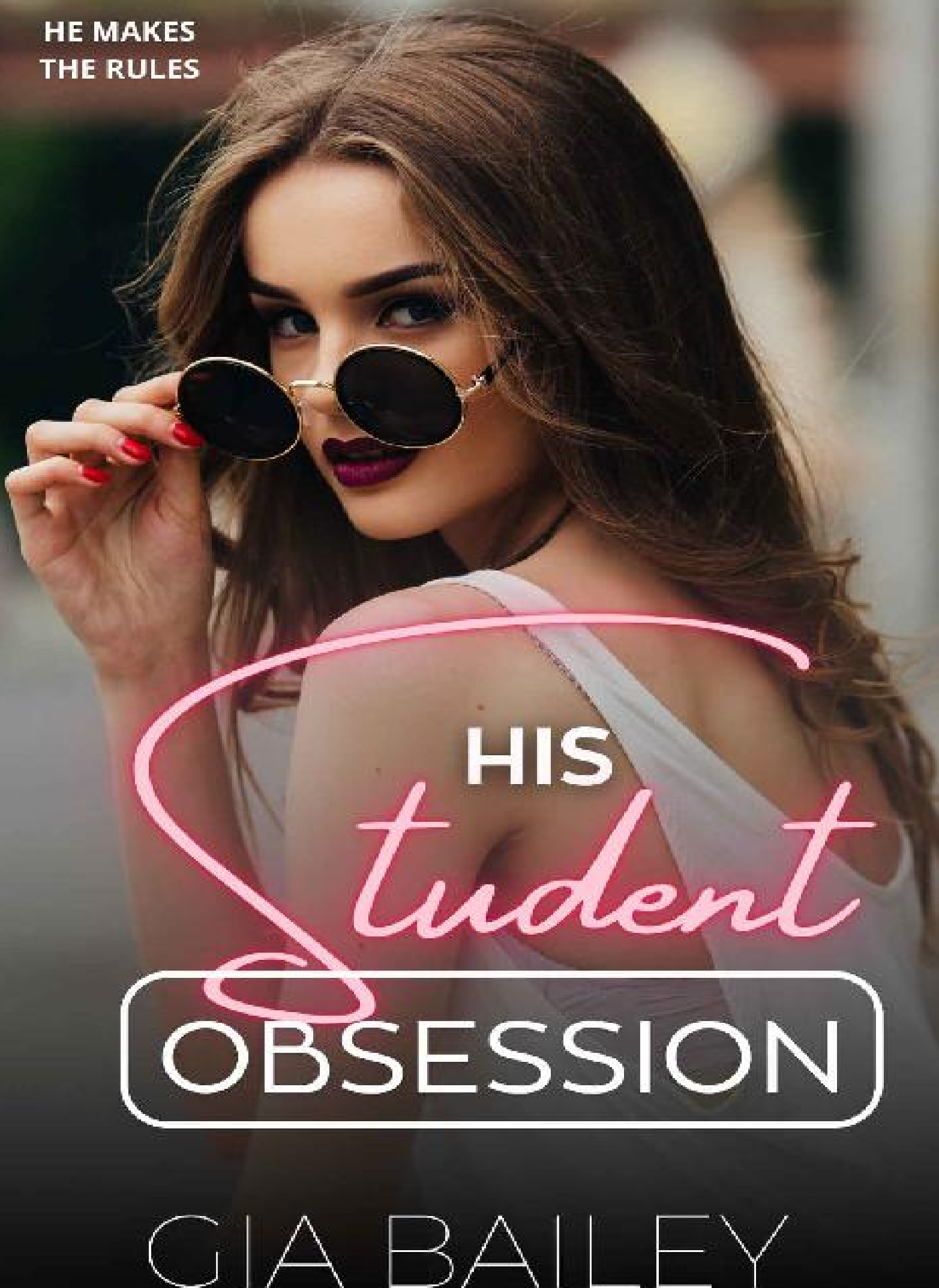


HE MAKES
THE RULES



HIS

Student

OBSESSION

GIA BAILEY

His Student Obsession

AN AGE GAP ROMANCE

GIA BAILEY

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Three years later

Gia Bailey

Also by Gia Bailey

His Obsession Series

His Obsession series features obsessed heroes who will stop at nothing to win the object of their obsession. If you love OTT possessive heroes chasing the bad-ass, sassy women who torment them, then you'll love His Obsession series. Extra OTT, extra spicy and always HEA.

His Student Obsession

His Au Pair Obsession

His Assistant Obsession

His Beauty Queen Obsession

CHAPTER 1

Caron

“Professor Cole, should I close the door?” A voice drifted to me over the loud hum of noisy grad student settling into seats, an irritating bang sounding each time someone sat themselves in the cheap folding lecture hall chairs.

“Not yet,” I ground out. “Not everyone is here.”

She isn't here.

The rabble could sit themselves down and drone on inanely to their hearts' content until Amy Mackintosh got to class. Only then would we begin.

I shifted behind the lectern, arranging my notes. It was a class I could have taught in my sleep. I didn't need the notes, but it helped create the illusion that I was a normal, functioning professor. It helped to hide the truth.

My eyes fell to the doorway, up above the sunken pit where the professor stood, and I saw her outlined in shadow against the bright fluorescents of the hall.

She hurried, but didn't rush. My girl never rushed, even when she was late. Oh, how I longed to teach her how rude it was to keep people waiting. I longed to do a lot to her.

She attempted to slip into the back row.

“Late comers will sit front and centre,” I said lowly into the small mic that was clipped onto my collar. My voice quieted the crowd, as they twisted in their seats to see who had been singled out for reprimanding.

Amy sat still a moment, and then rose. She walked down the steps of the aisle, lower and lower, descending to my level before stopping. Her eyes blazed at me, green and wicked. She tossed her dark, auburn hair over a shoulder and sat right in the centre seat, directly in my eyeline. It was empty, of course. No one ever ventured that near. I had quite the reputation around campus. The ogre business teacher that no one wanted to come too close to. The one with the dead man's stare.

Except Amy.

Amy wasn't scared of the dragon professor, whose bite was worse than his bark.

I held her challenging gaze for a blistering moment, before nodding to the kid at the back who was lingering near the doors to shut them.

I couldn't afford to look too long at the object of my desire. My obsession. It would make the truth too obvious, and I wasn't ready for that yet. The class wasn't difficult, and I launched into the subject with boredom. I could teach it in my sleep, and 8 am on a Monday was hardly my preferred class time, and yet, I never considered changing classes.

The truth was that I was only here for one reason, and one reason alone, and her name was Amy Mackintosh and she was mine, pure and simple. She just didn't know it yet.

But soon she would.

"Sit down, let's get started."

CHAPTER 2

Amy

Nothing spelled a crap week than starting it off with a run in with Professor stick up his ass Cole. Seriously, if the man wasn't some kind of superstar genius, who looked good in promotional brochures and TED Talks, then he'd be out of here. As it was, the Dean practically bent over backwards to make sure their celebrity professor was happy.

I had no such inclination. There was something off about that man. I'd thought it from my very first glimpse of him. Something in his eyes that tingled my gut instinct to run and hide. This man wasn't what everyone else thought.

This man was a wolf in sheep's clothing. It should be more off-putting than it was. The part of me that longed for love and affection was drawn to his dark stares. I knew it wasn't healthy. I knew it was dangerous, in some way that I couldn't even quite understand.

Tangling with Professor Cole was like playing with fire, and damn if I didn't find myself doing it, time and again.

"Miss Mackintosh, a word." The professor's voice was quiet, but held a weight of authority like nothing I'd ever experienced before. I sighed, annoyed that it excited me and scared me at the same time to be alone with him.

I packed my bag and lingered beside my seat as the rest of the class filed out of the hall. Once they were all gone, Professor Cole sat behind his desk, and gestured me to approach with one long finger. I swallowed down the hot, tight feeling in my throat, and followed his command.

Once I was there, I waited for whatever reprimand he clearly wanted to give me. But he had bent his head to his work, and was scribbling notes on a piece of paper. I waited.

He kept writing. I took the chance to look at him. It was easy to see why he had become such a hot topic and was in such demand for speaking appearances. He looked like Hollywood had cast for a hot professor and I could bet that half the campus had a crush on him. His thick, muscled thighs pressed tightly against this dark chinos, and his button-down shirt was already rolled to the sleeve, revealing completely indecent forearm porn. There was a hint of ink disappearing into the rolled white cuff, making me curious as hell about what was under his formal façade. He was older, a good ten years, if not more, maybe twelve. It wasn't off putting in any way. At twenty-three, I'd already lived enough to know what turned me on, and Professor Cole was it. He had that sexy, older aura of a real man, someone with knowledge, experience and confidence to boot. There wasn't a jock on campus who could hold a candle to the appeal of Professor Cole. Instead of a date night at a frat party, he looked like he'd sit and read with you, in a cosy, book-lined room, before taking his glasses carefully off, putting you over his knee, and then taking you however the hell he wanted you.

His pen scratched over the paper in front of him, scrawling words I couldn't make out, not that I was trying to read them. Who was I kidding? I was definitely trying. The slightest curve to one corner of Cole's stubbled lips told me he knew that.

I waited longer. Time spun out, and I stayed put. A hot and strange feeling came over me, like I was tied to the spot, waiting for his attention like a good little puppy at his feet. It was an odd game of chicken that I had no intention of losing. I might thrive on the fucked up energy between us, and wonder what it would be like to let this man control my body and will, in my most dark fantasies, but I was also competitive as hell. I'd always been a basketball player, and I hated to lose, no matter how small the game was. Moving or even fidgeting now would only show him he was getting to me. With a

supreme effort of will, I held my ground. Another minute ticked by, and then two more.

“Excuse me, Miss Mackintosh. I forgot you were waiting,” Professor Cole suddenly said, taking off his sexy, black-rimmed glasses and setting them down. Without them, he looked more like the wolf he was. The man was dangerously sexy. I shrugged.

“It’s fine. I figured you drifted off, or your mind wandered. I heard that happens with age,” I said, giving him a sweet, understanding smile. A muscle clenched in his jaw, the only sign that I had pissed him off, and then he pasted a crocodile’s smile across his handsome, full lips.

“Well, you have a lot of experience with making people wait, so I leave it to your expertise,” he said smoothly. He then reached for a crumpled piece of paper beneath the essay he had been writing and laid it in front of me. “Your tardiness and lack of basic manners aside, I wanted to talk to you about this,” he said, and laid the paper down. I recognised it with a sinking feeling in my stomach. It was my last homework assignment. It had been a case study on some company, and I couldn’t deny I’d phoned it in. The deadline had fallen right at a terrible time and between a basketball game I couldn’t miss, and two extra shifts that I’d needed to cover my bills this month, I’d run out of time. “Do you really think this is the standard that I’m looking for at this level or point in the semester?” he pressed. Shame filled me, and embarrassment. He might rile me right up and annoy me to death, but I didn’t want him to think I was dumb.

“I ran out of time.”

“Unacceptable excuse,” he said flatly. “You make time for the things that are important, unless I’m to assume that your degree is not important to you?”

“No, it is. Of course it is. I’d hardly be working two jobs to be here if it wasn’t.”

“Two jobs. Why are you working two jobs when you are studying full time?”

“I have my reasons,” I sighed, wishing I could take the words back. He studied me, clearly annoyed that I wasn’t telling him everything he wanted to know. He looked like he’d like to pin me to the table and interrogate me, and in all honesty, the thought was kind of hot. Clearly, I needed my virgin head examined if I thought I could handle a man like Professor Cole.

“Where are these jobs?” he asked instead.

“Why?”

“I asked you a question, and why is not an answer,” he said.

“Fine. I work at Super Suds all night laundry place, on Elm, and at the Jolly Rancher bar on fifth,” I confessed. Super Suds was an easy gig, and I got to catch a few hours shut eye during the all night shifts, and the Jolly Rancher wasn’t bad either. Sure, it was messy and noisy, but it was a gay bar, and I never had to deal with unwanted attention, so it sure trumped any other bar tending job I’d ever had.

“So, you expect to work all night, and then come to class during the day? That sounds reasonable to you?”

“No, but I can’t afford to care if it’s reasonable. It’s necessary,” I told him bluntly. “I wouldn’t expect you to understand,” I tossed out carelessly, feeling lower than low. Not only did Professor Cole now think I was too dumb and careless to do a good job on my assignment, but he also thought I was poor and reckless. It really was a great start to the week.

The professor pushed his chair out and stood, straightening to his great height. He towered over me when we stood side by side, and it thrilled me every time.

“Your work situation isn’t my problem, but this kind of work is completely unacceptable.” His harsh words cut through me like knives. I knew it wasn’t his problem. I was no one’s problem but my own, which made sense, since I was utterly alone in the world. “You are one of the brightest students in my class, Miss Mackintosh, and it pains me to see

you let a promising future slip through your fingers,” he continued. I froze at the shock of that unexpected praise, and then my cheeks flooded with warmth. I had always been cursed with an expressive face, and blushing was my downfall. A finger came up under my chin, and I looked incredulously up at my teacher. He was touching me. Professor Cole was touching me, and fuck, it felt good. I fought the urge to close my eyes and lean into his warm strength. What would it be like to have all the intellect, strength, and fierceness in your corner? I wished I could find out.

“Find a solution to these problems, or I will,” he breathed. “Tell me you understand,” he instructed. I felt myself nodding, spellbound by his eyes. “Good girl,” he muttered, and only made my blush ten times more furious. Fuck, I think my nipples just tightened and my entire body clenched at those softly muttered words. Outside, the bell rang in the hall, and disturbed the bubble of tension between the mysterious older man who plagued my thoughts and me. He let my face go and turned away.

“See you on Thursday,” he said to me dismissively, and I was free to go. It felt worse than I’d imagined it would, being sent away by him.

I turned and grabbed my bag, feeling cold reality press back in as I strode up the long aisle stairs toward the door at the top. That was mad, right? Professor Cole was dangerous, and this was exactly why. He made me forget myself, and that was a terrifying feeling. I shouldn’t forget it. I couldn’t afford to. I stopped at the top of the stairs, staring at the door for a long moment, fighting the urge to look back. I knew he was watching me. I could feel the weight of his eyes, like a touch on my neck.

Fear and curiosity battled in me, as I lingered there, and then fear won. I pushed through the door and out into the busy hallway. I didn’t look back.

CHAPTER 3

Caron

On Wednesday morning, I suffered through a staff meeting that nearly bored me to tears, or would have, if I had been listening. The head of my department was a study in tedium, and ill-suited to be teaching a class on business ethics considering he had gotten a student pregnant last year. The hypocrisy at the school was stunning, and yet, I was part of the problem as well. The memory of Amy's sharp little chin between my fingers played on constant repeat in my mind, over and over.

Touching her wasn't in the plan. Touching her wasn't allowed. Her studies had less than a year left, and then, and only then, could I pursue her. I had made myself that promise, the first day she'd walked into my classroom and my heart. But my resolve was slipping and my obsession was showing.

She'd been so adorable yesterday, blushing sweetly, while defending her poor paper. She really had no idea that I knew everything about her. I'd asked her to see if she'd lie to me, and she hadn't. I knew where she worked; I knew the shifts that she worked. I knew exactly how little time she had. My beautiful girl was working herself into the ground, and I wasn't going to stand back and let it happen.

"Now, we come to Professor Cole's point regarding a TA."

"Yes, I haven't recruited for the position yet, but I have someone I'd like to do it, and will be employing her immediately."

"Who is it?"

“Amy Mackintosh.”

“Ah, Amy. She has a pretty demanding basketball schedule. I think Coach Chris might have something to say about it.”

“She isn’t majoring in basketball or any sport related field. She should get experience relevant to her degree and that trumps everything else. It’s not my concern if the basketball team needs a business major part-time player to win,” I said dismissively. Silence fell around the table. Department Head, Alan, was nodding vigorously.

“Quite, well said. Let’s keep our priorities in order. So that’s decided,” he said, looking at me for approval. The man had yet to find his spine in twenty years of teaching. I nodded, confirming I was satisfied with him, and he smiled, and turned to the other things on the agenda.

“Now, the demonstration against the Greek hazing system-,”

I shut him out and stared down at the paper in front of me. I had the contract for Amy all ready to go. The position would pay twice what she made from her part-time jobs, and I’d ensure that she had plenty of time to sleep and get her schoolwork done. The actual pay for the position was very poor, but I was subsidising it heavily. I taught business and was rather an expert in the field. That there could be a poor-looking business professor seemed like an oxymoron to me. I knew how to invest money; I knew how to make money, and had already made enough to last me a lifetime. I wasn’t an ostentatious person. In fact, when I’d taken the position at the university, I’d been happy to live in a small house near campus. Of course, once Amy graduated, and wanted to move somewhere to pursue her work passions, I’d move too. She’d have the house of her dreams wherever it may be. For now, I was content playing the role of the well-meaning, humble professor who worked for the love of the subject and nothing else. To be fair, it had started that way. Once you have amassed more money than you could spend, what else is there to do with your time? Passing it on was a concept taught to me by my father, and his father before him.

Still, I'd never planned on making this small university town and campus my world for as long as I had. In fact, I had been on the cusp of handing in my notice to take up a position in England, at Oxford university, when I'd met Amy. One look, and I was smitten. One interaction, and I was obsessed.

"AARON, WAIT A MINUTE," A VOICE CALLED TO ME. BEHIND me, Monica, the accountancy professor, hurried after me. "Shall we get a coffee?" she suggested. I fought an internal sigh. This woman was relentless.

"I'm pressed for time," I told her, as we walked out the building into the warm, spring night. Campus was busy. There was music issuing from the student union, and people biking passed, or walking to the library with heavy backpacks. I joined the rush, moving toward the gates at one end of the huge sprawling green.

"You always say that!" she laughed, blind as ever. It really didn't take a genius to figure why I was always busy when she asked me out, but she was a person completely convinced of her own appeal and would never see my polite excuses as rejection.

"And I always mean it," I snapped at her, allowing my longer stride to carry me before her. She hurried after me, her heels clacking loudly on the sidewalk.

"You can't be busy every single time I ask. It's statistically impossible," she said, still on my damn tail.

"So, what does that tell you?" I asked, halted, and turning to face her. She slammed into me and reached for my chest to steady herself. She smiled up at me with what she no doubt thought was an endearing expression. "I'm no statistician, so I'll leave it to you to interpret the data," I said coolly. Over her shoulder, I saw a figure come to a dead stop on the sidewalk.

Fucking great.

Amy clutched her backpack, her eyes fixed on me and Monica. Her expression was surprised, and something more. My annoyance faded immediately to intrigue. Amy, my sweet

girl, looked almost hurt at the sight of me and Monica, my colleagues' hands still resting on my chest. I enjoyed it, though I shouldn't have. Getting a grip, I stepped back and let Monica's hands fall to her sides. I folded my own arms across my chest, putting a barrier between us, and fixed her with a withering look.

"I don't get it," Monica was saying, still trying to puzzle out what I had said. The idiot still couldn't understand a rejection, even when it was put plainly.

"I'm not interested. Do you get it now?" I asked. Her mouth rounded in surprise, and her smooth cheeks reddened. That blush did nothing for me. It was nothing like Amy's sweet, innocently pink cheeks when she argued with me, or gave me sass and got away with it. "Considering that, I think it's inappropriate to press personal invitations on me constantly." Monica stiffened, the insinuation that she was harassing me finally sinking through her thick skull.

"Right, I've got you," she said, and then forced an awkward laugh. "It was only a drink, and nothing more nefarious, I promise you," she said. I shrugged.

"Still, unwanted attention, no matter how small, is still unwanted. I'm sure, as a beautiful woman, you've experienced it often enough," I said. Her expression hardened, and she shrugged. Over her shoulder, I could see Amy tear her stare from us, and turn away toward a bike rack. She rode an aging scrap of metal to campus, that she called a bike. Soon, she would have enough money to buy herself a new one, and a goddamn helmet. Watching her sail along the small paths of the green without one, while jocks threw balls around and veered in her path, always turned my stomach.

"Now, if you'll excuse me?" I said to Monica and strode away before she could speak again. Hopefully, that would put an end to that. No matter how satisfying the smallest sign of jealousy might be from Amy, any tiny sign that she might feel even a fraction of the pull I felt between us, I didn't want her upset. I wanted no misunderstandings, or confusion in her head or heart. I was hers, and only hers. Soon, she'd know it.

CHAPTER 4

Amy

The Jolly Rancher was pretty quiet that night. Mondays were usually slow, and sometimes I was able to do some course reading, perched on my little stool behind the bar. My co-worker Theo let me sit and read as he cleaned the glasses and chatted with the regulars. I tried to focus on my book, imaginatively titled Quantitative Research Methods in business, but my mind kept lingering over the sight of Professor Cole and Monica Delvany, standing outside the faculty building. Professor Delvany had had her hands all over Cole. My Professor Cole. It had made me mad, and jealous, and feel foolish at the same time. He wasn't mine, and that was no doubt a good thing. Despite knowing this, it hurt to watch them. It had helped a little when he'd pushed her away, but I knew how these things worked. She clearly liked him, and they were co-workers. Before long, they'd be dating.

I turned back a page in my book, losing the thread of where I was once again. I marked the top of the page with a light dot. It was a habit I used to tell myself how distracted I was. Tonight, I was at sixteen dots already. This clearly wasn't my night.

"Look alive, stud alert. Hello, daddy," Theo suddenly muttered, appearing at my side. He nudged me and made me lose my place in the book for the seventeenth time.

"Hey, stop that. You serve him if he's so hot," I teased him.

"I would, honey, except this isn't my type of daddy. Well, it is, but I'm not his type. Besides, with the look he's giving you, you don't want to miss this," Theo said, and pushed me

off the stool. I lost my balance and landed on my ass on the tile floor. I glared up at him. He held his hands out. "Hey, don't look at me. I thought you were an athlete or something, who face plants getting off a chair, I don't know," Theo muttered, giving me an extremely judgemental look and then waltzing off without helping me up. I got up slowly, my ass smarting, and my book wet from the floor. Oops. It was a library book too. I sighed, wiping the corner off on my apron, as I turned my attention to the bar, and the 'daddy' waiting for service.

Holy shit.

All other thoughts fled my head as I took in Professor Cole, in all his fine as hell glory, sitting casually on the other side of the bar, watching me with narrowed, dark eyes. He was attracting attention from the regulars and no wonder. The man was outrageously hot, and not only in looks. He had that powerful, big-dick energy other men dreamed of having. For Professor Cole, it was effortless. He wore his dominance and confidence like a thick mantle across his shoulders. I couldn't picture him without it, it was too much a part of him, as natural as his eye colour and build.

"I'm sure this is just one reason studying at a bar isn't a good idea, Miss Mackintosh," he said. Great, not only had he seen me fall, but he was going to continue reprimanding me as well.

"Like I said, Professor, we don't all have a choice in the matter," I muttered, leaving my book on the shelf and wiping my hands on a rag. "What can I get you?"

"Whiskey, neat. It feels odd to hear my title off campus. Call me Aaron," he said.

"Aaron?" I repeated. I'd honestly never considered that Professor Cole might have a first name, or that it would sound so good on my lips. Aaron. I liked the way it rolled around my mouth. "Does that mean you're going to call me Amy?" I wondered. He smirked.

"Do you want me to?"

I shrugged, unsure how to continue that line of thinking. There were a lot of things I'd like Professor Cole to call me, but none of them were suitable for saying out loud. "So, I haven't seen you here before," I said, and jerked my head to the looks that Aaron was attracting. "You're causing quite the commotion."

"Well, I wanted to see what kind of job was important enough to mess up your paper for," he said, taking the glass of whiskey from me as I went to set it down. His finger brushed mine, and I remembered the feel of it against my chin, and bit down a gasp. "I'm not gay, in case you were wondering," he continued.

"Yeah, I didn't think you were. I saw you earlier, with Professor Devany," I said, and then cursed myself. Why had I brought that up? Now I looked like a crazy stalker.

"Did you?" He asked. I nodded, feeling scrutinized and seen right now. I knew he had seen me, he had looked right at me, and yet, here he was making me squirm.

"You know I did," I challenged softly. A hint of a smile touched his lips, and he inclined his head, agreeing with me.

"There is nothing going on between Monica and I," he said finally. He called her Monica. It hurt to hear. I was clearly going insane. "I'm not interested in her in that way, or anyway," he said.

"You're not?" I questioned. My hands were clutching the counter behind me, and I felt tight with tension. Aaron's eyes fixed on me, and he shook his head.

"Does that make you happy?" he asked, so quietly, I wasn't completely sure I wasn't imagining it, but nodded anyway. His smirk spread into a smile, a real one, just a flash, and then it was gone. "There's only one woman I'm interested in," he continued. I felt hot all over, pinned by his look to the counter, like I couldn't move unless he allowed it. His eyes moved from my eyes down to my lips and then lower still. He looked me up and down, his eyes lingering in places on my body that send blood rushing to my cheeks. Was he really blatantly checking me out, or was this just another power

play? Another way to exert his dominance over a lowly student? That seemed unlikely, since he never gave other students a second glance, even when they spoke to him, but still, the fact that Professor Cole, hottest man on campus, and celebrity business mastermind, could show me such appreciation seemed insane. I had clearly lost my mind when I fell off the stool.

I had to get laid, I decided, as I attempted to wet my parched lips. It wasn't right to be a virgin at the ripe old age of twenty-three, and lusting after your thirty-five-year-old professor. It was lust, addling my brain. It was just chemical, and my body was bound to embarrass me some more, if I didn't get it under control.

"What are you thinking about, Amy? Your expression tells me it's quite the hot topic?" he asked, his attention back on my face, and rapt.

"Nothing."

"It's not nothing. Do you know you wear your feeling on your face?" he wondered. I nodded, feeling guilty and exposed somehow.

"I've always had a glass face, my father used to say," I confessed. "It's pretty much a liability in business, or anything else," I muttered. Aaron frowned, considering my words.

"I don't see it as a liability, but a strength, in fact, Amy," he said. I pondered that statement. "Most people aren't brave enough to show how they feel. They hide it away. You wear it for all to see. It's braver than most," he continued. I didn't know how to handle that compliment from this man that consumed my thoughts far more often than he should.

"Is that what you do? Hide your feelings away?" I wondered, leaning on the bar, pulled into our conversation enough that I forgot I was meant to be working.

"Maybe, or maybe I just don't have any. There are plenty of sociopaths who made great business people," he said. My eyes widened as I stared at him. Did he just call himself a sociopath? Then he smiled, a faint, precious thing. "Only

kidding. I don a mask, just like every other self-respecting coward,” he said, and made me laugh.

“You had me going there. I thought you were about to prove to be far more self aware than most of us,” I said, flashing him a smile, as I went to serve someone else. I was aware of Aaron’s eyes on me the entire time. Once I was done serving the customer, I lingered before the professor again, drawn there like a moth to a flame.

“Does that mean you think I’m a sociopath?” he asked me, immediately returning to the topic at hand. He raised an eyebrow as I crossed my arms over my chest and gave him an assessing look.

“Well, let’s weigh the evidence. Brilliant, anti-social, untouchable... cold,” I finished listing things, and stilled. Shit, did I just insult my professor? Brilliant move to piss him off. He was only watching me, expressionless. “I’m only teasing you. You’re good at hiding your human parts. Better than me, but who isn’t?” I said breezily, trying to steer the conversation back to safer ground.

“Hmm, you had me going there. For a moment I thought you were going to prove to be far more switched on than others,” he said, repeating my words, and puzzling me, even as he grinned to take the edge off. There it was, that edge of darkness I always felt around this man. The edge that drew me in. The edge I toed around and wondered what it would be like to fall completely over. I wanted to know what was on the other side, in my deepest, most secret fantasies.

“Look, I have another agenda for coming here,” Professor Cole suddenly said, breaking the weird, white-hot tension between us. “I’m hiring a TA for the rest of the semester.”

“Congratulations,” I said, wondering at the sudden change of topic. He raised his glass to me in a toast.

“Likewise. It’s you,” he said shortly.

“Me?” I repeated, trying to keep up with his mercurial mood. He nodded. There wasn’t even a hint of teasing on his face now.

“I didn’t apply for a TA position.”

“I applied for you, and reviewed it, and chose you. It’s done.” An involuntary laugh left me at his highhandedness.

“With all due respect, but isn’t that a little presumptuous of you?” I asked, sticking a hand to my hip, and growing a little mad. This man was clearly power mad, and I should hate it more than I did. The fact that I didn’t hate it only made me madder; at myself.

Aaron shrugged with a perfect, eloquent nonchalance that needed no answer. He didn’t give a fuck.

“Well, thanks for the offer, but I’m afraid I already have two jobs, so I have to decline.”

“It wasn’t an offer. It’s a done deal, unless you want to fail my class,” he said smoothly. His words robbed my breath from my chest. I gripped the counter.

“Are you threatening me?”

“If I have to. The position pays more than both your jobs combined, so really, if you can’t understand working less for more pay, I don’t think any advanced business courses can help you.”

“The pay isn’t the point!” My voice was solid, but inside I was quaking. Paid more than both my jobs? Holy shit. I had to take it. “The point is your deciding for me,” I ground out. “You’re just my teacher, that’s it. You’re not my father,” I said stiffly. Theo’s words sounded in my head. *Hello daddy*. A furious blush blossomed on my cheeks.

“I am well aware and grateful for that, believe me,” Aaron said, and stood up. He dropped a \$10 bill on the counter.

“You’ve already paid,” I reminded him.

“It’s a tip for this pleasant conversation and scintillating company,” he said. I tried to read his face.

“Are you mocking me?” I wondered, more hurt by the idea than I should be. He shook his head.

“No. Not at all,” he said, and something in his flat tone seemed honest. “Think about the position. Don’t let pride or ego get in the way. Less work, more pay, and time to study. It’s a good deal, Amy, and I want you to have it,” he said, shoving a hand through his thick, wavy dark hair. He was so broad and sexy standing there before me at the counter, all that intense energy focused on me. I swallowed and merely nodded. He was right, however, that I couldn’t let ego stop me from taking a great deal.

“Wait!” I called, as he turned away. He paused immediately and turned back to me. “Doesn’t that mean we would be working together? Like... closely?” I wondered. I didn’t know all the duties that a TA had to carry out, but I assumed they worked closely with the professor. Aaron nodded and then gave me a grin that I’d never forget. It was the closest I’d ever seen the taciturn man come to showing me beneath that mask he talked about. It lit his handsome face up.

“We all have our crosses to bear, Miss Mackintosh,” he said, and then tipped his head to me. “See you in class. Don’t be late.”

CHAPTER 5

Caron

Amy was late for her first shift as my TA. She was late, and I was waiting.

I sat at my desk in my office, a large room with a working fireplace in the corner, and walls lined with books, except for the one wall taken up with a huge bay window with a built-in window seat.

I gave up any pretence of working, and watched the clock, as I wondered what the hell could make her late on her first day. She had ended up agreeing easily enough once she'd had time to consider the pay, and I was grateful. I seriously doubted my ability to get her to accept without letting my mask slip.

Work for me, because I'm obsessed with you, and the thought that you're tired and struggling keeps me up at night. Right, that would have gone over great.

A knock sounded at the door and sent me sitting straighter in my chair. Relief and anticipation filled me.

She was here.

"Come in," I called, flexing my hands and tried to hide my goddamn excitement. I was finally getting Amy alone, behind a closed door, and I couldn't fucking wait. I was a ghoul, ready to feast on her innocent flesh, and I'd almost stopped feeling bad about it.

"Sorry," she said, as she slipped in the door. She looked flushed and breathless, like she'd been hurrying.

“Close the door,” I told her firmly. She swallowed, the long column of her neck bobbed with the movement, and shut the door, leaning against it afterward. I leaned back in my chair, grateful that the dark wood hid the hard-on that sprang to life at the sight of her. She unwound her scarf from her neck and took her jacket off. She was wearing a white, plain t-shirt that showed her midriff when she raised her arms to hang her jacket on the coat stand. The band of skin seared its image into my brain.

“I’m so sorry, I couldn’t get a bus, and I had to just kind of run here,” she was saying, her words all a worried tumble. She no doubt worried that if she did a poor job, or pissed me off, she’d be fired. There was no chance of that. I’d finally found a legitimate way of giving her money. There was no way I was firing her for anything.

“Come here,” I said, pointing to the chair on the other side of the desk. She complied, sitting down on top of her hands and biting her lip as she looked at me. That looked utterly destroyed me. “You know my opinion on lateness, don’t you?”

“Yes, that’s why I apologised,” she said immediately.

“Do you think that’s a good look on your first day?” I prompted. She flushed more. I was being an asshole, I knew it, but then, that’s just who I was. Power plays, punishment and rules were all games to me. I wanted to play with Amy, but to really play, she’d have to know the game, and she wasn’t there yet. She was still my student, for fuck’s sake. I was skating dangerously close to forbidden territory.

“No, but I feel like I should remind you I didn’t ask for this job. You pressed it on me,” she said, raising her head to fix me with a look. I laughed. I couldn’t help it. There was something so irresistibly pleasing about her indomitable spirit. The sound ripped from my chest, like a rusty key turning in a lock. Man, it had been a good long while since I’d laughed. She looked just as startled at the sound as I was.

“So, what you’re saying is I wanted you, so I’ll just have to deal with your tardiness and excuses?” I offered, when I’d gotten myself back under iron-clad control. She shrugged, a

soft smile playing around her lips. The tension had passed. “Very well. Miss Mackintosh. Let’s get to work, and prove I made a good choice in my assistant,” I told her, moving things briskly along. Being around Amy like this felt too good. Just the sight of her smile, and her teasing in that lilting voice, made my chest feel warm and soft inside, like a melting glacier. I imagined myself as a cartoon wolf frozen in ice, and slowly melting away in the light of Amy’s smile. It was fucking ridiculous and yet absolutely undeniable.

“Ok, great. I noticed that the assignments from last week haven’t been logged into the system yet, and also, the handouts from yesterday had a muddled order,” she said. Another involuntary laugh left me as I took her in.

“Are you pulling me up for sloppy admin?” I wondered. She shrugged.

“If the shoe fits and besides, isn’t that why I’m here?” she asked. *No*.

I nodded and held a hand out to the stack of papers on the edge of the desk.

“Well, in that case, Miss Mackintosh, work away on what you think needs done. I won’t micromanage you,” I told her.

“Really?” she asked brightly. I shook my head.

“I trust your judgement.”

WORKING IN THE OFFICE BESIDE AMY WAS KILLING ME. WAS it possible to die from loss of blood flow to the head? Not because I’d been stabbed or injured, but because my dick was so hard most of the time I couldn’t think straight. It had been a week. A week of torture, and I had to admit, my office and paperwork were in the best shape it had ever been. She was efficient, hardworking and brilliant, nothing I hadn’t already known and yet, it was something else to see her work. I’d watched her study at the library before. Of course, no self-respecting obsessed man could fail to walk under the stacks

when the object of his desire was sitting for hours, absorbed in her books and not paying attention to greedy eyes.

Seeing her in my office, moving with precision, again, completely absorbed, but this time in my service, was something else completely. I couldn't take my eyes off her. Today, she was yawning near constantly, and I had a sneaking suspicion she hadn't given up her laundry mat job yet. I was going to have to confirm it myself, as I didn't think she was going to be forthcoming about it, and I needed to make sure she was taking care of herself. She had her headphones in, as she usually did, singing quietly to herself as she sorted files at the huge, hulking file cabinet in the corner. I got up to go to the printer and stopped just behind her. She was intent on her task, and listening to her music full blast. She didn't so much as turn as I stood just behind her. Her hair was like a cloud of auburn silk. I wanted to wrap it around my fist and tilt her head back, hold her in place while I explored her mouth with my tongue. I wanted to bend her supple, long neck as I held her, and keep her supplicant in my hands. I wanted her surrender more than I'd ever wanted anything in my wretched, empty life.

I'd been teasing Amy about being a sociopath, but there was a grain of truth in it. It wasn't normal to be so fixated on one person. It wasn't normal not to care if the rest of the world burned, as long as she was in my arms. I wasn't normal. But it was the kind of not-normal that society adored. Rich, powerful and brilliant, a man who was master of his domain. I was lauded for my focused personality, and undistracted mind. No one knew the things I felt for this woman, young, innocent, mine. No one knew how I longed to possess her, enslave her heart, and keep her forever. I wondered if society would see it as the insane obsession it undoubtedly was, or if it would only seem like a grand love story. Men like me could get away with a lot and still walk in plain sight, admired and praised.

I leaned in and smelled Amy's hair. There was a chance that she would turn, of course, and wonder what the fuck I was doing. And then, I'd tell her. I'd tell her how obsessed I was. I'd tell her how I wanted her, dreamed about her... watched her. And then I'd kiss her and forget about any ideas of

waiting. Fuck rules and forbidden relationships. I didn't care about anything else.

Her hair smelled like coconut and vanilla, and some underlying scent that was just her. She washed it often, I knew, because she played basketball nearly every day. My hand came up to hover just above her shoulders. I wanted to turn her to me and crush her mouth to mine. I wanted to circle her slender neck with my fingers, and bend her to me, feel her precious pulse fluttering against my fingers. I wanted proof that she was real, not only a figment of my fevered obsession.

The printer shook in the corner, spitting out a document, and the sound must have made it through Amy's earphones. She spun around and came up hard against me, standing just behind her.

"Oof! Professor Cole, I'm sorry, I didn't see you there," she said, breathless, and smiling. My hands steadied her, holding her shoulders. Her upper arms were strong, well-developed from all the sports that she played. Even then, my fingers easily spanned them.

"Why are you so tired?" I found myself asking. The question seemed to throw her. Her auburn eyebrows scrunched.

"Who said I was?"

"You're yawning constantly."

"Oh, I just stayed up late to study," she said. She was standing so close, I could see lighter green flecks in her eyes. In the late afternoon light, they looked like hidden gold.

She hadn't made any move to step away from me. I suddenly realised that while I gripped her shoulders her hands had come up under my arms, and she was holding my forearms. She didn't break that grip, even as the minutes stretched out between us.

"Are you lying to me, Miss Mackintosh?" I wondered. She laughed, but it was a lie. I knew Amy's laugh, and this one was hiding something.

"Why would I lie?"

“Because you know I wouldn’t approve of any other reason for being tired,” I told her. “You’re still working at the laundry mat, aren’t you?”

“Nope. I was on a date, if you must know,” she said blithely. It was like throwing a grenade into my heart. I stilled, my grip tightened on her shoulders without meaning to, while I processed what she’d said. She winced.

“You’re hurting me,” she muttered, stepping back and making me drop my grip.

“Likewise,” I murmured, turning away. I didn’t want her to look too closely at my expression right now. I was sure that I looked furious and bereft at the same time.

“What?”

“Nothing. A date? I’m surprised you have time to date, considering your schedule,” I told her flatly.

“Well, it’s thanks to you, actually. Now I have more time, I can do more normal things like other students my age, like date and party and hangout,” she said, folding her arms across her chest, and then fixed me with a challenging look. “Is that a problem?” she asked, sticking her chin up at me in such an obstinate angle I wanted to put her across my knee and teach her not to goad the darkness inside me like this. Not to anger the possessive, angry beast within that had already claimed this woman.

“Why would it be?” I said instead. She shrugged.

“I don’t know. Just tell me if it is,” she insisted.

“Would it change anything if it was? Would you not do it?” I wondered, stepping back into her space. Now that my head had cooled a fraction, analytical thinking was trickling in.

“It depends,” she said.

“On?”

“On why you don’t want me to do it,” she mumbled. The tension between us was unbearable. Her eyes flickered between mine and my mouth, and she poked out the pink tip of

her tongue to wet her lips. What was her angle here? I had to know.

“Maybe it interferes with your work, being tired and all,” I suggested. She rolled her eyes and shook her head.

“In that case, it’s none of your business and I’d still do it,” she said. I advanced a step toward her, scenting something in the air. Like a predator could smell fear, I could sense her vulnerability. She was telling me something, confessing something, and I wanted to hear it. I wouldn’t let her leave without letting me know it.

“So, what reason would there be that stops you?” I murmured. Her back came up against the filing cabinet, trapping her, and I stopped when my jacket was brushing her belt, and all she could see was me.

“You know what,” she muttered.

“Do I? I can’t think of a single thing,” I told her, even as I stepped once more toward her, this time, my chest pressing against hers. I could feel the soft globes of her breasts against my chest. She wasn’t wearing a bra, or at least, it didn’t feel like it, and it sent heat scalding me inside. My hard-on was pressing against my belt, trying to lift it up, and now I fitted it firmly against her soft abdomen. Her eyes widened a fraction, and her lips parted. “Tell me,” I instructed her in no uncertain terms. She shivered, her nipples flourishing into hard points that poked through her thin t-shirt and into my skin.

“I won’t say it,” she said stubbornly. “I won’t.” I brought my hand up to her chin, the same place I’d first touched her, and tilted her head back so her face was presented like an offering for my inspection. A gift for a possessive, obsessed deity. Her eyes fluttered shut and her lips parted, like she thought I was going to kiss her. She wanted me to. The realisation was a gut punch, stealing my breath away.

“Yes, you will,” I told her quietly, as my other hand worked its way through the thick hanging curtain of hair at her nape and gathered it into a thick rope. I wound it around my hand, just like I’d imagined doing. The reality of it felt even better than I’d hoped. I tilted her head to the side, like a

vampire about to feast on innocent blood. “Tell me what you want, Amy, and you will get it,” I told her.

“Really? Anything I want?” she whispered. Her eyes blinking open to meet mine.

“Absolutely anything, little one. I’ll give you everything, and anything you want,” I vowed, words that wrote themselves across my barren heart as I spoke them. It was a lot. The possessiveness in my eyes, the strength of my grip, and power in my command. It might be too much for my good girl. But then, the corners of Amy’s mouth curled in a satisfied, cat-like smirk.

“Ok,” she whispered.

“Ok?” I repeated.

“Yes,” she said again, her eyes falling to my lips. This was it. Her capitulation. The beginning of our forever. I leaned in to touch my forehead against hers, feeling like my heart was literally trying to tear out my chest and find a new home in hers. It was a greater emotion I could remember feeling ever before in my lonely life.

“I’m going to kiss you, little one,” I told her. “And after that, you’ll never think about kissing another,” I continued. Her eyes widened, but the spell wasn’t broken. She simply nodded. Surrender. It was the sweetest thing I’d ever felt. I touched my lips to hers, feeling her sweet breath against my skin for a glorious, precious moment.

A hard knock on the door felt like a spear through my chest.

“Professor Cole? Aaron?” Monica Devany’s voice came through the door. Fucking bitch. I stepped back, feeling icy cold wash over me, as Amy slapped a hand over her mouth and looked horrified. We’d just about been caught breaking the rules, and I couldn’t bring myself to care, except that Amy was upset. That was unacceptable.

“Aaron?” Monica called again.

“A minute,” I ground out harshly,, reaching for Amy. I just wanted to sooth her, reassure her, but panic was already

climbing in her eyes, and she spun away from my reaching hands.

“Amy, stop, you did nothing wrong,” I started. She was heading toward the door.

“Only because of being interrupted,” she tossed back over her shoulder at me, before reaching for the door and flinging it open. Monica jumped back as she took in Amy. She looked between us, clearly wondering what the fuck was going on. I panicked inside, knowing that Amy wasn’t ready for anyone to know. She wasn’t even ready for herself to admit how it was between us.

She turned her face to me, and I saw a tear run down her cheek. It crushed my heart. Then she turned and fled. Literally running down the hall.

“What was that?” Monica asked, coming into the office. I turned away from her, aware that I wasn’t in control of my feelings right now, not to mention sporting a hard-on that could have lifted the desk.

“No extra credit this semester,” I said flatly, sitting and hiding my lower body. Monica sighed and rolled her eyes at me.

“Seriously, Aaron, you don’t have to be such a hard-ass. You know what the students call you, right? The dragon professor,” she chastised. Thankfully, she was easily distracted.

“I’m not here to make friends,” I told her stiffly. “What can I help you with?”

I barely heard her reply. My mind was lingering on Amy, where she was, if she was upset. I felt torn in two. This couldn’t go on.

It was time to end the charade.

CHAPTER 6

Amy

It took me way too long to calm down from the encounter with Professor Cole in his office. I couldn't believe I'd done that. I had flirted shamelessly with him. He was twelve years older than me, strict, uptight and a total control freak. He was also clever, dry-witted, kind and I was fucking in love with him. Could you really fall in love with someone in a week? Someone you aren't even dating? Well, turned out I could. Maybe I had already loved him longer than that. Maybe even from the first time I went to his class and watched him speak. I'd thought it an annoying crush, but it was much more than that.

I was laying down on the plastic seat at the laundry mat. Aaron was right. I hadn't given up this job. I didn't mind it, and I usually slept there. It was warm and smelled good. Was it so wrong to want to save up a little more cash, since the job was so easy? I didn't think so, but Aaron had seemed annoyed about it.

I shifted around in the seat. Tonight, the calm atmosphere in the quiet place wasn't as relaxing as it normally was. Tonight, I was pent up and filled with frustration, and I knew exactly why. That moment hours before had been the hottest thing to ever happen to me, and we had barely touched. If that was what almost being kissed by Aaron was like, what would actual sex be like? I couldn't even imagine it, though I had definitely tried countless times.

"I knew you were lying to me," a deep voice called to me, and sent me skittering off the plastic seat. Aaron stood in the

doorway of the laundry mat. He was wearing a peacoat with collar turned up, and scarf and he looked too delicious. He came in, looking around the place. I squirmed, feeling caught in the lie. “Is this the date you were on that made you so tired?” he asked, coming to sit on the seat opposite me. I stared at him, trying to reconcile my feelings from earlier with the fact that he was here. He had shown up.

“It’s easy money. It doesn’t make good business sense to walk away from that. I like sleeping here. It’s cozy,” I told him. He narrowed his eyes, looking at the glass doors.

“It’s also dangerous, Amy. Anyone could come in, and you’re here, alone, asleep. It’s not smart, and you’re a very smart woman,” he said quietly. My shoulders sagged. I couldn’t really argue with that. It was risky, but nothing had happened so far. I’d gotten complacent, and I knew it. I flopped back and looked up at the fluorescent beams on the ceiling.

“Why does everything have to be so hard?” I wondered aloud. My shame at nearly being caught by Professor Devany crowded in on me and cringed hard.

“What’s so hard?” Aaron asked, watching me intently.

“Life?” I offered. He was quiet. “I’m so embarrassed about before-,” I started. Might as well address the elephant in the room.

“You do not need to be. It’s my fault. I’m the professor,” he said briskly. Right. Of course, he would blame himself for letting me act so badly.

“Right, you’re the responsible adult and I’m just the misguided student-,” I muttered. Aaron frowned at me.

“That’s not what I meant,” he started, but just then, a crowd of night cleaners came through the door. I knew the ladies well, and they usually stayed a couple of hours using the industrial-sized washers.

“I have to get back to work. You didn’t have to come here. It’s fine. I stuck my head in a bucket of iced water and cooled down. Don’t worry about me. You did nothing wrong,” I told

him. Couldn't he see I was the one who had started it? I was the one who had let my crush show. Crush was putting it mildly.

“Neither did you, Amy. Look, I see you're busy. Let's talk tomorrow,” he said, standing, as the ladies in the corner called their greetings to me. I stood up, ready to go and help them. I nodded to him, wrapping my arms around my chest, like that might hold in all the urgent and totally inappropriate feelings that were pressing to get out. Aaron nodded and then turned to the door. He stalked out with that big-dick energy I loved about him, as the ladies exclaimed over ‘my boyfriend’.

“He's not my boyfriend,” I told them again and again. “He's just my professor.”

CHAPTER 7

Caron

The usually peaceful campus was a hive of activity. Apparently, many people had a lot of feelings about the Greek system. A spate of date rape reports had come out lately at Greek parties, along with hazing horror stories. I only had one opinion on it, and the fuss really seemed misplaced. Just eradicate the system, expel the asshole legacy frat boys who thought they ruled the world, and salt the earth where the building had sat, and in time, we would forget that we had once glorified such mediocrity and nepotism.

However, the university wasn't looking to lose the money they wrung from these assholes' parents, and was dragging their feet in punishing or even naming and shaming the guilty parties. Of course, everyone knew on campus, students talked, and in this day and age, it was easier than ever to get the truth out. However, it was equally easy to spread the wrong message. Right now, the university was sending the wrong message, but that was their funeral.

I strode past the tables set up in front of the library where students walked with picket signs and chanted something about fairness and justice. I was only grateful that as a grad student, Amy wasn't interested in attending any events that might draw the slobbering losers who like to drug women instead of seducing or winning their hearts.

I pushed through the doors of the faculty building, noting the extra security presence. It made sense, considering the fog of tension that was clogging the air up today. The campus felt like a tinderbox, and every cry over the loudspeaker, a spark

landing closer and closer. Of course, just to really ignite the situation, the dean had announced the disciplinary committee's decision on the accused frat brothers' futures today, like more fuel was needed for the fire.

I headed toward my office, putting the annoyance at the management's incompetence out of my mind and focusing on more pleasurable things. Things like getting Amy alone. After yesterday's near kiss, I had barely thought of anything else. Amy had dropped her hand, and flashed her cards. My longing wasn't unrequited. She wanted me, and by god, she would have me. I was done waiting, now that I knew Amy's feelings. Everything else, the details of our lives together, we could work out later.

I was surprised to find my office door unlocked, as I turned the handle and went inside. Amy jumped guiltily from the desk and whirled to look at me. I was perplexed, but pleasantly surprised to find her here already.

"Don't tell me I'm late this time?" I wondered, though I knew I wasn't. She shook her head. "You have a key?" I prompted. Her cheeks coloured, an adorable pink colour.

"I copied yours one day, just in case I needed it," she said. "Are you angry?"

"No, why would I be?"

"Maybe you have things in here you don't want me to see," she suggested. I paused in the act of shrugging my coat off.

"Like what?"

"I don't know. You wouldn't tell me if you did," she muttered, turning away. I could feel her agitation from here.

"What's going on, little one? Tell me," I ordered her. I didn't care that it sounded like a command, that was just who I was, and besides, Amy wouldn't tell me for anything less than that. She was stubborn, and headstrong, and god, I loved her for it.

"Are you mad about the key?" she asked again. I shook my head as I approached her, slowly, like an animal I didn't want

to spook. I could feel her energy, it was flighty and electric. A whole storm of thoughts had been going on in her beautiful mind, and I could tell she was close to an edge.

“No. Copy whatever keys you want of mine, little one. Here,” I said, reaching into my pocket and taking out my phone and house key. I set them on the desk between us. “Copy my house key too, and my phone pass code is 0301. Look to your heart’s content.”

“0301. That’s my birthday,” she said quietly, looking pale. I’d decided overnight that it was time to bring this charade to an end. I nodded. She swallowed, her eyes flickering to the things on the desk and then back up to me.

“That’s quite the coincidence,” I said flatly. She narrowed her eyes at me. “Today, thanks to the mess outside, class is cancelled. If you could email my scheduled classes, that would be appreciated.”

I turned away by sheer effort of will and opened my laptop. Even though my eyes were far from her, I felt her presence, as she hesitantly went about her work. It was quiet, with only the occasional squeaking of a chair, or rustle of papers. I could live forever in days like this, quiet and contemplative, alone with Amy.

My office phone rang, jarring us both from the lull that had fallen over the office.

“Cole.”

“Hello Professor Cole. It seems we have a bit of an issue with the demonstration. Some of the other students, mostly fraternities, are counter-protesting the suspensions. They seem a little worked up about it.”

“Of course, they are. They want to make sure that this spat of rightful, yet weak actions against them aren’t encouraged. Add drink, mob mentality, and no doubt some illicit substances to it, and it will be an interesting afternoon on campus,” I muttered. The dean was silent a long moment, no doubt wondering how many of his faculty had seen the

oncoming problems clear as day, while he had been blissfully ignorant, as per usual.

“Well, let’s hope that’s just an exaggeration. However, I have called the police. There’s been some vandalism at the library building,” he admitted.

“Really? It’s barely noon. I’d say we’ll be lucky to still have a campus by nightfall,” I muttered.

“Look—just take off, I suppose. Leave campus, classes are cancelled.”

“Are you worried about me, dean?” I asked him wryly. Turning to watch Amy, as she pretended not to listen. “Don’t worry. I can take care of myself.”

“I know. Well, see you tomorrow.”

“See you tomorrow,” I said and hung up.

“What’s going on?” Amy asked, leaning against the desk.

“There’s going to be trouble on campus tonight, so it’s best if we get out of here,” I told her. She nodded and took her phone out of her pocket.

“Sure, ok. I’ll see you tomorrow,” she said.

“Where are you going? We are going together.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m seeing you safely home, and it’s not up for discussion,” I said quietly, taking her coat from behind the door, and approaching her. She stared at me a long moment with narrowed her eyes.

“I don’t get you, you know. What am I to you?” she asked.

“I just told you that there’s trouble on campus. The library was already defaced.”

“So what? I’m just your student, and your TA. Why do you care if I get home safely?” Amy was staring at me with that challenging look, the one that was born of the tension between us, the uncertainty, the need to break the fragile barriers that demanded that we continue to play the game of student and

teacher. She'd had enough, and so had I. I was in too deep to pull back now.

I stepped closer to her and caged her against the desk. Her eyes went wide as I put my hands on either side of her, and prevented her from moving, but she didn't push me away.

"If you are looking for an answer other than basic common decency, I'll give you one, Amy. Don't ask if you're not ready to hear it."

"I'm ready. For fuck's sake, I'm tired of not knowing. I want the truth from you," she bit out. Her eyes were flickering down to my lips, and I wanted to kiss her hard, mark her skin with my touch, and brand my ownership on every inch of her. Her look made something dark and twisted come alive inside me, something that had been growing since I'd first seen her, and watching her ever since.

"The truth? You already know the truth. You know there is something between us that would see the pages of this institution's rule book on fire. You know that this between us isn't normal or ordinary."

"What is it between us? This thing?" she asked, her pulse hammering in her throat, her breath shallow. I looked down at her, enjoying all the signs of excitement I saw. Savouring the anticipation of finally dropping the mask before this woman and letting my inner crazy show.

"Are you asking because you really don't know, or are you so in denial of your feelings?"

"I'm asking because I don't know. I have no frame of reference for this. I have no measure, no gauge. I don't know how to handle it. I don't understand what I feel inside," she said, all in a rush. My heart quaked in my chest at that confession. "Every time I'm around you, I feel like I'm standing on the edge of a mountain, or a dark, deep abyss, and I don't know whether to cling onto the side, and try to climb up, or-,"

"Or?"

“Or fall,” she muttered. “I don’t know how to be around you with this feeling inside me, and just pretend to me normal,” she continued.

“Then don’t be normal. Stop pretending. Fall.” My words were deep and pulled right from my heart. My sweet little obsession was cracking, her tough façade breaking right in front of me, and it was mesmerizing to watch. “Fall, and I’ll catch you,” I vowed, with a certainty I’d never felt about anything else.

Then, my lips went to hers, finally, and captured them in a kiss of pure want and naked possession.

This woman was mine. I was hers. No one would part us again.

Her lips opened beneath mine immediately, and I swept inside. Sliding my tongue along hers and tugging at her lips with my teeth. She wanted to burn, and I would burn with her. I pushed her back against the desk and pulled her onto it. Folders fell, scattering papers everywhere. I barely noticed. I brought my hands to cup her face, so precious to me, so perfect, and tilted her head to get deeper, to be closer. Her neck beneath my strong fingers was fragile, her pulse fluttering against my fingers as I kissed her hard enough to stop both our hearts. The dam was broken inside me, and the river was running, with no escape.

“I have wanted to kiss you since the moment I laid eyes on you, little one,” I panted against her lips, pulling back just enough to work her t-shirt off, pulling it over her head and tossing it aside. “I’ve thought of nothing else,” I muttered, lowering my hands to her bra, some sporty thing without a clasp. Instead, I pushed my hand into one cup and caressed her breast, savouring the full handful it made, thumbing over her nipple until she cried out, arching her back further into my grip. “Take it off, if you value it,” I muttered, and helped take her hands out. When she was bare before me, I couldn’t help slowing to look at her. Every inch was perfect, and mine. I would stamp my name into her skin, so all could see, and everyone would know. I took her tits in my hands, gripping them tightly, as I kissed her again. She struggled to get closer,

to pull me harder against her. My girl liked a firm hand, and god knew, I had one. I broke off the kiss as she pulled my lower lip between her teeth and bit down hard. I tasted blood as I pulled back. I looked down at her, seeing the dot of red on her lip, and brought a finger to smear it along her lower lip like gloss.

“That’s right, little one. Bite me, scratch me, mark me with your touch. Don’t hold back. I want it to show,” I murmured, and then lowered my head to her breast and sucked a nipple into my mouth. She cried out, a strangled, glorious sound of shock, as my tongue went to work on her, and my barely restrained teeth nibbled at her skin. I wanted to consume her.

Her fingers worked into my hair, pressing my head against her, holding my mouth to her nipple, and I loved it. I would give her everything she craved and more. My fingers dropped to her skirt, sliding the material up her smooth thighs, and then I was there, resting my fingertips against the damp cotton of her panties. “Has anyone ever kissed you here...?” I murmured against her skin, as I pressed her legs wide, and lowered myself to my knees before her. She shook her head, her eyes fixed on me with breathless anticipation. “Good girl. I knew that under all that fire you’d be a good girl... waiting for me.”

My knees met the ground as I knelt and pulled her panties down her legs. She was trembling. Her hesitant touch turned me on like nothing else. My Amy hadn’t gone around letting unworthy idiots fondle her. I was glad. I wanted to worship her like she deserved to be worshipped, and set an example that no other man would ever topple, not that they’d have the chance.

“No one’s ever touched me there, never mind... put their mouth,” she bit off her words in a gasp, as I spread her legs wide, and revealed her glistening pussy to my avid stare. I paused, awed by that confession. My sweetheart was untouched. I’d never dare dream of such a gift. I would be her everything, and she’d never want for attention or pleasure. Her every fantasy would be fulfilled, always.

“Then you honor me,” I told her gravely. She smiled, a small, secret joy that I treasured. Her legs tried to close when I

shifted my grip, and I returned to push them open. “Don’t hide from me.”

“I just feel so... indecent,” she muttered, her cheeks colouring at the confession.

“You’re not indecent. Nothing we do together is indecent. You’re feeling vulnerable and exposed, and that is unnecessary. Nothing about you isn’t beautiful for me. Every single inch is perfection—for me. Don’t feel shy in front of your biggest fan,” I murmured, before leaning in and licking her. First, I pressed a kiss to her clit, and then ran my tongue down the length of her slit, burrowing between the folds to just dip inside and out, and then back up. I brought my finger to tease at her entrance, as I tongued her bud, working into a rhythm and motion that made her gasp and her hips come off the desk.

“It’s too good!” she said in a strangled voice. “I can’t take it,” she panted.

“You can take it. There’s no escape from it. Relax and let it happen,” I told her, recognising that frantic energy that filled her voice as the absolute pleasurable torment of an encroaching orgasm, too strong and new to handle.

I pushed her toward it ruthlessly. This was only the beginning of the pleasure I would wring from Amy’s body. Her muscles started to contract and her thighs tightened around my head, locking me in place against her. With a rough cry, her orgasm tore through her, and her hips thrashed on the desk, while I held her ruthlessly in place and worked her through it, second by second, one pulse of bliss at a time, until she was panting, and releasing into a pool of pleasure on the bed, her limbs boneless, her breath finally even, and hands freeing my head. I leaned in and pressed one more kiss to her centre, and she cried out, a guttural, glorious sound, and jerked one more time, before going limp.

“That was the best thing that has ever happened to me,” she muttered faintly, her voice hoarse. I stood and adjusted my cock, hard as hell, and trying desperately to angle itself toward the tempting sight of Amy’s bare entrance, still hovering

temptingly close. But I was a man of control and discipline, and I wouldn't have my future wife's first time be on a hard desk on a campus that was dangerous to be on. I had to reign in my raging desire and get a grip.

Just as I went to tell her we should leave, and tugged her carefully up, the lights plunged out. I looked around, going to a window that overlooked the quad. I didn't see much of anything out there, but that didn't mean that troublemakers weren't around.

"Aaron?" Amy sounded uncertain, and I hated it. I wanted to make her feel confident and taken care of at all times. It started now.

"We need to get out of here. I want you safe." I told her, helping her stand on shaky legs, and looking for her panties in the dark office.

"It couldn't really be dangerous, could it? I mean, those guys are awful, and I'm so relieved they're finally getting suspended, but I don't think they'd be attacking random people on the quad," Amy said.

"They already attacked random women at their own parties, so I don't know why you think it would be much of an escalation. Someone capable of date raping another person is capable of anything. There is no line there between bad and worse," I told her firmly. "No matter what society has taught you to think..." I added, to soften my words. Amy nodded, accepting the truth to my words. Just because the good old boys' club of lawmakers and judiciary had taught women to think attacks on them were less serious or important than attacking a student or teacher in public didn't make it true.

"Ok, where will we go?" she asked, crowding closely behind me, as I slipped my hand into hers, took my bag, and locked up my office.

"Home, of course. School's out for the day, Miss Mackintosh. Will you play hookie with me?" I teased her, hoping to lighten the anxiety on her brow. She smiled.

"Of course I will, but my place is really close to campus."

“We are going to mine, of course, and we’re going to finish what we started here, if you want to,” I added, glancing back at her, as we reached the doors to the faculty building and pushed outside. She met my eyes and nodded, biting her lip in the most effortlessly sexy way I’d ever seen.

“I want to,” she confessed.

“Good. Let’s go.”

CHAPTER 8

Amy

We made it across campus easily enough. It was quiet, with most students clearing off to avoid any trouble, and enjoying the unexpected free day. Aaron held my hand clasped tightly in his, with no sign that he worried people could see. As long as I'd known the professor, I'd known that he didn't care what people thought about him. Now the veil had dropped between us, he didn't give a fuck if the faculty found out. It didn't matter to me; I was an adult, and soon I'd be done here, and lost in the world, but this was his job, and he was good at it. I hated the thought of him burning bridges, and his reputation here, for me.

We made it to the parking lot before the trouble found us. There was a group gathered around the dean's car, guys in hoodies, like a drawn-up hood, was really going to conceal their identities. There was a horrible smell in the air, like aerosol sprays, and as we neared, I could see that they were making a mess of the faculty cars.

"Look here, it's the dragon professor, Mr Asshole," someone called as we neared. Aaron continued, unperturbed, toward his car, which was so far untouched. "Hey, I'm speaking to you," the voice said closer, and a guy stepped in front of us. Aaron stopped immediately, tugging me behind him.

"I heard, Mr White, but I was doing you a favour in not acknowledging it. Tempers are running high today. I think it best not to make it worse," Aaron said. His tone hadn't changed from his usual terse, dry humor. Vic White, one of the

school's football stars, and one of the guys that had been suspended, sneered.

“Cut the clever words act. You're a dick, just like the rest of them,” he said, and jerked his head toward me. “Don't pretend to be better than us. You like fresh college pussy too, clearly,” he said and then swayed in, clearly drunk. “Word of warning, though, professor. Be careful what you do because even though she's holding your hand now, tomorrow she could turn around and say she never wanted to in the first place... then your ass is toast,” he said. Fury built in me and must have shown on my face, as Vic looked to me, and coloured, turning even redder than he already was. “What, you got something to say, bitch?” he started, and stopped as Aaron's hand landed on his chest, pushing him back.

“Don't start something that you've not got the capacity to finish, Mr White. It won't end well for you.”

“So what, I'll start it if I want,” Vic sneered, and then lurched into a slow, obvious right hook. Aaron simply stepped aside, tugged me behind him, and Vic's punch hit the air beside us, and made him stagger. “Stop moving like a little pussy, bitch. Fight me, like a man,” he goaded Aaron, who merely laughed. His crisp, mocking tone sent chills up my arms. There it was, the darkness that called to me from the man beside me. The smallest slither of edge that promised that Aaron Cole wasn't quite right. The edge that fascinated me.

“But you're not a man, Mr White. You're a boy, and a sloppy, ignorant one at that. Not even your daddy's money can save you, or summon enough charm to get the girls you want without Rohypnol.”

Aaron then moved so fast, I didn't quite see what happened. One moment, Vic was staggering toward us, and then he was falling back so fast his head cracked hard on the asphalt. Aaron crouched beside him, looking perfectly unruffled.

“And the truth is, you'll always be this way. Desperate, unwanted, unloved... merely suffered by people. There is no escape from yourself, and I pity you. Know that if you do

manage to have a family, or friends one day, they pity you, too.” Those quiet, confident words were devastatingly delivered, with soft cold precision and certainty.

Then, with a wintry smile that chilled me, Aaron stood and held his hand out for mine.

“Come on, little one. I’m taking you home, away from this human filth,” he said, and stepped cleanly over Vic, who was staring at him in a daze. I took his hand and followed.

SO, AARON COLE DIDN’T LIVE ON CAMPUS. IN FACT, HE didn’t live in a house that was anything like I’d imagined. It was a campus house, well, near enough campus, and outside seemed tidy, if spartan, but inside was another story. The dark wooden floors, and tasteful art, and array of antiques that dotted the surfaces spoke of a kind of restrained, quiet wealth that I had little experience with. It was hugely luxurious, but not in any showy, or definable way. Even the air smelled expensive and cultured inside.

I stood in the hall, taking off my Converse, suddenly overwhelmingly aware of the differences between us, not only in age, but social position. I was a poor grad student, until recently, working two jobs to get by. Aaron was not only older than me, more intelligent, travelled and cultured, but he was apparently loaded too. I felt completely out of my depth.

“Come on, let’s have some coffee,” he said quietly, watching me with those intense dark eyes that were always too knowing. I looked down at my socked feet, and fought down a curse, as I saw my toe peeking through a hole in one of them. Yep, I was definitely feeling the difference between us right now. I followed him down the tasteful hallway to a beautiful kitchen, full of high-tech appliances and shining counters. There was a vast array of cookbooks along one wall, from every country imaginable. I trailed my fingers along the spines, as he busied himself at the counter, and an intimidatingly fancy coffee machine.

“I wouldn’t have imagined that you cooked much,” I muttered.

“Why not? It’s a fun challenge, and you get to eat the fruits of your labour. It passes the time,” he said, turning on the machine, and letting the sound of steam forcing through delicious smelling grounds fill the air. He was leaning against the counter and watching me as I catalogued his personal space. A collection of records by the window and a vintage player. Rows and rows of books, and an antique clock collection, all set to different times.

“Foreign markets?” I wondered, jerking my head toward them. He nodded silently. I turned back to the books that lined the wall and looked at the titles. A whole lot of business books, classics. Even foreign editions. I pulled out one and lifted it for him to see.

“You speak Italian?”

“It passes the time,” he repeated. My eyes caught his, and the look in them stole my breath away. He was looking at me like I was the next meal he was going to devour, and I didn’t hate it. I didn’t hate it at all. I wanted it. That simple truth was absolutely undeniable. I wanted this man, I wanted him to take me, possess me, order me around. Love me. I wanted it all, and I wanted it with him. Crazy or not, rational or not, it was the truth.

“Here, you take it black, don’t you?” he said, suddenly behind me, and passing me an espresso cup.

“How do you know?”

“Lucky guess,” he said. I sipped the coffee.

“Really? You seem to have a lot of lucky guesses around me,” I muttered. He had moved close to me when he’d handed me the drink, and hadn’t moved away. He sipped his own coffee and watched me.

“You’ve got me. I’ve been stalking you for months,” he teased. My eyes leapt to his for even the slightest sign of honesty.

“Hilarious,” I sighed, knocking back the rest of my coffee. It was caramelly in tone and slid down smoothly.

“You know, I’ve yet to be accused of being funny by anyone other than you.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning, I’m not known to joke around much, Amy, so maybe you should believe me more often,” he said, taking my empty cup from my hand and setting it down on the shelf just past my head with his own. The movement sent him closer, and I had to step back to avoid bumping into him. That forced step brought my back against the bookcases, and he didn’t move away. I was once again caged against him. My heart started to pound in my chest, and images of his hot mouth between my legs, only an hour ago, surged into my mind. God help me, I might literally go up in flames around this man.

“So far you’ve hinted at being a sociopath and a stalker, so if I was to take you seriously, I should probably leave,” I muttered, bringing my hands up to his chest. His shirt was crisp beneath my fingers, and I slid them over his pecs, enjoying the feeling of his rounded muscles beneath.

“The door is there, and I won’t stop you, if that’s what you really want. If not, and you decide to stay, I don’t want secrets between us. I want you, that much is plain. I’ve wanted you since we first met, and I am a man who pursues what he wants. I’ll not sugar-coat that about myself.”

“So... you’ve had me now, right?”

“Amy, I’ve only just begun the things that I want to do to you. I’m not the kind of man who fucks around. I’m the kind of man who becomes obsessed and commits. I’ve never wanted anyone like I want you, and I never will again.”

“Obsessed?”

“That’s right. Obsessed. You deserve to know that, so you can make an informed decision. If you give yourself to me, little one, I will never let you go. Know that now, and stay knowing that... or leave. Now is the time to decide it.”

“You feel like that now, before we’ve... hooked up. You’ll feel differently after. Isn’t that what men do?”

“Not me. I might look like other men, walk and talk and function like other men, but I’m not like them underneath. I’m something else, and I want you to understand it. You want a guarantee from me I’m not just after sex, then you’ll have it, whatever you want. Take my house key, and my bank cards, and keep me hostage. I’ll welcome it. Marry me, if you want to be sure,” he said, leaning in to press a kiss to my cheek, his lips trailing gently over my skin.

“Marry you?” I repeated, my mind blanked with shock. He moved his lips to my ear, his hot breath scorching me with want.

“Marry me – why not? There’s no point in delaying the inevitable. Be my wife, belong to me, and I will be your slave,” he whispered.

“My slave?” I repeated. My mouth was so dry it felt like kindling before the match touches. He nodded, and then brought his hand up to trace over my lips, his finger pressing against the seam of my lips.

“Let me show you,” he commanded huskily. His fingers fell to the hem of my t-shirt, and he pushed it up, his skin scalding mine. My breasts still felt heavy and achy after his earlier kisses, and now, as he pulled my t-shirt from me, and my bra followed, I knew I was powerless in his arms. Logic, fear and doubt couldn’t hold a candle to the way he made me feel. This was it. The rightness of being in his hands filled me, and I knew it in my bones. This connection wasn’t ordinary. Sometimes, if you’re very lucky, you meet someone who fits you, like they were born to find you, and stay by your side forever. I’d never been much of a hopeless romantic, and yet, in Aaron’s arms, I felt right in a way I never had. In a way, I hadn’t even understood, until this moment.

He picked me up, holding me tightly against his broad chest, and sweeping out the room.

“Where are we going?” I murmured, as I watched the underside of his tight, stubbled jaw, and revelled in the feeling

of being held so carefully by this man.

“Bed. I’m not taking you for the first time anywhere else. You deserve the softest pillows and sheets, and everything I’m going to give you,” he said, looking down right into my eyes. “I’m going to give you the best of everything I can, Amy Mackintosh. All you have to do is let me.”

“Why me?” I heard myself ask. A small, creeping doubt and anxiety I couldn’t quite shake.

“Why not you? There isn’t a reason people click like they do... they just do. Don’t fight it, or question it... there is no explanation, except how you feel right now. It’s enough for me,” he said quietly, as we reached his room, and he shouldered inside. His bed was enormous, and luxurious looking, with plump pillows and satiny sheets. He laid me flat, and I wriggled back up the bed to watch him as he undressed. His eyes never left mine as he stripped off his shirt, and I got the first glimpse of his torso. I could only hope my mouth wasn’t hanging open.

“You know professors aren’t supposed to be so hot and thick, you know that?” I asked him. He flashed me a wolfish grin.

“And grad students aren’t meant to be so utterly tempting, but here we are. Two of a kind, meant to be together,” he said. His hands had moved to his belt, and he pulled the leather efficiently through the loops, and loosened his pants, with one more economic movement, he pushed down his boxers and slacks and stood. His cock was rising against his abdomen, straining and red, lined with thick veins. I was staring at it. I couldn’t help myself wriggling closer, and reaching out to trace the slit at the top.

“This is the first dick I’ve seen in real life,” I confessed, and at my words, Aaron’s member leapt, clear fluid leaking from the top. “Do you like that?” I wondered, now lowering my finger to scratch up the long length of him. He was a good nine inches and thick. It would definitely take two hands to cover his girth completely.

“Fuck, yeah, I like that. I never thought that I would get to be your first. I only ever planned to be your last,” he murmured. I cupped his balls, hanging heavily down between his legs, and gently tugged. I raised an eyebrow, looking up at him, and enjoyed the way the muscles of his neck were corded with tension, and his hands in fist, fighting the urge to reach for me. The big, bad dragon professor, shaking with want at my touch.

“My last? Why’s that? You planning on killing me?” I teased, thinking about that darkness about this man, that for some reason only ever drew me in, and never away. His dark eyes creased at the corners as he shook his head.

“I plan on being your lover forever and a day. Your husband, partner and fucking soulmate, Amy,” he said, sounding raw now, as I wrapped both hands around him, and experimentally moved up and down. He let out a ragged groan. “If you keep this up, I won’t be doing much of anything tonight,” he confessed, dipping his hips out of my reach. I pouted with annoyance.

“But I don’t even know what to do yet,” I complained, and then bit my lip, just to drive him mad. I loved to toy with this man, I realised. It was my new favourite thing to do. “As my professor, you really ought to teach me. Using your body as the practise dummy is the most straightforward option, really,” I said, as Aaron’s eyes flashed darker than ever, and he reached for me, prowling over me, and sending me back on the bed with a squeal.

“Enough. You’re really going to break me. No talking in class, from now on,” he snapped, and started to pull my remaining clothes off. My skirt sailed away into a corner, and then my panties, and I was naked. I felt far less embarrassed this time than earlier. He’d already seen it all, and was clearly ready for more. I felt beautiful in his fiery gaze.

His hand wandered down my body, pinching my nipples until I arched into his touch and then lower, slipping between my legs.

“My my, Miss Mackintosh. Still so wet and needy, aren’t you, greedy girl?” he said in a filthy, low mutter. I nodded, widening my legs and trying to encourage him to touch me more. He was moving a slow, torturous circle on my clit, and that was it. Even that was delicious beyond belief. “Don’t worry, I’m here to give you every single filthy thing you want,” he continued, and slipped a finger inside me. I tensed, enjoying the feeling, but needing more.

“More. I want more,” I finally confessed, as he fingered me slowly. I was still so wet from earlier, the noise of my readiness filled the air between us. He nodded, and shifted his body so he was poised over me, his hips leaning against mine.

“I see. Ask and you’ll get, sweetheart,” he said and brought both hands up to cup my face, kissing me deeply, while I could feel his hardness poking at my inner thigh, maddeningly close, but not close enough to take him inside. His hands came up to hold mine, and pulled them above my head, so I was pinned to the mattress, and suppliant beneath him, and his hips finally found their place, and the head of him slipped inside me. It was a tight fit, but I was so ready, I welcomed him. He muttered a curse as he began to enter. My muscles gripped him the entire way in, and I cried out at the sudden pain of him pushing past the last barrier of my inexperience and reaching his end. I was breathing hard, and so was he. His chest was pressed tightly against mine, and I could almost feel his heart beating against my ribcage. I felt completely in sync with this man, closer than close, gathered against his heart, as he started to move. Slowly, and with a tortured groan, he slid in and out. I tensed at first, the feeling new, and raw, and yet, soon, with my copious juices, and his careful stretching, his thrusts soon grew hard, and longer, and the pain faded gently away. I let myself fall completely under his power. I couldn’t move except to raise my hips and welcome him, I couldn’t stop, because stopping would kill me, the feeling inside was so much. I couldn’t even look away from his possessive dark eyes, as he leaned over me, making a space between our sweating bodies, and snaked a hand between us to find my clit, already so sensitive from the afternoon. His eyes bored into mine and he drank down my

every reaction, as he circled me evenly, and thrust into me at the same time. I rose quickly, too quickly, but I had no tether for this feeling. There was nothing keeping me grounded as I soared into a peak higher than anything I'd ever imagined. All throughout, Aaron watched me, never stopping his hand or hips from the movements that only sent me higher and higher. Every muscle inside me tensed, and I gripped him harder than ever, as my eyes locked on his, and he saw the pleasure destroy me. He followed with a rough growl, whether from my core milking him hard, or the look of utter desperate need and desire in my eyes. I don't know. All I knew was that my dearly beloved professor went rigid, his whole body drawing in and becoming harder, and then a blossoming warmth deep inside me. He came for a long time, his length pulsing inside me, as my greedy body sucked up every drop of him. I felt sated, and filthy, and wholly debauched, and it was an addicting feeling. I realised we hadn't even discussed protection, too caught up in the moment. I was on the shot, not that I'd really needed it, but I liked the routine of it. Apart from pregnancy, I trusted Aaron. He wasn't some sloppy frat boy, going around spreading STDs wherever he went. He was a man. He was responsible. He took charge, and I liked that a lot. I loved it. He pulled from me gently, peppering kisses across my forehead. I felt so tired, a sudden fatigue pressing me down into the mattress. I had held this taboo fantasy for so long that my sexy professor might want me back. Finally, living it felt surreal.

“Are you alright?” Aaron asked, as I lay beside him, looking up at the ceiling in a daze. I nodded.

“Just tired,” I confessed. I should speak to him about tomorrow, and what happens in class. I should make sure I knew what to do, so it didn't embarrass him, and yet, sleepiness was stealing my thoughts away.

“Sleep Amy. Sleep, and recover, and let me hold you,” I heard Aaron said, and the feeling of his warm body coming to spoon against me. Then all the worries and anxieties faded away into a haze of blissful contentment, and I thought no more.

CHAPTER 9

Amy

I woke suddenly, the memory of last night shaking me from my dreams, and into reality. Crisp, expensive sheets and Aaron's scent surrounded me. I breathed it in, a huge, greedy lungful, and pulled my face from the pillow with difficulty. I squinted toward the other side of the bed and saw it empty, the white sheets mocking me. Where was Aaron? I sat up, feeling sore all over, in the best way. I was pretty sure my body had plenty of marks on it from last night, palm marks, bite marks, bruises, undoubtedly, but I was also sure that Aaron's had just as many. We were animals last night and I couldn't bring myself to care at all.

"Aaron?" I called, and silence greeted me. There was no running shower sound, or clatters in the kitchen. A squirming feeling of unease filled me. Had I been naïve, after all? Was I the most gullible person around?

My phone vibrated wildly on the bedside table. I reached and grabbed it, my heart in my mouth.

"Hello?"

"Oh, good morning, Miss Mackintosh. This is the Dean. Would you be available to come into see me this morning? If it's not too much trouble?" The dean said. Fear replaced everything else inside me. Oh my god, this was it. I'd finally followed through on my crazy, forbidden fantasy of sleeping with the professor I had a desperate crush on and was immediately in trouble. Wow, sometimes karma is a fast-acting bitch.

“Of course, I can be there by ten,” I said, glancing at the clock.

“Ok, great. Ten it is. See you soon.”

I threw myself out of bed and got dressed. How the fuck had we gotten caught so quickly?

I looked around the room, and made sure all my stuff was in my pockets, and headed for the door.

“THANK YOU FOR COMING SO QUICKLY, MISS MACKINTOSH. I hope I wasn't interrupting you this morning,” the Dean said, and I searched his eyes wildly for some sign that he was fucking with me. He couldn't possibly know I'd woken up in Professor Cole's bed, my leg muscles still smarting from last night, right?

“No, it's er, fine, of course,” I muttered, twisting the cuffs of my jacket nervously, a habit I'd thought I'd grown out of in tenth grade but apparently sitting in the dean's office was the only trigger I needed to bring back the childish habit.

“Well, let me get down to the reason I asked you to come in. First, I apologise for the trouble on campus yesterday. Professor Cole reassured me he saw you safely off the premises?”

“Yes, he did,” I said. God, this was excruciating.

“Good, that is good. The other reason, other than to apologize, of course, is some bad news, I'm afraid. You'll have to find another TA position, as Professor Cole is going to be leaving us, effective rather immediately, I'm afraid,” the Dean said. I was stunned. It was happening. My worst nightmare was happening. Aaron and I had given in to the electric chemistry between us, and now we were both in the shit. He'd lost his job. Guilt and worry filled me.

“Why?” I heard myself ask.

“You don’t know?” he said, raising an eyebrow at me. I tensed, squirming like never before. This was every school telling off I’d never had but had always feared times one hundred. “I was sure he would have shared it with you. He’s taking a break to work on a book deal he’s landed. Quite the lucrative offer, or so I gather.”

I blinked at him.

“A book deal?” I repeated. He nodded.

“Yes, our rising star professor is moving to greener pastures, but assures me he’ll always keep in touch, and come in for guest lectures when we need him. I let him out of his contract so quickly precisely to ensure that,” he said, smiling, as if he had done anything other than give Aaron what he’d wanted.

I couldn’t get my head around it. It was all so startling and odd, and I couldn’t help but want to get my phone out and call him right away. What was he doing? Thinking? Was I factoring into this thought process?

“So, you’ll have to find another job if we can’t find another teacher who is looking for a TA,” the Dean was saying. I nodded numbly, standing up.

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll work something out,” I told him, and turned from the room.

THE CAMPUS WAS GREEN, AND PEACEFUL THIS MORNING, AFTER the mayhem of yesterday, though the marks remained. There was graffiti on the library, and benches and common spaces had been vandalised. The coffee shop’s windows were broken, and cones sat around the sizeable area of broken glass, sparkling in the morning light. I wondered in a bit of a daze along the path toward my building. My mind was racing, and I couldn’t ignore the shaky feeling in my gut that the thought of Aaron getting in trouble because of me flourished inside me. In my rational mind, I knew it took two to tango, and yet I felt wretched. I already cared for him so much, somehow. Had I liked him like this all along?

I turned toward my shoddy campus housing. After the beauty of Aaron's place, it was going to feel especially cheap and less than cheerful, but what else could I do? I pulled my phone and checked it about a hundred times on the way. There were no missed calls. The silence was deafening.

As I rounded the corner to my building, tears tickling my eyelids madly at this point, I was grateful I was nearly there, so I could collapse in a heap in my room and cry my eyes out like a toddler. It was going to be an epic cry. I could feel it already.

And then, just like that, I saw him.

Before the building was a small van, and there were men walking up and down the stairs, carrying things. Someone was moving, it seemed, mid-semester, which was weird, but not unheard of. There, amid it all, was Professor Cole, directing the workers this way and that, a man in charge.

It seemed that the person who was moving was me.

Excitement and nerves and pure, bewilderment filled me as I made my way toward him. I saw my old chipped vanity table being carried down the stairs.

"Wait, are these my things?" I asked, catching up with one of the guys. He simply shrugged, and nodded toward Aaron, who had turned to me, and was watching me with that dark intensity I saw in my dreams. "Am I moving?" I asked him, unsure what to think. Was I being kicked out of uni after all for sleeping with a professor?

"Yes, of course, you are," he said shortly, reaching for me as soon as I was close enough. His brawny arms went around my waist, and he pressed a kiss to my forehead.

"Where to?"

"My place, or I should say, our place," he said simply, as if he hadn't seemed to have lost his mind.

"We are moving in together?" I repeated incredulously. I should be mad at his highhandedness, or his pushy arrogance. I should feel something other than my heart pounding in my chest with excitement that I'd never felt before.

“I told you last night, Amy. I’m an all-or-nothing kind of man. You wanted me, you wanted this, so it’s all in for me. It makes little sense for my future wife to live in anything less than luxury while she follows her dreams and finishes her degree,” he said.

“That’s crazy,” I said numbly.

“Crazy or not, you want it... don’t you?” he pressed. Well, hell, there was only one answer to that question in my heart, and I couldn’t lie.

“What about your job?”

“Didn’t the dean tell you? I’m no longer your professor, as of this morning, and am no longer employed by the university.”

“But you loved that job,” I started, and broke off when Aaron laughed.

“I loved you, and would have taken any job to see you every day. Without you, I’d have packed in teaching months ago. It’s not for me.” His words echoed again and again in my head, like a deafening roar.

“You love me?” I repeated. He nodded.

“I do and you love me back. Don’t even try to deny it.”

I shook my head, a smile I couldn’t contain, jumping to my lips.

“I have no poker face, remember? I won’t try to deny it. There’s no point,” I agreed. He laughed, a booming sound that made me warm inside. “So, what’s the plan, then?” I asked, looking at my stuff filling up the truck.

“Finish your degree in a few months, and get married. I should probably write the book at some point. Choose on the map which city you want to work in, London, Paris, New York, you name it, and we go there. House, kids, delirious happiness etc,” he said, pulling me more firmly against him.

“Oh, is that all? You’ve not really put much thought into this, have you?” I teased him. He grinned.

“I came up with this very plan on our first class together, the one where you called me out on a fact that was outdated in my slides. I was so annoyed, and then, just like that... I was in love.”

“Just like that?” I repeated, wondering at the sheer madness and yet, undeniable truth of what he was saying. I understood his brand of madness, because I felt it too.

“All or nothing, remember?” he repeated, holding me close. I nodded. For this man, to be in his arms, to be his love and obsession, I would choose all, every single time.

Three years later

Amy

London in the early morning summer light was like something out of a movie. Black cabs drove through pretty old streets, lined with flowering beds, and cute pubs and colourful Victorian buildings. Here, in Notting Hill, you could even spot a real life red telephone box. I loved our little neighbourhood, tucked in the heart of one of the busiest, most vibrant cities in the world. We had been here for two years, and just bought our own place six months ago. A Georgian era townhouse with four bedrooms, three baths, and the most rare and precious thing of all, right in the city's heart – a garden.

I sat that morning drinking tea, as I was obliged to, being a UK resident, and answering work emails. Aaron sat opposite, reading an actual paper, and sipping coffee. My phone chimed on the table and I went to pick it up, but my husband was quicker. He clicked on the message notification and frowned. My grumpy professor had only gotten hotter in the last three years, with a sprinkling of grey at his temples, and new, previously unused laugh lines appearing on his tanned face.

“Why does this John whatever keep messaging you?” he asked. I sighed and held my hand out for my phone.

“Because we are working on the same project together. The Tokyo agency one, remember?” I said. Aaron frowned only more.

“Doesn't he know you're married?”

“He knows. He’s married too, in fact. Don’t worry, I’ll make sure to tell him again when we leave for the work trip on the weekend,” I said sweetly. Aaron put down his paper now and focused on me.

“You are going with John to Tokyo?”

“Yes, just the two of us, separate rooms though,” I said, tossing my hair back over my shoulder. I loved to toy with Aaron just as much today as I had three years ago. My possessive, OTT husband never failed to make me smile at his antics. He might be crazy, but he was crazy about me, and I couldn’t pretend I didn’t feel the same.

“Why didn’t I know about this?” he asked.

“Because you’re not my boss?” I offered. He scowled. “And no, for the tenth time, you can’t buy the company. That’s not a cute look, Mr Cole,” I said to him, hiding my amusement. His eyes narrowed as I picked up my toast and took a bite.

“Well, in that case, perhaps I’ll take that speaking invitation I had turned down in Japan next week,” he said instead, picking up his phone and tapping away at it. My professor turned author husband had become a well-known name in the investment world, practically a household brand at this point. He wrote books on the subject, gave talks, and of course, amassed his own fortune following his own advice. Our fortune, I should say. I of course, already knew about his Japanese invitation to speak, and had been dreading taking the trip without him. When work got too busy, it was possible not to see him for a week at a time, and it was like torture. Of course, I couldn’t admit that to him, as our ongoing rivalry prohibited it. He liked to challenge me, just as much as he had when we’d first met, and I loved to give him hell back. There was nothing as exciting as the prospect of tangling with my bossy dragon professor.

“You’re free to do what you want to, of course,” I said, tapping away at my phone. He didn’t know that not only was John happily married, but his spouse’s name was Eric. A long finger appeared over my screen and pushed my phone down.

“Mrs Cole, I don’t think you’re paying attention to your teacher,” he said in the quiet, demanding tone that always set my skin on fire. It was our playing tone, the tone that often kick-started hours of naughty fun. I batted my eyes at him and shrugged.

“If you think so, do something about it,” I baited him. He smirked, a tightly controlled display of his pleasure, before he stood up from the table and took my teacup from my hand. He set it down, and pulled me up into his arms, and then over his shoulder. I squealed in surprise, and I couldn’t lie, anticipation.

“Oh, I’m going to do something about it, Mrs Cole,” he said, and turned toward the house. As we walked and I wriggled, he smacked my ass hard with a hand, right where I liked it, stilling me for a moment. “Keep that up, and you’ll need a hard lesson upstairs on being good,” he warned, a smile in his voice. I considered that offer a moment and wiggled madly. Aaron laughed, that hearty booming sound I got to hear every day now, and put his hand to my ass, squeezing a handful through my dress.

“Message received Mrs Cole. Class is in session.”

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