feels a bit rushed, but I've known you your whole life. If you look at things that way, this kid was a long time coming."

"I like the way that you think," she said.

"You hungry?" he asked. "After dinner, I'll need to run back to the office for a few hours, if you're good."

"I'm good, and actually, I am hungry," she said. "It's a nice change of pace considering that I spent every morning this past week hovered over the toilet. I guess this kid doesn't like breakfast or something."

"Well, I can start making you dinner in the morning, if it helps," he offered.

"Already spoiling our baby," she teased. She didn't expect any different from Ford since he liked to spoil her rotten—and she wouldn't want it any other way.



## FORD

**T**he next morning Ford decided to call Tyler to put their plan into motion. It was a good plan and it had to work now that both his sister and the woman he loved were both expecting. Plus, he couldn't wait to tell Tyler about the baby. He and Luci's husband grew up together and were best friends, something that he almost blew when he found out that Luci and Ty were together. He acted like an ass back then, so a part of him understood why his sister was so upset about him and Journey. Once he accepted his best friend with his sister, he had to admit that they were good together. He was sure that if Luci gave him a chance to prove it to her, she'd see that he and Journey were good together too.

He was on his way to work when his cell phone chimed with a message from Tyler to call him when he got a chance. He quickly dialed Ty's number and noted the panic in his friend's voice when he answered.

"What's wrong?" Ford asked.

"Luci is in the ER," Tyler said.

"Wait—what?" Ford asked.

"She started having cramps and her doctor told me to bring her in to be checked. I'm scared, man," Tyler admitted. "I'm worried about her and the baby."

"I'm on my way over," Ford assured. "I have to tell Journey about this. She'll kill me if I don't tell her."

“Do what you have to do but get your ass to the hospital. Luci needs you both,” Tyler ordered.

“We’ll be there,” Ford promised, ending the call. He took a deep breath in and let it out while calling Journey.

“Hey,” she answered.

“Honey, I have something to tell you, and I need to know that you’re sitting down,” he said.

“What’s wrong?” she asked. “Just tell me,” she ordered.

“Luci is in the hospital. She was having cramps and Ty had to take her to the ER. She’s there now,” he said.

“Oh God, we have to go to her,” Journey said. “How could I have been so stupid—I shouldn’t have pushed her the way that I did?”

“What are you talking about?” Ford asked.

“I called her last night when you ran to the office for a few hours. I thought about what you said—you know about our kids growing up together, and when my call went to voicemail, I decided to leave a message.”

“What did you say?” he asked.

“I told her that I was sorry about keeping my feelings for you a secret from her all these years. Then, I told her that I was pregnant and that I knew that she was too, and I reminded her about our dream of having our kids grow up together. And before I ended the call, I told her that she was being stubborn and that we were wasting precious time that we’ll never be able to get back.”

“That’s a lot, honey,” he said.

“Well, it had to be said,” she defended. “I just never thought that she’d end up in the ER after listening to my message.”

“Let’s not jump to conclusions,” he said. Ford didn’t need Journey ending up in the ER bed next to Lucinda’s. He needed her to stay calm. “We don’t even know if she listened to the

message. Let's get over to the hospital and then, we'll figure it all out."

"You're right," she said. "Let me grab my purse and jacket. I'll meet you in the garage. Just get here fast." Ford was about ten minutes away and knew that he could make it in about five if he took a few shortcuts.

"I'll hurry. We'll take my truck," he said. "Are you sure you're all right?" he asked.

"I will be, as soon as I check on Luci," she said. He felt the same way, but he didn't want to let on how worried he was about his sister. For now, he'd have to stay positive for Journey—they'd get through the rest together.



Tyler met them in the emergency waiting room and he looked worse for wear. "How's she doing?" Ford asked. Ty pulled them both in for a quick hug.

"She's okay for now. They are monitoring both her and the baby," he said. "I was so worried that we were going to lose her, but they said that the baby's heartbeat is strong."

"Her?" Journey squeaked.

"Yeah, we found out that we're having a girl. Listen, I know that you want to see Luci, but she can't have any stress. Do you think that you can keep things lite?" he asked.

"We can," Ford promised. "If she seems to get upset, we'll leave."

"Okay, let me talk to the nurse about getting you back there. Give me a minute," Ty said. Ford watched his brother-in-law as he pointed back to them and talked to the nurse who seemed to be in charge of the waiting room. She nodded and Ty motioned for them to follow him back into the ER. Ford felt as though his heart might beat out of his damn chest as he followed Ty and Journey down the long corridor.

They walked into the second to last room and found Luci sleeping on the small bed. She was hooked up to a bunch of machines and he could hear the baby's fast heartbeat filling the room around them. Ford wondered if that was what his baby's heartbeat would sound like and a part of him couldn't wait to find out.

"Hey sis," he said, gently nudging her shoulder to wake her. "Journey and I are here; can you wake up?" He looked back to find Journey standing in the corner of the room and he reached out his hand to her. She hesitated at first, but when Luci began to stir, Journey joined in, taking his hand.

"What are you two doing here?" Luci asked, peeping her eyes open.

"I called them," Ty said. "They should be here for you, honey. This thing needs to end."

"You mean, I should get over my best friend and brother both betraying me? I should just move on?" Luci asked, sitting up a bit.

"No, that's not what he's saying," Journey said. "Ty called us to let us know that you were in the ER, but it was our choice to come to see you. I'm so sorry—this is all my fault. I shouldn't have left you that message. It upset you and now you're here."

"I told you that it's not your fault, honey," Ford said.

"What are you two talking about?" Luci asked. "What message?"

"I left you a message last night and it upset you, I'm so sorry, Luci. I should have told you how I felt about Ford. I shouldn't have kept it from you all these years," Journey said.

"No, you shouldn't have," Luci agreed, "but, I'm not here because of a message you left. I never got your message."

Ty shot his wife a sheepish grin and Ford had a feeling that he was the reason why she never got her message from Journey. "You didn't get it because I deleted it," he said. "You were in the shower when it came in and I didn't want you to

be upset. Plus, if you had listened to that message, you would have ruined my and Ford's plan to put you two back together."

"You and my brother came up with a plan to get me and Journey back together?" she asked.

"We did, but then this happened, and I thought, why not just have you two talk things out here," Ty admitted.

"What did your message say?" Luci asked. At least she was talking to them both. Ford had a feeling that telling her about the message would only serve to upset her, but she asked.

"I apologized for not telling you about Ford and me. You're my best friend and I should have told you. I just didn't want to hurt you," Journey said.

"It feels like you lied to me our whole lives," Luci said.

"I know, I feel awful about it. I just never thought that I'd have a chance with your brother and bringing up my feelings wouldn't matter. If he never wanted me, then why spill my guts about crushing on him?"

"You should have told me anyway because that's what best friends do. We tell each other everything," Luci said.

"I know that asking you to forgive me now seems trite, but I'm here to do just that. I want our kids to grow up together," Journey said, cupping her tummy.

"Kids," Lucinda repeated. "Wait—you're pregnant?"

"I am. I just found out that Ford and I are going to have a baby. I'm about two months along," Journey said.

"We're going to have kids about a month apart," Luci whispered.

"We are," Ford said. "I don't want our baby not to know his or her aunt and uncle because of a stupid feud, sis," he said. "Can't we just start over? I'm in love with your best friend and I won't apologize for that. I'll never apologize for loving Journey. I want a life with her—I plan on marrying her."

“You do?” both Journey and Luci asked in unison.

“I do,” he admitted. “We have so much to look forward to, can’t we stop looking backward?”

Tyler cleared his throat, “For the record, I agree with Ford,” he said.

“Of course you do,” Luci grumbled. He worried that his sister was too stubborn to accept any of their apologies, but when she smiled and reached for Journey’s hand, he knew that she was willing to try. “I think I agree with Ford too, even though it pains me to say so. As you know, I never like to agree with anything that my brother says.”

They all laughed and the nurse from the front desk walked into the room. “You all are being too loud,” she chided.

“Sorry,” Luci said, “we just found out that my brother and my best friend are going to have a baby too. We were just celebrating.”

“Congratulations but celebrate quieter.” The nurse turned to leave the room and another walked in behind her.

“Well, I have some good news,” she said.

“Do I get to go home?” Luci asked.

“Not yet,” the nurse said. “But you seem to be out of the woods. We’re going to admit you for the night and keep an eye on you and your little one. You should be good to go home tomorrow if you do well throughout the night.”

“Will I be able to stay with her?” Ty asked.

“Yes,” the nurse said. “There is a sofa in each of the maternity rooms that you’ll be able to sleep on.”

“We can run over to your place to grab what you’ll need for the night,” Ford offered.

“How about if you two boys run back to our place and get what we’ll need, and Journey and I can spend some time catching up?” Luci asked.

“You good with that, honey?” Ford asked. Journey smiled over at him and nodded, and God, she was crying again.

“Again with the crying?” he asked. She and Luci both giggled and Journey sat down next to his sister. It was good to see the two of them together again. He worried that might not happen, but they needed each other. Journey was the sister that Luci never had—and if he had his way, she’d become her sister-in-law very soon.

## JOURNEY

**J**ourney spent most of the weekend hanging out at Lucinda's place once she was out of the hospital. It was like old times being with her best friend, and she could tell that Ford was relieved to have his sister and his best friend back. Of course, he and Ty spent most of their weekend watching football while Journey and Luci discussed nursery decorating ideas. It felt good to have her best friend back.

She went to work on Monday morning and turned down the "Story of a lifetime" as Andrew liked to call it. Really, it wasn't a hard decision to make. She knew that if she took the job, she'd be putting her unborn child in danger, not that she was about to tell her boss that. She was only telling a select few people about the pregnancy. Journey knew that she still had a couple of months until she'd have to make the big announcement and give up her dreams of landing the "Hard news" stories. She would be put on fluff pieces, but it was a price she was willing to pay until after her baby was born. Honestly, it wouldn't be that different from what she was reporting now. She was sent out on human interest stories, and she really didn't mind. But a part of her wished to be a part of the big leagues, reporting on the hard-hitting world news, not just local fluff pieces.

For the most part, Andrew had been leaving her alone. Journey was hoping that he had finally taken the hint that she wasn't interested and never would be. She had made it very clear that she was with Ford. Of course, he helped with that,



showing up at her office and bringing her flowers or coffee. Ford always made a point to put on quite the display, kissing her goodbye at her desk, making sure that Andrew saw them. At first, it only seemed to piss him off, but after a while, he began to take less of an interest in her and her love life. Andrew hadn't asked her to dinner in weeks, and that had to be some kind of record.

Andrew poked his head out of his office, "Can I see you for a minute, Journey?" he asked. She avoided going into his office alone with him at all costs. She quickly looked around the office and realized that everyone else was missing from their desks. Most of them hadn't even made it into work yet. She was an early bird, always was, and usually was the first reporter into the office.

"Um, sure," she squeaked. She grabbed her phone and walked into his office, sitting as far away from him on the other side of the room. "What's up?" she asked, trying for casual.

"How about you tell me," he said. He seemed pissed and she wondered what that was about.

"I'm not sure that I know what you mean," she said with a shrug.

"I've been trying to figure out if the rumors that I've heard around the office are true about you," he said. Andrew was trying to trap her and she wasn't about to play into his hands.

"What rumors are you hearing about me?" she asked.

"That you've moved in with your boyfriend," he spat.

"Well, that's hardly a rumor or a secret. I have moved in with Ford," she said.

"When you introduced him to me in the parking lot after our dinner date, you said he was just a friend," Andrew reminded. Ford was just her friend back then, but so much had changed so quickly.

"First, it wasn't a date, Andrew. We met over dinner to discuss my story. Second, Ford and I have been friends since we were just kids. It blossomed into more, not that it's any of

your business.” She was pushing him, she knew it, but she just couldn’t help herself.

“Listen, I think that we got off on the wrong foot. I’d love to sit down with you and talk about your future with CNN,” Andrew said.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” She spat. “Are you threatening my job here, because I won’t give it up without a fight? You want to fire me, you’ll have a lawsuit on your hands.” He stood from behind his desk and took a step toward her. She backed into the wall and worried that he was going to keep pushing her, with nowhere else to go.

“I didn’t mean it that way,” he insisted. “I wish you’d just give me a chance here and listen to me.”

“I don’t need to listen to you anymore,” Journey said. “My life and whom I’m living with isn’t any of your business. It’s personal and our relationship is purely business. I’m sure that HR will agree with me.”

“So, now you’re threatening me?” he asked.

“I’m not threatening you, Andrew. I’m telling you that if you keep asking me personal questions, I’m going to report you to HR,” she said.

“Again,” he said, “you’re going to report me to HR again. I know all about you running to HR about me. What did you tell them again? Oh, yes, that I made unwanted sexual advances to you. If I remember correctly, you agreed to have dinner with me, and you seemed just fine with my behavior before your boyfriend stopped by and ruined our evening.”

“I was never all right with what you did to me. The only reason why I accepted your dinner invitation was that I thought that we were going to be working on my last article. As for Ford, he’s none of your business. Our living situation is none of your business either. Am I clear?” she asked. He took another step toward her, his smile mean, and she realized that she had nowhere to run. She was trapped in his office with him, and no one was going to come to her rescue.

“You know, it’s cute when you act all bossy,” he whispered. “But you and I both know that HR won’t believe a word you run to tell them, right?” He was right, even if it made her sick to admit it.

Her world started spinning and she closed her eyes, trying to remain upright. She really didn’t want to pass out in front of her boss, especially when he was practically on top of her. “I need some air,” she whispered.

“You can go get your air, but we’re not done here,” he promised. Andrew stepped to the side, letting her pass as she ran out of his office. Journey ran out of the office, practically plowing down the guy who was walking in the front door.

“Sorry,” she said over her shoulder as he grunted his response.

She pulled her cell phone from her pocket to call Ford. “You okay, honey?” he answered.

“No,” she breathed, “I’m not okay. Can you come to get me?” she asked.

“What happened?” he asked.

“Andrew,” she whispered into her phone. “He found out that I moved in with you and he’s angrier than usual.”

“I’m on my way,” he promised. “I’ll be there in less than ten minutes. You wait outside of the building. Don’t go back in there,” he ordered.

“I won’t,” she said, “but, my bag is in there.”

“I’ll grab your bag when I get there. You just stay safe and wait for me,” he ordered.

“I will,” she assured. “See you soon,” she breathed, ending the call.



Ford pulled up to the front of her office building minutes later and looked mad enough to kill someone. Journey worried that

he'd do just that if he went into her building to get her bag. He got out of his truck and rounded the front, pulling her into his arms as soon as he reached her. "Get into the truck and wait for me," he ordered.

"Ford," she whispered. "Don't go in there and do something stupid. It will give Andrew what he wants. You'll play right into his hands."

"I'm not going to touch the asshole," he assured, though Journey didn't believe a word he was saying. He looked about ready to beat Andrew into a bloody stump.

"You promise?" she asked. Two police cars pulled up to the curb and parked behind Ford's pickup. "What have you done?" she asked.

"What had to be done?" he growled. "I won't lay a hand on him, but you're going to press charges against him. It's only right," he said. "You need to make this stop, Journey. You're the only one who can do that. If HR won't do anything about it, you need to. File charges against that fucker so that this can end now." Ford looked so desperate, she couldn't tell him no. How could she do that to him? She needed to start thinking about him and their baby—the family that they were building together. It was the only way to have the future that she wanted with Ford. She was holding onto a dead-end job, and she knew that sooner or later, she'd have to give up on it. Her whole life, all she wanted was a future with Ford. Now, she was finally going to have that and she was foolishly throwing it away to do puff pieces for a news organization that didn't take her word that her boss was making unwanted passes at her.

She nodded, "I'll file a complaint against him, but it might not do any good. His side of the story is that I wanted him to touch me and ask me out. He just said as much when he trapped me in his office. How can I fight a man like that?" she asked.

"With me by your side," Ford offered. "I won't let him touch you again. Hell, I'll quit my job and camp out here if I have to," he promised.

“That won’t be necessary,” she assured. “I’m going to quit my job.”

“You can’t quit your job, honey,” he insisted. “You love your job.”

“No, I love the idea of my job. I hate that the company that I work for doesn’t believe a word that I say because my boss has called me a liar. I hate that I’ve worked my ass off trying to get ahead, and never make any leeway. I’m ready to move on,” she said.

“What will you do?” he asked.

“Well, I think that I’m going to concentrate on the baby for now. Then, I’ve been looking into freelancing. I think that I’d like to write articles for magazines, but I’ve really not given it much thought. If you don’t mind me taking some time to consider my options, I’d like to think things over for now.”

“I don’t mind at all. In fact, I think that it’s a great idea. It will give you time to plan our wedding and everything before the baby gets here,” he said.

“Our wedding?” she squeaked. “Are you asking me to marry you, Ford?”

“I am,” he simply answered. “I’ve loved you forever, Journey. Say that you’ll marry me and let me spend the rest of my life making you happy.”

“I’ve loved you forever too, Ford. I’ll marry you,” she breathed. He pulled her against his body, sealing his mouth over hers. He kissed her until a police officer cleared his throat behind them.

“I hate to break this up, but I need to take your statement, ma’am.” She looked into the lobby of her building, all of her coworkers standing there watching her, and she took a deep breath when she got to Andrew who was staring her down, shooting daggers at her and Ford.

“I will gladly give you my statement, just give me one minute,” she said. She pulled free from Ford’s arms and started for the building.

“What are you doing?” Ford asked.

“What I need to do, and I need to do this alone,” she said. “I won’t be long. We have our whole future to plan, and I don’t want to waste another second.” She gently kissed his cheek and turned back to the building she had basically called home for so many years now. She stared down Andrew the whole time, not wanting to let his intimidating stare get to her. He wouldn’t intimidate her ever again.

As soon as she walked into the lobby, the sea of onlookers parted and she walked right up to her boss. “I quit, Andrew,” she said.

“You what?” he asked.

“You heard me. I quit and I’ll also be filing charges against you for sexual misconduct. You won’t ever touch me or pressure me into spending one on one time with you to keep my job, ever again.” She turned to walk away from him, and he grabbed her arm, tugging her back. She looked through the window to see Ford’s murderous expression and she shook her head at him. The last thing she needed was for him to storm into the lobby and start a fight with her boss-well, ex-boss.

“Let go of me, or I will add assault to my statement,” she spat. “You need to learn to take no for an answer, Andrew. I don’t want you; I never did. Maybe you should learn to ask a lady before you just assume.”

Journey pulled her arm free and started for the front door, hoping like hell that she didn’t fall on her face and ruin her grand exit. Applause broke out around her and Journey looked around at all of the smiling women who were cheering her on. She walked out onto the street and straight into Ford’s arms. “I’m so fucking proud of you, honey,” he said. “I love you.”

“Love you too,” she whispered, “don’t let go of me until this is over,” she said.

“You don’t have to worry about that, honey,” he said. “I don’t plan on ever letting go of you again.” He walked her over to the police officer who was waiting to take her statement. She was looking forward to forever with Ford. It

was something that she never dreamed possible—a lifetime with her best friend’s older brother. Ford Dixon was her dream come true and she would never deny her feelings for him again.

“I’m going to hold you to that promise,” she whispered to him.

### **The End**

**I hope you enjoyed Ford and Journey’s. Now, buckle up for a sneak peek at K.L. Ramsey’s next release—His *Rebellious Assistant* (Billionaire Boys Club Book 6), coming March 2023!**

## ELI

**E**li Kingston wasn't sure if he was making a good decision by taking the job offer from McTavish Industries or not. When his brother, Evan called him to extend the offer from his new business partners, Alex, and Rod McTavish, he thought for sure that he was joking. But he should have known better since his brother never joked around—especially when it came to business.

His brother had bailed him out of more than one mess that he had gotten himself into, and for that reason, he felt as though he owed him. But that wasn't why he had taken the job. He accepted the job offer because it was the best he'd ever had. They were willing to let him head up the new risk assessment department at McTavish Industries and it came with a hefty salary. How could he say no? He couldn't, so he took the job offer, after their first meeting, and he wasn't about to second guess himself—at least not this morning since he was about to walk into the intimidating office building and start his first day.

Luke Tracy met him at the entrance, as promised, and took him back to security to get him signed in. “Your new assistant, Mina Flores is starting today too. Have you met her yet?” Luke asked.

“I have,” he admitted, “at Carrie and Evan’s wedding. She was Carrie’s maid of honor, and I was Evan’s best man, so we were kind of thrown together.” Not that he had any complaints about being tossed together with the raven-haired beauty. Mina was gorgeous and he had to admit, having to walk her down



the aisle and dance with her wasn't a hardship. Eli was just glad that he didn't follow his gut and ask her out on a date because now, they were going to be working together every day and that would have been awkward, to say the least.

"It was a great day," Luke said. "It was nice that Carrie's father stuck around for the wedding."

"Yeah, he's a character," Eli said. Carrie had convinced her father to stick around for the baby to be born, and he agreed. He had practically moved into her, and Evan's house and Eli loved being invited over to hang out with her dad. "Jack's a great guy."

"Well, you're going to be in training today with Mina, and then, I'll show you to your office. You'll be on the fifth floor. It's where the entire risk assessment team will be housed."

"Sounds great," Eli sarcastically said.

Luke chuckled, "Yeah, I guess that being stuck in training all day doesn't sound very glamorous, but I promise, it gets better."

"I know, I'm just joking around," Eli said.

"Sometimes I forget that you and Evan are nothing alike. You guys look so similar, but you have a sense of humor, and your brother—"

"Doesn't," Eli finished for him.

"I was going to say that, but as his friend, I didn't want to sound like an ass," Luke said.

"As his brother, it's okay for me to call him names and sound like an ass. It's expected, really," Eli teased. "I've always liked giving my brother a little bit of hell."

"And you've been so good at it," Evan said, walking into security. "Hey, man," he said to Luke, shaking his hand. "How's it going?"

"Good," Luke said, "how's things with you and Carrie?"

"She's going to have the baby any day now, and she's more than ready. She's been working half days, trying to take

some time for herself before the baby gets here, but it's driving her crazy. She's the type who likes to go full speed, every day. I'm just hoping that the little guy or girl gets here before Carrie goes completely crazy and takes me with her."

Luke and Eli both laughed. He knew how excited his brother was about the baby. It didn't matter that it wasn't his by blood. Once he married Carrie, he became that baby's father. Eli had to admit, he was pretty damn excited about being an uncle for the first time. He planned on being the coolest uncle on the planet—as long as he didn't have to change any dirty diapers.

A soft knock at the door had the three of them turning to find Mina standing in the doorway. "Um, hi," she squeaked. "I'm Mina Flores. I'm here to start my first day," she said to one of the security guards at the door.

"Hey, Mina," Evan said, pulling her in for a quick hug. "It's good to see you."

"You too," Mina said.

"You remember Eli," he said. She nodded and held out her hand to him.

"I'm looking forward to working for you, Mr. Kingston."

"Please don't call me that, Mina. I'm fine with Eli."

"Okay, Eli," she said, releasing his hand.

"And this is Luke Tracy," Evan introduced. "He's one of the heads of security here at McTavish."

"Nice to meet you, Mina," Luke said. "I've heard good things about you from Evan here."

She giggled, "He has to say nice things about me. I'm his wife's best friend."

"She's not wrong," Evan said, shrugging. "My pregnant wife will beat the crap out of me if I say anything bad about Mina."

"Well, I'm very excited to start today," she said. "I'm looking forward to working for McTavish Industries," Eli

noted that she seemed a bit nervous, but he understood the first-day jitters. He had them too.

“Great,” Luke said, “HR is expecting you both,” he said.

“I’ll take them up,” Evan offered, “I’m going that way.”

“Thanks, man,” Luke said, “good luck you two. If you need anything, just holler.” Eli followed Mina and Evan out of security after thanking Luke and noted the way that she clutched her bag. She was holding onto it as though it was her lifeline. They filed into the elevator and Evan pushed the button for the third floor.

“You okay?” Eli asked her.

“Um, yeah, why?” she asked.

“Because you seem a little bit nervous,” he said, nodding to the way that she was white knuckling her handbag.

“Oh, well, I am a bit nervous,” she admitted.

“I am too if it makes you feel any better. Don’t worry,” he said, “we’ll get through the first-day jitters together.”

“Thanks, Eli,” she whispered. His brother shot him a look and he wondered what that was all about. Honestly, it was the way that Evan usually looked at him—as though he was disappointed in everything that Eli did. He wanted to ask him what was going on, but he knew that now wasn’t the time or place. He was going to get through his first day on the job, and then he’d worry about not disappointing his brother later.

## MINA

**M**ina Flores was sure that taking the job at McTavish Industries was a huge mistake. Sure, her best friend, and former neighbor, Carrie McTavish—well, now Carrie Kingston, was crazy to even offer her the chance, but she had. When she first met Carrie, she was fresh off the plane from Scotland, pregnant, and scared out of her mind. It didn't help that she had her crazy ex-boyfriend hunting her down, all the way from Scotland, once he found out that she was carrying his baby. Meeting Evan Kingston was the best thing to ever happen to her friend, and now, Mina was going to work for his younger brother, Eli, as his assistant. She had zero experience at being anyone's assistant and the thought of fetching the boss's coffee made her want to gag. She had gone to college and foolishly dropped out after three years, not sure if she was on the right path or not. But now, all she wanted was to finish her degree in business management and hopefully aspire to be more than someone's assistant. It was a good start for her, and it paid well, but she still wanted more.

As soon as she walked into McTavish Industries, the butterflies in her tummy started. She was nervous about seeing Eli again if she was being honest. They were paired together at Evan and Carrie's wedding, and she had to admit that dancing with him was no hardship. They spent the day together, as best man and maid of honor and she found herself smiling a whole lot more than she usually did, and that had everything to do with the groom's very charming brother. She liked Eli and when the wedding was over, and he still hadn't asked her for

her number, she started to worry. Maybe he didn't feel the same way about her. Hell, maybe he had a girlfriend or wife even, who couldn't make it to the wedding. She just assumed that he was single, and now, she was getting herself all worked up over the same man again. But this time, he was going to be her boss and not just some guy that she was supposed to dance with at her best friend's wedding. This time, she shouldn't be wondering what he looked like naked or if he was a good kisser because she was pretty sure that HR would have some rules about that.

After the polite introductions were made, she tried to will herself to calm the hell down, but nothing seemed to be working. And God, when Eli dipped his head in the elevator to ask her if she was okay, she knew that she was a goner. He smelled as good as he had the day of the wedding. Of course, Mina lied and told him that she was just nervous and hearing him admit that he was too melted her defenses a little bit. She needed to get herself under control if she was going to get through the rest of the day. The very last thing she needed was for HR to pick up on some vibe she was giving off about Eli. She had liked guys before and had to be around them as just friends. She'd find a way to do that again because she needed this job if she was going to save up the money necessary to go back to college and complete her degree.

She and Eli spent most of the morning in HR, filling out paperwork and watching some boring videos about company policies and rules, and regulations that she was already thinking about breaking by asking Eli out for drinks tonight. She was even coming up with some stupid speech about needing to celebrate their first day at McTavish—but the problem still remained of her not knowing if he was single, and the only way that she'd be able to know was if she called and bothered her very pregnant best friend. Carrie would tell her for sure if she was about to make a fool of herself.

She ducked her head into Eli's new office and found him unpacking a few boxes. "Hey, I'm going to take a coffee break," she said. "Can I bring you back anything?"

“Nope,” he said. “I just had a cup. And by the way, you don’t have to tell me every time you’re leaving your desk.”

“Well, I’m going to be gone for about twenty minutes,” she said. “I didn’t want you to wonder where I was.”

“You’re allowed to take breaks, and I don’t need to know your location at every minute of the day. I don’t like to micromanage people,” he said.

“Thanks, Eli,” she breathed. “It’s just weird that we know each other and now, I’m working for you.”

“That should make things easier,” he insisted. “I mean, we already like each other, right?” She more than liked him, but there was no chance that she’d tell him that. Instead, she just nodded. “Okay then, we have a leg up on our working relationship then. I think us knowing each other is a good thing,” he said.

“I guess I just wasn’t looking at it that way,” she said. “I’ll be back in a flash,” she promised, turning to leave his office. As soon as she got into the elevator, she pulled her cell phone from her purse and dialed Carrie’s number.

“Hey, how’s the first day going?” Carrie asked.

“Good,” she said. “How are you feeling?”

“I feel like if one more person asks me how I feel, I’ll murder them,” Carrie grumbled, causing Mina to giggle.

“Sorry,” she said, “I’m at least smart enough to know not to ask if you’re still pregnant.” Carrie made it very clear after her eighth month that no one was allowed to even joke about that. Every time one of her relatives called from Scotland, they’d ask if she was still pregnant or if she’d finally had the baby. Carrie would assure them that if she had the baby, everyone back home would know it because her father would shout the news from the rooftops. Mina knew how much her friend hated waiting for anything and this baby was really trying her patience.

“Yeah, at least you’re smart enough not to ask me that question,” Carrie agreed. “So, why are you calling me when you should be working?” she asked, not missing a beat.

“Well, I’m on a coffee break and I thought that while I ride the elevator down to the cafeteria, I’d call you,” Mina said.

“Um, you do know that they have coffee machines on every floor, right?” Carrie asked. “Eli might even have one in his office.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that,” she lied, “but, it is my first day. Plus, I wouldn’t want to bother Eli by traipsing into his office to get a cup of coffee.”

“Are you all right?” Carrie asked.

“Sure, why do you ask?” Mina lied. She was feeling more and more out of sorts with every passing hour. She wasn’t sure if just coming right out and asking Carrie about Eli’s dating status was a good idea or not, but she had nothing more to talk to her about and she was going to have to get back to her desk at some point.

“Fine,” Mina whispered more to herself than to Carrie. “I called to find out if Eli has a girlfriend or if he’s married or something,” she admitted. The doors to the elevator opened and she stepped out into the lobby of the building. She had missed her floor, and now, she was wondering if she was losing her damn mind.

“Crap, I’ve missed my floor,” she mumbled.

“If you go outside and make a left, there’s a great little coffee shop about two blocks down. Their coffee is so much better than the stuff they have in the building,” Carrie said. “And, to answer your question, Eli is single. Should I ask why you want to know?”

“I think you can guess,” Mina breathed. She walked out of the building, nodding to the security guard on her way out. She spotted the coffee shop right away and practically ran down the two blocks to it.

“You like him,” Carrie said. She wasn’t asking, more telling Mina that she had figured out her deepest, darkest secret.

“Yeah,” Mina admitted. “Hold on a minute,” she ordered, “I found the coffee shop and I need to order my afternoon

pick-me-up.”

Carrie groaned into the phone, “Oh how I wish I could have more than one wee cup of coffee a day.”

Mina giggled, “You know, when you whine, you sound even more Scottish than usual.” She placed her coffee order, knowing that her friend was listening the whole time by the little moans coming from the other side of the phone.

“So, back to your brother-in-law,” Mina said, paying the cashier and stepping to the side to wait for her order. “You’re sure that he’s single and doesn’t have some woman hidden away somewhere?” she asked.

“I mean, I can ask Evan when he gets home, but I’m ninety-nine percent sure,” she insisted. “Why do you question if he’s single or not?”

“Because he didn’t ask me out at your wedding,” Mina admitted. “He didn’t even ask me for my number, and I was sure that we had hit it off, you know?”

“Yeah, you two seemed pretty cozy at my wedding, but I thought it was because we threw you both together. I had no idea that you liked him,” Carrie said.

“And I thought that he liked me too, but I guess I was wrong. Oh well, I’m going to have to do something about these damn feelings so that I can get on with my work,” Mina said.

“Or you can ask him out,” Carrie countered.

“He’s my boss,” Mina squeaked. The guy behind the counter called her name and she snatched up her coffee, nodding her head at him. She was going to make it back to the office in time if she hurried.

“Well, I hate to remind you of this fact, but my husband is my boss,” Carrie said.

“Yeah, I remember, but not all of us get your fairytale ending, Carrie,” Mina reminded. “But I appreciate the intel on your new brother-in-law. Talk later,” Mina said. Her friend protested loudly over the phone until she ended the call and



shoved her phone back into her purse. She'd pay for that later, but right now, she was going to have to hurry if she planned on making it back to her desk by the end of her break. Eli seemed cool about her taking breaks, but she didn't want to push her luck. Then, she planned on spending the rest of the night trying to figure out reasons why wanting her new boss was a horrible idea. She'd put him out of her head and move on in no time, Mina was just sure of it.

**His Rebellious Assistant (Billionaire Boys Club Book 6)—  
Coming soon!!**

**If you loved His Stubborn Submissive, don't forget to check out the rest of the books in the series. Here's a sneak peek at the book that started it all, His Secret Submissive!**

**AIDEN**

## PROLOGUE

**A**iden Bentley stood in the middle of the boardroom feeling as though he had just been blindsided. He must have reread the text from his wife over a dozen times as if he was expecting it to somehow change. It didn't and he was left having to figure out what the fuck he was supposed to do next because he'd never in a million years believe that his Allison would leave him. But according to her very short and not at all sweet text, she was leaving him to be with her new boyfriend whom she'd apparently been seeing for months now. She told him she had already moved her stuff out of the house that very morning after he left for work and she left the kids at her mother's. His favorite part was where she tried to justify the fact that she cheated on him by pointing out how he was always busy with his company and his political run for the vacant Senate seat and she was feeling neglected. Apparently, her new boyfriend gave her the attention she was craving and fulfilled her like no other man ever had. Allison concluded her text by saying she was too young to be saddled down with a husband who loved his company more than he loved her.

He turned his cell off and cursed and when it didn't help him to feel better, Aiden threw it across the room watching it hit the wall and smash into three pieces. Of course, his assistant would choose that moment to walk into the conference room.

"You all right, AJ?" she asked. Aiden couldn't help but give her a smile and nod. Rose Eklund was more than his

assistant; she was like the mother he never knew. In fact, she was one of the only people to call him by his childhood nickname. Well, she and her son, Corbin. Not too many other people even knew him by that name but Rose did. She was his best friend's mother and when he and Corbin opened their company together ten years earlier, she agreed to work for them until they got up and running and she just stuck around. They began their little start-up in Corbin's basement and he was sure Rose agreed to help just to keep an eye on them. They were just kids back then, fresh out of college and with enough ambition between the two of them to be cocky enough to believe they could make something from nothing. Now they were a multi-billion dollar corporation with offices all over the world and he and Corbin had Rose to thank for most of their success. She kept them organized, focused, and most of all—grounded.

“I'm fine, Rose,” he lied. She shot him a look that told him she wasn't buying what he was selling. Rose could always tell when he and Corbin were being less than truthful with her. As teenagers, they didn't get away with anything. Looking back now, he had to admit he was thankful he had Rose to keep an eye on him. After his mother left when he was just a baby, it was him and his dad. His father did the best he could with Aiden but he never really got over his wife leaving him. Aiden's dad masked his sadness with alcohol and wallowed in the pit of self-pity that consumed him. Most of his time was spent in bars and when he was able to sober up enough for a job, he worked nights. Rose made sure Aiden had a safe place to hang out over at her house. She made him do his homework and even fed him dinner. Most nights, he'd crash at Corbin's house and Rose would feed him breakfast and make sure he had clean clothes and lunch money. Aiden didn't know where he would have ended up if it hadn't been for her and Corbin basically taking him in.

“Would you like for me to wait here for the truth or do you want to come and find me after you come up with a better story?” Rose crossed her arms over her chest and cocked an eyebrow at him. Aiden didn't hide his amusement especially when she did her best to try to hide her smile.

“You might be part witch,” Aiden teased. “How do you always know?”

Rose shrugged, “Mother’s instinct, I guess,” she said. “So, would you like to try your answer again?”

Aiden wasn’t sure if he should tell Rose about Allison’s text. Hell, he wasn’t sure he understood everything yet and he needed to pick up the girls before Allison’s mother got sick of babysitting them and dumped them off at his office. He knew he didn’t want the news of his wife leaving him for another guy to work its way around the company and he damn sure didn’t need it leaking out into the press. They’d have a field day with the prospective Senator who couldn’t keep a leash on his wife. If they only knew the half of it they’d make minced meat out of him and he could kiss his political career goodbye.

“You can’t tell anyone this—not even Corbin yet. Promise me, Rose,” he said. She looked him up and down as if he lost his mind. Aiden wasn’t sure she was going to make him any guarantees to keep her mouth shut and that would mean he had no one to confide in.

“You can’t expect me to keep anything from my only son,” she chided. Hearing her call Corbin her only child smarted a little. He had to admit he’d like to think she considered him a son too, but he knew that might be asking too much. Rose was right. Asking her to keep a secret from Corbin wasn’t fair to either of them.

“Fine, I’ll tell Corbin tomorrow. For now, can this remain between the two of us?” he asked. Rose gave a curt nod and he let out the breath he didn’t know he was holding. “Allison left me. She just let me know, by text,” he admitted.

“By text?” Rose shouted. “How could she do that to you? Oh you poor thing,” she sympathized. Rose crossed the room to pull Aiden in for one of her famous mama bear hugs he and Corbin like to tease her about. But instead of leaving him feeling like he wanted to poke fun of Rose, he felt more ready to cry on her shoulder. She held him with no signs of letting him go any time soon and Aiden wrapped his arms around her waist, knowing resistance was futile.

“She can’t just take the girls away from you, Aiden. Did she tell you where she went?” Rose asked.

Aiden barked out his laugh, “Yeah, I’m pretty sure she went to live with her boyfriend. Apparently, my loving wife has been cheating on me for half a year now.” He pulled free from Rose’s hold and she let him go, seeming to know he needed some space.

“I never liked her,” she insisted. Aiden shot her a disbelieving look and she shrugged. “Well, it’s true, honey. I thought she was just playing you from the start,” she admitted. Aiden knew a good many people felt that way, Corbin included. On the day of his wedding, Corbin pulled him aside and begged him not to go through with it. He tried to convince Aiden that Allison was just out for his money, but he was determined to see marrying her through. Allison was five months pregnant with Lucy at the time and he didn’t want his kid to grow up without both parents like he had. He saw no other way around marrying Allison and when she agreed to sign the prenuptial agreement, he thought for sure Corbin and everyone else was wrong about her.

For a while, they were happy; especially after Lucy was born. Two years later, they had Laney and he was sure he’d never been happier in his life. He had a gorgeous wife and two beautiful daughters—what more could he ask for? The answer to that was a hell of a lot more complicated than he’d ever care to admit. For as much as he wanted to blame Allison, she was right. He spent late nights at the office and at political functions, trying to fundraise for his run for Senate. Maybe it was all a ruse to cover up the fact he wasn’t happy at home, he never really was. He loved Allison and the girls, but he wasn’t being completely honest about who he was with his wife or himself. He needed more and that usually left him feeling like a complete ass. Aiden worried there was something wrong with him. Hell, he even went as far as going to see a therapist to help him get over those feelings that plagued him daily.

He was dominant and his need to control and be in charge didn’t end when he left the boardroom. He wanted to introduce that side of himself into his marriage, but when he brought up

the topic with Allison, she shut him down telling him it wasn't her thing. He tried to tell her they could begin slowly and only incorporate things she would enjoy doing with him in the bedroom but she wasn't willing to even hear him out. His therapist told him he had two choices—either accept his wife's denial and his marriage the way it was or leave. Aiden decided to stay and try to work through his needs and desires, for the sake of his family. His girls deserved more than a father who'd walk away from them so easily. The press shoved the idea of his perfect little family to the masses and voters seemed to eat it up with a spoon. On the outside to everyone looking in, he was a normal business owner with the perfect family life. Aiden was the small-town boy who made good and a loyal family man and that was the persona he decided to stick with. That guy got votes. Aiden wasn't sure if he'd be so public-friendly when everyone found out what kind of kinks he liked in the bedroom. The only people who truly knew who he was were Allison and Corbin.

“I don't want to get into this now,” Aiden admitted. Rose shot him a sympathetic look and he hated knowing that once word got out, everyone would be looking at him the same way. “I have to go pick up Lucy and Laney. Allison left the girls with her mother. She doesn't know if she can be a mom to them right now,” he said. He hated how his wife could walk away from their daughters. He knew firsthand what it felt like to know that your own parent didn't want you. He would never let his girls feel unwanted or unloved. At thirty-two he was still living with the demons of being abandoned by his mother after birth and he wouldn't let his daughters be consumed by that same darkness.

“She just left those sweet babies?” Rose choked. Aiden nodded his head, too raw from the emotions roiling through him. He needed to get to his girls and make sure they were both all right. God only knew what Allison had told them and it might be up to him to explain their Mommy wasn't coming home again. He'd just have to find a way to give them the truth without breaking their hearts.

“Okay, you go get the girls and call me later to let me know you are all home safely,” Rose ordered. “I'll keep this

information to myself but you need to tell Corbin. He loves you like a brother and there isn't anything he wouldn't do for you and the girls." Aiden nodded again and kissed Rose's cheek.

"Thank you," he said. "I'll probably be working from home for the next few days, just until I can get the girls settled and make some sense out of all of this," he said.

Rose shooed him out of the room, "Go, I've got this. You just go and fix your family," she said. Aiden wanted to tell her it was going to take a damn miracle because he was pretty sure his family was broken beyond repair. He just didn't know how to tell her it was just as much his fault as it was Allison's.



Aiden pulled up to his mother-in-law's home to find Connie waiting on the porch for his arrival, almost as if she was expecting him. He wondered just how long she had been standing out there. "It's about damn time," she shouted at him before he was even completely out of his SUV. "I've been waiting for over an hour for you to show up. Allison told me she texted you and you were on your way here to get the girls and then she disappeared. She didn't even say goodbye to them and now they're upset and asking when she's coming home."

"Did Allison tell you where she was going?" Aiden carefully asked. He hated that he might have to break the news to Connie too, but he was starting to see Allison left him quite a mess to have to clean up.

"Nope," she admitted. "Allison just showed up here out of the blue and told me she needed me to watch the girls. When I said I couldn't because I had a doctor's appointment, she promised you would be right over. I've missed my appointment and now I can't get back in to see him for another two weeks," Connie grouched. "What am I supposed to do for my blood pressure medicine until then?"



“I’ll take care of making you another appointment and getting you your medication,” Aiden promised, making a mental note to have Rose do that for him in the morning. He hated that Allison would put her mother’s health in jeopardy to run off with some guy. Of course, he hated, even more, he was going to have to be the one to tell her mother that. “I’m afraid I have some bad news,” he said. “You might want to sit down for this next part.” Connie found her rocking chair in the corner of the small porch and sat down.

“I’m all ears,” she said, smiling up at him. “I have a feeling my daughter has gone and done something stupid and I’m looking forward to the part where you defend her bad behavior.” Aiden shot Connie an apologetic look, knowing she was probably right. He was always sticking up for his wife when she would make a decision that seemed to hurt everyone around her. Maybe it was the guilt he lived with for wanting more or maybe he was just blind and stupid.

“I don’t know that I’ll be able to defend her behavior this time, Connie,” he admitted. “I got a text from her saying she’s left me and the girls.” Connie’s gasp answered his question for him. He wanted to ask her if her daughter had shared the fact she was so easily abandoning her family or if Allison truly just dumped the girls off and left. “So, you really didn’t know, did you?”

“No,” she stuttered, raising a shaking hand to her mouth. “How could Allison do that to you and her daughters?” she questioned.

“I have no idea, really. I mean, she mentioned something about having a boyfriend for the past six months and well, maybe I don’t blame her. She said I wasn’t the best husband and she wasn’t all wrong. I spent a lot of late nights at the office and campaigning. Maybe if I had paid more attention to her, this wouldn’t have happened,” he admitted. He decided to leave out the part about craving a kinkier lifestyle and possibly pushing Allison away when she flat-out told him no. Maybe this whole mess was his fault.

“Now there you go,” Connie chided. “Allison has admittedly been cheating on you for six months and you blame

yourself. God Aiden, you were just providing for your family. My girl was never going to settle down and be happy. Not with you or anyone else, for that matter. Allison was always looking for the next best thing in her life and never stopped to look at what she already had. I'm sorry she did this to you and the girls." Aiden gave a nod not knowing what else to say. She could deny him having anything to do with Allison leaving but he knew the truth. It had been about a year since he came clean and asked Allison to try some of the things he had been wanting. He wasn't asking her to go to a BDSM club from the get-go, but he hoped she'd want to try at least some of the stuff he asked for. It was a lifestyle he knew well, having lived it for most of his twenties. When he met Allison, he was almost twenty-eight and he worried he would never find a woman to settle down with if he didn't leave the BDSM scene and give up his kinky lifestyle. So he did. He started dating Allison and he pushed down that side of himself, never letting on what he needed and everything he craved from her in the bedroom. But Aiden wasn't really happy and he knew if he continued to live a lie, he'd end up hurting them both. He was toying with telling her, but then she announced she was pregnant with Lucy and he got caught up in the excitement of a baby and a wedding. He decided to wait and spring his news on her after Lucy was born and they were officially man and wife. He had some crazy notion that as his wife she'd want the same things he did but he was wrong. In fact, the only thing he had been right about this whole time was the fact his lie would end up tearing them apart. He hated he was correct about that and especially hated how his girls would be the ones to pay the price.

"Listen, I have to get the girls home and tell them about their mother," he all but whispered. He really didn't want to have to do this next part but he had no choice. The three of them were going to have to get used to living without Allison and the sooner he told Lucy and Laney, the sooner they could begin the healing process of moving on. Connie nodded at the front screen door to where both girls stood, watching him. He could tell by Lucy's confused expression she had heard most of their conversation and she had questions.

Aiden opened the door and pulled both girls into his arms. “Hi babies,” he murmured. “I’m going to take you home from Nanny’s today,” he said. Allison was usually the one to pick the girls up from her mother’s on the days Connie watched them. Allison called her time away from them her “me time” and insisted it made her a better wife and mother. Now, Aiden could guess her “me time” involved her meeting up with her current boyfriend and he almost wanted to laugh at the irony of it all.

“Where’s Mommy?” Lucy questioned. “She usually picks me and Laney up.” His four-year-old was usually very inquisitive and he knew now would be no exception. She would ask him for answers and Aiden worried he wouldn’t have any to give.

“Mommy had to go away for a while,” he said. “I’m so sorry, girls but Mommy won’t be coming home.”

“Ever?” Lucy questioned. Laney stood next to her sister, watching between her and Aiden as if watching a volley. At two, she wasn’t a talker like Lucy had been. Laney was more reserved and observant, but he knew she understood everything they were saying. He wouldn’t lie to either of them, ever.

Aiden shook his head, “No baby, not ever. You’re Mommy had some things to do but I’m here and I won’t ever leave you,” he promised. Lucy gave him a look that told him she didn’t believe him, but that was par for the course. He knew both girls were closer to Allison; she was the parent who was around the most for them. If he was going to earn their trust and help them through this process, he was going to have to make some changes. The first being he needed to be home more often and let Corbin pick up some of the slack around the office. He needed to show the girls he was going to step up and be the parent they deserved, unlike his own dad after his mother left him. He’d never turn into his father. That wasn’t even an option—his girls deserved so much better than a drunk who was unreliable at best.

“How about we go home and I’ll make us some pancakes for dinner like I used to. Then we can talk this all out and you

can ask me all the questions you'd like." Lucy looked him over as if deciding if she wanted to go with him or stay with Connie. He didn't want to admit he was holding his breath waiting for her agreement but he was. Sometimes negotiating with Lucy was like trying to reason with a tiny terrorist who knew the ins and outs of the system. She knew just what to say and how to work over the person she was up against and Aiden worried she was already smarter than he was.

"Can we have chocolate chips in our pancakes?" Lucy asked, looking at Laney to back her up. When the two-year-old eagerly nodded her head, Aiden couldn't help his chuckle.

"I think I can arrange that," he promised.

"And cream?" Laney chimed in. Aiden was sure his daughters would eat whipped cream on everything if he allowed it.

"Sure, baby girl. We can have whipped cream on top. Any other demands, ladies?" he teased. The girls looked at each other as if silently communicating, trying to decide if they would have any further stipulations to join him for dinner.

Connie giggled from behind him. "I think your Lucy might just become a hostage negotiator," she teased. "They sure do have your number, Aiden."

"They've always been able to twist me around their little fingers, even Allison," he murmured. He knew it was going to take time to get over his wife. He loved her, but that didn't stop the pain or hurt she caused by walking away. Aiden knew from experience that would take time and might never completely happen for him or his girls.

"So, what's it going to be?" he expectantly asked. Both girls nodded their little blonde heads and smiled up at him.

"We'll take your offer," Lucy agreed as if she had just brokered a business deal. "Thanks, Daddy." She kissed him on his cheek and Laney did the same. He watched as they both ran into Connie's house to get their things.

"Thanks, Connie," he said.

“No need to ever thank me,” she offered. “Just call me when you’re ready to venture back into the world and I’ll help keep the girls as much as I can,” she said. Aiden appreciated the offer, but knowing his mother-in-law had health issues would put a damper on him asking too much of her. He loved her for making the offer.

“Will do,” he said. Lucy and Laney ran from the front door and over to Connie to kiss her cheek, shouting their goodbyes as they raced to his SUV.

“Come on, Daddy,” Laney bossed. He watched as his resilient girls climbed into the back of his vehicle and he wasn’t sure how he had gotten so lucky. Aiden wished the promise of chocolate chip pancakes with whipped cream could fix all their problems long term. But for now, he’d take all the help he could get, even if it was only a short-term fix.



Aiden got the girls fed and bathed before Corbin showed up at his house. From the sympathetic expression on his face, Corbin had been completely filled in on all of the sordid details. There was only one person who could have clued him in and Aiden wasn’t sure if he wanted to thank Rose or wring her neck for sharing his secret. Honestly, he knew Corbin would always have his back, and having someone to talk to would be a great help. In just two short hours, Aiden had worked through his self-pity over his wife walking out on him and had already moved straight on to anger. He just hoped he could get the girls to bed before he took his newfound feelings out on them. It wasn’t their fault their mother had up and left him and he needed to remember that.

He met Corbin at the front door and held it open for him. “So, I’m guessing your mother filled you in?” he questioned, already knowing the answer before Corbin nodded his head.

He shot Aiden a sheepish grin, “Don’t be mad at Mom, AJ,” he said. “She’s worried about you, man. You know she thinks of you as a son and hell, your girls might be the only

grandchildren that woman might ever get. I'm not ready to settle down and have any of the little beasties myself." Corbin grimaced and shuttered from just the thought of having kids and Aiden laughed. His best friend never seemed to understand why he wanted to settle down and have a family. When Aiden and Allison announced she was pregnant, Corbin's first question was whether or not she was going to keep the baby. Looking back now, that might have been the first clue he had that his wife and his best friend weren't going to be each other's biggest fans. Aiden had to run quite a bit of interference back then. After the girls were born, they both seemed to settle down and Aiden could let his guard down a little.

"You're not here to say you told me so, are you?" Aiden grouched. "If you are, you can just turn right around and leave."

Corbin held his hands up in defense, "Naw, man. I'm here to tell you I'm sorry you and the girls have to go through this. I love you like a brother, man. I would never want for any of this to happen no matter what differences I had with Alli," he offered.

Aiden smiled at the nickname only Corbin call his wife. "You know she fucking hated when you called her that, man," Aiden said.

Corbin's wolfish grin said it all. "I know. It's mostly why I did it," he admitted. "How about a beer?" he asked, holding up the six-pack he had hidden under his suit jacket.

"Sure," Aiden agreed. "Make yourself at home. I'm going to tuck the girls in and I'll be right back down," he said. Corbin pulled his tie loose and by the time Aiden got back downstairs, twenty minutes later, his friend had stripped out of his dress shirt and was just wearing one of Aiden's t-shirts and a pair of his gym shorts.

"I hope you don't mind me borrowing some clothes," Corbin said.

Aiden laughed. "No problem. Although I'm afraid you're going to stretch out my shirt," he teased. Corbin worked out

daily and he was bigger than Aiden, always had been. His arms alone looked like two of Aiden's put together. The women in town seemed to appreciate Corbin's gym efforts and loved the tattoos that banded his arms. Corbin usually kept them hidden under his dress shirt and jacket but when they would all casually go out for drinks, he basically had to turn women away left and right. Women fell for his good guy persona wrapped up in his bad boy image. Aiden had never seen the appeal of tattoos, even if the women seemed to go a little crazy over them. He had one tattoo on his upper arm of a shark wearing swim trunks and sunglasses. Aiden usually kept it secretly tucked away under his suits during the day, but it was his harsh reminder of a drunken bad decision made with Corbin while they were pledging the same fraternity in college.

"I ordered pizza too. I haven't had time to eat all day and I'm starving," he said. As if on cue, the pizza delivery guy showed up with Corbin's extra-large meat lovers' pizza that made Aiden's mouth water. He paid the delivery guy and they both settled in the family room with their beer and pizza. Aiden could feel Corbin was holding back with him like he was keeping his hand close to his vest.

"All right, man let's have it. I know you're dying to say your peace, so spill it," Aiden insisted.

"I really don't have anything to say you haven't heard before, man. I hate to say, 'I told you so'," he lied.

"You'd fucking love to tell me you were right. In fact, I'm betting you love saying those words to me more than you love pussy and that's a whole fucking lot," Aiden teased. Corbin stroked his beard and looked over at Aiden as if he was trying to decide if he was right or not.

"Well, you're not completely wrong but I guess it just depends on the pussy," Corbin joked. Corbin and he might have been the same age but his best friend was always taking lead when it came to their relationship. He seemed to think Aiden needed protecting, being smaller than him growing up, and who knows, maybe he was right. It sure felt good to have Corbin in his corner no matter what he was up against. It was

one of the reasons Aiden chose to go to the same college as him, not ready to part ways with the person who stuck by him through thick and thin. Corbin was basically his brother and he wasn't sure what he would do without him.

“So what now?” Aiden asked. “Allison left me with two little girls who are probably going to grow up without a mother. How do I fix that?” Aiden took a swig of his beer and tossed his half-eaten pizza back into the box.

“You don't fix it, man. You be the best dad you can be and show your girls when life gives you shit, you find your shovel,” Corbin growled. “How do you know Alli won't be back, AJ?” he asked. Yeah, he hadn't gotten to the best part of his day yet—the part where Lucy handed him her backpack and told him Mommy left something inside for him. Allison apparently told the girls to wait to give him the letter she wrote until they were home from Connie's house. He had to hand it to his wife, she sure knew how to bring the drama. At least he could read her letter in the privacy of his own home and this time, when he finished reading it, he could just tear it up and throw it away. His poor phone bore the extent of his anger at her earlier text and now he was going to have to run out and pick up a new one in the morning.

“Allison left me a letter with the girls. She told them to give it to me when we got home from Connie's,” Aiden admitted.

Corbin whistled, “Wow, she had this all planned out, didn't she? What did it say?” he asked.

“Basically, she said she wasn't cut out to be a wife or mother and she wasn't willing to spend her life wondering, ‘What if?’. She told me to text her when the divorce papers were ready to be signed and she didn't want anything but the money that was promised to her when she signed the preup.”

“And how much is that?” Corbin angrily barked.

“One and a half million.” Aiden shrugged.

“Fuck, man,” Corbin swore. Aiden didn't hide his smile. Corbin seemed angrier than he did about the day's events if



that was even possible. Honestly, Aiden just felt numb about the whole thing now. He wasn't sure that was going to change any time soon either.

"It's only money, man," he said. He meant it too. He'd pay just about any amount to have Allison be a part of the girls' lives but he knew once his wife made up her mind, there was no changing it. She chose to walk away from him and his daughters and now, the three of them would be the ones paying the price.

"How about you take some time—you know figure out just what you and the girls need. I'll handle the majority of the work stuff and that way you have time to focus on your family and politics," Corbin offered.

"I can't just dump the company on your lap, man," Aiden said. "I'll handle my own shit but I'm going to take the next two weeks off. I need to figure out the girls' schedules and make sure they are both all right with everything that is changing. Maybe we'll take a quick trip somewhere, get out of town for a few days—you know the whole change of scenery thing?" Aiden didn't really have a plan but as far as ideas went, a little family trip sounded like a good one.

"That sounds like a good plan," Corbin confirmed. "Get the girl's minds off of missing Alli and you can take some downtime."

"Right. I'll have Rose book us something in the morning," Aiden agreed. Corbin shot him a concerned look and Aiden chuckled. "Don't worry, man, I'll be fine. Allison made her decision and we will just have to live with it. Life marches on, as your mom likes to say."

"Yeah," Corbin agreed. "I always hated that expression I just never had the balls to tell her," he admitted. Aiden threw back his head and laughed and for the first time since getting Allison's text, he felt normal, as if everything was going to be all right. He just wished he believed it because Aiden wasn't sure anything would be right ever again.

## ZARA

Six Months Later

**Z**ara Joy walked into the local club and she wasn't sure how she let her best friend talk her into this. A nightclub was one thing but the town's only BDSM club was quite another. She was sure she wasn't going to be able to follow through with the dare she accepted and would run out of there like the meek little mouse she was. When Avalon tricked her into agreeing to step out of her comfort zone, she had no clue it would be this far out. Her comfort zone was a distant blip on her radar and Zara wasn't sure if she'd ever be able to find her way back again. But once Ava found out she hadn't lost her virginity, as she falsely reported the one and only time the subject came up, she went off and dared her to do the unthinkable.

Truthfully, she wanted a change from her everyday pace and when Ava told her about a new club in town, she was intrigued. The idea of dancing the night away left Zara feeling daring and ready to take on Ava's challenge. But her sneaky friend never mentioned the new club wasn't a nightclub but a sex club that catered to the elite clientele who paid hefty fees to join. Ava's father owned half the town so she had no problem getting Zara into the club as a guest for the night.

Zara's cell rang and she pulled it from her purse. "Hello," she whispered.

"Hey girl," Ava sassed, "did you make it to the club all right?" she asked. Ava knew damn well Zara wouldn't be able

to resist a dare. Zara held the phone away from her face and put her on speaker so Ava could hear the moans and groans of pleasure filling the club. A woman was in the corner, sprawled across and bound to what looked like a saddle, having her ass spanked red by a man standing behind her with a leather paddle. She hoped Ava would be able to hear the sound of the paddle every time it made contact with the woman's fleshy ass or the way she cried out and then moaned with pleasure.

"Does it sound like I'm at the club?" Zara asked.

Ava giggled into the other end of the cell. "I knew you wouldn't turn down a good dare."

"Yeah well, I thought you were sending me to an actual club, not a meat market of naked women getting men off," she whispered. "What the actual hell, Ava?"

Her giggle filled the other end of the line again and she knew their conversation was going nowhere. "You should totally take advantage of one of those men, Z," Ava said. "You're a twenty-five-year-old virgin and it's time for you to drop that title." Ava was right but what was she supposed to do? Walking right up to some leather-clad man welding a whip didn't seem like the best idea. Zara was sure that scenario playing out wouldn't end well for her.

"I can't just walk up to a complete stranger and ask him for sex," Zara spat.

"Oh, I don't know. You might find some of us complete strangers are open to a little fun, honey. That is why most of us are here." Zara spun around and found a man standing so close to her, she could feel his breath on her skin. He was sexy as sin, impeccably dressed in a three-piece suit with his light brown hair disheveled as if someone had run their fingers through it already. His blue eyes were what caught her off guard. They were so dark that him looking at her felt as if he could see directly into her soul, even eliciting a shiver from her.

"I'm sorry," she said, taking a step back from him. "I was having a private conversation with my friend." She held up the phone as if proving a point. "Ava," she said into the phone,

realizing her so called friend had hung up on her. “Fuck,” she cursed. The sexy man’s smirk was nearly her undoing and she found herself smiling back at him for no real reason.

“Seems your friend had other plans than to talk on the phone all night. You have any other plans Miss—” He looked her up and down as if waiting her out. Zara thought not answering him might be her best bet but the way he looked at her as if he wasn’t giving her an option but to answer, she had no choice.

“Zara,” she answered. He gifted her with his sexy smirk again and she was sure her panties were going to burst into flames from just the scorching way he looked her up and down. It was almost territorial like he was marking her with his gaze.

“Nice to meet you, Zara. I’m Aiden,” he said holding his hand out to take hers. She hesitantly took his offered hand and gave a gentle shake, noting the way he didn’t take his eyes from hers. “Is this your first time here?” he asked. Zara nodded and pulled her hand back from him.

“I’m here because of a stupid dare,” she admitted. God, she sounded like a child and she wished she could take back her words. “Um, I mean my best friend dared me to go out to a club by myself and well, I thought she meant a regular club—you know like dancing and drinks.” Aiden smiled at her and she felt like a giddy schoolgirl. “Instead, she sent me here and well, this wasn’t what I had imagined,” she admitted.

“You don’t sound very happy about being here, Zara. Would you like to leave?” That was a very good question. She looked around the room as if trying to decide her answer. A part of her was curious and she had to admit the chances of her returning were slim to none. What would it hurt to take a look around and maybe get a little bit of experience? No one knew who she was or that she was a virgin, at least she hoped they didn’t. Last time she looked, it wasn’t stamped on her forehead or anything.

“I think I’d like to stay,” she almost whispered. Zara didn’t turn to look at him, fixated on the woman in the corner of the

room she saw earlier. The man who had been spanking her while she was strapped to a leather saddle released her bonds and was fucking her from behind, in front of the whole room. People had stopped what they were doing to watch the two of them together and Zara felt like an intruder. She wanted to look away but she couldn't. They were seriously hot together and the way he commanded her body made Zara feel things she never had before.

“You like watching them?” Aiden whispered into her ear. She nodded and smiled back over her shoulder to where he stood. He was so close again that she wondered if this guy had any personal space boundaries.

“I—I think I do,” she shyly admitted. If she was being completely truthful, she would have told him she wasn't sure what she liked and didn't like because she was never with a man before, not in that way. Sure, she had dated her fair share of guys over the years, but working as a nanny didn't afford her the luxury of meeting too many people on the job. It wasn't like she could have an office romance or go out for drinks with her co-workers after the day was over. She usually lived with the families she nannied for making it hard for her to have any sort of social life. Zara never really had friends over to the family's house, not wanting to presume that was all right. Besides Ava, she really didn't have many other friends but she wasn't lonely. She loved her work and the families whom she grew to think of as hers especially since she didn't have one of her own.

“Would you like to try the spanking bench?” Aiden asked.

“Um, shouldn't we get to know each other first or something?” she questioned. Zara felt silly asking but this whole thing felt completely foreign to her. When she thought about having sex for the first time, she imagined the guy would at least buy her dinner first. Never in her wildest dreams did she think he'd be asking to spank her ass red while she straddled a leather saddle.

Aiden's chuckle and his warm breath on her shoulder made her shiver. “It was just a question, Zara. Maybe I should have dared you,” he teased, causing her to giggle.

“Accepting dares apparently never ends well for me,” she murmured.

“Well, maybe tonight will be different,” he suggested. “I can help you with that,” he offered. Zara wasn’t sure how this was all supposed to work but she felt foolish asking.

“I’m not sure I’m ready for all of this—” she said, waving her hands wildly about. “It’s just so public,” she admitted. Zara felt like a complete fraud standing in the middle of a sexual playroom with no experience of her own.

“Would you like to get a private room?” he asked. She could tell he was trying for nonchalant, but the way he looked at her so intensely, she knew he was hoping she’d say yes. How could she not? He hadn’t even really touched her yet and she was sure her panties were wet. She wanted Aiden, that was not the question. Why she wanted a complete stranger might be something she should think about but not now. Right now, she wanted to go with Aiden and take him up on his offer. Zara was done being a coward and it was time she did something about it. She was going to do this for herself. She didn’t give a fuck about Ava’s dare and when she walked out of that club tonight, she wouldn’t have to look back or wonder about what if’s because that wasn’t what Aiden was offering her. She might be naïve, but she knew enough to know her handsome stranger was going to give her just what she wanted—a night of strings-free hot sex and that was just fine with her.

“Yes,” she whispered. “I’d like that, Aiden.”

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## ABOUT K.L. RAMSEY & BE KELLY

*Romance Rebel fighting for*

*Happily Ever After!*

K. L. Ramsey currently resides in West Virginia (Go Mountaineers!). In her spare time, she likes to read romance novels, go to WVU football games and attend book club (aka-drink wine) with girlfriends. K. L. enjoys writing Contemporary Romance, Erotic Romance, and Sexy Ménage! She loves to write strong, capable women and bossy, hot as hell alphas, who fall ass over tea kettle for them. And of course, her stories always have a happy ending. But wait—there's more!

Somewhere along the writing path, K.L. developed a love of ALL things paranormal (but has a special affinity for shifters <YUM!!>!! She decided to take a chance and create another persona- BE Kelly- to bring you all of her yummy shifters, seers, and everything paranormal (plus a hefty dash of MC!).

## **K. L. RAMSEY'S SOCIAL MEDIA**

Ramsey's Rebels - K.L. Ramsey's Readers Group

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KL Ramsey & BE Kelly's ARC Team

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/klramseyandbekellyarcteam>

KL Ramsey and BE Kelly's Newsletter

<https://mailchi.mp/4e73ed1b04b9/authorklramsey/>

KL Ramsey and BE Kelly's Website

<https://www.klramsey.com>





## BE KELLY'S SOCIAL MEDIA

BE Kelly's Reader's group

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