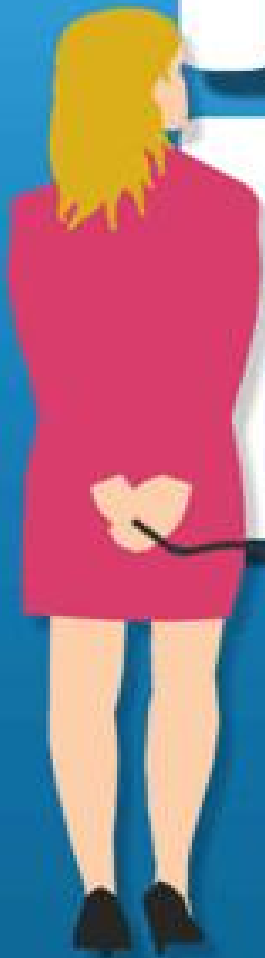


# MY RUFF BÄSS



OPHELIA JEWELS

My Ruff Boss  
A Grumpy Billionaire Boss Romantic  
Comedy  
Ophelia Jewels

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# The Boring Stuff

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Everything in this novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, and incidents are portrayed in it are the work of the author's dirty imagination. *Though, if this has happened to you, I am insanely jealous.*

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**Cover by** Ophelia Jewels. *Triple threat right here folks. She can write, she can design, and she can... I'll get back to you.*

**Edited by** Ophelia Jewels. *Thanks to the advances in technology. If there's any mistakes blame the robot uprising.*

**Supported by Lavandar, Duckie and my author team.  
Not to forget long nights, coffee, tea and all the sugar.**

# Author's Note

This book is dedicate the world's current billionaire's.  
Thank you letting fictional billionaires shine.

**An important note:**

**NO DOGS ARE HARMED IN THIS  
BOOK.**

All of them are loved, happy and spoiled A.F.

# Chapter One

## Faye

Banana fucking shenanigans! My stupid heels click on the lobby's marble floor. I'm late. So late.

"No, we are *not* late." I say to the basket of squirming puppies in my arms, like it would help.

Four metal elevators hold the finish line. I double tap the up button. And then again. And once more. In case it does make a difference. But none of the elevators are near the lobby. Dang it.

I take a breath and peer into the basket. Three pairs of adorable eyes melt my heart and worries like an ice-cream cone on a summer day. "You doing okay?" I smile. "It won't be long before you're free."

The elevator doors open to a man. Not just any man. A stop my heart, and make me second guess my underwear choice man.

His gray suit is gorgeous, pulling tight around his muscular frame. Every detail is perfect. The color matches the slight peppering in his hair. The white shirt has crisp edges. Elegant and sophisticated. Almost like he is from one of those weird perfume adverts. The ones where you don't know what they are selling, the product or luxurious sex. And we all know it's the latter.

Yep. I should have trusted my gut and the fact this is the fanciest building in the city. My dinosaur blouse is not up to James Bond standards. Even if it's rawresome.

The man's hand flies out, catching the closing door.

"Thanks." I say.

His dark eyes pierce into the basket as if he is a child trying to use x-ray vision on his Christmas present. But not in a happy, excited way. No, he knows it's another pair of socks from grandma.



“Puppies.” I say. “Allergies?”

The stranger’s grip tightens, knuckles puncturing with white.

“Cynophobia?”

No response.

“Woof. Woof. No?”

A small muscle in Mr Tall-Dark-And-Silent’s jaw twinges.

A flush of heat crashes over my cheeks. Oh no, I just barked at a complete stranger. It’s fine, totally fine. *Dork*. “Well, as much as I would love to bark at you all day. I have places to be, so am I coming with you or waiting for the next one?”

The man’s shoulders drop with a sigh, and he moves to the side.

“Thank you.” I step into the elevator. Light fruit and woody scents infiltrate my nose.

Tall-Dark-And-Silent stares at the doors. I reach for the elevator buttons, but the floor is already lit up. Great! There hasn’t been a person I met that needed a puppy cuddle session more than him.

“Are you looking to adopt a puppy?” I ask.

Silence.

“Well as a thanks for the ride, I will be sure to tell the puppies not to pee on you.” I lean to the side, closer to him. “But between you and me, I don’t think they will listen.”

Wow. Nothing. Not even a smile? Fine. I get it. No sense of humor. No dogs. No talking.

Out of the corner of my eye, I scan over him. Perhaps this is the rich thing Charlotte talks about. It’s not all about the flashy products but superior ones. And damn, that suit is good. At least according to the butterflies in my stomach.

Two floors up and we stop. The doors open to a young man wearing thick glasses which do nothing to hide the racoon eyes. He is holding a mountain of paperwork and muttering under his breath. Okay, move over Tall-Dark-And-Silent. We

just got a new contender for the person-who-needs-a-puppy-break-the-most award.

Another floor and the silence is gnawing at my soul. “So how’s everyone’s morning?”

Both of the men stare at me as if I have grown another head.

“Well, my morning has been quite uplifting.” I snort at my joke. At least one person will have fun during this ride. “Suppose there’s many levels to that, though.”

The elevator stops, and the paperwork man gets off.

“Must have pushed his buttons.” I laugh. I am on fire today.

For a split second, I swear Tall-Dark-And-Silent smiles. No, not a smile. A smirk? A curl? Lip twitch. Well, whatever it was, it at least proves he’s not a cyborg.

I stare at the metallic doors. I am sure I have missed an elevator pun. You totally floor me? That will sound like I am flirting with him and I am not flirting with him... then again. What would Honey say? Be you, Faye. If you want to flirt, flirt. Have fun. What is he going to do?

Imaginary Honey in my mind is right. What is going to happen? He flirts back? He sweeps me off my feet? Or he becomes a stalker and finds out where I live... well, I am going to have to move out of the city regardless soon, so... why not have some fun?

Our eyes catch. Tall-Dark-And-Silent arches an eyebrow. My heart jumps to my throat.

“I... I...” A heat of embarrassment floods my cheeks. “Just so you know I am here to ride the elevator, not—” you. My stomach clutches with a laugh, cutting off my words. I am so taking this ‘be yourself’ mantra too far. This isn’t me. I don’t flirt with hot strangers who are way too good for me. “Never mind.”

Tall-Dark-And-Silent knits his eyebrows tight. Yeah, like he didn’t know how I was going to end that sentence.

I gaze back at our reflections on the door. It wouldn’t have worked, anyway. He is refinement with a capital R, and I... I

am a mess.

Shitake mushrooms. My curls have taken a serious vengeance against today's humidity. There is something that I do not want to know what it is, stained on the pink T-Rex near my collar. My wrinkled pant legs are covered in dog hair. And Honey's heels, well the heels are scuffed—no surprise there. I should have worn my sneakers. But no, a part of me had to make sure I fit in with the business attire on some level. I need to sort this out.

“Hey, can you do me a favor?” I ask the man.

The man cocks his head to the side.

“Can you hold this for a moment, please?” I hold out the basket of puppies. “I promise, it will take them two whole minutes to chew their way out. So there's plenty of time.”

Tall-Dark-And-Silent reaches out, but hesitates. “How long have they been in there?”

Oh, he can speak. And not only that, but he can speak in a spine tingling voice. Low and deep, as if he's whispering on my shoulder. No wonder he's quiet with a super power like that.

“Please,” I ask again.

The man takes the basket of puppies and holds them out at arm's length.

“Thanks.” I yank my hair tie out. Bend over. Shake. And gather my hair back up into a tight knot. “First day. Figure I should make a good impression. Even though I am sure no one notices me compared to the pups. But got to be professional in front of the boss and all that.” And damn do I need the business.

“Mhmm.” The man murmurs, eyes locking onto my shirt. Yes, yes. I get it. Next time I won't listen to Honey and her encouragement to always be myself and own it. In some situations, you have to fit in and not be the dork you are. A boring shirt next time.

Licking my thumb, I rub the stain on the blouse. Luckily, it seems to be coffee.

“Hopefully I am not over dressed.” I say.

The man raises an eyebrow.

“The company I am going to. Deep Throb.” I chuckle. “Sounds like I should be in my nice lingerie and brought blindfolds for the innocent puppy eyes.”

“It’s a dating app.” He says under his breath.

I take back the basket. “I know.” I smile. “I am sure it is *a* type of dating app. Not shaming anyone who would use it. Sometimes you just want a good deep throb.” A breath catches in my throat. “I know I do.”

The man’s lips purse tight.

Cheese and delicious cheddar, abandon the conversation. I should not be hitting on him. Where’s the emergency escape button? “Sorry, didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

“You didn’t.”

I swallow hard. “Well, it’s a strange name regardless... Deep Throb. There must be a board room laughing their heads off somewhere.”

Tall-Dark-And-Silent’s jaw clenches and the elevator doors open. I follow the man out and into a gorgeous office space. Cubicles lead to a grand office behind a glass partition. Everything is clean and white. Hints of blue and aqua accents pieces are dotted around the place. It’s beautiful and less... leathery than I expected.

“That was quick, Mr Hunnd.” The chirpy blond receptionist sighs.

Wait.

Back up.

That’s Mr Hunnd.

Dang it, he looks nothing like his brother. Dash is so more... like a Labrador puppy. This Hunnd is a bulldog pouting in the

corner. So much for the professional impression to the rich-ass CEO who has hired you, Faye. Well, it can't be worse than the I called the police man who pulled me over Daddy.

“You're Mr Hunnd?” I stutter.

Mr Hunnd nods.

I place the basket on the reception desk and extend my hand for a shake. “It's lovely to meet you Mr Hunnd.” I smile.

An eyebrow cocks, but he doesn't shake my hand. He straightens his tie and walks away.

Rude.

“It's nice to meet you too.” I call out after him.

He freezes.

“Thank you for taking the puppies. You were a great help.” I say to his back.

There is no reply. Of course, not. What is up his butt? Not politeness, that's for sure. But there's something about him. Something that just makes me want to crack his shell, and see him smile.

“No problem. I will show you where to set up. By the way, Puppy Break sounds like a great idea. My employees will love it and no doubt adopt some. Personally, I can't wait to play with them.” I mimic his deep voice. It's terrible, but it makes the receptionist cackle.

“I don't like dogs.” Mr Hunnd states stalking away.

What might as well be hundreds of eyes peer over the sea of cubicles toward us. This might not be the best idea I've had. But I am not letting him have the last word.

“Well. Deep Throb is a porn studio name.” I say too loud. “And not a good one.”

# Chapter Two

## L

“Will you stop it?” Charlotte says.

I can't draw my eyes away, though. There are tiny fluffy balls of terror bouncing around my conference room. My employees are rolling around on the carpet. And there's laughter, buckets and buckets of laughter. And it's all because of her. That breath of fresh air who hasn't even glanced at me since the reception desk.

“The pen will break if you keep clicking it like that.” Charlotte sings.

I slam the pen down on the desk.

Fuck. I shouldn't have done that. At least Charlotte doesn't to seem to have noticed my outburst, or at the very least isn't reacting to it. I guess that's what happens when you're my soon-to-be sister-in-law. You get used to me.

“This is all your fault.” I murmur, sweeping the pen into the desk drawer.

“Really?” Charlotte rolls her eyes. “The employees, *your* employees, have been working their asses off to get this app ready to launch. They deserve some downtime, or do you always want the label of grumpy boss?”

I chew on my cheek, ignoring the remark of grumpy, it makes me sound like my father. Charlotte is right, though. I owe my employees more than I give. But did it have to be dogs? And did their commander have to be so... so... I don't know... nice?

Charlotte brushes a lock of hair behind her ear, and she stares at me. Deep into my soul, as if she is trying to read my inner thoughts. I stare back. Her eyes squint.

Suddenly, Charlotte's eyebrows hit the roof. “You like Faye!”

“What.” I snap, blinking. Dang it.

Faye? So that's her name. Faye. I believe it means fairy. It suits her, I can imagine her as a fairy of light and hope.

"Do you? Do you like Faye?"

That's what I thought she said, and yet the question still doesn't make much sense. Like her as in... we had a pleasant ride together. A heartbeat thumps in my throat with the racing images of us together. A sweetness I don't deserve to taste. The beaming smile as I kiss her in the right place. And even the snort when I tell her something funny.

And once again, I am staring at the conference room.

"So, you're not denying it then?" Charlotte brings me back to reality.

"No." I say.

Charlotte's lips part into a wicked smile,. My stomach rolls.

"No. I mean, no, I don't like her."

A fleeting glimmer flashes in her eyes and a hand shoots for her phone. Oh great, she's going to snitch on me.

"Touch your phone and I will have all the puppies lick your face."

Charlotte drops her hand to her side. A dramatic pout on her face. "You know that is why we brought them here. Some people like puppy kisses."

Disgusting. Do people not know where a dog's tongue has been? And their paws. The tiny little *so* not cute toe beans dragging in who knows what from outside.

Charlotte's fingers drift over her pocket.

"Do not tell Dash." I warn.

"Tell Dash what?" She says in a sing song voice. They are as bad as each other.

"You know what." I grunt, opening a manilla folder in front of me. Growth projection predictions. I have already been through this. But at least the numbers are better than looking at Faye or Charlotte's all-knowing smile.

“Dash likes Faye. I like Faye. She’s fantastic. It’s not like she’s some scary witch, or your mother.”

We both shudder.

That’s right, Charlotte and Faye are friends. Faye is the one who organized the adoption of Dash’s own ball of slobber. The only reason I said yes to this was because Charlotte kept going on and on about an idea she had and it made her shut up. Well, that, and the whole creating a business and app has turned my brain to mush.

“Fine.” Charlotte slumps into her chair. “I get it. Dash will be at you like a dog gnawing a bone.”

The pun is not as elegant as Faye’s.

“Thanks.” I mumble.

“You do like Faye, don’t you, though?”

“No.” It’s impossible. You can’t like someone after only being in an elevator together. Or from being barked at.

“Is this the real reason you are sulking in your office?” Charlotte asks.

I slam the folder shut, and move onto the next. I don’t even bother to pretend to read this one.

“Okay. How about I will tell Dash that you do not like Faye?”

“Are we in school?” I roll my eyes.

“You know your brother and I worry about you.” Charlotte sighs leaning back into the leather chair. “We all do. You work way too hard.”

“And Faye will fix that?” *Yes.* No, it would make everything worse. I can’t even get any work done now. And if, in theory, we were together, I doubt I could ever concentrate again. The app is launching next month. That is my priority. This is my stepping stone to launch my company and start redefining how businesses work.

I clench my jaw, eyes once again drifting to the conference room.



Charlotte shrugs. “You’re both adults. You are single. Faye is single. Put the three together and...” Charlotte presses her two fingers together as if they are kissing.

Faye’s single.

Not like that changes anything. If anything, it makes this whole thing more annoying.

“I don’t date.” I say. Once again staring at words on a piece of paper trying to look busy.

Charlotte smirks. A horrible smirk, as if she has figured out how to take over the world. “Who said anything about dating?” She says, leaning forward. “Unless you like her, like her.”

I grit my teeth. I might as well be in a play ground with a horde of children singing K-I-S-S-I-N-G. “Why are you in here, anyway?”

“Oh no. Don’t go changing the subject, L.” Charlotte stands, drumming her bright pink fingernails on the desk. “Do you like her? It’s a simple yes or no question.”

I lean back in my chair, meeting the gaze that’s turning from joy of pushing my buttons to one of concern.

Do I like Faye?

There is an energy about her. That’s all. It’s not everyday you get to meet someone who... I don’t even know how to describe it.

My gaze turns to Faye. She’s pulled a chair to the middle of the room, stroking a chocolate fur demon in her lap. The smile on her face, though. It makes me want to smile too, even though there is no reason.

“You can’t like someone that quick.” I say.

“So love at first sight is for?”

“Fairy tales and Charmant’s, Robin Hearts, romance novels.”

“Fine. How about as a business man?” Charlotte leans on my desk with both hands. “You must have a feeling about her. What do you think of her?”

I don't know when I got my pen back out, but my tapping echoes around the room. Does Charlotte really want me to tell her? They are friends. But, she asked. "She makes puns to herself. Snorts when she laughs. Has evil minions and... and... she called my company a porn site."

"Deep. Throb." Charlotte states.

I stand, hand slapping on the desk. "Like the deep throb in your heart when you fall in love for the first time! Why does no one get that?"

"Because you don't love. Or believe in love at first sight." Charlotte shrugs as if I haven't just yelled in her face. "Or because we all live in the gutter. And by the time someone had the courage to tell you it was too late."

I slump into my chair. "Like I would change it, anyway. It's a good name."

"Sulking."

I run my fingers down my silk tie, straightening it. "I don't sulk."

"Sure you don't." Charlotte smiles wryly and turns for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"Well, since you won't admit your very obvious feelings, Mr. Staring-at-her-and-pretending-to-work. I am going to have lunch. You want me to pick you up something? Let me guess..." Charlotte presses two fingers against her temple. So dramatic. "Ham and cheese? Like always."

I nod, gaze drifting behind her. Faye is wandering around the office. Laughing again. But this time it is a shoulders moving up and down laugh. And just like that she's been her for two hours and now she's disappearing for good.

"If you're shy L, I don't mind giving you her your number."

I stop. My heart stops. The world stops. I could go out with her. No. I couldn't go out with someone like her. All I will do is make Faye hate me.

“Shouldn’t you be going?” I grunt, unlocking the computer. The email pop-up chimes. Thirty new emails. If that isn’t a sign I don’t have time to be distracted by anyone, then I don’t know what is. Everything I have. Blood, sweat, tears and emotions all have to go to Deep Throb. I am not throwing it away.

“Yes. Yes. Yes. I am going.” Charlotte pauses at the door and throws a look over her shoulder. “I guess you can ask her our next week.”

“Next week?” No, no, no. I can’t have her here again. Or those fluff balls. I— We, I mean my employees will get no work done.

“That’s what I came in here to tell you. All the employees voted. We would like puppy time to be a weekly thing. Faye is all for it. Gerard is adopting this very cute little chocolate Labrador cross—”

“No.” I say, but Charlotte speaks over the top of me.

“Of course, you are the boss. But if you put her on an outside contract for say... six months. You could really help the puppies, and I am sure she would be grateful... which I may have already told her was on the table.”

“What?”

Charlotte shrugs. “But you are the boss, so at least I am the one who doesn’t tell Faye she’s not welcomed here.”

A breath pulls deep in my chest. I can already imagine those darling eyes looking so upset at me.

“Two weeks.” I say.

“Two Months.”

“One month.”

“But it’s a test period that can be extended.” Charlotte puts her hands on her hips.

“Fine.” Crap on a cracker, what did I agree to? An entire month. Eight more hours of Faye and her horde of mutts in my office.

“Charlotte. You were lying about offering her a contract, weren’t you?”

“Yeah,” Charlotte looks over her shoulder with a wry smile.  
“You won’t regret this, L. I have a good feeling.”

# Chapter Three

## Faye

The key to the city? Shoes—specifically flats. And especially when you have a basket of puppies and Dear Old Spud in tow.

I hit the button for the elevator. Spud wags his tail. His growth of new fur shines under the bright fluorescent lights. He is looking better every day.

“Today is the day, Spud. I can feel it. Today, you are going to find a fur-ever home.”

The words linger on my tongue. When I started my adventure to help dogs in need be adopted, I knew there would be hard cases. With so much good that comes with running around after puppies. Or seeing a little girl’s face as she understands the dog is her new best friend. Or being there when a dog finds their human, there is also the bad. Bad enough that all you want to do is scream at everyone and ask what the hell is their problem. Moments where I want to break down. And moments like these where I know the truth behind my words. An old dog still recovering after a serious bout of mange, missing a leg, an eye and a tip of his ear? There’s a high chance adoption is out of reach.

Spud looks at me and blinks his eye. Dogs know everything.

“But we are holding onto hope, Spud! I would keep you in a heartbeat. But that wouldn’t be fair to you. So we are going to find the next best thing.”

A woman standing near us glances between me and Spud. She scrunches her nose and walks away.

“Don’t worry the people upstairs are nicer.” I say. “One will choose you. Cleo, well she is a straight shooter and might be too loud for you. Gerard seems nice, quiet. You would like Matt too, he is funny. And Mr Hunnd... Okay, not Mr Hunnd, though. Between you and me, Mr Hunnd—”

The elevator doors open to familiar stern eyes piercing into me.

“Mr Hunnd.” I say. Holy double chocolate fudge sundae. Did he always look that good? The well-fitted black suit highlights his shoulders and jawline. A simple thin black tie draws my eyes... down there. I snap my gaze up to his full inviting lips pulling thin tight. “Umm...” I snap back to reality. “Are you going up?”

Mr Hunnd reaches out. For a split second, I swear he is going to press the close door button, but he holds the elevator door open.

“Thanks!” I say, shuffling into the metal box.

The lead in my hand tugs. I turn to a very grumpy Spud staring at me.

“Come.” I coo, delving my hand into my overalls.

Spud cocks his head to the side.

“Spud. We’ve been through this. You may be old, but you aren’t deaf. Spud, come. I promise...” I drag my gaze from Mr Hunnd’s polished black shoes to the disapproving, clenched square jaw. “... Okay, he may bite. But I will be here. So I will protect you. So come, Spud. Spud. Spuddy. Stinky-potato.” Nothing.

Mr Hunnd heaves a sigh and holds out his hand. For me to hold? Oh no, to hold the puppies. Mr Hunnd holding my hand? Jeez, I need to get a grip... maybe his. No, Faye. Concentrate.

With the puppies safe with Mr Hunnd, I drop to my knees. “Come one Spudkin. You’ve been on elevators before.”

Spud moves. He sits. And... he licks his junk.

“I swear he’s not usually like this,” I say.

Mr Hunnd whistles a short, deep tune. Spud perks up and, like nothing has happened struts into the elevator and sits next to Hunnd.

“How did you do that?” I ask straightening myself up.

Mr Hunnd shrugs, handing the basket back.

The elevator doors shut, engulfing us in silence.

“What is it?” Mr Hunnd grumbles after the third floor.

“The smell?” Yeah, it’s pretty bad. It’s not like Spud can help it. He eats too fast no matter what tricks I try. Honestly, I am surprised the elevator hasn’t turned into glass and blown through the roof with his farting power. “My new perfume.”

Mr Hunnd turns to me. The look on his face is priceless. It’s as though I have slapped him in the face with a tuna. “That.” He says, nodding to Spud.

“It’s a dog.”

“I thought dogs had fur.”

“There are some dogs that aren’t meant to have fur. Like the Pila, Chinese Crested, American hairless terrier...,” my voice drags. I’m dogging out, and it’s not like Hunnd cares about how many hairless dog breeds I can name, anyway. “Well, there’s a few.”

Mr Hunnd raises his eyebrows and the dark eyes search mine.

I shrug. “I like dogs. Is that a surprise?”

“It’s missing a leg.” Mr Hunnd states.

“Shit.” I slap my hand against my head. “I knew I forgot something when I left this morning. Maybe I dropped it on the way here.”

“Funny.”

“I like to think I am.”

“Still not a dog.” The voice is so low, I doubt I am meant to hear it.

I bite down on my tongue before I say something I regret. The silence doesn’t last long. “You know. You didn’t have to wait for me.”

Mr Hunnd moves his shoulder, tugging on his jacket’s button. Oh Mr Hunnd, I am not getting under your skin am I?

“Though, I appreciate it.”

“Charlotte.” He states, raking a hand through his short dark hair.

I force down a laugh of glee. He caught on quick. Charlotte blurted it out at last week’s lunch. Mr Hunnd likes me. The grumpy prince of Manhattan likes me. I may not be in a dating phase or even thinking about a man phase, but it’s a glorious feeling none the less. Someone likes me even though I was a dork in front of them. And for that, to be the handsome Leroy Hunnd is something that would make anyone giddy.

“Actually, my name is Faye.”

Mr Hunnd squints at me. It only makes me laugh more. “Don’t listen to her.”

“You *do* know Charlotte, right? There’s no way you can’t listen to her.”

“She—” The words cut off, and the wall of armor around him goes up. Everything Hunnd does is perfect. The crossed arms, tense jaw and staring straight ahead. All he is missing is a giant tattoo on his head that says do not engage. A master of body language.

It takes ten floors of silence before he breaks it. “Just don’t listen to her.”

“Mhmmm.” I sing out. Mr Hunnd likes me. He wants to kiss me... in my dreams.

“What does that mean?” His voice drops an octave.

“Honestly?” I ask. His broad shoulders tense. I guess that’s an ‘okay, hit me with your thoughts’ gesture. “I think there’s a kernel of truth in what she said. You waited for me after all.”

“I didn’t wait for you.”

“You happened to be in the same elevator, at the same time as me, for two weeks in a row?” Checkmate, Mr Hunnd.

“I don’t control the elevators.”

“So you ride in them for fun?” What is it with him. I just... Fuck. I want to see him smile. “There are better things to ride for fun.”



“No.”

“Are you sure?”

Mr Hunnd cocks an eyebrow. I nod to the door. It’s closing. On our floor. We both race for the button, our hands brushing against each other but it’s too late, the elevator is going down.

It’s funny though. He doesn’t seem to be annoyed at it. And neither am I. This might be the most fun I have had talking to someone all week.

I turn to him, a huge smile on my face. “See. You like riding elevators for fun. Or is it just with me?”

“I was going to my car. Because I forgot something *if* you must know. And the elevator happened to stop at the lobby on the way up. Then you were there. And now we are here. So. There.” My Hunnd stares ahead.

Charlotte said Hunnd was a quiet man. Well, not in those words. She said he was a man of few words and when he does speak, it is something profound like yes or no. Unless you were in his inner circle, then you might get a well-thought out answer, but only if it was needed. Charlotte and his brother are the only people he talks to. So.... I don’t know what to make of this. But I like it especially this whole ‘you are annoying me but don’t stop’ look he’s got going on.

“You drive? A rich man like you drives to work every day?” I ask.

“I didn’t say it was *my* car.” He sighs.

“So,” I shrug. “What did you forget?”

L purses his lips tight, and stares at his open hands. “I... uh... forgot sunflowers.”

We both pause, eyes staring at each other.

There are no sunflowers in his hands. In fact, the only sunflowers are on what I am wearing. Practical shoes, a white blouse and a pair of long overalls... A sunflower on the chest pocket and two on my ass. Which only means one thing. “You’re checking me out!”

“No... No I am not.”

“Ouch.” I feign hurt.

“I... I...” Mr Hunnd stutters, actually stutters. God, why does it make me so gooey inside? I am like a chocolate lava cake, under cooked and flopping out of the tin. “It looks nice.”

“Thank you!” I burst with a smile.

“Not very office attire, though.” Yeah, he’s got me there. Charlotte promised me it would be okay, though, since I am an outside contract. And overalls are practical for my work. Who am I kidding? I just like all the pockets. And I am wearing a business shirt.

“Too bright?” I ask.

Mr Hunnd half shrugs. I follow his gaze to Spud’s head resting on his shoe.

“You should see my underwear.” My head is spinning and light, but I don’t think it’s because of his shocked face.

Mr Hunnd’s eyebrows furrow. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

Forget about eyes shooting daggers. Mr Hunnd’s are shooting out cannonballs.

“I have a headache. Maybe it’s from not having enough hands for a coffee this morning. Or it could be because we are going up and down in the elevator.”

“Oh.” Mr Hunnd says, re-selecting our floor.

The elevator lurches back up.

“Still think you like me.” I mumble. It’s a joke, but it makes my stomach roll. I want to believe it. And yet... no, there is no way Hunnd could like me like me. He’s everything I am not.

“I like you as much as I like dogs. Which isn’t much.”

I laugh. I doubt he even believes the words. One thing is becoming clear. Mr Hunnd likes dogs and is keeping it as a massive secret for whatever reason. And there’s a chance. A

slight chance he does like me. Or at least likes me enough in fifteen-minute intervals. “That’s the greatest compliment I have ever received. Thank you.”

“I don’t like dogs.” Mr Hunnd says, flicking a look at the basket out of the corner of his eye.

“Why?”

And we are back here again. Silence, and a brooding rich boss staring at the elevator doors. This time, though, it only takes five floors for him to break the silence.

“I just do.”

“Is it a cuteness overload? Your grumpy brain can’t deal with it, and if you dare hold a puppy, you would implode?”

“Explode.”

“Implode sounds better. At least it sounds like less mess to clean up.”

Well, damn. Mr Hunnd’s lips twitch, almost curling upwards. “As long as I don’t have to clean up.”

“Wait is it the tails? The way they wag does it make you feel sick? Side to side, side to side.” I do the motion, and my stomach rolls. Of course it does. Ha. I’m an idiot sometimes. I reach out to the handrail, steadying myself.

“Maybe it’s because of the owners?” Mr Hunnd says.

“Oh, Mr Hunnd. That can’t be true. You seem like a true gentleman who likes everyone.”

His eyebrows shoot up.

“Is it because—”

“You’re not going to stop are you?” He cuts me off.

I drawn in my bottom lip and shake my head. Mr Hunnd makes a sound. An ear rumbling, hair standing up on the back of my neck groan.

“Okay, then what is your top reason?”

“Why?” He snaps, before correcting himself. “Why do you need to know?”

I study the man. There are wrinkles forming at the corner of his eyes. The strong features are well defined. He is gorgeous and sad.

“I will not force you to take a dog, that’s not why I am asking.” I say.

Mr Hunnd turns to me. Our eyes lock together. It’s like he is searching for something, trying to see into my soul. But I can see back. He’s scared like a dog not knowing whether to trust you.

“Why?” He says after a moment.

“Sometimes people want to get to know you. The good. The bad. And everything between.”

Mr Hunnd’s lips part open.

“So?” I say on the edge of my breath.

“Missing fur. A leg. An eye and a corner of his ear. Is that a good reason?”

I stare at him and shake my head. “That’s just Spud. He doesn’t count.”

Mr Hunnd’s jaw clenches. “So I was right. He isn’t a dog.”

The doors open, neither one of us moves. “Thank you for the ride. Probably not to be repeated, I guess?”

I walk out of the elevator, leaving him behind.

“Why?” He says, low enough for Cleo not to hear, even though she’s staring at us from reception.

“Because if you do, then maybe you would like me Mr Hunnd. Wouldn’t want that now, would we boss?” I land on boss hard.

The dark eyes narrow on me. I don’t know why it is sparking a flame in my chest, or why it stretches my smile out that much more. Yeah, I do. As much as Charlotte thinks he likes me, I like him.

# Chapter Four

## Faye

The elevator door opens.

By all the good cheese wheels in the world they lock up in safes. Mr Hunnd is wearing a three-piece suit. Navy blue and a matching vest. Crisp white shirt, and a thick blue and white striped tie. Every single cell in my body is going haywire. I have never understood wanting to woohoo in an elevator. It seems too hot and stuffy but now I get it. I *so* get it.

Mr Hunnd steps forward, a shiny shoe catches on the closing door.

I didn't even notice he was carrying coffees. But his eyes, his eyes I noticed. They almost seem brighter than usual.

"Mr Hunnd." I say, breaking out of my daze. "The man of mystery."

Dear Old Spud trots in, leash tugging my hands. Spud sits his huge butt down on Mr Hunnd's foot, but Hunnd doesn't flinch.

The elevator doors close. Spiced cologne and sweet caramel fills the air. It's intoxicating, almost suffocating.

The man is a fucking magnet. I can't keep my eyes off him. He must have dressed up for a reason. Charlotte, aka L Tracker 3.0 mentioned nothing about this. Sure text me how L has only grunted to her and Dash for a week, and how she thinks he is sleeping in his office because of his app launch is fun. But why not mention he can wear the hell out of a three-piece suit?

"Let me guess, you weren't waiting for me?" I ask.

"No."

"Just impeccable timing, as always, Mr Hunnd?"

"Suppose."

I nod to the button panel. A four floors are lit up, including ours. Maybe Charlotte is right, and he does like me. “And the buttons?” I ask, trying to be as serious as possible.

“Fingers slipped.” He gestures to his full hands.

“Mhmm.” I rock on my heels. Is that the excuse we are going for Mr Hunnd? And I guess every other elevator is *just* under maintenance. Not forcing me to take this one.

He stares at me from the corner of his eye, drawing a coffee cup to his delicious lips. “Suppose like yours.” L’s whisper is heavy. Tingles race down my spine.

“Huh?” I follow his gaze down my chest. My pink blouse buttons have tugged free. Shitake freaking mushrooms. I knew I shouldn’t have worn these overalls today. But it felt like a cute mushroom kind of day.

How am I going to do this? One puppy basket, one Spud, and a rich man with his hands full. There is no answer to this equation... unless it’s the one staring me right in the face.

“Do you want to perv or help me with the dogs?” I ask.

Mr Hunnd’s lips curl, and he puffs out a light breath of air. Look at you Mr Hunnd becoming more and more like a human being at every meeting we have.

“I take that as a ‘I’ll promise to not be obvious at looking at you, so it’s fine. Just be professional when we get into the office?’”

“Yes.”

I smile and nod.

We go up a floor in silence. Hunnd’s glances to my chest are too much. My cheeks are burning, and my heart quickening. I want to giggle. No, I want to see how far this will go. That is a bad idea. Sure, Mr Hunnd is charming, and magnetic, and looks well, like a sex god wrapped in a suit... And he’s opening up to me. And Spud likes him. Dogs are always have a good sense of someone’s true character.

No.

Stop. No more, Mr Hunnd. Cut it off now before I am sat in the airport asking myself what could have happened if I gave in and asked him out. Or kissed him. Or run my fingers down his back.

“Coffee?”

Coffee. Yes, that’s what I need. A good wake-me-up-to-reality-because-this-wouldn’t-turn-to-anything-anyway coffee.

“Faye.” My eyes pull to his. The way he says my name, it’s better than I can imagine. Dang it, girl, you’re horny. Nothing more. “Coffee?”

I stare at the coffee cup thrusting in my direction. What is happening? “You bought me coffee?”

Mr Hunnd raises an eyebrow and moves the cup toward me again.

“Thank you!” I swallow down my racing heart.

I reach for the coffee. The lead in my hand tugs. Damn. I move the basket up my arm and switch hands. Pause. And sigh in frustration. This will not work. If anything happens, I won’t have proper control over Spud.

“I—”

Mr Hunnd pushes the coffee cup in my hand, cutting off my words. He takes Spud’s lead, fingers grazing across my palm. My heart skips a beat.

“Thank you.” I stutter. Not elegant at all.

I bring the cup up to my mouth. The sweet, warm caramel greets me. No.... he didn’t. Did he? I take a sip, and it confirms my suspicions. A caramel latte. The coffee I get when I want to be fancy, well fancy enough to justify the price. “How... How did you know?”

Mr Hunnd takes a sip of his own coffee. There’s not a doubt in my mind that behind the paper cup is a look of complete smugness. “Money buys you things.”

“You bribed a coffee merchant?” I laugh. “I don’t know if that is a romantic gesture or something I need to think about getting a restraining order for.”

He purses his full lips and releases them with a burst of color. “Charlotte.”

Charlotte. Of course... Something else she failed to mention.

The elevator doors open to a dark dingy office space. Cleaning products waft into the elevator. It’s in the middle of renovations. Did Mr Hunnd choose the floor on purpose, to make sure no one gets on... or no one sees us together?

“Slobber.” Mr Hunnd says as the door closes.

I wipe my mouth with my sleeve.

Mr Hunnd turns around, his whole body facing me. This is new. This is scary. “Not you.”

“Good, that would have been embarrassing.” I say. “Literally slobbering over a man because he bought me coffee... Well, maybe not just that.” So, I am flirting with him. This is the path I am choosing. Yeah. Be yourself. And the voice in the back of my mind is saying who cares? It’s not like anything will come to it. Do what makes you happy.

Mr Hunnd doesn’t respond. There isn’t even a flicker of recognition of what I have said. Good bye, faint spark of hope and the distant fantasy of the suit on my bedroom floor.

“For the dogs.” He says, leaning back against the gold hand rail. His fingers tighten around the rail, and Spud’s lead.

“You don’t like dogs because of the slobber?”

“And the mess. Did you see the conference room last week?”

“I cleaned that up.”

The devilish eyes flick to my chest and back. No, I am not making this up. There is some sort of attraction here. I am going to go for it. “Down on my hands and knees, and everything.”



Mr Hunnd shoots his gaze back to the door. There is something here! And dang it the more he is trying to ignore me makes me want to play with it. Bad, Faye.

“Hair.” He says.

“We all have hair. That’s nothing new.” I say.

“Everywhere.”

I laugh. “We all shed hair. I swear I lose a mini poodle’s worth every week. Have you never lived with a woman?”

Mr Hunnd shifts his weight to a foot. Has he ever lived with a woman? That wasn’t on one of Charlotte’s stalker texts. And Dash, when he went on and on about his brother. All said was L had girlfriends before, but he never knew how the relationships ended. Maybe they weren’t girlfriends to begin with.

“The smell.” He says.

I shift my coffee to the basket in hand, and bring a lock of hair to my nose. “Strawberry and...” Is it vanilla? I should know. I read the bottle every time I wash it. It’s something sweet.

“Honey.”

Yeah... yeah. It was honey. I scan Mr Hunnd’s face. “Well. You can bathe dogs.”

His shoulders tense with another sip of coffee.

“Are you out of responses?” I ask.

“No.” He huffs.

“Looks like you are.” I half smile. “You know... Charlotte told me.”

Hunnd’s eyes widen like a deer’s in headlights. “What.”

“About her’s and Dash’s dog.”

“Oh.” Mr Hunnd sighs.

“You held him.” I sing with a small laugh.

“Not by choice.”

“You smiled.” I am going too far. Way too far. I am about to put my foot in it. And for the love of everything sparkly, I can’t help myself. “I can see it now. This big, handsome man, in a beautiful suit, holding a bundle of fluff in his arms. Smiling.”

“I’m not that much of a monster to not do that.”

The elevator doors open. And a knife twists in my chest. “You? A monster?” I try not to laugh, but it comes out anyway. “Why would anyone even think you are a monster?”

Mr Hunnd’s face pales, and his lips part open. He can’t think that can he? A monster. That’s ridiculous. Maybe rough around the edges, but it’s not like he’s a screaming metal lizard ruining everyone’s day. From what everyone in the office said, well, they didn’t say anything about him. An odd comment here and there that they should give him a puppy to hold. But isn’t that what you want from a boss? Someone that no one can even talk about behind his back because he is that decent.

“They chew things.” Mr Hunnd pushes off the rails and strides out of the elevator.

I follow him. “Is that your attempt to get the last word in?”

“Yes.”

“You can train them not to. Or adopt an older dog.”

“No.” He says over his shoulder, walking through the reception.

Last word, my ass.

“Mr Hunnd.” I call out. He stops. Perfect. “Thank you. For the coffee.”

“You’re welcome, Faye.” There he goes, saying my name again.

Mr Hunnd goes to walk again. “Mr Hunnd.”

“What?” He snaps.

Cleo looks up from the reception desk, a lollipop hanging out from her lips. She is effortlessly cool with her don’t give a shit look.

“Spud?”

We both look at the dog, lead in L’s hand. Spud is staring at L, waiting for his command, like a good boy he is.

Mr Hunnd looks to me, to Spud and back to me. “Charlotte!”

“What?” Charlotte’s voice booms from inside the office floor. “You know you have other people in this office. Or you could get an actual assis—”

Charlotte holds back a smile and takes the lead from Mr Hunnd. As soon as he is free, Mr Hunnd is gone.

“What just happened?” Charlotte whispers.

“I don’t know.” I sigh. It’s as though I have just run a marathon.

“Coffee?” she asks.

“Yeah.” I stare down at the lid. A big L is on the top of it.

“Shit. He is smitten with you.”

“No he’s not.”

“Oh, come on,” Charlotte drops her voice low enough for Cleo not to hear. “He’s never bought anyone coffee before.”

I roll my eyes. “Well, I did flirt with him.”

“And!” Charlotte falls to her knees and makes a fuss over Spud.

“Nothing. I threw a line out there, and no bites at all.”

“It’s Leroy Hunnd. It flew over his head.” We walk through the already empty cubicles. It’s become a common sight. It would be easy to think no one worked for Deep Throb. Only to look up at the conference room and see dozens of eyes staring at the basket of puppies. And of course. Next door is him. L taking off his jacket and slumping down onto a leather couch.

“Trust me. He likes you. It’s just his whole rich, grumpy persona. He keeps everyone at arm’s length. The only reason he talks to me is because he knows I will rat him out to his brother, or make him have dinner with us.” Charlotte says, still

patting and cooing at Spud. “Just keep trying. That’s, of course, if you do like him...”

Charlotte stops, looks at me, and raises her eyebrows.

I want to say yes, and I believe her. He bought me coffee, and he hit the elevator buttons. But...

“No. I can’t. This is a good thing, Charlotte. Even if for some miraculous reason he liked me that way, it’s best not to entertain the thoughts.”

Charlotte sighs. “If you think I will ever let you leave this city. You are being silly, Faye.”

But that’s the thing. It isn’t up to her. And right now, it’s not up to me either.

# Chapter Five

## L

The coffees warm my hands. I make a note to ask for double cups next time. And a better lid. It's hard to think that no one has come up with a sustainable and more usable paper coffee cup before. Then again, I guess they aren't designed to be held while going up and down on an elevator.

The lobby light turns on. This is it. It has to be, unless it's Gareth again wanting to talk about his cat and three-week holiday in... wow. I wasn't even listening.

I check my suit using the metal doors reflection. Grey and elegant. The waist coat is tugging a bit, but that's what I get for not waiting to get it altered. It'll be worth it, though. Faye's reaction was hard to ignore last week. And the only thing different I did was the three-piece suit. And looking at myself now, I do have to agree. It looks good, maybe good enough that Faye won't be able to look away this time.

The elevator comes to a stop. I swallow the lump in my throat. It's all so stupid. I don't even know what we are doing, but I can't get enough of it.

The doors open and there she is. A huge smile on her face, a stray ringlet and... and Charlotte. Fuck. The one thing I didn't account for.

"... and all the elevators are broken." Charlotte continues. I don't think she even knows I am here, let alone that the doors are open. But Faye does. She's glancing at me from the corner of her eyes, holding back a smile.

The suit was worth it.

Spud trots into the elevator, pulling on his leash to sit by my feet. Faye follows.

"Serves you right." She says with a lightness that tightens my chest. "You shouldn't have decided on tacos for breakfast."

"L." Charlotte's head jerks back.

I mumble an acknowledgement. Charlotte goes to press the button and my stomach drops. Oh no. I will never hear the end of this. I selected way too many buttons for it to look an accident.

“What’s up with these elevators L?” she says.

I shrug, staring at Spud who has a dirty paw on my shoe. I have to hand it to Faye. Whatever she is doing for the mutt is working. He is looking like a dog, minus the missing body parts. Which I doubt will grow back unless Faye is a miracle worker. But there are sprouts of fur, and more weight on him. There is also an aura of happiness. “Your dog is looking...” I say.

“Good, right?” Faye beams. “Won’t be long until someone adopts him.”

“It’s a shame you can’t.” Charlotte quips. “Though if there was someone who could—”

“No.” I say as Charlotte flicks a look at me.

“It was a suggestion.” Charlotte leans back against the railing. “Suppose you wouldn’t want Faye coming over to visit him, anyway.”

Oh, I am so not coming to your dinner now, Charlotte.

My attention falls back to Faye, eyeing up the coffee cup. I hold the coffee out for her, and we swap coffee for dog leash.

“How come you let L help you with the dogs?” Charlotte pouts.

“You are looking very dashing today.” Faye says, ignoring the dramatics. “I like the tie clip.”

“Thank you.” I mumble, ignoring the wandering eyes scanning over every inch of my skin. Maybe she’s trying to undress me. Ha. That would be something, Faye’s fingers skating across my body. Her breath blowing over my skin.

“Faye looks good today, too.” Charlotte breaks the silence. “Doesn’t she, L?”

Really? I stare at Charlotte. Not obvious at all. But she has a point. Unlike Charlotte's strict office attire, Faye does her own thing. And it suits her. A plain white business shirt matched with pastel pink short overalls. The chest pocket has a large strawberry and... yep. They are on her plump ass too like the sunflower ones. Bright, bubbly and confident. She's a ray of sunshine in a world full of clouds.

"Cute." I say, taking a sip of coffee.

Faye blushes. Lust pools into my lower stomach.

"Thanks!" Faye laughs.

We go up a floor in awkward silence. I don't know what to say. How do I even follow up with a 'you look cute today' comment? Everything coming into my mind sounds wrong, or creepy. You smell pretty, Faye. I preferred the sunflower overalls better, they remind me of you? How was your week? Do you know what I want to do to you? Do you know my cock aches for you at night and when you look at me, I want to fall down on my knees and worship you?

"How are you L?" Faye says. "Charlotte says you're pulling late nights for the launch."

*L.* Is that the first time she's called me that? It's nice. Free and casual. I give Charlotte another look.

"What? We talk." She shrugs.

"Fine. Thanks." I mumble.

"Really?" Charlotte scoffs. "Cause this is the first time I have seen you outside your office this week."

"Well. Coffee is important." I shrug.

"He's right, Lottie." Faye says. "It's on the food triangle. You can't argue with that."

Triangle?

"And what food pyramid would that be?" Charlotte asks.

"No, not pyramid. It's a triangle," Faye says. "It has three points."

“Here we go,” Charlotte shakes her head at me.

“There is coffee and sugar at the bottom.” Faye locks eyes with me. “And at the top hot, dripping, sticky caramel sauce.”

Fuck, I tear my gaze away. It’s too late. Images of sticky caramel sauce dripping over Faye’s naked body race in my mind. My tongue lapping up every drop, suckling on the sweetness. A sweetness that is on her lips right now.

I take a sip of my coffee. Damn. It only makes it worse. I got caramel too. All I can taste is the fantasy.

“And the coffee,” Faye’s voice drops to a near whisper. “It has to be tall, elegant. Everything a woman could want.”

Laughter fills the too stuffy, stupid metal box.

Faye has to know what she’s doing. Flirting, this is what it is. She’s flirting with me. Why? There is no reason for her to think of me like that. All I should be to her is a guy in a three piece suit who buys her coffee to make her smile. And that’s fine. It will have to be fine even if this is pure hell.

The elevator doors open to the floor being renovated. I should make a run for it. If Charlotte wasn’t here, I would.

“But you are okay? You aren’t working too hard are you, L? Cause you can always take a break with me and the puppies. Or did you come up with another reason?”

“The bubonic plague.” I say too fast.

“What?” Charlotte and Faye laugh together.

“They’re bubonic plague carriers.”

“That was fleas.” Faye quips with a smile.

“And dogs carry fleas.” I win.

Faye smirks. Dang it, can I not have the last word? “Not if you medicate them.”

True. Damn. “The vet bills.”

“I thought you were rich.” Faye furrows her eyebrows.

“Oh, he is.” Charlotte says.



If only my eyes had lasers maybe she would stop.

Charlotte rolls her eyes at me. “It’s not like you hide it, Mr Tailored-French-Suit and has not one, but two fancy cars while living in a city.” That’s it. It’s official she is worse than my brother.

“One.” I correct. “I won the other. I didn’t buy it.”

“Won?” Faye asks.

“Go fish.” I shrug. It’s not my fault the others want to bet stupid prizes. Dash should have known what was going to happen. Trying to bluff his way out of the hand. He’s never won a game against me since childhood.

“Seriously?” Faye asks. “I thought Dash was joking about that.”

“Nope, it’s real. A go fish tournament. You know that ugly vase in my living room?” Charlotte says. “The spoils of Dash’s victory.”

Yeah, well. At least Charmant lost a vase, not a car. Even though I did like that—

“I like that vase.” Faye finishes my thought. Really? It doesn’t quite seem like her. White, blue and a gold rim. It’s rather subtle for her tastes. Faye turns back to me. “Any other excuses?”

“Time constraints.”

“Oh.” Her pretty little mouth pops open. “Okay, I will give you that one.”

Finally.

“Match point, L.” Charlotte’s voice distorts under a hand over her mouth.

“Unless....”

“And Faye gets ready to serve again.” Charlotte says.

“An older dog who just wants loves. A walk to and from the office, not far. Sleep all day. Has three legs.”

I knew it. She wants me to take Spud. “Nice try.”

“And The Hell Hound hits it back.”

I stare at Charlotte.

“Fine.” She drops her hand. “This elevator is boring okay? If we didn’t have to stop on every other floor...”

“Anyway,” Faye continues. “the option is there. Especially since we all know you haven’t given me the real reason you don’t like dogs.”

I grit my teeth. This is becoming too much. Why does she know me? Why I would even day dream about us being together? And this waist coat, the stupid waist coat is too tight. I can’t breathe. What am I doing?

“But that’s okay. You can tell me when you want. I’ll be here.”

The elevator lights up our floor on the panel. About fucking time. I need air. Air that doesn’t smell like her.

“Thank you for the coffee, L. Again. I appreciate it.”

Why does she have to be so fucking nice?

The elevator door’s open. “You’re welcome,” I mutter, bee-lining out of the elevator.

“See you next week?” Faye calls out, stopping me still. She is planning next week. Another elevator ride. More excuses. More smiles and laughs.

I glance over my shoulder. Her trademark smile is there, but softer. Does she know me already that she’s pushed that little too far? Does she know if she asked, I would do anything for her if it makes her happy?

And... I am taking Spud to my office again.

I walk back, and hand Charlotte the leash, my eyes not moving from the floor.

“You know what they say, Mr Hunnd.” Faye says in a low, light voice. “About third coffee dates, don’t you?”

“I—” Our eyes meet. Faye is serious. That is a pick up line. A huge pick up line. I want to say something back, the words

are my tongue. Words she thinks she wants to hear but will only come to regret them.

“Cleo!” Charlotte calls out, interrupting us. “Can you come take Spud, please? I forgot I need to talk to L about the new billboard before he goes brooding in his cave again. You go ahead Faye, I’ll catch up.”

Faye hesitates a moment but leaves, once again with the last word.

Charlotte stares at me. A fire flickering in her eyes, oh no. What have I done now?

“You!” A finger thrusts to my chest. “What is your problem?”

“Nothing. Unless there is something wrong with the billboard design because I swear, Charlotte—”

“Not that, you big teddy bear.”

Oh. I swallow hard, straightening my tie. This is the Faye lecture I have been waiting for.

“You like her.”

“Who?” I say under my breath, looking for an escape. No one is here to save me.

Charlotte folds her arms over her chest. It’s like I am about to get a very stern letter sent home to my mother, well, my brother.

“It’s none of your business.” I say.

“No it’s not.” She sighs, raking a hand through her hair.

We stand in silence. I know I should say something, but I don’t know what. Keep your mouth shut unless you have something important to say.

“You aren’t blind though, right? You know Faye was flirting with you?” Charlotte says after a beat.

“Yes.”

“Good.” Charlotte takes a breath. “Good.”

“I don’t date Charlotte.” I search her eyes, hoping she understands. As strange as it is, Charlotte has come to be my closest confidant. Mainly for the fact she’s everywhere. At work, or with my brother. But if anyone knows that ‘I don’t date’ means Faye isn’t a girl you fuck one time only, it’s her. “Even if, *if* I wanted to, I don’t have time to date. The beta launch is next week and—”

“Okay. I get it. It’s your decision.” She stops herself with another huff. “Just. You two like each other. And I’ve never seen you so talkative before. It’s creepy. But... I wouldn’t wait on it, L. If you are going to ask her out.”

“What does that mean?”

I know what it means. Faye is perfect. Bright and happy, any man will fall for her.

Charlotte purses her lips tight. Oh no. I have seen that look before. That is the look Charlotte gave me before she blurted out that Dash spilled ketchup on my Calvin Klein rug.

“What aren’t you telling me, Charlotte?”

“Just...” Her hand reaches out and slides down my arm. “Trust yourself, L.”

I do. This is why I am in this position. I trust myself that I will hurt Faye. And I trust in the fact I don’t deserve someone like Faye to even smile at me. I know what I am doing. You don’t get to where I am without relying on that.

And yet, it still hurts. I won’t be able to taste those caramel lips. Life is never as sweet as you want it to be.

# Chapter Six

## L

I stare at my open notepad.

The billboards are looking great. The advertising campaign is fantastic, but I need the final approval and a content check. Maybe one more look over... or ten. That goes to the top of the list. I place the yellow sticky note under the top priority heading. No, this should be my highest priority today. I unpeel the note, and stick it onto my computer monitor.

I glance through the office space. The elevators have not moved. Maybe she's running late because Spud is digging his claws in at the door. Or got his nose in who knows what.

No. Concentrate.

The beta launch party, tonight. Ugh. So not my thing. I have left those days behind, even though there weren't many of them to begin with. But at least it's a small bar. The booking will need checking.

Is Faye going? Did Charlotte ask her? She is an employee. It's not like if we both went it would be a date.

I tap my pen on the desk, staring at the two coffee cups. Dang it. Faye is more distracting not here than when she is.

I scribble on a fresh note to check booking and put it on Cleo's page. My page for today is overflowing with tasks, and here I am wondering where the fuck Faye is. I will not ask Charlotte, though. No, it will make her poke me again, asking about my thoughts on Faye. Nothing is changing on that matter.

Double check on the programmers. Yes, that's a major priority even if I don't know what I am talking about most of the time. I have been trying to catch up on my knowledge of technology, yet I am still behind. Creating an app base company might not have been the brightest crayon in the box to choose from. Which is why you select a good team and idea you love.

Would Faye use the app to find someone she deserves?

Dammit. I slump back in the chair, dragging a hand down my face. I am tired. That's all this is. I am tired.

Taking a coffee cup, I spin around to the city. The bright sunrise of pinks and oranges has long since disappeared into blue and gray.

We are so close to finishing this hurdle. Beta launch. Some fixes and then it will be launch. This is the final push.

Coffee pours into my mouth. Caramel runs over my taste buds. It's sweet too sweet and no where near my usual black coffee. Not that it matters, this isn't a coffee to power me through the day. It's the lingering taste on my lips I am searching for.

Ugh. The drink isn't hot. Well, not hot enough for it to be nice. I turn back in my chair, grab Faye's cup, and toss it into the trash.

Huh? My door is ajar. I stand up, peering over the desk. Two beady eyes stare back at me.

"Spud." I say. A weight lifts off my shoulders. She's here. That's one less thing to worry about.

Spud tail wags. For a misshapen dog, he has a quality to him. Though, I haven't quite figured him out yet. Spud is like a patchwork quilt of breeds. Short nose, long body. At least he has one of those resting smile faces. Probably picked it up from Faye.

"Where's your owner?" I ask.

Spud cocks his head to the side.

"Don't give me that. The coffee was cold. Cold enough." I mumble. Shit. I am talking to a dog. And what's worse, he's communicating back to me. "It wouldn't have been nice."

Not for her.

The door bursts open. I jolt. Spud scampers under the deck. His trembling body pushes against my leg. My hand drops, stroking the soft fur.

“L!” Charlotte bursts. Her cheek’s are bright red, yet the rest of her face is as pale as a ghost. “I am in big fucking trouble.”

“This better not be about blowing up our microwave, again. Or the marketing plan.”

“What! No. We’ve lost—” She frowns. And with a large breath, her natural hue races back. “He’s in here isn’t he?”

“Who?”

Charlotte plummets to her knees and looks under the desk. I jerk my hand away from the mutt. “Spud, you fucking bastard. I was about to cry.”

“Were you?”

“No. But that’s beside the point.” Charlotte straightens herself up and goes back to the door. “Honey! I found him.”

Honey? That’s a strange name for Faye. And yet it suits her. Sweet and golden. Sticky enough that it’s on your skin for way too long like a beautiful memory. Honey. It would be a nice term of endearment. Hi honey, I’m home. How was your day, honey? Are you going to cum, honey?

But Charlotte wouldn’t call Faye that. “Honey?” I ask, clearing my mind.

“Yeah. Faye’s friend. Her roommate.”

My mouth parts open. Roommate? So Faye is still missing.

“If you want to know you can ask her,” Charlotte sighs, pulls her hair tie out, and scoops it back into a bun.

What does she mean by that? I can ask her. Does that mean she’s hurt? No, Charlotte wouldn’t be that cruel. Sick? No, Charlotte would say something. Then again, I would have expected Faye to have said something. Told someone. She is an employee, after all. You can’t not turn up and not tell me.

I pick up the phone. It connects straight away.

“Sup, Hunnd?” Cleo laughs. “Get it?”

“No.”

“Sup, dog?”

I grit my teeth. “Why is there a stranger in my office?”

“Ummm. Because Faye is away and dogs can’t drive cars or walk themselves.”

I rub my forehead. It’s way too early in the morning for Cleo and a headache. But at least she does her job and talks straight to me. “Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why?” I grumble again.

“Do you want me to ask everyone why they want a day off?”

Charlotte takes a seat in the chair in front of my desk. It’s too early in the morning for her as well, especially the eyes staring into me.

“No.” I reply. “But—”

“Yes, she called it in. You said only to interrupt you with important issues. Is Faye important?”

I swallow.

“It didn’t seem like an issue.” Cleo continues with what I can only think is a nail file scrape, scrape, scraping away. “She replaced herself any.”

I glance at Honey opening the basket of puppies in the conference room. There is only one pup I recognize from last week. The other two are new. But it’s not the dogs that make the image wrong. It’s everything. Honey’s dressed in boring clothes. Her brown hair is in a tight ponytail. She is smiling, but it’s not the same. There is no way she can replace Faye.

“I left you a note.” Cleo says.

“No you didn’t.” I shuffle the papers on my desk. There’s nothing.

“In the middle of your desk.”

“There is nothing. I am not blind—”

“Pick up your notebook.”

I pick the notebook up, and there it is. A half folded pink sticky note.



*Faye Away. All good.*

I slap the phone down.

Damn. She's really not here today. I just... Why?

Charlotte clears her throat.

"What?" Oh. Right. I pick the phone back up.

"Mr Hunnd you have to stop calling me like this. What do you think the other employees will say about us?" Cleo chokes out a hard laugh.

"Thank you." I say, and hang up again.

I stare at Charlotte.

Charlotte stares at me.

I stare at Charlotte.

"I am not telling you. You are her boss." Charlotte says, folding her arms over her chest. "Or is this not a boss thing?"

Here we go again. "I can be concerned about an employee. I would message you if you didn't show up."

Charlotte's face brightens, and a hand touches her chest. "That's actually really sweet of you. Don't tell me you are starting to feel emotions."

"Not about you." I mumble under my breath, concentrating on fixing my note book back up.

"So?" Charlotte chirps.

"So what?"

"So why don't you message Faye?"

Yeah. And how would that go? Hey Faye it's your boss, you didn't show up today. She will think she's fired. I can't do that to her. Of course I could go the more. Hey, I miss our rides together. Faye's giggle is ringing in my ears already. But that's not appropriate. No. From an employee point of view, she's done the right thing. There's no need for me to ask her.

Though if she is sick, I could send her some soup. Faye doesn't seem like a soup person. Maybe ice cream. And once

again, I am drifting into this weird fantasy where I can look after Faye. That I can make her giggle. Or make have her eyes on me, giving me a hug from within.

Charlotte sits down. The leather squeaks breaking my thoughts. “You could ask her out.”

I hesitate for a moment. “No.”

“Don’t get your underwear in a twist.” Charlotte sighs. “I mean tonight. The party is still on isn’t it? And since Faye hasn’t said a word about it to me... I am assuming you haven’t invited her.”

“You haven’t told her?” I stammer.

Charlotte smirks. “I am not her boss.”

I chew on my cheek. If I ask her, I will make a fool out of myself. Or say something I regret. Or make her think less than me. Like that matters anyway. But if you can’t say something properly, don’t say it. “You can ask her.”

“Ah ahh, bucko.” Charlotte’s smiles. A shiver runs down my spine. “I am done with being you two’s fairy god mother. You don’t want to ask the girl we all, and yes I mean everyone knows you are crushing on.” Charlotte leans back in her chair and purses her lips tight. “And she doesn’t want to date you.”

The words hit me like bullet. Faye doesn’t want to date me. So all that flirting was for nothing. Maybe it wasn’t even flirting. She was just being nice, and I got my wires crossed.

She doesn’t want to date me.

My hand balls against my thigh. I need to think reasonably. It’s for the best. Yes. And this isn’t new information. There is no way Faye would want to date someone like me or she is saving herself from me. But that spark of hope is gone. The thoughts of where I would take her and her looks as I touch her are useless.

“Fine.” I don’t even convince myself.

“Good.” Charlotte says her eyes growing wide.

We sit in silence for a moment. Charlotte wears her emotions on her sleeve. She would be easy to play cards against. And right now I can see her, the fingers digging into the chair's arm, the lip chew. She wants me to fight.

After a long silent moment, she heaves herself up. "Do you want me to take Spud? He seems lost without Faye." You're telling me.

I move my shoe. Spud's weight is on it. It must be his head. "He's fine. But you are cleaning up any messes."

"Fine." Charlotte sighs and heads for the door. "Ask her about tonight though."

I lean back in my chair. "I thought you weren't getting involved."

"I am not. Not as your family, or friend or hers. But as a colleague. She would be the only employee not to go. And people might ask where she is. And do you want to tell them why?"

The reason I would give would be nothing but pure nonsense. Because I was scared, terrified of what I would say to her.

"I'll come back for Spud when Honey is ready to leave." Charlotte pulls the door open.

"Charlotte."

"Yes?"

Did she say why she didn't want to go out with me? Does she know me well enough that she knows I won't be good for her?

As long as I have a list for not liking dogs, I've made a list longer for why Faye won't like me. I am her boss. I am a rich elitist. For a dog lover, I am a challenge. She deserves more than me.

What's the point in knowing why, though? It's not like anything would change, though. Because I can't be with Faye.

"I'll ask Faye." I sigh.

# Chapter Seven

## Faye

Spud is sprawled out over the rug. He looks like a chicken or road kill. Which ever one it is, he looks how I feel. Exhausted.

All at once, everything seems to have caught up to me. All the dog walking, cat sitting, gallivanting with the puppies and trying to find them homes. Not to mention caring for them. Today might be my first day off this month. And some day off this is.

I have never been so embarrassed in my life. They practically laughed me out of the bank for the business loan application. Tears well in my eyes, and I roll over onto my side, staring at the dark couch material.

I should be stronger than this. I am stronger than this. I moved to Manhattan by myself. I was able to make somewhat of a business doing what I love. Well, enough to live off.

The finish line is there. Adoption centers, focusing on maintaining a home environment to make transitioning easier, and get more dogs in need adopted. That's all I want, to get as many dogs in need in their furever homes as possible. Why does doing something so good have to be so challenging?

I let out a long breath, hugging a cushion closer to my chest.

Okay emotions are pointless. I can be upset for five minutes. For five minutes I can feel all the emotions, cry, yell, scream. But then I am going to stand up. Make a cup of tea and work on Plan B.

Plan B. Moving out of the city. There are so many holes in the plan that need working out. Where do I go? If Spud doesn't get adopted what do I do? There is no way he can fly, so we will have to drive.

I will leave Charlotte. I will leave Honey and this shitty apartment we spent so long trying to make it home. My heart drops.

There will be no late night pizzas or movie marathons. And there will be no fun elevator rides. L won't look at me like I have lost the plot or try to hide his smile. Or the little muscle in his jaw twinges when I say something I shouldn't.

A sob aches out of my chest, and that's it. No more. Crying will get me nowhere. Plan B it is. My friends will still be my friends. Spud will be Spud and L... L will be a fantasy like he should be.

I sit up and gaze into my hands as I am a palm reader. But no lines on my hands will define me. This is my life, and my dream. I will help all the dogs in need I can. I will do this.

After a cup of tea.

Wiping the tears, I make my way to the kitchen. I pick up my well worn and chip tea-rex mug, and hesitate. Nope. Today is a good day.

I grab the beautiful glass tea pot and cup set Charlotte and Dash bought for my birthday. And pick out the second last blooming flower tea. It's not my favorite, but when the tight ball unfurls to a flower, it makes me feel fancy as fuck. And today is a fancy as fuck kind of day.

My phone chimes in my pocket. Two butter cookies it's Charlotte. Probably with an L update.

**Unknown Number:** Hi.

Unknown? It must be one of those scams. What ever. I put it on the kitchen bench and search the cupboard for my secret stash of cookies. My fingers crumple the package and Spud's head pops up. Luckily, the penned puppies have yet to learn the meaning of packaging.

My phone lights up. The lock screen flashes with a new message.

**Unknown Number:** Are you okay?

I have to give it to the scammers. They are becoming very kind. It's a lot better than you have debt to pay off or we will call the police.

I grab Spud a dog treat from his treat jar and give it to him with a good boy pat.

Making the kitchen bench rumbles with another vibration. Nope. Not falling for it.

**Unknown Number:** Faye?

I freeze. Okay, that's spooky.

**Faye:** Who is this?

The message dots dance. And stop. And dance again.

**Unknown Number:** L

You have got to be kidding me. This has to be a joke.

**L:** Are you okay?

I hold back a laugh. L's worried about me? Surely, Charlotte told him where I was. Ah! L is texting me.

**Faye:** I am fine! Hope honey was okay for you.

**L:** Good.

Wow, it's like L is right here in person.

**Faye:** I didn't make you worry did I?

"What are you smiling at?" Honey asks. I jolt, pushing my phone against my chest. "Please don't tell me it's the baby gorilla learning he can fart video again. Cause I swear after the fourth time, it loses its power."

"Nooo,"

Honey runs her fingers through her long brown hair. She looks nice tonight. Tight jeans, and a t-shirt low enough to show off her assets. The pink leather jacket pulls everything together. This isn't her normal helping at her Grandma's bookstore evening look.

"So?" Honey asks.

"You look hot." I say. "The jacket suits you."

"Not me." She blushes. "Who are you talking to?"

"No one."

“Faye, you are like Spud. You can’t hide shit. I know when you are trying to hide a surprise and I know when you are about to giggle at something.”

I stare back at the phone. There’s no reply. Not even a bubble bopping.

“Faye.”

“Honey.”

“Faye.” Honey’s smile is bigger than my own. And the aura of smugness to it is like an arrow pinning me to the wall. “Oh come on! This is what you do every month when I make you flip the calendar to the next hot naked firefighter. Any second now, you are going to sound like a fairy on laughing gas.”

“I don’t sound like that.” I giggle. Firefighter June, though, and his hose pipe...

“See!”

“So, who is making you giggle?”

Maybe I am crushing on L more than I thought. It’s not my fault though. There is just something about him. The more I try to stop thinking about him, the more he pops up in my mind.

“It’s not like that.” I don’t even think I am convincing myself.

Honey’s eyebrows rise. Damn.

“If you want to know, it’s L.”

“L?” Honey pauses. “Does he come with more letters than that?”

“Many more.”

Honey yanks her phone out of her pocket. “Fuck a duck. I am late. I have to set up for the book signing. Glam-ma will be tutting in the corner.”

Oh, that’s right. How did I forget about that? Honey has been complaining about the signing for weeks.

“And you.” Honey says, grabbing a bottle of water from the fridge. “You need to send a boob pic.”

“What!” I choke. “Honey! I can’t do that.”

“You’re thinking about it.” Honey cocks her eyebrow.

“Only for like a fleeting second. Just because his reaction would be funny.” L might smile or laugh. Maybe. And then L would never be near me again.

“Okay sweets,” She grabs her bag from the bar stool on the other side of the counter. “Got to run!” She sings.

“Thanks for today.”

“Hey, I was taking today off, anyway. It’s no problem. And remember, if you go for a fuck.”

“It’s not all about protection. Lube it up and slide yourself into a fucking good time.” I roll my eyes, reciting Honey’s speech from memory.

“Booyah. But also I won’t be in till late. But Maya will be home. She would look after the pups. Just don’t keep ordering her pizza or we will find another stray in the house.”

I nod, stopping the kettle from over boiling.

“Okay, but I am not. I don’t do that. You know... sleep with men I haven’t dated. Or pics. Or...” My cheeks are on fire.

“Sure.” Honey shrugs. “But if the opportunity arises. You can say yes, sweets. Go get yours.”

My stomach flips. L’s hand on the small of my back. His low voice rumbling in my ear, asking me if it’s okay. The perfect stubble brushing against my cheek, panting on my neck. Fuck, I want it.

I am not like Honey though. I love her with all my heart, but she is so confident I can’t compare. According to her, I am coming out of my shell, wearing what makes me feel happy. But Honey. Honey is a different level. She knows what she wants, and she’s not afraid to chase after it.

“Promise me!” She calls out, opening the door. “You will have fun.”



“I promise.” Yes, fun. I might just watch a musical with tea and start Plan B.

The door shuts, a bit too loud. But none of the dogs move.

I focus back on my phone. The dancing bubbles have returned... have they been going all this time? That would be an L thing to do. Typing out something. Delete. Reword. Delete.

It explains a lot. The way he speaks is so clear and concise, like he’s rehearsed it, and then, I catch him off guard and it’s like it’s the real him.

The bubonic plague... the dork.

Maybe I can catch him off guard.

**Faye:** Thanks for checking in with me, L. I’ll see you next week.

**Faye:** I’ll...

**L:** No.

I delete my message.

**L:** I mean.

Dancing dots.

**L:** Tonight.

Tonight? A breath catches in the back of throat. Please don’t tell me Honey is right.

**L:** There’s a party.

**L:** Would you like to go?

I hesitate for a moment. **Faye:** Are you asking me out?

**L:** No.

**L:** It’s at a bar. It’s not a date.

I laugh to myself. And suddenly, I don’t care about Plan B. Or anything. L freaking Hunnd is asking me out.

**Faye:** It sounds like a date.

**L:** It’s for work. The beta launch.

**L:** I am not asking you out.

**L:** I am asking you to the party.

**L:** As an employee.

The texts are coming in fast. Oh no, he's panicking. And I'm laughing. But oh lemon sherbets, this is cute.

**Faye:** Okay.

**L:** Charlotte is going. And the others.

**L:** It's not a you and me situation.

**Faye:** Okay.

**L:** It's not a date.

**Faye:** Oh, you made that clear.

Has even noticed I said yes?

**L:** So, will you go?

Faye: Yes.

**L:** Good.

**Faye:** Thank you for the invitation.

**L:** You are welcome.

I bite on my tongue. I have to do it.

**Faye:** So it's not a date?

**L:** No.

The dots dance and dance. I can't peel my eyes away. Not even to watch the water making the flower bloom. I need to put him out of his misery.

**Faye:** It was a joke.

**L:** Yes.

**L:** Yes. I know.

The dots bounce and stop. Damn, L. Way to leave a girl on a cliff hanger. But maybe it's not one but a clear line in the sand.

We can't be together.

# Chapter Eight

## L

“... and then she said. How are you doing?” Connor yells loud enough that it sounds like he is next to me and not on the other side of the bar. “And I said. Well better than your rabbit.”

My employees and their friends erupt in laughter. I don't understand why it's funny. But then again, I only got half the joke. I doubt it was funny, anyway. Faye's only smiling.

I swirl my drink . If I can make it last another ten minutes, it should be enough to make the whole the Boss showed up and had a drink with us a bit more realistic.

“You okay?” Charlotte's voice whispers, a hand landing on my shoulder.

“Fine.” Vodka and cranberry juice fill the air as she takes a non elegant seat on the bar stool next to me. “Where's Dash?”

“My beloved, truest of hearts is asking if that gentleman.” She spins around, throwing a finger behind her to Dash. He's laughing with a man three times the size of him and a beard he could only hope to grow. “For one of those. You know. What's the things that can before the internet? With songs. La la la.”

“A music player.”

“Noooo,” she shakes her head. “Shiny.”

“A CD?” I ask. Jeez, Charlotte, how much have you had?

“I told Dash you were brilliant!” She howls with a laugh. “That's it a CD.”

I have never seen Charlotte tipsy before. As much as I have seen Charlotte relax around me over her time with Dash, she's never been quite like this. It's strange. It's fun watching her and Dash being aloof with each other, and share in pure joy. But I can't help but want to protect her like a baby deer. Almost as if she was indeed my sister.

“You should have some water.” I wave my hand at the bartender requesting water. With a nod, and a sir, he disappears.

“They look like they’re having fun, don’t they?”

Charlotte draws my attention back to my employees. Fun is... a word. If I wasn’t so worried about being called a party pooper, I would send them off in a fleet of cars to go home. They’ve all had too much, and it would be better than letting them free on the streets. But the group is already dwindling.

“You’re a good boss, Mr Bossman.” Charlotte comments, taking the bottle of water from the bartender.

I don’t respond.

Charlotte turns her entire head toward me and rests it in her hand. Misses. And does it again. “She looks like she is having fun.”

I fight my gaze from finding Faye, and focus on Charlotte closing her eyes, and opening them again as if she’s an alien, learning how to blink for the first time.

“What are you doing?”

She blinks again. “Winking.”

Fuck, I shake my head, hiding a smile. “You need to go home.”

Charlotte sighs and throws herself back around to look at the group.

Faye is sipping something pink through a straw. She is different tonight. Instead of overalls, she is wearing a well fitted white dress with bright yellow dots. The square neck and tiny sleeves make her look... cute. Elegant in a cute way, like a princess ready to burst into song. Her hair is tied up, but the bun is looser than normal. There doesn’t seem to be a care in the world about the curls trying to break free.

That’s what is different. There is an air of freedom to her.

“I am worried about her.” Charlotte says.

“Worried?”

“She hasn’t had a great day today. Silly stubborn fairy.”

“What do you mean?”

“Isn’t that what she looks like?” Charlotte claps her hands together. “That has been bugging me for ages. She looks like a fairy! So happy and light. Flittery and fluttery spreading all her annoying smiles everywhere.”

”Charlotte, what do you mean about today?”

“Faye!” she calls out. “Come here!” Fuck. I shrink into my seat. So much for not talking to her tonight... or ever after the stuff I messaged.

I can’t even escape before she is approaching us.

“What’s wrong?” Faye asks. Well, she’s not as tipsy as Charlotte, unless she can handle her alcohol well. “Hi, L.”

I nod, focusing on my drink.

“We think you look like a fairy! Faye the fairy!”

Faye chuckles. Her hands fly down her dress. I should have known. They aren’t just any old yellow dots. That would be too boring for her. Yellow rubber ducks. Perfect. “Well, my name—”

“—means fairy.” I say.

Both sets of eyes look at me.

“L is a huge name buff.” Charlotte says after a beat.

“I didn’t know that.”

Well, it’s not like it’s my resume.

“What’s my name again?” Charlotte frowns.

“Charlotte.” I say.

“Ahhhhhhh,” she prods me with a finger. “You. You jokester. I told you he was a human, Faye. And you thought he was a robot.”

Faye’s mouth drops open, pink flushing her cheeks. “I didn’t... Well, it wasn’t a...”

“It’s fine.” I take a long breath through my nose. I’ve been called worst.

“So, what’s my name?” Charlotte says again.

“Free man.” I answer.

“And Dash?”

“Dashiell. Closest for him is sky or from a wealthy family.”

Faye smiles, leaning on the bar. I would give anything for Charlotte not to be between us. “What got you interested in names L?”

Cause I got stiffed with one I hate.

“Leroy!” Charlotte laughs, throwing her head back. “Sorry, it’s not funny.”

“My father’s name.” I say.

“And what does Leroy mean?”

I swallow hard. “King.”

“It suits—”

“Dash!” Charlotte shrieks, turning around.

“You ready?” Dash says from behind. Oh right... he’s not talking to just Charlotte. Faye too. They’re all going home.

“I am, but Faye is having fun! She’s a little fun fairy. And so cute.” Charlotte jumps up and wraps a hand around Dash’s neck.

“I think you’ve had fun, too.” Dash says. “Time for bed.”

“With you?”

I roll my eyes and turn back to my drink. Dash and Faye bicker with Charlotte that it’s time to go. But Charlotte is not having it. Faye needs more fun.

“How about.” Faye says in a calm firm voice, drawing my attention back to the group. “You go. I stay and take a ride-share home.”

“But what if he is scary?” Charlotte whispers. “Or likes olive bread.”

“I will curse him with my fairy powers.” Faye laughs.

“Faye. We will take you home.” Dash says. “It’s what we agreed to.”

I know what I am going to say. And I want to say it. No, I don’t. But I am going to, aren’t I?

“I am sober. I can handle myself.” Faye says.

The words are bubbling on my tongue.

“We brought you here. How about ten more minutes?” Dash says.

My fingers grip around the glass. If this is one of Charlotte’s plans she’s outdone herself. “I will take Faye home.” I say. The three of them fall silent. I down my drink. “When Faye is ready.”

“Yay!” Charlotte yells. “It’s a win-win-win-win-win-win.”

“That’s too many wins.” Dash laughs.

“Not for you, it isn’t.” Charlotte tries to whisper.

“Is it okay with you, Faye?” Dash asks.

Faye nods, and if I am not mistaken, there’s a slight relief to her resting smile. Then again, with Charlotte’s kisses plastering onto Dash’s cheek like wet paint, I can’t blame her.

“Okay, and we are going. Thank you brother. Faye.”

It’s not long after the magic couple leave, Faye sits next to me and starts poking her drink with the straw. The dress is even more beautiful up close. The highlight are the yellow dots, which are, in fact, rubber ducks.

“You don’t have to worry. I am fine to get a ride share.” She says, breaking the silence.

I shake my head. With a raise of my hand, the bar tender takes our drinks away and starts making a new round. Sometimes I am really happy that I have money. A quick whisper of whatever our group orders you will get a thirty percent tip does wonders.

“I drove.” I say.

“Your fancy car?” Faye perks up a bit.

I nod.

“Can I drive it? I haven’t had a sip of alcohol. I swear!”

“Umm—” Dang it. I want to say yes. Faye laughing, hair blowing in the wind. I want that.

Suddenly, a hand lands on my arm. “It’s okay. It was a joke... a tiny one.”

Our drinks slide towards us. And the hand moves. Fuck, this was a mistake.

“You look tired. It’s been a big few weeks, yeah?” She asks.

“Yeah,” I sigh. With no help from you, Faye. I have been running around like a dog looking for his owner.

“Hey!” she says. “Knock knock.”

“What?” I frown.

“Knock, knock. It’s a joke. You are meant to say—”

“Who’s there?” I finish her sentence.

“Interrupting cow.”

“Interrupting cow wh—”

“MOO!” Faye bursts out laughing, forcing a smile onto my face.

“Really?” I can’t believe I just fell for that. Dear fuck, I must be tired.

Faye holds onto her stomach, still laughing. “Have you never heard a cow interrupt before?” She looks at me and then bursts out laughing once more.

“What?”

“You!” she giggles. “You’re laughing.”

“N—” Shit, I am. It was just... came out of no where. “Well, it was a dumb joke.” I try to save face.

Faye reaches out and takes a sip of my drink. “This is lemonade you haven’t even had a drink.”



I smile down at my glass. A smudge of lip balm glimmers under the light. Pink and sparkles.

Once again, Faye laughs at herself and takes a drink from her own. “Can’t believe I got the L Hunnd to laugh because of a silly little cow joke.”

“Well, it’s a moo-t point now.”

Faye turns to me. Her lips part open and slowly curl up. “L,” This. This is what I want. Faye to look like this because of me. Happy. So happy she can’t comprehend why she is laughing again.

“I thought you liked puns.” I ask.

“I do. I just. Are you sure you are L?”

The conversation lulls. Quietens. Dies with only the whispers of what could be between us in a perfect world.

“Today...” I break the silence. “Are you okay?”

“Yep.” For a simple word, it means so much. It’s happy, it’s pushing me away. It’s a lie.

I turn on the bar stool. Our knees are so close to each other. I want to put my hand on her arm, like she did to me. But now, it would look creepy.

Faye catches me in the corner of my eye, and stabs her drink with the pasta straw. “I had an appointment with the bank. Believe me, I would have much rather been in the office.”

“The bank?”

Faye looks over to the handful of employees left. The night has ended. Connor is drinking a coffee with James and Becca. I wouldn’t be surprised if they are sobering up to hop to another bar. “Do you want me to bore you with the sadness in my heart?”

“Yes.” I say way too quickly. Fast enough to have Faye’s beautiful widening eyes on me in a second.

“Oh.” she says, gazing back to her drink. “It’s not that big. I applied for a business loan. And was gracefully denied it.”

“Business loan?”

“Yeah.” Faye smiles wryly. “Dog adoption. I want to make it what I do. I love it. Helping the animals that deserve nothing but the good things. You should see them L. And not just the puppies...”

Faye’s words fade in my ears. I don’t need to hear them to understand. This is her calling. She is passionate about hairy little vacuums. It’s more than that. This is her dream. My chest grows light. Faye is truly amazing. Dedicating her life for something so unselfish.

“... but of course the big dream...” Faye trails off.

“The big dream?” I ask.

Her cheeks turn as pink as her cheeks. “I am sorry. I must be boring you.”

“No. Of course not.”

“I am not dogging out?”

“Dogging out?” I ask. Why does that sound so dirty? “Faye.” I say. She looks at me. “What’s the big dream?”

Faye hesitates. “You know the big world changing things. Building a foundation. Setting up adoption centers around the country. But not the concrete ones. One’s like a person’s home. So the dogs can acclimatize and feel safe. I just... I want to help as many dogs as I can. To let them, such unconditional loving animals know we love them just as much.”

I smile to myself. I understand I really do. Why I might not be working on the same dream scale as Faye? All I want for Deep Throb to do is help people find happiness. To feel loved by their perfect match.

“I can help you.” I say without thinking.

“What?” Faye snorts, sending drops of pink spraying toward me. “Oh shit. Shit. Fuck. I mean. I don’t swear to you. Dang it.”

She snatches a paper napkin and scrubs my tie. I don’t have it in my heart to tell her it won’t work for such an expensive

tie. Pink strawberry virgin fizzes won't come out of silk.

"I am so sorry, L."

"It's fine." Her delicate fingers are stroking my tie, like one of her puppies.

"It's not. It's ruined."

"It's fine." The silk keeps running through the napkin.

"I'm sorry."

I catch her hand. A delicious shudder shoots down my back. Faye looks up at me. She's so close. The lips are so tempting. In an instant, I could have her.

"Faye." I say. "It's okay."

"You're really nice, L."

I doubt that. If it was Dash, I would have made him pay for it.

"But I don't want your money."

"Money?" I ask. Fuck, I am still holding her hand. Worse than that, I dragging it closer to my chest to feel my heart beat racing for her.

"I don't do hand outs. I know you are sweet, wanting to help me. But I can do this. This is my dream. And I will do it."

And just like that, I fall a bit more.

Fall? Yes, I fall for her that bit more. A strong woman, who wants to forge her own way in the world. Who wouldn't want that?

"I just. I can do this by myself." The fingers let go of the tie. "Thank you. For the offer, though. Maybe when I have my foundation, you can donate." She laughs at herself. The laugh is bitter though. As if she doesn't quite believe it.

"The business plan." I blurt. If she doesn't want money, then I can help her in other ways.

"Hmm?"

"I can look over it. Strengthen it. Make it..."

Faye half smiles. “Better?”

“I am not saying it’s bad. Or that there is a problem, but if there is. I can show you now and try again at the bank. Or I can—” I stop the ramble, sinking into the bar stool. I sound like an idiot. Worse I sound like Dash when he gets excited over a new toy. What am I even doing? The last thing I need is more alone time with Faye. Just us in my office, or my couch. The lights on dim, and the rain pounding the windows. “Sorry,” I mumble, stopping the thoughts from stirring.

“What for?” Faye furrows her eyebrows.

“You said you didn’t want help.”

She shakes her head. A golden curl bounces free. “You know what? A smart thing to do is to accept help from a good business man. I would very much appreciate it L. Just to know. Point me in the right direction.”

Heat burns my cheeks. I don’t know what part of that got me, but it got me good.

Faye pulls her straw out of her glass and downs the rest of it in one go.

“Hey!” She turns to me. “You want to leave?”

I copy Faye, gulping down my drink.

“Not to your car.” Faye adds, standing up.

Wait. What?

“Like, let’s leave and get some fresh air. I think Charlotte is right. I need tonight. But I really want some ice cream.”

“Ice cream?”

“Yeah, you know the sugary, milky deliciousness.”

I shake my head. “I know what ice cream is.”

“Just checking.” Faye’s fingers wring around each other. “So?”

I cock my head.

“Would you like to go get ice cream with me, L? professionally, of course.”

Every part of me is tearing in half. Bad idea. Great idea. Bad idea. Great idea.

Faye smiles.

“Yes.”

# Chapter Nine

## Faye

“Peanut brittle. It has to be.” I spin around, thrusting a finger into L’s chest. Damn. The pink patches of my drink might as well be polka dots on his shirt. And his tie, well that’s ruined.

Yet he still looks dashing. Even more so walking the quiet streets with his hands in his pockets. The broody billionaire aesthetic is on point.

“Way too hard to be enjoyable.” He says, looking at my finger.

I bite down the need to say that’s what she said. Making L laugh with my cow joke is good enough for tonight. I don’t want to scare him off.

“Hmmm,” I withdraw my finger, spin and start walking in front of him.

It’s a glorious night. Warm with a hint of a breeze light enough to cover my skin with goose pimples. Or maybe that’s just having L’s eyes on me.

“What ice cream does L like? Of all the flavors in the world.” And it would be in the world. L has probably tried more flavors than I could even imagine, which is a feat.

I stop still.

A hand presses against the small of my back. Oh god. L is touching me. His hand is big and comforting. My stomach squeezes tight. Desire pulses through my veins.

“What’s wrong?” I asks, moving his hand away.

The butterflies don’t calm down. My skin crawls with heat, but for a different reason. L has money, and he’s lovely... I have no doubt he will pay for my ice cream. Which means... I could go fancy. Not over the top. But maybe a topping or two. Jeez, it’s L. I doubt he would even flinch if I asked for all the toppings.

“Faye?”

I turn, facing L. His eyes are wide, eyebrows knitted tight. How do you even ask someone to buy you something? Even if it's ice cream... it changes things. "I don't know how to ask you. So don't worry about it."

"Ask me."

"I—" Nope. Abort. Abort! This feels wrong. "Do you want to take the shortcut through the park?" *Chicken.*

"Is that what you wanted to ask?"

"Yep, and.... rocky road?"

L shakes his head, and we walk to the park entrance.

"Rainbow sherbet?" I try again.

"Too sweet."

Dang it. For some stupid reason, I thought I knew L. But all my guesses aren't good. And now, I am questioning everything. And maybe I should. Just because he brings me coffee and has spoken to me a handful of times doesn't mean I know him. And it's even more silly of me to think there is something between us.

"What does L like?" I sing again. I grab the skirt of my dress and swoosh it with my bouncing steps. "Let me guess, not berry?"

"No?" He says from behind me.

"And not chocolate?"

"No."

We come to a large circle fountain. In the middle is a woman pouring a bucket of water. She looks pretty, but tired. All day standing there looking at other's pass by and enjoying the park. And she's here still working. I don't blame her. I step onto the fountain's edge.

"What are you doing?" L's voice rises to a near shout.

I drop my skirt, and meet the wide eyes. "I'm... walking. Well, more kind of dancing? Skipping?" I laugh. L being near me makes me skip.

L stares at my feet. “You’re going to fall.”

“Then you will have to take me home wet and dissatisfied.”

L runs a hand through his hair and moves to my side. For a split second, I wonder if he is going to throw me over his shoulder and spank me. But he doesn’t. His shoulders tense and he keeps up with me.

“You...”

“I’m?” I ask.

L shakes his head. With the new height difference, I could hold on to his shoulder. I could lean down and kiss him. My fingers twitch.

“Go on. Or is it that bad? I’m a dork? Crazy? Weird.” I say the list in my head. Even when I tried to be like everyone else, I heard it. I was always different. Me but wrapped in layers of dull clothes, laughing at jokes to myself.

“I’ve never met someone like you.”

I freeze and L faces me. Okay. I was not expecting that tone of voice. It wasn’t a recoil or an insult. More... I don’t even want to think of it, but... admiration? Ha! Yeah, right. “Well, that’s a good thing. I would hate to think there was an evil twin running around being me.”

He smiles. A serene smile that I didn’t even have to make a joke for. “You are just... live in the moment, don’t you?”

Is that a proper question? Do I live in the moment? No, living in the moment is not caring what people think, and I do. I care about the way L is watching me. The man at the chess table glancing at us. I love this dress. I love it makes me feel like a duck princess. It still took me twenty minutes to decide, though. But sometimes the felling of putting something cute on outweighs knowing you look like a dork to everyone else.

Me? Living in the moment. No.

Spontaneous. Yes. Maybe Mr Well-Suited-Silent-Boss doesn’t have that itch, and is what he sees in me.



“Haven’t you ever wanted to do something spontaneous?” I ask, returning to my bouncing walk.

“Sure.”

“Really? Like what?”

“Betting on a hand I was bluffing on...” L’s voice drifts and he looks at the floor. “Saying yes to you and your hairy vacuum cleaners being in my office.”

I hold back a laugh. “And for that, I am grateful.” I say. “But haven’t you done something like wild? Real crazy. Sing out loud for no reason. A daring stunt of romance. Stripping naked and going skinny dipping in a fountain. Do you want to?”

“Skinny dip?” L asks with his eyebrows rising. That is not a ‘what? are you an insane?’ question. Maybe there is a wild streak in him.

“Ha! No silly. I mean just be free for a moment?” I stop L follows.

The dark eyes find mine. My fingers run down the pink speckled suit collar, finding their way to the ruined tie.

He steps closer, and the world slows down. My heart beat rushes with the sound of the fountain. Fuck.

“Can I take it off?” I whisper.

L nods.

With a small tug, the silk tie comes apart.

“Button?” I ask, my finger tracing around the top one. L nods and I free the button. I want more. To feel the touch of his warm skin on mine. My finger tips gliding down his chest. Every breath I am taking, L is engulfing me with spicy cologne and warmth. I want to suffocate on it.

“Why?” L asks.

Umm. Because you smell like a billion dollars sat in front of a fire on a chilly night. Oh.

“You’re not so buttoned up now.” My heart jumps in my throat. Fuck it. I grab hold of his broad shoulders and jump.

Huge, safe hands grip my waist. We spin until I land on the ground.

“See!” I laugh.

L clenches his jaw.

“Spontaneous. It’s fun.” Brave, and daring, del—

L cups a hand to my face. A thumb caresses my cheek. Oh by all things sparkly. He’s going to kiss me. L is going to kiss me. Please, L.

The touch drops away.

“Rum and raisin.” L says on the edge of his voice. The whisper tingles my lips.

“Huh?”

“Rum and raisin.” He repeats. “That’s my favorite flavor.”

L walks past me, brushing against my arm.

What on earth just happened? But really, that flavor? “Rum and raisin, are you kidding me?” I shout, running to catch up.

“I like unlikely pairings.”

# Chapter Ten

## Faye

The bell chimes. This place is adorable. Pink walls, black-and-white tiles. It's like 1940s ice cream parlor. Including the couldn't care less teenagers wearing red and white striped uniforms. But the cherry on top of the sundae is the ice cream counter. Rows and rows of different colors stretch across the room. When you think it ends, it keeps going. "I knew we would find an ice cream place!"

L furrows his eyebrows, giving me a side glance. "You mean you didn't know where we were going?"

"No?" It's easy to guess, though. If you are near a park, there is sure to be ice cream somewhere. And well, the city never sleeps. "Spontaneous remember."

I scan over the ice-cream. Colorful, funny named ice creams of delightful combinations. Ice ice baby. Cereal Milk. Nuted Cream. In the corner, as if hiding with shame of itself is what I am looking for. "L!"

"You don't need to shout." He grumbles.

"But they have rum and raisin." I press my finger against the glass. "It's not extinct yet."

He rolls his eyes, and my heart skips a bit. "Why would it be extinct? It's a staple."

"For a certain age. Soon it will be one of those retro flavors that come out once or twice a year."

"How old do you think I am?" L asks.

I bite the side of my tongue, but nothing will stop the words. "Old enough to think on the first day we met, you thought my dinosaur shirt was a memorial for your brethren."

L locks his eyes on the row of ice cream and runs a hand through his hair. The small smile is there, though. Damn, I am becoming addicted to it.

L looks at the servers, who have yet to take their eyes off their phones, and leans closer to me. “It’s a shame isn’t it? Guess that means I am too old for you.”

What? No. No. Is he, did he? Was that a flirt? L’s face gives nothing away.

No, I shake my head with a laugh. L Hunnd is not flirting with me. He’s made is quite clear he doesn’t want me. I doubt he even thinks of me in that way. If he did, he would have kissed me. A beautiful night in the city, next to a fountain and my fingers wrapped around his tie. He should have kissed me.

I should have kissed him.

Damn, when did I become obsessed with the fantasy of us? L would never like a dork like me. I have to pull myself together. This isn’t even a date.

“They have Sweet Dreams Unicorn.” L breaks the silence, nodding to the rainbow ice cream topped with sprinkles.

“Yeah. They do.”

“Well?” He asks. “Isn’t it your favorite?”

“Sweet Dreams Unicorn? Pffft, no.”

L’s eyebrows rise. “Caramel?”

“No, my favorite is vanilla.”

L laughs. Actually laughs. And not in a ha, you’re funny way, but an ‘oh my god, really?’ chuckle.

My cheeks burn with embarrassment. Vanilla is boring. Maybe I should be a bit of a rainbow fizz girl or a sugar sprinkle lover.

“You like vanilla?”

“Yeah,” I say, focusing on the ice cream. “Shouldn’t I like it?” Fuck, what am I doing? I like vanilla. I should own it. Not feel like this. But sometimes it’s hard to be yourself. Especially when it means people have reactions that make you question everything.

One of the servers approaches the counter. No doubt eyeing up the fancy three piece suit man in a good mood for a tip. L orders his ice cream and I sink into the shadows scanning over the different toppings.

This store is something else. The toppings are ridiculous. Cookie dough. Melted marshmallows. Mini chocolate bars. But the price. Damn, for the good stuff, it costs nearly as much as the ice cream itself.

“Faye?” L says. His voice is low, almost as if he’s going back into his shell.

“I’m sorry,” I rush out.

“For?” In the reflection of the glass, L rocks toward me. His hands are deep in his pocket. This might be the most relaxed he has looked all night.

“Making fun of your ice-cream choice.” I say.

“It was amusing.”

“Rum and raisin suits you, you know?” Our eyes lock on our curved reflection. “Strong and elegant.”

“And you... do not suit vanilla.”

We laugh.

“I suppose though.” He says after a moment. “It does. If you get the real vanilla ice cream. It’s... beautiful and decadent. The best there could ever be.”

A lightness grows in my chest. “But boring.” I add before I can let the words hit.

“You said it, not me.”

“Don’t worry. I am not vanilla. In any sense.” And once again, I am flirting. I swear throw me a compliment, and I will roll over for you. “That’s the best thing about vanilla, though. You can add anything to it, and it’s still perfect.”

“Faye.” L clears his throat.

“Yep?”

“What were you going to ask me?”

“Huh? When?” I turn to face L. His eyes search mine, but it’s no use. I don’t know what he is talking about.

“You said. I don’t know how to ask you. So don’t worry about it.”

Two huge ass cups of ice cream push toward us on the counter. They’re large enough to be two nights worth... if I wanted to let eat sensibly. Which I don’t.

“You got me, vanilla.” I say.

“Were you joking?” He asks.

I shake my head. No. I wasn’t, nevertheless, L took me seriously.

L hands me the cup. My fingers graze over his. Tingles race down my spine. The hair on the back of my neck stands at its ends. I tug the cup, but L won’t let go.

“What was the question?” He asks.

“Nothing.”

I tug the cup, but it is as solid as a rock in his grip. And here it is. The condition. Everything with humans, there has to be a condition to it. Dogs don’t care. Even if they see the worst of humanity, they will love someone unconditionally.

I sigh, and the cup comes free. “You are lucky I like you.”

L smirks.

Damn, I didn’t mean it like that. Not this time.

“I was going to ask if you were going to pay.” I confess. “But it seemed really, *really* rude. And it still does. But since you did. Thank you, L.” I chomp into a spoon of ice cream.

BAM!

Pain pierces into my head. Fucking brains freeze.

“Why?”

“It... It...” Oh fuck. This hurts. I close my eyes, shaking my head. “Brain freeze.” I stammer.

“Look up.”

“What?”

L’s thumb hooks my chin and guides my head back. “Now, breathe through your mouth.”

I obey. Every breath eases the sharpness, and the claim of L on me melts my body into a puddle of warmth. What type of magic was that?

“Why did you want to know if I was going to pay?” L soothes, letting go of my chin. He takes a seat on a vinyl red stool. I copy him.

“What do you mean?” I ask. The perfect creamy ice cream now looks evil. I take my revenge, stabbing my spoon into it.

L’s eyes search mine. The more time we spend together, the more I am understanding him. Every time he speaks around others, it’s poised and well thought out. Like the text messages, I am sure he re-writes them until he has the perfect answer. That’s not the L I like, though. I like it when he makes mistakes, and gets flustered. It’s cute. It’s him.

“Go on, L. What are you thinking?”

“You really want to know?” He asks.

“Of course I want to know what you think.”

For a split second, he looks taken aback. “I think you are not the type of woman who asks a person out for ice cream and assumes they would pay.”

“Well, yeah. That’s just rude.” I mumble through a spoon of ice cream.

“But you wanted to ask. Which would mean you wanted to know because...”

L stabs his ice cream with his spoon and holds out a hand to me.

“What?”

“Give me the ice-cream Faye.”

I look at him, and at my ice cream, and then back to him. “No, I like it. Don’t take my baby away.”

L cocks an eyebrow, and I sigh, giving in.

“Fine. But only because—”

“You like me?” L smiles, finishing my sentence. He waves the server back.

The young, scruffy man is strangely attentive.

“What topping do you want, Faye?”

L... As soon as I think there’s not a chance you like me you pull this. You make me feel seen. Heat crashes over my cheeks and I try to hide my face from him. “Chocolate fudge. Please.” I say into my hand.

“And?”

You are killing me here. I can’t even look him in the eye. “Sprinkles. The good ones. The hard ones.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I catch L’s smile. His beautiful smile. It’s not forced into a laugh, or fake. It’s a resting radiant face.

L leans closer to me. His lips are so close to my ear. Rum and raisins infiltrate my senses. “Faye?”

“Mhmm?” I swallow.

“Do you want all the toppings?”

“Is it too much?” I ask. The prices of some of these. Especially the high end stuff like the pear flavored popcorn, and the handcrafted Turkish delight.

“I think we are going to find out. Two spoons and you’ll probably be done.”

My laugh comes out as a snort. “Yeah, in what universe will that happen?”

L hands the ice cream back to the server, instructing him on the request to fill it with all the toppings.

“L,” I place my hand on his leg. Shit. I snap it away. “Thank you. Really.”

“No problem. Next time...” he says. “Just ask Faye. Anything—” He clears his throat, cutting off his words.



“Honestly, I have always wanted to try this.” I turn my attention away from the server pumping strawberry syrup to L. He’s on his phone. My stomach twists with guilt. Even if it’s late at night, I bet L should be working. I should be working, I should be pouring everything I can into my business plan, to help L help me.

But this.

This is nice.

How long has it been since I have not worried about the puppies? Or Spud. Or that I have to go to Ms Montgomery’s tomorrow morning and feed her cat. Then do a home trimming for Poo The Poodle, and then the pups last vaccination. Charlotte was right. I needed tonight. And I think so does L.

“Work?” I ask.

“Hmm?” He says eyes locked on his phone.

Dang it. “If you need to go, L—”

“What? No.” L says, eyes snapping up to me. “I am messaging my driver. You are not taking that thing in my car and walking...”

I follow his gaze to the ice cream. The sugar monstrosity has a new home in a larger container. “More ice cream.” L directs the server.

“My arms might fall off walking home with it?” I say.

“It’s okay though?” L asks, pocketing his phone. “If I...”

“If you?” Kiss me. Take some of the ice cream and drip the caramel sauce onto my naked skin, and lick me until Ice-cream. Dear fuck, I am losing it. Of course I am. It’s L. The gorgeous sweet man wrapped in a three-piece suit. And the tie hanging on his neck is a fierce reminder of how close we came.

And maybe... despite our differences we could be together. The dork and the billionaire. The girl who wears a rubber ducky dress and the handsome tailored suit man. The rum and the raisin.

Maybe. And maybe there's a chance if he helps me with my business loan application I can stay in the city. And maybe right now, at this moment, I am looking at my future.

“Is it okay if I take you home?”

I bite on the wooden spoon and nod my head. “Thank you.”

# Chapter Eleven

## Faye

L is magnetic. And I swear he is doing it on purpose. He has to be. The streetlights racing flash across his face showing off his strong features. Without breaking his gaze from the car window, he takes a spoon of ice cream and places it in his mouth. The end of the spoon dangles on his lips. Fingers pull on his shirt, unhooking a button, and he ruffles his hair.

Damn. He looks better than ever.

“You know you can eat it, right?”

“What!” I gasp. Shit. He’s watching me watch him in the window.

“If you don’t eat it, it’ll melt.”

It’s too late for that. The ice cream is already melting from where I am holding it. “I don’t trust myself. I don’t want to spill it.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“Ummmm, have you seen this car? I think there is much to worry about.” The interior is leather, no doubt real. There’s not a receipt or soda cup in the back. And the screen on the back of the headrest doesn’t have a single fingerprint on them. This car is way too nice for me.

L shrugs. “Archie gets a bigger tip.”

The driver smiles in the rear view mirror with a nod.

I take a scoop as careful as I can. The sweet sugar dances on my tastes buds. There is everything. Chocolate. Strawberry, caramel, sprinkles, chocolate bars, gummy bears. This is insane. I might as well be in Willy Wonka’s factory trying to eat my way out.

“This is ridiculous.” I say as the ice cream rush down the back of my throat. “Its so good.”

“I am glad you are happy.” L says, turning back to the window. “It’s nice.”

The comment warms my chest.

We sit in silence. It’s a silence that differs from the elevator. This is comfortable, as though we are two people sitting on a couch. One of us on their phone and the other, watching television. Both enjoying the proximity of each other’s company.

“Why don’t you take Spud?” L asks out of nowhere.

“Take Spud? Like adoption?”

“You like him. He likes you. Is there something wrong with him? Something you don’t like about him?”

“What? No?” I say way too loud. “I love him. It’s just... Spud is old and his life has been a bit *ruff*.”

L gives me a side eye, but I don’t think it’s because of the bad pun. “You don’t want him then.” He says as if it’s a face.

I shake my head. “It’s not that at all. I would take him in a heartbeat, but it’s unfair. Spud deserves more than I can give him. All the treats, company all day, and quiet. I know he gets bothered by the puppies and if I can help it, that will not change. He just needs more.”

“I see.” L says, turning back to the window. “You are a good person, Faye.”

“Thank you?” A good person. No, I am a person. Every person should have the basic empathetic skills to know if they can support and give a dog a life they deserve.

“I had a dog when I was young.” L says after another moment. “A teenager really.”

I put my spoon down. L’s eyes are full of emotions and he’s not hiding them.

“My best friend. Suppose he was the only one who ever knew me. The real me—” The deep voice cracks.

“L, you don’t—”

“Shep.” He turns to the window.

“L,”

“I just. I don’t think I can go through that again. Never again. I loved that dog so damn much.”

I reach out, placing my hand on top of his. My thumb rubs the side of his palm.

L pulls away.

“We’re here.” He states hard. And then he’s gone. I don’t even have time to feel the car stop before his door is open.

One step forward. Three steps back. That’s L. Never moving in a straight line.

The door opens for me. I thank Archie for the ride home, and slide out.

I don’t know what to say. Do I just ignore what he said to me? Pretend it never happened. Ask him what the fuck is his deal? Why can’t I hold his hand to comfort him? Does he hate me that much? Is he afraid I am going to make his hand sticky?

But none of the questions come out. I just look at my melting ice cream and follow the path to my door.

I place the ice cream on the step to search for my keys, glimpsing L’s shining shoes on the path behind me.

“Good night, Faye.”

No. This night doesn’t end here.

“Was he a good dog?” I blurt out, spinning to him. The step difference between the door and the path brings my eyes straight to his.

“Of course.” He states, taken aback.

“And you gave him everything he deserved.”

L furrows his eyebrows. “Yes.”

“Then you are the world’s greatest owner. He loved you as much as he loved him. But all thing’s, L. All things good or

bad have to move on. And all you can do is enjoy the memories you made.”

L’s shoulders fall and he looks at the floor. “I know.”

“And despite the heartache of losing him, you were happy? Weren’t you?”

“Yes.”

With a single look from those deep eyes, I understand. All the small things are making sense. The thoughts about being a monster. Not wanting to be near dogs. The distance between us. Even now.

I reach for him. My hands cupping his face, pulling the glorious eyes to me and only to me. “Don’t you deserve to be happy, L?”

Silence.

“I believe you should be happy, L. You deserve it. You really do. You are so sweet and kind.” Please, L. Please believe me.

“Faye,” He whispers. Warmth floods my stomach to thighs. He catches my hand, holding my palm against his face for a second before pushing it away. “Don’t.”

“Don’t?” My hand is aching to touch him again.

“We can’t do this.” But L’s actions are defying his words. He steps onto the step I am on, forcing me to move back until I am against the door.

“Do what?” I whisper, voice cracking as he presses me against the wall.

“It’s wrong.”

Oh no it’s not, this isn’t wrong. L is on me. His chest brushing against mine. Rum and raisins blowing on my lips. And his hand, his hand is on my hip. Holding me. If this is wrong, I can only imagine what right can feel like.

“Is it?” I squeak.

“I’m older.” He’s eyes are holding me together.

“And?” L isn’t that much older.

“You’re my employee.”

“Not for that much longer,” I say. But I understand what will this look like. Everyone will think he is the office hook up.

A smirk dances on his face. “I am working. Busy.”

“Now?”

I press my hand against his firm chest and move it up so a finger tip can touch his chest. And I swallow hard.

No one has ever made me feel this way. It’s as though my whole body is on fire. I am going to explode if I can’t get more of L. To feel his lips on mine. His hands claiming every part of me. Every second between us is pure pleasure, and the knowing I am safe. I am seen. I am his.

“You always have to have the last word.”

“Maybe.” I say.

“You are magnificent. Faye.”

“L,” I rasp.

He pushes his body against mine, flattening me against the door. He nuzzles into my neck. I wrap my hand around the back of his head, trying to get as much of the breaths cascading over my skin as possible. “Do you know what I want to do to you?”

A vice tightens around my chest. I squeak.

“I want to kiss you, Faye. More than that. I need to drag my tongue over every inch of your body. Lick, and suck until I am covered in you. Your thighs. Wrapped around my face.” L’s breath grow faster and faster vibrating on my neck. He’s nearly panting for me. “Have you clenching around my hard cock, screaming my name.”

Yes. And it’s hard. So hard pressing against my stomach. I want it.

“Begging me to stop. Begging me to keep going.”

L’s hand slides to my ass. His thumb melding me like I am his toy.

“Yes.” I swallow hard.

L moves, his forehead pushes against mine. Our lips are so close, yet too far. “I want to make you mine.”

“L,” I whimper.

“The things you do to do me, Faye.”

He pulls away. I wrap my arms tighter around his neck. “Please.”

“No.” He pushes against the wall, breaking free. “Maybe you’re right. Maybe I deserve some happiness. Maybe I deserve a dog. But there is no possible way I could ever fucking deserve you, Faye.”

“But, but, but.” I mumble, but L is already walking away. He’s getting into the car and not looking back.

Fuck. I need him, and will do anything to have that hungry touch back on me again.



# Chapter Twelve

## L

The ice cream taunts me. It shouldn't. She shouldn't. But all I am consumed by is Faye's body melting under mine. Her hand on my chest and soft body squirming under mine. For a moment, I tainted my beautiful sunshine and I loved it. Every. Damn. Second. I loved it.

I fucked it all up. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

I snatch the ice cream container and pull my arm back. No. It will be a bad idea to throw it across the apartment. I step on the bin and toss it into the trash can. Not satisfying at all.

But then again, I don't even deserve to have a good tantrum.

What did I do?

I had her. I had my sweet girl. Despite everything she could think about me, she was in my hands. Her lips brushing against mine.

I stomp across the apartment and into my room.

Sleep. That's what I need. Sleep and pretend this was all a bad dream. I ignore my laptop and files. Doubt even bury myself in work will help me tonight.

I collapse back onto my bed and tug my tie free. The gray material has pink drink speckled on it.

The silky material runs through my fingers. It's not a tie anymore. It's Faye. Her snort laugh. Her spontaneous touch. The way she looked at me not as her boss, or as a Hund, or a monster. She looked at me for me.

I hold the tie against my chest and stare at the ceiling. Who knew someone could cause you this much pain? I did the right thing, though. I am sure of it. Even if she wanted me at the moment, like she said all things have to move on. And I can't do that, not if I get a taste.

Just one more week. That's all that's left. A week after her in my office with the dogs. And then... Nope, that's a lie. I told

her I will help her business. Oh fuck.

I need to apologize, yes. A spontaneous apology, she will accept it. And it will all be behind us.

I pull my phone out and send Faye a message.

**L:** Sorry

**Faye:** Tuesday?

The phone beeps in the same second. What? Oh fuck, she's still awake. She's answering me.

**L:** Tuesday?

**Faye:** Sorry?

The messages hit at the same time. And I am already smiling.

**Faye:** To help me with the business plan? Will that be okay?

No, no, it's not. I can't face her again.

**L:** I have a meeting.

It's not a lie, but the guilt is sharp. I could move it. I would move it for her.

**L:** Thursday?

**Faye:** My place or yours? ;)

Faye, what are you doing to me? Did you not hear me?

I put my phone on my chest, but it vibrates again. I pick it back up. Jeez, I have no self control.

**Faye:** Why are you sorry, l?

For everything.

**L:** For

I pause.

**L:** For ruining your night.

**Faye:** Oh.

Is that a good oh or a bad oh? Texting needs less subtlety to it.

**Faye:** Here I thought you were sorry for my ice cream stomach ache.

**L:** You ate all of it???

I am not surprised. Faye's eyes beaming when seeing the mountain of sugar. She was already devouring it before she picked up the spoon.

**Faye:** Nooooo.... not all of it.

**Faye:** For the first time ever.

Hmph. So even Faye has a too much sweetness level.

The dots dance. I should say something. Tell her I will never touch her again. And I won't. The whole thing was a mess. The invitation of her eyes, the cheeky smile. It's all my cock needed to take over. And it was too much. Way too much for my sweet girl. No, there's no way I can trust myself.

**Faye:** I...

My stomach hardens. Just tell me Faye. Say you hate me. Please, cause we both know I will only listen to you. Put me out of my misery.

**Faye:** Why are you awake?

**L:** Because someone is texting me.

**Faye:** Because I know you would be awake.

Really? Faye. Stop making me smile.

**L:** Why am I awake?

**Faye:** Catching up for the work you missed while you were with me?

In a normal world, I would be. In fact, I should go through the beta feedback from tonight and making a detailed plan for the morning.

**L:** No.

**Faye:** Is this another guessing game?

**Faye:** L what you said.

**L:** I meant it.

**L:** It's a bad idea.

**Faye:** I know.

The dots appear. Stop. Move again. Stop. A tightness wraps around my chest. Fucking hell, Faye. You are killing me right now.

**Faye:** L?

I jolt up, gripping the phone so hard it's a surprise the screen isn't cracking.

**L:** Yeah.

The stupid fucking dots come back. Come on Faye. Just tell me I am right. This is a mistake between us. Let's rip the band aid off, so I can go back to sulking in my office.

**Faye:** I can't stop thinking about it.

**L:** About what?

**Faye:** You.

**Faye:** Your hands.

**Faye:** Your lips.

**Faye:** The thing pressed against my stomach.

Faye... Lust pools at the base of my spine, dripping down my thighs. The memory of the sweetness under my hands. We were so close. I could taste the sugar on her lips.

**Faye:** It's wrong though, right?

Yes. Yes, so wrong.

**Faye:** L.

My thumb hovers over the keyboard.

**L:** Yes.

**Faye:** But... I want you too. Everything you said. I wanted that too.

I close my eyes, falling back into the bed. The message is there when I open them I lock the phone, and unlock it. It's still there. The greatest four words in the universe. I want you to.

**Faye:** For you to kiss me, L.

A deep breath pulls on my core. I need more of this, more of her. This isn't real, not really. It's not like I am actually going to kiss Faye or touch her. Or her real screams... and I am justifying this. This is wrong. But it's better than tainting for her.

**L:** What else?

The chat falls silent. Not even the bubbles move. Fuck. I fucked it up. I should've said, me too. Or that's nice. Or—

**Faye:** To kiss my neck and pull me close to you.

Yes, Faye. Yes.

**L:** And then?

**Faye:** L?

And I come back crashing into the floor. She's going to stop this.

**L:** Yeah?

**Faye:** I've never done this before.

**Faye:** I mean over text...

Images of her cheeks blushing and a tight smile fills my mind. Oh, sweet girl. If only I could reach out to you. Hold you and tell you it's okay. It's you, Faye. It doesn't matter what you say, it's you.

**L:** Can you feel it?

**Faye:** Can I feel what?

**L:** Me. Pushing up against you.

**Faye:** Yeah.

**L:** Do you feel what you do to my duck?

Shit.

**L:** Duck.

**L:** Ducking duck.

**Faye:** Hahahaha. Yes, L. I can feel your dick duck.

I take a breath.

**L:** You make me so hard, Faye.

**Faye:** Now?

My cock throbs as if it knows we are talking about it.

**L:** Of course.

**Faye:** Me too.

**Faye:** Well, you know what I mean.

A growl rumbles in my core.

**L:** Are you wet?

**Faye:** Yes.

Oh fuck. Where is she? Is she on her bed, hiding under her covers, wearing nothing but her underwear? They would be bright, cheerful. Yellow to match her smile. The images don't stop.

**L:** Are you touching yourself?

There's a slight hesitation.

**Faye:** No.

**Faye:** Not yet. Do you want me to?

I suck in a breath.

**Faye:** Are you?

**L:** I want to. But not yet...

**Faye:** Why?

**L:** You Faye. You.

My heart pounds in my chest.

**L:** You come first. Always.

There is a long pause in the conversation. Is silence good? Maybe she's getting ready. Her underwear being kicked off. The gorgeous body sinking into the bed. I bet she's biting her lip like when she is trying not to laugh.

**Faye:** What do you want me to do?

Everything. Everything sweet girl. It's taking all my strength not to loosen my belt. Even more to ignore the throbbing need. I mean my words, though. It's all Faye. Always. And now nothing is holding me back. I will make her cum and have her moans in my mind.

**L:** Can you still feel me?

**Faye:** Mhmm.

**L:** Tell me, sweet girl.

**Faye:** You smell like rum and raisins. The hint of cologne. Hot breaths are panting on my neck and...

**Faye:** Your erection is pressing against my stomach. It makes me feel needed.

**L:** Cause I need you, Faye. I need you to touch your stomach. Graze your fingers over where I am.

**L:** Slow and steady.

**L:** Just like I would.

My fingers run over my stomach. The shirt material pushing and pulling.

**L:** And I would, my sweet girl. I would all the time in the world to worship you. Kissing your neck.

**L:** Your cheeks.

**L:** Your lips.

**L:** I would savor you. Sinking the memories of every touch and quiver into the back of my mind.

**Faye:** Oh, L.

**L:** Slowly, slide your hand up your chest.

**Faye:** Mhmmm.

**L:** Fuck you are beautiful.

My body is going haywire. Toes curling. Thighs tightening. Fuck, why aren't I with you?

**L:** I want to kiss you. Lick you. Suck those hard nipples.

**Faye:** Oh fuck.

**L:** Pinch them, sweet girl. You want to me to suck them don't you?

**Faye:** Yes.

**Faye:** Yes.

**L:** Lick your fingers, and make them all wet. Make them ache for me.

**L:** Fuck. Faye. I would watch you. Watch your body squirm as they get hard.

**Faye:** I am L. I a

The broken sentence is everything. She's listening to me. On her bed squirming for my touch even though she knows it won't come.

**Faye:** I am wet. So wet, L.

I bite down on my cheek.

**L:** Good girl.

**Faye:** L.

Oh fuck. Is she begging for me?

**L:** Do you need to touch yourself?

Faye: I need you.

Jeez, Faye.

**L:** You don't know what you are doing to me.

**L:** Do you want to touch yourself? Make yourself so wet for me.

**Faye:** YES.

**L:** Slowly, sweet girl. Slowly.



**L:** Trace up your thigh. And back down.

**L:** My hands pulling you open.

**L:** Fuck, I want you. I want you dripping on my mouth. My tongue suckling on your clit until you can't breathe.

**Faye:** Please, L. Please

**L:** Touch yourself sweet girl. Rub that gorgeous clit for me. Make it throb for.

The dots disappear. I need more. I need her. The pressure in my cock is too much.

**L:** That's it sweet girl. Don't rush it. You know I won't.

**Faye:** I lshk.

I smile. Good girl, Faye. Such a good girl getting off for me. My fingers release my belt. The zipper roars. Lust and desire form a tight ball deep in my core.

**L:** Fuck I am hard, Faye. What do you do to me?

**Faye:** Yes

**Faye:** Fuck me.

**L:** Oh no, sweet girl. I need you cumming on my cock.

I can imagine her. Her eyes rolling to the back of her head. The annoyed little moans, and the fingers slick, keeping their pace. Now and then speeding before forcing back to the steady.

**L:** I want to taste you. Run my tongue up your wet pussy, splitting you open. All to lick your clit, fast and hard. Make you know you are mine.

Oh fuck, I am losing it. I am not even thinking about what I am saying anymore. My thumb runs over my soaking slit. Tingles shoot down my thighs.

**L:** Love your clit, Faye. Love it like I do. The sweet little thing. I can never get enough of it. There's not a day that wouldn't go by without me teasing it.

**L:** Oh, fuck. You need to stop.

I wrap my hand over my cock. Pumping ever so slowly. I am barely holding on.

**Faye:** No. No.

**Faye:** L.

**L:** Suck on your fingers. Taste yourself.

**L:** That's it sweet girl. Suck on them. Lick them clean.

I swallow. Fuck, I am nearly drooling.

**L:** You taste fucking good don't you?

**Faye:** Yes.

**Faye:** L.

**Faye:** I am so close.

**L:** Me too, my sweet girl.

I heave a breath. My hand pounding faster. The pressure it building.

**L:** You're doing so well.

**L:** I want to hear you moan.

**Faye:** Please L. Let me.

**L:** Such a good girl. Fuck yourself. Hard. Fast.

**L:** Don't stop.

**L:** I won't be able to Faye. Fuck. There's no way to make me stop fucking you. You're so good. Too good for me.

Dots appear. Disappear.

Oh fuck, she's cumming isn't she? She's screaming my name. Rubbing that clit faster and faster. Her whole body jerking in the sheets looking for me.

I drag my grip up and down. Up and down. Pre-cum leaks. I can't stop. Can't get enough. I need more, more, more of Faye.

**Faye:** I screamed for you.

**Faye:** I am aching for you.

**Faye:** Fuck, L.

**L:** I'm cumming

I don't know if that's what I send. The phone disappears, and all my mind is consumed with Faye's smiling face. A tongue sliding over her lips. My body goes into overdrive. Cum explodes, coating my hand. The orgasm takes over. Animal groans and grunts fill the air with her name.

Oh, fuck. Oh fuck.

I pump the end of the orgasm out, grabbing the phone by my side.

**Faye:** Yes, L. Cum for me. I need you to cum for me.

Sweet girl. What did we do? The cold, hard reality sets in.

**Faye:** Did you cum for me?

**L:** Of course.

**Faye:** L... I...

**Faye:** Come over.

My heart drops.

**L:** Don't ask me that Faye.

**Faye:** I still need you.

**Faye:** This wasn't a mistake.

Maybe it wasn't. Maybe it wasn't. But nothing more can come out of this. This is dangerous, and she is intoxicating. All this has proved is I can never get enough of Faye.

**L:** You did so good, sweet girl. But it's for the best. This didn't happen.

**Faye:** L.

I sit up, straightening my self up. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

The phone buzzes. I shouldn't pick it up. Shouldn't read the message, because if she asked me... I will go over there. I will never leave.

I pick up the phone.

**Faye:** Okay.

**Faye:** See you in the elevator, Mr Hunnd.

Fuck. That's worse than asking me to come over.

# Chapter Thirteen

## Faye

My hands twist in Spud's lead. Holy guacamole, I have never been this nervous before. I hover over the elevator button and check my phone. I am a few minutes early for my normal time. If and that's a massive if, if L is waiting for me, he should be on the elevator by now. And there is still only one elevator working, so the chance of L being in this elevator is high.

Fuck it.

I hit the elevator button. The doors open. And there's L. The ever so dapper man with two coffees in hand. His stone gray three-piece suit is perfect as always. Except one tiny thing. The blue tie is loose. On purpose? No, I am overthinking it. He wouldn't sacrifice the way he looks just to make me think about the fountain. Especially since I can't get the sexts out of my head already. And I definitely need no reminders.

"Morning." L says, stepping in front of the closing elevator door. So, I guess we are going to pretend nothing happened.

"Good morning L." I follow Spud into the elevator.

Without a word, we exchange puppy basket for coffee.

The elevator door closes. I blink at the control panel. Every single floor has been selected. "The owner of this building should really fix the elevators."

"Yeah." L says, taking a sip of his coffee. "The maintenance has been really up and down lately."

Dang nabbit! I choke on my coffee. L smiles.

"How long have you been thinking of that one?" I ask, wiping my lips with the back of my hand.

"Since your first day, and you didn't use it."

Oh. That's incredibly... cute. My eyes fall to my pineapple blouse. A few drops of coffee are around my collar. Damn.

“You and shirts.” L shakes his head.

“It’s not me. It’s you!” I laugh. “You need to stop with the unexpected jokes.”

Our eyes find each other, and like a hurricane all the emotions come racing back. The words pressing against my shoulder. His wants, my needs.

I tear away, looking at the elevator doors. They open, shut. Open, shut. Every floor we pass the more awkward the tension in becoming and the more my thoughts are stirring.

What is L thinking? Is he thinking about his fingers sinking between my thighs? My lips kissing every inch of his skin... or watching me writhe on my bed saying his name.

“About the other night,” L says after a long beat.

“If you tell me I was actually texting someone else, I swear L—”

“What? No.” L shakes his head, but there is a small smile on his face. Okay, so we aren’t in a dark place about what happened. “I was thinking about what you said.”

What I said... what part? He deserves happiness. He deserves me? But L isn’t looking at me, he’s looking at Spud.

You’ve got to be shitting me. “Really?”

L shrugs.

“Wait this isn’t because of...” I raise my eyebrows twice.

“No.” L’s jaw tightens. “You said he needs the quiet and company. And there is no mistaking he likes the office. So, maybe... a dog bed in there wouldn’t be an inconvenience.”

“He will need breaks.”

“So do I.”

“And treats.”

“Yes.”

“And... and...” I don’t know why I am fighting this. But one look at Spud and I know. The furry brown mutt staring up at me with his eye. I love him. L could spoil the heck out of him.

And I know he would. And I have to be honest... He's always been L's dog. Spud has just been waiting for him to accept him.

"A trial basis, of course." L nods.

"Yeah."

"After the launch." L says.

"That's fair." I say. Damn, I am nearly going to cry.

The elevator doors close once again.

Spud has a foot on L's shoe, and either L doesn't notice or doesn't care. They will be good together, as long as L's intention is good. "L,"

"Yeah," He says, taking another sip from his coffee.

"This isn't a strange scheme is it?"

"A scheme? Why would taking a dog be scheming?" L scans over me. He kind of seems impressed.

"Like, since this is my last day it would be an excuse for me to come back to the office and we..." Can keep seeing each other, and get closer to each other but with an excuse. "... keep these elevator appointments."

"Who said it was your last day?" L cocks an eyebrow.

Oh!

Oh.

Ohhh. That means he still wants me to be his employee. Which means he's serious. There can't be anything between us. My heart drops.

"Faye," L whispers. "It's there if you want it. I can draft a long term contract."

Long term.

"My employees sure enjoy you. Cleo raves about your sessions all week, and Charlotte. She's Charlotte. But I can see the benefits, and the need for—"

"I understand." I say too hard.

L freezes, the widening eyes searching mine. He takes in a large breath and lets it go slowly. “Faye. I told you. We shouldn’t.”

I understand, but I don’t understand. He thinks he doesn’t deserve me. And I know he will never want a dork like me. But logic doesn’t seem to apply here. All I know is one thing: I want him. I want Leroy Hunnd even if it’s just a taste of the bliss he can give me.

There is a thing about relationships, though. It takes two people to work, and right now, there’s only me on team L and Faye kiss. Well, and probably Dash and Charlotte, too.

“Okay.”

“Okay?” L asks.

I don’t respond. I am scared of what I will say. I am terrified of what he will say.

I hold my coffee cup out to L. “You can keep the coffee.” He says.

“Your tie, you moose.”

“Isn’t it goose?” L shifts the puppies’ basket up his arm, taking my coffee cup.

“No. It’s moose. Why would a goose be funny? They’re evil.”

The soft material runs over my fingers. It’s luxurious even better than the one I ruined. With a small tug, everything is perfect. Yet, I can’t seem to let go.

“Faye,” L murmurs.

I shake my head. Take a breath. Smile. “Just one thing, L.”

The beautiful eyes swallow me whole. “Anything.”

“Can you... can you call me sweet girl? Just once.”

“Really?” He cocks an eyebrow.

“I just want to hear it.” The tie runs over my fingers for the last time.



I reach for my cup, fingers falling into his. A soft kiss plants on my forehead. “I am sorry, sweet girl. But you deserve so much better.”

The elevator jolts. I squeeze L’s hand. Coffee explodes everywhere.

“Oh shit!”

“Dogs!” I yell. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Spud seems a little concerned but nothing is on him.

L peers into the basket. “They’re fine. These are sausage dogs... You didn’t have these last week. Did you know these are different dogs?”

“Of course I do.” I roll my eyes. There is coffee everywhere. I am sure if I wring out my shirt I could fill the cup back up. And L. Oh god. I haven’t just destroyed his tie this time, but everything.

“Are you okay?” He asks, focusing on me.

“Are you?”

“Faye.” He states. “Are YOU okay?”

“Yeah, I am fine. I am fine, L.”

L lets go of a breath. He isn’t even concerned about his suit. Just me.

“What the fuck!” Charlotte gasps. Oh, we are here. “What happened?”

“Coffee.” L says in his rough voice.

“Yeah, no kidding.”

“Can you?” L hands the puppies to Charlotte, and she takes Spud’s lead off me. “Here, Faye.”

L swaps my destroyed coffee for his own. “No, it’s—”

“It’s a carmel latte. Don’t worry.”

“Are you okay?” Charlotte turns to me. “It didn’t burn you, did it?”

“No. No. It’s okay. Don’t worry about it. Just L leaving me wet and dissatisfied again.”

L stares at me with a look I am not sure I understand. Is he... is he thinking of a pun? And his brain is breaking.

Charlotte chuckles.

L smiles at me. “Oh Faye. You know leaving you dissatisfied is something I could never do to you.” And he walks away.

I—. I—.

“What did you do to him?” Charlotte asks. “L doesn’t joke around.”

Yes, he does. But not that time. L didn’t joke about that.

# Chapter Fourteen

## Faye

L stands in my doorway. Despite still wearing a suit, the lack of a jacket gives him an easy, casual look. He gazes around the apartment, like a vampire waiting for permission to come inside. “It’s so...”

“So?” I ask.

“Small.”

I walk up to him and hold my hand out for his briefcase. L is frozen, so I take it from him and take his hand in the other. “You better not stand out in the hallway.”

“Because it’s a fire hazard?”

“No, because someone might rob you.” I laugh, shutting the door behind him.

Spud trots to us, sits and stares at L. L smiles and scratches Spud behind an ear. My heart flies to the moon.

“And there’s two people leaving here?” He asks.

“Yes, L. Welcome to the real Manhattan.”

“Oh, the man outside with the colander on his head. Already welcomed me.”

“You met Spagbowl. He’s hilarious, used to steal fish. Did time. But now he’s good.” I say. “Tea?”

“Yeah.” L clears his throat so. “I think that’s for the best.”

I place the briefcase on the coffee table next to my paperwork I have picked over with a fine-tooth comb to make sure it’s okay. And rub my sleeve on a spot of dirt I missed. Honey’s and my place is no where horrific, or dirty. Just untidy. We had to move our bimonthly housework jam session up for L, though.

“Are you sure two people live here? And the dogs.”

“Yes, Mr Fancy Pants. And we like it. There’s a pleasant enough area out the back for the dogs, a park not too far away, and well.... this is just home.”

“My pants aren’t fancy.”

I cock an eyebrow.

“They’re not. You should see my brothers. Velvet, pattern, skinny.”

“Oh, I would love you in skinny jeans.” I laugh.

“Don’t get your hopes up.”

Yeah, the thought dies. If L wore skinny jeans, I wouldn’t stop laughing for a week.

I walk into the kitchen and fill the kettle up. Out of the corner of my eye, L wanders around looking at photos and small trinkets. Spud is glued to his side with every step.

“Open floor planning is very chic.” L comments.

“Well, if they divided it, I don’t think we could be able to move.” I suppose that’s what L’s place is like. Multiple floors? A gorgeous view of the city. A large ass bed that would fit us and the dogs, and... what am I thinking?

“You have a bath.”

I turn to him, peering into the bathroom. “Let me guess, you have a magnificent claw foot bath or a spa bath? A claw foot spa bath?”

“No. No bath.”

“Really? Why?”

“It wastes time.”

Well, that’s the most L response ever. But the image of him sitting in a bath on a Sunday morning, reading a paper and drinking coffee is in my mind. He would probably like it, though, never admit it. Especially if there were bubbles.

L places a hand on my room’s doorway and freezes. My heart leaps to my throat. Please tell me I didn’t leave

something dumb out. Oh shitake mushrooms, my vibrator on my pillow or something dorky.

L shakes his head, but in a good way.

“What?” I say, going to his side. Well, there doesn’t seem to be anything embarrassing out. Maybe Mr Tibbs the stuff elephant. But everyone has a stuff animal from childhood... or wish they still do.

“Nothing.”

“What?” I ask, poking L in the arm.

“It’s just the bright colors, the bed, the pictures of you being happy, dog trinkets, everything. It’s just... you.”

A warmth fills my chest. Yeah, it is. My room is my room. It’s my safe have. I can have it however I want, and know I won’t be judged for mixing yellow, pink and green together. Only Honey and Charlotte have been in here. They couldn’t care less. And now L... it didn’t even occur to me. He might judge me for being me. He hasn’t commented on my sausage dog dress or my messy hair. There isn’t even a look from him that makes me question why I can’t be normal and wear normal clothes.

I don’t think there ever has been.

I scan over him. A dark three piece suit jacket and a red tie. Perfect in every way. Except once again, the tie is loose. Sure, the first time is a mistake. But a second time L. I would like to think you know me better than that.

He says we can’t, but he sure is happy to play with the line.

And I am too. Just for a little longer.

“Faye?” He asks.

I shake my head and reach for his tie. With a tug, it’s fixed. With the tug, I don’t want to let go. And with the tug, L lets out a large breath.

“Here I was thinking you were day dreaming of me lying on my bed, reading your messages.”

“Faye...”

“It’s a joke.” I pat his tie against his chest and step back. It’s not a joke at all.

“Yes. Good.”

“All my paper work is on the coffee table. I will pour the tea and plate up the cookies.” I say, turning away before I do something stupid.

“You cook?” L asks, voice moving toward the living area.

“Yeah? You?”

“No. I have a cook. Charlotte nagged.”

I smile to myself at the thought of L in the kitchen wearing an apron to make sure his suit doesn’t get ruined. “That’s what sisters are for.”

“Spud down.” I busy myself, pouring the tea and plating the cookies. They aren’t anything special, but they sure smell good. “She’s my soon to be sister-in-law. Not sister.”

“You think there’s a distinction with your twos relationship?”

Taking the cookies to L, it hits me. They aren’t good. The edges have caught. One is twice the size of all the others, and two are getting it on. I can’t serve L these.

“What’s wrong?” L asks, turning to me. He looks at me. The plate. Me. And holds out a hand. I pick the best cookie, well the best one of the bunch. One that... hasn’t burnt. L doesn’t even look at it. He bites. “Yours are better than Harrison’s.”

“Really?”

L nods, turning back to my paperwork. One hand absent mindlessly opens his briefcase and pulls out a pair of glasses. And oh shit, he looks even better with thick frames. My hand twitches by my side, desperate to run my hand through his hair.

“Faye?”

“Yeah.” I snap myself out of the trance luring me in. “The kettle.”

Oh shit. It's whistling. Heat rushes over my cheeks, and I high tail it back to the kitchen. My last blooming flower tea unfurls its self in the small glass teapot. I fill my tea rex mug with the hot water. The purple color seeping out of the tea bag.

"Do you really do all of this?" L asks.

"Do what?" I pull out my phone and start the timer. Two minutes, thirty seconds until I am back at his side. Two minutes, twenty-five seconds until I am sitting next to engulfed by the cologne I need to cover my pillow in.

"The cat sitting, dog walking, puppy play dates in the offices..." Paper turns. "Grooming."

"Yeah. Why?"

L turns on the couch, his arm resting on the back. Oh stop my beating heart why don't you? L's sleeves are shoved up, showing off his forearms.

I swallow hard. And that's enough steeping. I turn, breaking my gaze. "I need the money, L. To keep the adoption costs as low as possible. It's not right asking someone for hundreds to thousands of dollars for a new dog, when that money can go to food, toys and vet bills."

"I see."

I pick up and walk to him. Each step is careful. I will not ruin another suit. I hand my glass teacup to L. "Anything for the dream, right?" I smile.

"I can have the other cup." He nods at my chipped mug.

"No, you are the guest. You have the nice one."

"Faye, it's fine."

"I don't even like the glass one."

L shakes his head and takes the glass cup. It suits him, especially in his large hands. It's so delicate. Elegant. "You're lying."

"It was a white lie. No one got hurt."

“Until you spill tea all over yourself.” L scrunches his nose at the tea.

“I haven’t done that since last night. Plus, who doesn’t like dinosaurs?” I take a seat next to him. I shouldn’t be surprised that Spud is on the other side of him, head in his lap. Lucky bastard. So much for listening to your new master.

“So...” I break the silence. “Are there any big glaring problems? Maybe there’s a record of the Nigerian Prince I sent money to. Or the failed taco truck enterprise, Taco Queen.”

L laughs, taking a sip of his tea. “White tea and blueberry?”

I nod.

In time, we lean forward, putting our teas on the coffee table.

“You’ve done well with this plan. Really, well actually,”

That is the worst compliment ever. The bank’s decision is real. I can’t keep up with these expenses. This work load. “Then I need to move.”

“Move?” L says, ripping his glasses off. The widening eyes pull something in my chest.

“To keep the overhead costs down. The city isn’t the best place for that. And it’s not like there won’t be dogs in need outside of the city.”

Silence falls. A dark silence. I swallow the heart beat in my throat down. There it is. It’s settled. Time for Plan B. I reach over L’s lap and pat Spud. Everything is falling into place. Spud will be with L. The puppies will find homes. And I can use the last of my savings to try this all again. L was right keeping whatever it is between us at bay. It saves a lot of heartache. Shame it won’t stop the what could have been questions.

“No.” L states.

“No?” I laugh. “L, I am not giving this up. This is just a hurdle.”

“Jus...” L runs a hand through his short, dark hair. “Look, if we change your focus onto the businesses that earn a profit.



Your focus isn't a loss leader."

"Puppy adoption?" My mouth dries. "But—"

"I know. But that's not what the bank is interested in. They want to see you are making money. So we call your pet sitting, walking and grooming like Faye's pet services."

"Bark at Yah." I say.

"Dirty Dawg."

I laugh, hitting L on the arm. "And to think you came up with Deep Throb?"

"It's a good name." L says a bit too quick.

"You think this will work?"

L nods, taking papers out of his briefcase. "I am sure Dash and my card buddies will be happy to have your puppy play dates to help as well." L stops, and his eyes search mine. "If that is okay. I won't be giving you money. You will have to work for it."

My heart skips a beat. Of course, L checks in with what I want, and the last thing I want is a cash handout and for him to pity me. I can do this. I can make this all real. There will be no need to move out of the city and leave Honey. Or Charlotte and Dash. Or... L.

"In five years." L continues. "And some minor expansions you will have enough for at least one adoption centre. It will be tough."

"I know." I nod. That doesn't scare me one bit.

"But it means you don't have to move."

Suddenly, L's hand is on top of mine. The warmth of him sends a flood of goose pimples up my arm.

"I don't want you to move." L says.

Oh. God. The paperwork pushes in my direction, and with a light squeeze, L lets go.

"What's this?" I sniff.

"Your contract. If you want it."

My eyes glance over strange money amounts and time lengths. Whoa. “This is way too much. This will be taking your money, L. Thank—”

“You are undercharging for your services, Faye. I did some market research, and this is what similar services charge.”

“Really?” Damn. I mean, it’s not a life changing amount. And I still have to do some of the extra things. But this will ease the pressure.

L nods.

A year contract, though. That is a long time of L. Fifty-two elevator rides. Fifty-two coffees. Fifty-two times of looking through the window, knowing there isn’t even a spark of hope between us.

But this... this is incredible. I could do such much. Upgrade my grooming clippers. Maybe even get a safety net for Honey’s and my rent in a few months. L is right, with this in five years I can have my first adoption place.

I have to follow my dreams.

L hands me a sleek metal pen. “I promise Faye. This isn’t giving you the money. It’s you working on market value. I wouldn’t do that to you.”

“I know L.” I look into his eyes. They are steady. If there was any time for him to admit that he likes me, that he thinks there’s a chance for us. it would be now. But there’s nothing. “I trust you, L. You could never hurt me.” I laugh to myself. “Not even if you tried.”

Even this niggle of hurt is nothing. Because signing this means he will be by my side. That L has faith in me. That he sees me and respects me. Who am I to argue with that?

But I am hesitating. The memory of his touch is lingering. If I could make a better choice, it would be to find a way for us to be together.

L doesn’t want that though.

I go to click the pen. L snatches my wrist. The pen flies across the room.

“Faye.”

# Chapter Fifteen

## Faye

Spud jumps off the couch and walks to the pen. Sniffs. And finds his bed.

Every part of my body is pounding. I can't breathe. I can't think straight. All I know is L is holding my arm. He stopped me.

L lets go of a deep breath, lips pulling tight. "It's a trick."

"What?" A trick? What the fuck?

"The pen." L's hand grips tighter. "It's a trick pen. It doesn't look like one of mine. Mine don't click. Dash. He must have put another one in my briefcase. I thought I got them all. I thought—"

"You didn't want to stop me?"

The grip loosens, but L doesn't let go. "Of course I did. I do."

"What?"

"It would have hurt you." L says on the edge of his breath. Okay, so we are still talking about the pen. Aren't we? But I don't want to talk about the pen. I want to talk about us. What this means. What it means when he doesn't let me go.

Wait.

Does L even want this? All he has said is that there's a contract if I want it.

"L," I swallow. "Do you want me to sign the contract?"

His grip disappears, and he turns away. I catch his firm jaw, pulling him back.

"This will be for the best." He says after a second.

I see it now. His brain working overtime trying to find the right words. The safe words.

"For you, me or us?" I ask.

“Faye...”

I turn deeper around to L. He is right there, so close to me. “Do you, L, you, want me to sign the contract?”

“It doesn’t matter what I want. This is your contract, Faye. I am not part of it. If I... I would... it would.”

“L,” I graze my thumb over his cheek. “This is about you. And I am asking you. So just tell me. Do you want me to sign this contract?”

L pushes my hand away. “Of course I don’t Faye.” he snaps. “But that would make me selfish. It would hurt you. And I am not—”

“You, sir.” I laugh, cutting off his words. “Are a moose.”

“Way to kick a man when he’s down.” L slumps back against the couch, both hands running through his hair. “Faye, I’m—”

This is it. He wants me. I want him. And fuck it. If he doesn’t want to make a move, I will. I move on top of him. His huge lap spreading my legs apart. My hands find his shoulders. There is no hiding the erection forming.

“Oh, sweet girl. You know we shouldn’t. I shouldn’t...”

I push my fingers against his lips and shake my head. “Why shouldn’t you pull me closer to you?”

“Because it’s wrong.”

I take L’s hand and guide it to the small of my back. I don’t have to say a word, as he pushes me further up his lap. This is what I want. What we want.

“And why shouldn’t you lean back further so I am on you?” I ask.

L’s eyes search mine. “Because you make me laugh.”

“And?” I say, My hand presses against his chest. The glorious material can’t hide the racing heartbeat.

“Because you are beautiful. Confident.”

I laugh. “No, I am not.”

L shakes his head, falling deeper into the couch. “Oh, you are sweet girl. You are wonderful.”

I believe him. I believe he sees me that way. I guide a hand up to the side of my face. “Why shouldn’t—”

Fingers tangle in my hair. He yanks me back, holding my gaze on his. “There is no way I deserve you, Faye. You are my light shining in the darkness. A beacon of purity I can never live up to, and that’s not fair, Faye. It’s selfish, and I am so tired of—”

“L.” We share a long breath. Delicate tea engulfs my senses. He’s beautiful. Strong and sweet. Handsome and wonderful. I can’t stop myself. I lean down and kiss him.

Our lips slide together. The kiss blooming with passion and greed. It’s too much. But I can’t get enough.

“Faye,” L moans. He kisses me again and again. A tongue sweeping open my lips. The hand on the small of my back forming a fist.

There’s a firm heat on my thigh and no control over my body as I move to find his erection. Who have I become? This isn’t me is it? Grinding myself on a man. Pushing my fingers through his short hair, to pull him back and make the kiss deeper than before. No. This wasn’t the old Faye. This is Faye with L. And dear fucking ducks, I love it.

“Faye. I have to stop.” L rasps between another kiss. “Fuck, I need to stop.”

Against all my desires, I pull away. Our eyes meet, delving into each other’s lust.

L’s hands grip onto my hips, holding me down. The throbbing cock pounds between my thighs. It might as well be a war drum, vibrating my body.

“L,” I say, pushing a lock of hair off his forehead. I don’t know what to say. No, I know exactly what to say but I am hesitating to tell him to make me cum. That I need his fingers on me, need his cock in me, making me his. My fingers trail down his shirt. His panting breath pushes me away, only to draw me back in deeper. “I need you.”

A thumb hooks under my chin, ripping my head up. His lips seal over my mouth. Passion explodes.

“Fuck.” L rasps. “You’re grinding on me.”

“Yeah, I am.” His acknowledgement flames something inside of me. My moves are becoming more powerful and deliberate. “I want more of you, L. I need you to do all those things you told me.”

We fall into a kiss again. L is devouring me. Moans rumbling against me. Fingers digging into my ass.

“Fuck me,” I whimper.

“No. Oh no, sweet girl.” He pulls away, my forehead finding his. “I am not going to fuck you. If I do that, I won’t stop.”

“But—”

Hands tear on my dress buttons, ripping the material a part. “I will give you everything, Faye. But I can’t do that. Fuck. I can’t do that.”

Kisses rain over my chest, not an inch if spared from the assault. Soft stubble tickles, and my stomach tightens.

L catches a nipple with his mouth. The hard, possessive shock sends a lightning bolt ricocheting against my ribs. He holds it in and a masterful tongue flicking the sensitive bud back and forth.

“Oh fuck,” I gasp. The orgasmic pull in my stomach yanks. L is fucking going to get me off just with a nipple.

No. I want so much more than that. My fingers twist in his hair, pulling the delicious suction off. L face is beautiful. Lips plumper, eyes wilder, and the smile. Oh, fuck the smile.

“Grind my leg, sweet girl.”

I claw my nails into his shoulders, grinding as much of my wet pussy against.

“That’s it, don’t stop.” L groans. “Don’t fucking stop.”

I shake my head. “I need more, I need to—”

L's powerful hand forces its way between my legs. A thumb works up my soaking slit. It finds my clit, and stops.

My stomach is doing flips, setting loose a million butterflies. Oh fuck.

"What do you need, sweet girl?" I fall forward, head landing on his shoulder.

"Cum." I whimper.

"Say it." The thumb flexes. Pressure grows in my stomach like a ball of light pulsating larger. Larger. Larger.

"Please, make me cum. Please."

"Anything for you." he chokes out.

L grabs my ass, lifting and dragging, massaging faster and faster, grinding me against his touch.

Everything is becoming too much. Breaths are sticking to my ribs, a voice that doesn't sound like my own groaning out. And the pressure. Oh god the pressure is pulling me under. L doesn't stop. He doesn't change the pace. It's another ending torture.

Grunts vibrate on my shoulders, mixing with harsh kisses and teeth nipping. It's heaven and hell. Pleasure and sparks of pain. It's glorious. And it's going to make me explode.

"Fuck, sweet girl. No one should ever fucking touch this pussy. It's too good. Too good."

Oh fuck. My teeth sink into his shirt. L pushes a finger inside, twisting and thrusting. Curling until it finds the right spot.

"L!" I sob against the wet material.

"Look at me," He grunts. "Need. Need to watch you."

I tear my head up. Orgasmic pleasure ripping through every fibre in my body. My hips thrusts frantic desperate for more. I ride through the sweetest thing any man has given me, L grunts keeping me company through the frenzy.



“Good girl.” A heavy hand lands on the back of my head stroking down and drawing me back to reality. The best reality I could ever want. L needs me. I can take care of him and share this pleasure.

I kiss with everything I have, hoping I know my intention.

Sticky fingers press my dress against my hip, pushing me away.

“L,” I whine with a breath. “You said.”

“Faye,”

My lips move to his cheek, finding his ear. “You said you would do anything.”

“Fuck,” He roars, my fingers falling on his erection. “I’m not... I’m not... You are too good Faye. For me.”

I sigh, pulling away. I can’t control the smile on my face. L is going to fuck me. I cup his face, grazing a thumb over his cheek. “I know you think that. But I need you L. I need you to take me to my bed. To use me for relief. Please.”

My hand falls. His erection is hard, like steel and pulsing.

I stand up and hold out my hand.

He takes it.

# Chapter Sixteen

## Faye

Clothes fall to the floor. Fast and hard. The eagerness pulsing through us. L grabs the back of my head, yanking me into a rough kiss. My fingers run down his bare chest. Oh, fuck it's better than I can imagine.

My bed hits the back of my knees. I fall onto it, dragging L with me.

“Fuck. “He groans, vibrating my lips. “Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.”

L pulls my hands above my head, holding my wrists together in one hand. The dark eyes I love so much are wide as saucers. He shakes his head, eyes falling up and down my panting body.

I don't know why he is looking at me, he should look at himself. Fuck, he's glorious. Muscles taut and lean. And his erection is so huge. So good. It's begging me to touch it. I suck in a sharp breath, arousal crashing to all the right places.

“Condom.”

“What?” I stutter, tearing my gaze from his. Condom. Oh, yes. Fuck yes. “Drawer.”

L lets me go pulling open the night stand. Foil tears open, and I savor him touching himself. My stomach flipping. This isn't the first time you touched your cock because of me is it, L? Dear fuck I hope not.

With his knees, he spreads my legs open. The thick head pushing against my pussy it drags up and down. Up and down. Oh, he feels so good.

He folds over, kissing my lips softly. “Should wait.”

“No.” I whine, squirming under the pressure of his cock. Up and down. Up and down.

“I need to taste you, have you dripping on my mouth. Make you cum.”

“And I need you to fuck me.” I whimper through a broken kiss.

“Shouldn’t be touching you.” He groans. “Shouldn’t be touching you with this filthy cock, sweet girl. You’re too good. Too—”

I swallow, moving my hips further to him. My legs wrapping around his thighs.

L lets out the sweets moan. Goose pimples races over my skin. “Oh, fuck.”

The head pushes against me. His tip pumping in and out.

“Shouldn’t,” He heaves.

Something niggles in the back of my mind, an explosion of something I don’t quite understand. And words rest on the tip of my tongue fighting for freedom.

“You can’t help yourself, can you?” I whisper.

L’s lips crash on mine, thrusting deeper into me. “No. Fuck no.”

“So fucking bad. Your big cock fucking me.”

“Fuck, Faye.”

“That’s what you want isn’t? You want to fuck me? Fill me with that filthy, aching thing.”

L roars, thrusting every inch in. I laugh, kissing him back. “So tight,”

“For you, isn’t it?” I don’t recognize myself. “My tight pussy is just for your dirty cock.”

“Fucking hell.” L loses it. His entire weight pushes me against the bed. He rutts into me like a wild beast, yelling words that make little sense into the nape of my neck. But he’s using me for relief. I am giving him everything. “Fuck. Faye. Fuck.”

Our bodies slap together, slick with sweat.

L yanks my hand to us parting and joining. My fingers rub my clit before he even has to tell me.

“Cum on my cock, sweet girl. Take fucking everything.”

The orgasm crashes over me out of no where. I arch back. L's lips presses against mine, sloppily kisses me with his sounds of relief.

“Mine.” He groans, pulling my trembling body into him.  
“My sweet girl.”

A last thrust and I am left empty and satisfied.

“My gorgeous sweet girl.” L presses a hot, wet kiss on my forehead. “I was right. You are way too good for me.”

# Chapter Seventeen

## L

“Faye.” Where is she? It’s way too early for someone other than me to be up. But there is no sign of her, or even her roommate. Maybe she left... her own apartment. Yep, that’s how big of a mistake I am. I make my lover leave her own apartment.

Spud raises his head to me and then places it back onto his cushion. See, it’s even too early for a dog.

“Faye?”

“In the bathroom.” Her voice calls out.

Oh. Well... I am not sure what I should do with that information. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, you can come in.”

“Are you decent?” I check my watch. Launch is tomorrow. I need to get to the office for the last checks. But then again, Faye could be naked, that glorious bod of her in full view. Or in the shower, wanting me to join. Or... it doesn’t matter. I am going to be late no matter what.

The bathroom door opens, and there she is. My angel. Wet curls frame her blushing, smiling face. To my utter disappointment she’s wearing jeans and a white shirt. The shirt has two bees wearing a white cloth with eye holes sitting against her braless chest. Boo-bees. Fuck. I cackle.

Faye’s divine smile widens. “Would it matter not if I am decent or not?”

“No,” I tear my gaze away. Fuck. I want her again. I knew this was going to happen. Faye is under my skin. I can never get rid of my need for her.

My tie tugs, turning me back around. Greedy lips steal mine. Oh, my sweet girl you are too much for me. I grab Faye’s waist, lifting her up and pin her against the hallway wall.

Purrs of pleasure flood into my mouth, and legs wrap around my waist, locking us together.

It's another moment before our hot and heavy kiss breaks.

"Good morning, L." She laughs with a brief peck on the lips.

"Good morning." I whisper back. There's a mark on her neck. My mark. My hickey. Mine. Mine. Mine. No, I need to focus. "You woke up early."

"Pups. Dogs." Fingers drift down my buttons. Saucy little minx. "How are you L?"

"Good. Good." I shift Faye's body weight on my hips. She can probably feel I am getting hard again. But this time, I am not ashamed. I wear it like a medal of honor. This is what you do to me, Faye. One touch and I am yours.

"And tomorrow?" She asks. "With the launch?"

My entire body tenses.

"You're nervous." Faye states.

I don't know whether that is a question or a statement. It doesn't matter. Faye pushes me away, and her feet find the floor. "I made you something, L."

"In the bathroom?" I cock an eyebrow.

"Yessss..." She smiles. "Wait. That sounds gross."

Yep.

"It's not. It's good, I think you will like it." Faye says, taking my hand.

I follow her into the bathroom. The delicious scent of her hits me. Strawberries and honey. There are different colored bottles lined up on the sink, and a single candle down to its last hours. The star of the show, though, is the bath and its mountains of bubbles. "What is this?" I ask.

"A bath."

"I don't have baths."

"I know, L. You don't have time."

“And—”

Lips are back on me, and I am melting. The passion burning as hot as the candle. She tastes so good. Tea and honey. Sunshine and laughter. Hands wrap around the back of my neck, sending my cascading kisses to her shoulder.

“Do you—” Faye rasps against my ear, sending the tiny hairs to their ends. “Do you want to go to the bedroom?”

“Yes,” I rumble against her neck.

“Then.” Faye pushes me away, eyes beaming with the biggest smile. “You have time for a bath.”

And she’s got me there. “In the morning?”

“That’s what time of day it is.”

“Aren’t baths for night time?” I ask.

“Are you the Lord of Baths now?”

“No,” I sigh. “But I do know him, has a nice porcelain throne.”

The laugh snort echoing sets off my laugh.

“Oh, Mr Hunnd.” Faye laughs, hands rushing up my suit. “You better be careful. If you keep laughing like that, you might never stop.”

One by one, Faye frees my buttons. Undressing me slow, and tormenting. Her touch is everywhere. Fingers raking down my arms. A kiss on my collarbone as she frees my belt. Soft laughter blowing against my neck.

“Would the laughing make you stay with me?” I ask.

“I will stay with you, if you want me, L.”

My heart skips a beat. The words sink in. They make sense but don’t at the same time.

“Oh,” Faye whispers. “You mean for the bath?”

“Yeah.” I catch her hand, undoing my pants button.

No.

Rewind.

Say it again.

Say you want to be with me so I can believe you. “Faye.”

Faye nods and turns around facing the door. “Do you want a drink? A coffee?”

Well, that moment is gone. “In the bath?” I ask. I have to admit the peeks of water under the bubbles look tempting. And if Faye says I might enjoy it...

I push my pants off and place them on the sink area with my shirt and jacket.

“Sometimes a drink in the bath relaxes you. This is all about making you relaxed, L. So, would you like a drink?”

“Probably not.” I say,

“Okie dokie.”

Okie dokie? I snort out a laugh. Out of the corner of my eye, I meet Faye’s looking in the mirror. She’s checking me out. Tugging on her lip. Eyebrows are nearly as high as the roof. Dear fuck she is adorable.

She sees me watching and smiles. “Get in. You have to go to work today, after all.”

And for the first time, that is not where I want to be.

I step into the bath. Dang it. The water is pleasant. Hot, hotter than just the outside realms of comfortable, it’s the way I like it. Faye must have guessed that. She can catch me off guard with some of the other stuff, but knowing my ideal water temperature is too much.

Sinking into the water, bubbles crawl up my chest. My knees stick out of the water like mountains emerging from a fog.

“Stay there.” Faye instructs, disappearing from the room.

Okay, then.

I take a breath, trying to relax.

And... just sit here.

Relaxing.



I don't get it. I am just sat here. Doing nothing. It's not very relaxing, if anything it's stressful. Thoughts about tomorrow and my list that needs to be done is growing rampant. I will not get my head start this morning, or a coffee, probably. And the worst thing, I am going to smell like Faye. All day. It will not leave me. As well as the thoughts of her. The touch of her hand, the giggle on my lips or her face when my filthy cock claimed her.

Maybe it's not a bad thing.

Faye opens the door, a small wooden stool in hand.

"You aren't coming in?" I should have thought about that question. It's not like she could fit in here unless she was on top of me.

Faye positions herself so as she sits on the stool she is facing me. "Don't worry, I had a shower."

"I can't stay long." I remind her.

"I know. I am excited for you, L." She rests her head on her hand. Under her gaze, I am melting. There's nothing to it. It's not hard or scared, or trying to work out what I am thinking. Faye is just watching me. "Launching an app. All the hard work you put into it, and seeing the end product. It must be so much fun."

"I suppose."

With a soft smile, Faye leans forward, planting a kiss on my lips. "Relax, L."

"Where's your roommate?"

"Is that what you are worried about? Don't worry. I told you we could keep this a secret. And Honey... Well," Faye laughs. "You think you work hard? Honey leaves before dawn and isn't back until after dark. Sometimes she just sleeps at the office, or her grandma's bookstore to save her the trip."

I shift, sending water over the side of the bath. The bubbles are dispersing.

Faye digs into a drawer, retrieves a rubber duck, and covers my erection with it. "Better?"

“It’s a rubber duck.”

“It’s a dickie duck!” Faye barks out a laugh. “Plus Lord Duckington the Second makes you look cute. And well, it’s not like I haven’t seen it L.”

That is true, but it also doesn’t make it less uncomfortable. It’s been a long time since I have been with a woman, longer still since someone has looked at me for the sake of it. Maybe never? But that’s what Faye is doing, marveling at every part of me.

“Hey, L.” Faye whispers.

“Yeah?”

“You’re even cuter when you blush.”

“Thanks?”

Faye smiles. “Now lean forward.”

I hesitate. What is she up to?

“I am going to wash you hair.”

“Like a dog?” I say. “I am not a dog.”

“Really? Could have fooled me looking so cute.”

Heat floods my cheeks, and Faye giggles retrieving a jug from under the sink.

“Don’t worry L, I don’t think you are a dog.” Faye fills the jug up from the bath’s tap.

“Good.”

“You’re a cat.” She flicks a look over her shoulder, stopping my heart. “A big, floofy, grumpy cat.”

I pout, sending Faye into another fit of giggles. “Oh, L.” she says after a moment. “Lean forward.”

I obey my commands. Warm water rushes through my hair and rains down my back. With a pop, oranges and blossoms fill the steamy air. Yep, I am so not going to think of anything but Faye today. Especially the magic fingers. The firm touch works circles up, down, around. Massaging and easing my jaw

and neck. She's magic. That's what Faye is, a fairy of the human body.

"You never told me." Faye says after a long moment.

"Told you what?"

"Why Deep Throb?"

I sigh. How many times do I have to go through with this? I am never naming a company again. "It means the throb you get, a tug of your heart when you fall in love with someone. Like when you get a dog for the first time." Or seeing a cute girl who is snorting at her own silly puns. Oh. My heart did that. The sweet pang of possibilities of having Faye smile at me. And, it is still doing that.

Out of the corner of my eye, I study Faye. I am desperate for her to say she knows the feeling. That I give her that feeling. Even if it's not every time I look at her, but at least once I've made her throb... Yeah, it is a bad name.

"I wasn't talking about the porn studio name. I mean why did you choose a dating app?"

The running water filling the jug back up gives me a chance to think. But the funny thing is, I am thinking about work and it's not stressing me out. If anything, it's exciting. "Dating apps have a sustainable revenue stream if you can provide the users what they want..." Faye washes the shampoo out, the warmth of the water spreading as quick as the fire in my stomach. I am being stupid, though. No one wants to hear about my goals. "Don't worry."

"Keep going, L. I am interested." Funny, she sounds almost genuine.

"I don't want to bore you."

"You're silly. I am the one asking the question. Now, spill or Lord Duckington the Second will judge you."

Damn, duck. He would too. Wouldn't he? It's the eyes. You can always tell by the eyes. "The goal. My goal. Is to use the revenue to build. Hire more programmers, team members, and

focus on apps that won't turn much profit." Grand words there. This is why I need to think before speaking.

Faye moves the jug to her lap, her eyes questioning me. "So the money? You aren't trying to get more?"

"Why would I need more? I have enough funds and investments to make sure I am well catered for, and generations to come. But that isn't sustainable if I fund all the projects I want to. I need an internal revenue source."

A small smile pulls on Faye's face. It fuels something deeper inside of me.

"I can't let my employees down, especially if my well dries up. So this is the way." I say, straightening up. Water splashes around me. "And my employees well, they need to be catered for. It's a major discussion point lately at game night. You see, employees are the backbones of every company. Of the economy. Of the country, really. And they need to be treated as such. So, Faye." I turn to her, my hands wave around as if I am a scientist creating the next big breakthrough. "I can do so much with more revenue. Higher pays, commute bonuses. Work at home schemes. Sick days. Longer holiday pays. Things like puppy play dates. But..."

"That sounds fucking good. But it's not sustainable at the moment?"

"You get it!" I say, voice echoing around the tiny room.

Faye laughs. "Of course I do."

Of course Faye does... She understands me. I am not just a dreamer thinking of the impossible to her. Speaking to my friends, they get it. But I can tell they aren't on board. Not like Faye. And they definitely don't look at me like the way she is... as if I have already achieved all of this... as if she is proud of me.

"And?" Faye asks.

"And?" The answer should have sufficed a curious mind. But then again, I have never met a mind like Faye's.

"Apps? What apps do you want to create?"

“Everything. Helping wasted food go to places in need. Apps to children explore technology safely. Or connect people to specialists with ease.”

Faye lurches forward. Her lips seal over my mouth. Slow and savoring. A kiss to burn the world down. My wet hand tangles in her curls dragging her closer to me.

“What was that for?” I rasp.

Faye shakes her head, straightening her shirt. “Oh, you know. I just love seeing you this passionate.”

Oh. Passionate... that’s something no one has described me as that before. I like it. It makes my chest lighten with the desire to do more. Be more than who I am now.

“What time do you have to leave at the latest?” Faye asks, phone in hand.

“Six—” The latest. “Seven.”

“Plenty of time.”

“For?” I ask. Sex? Another kiss. A coffee on the couch. My arm wrapped around Faye. Her body resting against mine.

“Conditioner.” Disappointing.

A plastic bottle pops, and with the replenishment of orange waft in the air. I lean forward. The wonderful fingers return to their massage. This time it’s nearly as better as the last. Sweet hums of a melody I don’t know echo.

This is the best morning. Ever.

“So, why a dating app?”

“The revenue,” I sigh. Maybe she wasn’t listening after all.

“I know that you, moose. But I am sure you could have made money with a game. Or something else.” Faye dunks her hands in the water. Tingles race down my legs at how close she is to me. “You have to leave it in for a bit.”

“Why a dating app?”

Faye nods, reaching back behind her for a towel. A couple of folds, and it’s behind my head, and a controlling hand

encouraging me to lean back.

I fixate on the light cracks in the ceiling. Why are dating app? Something they have asked me a million times, and a question with only one answer. An answer I don't like. "Because nearly everyone deserves to find love."

"Nearly everyone?" Faye's voice rises.

I abandoned my family, gave the business I was raised to take over to Dash. In a monstrous selfish moment, I gave away everything I have to focus on my wants. My needs. And I would do it again. I will always do it again. So, yes. *Nearly* everyone.

"L?" Faye asks trickling water over my head again.

I grip my hand on the side of the bar. The air is suffocating. The smell of her is choking me. My breaths are painful.

Faye places her hand on mine. "L," she soothes. "Tell me."

For a long moment, we lock eyes. I would give anything for her to reach deep into my mind and know me. The man I truly am. If I am given the choice, I will always choose the selfish option, no matter who I hurt. No matter if I hurt her. It's my nature. It was my father's nature, and it's my mother's. And no matter how much I try to outweigh it, it will never work.

Faye eases my hand off the bath, planting a soft kiss on it. The simple act allows me to breathe.

Fuck. Look at everything she has done for me. Who the hell has ever made me a bath? Stayed with me? Listen to all my crazy dreams and be interested in them? And yet, I can't bear to look at her. I don't want to see Faye looking at with sadness and worry. She doesn't deserve that. And I... "I don't deserve you or your kisses, or affection." Or any of this.

"Why?"

My eyes harden on the ceiling. Why? *Why?*

"Because I'm selfish. And I will always will be. I hurt people."

A sharp cackle splits the air. I jerk up. Faye laughs and laughs. Her hand on her stomach, face so red it's about to burst.

I don't know what I was expecting from the confession, but it's definitely not this.

After way too long, she stops. "You, selfish? Oh, you had me there. Maybe I liked it better when you were the silent boss man in the elevator. *Selfish*. Next, you will be making a duck pun. Don't worry I am just being quakers."

Her eyes find mine. The beautiful color of her face disappears and lips part with a slight gasp.

"Wait," Faye says. "Wait. You don't think that do you?"

Heat prickles down my neck. Why is it embarrassing to admit? I know I am selfish. And there is nothing Faye can do to change that.

"L, how I the world could you be selfish? You go out of your way to get me coffee. You are taking a bath because there's no doubt you know it will make me happy. I wanted ice cream, and you walked with me. But if anything I—"

"That's because it's you, Faye." *I needed you. I wanted to be with you.*

Faye's hand cups the side of my face, her head shaking. "And for a man who dislikes dogs, you agreed to have them in your office because?"

"Charlotte was annoying me, so I said yes."

"But you could have said no. All those times you could have said no. Look at your plans for your business. None of them is about you at all."

I turn my head. Faye stands, pulling my head with her. She has me. Her eyes, her words. She has me captivated. But I don't believe it.

"L you are not selfish. Not as much as any other person on this planet."

Our eyes lock, and time flows by. I can't see what Faye is saying, though. Maybe someone else would have given up their family company to follow their dreams of being an app king. Maybe they would be okay with leaving the pressure on their brother. Or what I did, take my share of the families' money while not deserving a penny. But it doesn't mean it is right.

"You don't believe me." Faye whispers.

I shake my head. Why Faye? Why do you know me? Why can't I just lie to you and pretend everything is okay?

"You don't have to believe me, L. Not for that."

A weight shifts off my shoulders.

Faye sits on the side of the bath. A hand plunges into the water and rips the plug out. "But please, believe me when I say, as long as you want I will be happy to be here for you. No matter what you think."

A vice tightens around my chest. "Faye."

"I will be happy you to remind you every day, every minute of who I know you truly are."

I sit up. Faye presses a hand to the centre of my chest. Her elegant fingers stretching out.

"I will remind you what you deserve." Faye whispers, eyes drifting down my body. "If that is something you want."

But that's the thing. I don't know if I want that. I don't think I can want it. That's a lie. Of course I want Faye. But this... this... is too much.

The hand releases its control, I push up. Faye's forehead presses against mine.

She's too much. The lips brushing over mine. The tingles only she can create racing down the sides of my neck. Her belief in me.

Fingers glide down my chest. Faye picks up dickie duck and, without moving from me, puts him away.

"What are you doing?"



“I want to show you, L.”

An elegant finger drags down the centre of chest. Trails of fire burn in its wake.

“Faye, what?” I stammer. “What are you doing?”

The beautiful eyes find mine. Her smile is different, not as light as before. It doesn't even make me want to smile. No, it makes me want to beg for her.

“I want to show you, L. Show you how much I like your big,” She hesitates, cheeks blushing, voice dropping to a whisper. “Filthy cock.”

It's like a switch is flicking on in the back of my mind. The shame of my hard cock for her sends my body into a frenzy. But knowing Faye sees me. Faye sees how wrong I am for her, and yet still wants me. She might as well as take my dick and claim it as her own.

Faye spins around, opening a drawer. A pop echoes, and Faye squirts a bottle of lube onto to her hand.

“Do you just have lube everywhere?” I stammer. I am trying to calm down. Trying being the keyword. Like that would happen. “Or did you plan this?”

Faye laughs. “Both. Who are we kidding L? I think we both knew what we would be doing this morning.”

“Hoped.” I sigh, leaning back in the tub. My erection is at her complete attention. “Hoped you would have me again.”

Her warm, silky touch wraps around my base. I grip onto the sides of the tub. It won't do anything. It's clear my sweet girl has a plan, and who I am to not let her follow it through.

“What would you like me to do, L?”

My heart lurches in my throat. “Keep talking.”

Faye bites her bottom lip and shifts.

“You feel so good, L.”

I groan, the grip drawing up to my staff and back down.

“And I like how you make me feel.”

“What’s that, sweet girl?” I seethe trying to calm myself down. It won’t happen, though. Faye is touching me. Those perfect hands pumping my cock. Her eyes locked on me as if it’s the enormous tub of ice cream with all the toppings she could ever want.

“Confident. Needed.” She hesitates for a moment. “Sexy.”

My hips jerk up and my head sinks back. If I keep watching her, I am going to explode sooner than I want.

“I like talking like this, L. I love the words falling out of my mouth. They’re filthy aren’t they?”

A loud sob rips from my chest. On the edge. Fuck, this girl could make me lose it with just her words.

“And I only say them for you. That’s how fucking filthy your cock is. It makes me speak like this.”

“Love it. Love it.” I chant. She has me. All of me. I am hers.

“And your dirty cock is so full for me.”

*Yes.*

“Yeah, it is, baby. So full. My balls are rock hard. Touch them, sweet girl. Feel what you do to me.”

Faye is perfect. There is no other way to describe it. Her free hand doesn’t hesitate at my words. She cups my balls, lifting and dropping them as if they are delicate gems. Fuck. So fucking good.

“That’s it.” I croak. “That’s it. Faster,”

Soft giggles mix with my moans. My fingers claw into the bathtub. Faye is pumping faster. Faster. Faster. Oh, she shouldn’t be doing this. I told her she comes first. She needs to come, not—

The grip tightens. Pre-cum spurts. Every muscle in my body twitches.

“Fuck , L. Fuck.”

“Need you. Fucking. Angel. Faye.” I seethe, biting down on my lip.

“You have me.” The words echo around me. “Show me, L. Cum for me.”

I groan, shooting my seed. The orgasm takes hold. And I am thrashing up into the glorious hands milking every drop out. “Oh, fuck sweet girl.”

“So fucking good.” Lips crash into mine. The high of Faye will never get old. “Look what you did,”

It takes all of my effort to tear my gaze to my spent cock nestled in her hands as if it’s found a new home. Lube and cum glisten under the light.

“You coated me in your filthy seed.”

A wet finger drags along my bottom lip, and is quickly replaced with a blazing passionate kiss. Faye’s tongue licking the residue off. Holy fuck, this is insane. What have I done to my sweet girl to turn her into this sexual goddess?

“Your turn.” I manage out, catching my breath.

Faye shakes her head, pulling away. She takes a towel and wipes her hands.

“This is your bath, L. I need nothing more than to see you like this.”

“You’re wet.”

Faye cocks an eyebrow, leans in close, and drops her voice low. “Always, when I am with you.” A soft touch pushes on my shoulder. I lean back into the dry bath, my vision blurs on the ceiling, and I can’t wipe the smile off my face.

“I think I like baths.” The ceiling cracks come back into focus.

“I told you.” Faye smiles.

“Only with you, though.”

Faye nods. “Like I said, L. I will be here for you, including the baths, as long as you want me.”

I grab hold of Faye’s hand, squeezing it lightly.

“Do you?” She whispers. “Do you want me?”

Yes. Of course I do, Faye.

But the words, they are not coming out.

“You should wash the conditioner out.” Faye says.

Fuck. I’ve blown It.

# Chapter Eighteen

## Faye

“I am sorry miss, but the building is closed.”

I sigh, pulling out my phone. Charlotte’s texts open straight away. I scroll up to where I need.

**Charlotte:** Excited for tomorrow. Launch day.

**Faye:** Is everything ready?

**Charlotte:** It’s been ready for weeks. L is just... L.

**Charlotte:** He’s even pulling an all nighter. Once again. Honestly, the guy might as well buy a floor and live there.

Sent one hour ago. There is no way he has left, so the building is open.

“Mr Hunnd is here, though.” I say.

Mr Security Man’s eyes narrow on me. “That is not for me to say.”

“So, that’s a yes?”

“Why would it be a concern for you?”

“Because I am an employee.” I say, eyeing up the elevators. No one is here in the day. Why do they have to be so strict at night? “Actually, I am not an employee-employee. But I—”

“Oh.” The blue eyes shift down my dress. “You don’t look like one.”

One? One what?

“And I have never known Hunnd to have—”

The pieces click together with a snap. “You think I am a hooker?”

“Without a fashion sense. Shouldn’t you be showing more... assets?”

“Hey, I like this dress. I think it looks nice.” I run my hands down the velvet. Okay, it may be a bit too short for my liking,

but the gold moon and star print is pretty. And the bell sleeves kind of make me feel like a queen.

But my dress isn't important. I didn't waste Honey's night watching the dogs, or come all the way down here to go back home.

"Mhmm."

"Well. You haven't seen what is underneath. It's very kinky." If you can call actual matching underwear kinky... which I do. "They don't call it Deep Throb for nothing."

Mr Security Man furrows his eyebrows, sighs and picks up the phone. "Let me tell him you are on your way up."

"Oh no. Don't." I reach over the desk, blocking the number pad. "It's part of my performance."

"Whatever." With a roll of the eyes, I am free and making my way to the elevator.

The doors open, and my stomach knots. This is going to be fine. Even if I don't know why I am here. Yes, I do.

I don't want that to be how I leave L. Telling him I will be there for him if wants me and then for him to not give me an answer. But now, I think about it... showing up at his workplace. That's pretty clingy. And he hasn't messaged me. He barely said a word to me after the bath.

Oh. Fuck. What am I doing?

My fingers wring against each other. Okay, what does Honey keep telling me? Be who you are. And under all the questions, and what ifs, this is me. All I can think of is L sitting in his office staring at a screen. He hasn't eaten. Or had a coffee. And if it was anyone else I would do just this. Make sure they are okay and bring them coffee and a sandwich... and a condom... because I am prepared for every situation.

But maybe being me is too much?

This is a mistake.

The elevator doors open. Deep Throb Headquarters is spooky when dark. The only light on is a computer screen, no

surprise from L's office.

I ball my hands against my thighs.

This is me, and all I am is concerned about is a friend.

I walk through the office. Every step, L's silhouette is clearer. He is at his desk... but looking at his lap. His arm moving.

Oh no. I stop at the door. Is he... pleasuring himself? What do I do now? Walk in on him. Knock. Join him... I could join him and leave all this other stuff till later.

L looks up. My heart skips a beat, and blood rushes to my ears.

"Faye?" He gasps.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt... ummm keep—"

L places his phone on the desk, standing up. Oh. Yeah. I need to stop living in the gutter. "What. What are you doing here?"

"Charlotte mentioned that you were pulling an all nighter. And. I know it might be too much for you. But. I—" I take a breath. Own it. "Have you eaten?"

L shakes his head. His muscular arms pushing against the desk, making the plain suit he wasn't wearing this morning tighten around his biceps. "No. But Faye, this isn't... I don't have time to take you out."

My chest lightens. He doesn't want to get rid of me.

I dig into my side bag, pulling out a foil wrapped sandwich and a small thermos.

L sighs, a hand running through his hair. "Of course you did."

"Are you mad?" I ask.

The thick eyebrows furrow.

"Is it too much? There is no need for me to stay. I wasn't planning on staying long, anyway. I just..."

L strides across the distance between us. A hand skates around my lower back, and he kisses me. It's a kiss hot, and passionate. One that makes the back of my mind tingle.

"... I was worried." I whisper, pulling away just enough to speak.

"I'm sorry, Faye." L kisses my lips. "For making you worry." And another kiss. "For leaving you without saying a word this morning." Another kiss. "I fucked up didn't I?"

"L," I sigh, planting my heel back to the ground. Thoughts race to the tip of my tongue. All I want to do is hold on to him and say it's okay. I understand you shut yourself off. Well, I don't *understand* understand. But I know it's you. But all I want to know is where I am standing. Does the kiss mean he wants me?

"You shouldn't have made me anything." He says, taking my hand in his.

"Well, you just said you didn't eat."

"I know, but you didn't have to come all the way down here." L leads me to the desk and hesitates. His gaze falling to the leather chairs in front of it, and back to his chair.

"How is it going?" I ask, breaking our hands apart. L smiles as I sit on the edge of the desk. "I didn't make you late this morning?"

L sinks into his office chair. I haven't seen a chair so big before. It's like a leather throne. Despite L's broad shoulders, there is room to spare. "No, you didn't."

I nod. "Thought so."

L cocks an eyebrow.

"I very, very secretly asked Charlotte."

"You did?"

"Yes," I bite on my lower lip. Dang it, the way his eyes are lightening up. My stomach is in knots. "I suggested a free puppy day. And, well, you know Charlotte. Next thing I know you had no meetings."



“She talks too much. Dash has done a number on her.”

I smile to myself. I guess you can say something like that about us, Mr Silent, and wouldn't even smile at one of my exceptional elevator puns.

“You can stay, Faye... if you want.” L says after a beat.

“Are you sure?”

“I will very much enjoy your company.”

My chest warms. Distracting myself, I dig into my bag and retrieve the flask and sandwich. Oh no... it's cold. I should have thought that through.

L snatches it from my hands.

“Sorry.” He mumbles, handing it back.

“Hungry?” I give it back to him.

“I didn't realize.”

Oh, L. But I get it. I have done the same. The tunnel vision when you are following an idea.

L peels back the foil and pokes the bread. “What is it?”

“Okay, so I promise it's edible. And in fact, it's my signature dish.”

L pulls out a half and devours half of it in one go. His eyebrows furrow. Relax. Furrow. And a beautiful smile creeps in. “What the fuck is this?” He says covering his mouth.

“A grilled Nutella, peanut butter, banana and bacon sandwich.” I say, a small burst of pride burning in my chest.

“It's—” L swallows it hard. I hand him the thermos.

“Not bad, is it? Though, imagine that it's—”

“It's magnificent.” L stuffs the rest of the half in his mouth.

Heat races to my cheeks. Everything he says is different compared to if someone else said it.

L sips the coffee with another hard swallow. “Black coffee?”

“The liquor of gods. Didn’t think you needed caramel in it after that. Don’t want you bouncing off the walls.”

“I prefer black.” L says.

“I’ve seen your coffee order, the little thingy? Do-hickey?”

“Button?”

“Indentation.” No, that doesn’t sound right.

“The button.”

“Sure. It’s always pressed in. Like mine. Cause...” I stare at him. The puzzle pieces are there they are just not clicking together.

L’s dark eyes pierce into mine. “Just in case.”

“I spilled my coffee. And you gave me yours.” I don’t know how much more my heart can take more of this. He is... everything. And L doesn’t see it.

I stare at my hands.

“Faye?”

L’s hands slide between my knees and push them apart. The chair rolling into the gap. It would only be a small fall to land in his embrace. “Was it wrong?”

“No. Well, unless you did it cause you thought I was a klutz.”

“That wasn’t my intention.”

I suck in a breath. “Yep. I know.”

L doesn’t say a word. He doesn’t even push me to fill the silence. He takes my hands and holds them.

“You should get back to work.” I say.

“Everything is done. I just... It’s my baby. I can’t leave it alone.”

I nod. So we are doing this now. Buckle up, Faye. We are in for a ride.

“L,” I say. “I am trying to understand this morning. Trying to understand now. I don’t... You don’t see yourself the way I see

you, and it confuses me. Everything about this is confusing and I don't even know what this is."

"This?" The dark eyes find mine.

"Us."

Are we together just fucking? Do I walk on a tightrope waiting for a contract to fall on my lap, clarifying that a boss and employee should not date and break up? Or do I do my best and trust myself to be there for L, knowing everything can go wrong, knowing it might not be he doesn't deserve me, but I am not enough for him. Oh god. What if I am not good enough for him?

"I don't know, Faye." L says, breaking the suffocating silence.

His lips pull tight. L might as well stick a sticky note on his head with I am thinking words, but I don't want to say them. I shake my head. When did I become an expert in L?

"Tell me," I mutter.

The chair pushes away slightly. L shakes his head.

"L, if we can't talk. It's going to make everything that much more confusing."

"No," L says, eyes falling to the floor. "I will make you upset or angry at me. Or I will say something stupid."

"So?"

"Faye, I..." The words drift off.

"It's okay for you to make me feel those things about you, about me, about anything. But communication is key, L. And I want to know you. I told you. I will be there for you if you want me... or..."

L's head snaps up. The chair rolls on the hard wood back to me. "I want you, Faye."

Oh, fuck L.

"But..." He says. "I am scared, petrified. I will hurt you."

"You—" A vice grips around my heart.

“I will be selfish.”

“You are not—” With one sad look from the sweet eyes, my stomach is flipping. “What happened L?”

“I will always put myself or my company first. I know I will. I have don’t it in the past even to my family. My brother.”

My mouth opens, but words don’t form.

“Faye,” His head drops. “I will make you hate me.”

The idea is so ridiculous that I want to laugh. I can feel the laugh burning in my chest. Why aren’t I laughing? Because my heart is tightening, and my fingers are digging into my thighs. “I doubt that.” I say. It’s the truth... but how do I know that? This is all so new. It’s all so much. I shouldn’t have feelings for a guy I’ve only slept with. But that’s what I have isn’t it? I have deep, huge stupid feelings for L.

I run my hand through his short, dark hair.

“I want you, sweet girl.”

“I know.”

The dark eyes find mine. Fuck-a-duck, they are breaking my heart. I can’t help to draw the plump sad lips into a kiss. Soft and tender. There is no passion, no burning lust between us. This is something different. A sweetness I am not sure I understand. Our tongues finding each other and my fingers drifting over the broad shoulders.

“I know L.” I say, choking on a whimper. “But you...”

L’s fingers draw up my thigh, finding their way under my skirt. He kisses back, sighing softly. “Don’t say it.”

Tears prick my eyes. It’s there, sitting between us there though. The suffocating truth. He wants to be with me, but he won’t. I won’t be his sweet girl. I won’t be his.

L stands, guiding me back onto his desk. My fingers run up and down his back, legs pulling him deeper into me. I can’t let him go. And I won’t be able to if he doesn’t say it.

I cup his face, pushing his beautiful lips away from me.

“You have to L,”

He tears his eye away from me, focusing on my chest breathing heavy. My heart is thumping and vibrating every fibre of my body. “This isn’t fair to you, sweet girl.”

My fingers drift down to his belt, tugging it free.

“I can’t ask you to be with me.”

I nod, undoing his pants button. “Condom,” I whisper.

“Faye,” L catches my hand.

“Please. Just one, one last time.” I need something anything from him. I just... I don’t want to let go. Not yet, just let me live in this perfect fantasy world for a little while longer.

L halfheartedly smiles and pulls a drawer open. “My filthy \_\_\_”

“No.” I arch my hips to him. “Not this time, L.”

He tears the foil package open with his teeth. Fuck, he’s beautiful, stunning, and he consumes all of me. My mind, my body and every breath.

“I just need you, L. You.” I whisper.

L’s eyes widen, for a split second time freezes. “Anything for you, sweet girl.”

He leans down, pressing his forehead on mine.

“I need you.” I whimper. A hand skates up my thighs and a finger slides through my slick folds.

L moans on my lips. The sound of him is nearly as intoxicating as watching him squirm with my filthy words.

“You’re so wet for me,”

I nod, arching back into the desk. The masterful finger glides in circles over my clit. L moves away, eyes locking onto me, studying. He’s learning about me. Watching my little movements every time he changes what he is doing. Kisses cascade on me now and then.

Pressure pulls in my stomach. This is different from anything I’ve done before. It’s as though L is worshipping me.

And I love it. I hate it.

Don't make me give you up, L.

My body jerks, and L smiles, breaking my heart.

"That's it sweet girl," He says. "Let me make you cum. Let me see you."

"L," I bite down. The finger is not stopping keeping the constant pressure the same. Circling around. And around. And around.

"It's okay," He kisses my lips, stealing my moan. "I've got you, Faye."

My fingers grip on the edge of the desk.

"Fuck, you are making me hard."

"Yeah," I whimper, trying to hold it together. It's a losing battle, though.

"Yeah, sweet girl. Watching you..." L hisses out a breath. "... I could cum just from watching you."

A long, shuddering breath pulls my body down to the desk. "In me."

"Come first." L sighs.

I shake my head, running a hand through my hair. I can't take much more of this. It's not fair, it's sad, it's beautiful. And it's going to end.

"L, I need you. Please." I move my hand to his, pushing it away. The air hisses over my throbbing clit. An electric spark races up my spine. I continue the rubbing with two fingers, trying to keep the same slow steady pace. It doesn't feel as good as L's.

"Fuck." L groans. "You look like an angel."

My heart skips a beat. "I. Need. You." I say with a broken breath.

"Fuck, need you too." The pulsing head rubs over me. His tip tapping my hand as the hips pump already.

Excitement and pleasure spike through my blood. The jaw flexing makes me rub harder.

“Too fucking good.” L pants. He grabs hold of his base and tunnels himself into my soaking entrance. Fullness fills me like a hug from the inside out. “Keep rubbing, sweet girl. Keep going.”

“Yes,” I say trying to catch my breath.

L folds over me. Hot pants bathe my ear with words I don't understand. But I know what they mean. It's the sorrow and need for me, for us.

I wrap my hand around his biceps. Even under his jacket, I can feel the tension as hard as a rock. As much as I am, he's milking this out. Thrusting in. Drawing out slowly. In, out. In out. He's holding everything back, and that's what breaks me.

“L,” I whimper. “L,” Oh god I'm begging. I want this to keep going. I want it to stop.

L's hand pushes between the small of my back and the desk, pulling me deeper into his hips. “I know, sweet girl. Keep going. Keep going.”

I rub faster and faster. My fingers sliding without friction. My toes curl. A breath sticks.

“Good girl,”

“L,” I sob out his name.

“Good girl.”

The blissful fog of orgasm explodes in the back of my mind. My moans fill the air. I wrap my legs around his waist. My hold body clamping him the beating cock into me and locking in place. L pushes his cock in deeper and freezes.

L groans on my lips, seething and panting. It takes a second for it to hit that he's cumming, and not because of fucking me. But because of me cumming on his cock. The knowledge pushes my orgasm out that little longer.

Sweet kisses bring me back down to reality. A reality I don't want.

L tries to pull out, but I press my heels into his ass. “Say it, L.”

“Faye,”

“I need to hear it. Tell me there is no more after this.”

L’s forehead presses on mine, his eyes and close and we share a long breath.

“Tell me you don’t want me.” My voice breaks. Just give me something. Tell me we are too different. That we could never work. That a dork like me couldn’t be with a billionaire. Fuck, I will even settle for him forcing me to sign the contract, and saying a boss and employee can’t be together. Why didn’t I sign that contract?

No, that’s not right. I was stupid for even thinking I would sign the contract. I would never give up on these hours with L.

“I can’t say that. I can’t lie to you.” L sighs, pulling away from me completely.

“Maybe... Just... I don’t know. If I hurt you—”

I move up to my elbows, studying the broken man. There’s winning this. L is convinced he will hurt me, and I can’t argue with him.

“L,” I say, forcing a smile onto my face. I doubt its help. “I understand, L. Just you know... I will be here for you.”

That’s all I can say—the truth. I understand why he’s worried. And I will be here for him. I will wait for him for as long as I can. Because there is something burning inside my mind saying maybe he... he is the one. It’s stupid and illogical. But I can’t ignore it.

I reach out and take his hand. “Just... I don’t think I could ever hate you L. I don’t think you are selfish. Not this man standing in front of me. And I think...” No, I know. Nothing about us makes sense, but there is something here. “... we could take a chance on this.”



# Chapter Nineteen

## L

I hate this office. Everywhere I look, Faye comes to my mind. But there is no escape, not today.

My eyes daze across the cubicles. For an app launch, I didn't expect it to be this much. But my employees have gone over the top. Pink and balloon balloons cover most of the ceiling, an enormous banner with congratulations: it's a boy, crossed out to say, congratulations: it's an app. And everyone is wearing a party hat and annoying blowers hanging out of their mouths.

All I was thinking was a cake, maybe an ice cream one, but we don't even have that. Instead, Cleo has gone and ordered a catered lunch. Which is fine, it's just... I should have planned all this out. Not them.

Gareth pushes my door open. Two party hats like horns are tangled in his blonde man bun. "Ten minutes, boss."

I nod, not needing the reminder. The clock is counting down on my computer screen. In fact, it's been counting since I bought this place.

The office phone rings. I snatch it up. "Cleo." I say without the need of looking at the caller id.

"Newsology magazine interview in thirty."

"Fine." I hang up.

The phone rings again. "Yes." I answer.

"Thankyou?" Cleo says. I can't even see her and I know she is rolling her eyes.

"Thank you." I sigh, rubbing my eyebrows. I need to get it together.

The door opens again. And Amy pokes her head through. "Congratulations, Mr Hunnd."

“Thank you. Congratulations to you too. Your instincts on interface are going to make this a game changer.”

Amy blushes as if I have never complimented on her before... and maybe I haven't. “Can I get you anything?”

Yeah, some peace and fucking quiet. “No,”

The door closes, and I stride across the room, flicking the latch before another interruption. With a sigh, I slump my back against the door. The laughter outside doesn't let the moment be quiet, but it also doesn't stop the thoughts racing through my mind.

I've done it. I have launched an app using my own business. One I have built from the ground up. And... I am not happy.

Not when I screwed things up with Faye. I opened up to her and pushed her away. Selfish.

*I understand, L. Just you know... I will be here for you.*

Well, it's hard to see that in your la la sunny way, Faye. Especially when you are the only person I want to be here. Just the two of us, her in my lap as we watch the timer. That's the celebration I want. I want last night with the deep talk, over and over again. She's working, trying to achieve her own dreams. I understand that. But it doesn't change the fact I want her here.

The door thunders with a knock behind my head.

“Yeah.” I mutter, pulling myself together.

“L,” Charlotte's voice booms, banging at a fast beat. “L. L. L. You can't hide in there.”

“I am not hiding.” I tweak my silver cuff-links, so the peak of the triangle is pointing to me.

“There's someone here to see me.”

My heart skips a beat. Faye. She came.

I pull the door open. Charlotte nods to the elevators and there is... so not Faye.

The pack of billionaires might as well look like a group of hungry lawyers getting ready to take every penny you have. Did they get a group rate or something to get here?

Dash beams waving his hands as if trying to hail down an airplane. “Did we miss it?” He yells. My brother has no sense of decorum.

I shake my head. Corni and Dash are laughing loud enough for everyone to stare... no doubt over another antidote regarding Hugh’s daughter. And Dirk... well, he’s bee-lining for Cleo of course, no doubt cause it’s the first girl he sees. Well, I hope Cleo chews him out. And Charming... he’s actually here. Oh duck. Please don’t tell me Charming flew back early for this.

“You look surprised.” Charlotte says.

“A bit.” I say. “Why are they here?” And especially all five of them.

“For you?” Charlotte frowns.

“Why?” I ask again.

“Because they are your friends, L. They are here to celebrate with you. To celebrate you. This is a big day and even if you hate the thought of it, we all love you, you grump.”

“Oh.” I rub the back of my neck. I suppose friends would do that... even if they have business to run, books to write, kids to look after. Nope. I can’t understand it. It’s hard enough organizing everyone’s schedules for the monthly Go Fish tournament, let alone a spontaneous surprise. “Right.”

Charlotte waves to Dash, and he strides over. The others mingle with ease. Each of them making quicker friends with my employees than I did. Hugh even graciously accepting a party hat from the flock of women surrounding him. Suppose that’s what happens if your family owns an entire make up empire, fans everywhere.

“Congrats, bro.” He says, punching me on the shoulder.

“Thanks.” I mumble.

“What’s wrong?”

“You guys surprised him.” Charlotte says. “Think he’s still in shock.”

Dash laughs. “Nope, that’s not it.”

Damn him.

“L?” Charlotte asks.

“The countdown is nearly over.” I nod towards the screen.

“Exciting!” Dash claps his hand together. At least he is easy to distract. Roll a piece of tinfoil up in a ball and Dash would be entertained for hours. “Where’s Faye?”

Okay. That didn’t work.

“She’s not here.” I mutter.

Charlotte follows my gaze to the elevator. “Oh,”

Yeah.

“This *was* meant to employees only.” I shrug. It’s the truth. Why would she come? It’s not like we are together. And maybe we aren’t even friends.

“Faye is an employee.... Isn’t she?” Dash looks at me. Charlotte. Me again.

I take a breath. Shields going up. “No.”

“What!” Charlotte’s jaw drop. “What do you mean? I thought you were giving her a new contract. You said she will sign it with the new rates and everything. I knew she had been quiet for a reason. Fuck, L.”

“What did you do?” Dash says. Oh god I am being eaten alive by sharks. “She signed ours.”

“Yeah, she signed Dash’s. What did you do?”

“One minute!” Someone yells. Dash and Charlotte turn, and I make my escape.

I did nothing, though. Not really. Okay, I did everything. But it’s not like Faye can’t sign the contract. If she wanted to. And why wouldn’t she? I told her to wait for me... and even she said yes, that doesn’t mean she has to. We don’t have a contract for our relationship. My stomach knots.

I don't want her to sign the contract.

I don't want her to leave.

I don't want her to not be by my side.

But I can't even bear to hurt her.

Everyone huddles around a monitor. I move to the back. I can barely see the timer with everyone's heads in the way, but I am not missing out. Dirk counts down from forty-eight seconds like an excited child. Of course he does.

This is it.

*Thirty-eight seconds.*

The launch of Deep Throb. The first app to a gateway of a new world. A world where the idea of business will change.

*Thirty seconds.*

Everything is fine. My team is amazing. The beta testing went surprisingly well.

*Twenty-five seconds.*

I have interviews this afternoon, and with a splurge of social media budget we will have our first thousand users in no time.

*Twenty-three seconds.*

This is a good day.

*Nineteen seconds.*

My hands ball against my thighs. I should have asked Faye to be here.

*Fifteen seconds.*

Why didn't I ask her here? I fucked up.

*Thirteen seconds.*

All of this is fucked up.

*Twelve seconds.*

I want to be with Faye.

*Ten seconds!* The crowd's energy is exploding. The chanting numbers growing louder. It's all too much. I take a step back.

*Five.*

Something tugs at my pants.

*Four.*

Spud's eyes meet mine.

*Three.*

Spud?

*Two.*

I turn around.

*One! We have an app!*

"Congrats, L." Faye smiles.

My heart jumps to my throats, she looks perfect. More that perfect. And she's here.

"Faye! You got the cake." Charlotte says under the rushing blood in my ears. "Did you—"

I kiss Faye's tense lips. My fingers tangling in her hair, dragging her closer. The world turns into a deadly silence. Wet gooeyness that isn't me smothers my suit but I don't care. Faye is here, and I am not letting her go.

"L," Faye sighs, pushing against my chest, creating a gap. Her cheeks are redder than a strawberry.

Everyone is watching us. All the eyes. My employees. My friends. Dash and Charlotte. It doesn't change the anything. I want to have Faye by my side for the highs and my lows. Her smile, the worry lines her eyes make, and everything in between.

"Faye, will you go out with me?" I blurt out.

"What?"

"Will you," I say, running my hands down her arms. "Will you go out with me?"

A soft smile curls on her lips. It grows larger, and larger. My heart swelling bigger and bigger. “Yes, L.”

“Really?”

She nods, falling into my arms and pressing the huge sticky mess between us. The office around us erupts with laughter and cheers.

“Holy shit,” Charlotte whispers next to me.

Yeah, holy shit. I don’t know how this day can get any better. It takes all my strength to pull us apart.

“Ice cream cake?” I ask. My suit is ruined and so is Faye’s bird dress.

“Yeah.” She smiles to the crumpled to the floor. “Rum and raisin.”

“Rum and raisin.”

# Chapter Twenty

## Faye

“Nope.” Honey shakes her head, throwing my pink bubble dress onto the bed. Fair it’s not very date night worthy. I only got it because a bubble print bubble dress made me laugh. Especially in bubblegum pink.

“Where is he taking you again?” Charlotte asks, taking another sip of her cocktail. I am not sure how she can enjoy it. The margarita mix is half floating on the top.

“Ummm, Extra.”

Honey drops a dress. The hanger clanging to the floor. “Fuck me.”

“No, thank you.” Charlotte laughs.

“Seriously, he’s taking you to Extra?” Honey turns to me.

“That’s what the text said. Why? What is it? Please tell me they don’t sell snails.”

Honey crosses the room and sits down on the bed beside me. Charlotte perks up and thrusts a phone in us. “This is the restaurant Dash wanted to take me to. It has a two year waiting list. Oh, Dash is going to be annoyed. L got in before him.”

“Two years?” I ask. “That’s extra.” I laugh at my joke. No one else does.

“It’s a very, very nice place. Top tier stuff.” Honey says.

“Have you been?”

“Pfft me? Nooooo. But...” Honey grabs my hand. “Faye sweetie, it’s a posh place. And I know I keep saying you should be you.”

“Try to fit in tonight?” My heart drops. I see. Maybe I was right, and L doesn’t like that dorky side of me. This could be his way of testing the waters of how I act in his world.

“Just for tonight.” Honey says. “It’s a really fancy place. It might surprise you.”



I look to Charlotte for help, but it's clear she's agreeing with Honey.

"No cute prints?" I ask.

Charlotte and Honey shake their heads.

"No jeans?"

They shake their heads.

"A cute handbag in the shape of a carrot?"

"Oh, did you buy it?" Charlotte asks.

I nod. "Yeah, Mr McKenzie at the thrift store—"

"Then no."

"Fine." I sigh. "But this means I have nothing to wear."

"But I do." Honey jumps up and disappears out of my room.

"You okay?" Charlotte asks after a moment.

"Yeah." I mutter.

"This is just the Hunnd's, Faye. They know nothing but money. It's their love language. You can always tell him."

"Yeah, I know. It's just... I thought L knew me. Liked me for me."

"I am sure he does. But hell, that man keeps his cards close to his heart. I still can't get over the fact that he asked you out. And he kissed you. And all this hassle."

"Hassle?" I ask.

"Where do you think Dash is?" Charlotte laughs, handing me her phone.

Her and Dash's texts are open.

**Dash:** He's convinced.

**Dash:** Nope.

**Dash:** We are going back to gray.

**Dash:** Nope, we are on black.

**Dash:** Apparently tartan is too much. :(

**Dash:** Slate now. Not slate, but the light slate.

**Dash:** And now we begin the ties.

I scroll up scanning over every one of L's fashion choice.

**Dash:** THESE SHIRTS ARE ALL THE SAME.

**Dash:** Apparently, F likes three-piece suits. He won't change his opinion.

I giggle.

**Dash:** Eggplant. Eggplant. Peach. Octopus. Coconut.

Ooops too far. And I so don't want to know what that means.

"L is nervous as fuck for you, Faye." Charlotte says. "He likes you. You do not have to worry about that."

"Here it is!" Honey stands in the doorway throwing her arms up as if she is a model unveiling the grand game show prize of a jet ski. A red dress is in her hand, and a pair of nude high heels. "Try it."

"Ooooh," Charlotte coos. "Where did you get that?"

"You know that little thrift store on the corner? The one with the cute mannequin. He has—"

"One arm?" Charlotte finishes Honey's sentence.

"Yeah, that one!"

"They call him Hand Solo."

Honey's eyebrows rise. "Fuck, he looks like a young Ford, doesn't he?"

"We should steal him."

Charlotte and Honey's schemes and laughter fade as I take the dress. The red velvet is luxurious. The stitching is invisible. It's exquisite, and yet... I don't like it. This isn't me. Sweet heart neckline and no sleeves. It seems to want me to defy physics. "Ummmm," I say, interrupting the conversation. "How does it stay up?"

"There are grips in it."

“And my...” I gesture to my breasts. “... Boobies? I can’t wear a bra in this.” I need a bra. A bra is there for support, and if there was a time for me to have additional support, it’s tonight.

“You have great boobs.” Honey says. “Best lot in this room.”

“Paul is bigger than Ringo.”

“Please do not tell me you call your boobs Paul and Ringo.” Charlotte snorts out a laugh.

I move to my full-length mirror, holding the dress up. It’s going to be a tight squeeze. “At least I don’t call them Dipsy and Laa-Laa.”

“Who calls them—” Charlotte says loudly, “Honey, you don’t do you? Dipsy and Laa-Laa.”

“It was only for a trial run.” Honey barks out a laugh.

“I’m more upset than Twinky-Winky didn’t even get a trial.” I say, focusing back on the dress. “I can’t wear this. I need a bra. I need sleeves to hide my bingo arms.”

“You don’t have bingo arms.”

I lift an arm, studying it in the full-length mirror. “If I did that too fast it would cause a sonic wave and wipe out half the city.”

Charlotte walks up behind me and pushes my arm down. “Faye. You are beautiful. You know that. And L is head over heels for you.”

“I haven’t heard these insecurities for a while, Faye.” Honey says. And it’s true. They used to be a constant pressure. I hated looking in the mirror. But thanks to Honey encouraging me to be more me, the thoughts turned to me comparing myself to everyone else in the city to this mushroom dress is so freaking cute and makes me feel like a fun-guy. I hadn’t noticed my arms, or knees, or hips. “It’s okay to be nervous.”

“L liked you in all your other clothes.” Charlotte adds.

“Try it on, and see if you like it.” Honey says. “And if you don’t think you are the drop-dead gorgeous and turn every

head in Extra around, then we will find something else.”

I sigh. Can't argue with that.

“We'll wait for you out here.” Charlotte says. “And hair down.”

Great, just add another thing to the list of things that will annoy me all night.

Honey and Charlotte flash a smile, and leave.

I take another moment to stare in the mirror before stripping off my clothes. The dress is tight. It's like reverse squeezing a tube of toothpaste. I pull it up over my thighs. A jump. A jiggle. A wiggle and it's up. I turn back to the mirror, meeting eyes with the stranger looking back at me.

“Holy fuck.” I say. That is not me. I place my hands on my hips, and the reflection follows. Okay. So it is me. The velvet pulls on tight around every curve of my body. It's a good thing I can barely breathe in it because the snugness makes my boobs look amazing. Well, Paul is still bigger than Ringo. But they look like they are in a bra.

I slip on Honey's nude high heels and pull my hair tie out. The curls need fixing but it helps the whole 'fucking a billionaire image.' But I just can't shake off the feeling I am playing dress-ups.

“Are you stuck in there?” Honey calls out.

“No.”

“Good cause I ain't cutting you out of the dress.”

“Are you ready to show us?”

“Yeah,” I say, taking a last look in the mirror.

I wobble in the heels, grabbing the doorway for balance. It takes careful maneuvering to turn into the hallway. The dress is gluing my legs together, but the look on the girls' faces is worth it.

“Fucking hell,” they curse out together, standing up from the kitchen stools.

“Good? Bad?” I ask. My eyes cast to Spud’s empty dog bed. It’s weird not seeing the slight head lift in my direction every time I enter a room. Hopefully, he’s doing it to L now.

“Glorious!” Honey says. “You can keep that dress. There’s no way I will look that good in it.”

“Charlotte?”

“You look stunning.” Charlotte whips her phone out.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“Do not send L a photo. He has to be surprised.” Honey taps Charlotte without taking her eyes off me.

“I am telling him L needs to bring his fucking A game tonight.” Charlotte’s thumbs speed over her screen. “I swear if L doesn’t smile when he sees you, he is not human.”

Well, I guess I have no real choice in the matter. This is what I am wearing. An icy shiver runs down my spine. What if Honey is right and everyone will look at me? This isn’t fitting in, and it’s not being me. It’s standing out in the middle of the street naked.

“You are so going to get laid tonight.” Honey beams with a laugh.

I run my hands down the side of my thighs, smoothing the velvet. “Oh, I am not worried about that.”

“Confident.” Charlotte raises her eyebrows.

“Oh. I.”

“Own it.” Honey soothes, pouring a glass of the cocktail mix for herself. “Cause you are getting laiiiiiddddd.”

My stomach flips with excitement. It’s the best thing I have heard all day. L’s lips will be back on my neck. The hungry erection throbbing in my hand.

“He won’t. L is... proper. Date three at the earliest.” Charlotte says.

“I thought he kissed her in front of everyone.”

Charlotte's lips pull tight. "Nope. Date three. I'm telling you."

"Five bucks?"

"Fine." The girls shake hands.

"Are you really betting on my sex life?" I sigh. My hands run down my dress again. I can't stop touching it. The material is so soft.

"I am..." Honey straightens herself up, with her drink still in hand. "Betting you have a good night. And dear fuck, I hope he's good. From what you have all saying he's got that rich, brooding personality. You know they are good in bed. The whole you're 'mine' thing."

"You've been reading too many Robin Hearts novels." Charlotte laughs.

"Of course I have. You have to read the books of the authors doing a book signing. You should have seen Glam-ma though. She was first in line. I know it's her store... but she was a little too enthusiastic to 'no idea who Robin Hearts is' I know she all the books under her bed."

Charlotte and Honey cackle, bringing a smile to my face.

"Just. I hope he doesn't disappoint you that's all. Or selfish, fucking hell I hate cocky selfish men. The whole, so was it as good for you as it was for me? Bullshit. Like, if I have to wait for you to leave the room to get what you need, it ain't good."

"Oh, believe me. L is not selfish during—" I snap a hand over my mouth. A rush of heat claiming my cheeks. "In my dreams. He's not selfish in my dreams."

"Faye..." Charlotte's eyes widen.

"I had dirty dreams about him. That's all." I murmur.

"You are the worst liar ever!" Honey howls.

Charlotte's jaw drops. "You slept with him!"

"Maybe." I mumble, rubbing the back of my neck. "A little."

“What!” the girls yell together. “When. How was it? What? How? Where?” The questions thunder.

“Just... you know.”

“Was it a one-night thing?” Honey gasps as if this is the best piece of news she’s heard in her life.

“Ummm... A night. A morning. A night.”

“When? Does Dash know?” Charlotte is still as white as a ghost.

“Yes, I am sure L told Dash I gave him a handy in the bathtub.”

“Which bathtub!” Honey gasps.

“Our one,” I mumble.

Charlotte turns whiter.

“I use that bath you know.” Honey sighs, with the roll of her eyes. “Please tell me you cleaned it.”

A breath pulls against my ribs. Oh no, Charlotte looks so upset. “Charlotte, we said we wouldn’t tell anyone. Cause we didn’t know what it was.”

“Sex?” Charlotte says shaking her head.

“Us.” I laugh. “I think I know what sex is.” Well, now I do. L certainly is a professor on that topic.

“I mean... I’m happy for you. More than happy. Just a bit...” Charlotte pauses, an enormous smile forming on her face. “You like him then? I was right. You both like each other?”

“Yes. I like L. And yes, you were right.”

Charlotte’s phone pings. She glances at it and smiles. “L is on his way to Extra. Early, of course.”

“I guess I should call a ride share.” No time to change now.

“Good for you Faye. You get what you need.” Honey laughs, downing half her drink. “And you owe me five dollars, Char, because she is so going to get laid.”

# Chapter Twenty One

## Faye

I follow the maitre d? server? The nice greeter through the quiet restaurant. The dim lighting, maroon palette and tables lit by candle light gives this place a real creepy vibe. I mean elegant and sophisticated. Nah, it's creepy. It's like a haunted mansion that has found new owners who knew the only people who would eat here were the rich and famous if they used the word exclusive.

A few of people look from their party towards me. It's no worse than me yelling out Deep Throb is a porn name in L's office, but my hair is standing on its ends. I suppose I fit in after all.

The most terrifying thing though... the cutlery. Every table has endless lines of gold cutlery. Why would someone need four forks? Do I need to use four forks? I guess I could stab someone with one and have a spare. I am going to make a fool of myself.

"Madame." The server snaps me back to reality, my focus landing on L's face that looks like someone has slapped it.

"Hi," I whisper, smiling. Okay, this dress might have been worth it after all. I thank the server for his help.

Color rushes back to L's face. He jumps up, grabbing my chair and pulling it out.

"Fuck." He whispers under his breath, and down my bare neck.

I sit, trying not to giggle. It's an impossible mission.

"Honey and Charlotte."

L nods, making his way back to his seat. He ended up going for the slate three piece suit. The vest is lighter than the rest, making it that bit more refined. A small gold pin on the breast pocket catches the candlelight. Is it?... It is, it's a little silver duck. Noooo. This is L. Oh, by all things sparkly, my heart.



“Faye, you look—” L clears his throat, dropping it down an octave. “Fucking amazing.”

My cheeks catch a fire of embarrassment. “So do you, is that pin...”

“A duck.”

“It is!” I laugh, clapping my hands together. “No, L. Why would you do that?”

L smiles. No, no smiles, beams looking away from me. “That’s why.”

It takes a second to understand. It’s to make me laugh. And suddenly, we aren’t in a fancy pants restaurant with a million forks that can fork off. It’s L and I together. “Thank you,” I say.

“Would you like a drink?” L asks, raising his hand.

“Oh,” Shit. I should have prepared for this. I didn’t get to do my two hours of reading the menus online to decide what to get, since this place is pretty much so Extra it doesn’t exist to the normal public. “I don’t know what to get.”

L furrows his eyebrows slightly. My stomach knots. Great, that didn’t last long.

“What are you having?” I ask, trying to sound cool. Another failure.

“Scotch.”

The server introduces himself, but I don’t hear a word. I don’t like scotch. Well, I do. But that seems weird to drink here. Shifting in my seat, I glance at the surrounding tables. One couple is drinking champagne, another one has something in a very tall glass with puffs of clouds coming out of it. There is wine. A lot of wine. But how does one even order wine? I can’t quite say I will have a red a la boxed.

Another server passes us two plates in her hands. Oh no, I didn’t think about this at all. This place is fancy, fancy. Like one mouthful per course. Why didn’t I eat those corn chips?

“Faye,” L says.

“Sup,”

The server recoils, eyebrows rising. Oops.

“I mean, I am sorry. I didn’t hear you.” I correct myself.

L’s warm eyes swallow me whole. “How about a strawberry fizz?”

“Really?” They make strawberry fizzes here. That’s so normal. But maybe they don’t. The server does not sound impressed by the order.

“They will.” L says, nodding to the server.

“You didn’t have to do that,” I mumble, hands tugging on my dress to pull it down my thighs a little.

“Do what?” L asks, handing me a menu.

“This doesn’t seem like a place they would sell things like that. Kinda more of the place where every alcohol bottle is so old enough it could buy itself.”

L peers over the menu. “It’s money, sweet girl. They don’t mind. And I will compensate them.”

He called me sweet girl. In public. And so casually. I bite down on my lip.

“Speaking of which,” L says. “You can choose anything off the menu. What ever you want, Faye. Just ask.”

“Thank-you.” And thank god. Nothing on here has prices. What’s the point of a menu if you can’t weigh your enjoyment compared to its monetary value?

I don’t understand half of the names, let alone the ingredients. Salad! I know that... and how hungry a salad will make me in an hour. This is a lot.

“Are you okay?” L asks, breaking my concentration.

“It all looks good.”

“The matelote is nice, apparently. Charming says he gets it every time.”

I nod, ignoring the sexy French thing L is doing. That has to be the thing with fish. Fish isn’t my favorite, then again if I

accidentally order snails it might move up the list a few spots. “Charming?”

“Richard Charmant. This is his regular table. He owed me from a tremendous loss at Go Fish.” The name clicks. Richard Charmant. I knew he looked familiar at the launch today. He is the biggest self-help guru ever. Then again, all of L’s friends looked familiar. I need to ask Charlotte.

“Thank him for me?” I say, staring at the next page of the menu. It keeps going on and on. “It’s extremely nice of him.”

“Yeah...”

“Faye.”

“Mhmm.” I tear my eyes away from something I am pretty sure might be a duck soup, which seems mean to Lord Quackington.

L shakes his head, and not in a good way. That’s not his trying to hide a smile shake, but I am disappointed in you. My stomach plummets to the floor. “Stay here.”

“Wha—”

It’s too late. L is striding across the restaurant towards our server. They are exchanging word. Oh, ducking ducks, did I do something? Did they? We haven’t even got our drinks yet. I scan over the tables. A few people glance at L, but most of them are in deep conversations. Everyone is so fancy. Some men are wearing suits with bow ties. And the women. Every one of their necks is glimmering with jewelry matching their wrists. There must be more money in here than I will ever earn in my lifetime.

But the common factor, everyone is so beautiful. All of them. Even the elderly couple in the corner are gorgeous. The woman’s silver hair tied up without a strand out of place complementing her dark green silk dress. The thing that stands out the most though are their smiles. They could be teenagers on their first date.

L walks back to the table, blocking my view. A firm hand lands on the back of my chair, and his cologne hits me. The smell I am understanding I miss when it’s not around.

“Are you ready?” He cocks an eyebrow, eyes firmly on my chest.

“For you to look down my dress?”

L rips his gaze away. “They were there. I wasn’t looking, looking.”

“That’s a shame.” There is no doubt my playful smirk is matching his. “And here I thought having them nearly falling out would get your attention.”

“Well,”

“They’re falling out aren’t they?” I don’t even need to look down to know an adjustment is needed.

“Yeah.” L says, eyes coming back to me.

Damn. L moves slightly to the table, giving me the coverage I need to pull my dress up.

“Thanks.” I say, laughing at myself. And like a lightning bolt, it hits me. This is a nice restaurant and I am going to enjoy my time here. L is looking at me, and he’s so open tonight. Laughing and being adorable with the Dickie Duck pin. All the stress from yesterday’s launch no where to be seen. It doesn’t matter who is watching me, or what I look like. I am happy. The happiest I have ever been. “I am. I am ready to order.”

“We are leaving.” L pulls my chair and without his suit straining over his muscles, I am moving.

“What?”

“There’s been a mistake.”

Oh no! I did something. Please don’t tell me I embarrassed L somehow. Was it looking at everyone? Shouldn’t I have done that? “I am sorry. I didn’t mean to do whatever I did.” My heart pounds in my ears. Okay, apparently I am not okay with all that, not if it means I’ve embarrassed L.

L’s eyes widen. “What?”

“I am just... this place is so nice... and—” I run my sweaty palms down my dress.

Suddenly, L drops to a knee. One by one, the tables around us turn to us silently. Okay, okay. Don't panic. He's not proposing.

Nooo.

What do I do?

Say yes. I have to say yes. This is L.

But no! He cannot propose to me when my tits are half hanging out.

"What are you doing?" I rush out.

"Apologizing for fucking up."

My chest lightens, yet the grip on my heart tightens. He's not proposing... I should not be getting sad at that. Not this early. Jeez, it's our first date.

"You did nothing wrong, Faye. It was me. I fucked this up. I have no idea..." L drops his voice lower. "... why I brought you to a place like this other than I was selfish for thinking this would be a good place to take you. But this isn't you. This isn't us."

"L..." I say a breath catching in my throat. "This is you, though. And it's only fair we do both. I am not trying to and I don't want to change what you like. If you want to stay, I am more than happy too. Though fair warning, I am pretty sure there's a fork on the table that is a back trident."

"It's a fish fork." L smiles, the candle light catching his neat stubble. "And this isn't me, Faye. Me is watching you devour ice-cream and dancing on a fountain."

Something shifts in my chest. A throb, one so deep it feels like it's not a part of my body. A deep throb.

Deep Throb. Dang it that is a good name.

I am falling in love with L.

It all makes sense. His smile working triple on me. The touch of his hand on mine sending shivers down my spine. "So let's go find somewhere which is us."

I nod, fighting back the pricks of tears threatening to break free. But there is no doubting it. L sees me.

“What’s everyone looking at?” L asks head twisting around like a meerkat.

“You.”

L leans in closer. “Why?” He whispers.

I seal a kiss on his mouth. The room explodes with polite applause.

“What’s happening?”

“Nothing. Let’s go.” I laugh, running a thumb over his cheek.

# Chapter Twenty Two

## Faye

“—Every weekend since I was about ten was spent in the office with my father. He made me learn everything. The books, how to talk to people, what gifts to give to right people. He even had me fire someone for my thirteenth birthday.”

I squeeze L’s hand and trust my gut to not say I am sorry. “But you didn’t take over the company?”

L shakes his head, pointing to the entrance of a quite familiar park. I don’t know how long we have been walking, but it’s been long enough for the smell of L’s jacket wrapped around me to lose its power.

“No.” We walk through the small plaza. Sweet flowers blow in the wind, sending their delightful smell swirling around us. The water fountain babbling. It’s more beautiful than the other night.

L slows his paces. “I didn’t want it, Faye. Foodgenics is a food company created by my father’s greed. I just... I didn’t want to turn into him. Imagine taking your son to work instead of a childhood to protect your own legacy. It’s—”

“Selfish.” I finish for him.

Suddenly, L stops. He shoves his fingers through his hair.

“I—. I didn’t even think about the consequences. That is would be Dash to take over. I swear he hated it just as much as we did as kids. And my moment of selfishness forced him into the same position.”

“L,” I move in front of him. “You are not your father.”

The dark eyes widen, and his eyebrows furrow. I might as well be speaking another language. “No one is. If you are like him, that is a choice. And by the sounds of it. You are doing everything in your power not to be.”

“Yeah. But—” L’s shoulders drop with an invisible weight. “What I did to Dash. I didn’t even think about it. And what’s

worse. I would do it again. I don't even regret it.”

“Really?” I swirl my hand around his chest. “Cause this seems like a lot of regret.”

“This.. this... is guilt.”

I nod slowly, sliding my arms around his waist. “Have you asked Dash? This might not be his point of view.”

L pauses. His eyes searching mine. I guess the silence means he hasn't asked Dash. But there's something else weighing on him. I tighten my hold on him. I wish L was a mind reader so he knew it was okay. That he can tell me anything.

“What if I do it to you, Faye? What if I make a decision, and choose me over you? And not feel a thing about it.”

“If this is you not feeling anything, L I think you're okay. And I told you L. As long as you want me, I will be there for you. I promise, if you do something that upsets I will tell you, and we will work it out.”

“Oh,”

“One of the greatest skills humans have, L. Communication. Believe me, it would be a lot easier if dogs talked.” I pull away, stepping back to take in all of L. He is magnificent. His jacket did nothing but hide his bulging biceps. The waistcoat pulls tight, putting his full figure on display. “So, what can we do to make you happy right here, right now?”

“Hear you laugh.” L says quicker than I can understand.

A sharp laugh frees from my lips. “Can you dance L?” I take L's hands in mine, tugging slightly.

“Dance?”

“You know move your body to music. All the cools kids are doing it.” I throw an arm up, pumping the air.

“Not like that.”

I move into his open arms, sliding my hands over his broad shoulders. L's muscles are tense, harder than stone. “Spontaneous remember.”



With a sigh, his hands fall to my hips. The embrace is soft, yet strong. I feel safe. No, it's almost like I am home.

"Can you dance? Like this." He murmurs, glancing down to my feet.

"In high heels? No. In general? No. So I am all yours, L."

A soft laughter blows over the top of my head. I wrap my hands tighter around his neck. Our bodies coming together and moving as one, rocking side to side. L guides my right hand out, holding onto his.

I was right.

It doesn't matter where I am, what I am wearing or who is watching. None of it matters. Not when I am with L.

Soft hums of a slow tune I don't recognize sing in my ear, softening me into him even more. I rest my head on his shoulder, taking in the warmth and scent I miss so much.

"L," I mumble into his chest after a long moment.

"Yeah."

"I mean it."

"Mean what, sweet girl?"

"I am yours." I whisper. A breath sticks to my ribs with a new found lightness. There is no fooling myself anymore. He has a hold on my heart. "Not just for the dance."

"Faye. I—" He takes a breath, chest pushing against me. "You will never know how much that means to me."

I break our hands apart, hugging L so tight I am worried I make break his ribs. He defies everything and makes me question everything. Dogs are beautiful beings who love you unconditionally. Humans are complicated, and they are what L fears in nature. Selfish intentions. But with L, he's doubt, worries and baggage make him who he is. They aren't conditions they are the parts of him that make me fall for him that much more.

"Oh. Fuck!" L rips himself away, holding me out at arm's length. His eyes are as wide as saucers.

“What? What!” I yell, panic striking down my spine.

“The restaurant. The clapping. I was down on one knee like I was...”

“Proposing?”

L slaps a hand on his forehead. “You didn’t think... did you... that I was proposing? Oh, dang it Faye.”

I bite my lips together. There is something about L being flustered. It’s utterly adorable. “I won’t lie to you.” I pinch my forefinger and thumb together. “A little.”

“Fuck.”

“But only for a moment.”

“I wouldn’t. Not like that. Just so you know.” L takes in a deep breath and runs both hands through his hair. “Everyone knew?”

I nod, walking back into his arms. “It was embarrassing.”

“Sorry,”

“Now it’s funny, though. Like you asking me out in front of your entire office? After being so, we should keep this a secret.” I plant a small kiss on his lips. “And we shouldn’t even date. It’s so wrong.” I kiss again. “So bad.”

A soft touch rushes across my cheeks, pushing a lock of hair behind my ear. “Maybe it’s our thing.”

“What?” I lower my voice, pressing myself against the warming erection. “Having you huge filthy cock beating on me.”

L huffs out a laugh. “Having people clap when we kiss.”

He lowers his lips onto mine, kissing at full burn. A firestorm of passion and promises of so much more.

“Looks like that’s a no,” I say, catching my breath.

“Guess we are back to the cock, then.”

“I *so* cannot complain about that.”

L grabs my hand, and suddenly, I am spinning out, and coming back into his arm, wrapping around me. He holds me as close as possible, sealing my back against his chest. And oh, I can feel all of it. The furious need pushes on the small of my back. The slight movements grinding it into me being disguised as musical swaying.

“We are in public, L.” But even that won’t wipe the smile off my face.

“And you look beautiful. What else am I meant to do?”

I push a little more back against him. “The boob-falling out dress works then?”

L moans in my ear. A sneaky hand runs down my outer thigh, making me look around. There is no one around, around. But that doesn’t stop me from being on high alert and feeling naughty. “Do you want the truth?”

“Always.” I sigh, smiling to myself.

“I liked the other one better.” Hot lips press against the nape of my neck. “The black one. With the gold stars.”

“Really?” He has to be kidding.

“You looked so powerful and happy. I was ready to fall onto my knees and—”

“Propose?” I laugh.

A faint laugh rushes over my neck. L spins me out of his hands, and back towards this time catching me so we face each other, resuming our dancing position. “I am never going to the hear the end of that am I?”

“Nope. Even worse, that I had to help you up, old man.”

“It was the floor.” L hides a small chuckle in his throat. Shitake freaking mushrooms, I love it. I love how there seems to be nothing between us anymore.

“Sure it was Romeo.”

“Faye.” L’s voice turns serious. “What were you going to say?”

“When?”

“When I was down on one knee.”

A chill runs down my spine. Yes. There is not a doubt in my mind I would’ve said yes. Every little hang up between us, every doubt, worry, need the only end here is us together. Isn’t it? “What ever you think I was going to say.”

“I wouldn’t you know. Do that.”

“Marry me?” My heart drops. When did I want marriage? But with L it seems... it makes sense. It makes me happy.

“Ask you on the first date.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Not... Just not yet. I mean—”

I push a finger against L’s lips before his fluster says something weird. And before the actual thought sinks into my brain... oh, too late. L is already thinking about marriage. One thing to think of is our happily ever after, another to know he is thinking about it as well. It should scare me. It should be terrifying, but all that is consuming me is happiness. L is serious. He wants me and on some level he knows we can work. For now, that is more than enough.

“You got one thing wrong, though. This is so not our first date.”

L’s eyebrows furrow. “Yes, it is.”

“Come on. Coffee dates. You coming over to my place? The last time we were here.”

“They weren’t dates.”

I pull away, staring at the dark eyes. Oh, they are better every time I see them. This time, they are full of impish fun. “What were they then?”

“Missed opportunities. Every. Single. One.”

I smile, looking down at the floor. “They were still dates.” I mumble. “And anyway, you are about to miss the biggest opportunity ever.”

“And what’s that?”

“Watching me eat the fuck out of some fried chicken.” Not letting go of one of L’s hands, I tug him along.

He digs his feet into the ground. “You’ll have to give me a minute.”

## Chapter Twenty Three

### L

This place is a hole in a wall. Literally, if it wasn't for the door, it would be a hole.

“What's wrong?” Faye asks.

I hold back my thoughts. I have fucked up enough today for this to be an issue.

“Have you ever been to a place like this?”

I hesitate for a moment, as if I am not sure of the answer. I one hundred percent know. There is no way anyone I know would come to a place like this. Well, maybe Hugh. But that's only in the recent years, ever since he declared he wanted to give his daughter everything life offered, and more than anything some normalcy. I can't blame him there. “No.”

“I know, it's not as fancy, but I promise you this is the best fried chicken ever.” She tugs my sleeve, and with an instant all the worries melt away.

Faye pushes the red door open, and a tidal wave of fried goodness slams into us. Okay. Do not judge by appearance.

“Good evening!” Faye calls out.

Two women, older in appearance stick their heads out from a back room. Their black curly hair is poking out from nets and tired smiles might as well be a sign that they have been working all day.

“Ooooooh, aren't we fancy tonight?” One of them calls out. Laurel or Lauren if my farsightedness isn't failing me. The other name badge is definitely Maybelle. They must be sisters. Twins even.

“Thank you.” Faye gives a small twirl from side to side, showing off my jacket. “L where do you want to sit?”

“Oh.” The restaurant is small. Tiny. My terrace is bigger. There is only a proper table with a booth and two chairs. The

rest of the seats are stools at the counter. Two already occupied by gentlemen in worn suits. I nod to the booth.

“All yours, sugar.” Maybelle says.

I gesture at the table. Faye slides into the chair, leaving me with the booth. I kind of wish she was next to me, though. No, better not risk it. I am on edge enough as it is. I don’t need the vixen tempting me to do something uncivilized.

“So what are we celebrating, loves?” Laurel asks, making her way down the counter.

“First date,” I say.

“A big app launch,” Faye says at the same time.

The women peer down at me, making me shift in the booth. “She knows this is a first date, then.”

“Yes,” I say as Faye chirps, “No.”

Faye! What are you doing?

“Mhmmm.” The women judge me harder than a man wearing socks and cros.

“We are in a disagreement. This is my first official time I asked her. But then. There was coffee. But it shouldn’t of counted. Not really. It’s not enough. Honestly—”

Faye’s hand shoots across the table, catching mine and stopping my words. Fuck, what is with me? As soon as I start, I can’t stop. I know I try to wait until a thought is properly planned and needed, but I would have thought I could still hold a conversation. But ever since Faye... actually, I’ve stopped thinking.

“Technically, it’s the first.” Faye spins around the chair. “But... you know.”

“Ohhhh,” the women nod, all too well knowing smiles pulling on their faces. They definitely are twins.

“Don’t worry. Laurel and Maybelle are like family the amount of times we eat here.” Laurel, not Lauren I note. “Plus, they love a bit of man candy to gossip about.”

“Who?”

Faye cackles out a laugh, letting go of my hand. “You are a moose. How do you not know you are walking man candy Mr Three Piece Suit?”

I swallow, ignoring the heat claiming my cheeks. “Well, then. I guess I am sweet enough for your sweet tooth.”

“Oh no, L. Do not do that.” Faye leans closer to me.

“Do what?” I cock my head.

Faye raises her eyebrows, and a foot runs up my pants leg.

We both know. A smile, a joke, and it’s like I have stripped off in front of Faye and asked her how many times she wants to come tonight. It makes me feel warm inside. Her eyes are crinkling in the corner, a smile fighting on her face. This doesn’t even compare to when she scans over my body when I wear a new suit.

The bubble of realization burns in my chest. My biggest turn on to her is my happiness.

“You want the usual sugar?” And we are not alone.

“One minute.” Faye says the smile on her face falling. “L,”

“Yeah,” I say leaning closer to the table.

“You know... I...”

“You?” I search Faye’s eyes, but they are giving no hints at the puzzle.

“Okay,” Faye slaps her down on the table. “I know Extra was expensive, and I really hope you didn’t have to pay. But,”

“You want me to pay for here?” I say, trying not to be overwhelmed by the sweet blush forming on her soft cheeks. “Is this the whole ice cream topping thing again?”

Faye nods, not making eye contact.

I laugh to myself. I don’t know what I am going to do to with you, Faye. If she keeps worrying about asking me for money, she won’t get what she wants when she wants it. It’s the hidden truth about money. It doesn’t make you happy. But



it sure helps you to be happier easier, and Faye deserves all the happiness the world can give her.. “What did I tell you Faye?” I pull out my wallet. “Just ask.”

“Can I do something crazy.. with your money? Not all of it... wait, how rich are you?” She stammers.

“Are you going to buy this place and the surrounding ten blocks?”

“No?”

“Then I don’t need to use two cards.”

Faye smiles, taking the black card I hand to her. It’s nothing though. The smile is nothing. It’s not even oh, fuck I made the right choice going out with a billionaire, can’t wait to get in your pants smile. But an old lady smile, saying, that’s nice dear.

“Thank you.” Faye grasps my hand with both of hers. “I really mean it, L. Thank you.”

I swallow hard. “Anything, Faye.”

Faye stands up and leans over the counter. My eyes are glued to her plump little ass, shifting from side to side as she pumps her legs up and down.

“You ready to order, love?”

“Kind of,”

Maybelle pulls a pencil out of her netted hair. What are you going to do, Faye? Pay them to shut the place down for us, with a bit too generous of an amount of money.

Faye turns, pointing at me. “See my...” Boyfriend. Partner Lover. “My... L.”

My L. I can work with that.

“The cute one?”

“The one so hot he’s peeling paint off the walls?” Laurel shouts.

I sink further into the booth.

“Yes! Well, you see. He’s one of these rich New York business men types.”

“No surprise there.”

“You’ve caught a good one. Do not let him go.”

Faye leans on her hand, covering her mouth. “Well, he has never had the divine experience of eating somewhere like here.”

“Too busy eating all the hoyty toyty crap that can barely feed a mouse.” Laurel cackles. She’s got me there.

“So I was wondering...” Faye continues. “If...”

“Boy, have you ever even a home cooked meal?” Maybelle shouts way too loud for such a small place.

I perk up assuming Boy is me. “I’ve had meals at my home.”

“What does that mean?”

“Your mother ever cook?”

I nearly peel over with laughter just at the thought. “No.”

“He has a chef.” Faye says, smiling at me. Snitch.

Both the women look at each other, and then at me. Hands falling to their hip. So this is what the whole, I am not angry at you just disappointed thing feels like.

“What do you want sugar?”

“Like?” I ask.

“Anything you want. You want it. We will make it for you and show you all the good food you have missed.”

I rub the back of my head. What do I want? Dash always raves about Charlotte’s family cooking. That will probably be the way to go. Meat, vegetables and a desert. Maybe not a dessert, it’s still not too late to get ice-cream. I am sure Faye can sniff out a store around here.

The card waving in Faye’s hand catches my attention. “How about Maybelle and Laurel? You bring us whatever, and everything you think he needs to have?”

“He needs weight on him.”

“He’s paying. Plus a very nice tip, twenty percent.” Faye says.

“Thirty,” I correct.

The sister’s face light up. “Oh, we got you. We got you.” They say, disappearing behind the back door.

Faye returns to the table. “That was kind of you.” She says.

“Might as well get on their good side. I have the strangest feeling we are going to become here a lot.”

“Are we now?”

Is that a real question?

“I’m getting a second date?” Her eyebrows rise.

“Hey, you called this the second date?”

“I know,” she sighs. I love every little emotion flying over her delicate features. The lips fighting off a smile, the fingers pushing a supple cheek. “It’s a shame, though. By dating law, it means I shouldn’t put out tonight.”

The naughty little shoe runs up my leg again, making my stomach drop. “Is that right?”

“Mhmmm.” Her pink stained lips catch the shine of the lips. Bubblegum. That’s what they tasted like tonight. Not a normal bubblegum though, one from my childhood. Something with so much sugar they probably stopped making by now. “I suppose it’s a good thing.”

I lean back in the booth, arms spreading out over the top. Where are you going with this, Faye? Being a temptress luring me into her wiles.

“With tomorrow and everything. I shouldn’t really be distracted. Or maybe a distraction would be nice.”

Tomorrow... what’s tomorrow?

“You know let me forget about everything. Over and over again.”

The faint memory of Faye's moans roll in my ear. No, get back on track.

"What's tomorrow?" I ask.

Faye jerks back a little, eyes losing their playful spark. "Oh, it's..." She picks up a fork and starts fiddling with it. "... my bank appointment."

Fucking shit. How in the earth did I forget about that? "I'm sorry, Faye. I just—I don't know how I could have— Damn."

Faye's slight laughter does nothing to ease the guilt. "Don't worry about it. You have plenty of things to do between the app... and well, me."

It's not an excuse, though. As much as Deep Throb's launch was a milestone in my life, this appointment is a milestone in Faye's. If she was there for me, I am damn right going to be there for her. "Do you want me to go with you?"

"What?" Faye eases back into her chair. "No, L. It's okay. I'll be fine. I mean I can't fail with our new plan. Plus, it's my business."

"I know, but..."

"Honestly, though," There's a new sadness to her voice. "Thank you. For everything. I don't know what I would have done. Well, I would be probably packing boxes to try again. But I am glad I can stay here." Faye reaches out, taking my hand in hers. "I am glad to be with you, L."

"Me too," I say, pulling my phone out of my pocket.

"Romantic." Faye laughs. "Who is it? Did Charlotte tell Dash?"

"About what?" For the first time in the lifetime of this phone, I have do not disturb enabled. There isn't even a single notification popping up on my screen. And somehow, that's really fucking nice. I open my calendar app.

"I kind of accidentally told Charlotte and Honey." Faye mumbles under her breath, sinking into her chair.

With two clicks of the colored boxes, I now have two hours free for lunch tomorrow. I lock the phone placing it on the table.

“Told them?” I ask.

“Well, in my defense... I have none. But Honey was hoping you were good in bed, and worried. And I just blurted it out.”

I raise my eyebrows, letting the words sink in. It doesn't matter if anyone knows or not. They would have found out even if we kept this a secret. It's not like I can keep my feelings for Faye locked away. “And am I... good?”

The rosy blush creeps over Faye's face. “You have no idea.”

My heart jumps into my throat. I lurch over the table, a hand tangling in Faye's loose curls. Our lips collide with heat.

“Good.” I pull away just enough to speak. “Sweet girl.”

“L,” Faye mewls. Dang it, why are we eating food here, and not in my bed?

I let go and move back into the booth. I grab my phone and cancel all my late appointments for tomorrow. And the rest of the week, except for Go Fish.

Faye's wide eyes catch mine.

“Clearing my calendar for you.” I say, putting the phone away.

“Really?”

A plate of food slides on the table. “Now, try everything.” One sister says.

Like an assembly line, over filled plate after over filled plate finds its place on the table. Green beans covered in melted butter. Three different potatoes dishes. Waffles. It's enough food to feed my entire office building. Just when I think there is no more room, Maybelle walks out with an enormous plate of fried platter.

The smell of everything makes my mouth water.

“Welcome to heaven on earth,” Faye laughs, clapping her hands together. “So much more extra than Extra.”

She has a point there. I don’t even know where to start.

“Laurel?” Faye asks.

Laurel turns around with a smile. “We are getting the boxes for leftovers now.”

“Great, I do not have to cook for a week!”

I shove a piece of the macaroni cheese in my mouth. The creamy saltiness dances on my tongue.

“Good?” Faye says.

“Nothing could be better than this with you.”

## Chapter Twenty Four

### L

“You would hate my parents.” Faye smiles. The light of the elevator basks down on her wild curls.

“By the sounds of it, I wouldn’t.” A teacher and an accountant. Two people working hard to provide for their family, dragging out every penny so their daughter can buy ice cream at the park. Or making sure they both have a vacation every year, even now to celebrate her birthday. They sound lovely.

“Oh, believe me you will.” Faye shifts the brown paper carrier bag from one hand to another. I take it from her, adding my collection. “Because they will dote on you like a long-lost son.”

“Would they?” I ask. The idea kind of excites me, but it’s nowhere near the level of anticipation to hear stories about Faye as a child. No, even better as a teenager. She must have been something else.

“By the way,” Faye rocks on her feet. The high heels discarded as soon as we hit my lobby. “That’s you know. I am not saying you should meet my parents. Cause that would be moving fast. Way too fast. I mean you a normal relationship... we should wait.”

“Is this a normal relationship?” I ask. It’s a kind of joke, but not.

The elevator doors open to the penthouse lobby. I nod Faye to exit first.

“It’s just... Well, you know the whole proposal thing kinda through a wrench in normal.”

A laugh escapes my lips. “I did not propose.”

Faye turns around, leaning against my apartment’s door. Fuck, she looks gorgeous. Her being wrapped in my coat, way too big for her. It’s like I am watching myself hug her. My arms begging to replace the material ones. And whether or not

on purpose, there's a gorgeous peek of her chest, dress hanging lower than it should.

Delicate fingers wrap around my tie, pulling me into her. Our lips drift over each other, teasing with the need to taste. "You proposed proposed." She sighs.

"When?"

"At the fountain."

I did, didn't I? But it seems right. So right. I don't want this night to end, let alone not seeing Faye for than day. Everything in the world is so right. It's the moment of being I've been longing for all my life. She is the person I have been missing all of this time. My other half, the better half. Faye. The person I am utterly devoted to, and so deep in love with it hurts.

I love Faye.

My lips peck hers. Kissing again and again. "If this is too much," I manage out.

Faye's fingers rake through my hair, pulling me in deeper.

"We can slow down."

"No," Faye says through a broken kiss. "No, I want you L. Now."

A hand skates down my shirt, fingers running over my waistcoat buttons. And there is no stopping them as they force themselves under my belt.

Lust pools in the base of my spine sparking down my thighs and into my balls.

"Oh, fuck." I groan against her mouth.

"I want all of it." Her voice drops.

"D—door."

Faye's touch disappears. The door handle clicks, and she stumbles ever back. I use my elbow to flick on the lights.

"Wow," Faye stares, lips parting open. "This place is enormous."



“One perk of being a Hunnd.”

Small taps scamper on the tiles of the kitchen. My heart swells.

“Spud!” Faye cries out, dropping to the floor. The happy dog jumps up on her, tail wagging as if it can propel him fast enough to turn into a helicopter. “I miss you too. So much.”

Spud pivots, turning towards me. The tail never misses a beat. “Hey, boy.” I put a bag down to scratch his right ear. Not his left ear. He doesn’t like that. I suppose if you only have three legs, you are stubborn to prove you can do what you can.

My gaze draws to Faye. It might be the lights in here, but I swear her eyes are welling up.

“He loves you.” She smiles.

“You think so? It’s not like we are best friends. I mean what, it’s been... a day.”

Faye shakes her, standing up. “Can I tell you a secret, L?”

I cock an eyebrow.

“Spud was always your dog. Ever since the first elevator meeting, he knew you would love him. Animals are funny like that. They choose their humans. He’s probably been waiting for you.”

I look back to Spud, twisted into a pretzel to lick his balls. “You think?”

“Yep.” Faye says, beaming a smile. She reaches out to take a bag. I pull it away.

“I’ll do this. Can you take Spud out?” I nod towards the terrace doors.

“Sure,”

Faye calls Spud, opens the doors and disappears. I let go of a deep breath. All the tension and nervous that have been bundled up for so long drift away. This isn’t a date anymore. I am home. Home. With Faye and Spud.

I make my way to the kitchen, sliding the carrier bags into the empty fridge.

“Did you do all that for Spud?” Faye asks, poking her head out from behind the sliding door. “It’s really cute.”

“I hired someone.” There’s no way I have the skill to install all of that. If I did, the fake grass would be bumpy, and the mini white picket fence would point upside down. Putting the fake fire hydrant out is as top of my skills as it comes.

“So you did?” Faye laughs, calling Spud in.

Spud shakes and slinks off to his corner. Plopping himself on his bed. All this excitement too late at night must have worn him out.

“Whoa.” Faye says. “I am just going to say this... You are spoiling that dog.”

“Am I? It’s just toys and beds... I didn’t really know what he would prefer. So I just bought—”

“Everything.” Faye finishes. “He certainly picked a wonderful human.”

I walk up behind Faye, running my hands down my jacket. She shrugs it off, revealing the tight red dress. “Beautiful.” I whisper into her hair.

“L,”

“Mhmm,” I hum, making a note to never wear this jacket again. I need it vacuumed sealed to keep the smell of Faye on it. My lips fall onto the nape of the soft neck.

Faye sighs, moving closer to me.

“I do... want you.”

“I want you too.” I say, walking away towards the hallway.

“Where are you going?” Faye stutters.

“I need to put the jacket away.” I stop at the door. “In my room. I might need some help.”

Laughter glows through my apartment, warming it as much as all the lights in the world. I duck into the walk-in wardrobe,

and place the jacket on the ottoman, and make my way back out.

Faye is standing at the corner of my bed, her eyes gazing over the white and gray sheets. Despite how fucking gorgeous she looks. Despite Faye, *Faye*, being in my bedroom. And knowing that she wants me, I can't help but notice the gnawing heaviness in my stomach.

Damn good chicken. It wasn't the chicken, though. It was the mac and cheese. Filthy and rich. Laurel and Maybelle might as well have server up my own sinful thoughts on a plate.

"Hi," Faye gives a wry smile to me.

"Hey,"

The city lights behind her highlight all the natural curves on her body. Hips and thighs. Chest and stomach. And I want to kiss and explore every inch of them. Whisper over her skin, making her skin telling her she is mine, and promise Faye everything she deserves.

I sigh, putting the thoughts of the food sinking in my stomach aside and cross the room to her.

"I am in your bedroom." Faye whispers.

"Yes, yes, you are."

She touches the sheet with a finger. "I am touching your bed."

"You will be in it soon enough."

"Mr Hunnd, how raunchy."

I slide my hands around her hips. Faye tugs my tie and it flutters to the fall like a leaf.

"Sweet girl, I don't know how I got you. I really don't. But I don't want to let you go."

Our lips slide over each other. Tasting and exploring. Everything is slow and precise. "Then don't."

The velvet material invites my hands to explore. My fingers running over every inch. Up and down. Drawing to her waist. Beautiful. Perfect. I should be on my knees before her.

“Fuck, I want you L,” Faye sighs, moving her hands to my chest. She pushes me away, giving me a little sad smile. “It’s just that...”

“The food?”

Faye lets out a sharp laugh. “The food. It was a mistake wasn’t?”

“No. Fuck, no. It wasn’t. Just probably should have had sex first.” I smile. “Lesson learned for next time.”

“That sounds good.”

“Would you...” I hesitate, finding the right words. “Would you still like to sleep with me? Not sex, just...”

“Wow.” Faye gasps over-dramatically, finger tugging my waist coat’s buttons free one by one. “I don’t know, L. It’s a first date. That seems a bit much. And I have the bank tomorrow.”

“Are you nervous?” I ask, helping pull the waistcoat off.

“Not as much as I was the last time.”

“Good,”

Faye tugs my belt free, “cause I really don’t think you need to be nervous.”

“Not with the magic touch of L on my business plan.”

The metal buckle clunks onto the floor.

“You give me too much credit, Faye. You had it there.”

The fingers stop undoing my shirt buttons. “I nearly had it. I could nearly do it.”

“Hey,” I soothe, planting a kiss on top of her head. “Sometimes we all need help. It takes strength to admit that.”

Faye pulls the rest of the buttons free. “Thank you,” she whispers.

Our lips find each other again. My shirt pulls off. Pants pool around my ankles, followed by my underwear.

“Turn around,” I say.

Faye shakes her head and takes my erection in her hand. “I can you know, take care of this.”

A spark of lust tightens my thighs. “No, not tonight.”

“Are you sure? I don’t mind at. All.”

I move her hand away, and spin her out from me, and back in as if she is the a perfect music box ballerina. Like I magnet I find the concealed zipped on the side of the dress. “Do you want to know what I really want to do tonight?”

“Kiss me?”

“Well, yes.”

“Sing to me?”

I laugh, “No.”

“How many guesses do I get?” Faye’s voice gasps at the end as I yank the tight material down her chest. The beautiful breasts bounce. Pale skin catching the hints of the full moon.

“One.”

“You want to sleep?” She says, pushing my hands down with the material.

“With you in my arms. I want to hold you as close as I can, knowing for once, it isn’t a dream or something that might not happen again.”

“L,” Faye soothes the black lacy underwear fall down the gorgeous legs. “That sounds wonderful.”

I hold my hand out, guiding Faye to step out of the clothes. “Which side do you sleep on?”

“Right.”

Faye smiles. “Well, that’s lucky.”

My heart thunders in my chest. By the time I am pulling my side of the sheets down, Faye is plumping her pillow up.

“I am so glad I didn’t wear makeup tonight.”

“That’s not true.” I comment, shuffling to the middle of the bed. “You had bubblegum lip something on.”

“Strawberry bubble gum bliss.”

I command the lights off, and place my hand on Faye’s hip, and she rolls over into the perfect little spoon position. She is magic. That’s all I can describe her as magic. Her body next to mine makes me at ease. I wrap my hands around her, pulling as tight as I can. I don’t even care that my erection is poking her in the back, if anything I push hard hoping she can feel it and she doesn’t take the no sex tonight as an insult.

“I am nervous, L.” Faye whispers after a long moment. “About tomorrow.”

“It’s good to be nervous.” I snuggle into her hair.

“Sure,” she scoffs, placing her hand on mine, pushing me deeper against her chest.

“It is. It means you really want it.”

“I want it. I want to help all the dogs I can. I want them to find their homes so they can be as happy as Spud.”

“And that will happen. I believe in you, Faye.”

A soft snuffle echoes around the room, and Faye’s body jerks with a small sob. “Thank you, L.”

“Always.”

It takes a little longer before Faye’s arms move under mine, moving towards her face. In my mind’s eye, I can see her wiping tears. My heart breaks, and I pull her even tighter.

“Oh, sweet girl, I know. I know what it means to have someone believe in you when you least expect it. It’s what you did to me. It makes everything feel that much real. You are not sad or happy. But it’s as though a weight has been lifted off your shoulders.”

Faye nods.

“And I will be there to help with that weight. However, you need me to hold you up. But Faye, you are a light that will change this world. Tomorrow is just your beginning.”

Faye grips my hand on her chest

Time passes, but sleep doesn't come for me. It seems impossible. And Faye... she's not asleep either.

“Faye,” I whisper.

“Yeah?”

“Nothing, mattress when we are together.”

Faye spits out a laugh, sending my laughter free. “That was horrible.”

“Well, it's not like I could have prepared pillow talk for a first date.”

“Oh fuck. I've never wanted you more, L.”

“Lucky you have me then.”

The laughter dies down.

“L?”

“Go to sleep.” I mutter, kissing Faye's shoulder to stop another fit of laughter.

“Have you got a condom?”

“I thought—”

“It's for something else.” Faye cuts me off. “Well, kind of.”

“There's some in the drawer.”

Faye pushed her way out of my hands, and the drawer opens. Foil rustles. “Oooh, lube too. Someone's prepared.”

“I had a feeling you would be in my bed eventually.” I say. “But please don't tell me you are making a balloon animal.”

“No!” Faye falls back in bed, holding the wrapped condom to the moonlight flooding through the window. “Though I could make a pretty awesome snake.”

“Or a worm.”

“A worm snake. Called Harold.” She rips the foil open.

“What are you doing?”

“We are doing something.” Faye turns to me. “Honey told me about this thing, once upon a time.”

“Your roommate?”

Fingers dance across my body, finding my erection. “Can you?” Faye asks.

I take the condom and roll it on, accompanied by a squirt of lube worked on. “What is the thing?”

“She called it cock warming.” Faye kisses me. The hint of her strawberry bubblegum lip balm is a long memory. She turns around back to the original spooning position, wiggling against my wrap cock. “Put it in.”

“Why does this sound like a trap?” But I am not even hesitating running my thick tip. “Fuck you’re wet.”

“Of course I am, L. You make me.”

Faye moves, allowing better access. My cock pushes in, the warmth sending my body into a frenzy.

“Now, stay like that.”

“What?” I rasp. “Just like this.”

“Mhmm,” Faye moves my hand to hold her. “Does it feel good?”

“Yeah,”

The walls tighten around my cock, and release. “Well, not if you keep doing that.”

“Sorry, couldn’t help myself.” Faye laughs. “Now we sleep.”

“Like this? Are you sure?” Like fuck if she thinks I can sleep like this. My cock is throbbing, pleading for more.

“Yes, L. I want your filthy cock in me while I drift off to sleep.” Faye’s muscle relaxes. “Unless it’s too much for you.”

“No, it’s just...”

“Just?”



“Nice, Faye. Gorgeous.” We can not get any closer than this,  
and I will savor every second.

# Chapter Twenty Five

## Faye

I open my eyes to the gorgeous view of the city. The warm sunrise kissing the tops of the skyline. Snoring vibrates the pillows next to me. I guess it should annoy me, but there is something comforting about the purr.

Oh, how I could stay here. Spend all day naked in messy sheets that will only get messier. It will not happen, though. There's no way I can move my bank appointment though. This is it. My business loan will be mine today.

"L," I whisper.

The snoring continues.

I roll over... and there's no one in the bed. I jolt up, staring at the nearly made side. What the... Who's?

The vibration stops, and a tail wags from under the massive piles of pillows. "Spud, you weirdo." Way to creep me out.

He stretches, face poking out to where my head was. He is so lucky he is adorable. But the question now is, where is L?

I slide out of my bed, feet dropping to the luxurious rug. Any sign of L and I's clothes are gone. Shit, and the enormous floor to ceiling length windows have no curtains. Surely, no one can see.... Nope. Doesn't matter. I wrap a sheet around my body, and skip, giggly to L's closet.

My dress is folded neatly on the large ottoman. Yeah, there's no way I'm putting that back on. It was a pain and a half the first time. I choose one of L's plain white business shirts from the hangers and slip it on. A wild streak burns in my blood, and I hold it shut instead of buttoning it and make my way out of the room.

This apartment was spectacular last night, but now in the light it's jaw dropping. Everything is modern and clean. White and glass. Every now there is a pot plant, or a picture frame accenting the room. It makes me feel like I am tiptoeing around a show house. And maybe I am.

I stop at the large double door stainless steel fridge. Pictures of L's friends, Charlotte and Dash are everywhere. Okay, so not a show house. Just as immaculately well kept, like L.

There is no sign of L. Spud walks past the dogged out corner and heads for the patio. I follow.

"Morning," L says. "Are you okay?"

My heart jumps to my throat.

L is sat on the opposite side of Spud's fake garden on a wide bench. The table in front of him is covered in plates of food. Berries. Bread. Boxes of cereal. A coffee pot and, well, more than enough baked goods to feed an army. He didn't do all of this for me, did he?

But the thing that blows me away is L himself. His white shirt is half button, hair a mess, and the smile on his face makes me melt to the door.

"Yeah," I say.

"Nervous?"

I nod.

"Hungry?" He asks, taking his glasses off. L folds a large newspaper up, placing them to the side. "I didn't quite know what you would like."

L taps the set next to him, and I walk over. Every step, the dark eyes pierce into me. It's like he is a lion watching his prey. Fuck, I love it.

I let the shirt go. Warm air rushes against my the middle of my chest where the material pulls open.

"Oh, sweet girl." L murmurs. "You are not wearing one of my shirts."

"Maybe."

L moves back against the cushioned bench, his arms spreading over the top. The powerful jaw twinges. Oh, L the way you look at me, it's like I am a goddess in your eyes. What will I do if you ever stop looking at me like this?

“That’s a dangerous move.”

I pick up a strawberry and bite it, using my lips to suck as I pull it out. It does surprisingly feel sexy. No wonder so many movies use it. “Why?” I smile, stepping closer.

L lurches forward. Hands wrap around my arms. I am yanked on top of him with a squeal of delight.

“Because I don’t care if it gets ruined.”

Hot, hungry lips slide over mine. A tongue sweeping across mine. I shift, falling onto his lap, fingers tangling in his hair. I relax into him. Fingers trail up my chest, and tease my nipples. Rubbing and pinching lightly.

“We are outside,” I whimper, breaking the kiss. Our eyes meet, breaths panting.

“So?”

“So,” I laugh. My heart lurches to my throat. What is it about L? When I am with him, it’s like I am unlocking an unknown part of myself. A person who wants to be sexy. Someone who says dirty things that in any other situation would make me die of embarrassment even if it wasn’t me who said it. “Someone will see us.”

“Like that will matter. But I doubt it.”

“Mhmmm,” I say, sliding my hands over L’s broad beating chest. “It is a bit exhilarating.”

L cocks an eyebrow. The look in his eye sends warmth to all the right places. Would it be so bad being out here with him? I can’t even think of a reason for not waking up neighbors with the screams of L being mine.

“What would you like, sweet girl?”

“I—”

L’s phone pings, and he sighs. “Ignore it.”

“Is it important?”

“Not as important as you, Faye.”

I smile, but I know the truth behind the words. I slide off L's lap and sit next to him. L shakes his head, hesitates, and then reaches for his phone.

"I don't mind, L. Work is work. I don't want to keep you from your job."

L wraps an arm around my back, pulling me into his side. The spicy cologne fills every breath with warmth. I don't think I have ever been happier. "So?"

The soft laughter soothes the idea that this morning is going to be ripped away from us.

"They are figuring it out," L sighs, sinking deeper into the chair, bringing me with him. A kiss lands on the top of my head.

"Charlotte?" I ask.

"All of them. The rumors of you not going home are like wildfire."

"We need new friends."

L shakes his head, leans forward, and takes a strawberry from the bowl. The tip of it presses against my lips. It has to be the best strawberry I have ever tasted. The hint of sunshine and summer dances over my taste buds. "They're good people. They just..."

"Happy for you." I finish his sentence.

"For us."

Our lips find each other, sliding and sharing the taste of strawberries. This is it. I am happy. I thought I was always happy, but this is something different. I feel, I feel like I am home.

"You know what we should do?" I say.

"Fuck?"

I laugh, heat burning in my cheeks. "No." I lean over and take L's phone, passing it to him. "Camera."

L cocks an eyebrow and opens the camera app. I plant a kiss on his cheek and the camera snaps. But not just once. L holds the phone clicking away, and I can't help but to make silly poses.

“You should send it and tell them you captured me for the night.” I laugh at the weak pun.

Suddenly, L's lips are on mine, kissing with a laughter. A gasp of surprise catches in my throat.

“That should be a good one.” L says, pulling up the gallery.

He's right. Of course he is. The image of us is beautiful. Our foreheads pressed together, eyes closes and serene smiles on our face. We look so natural. So full of life. Everything feels right. “Are you? Going to send it?”

“No. Why would I do that?” L says. “This is too good. It's mine.”

Oh, L. “Maybe one with—” I look up to the other side of the patio. There is no sign of Spud.

“Smart dog.”

“He loves the camera. You should see all the photos I have of him. I swear I might need another phone for them.”

“Yeah,” L's pulls tight around the small of my back. “But he knows what's coming.”

L's hands grip into me. As if I weigh nothing at all, he moves me back on top of him. A harsh kiss swallows my squeals.

He is everywhere. Consuming every part of me. Hot kisses pressing up and down my neck, on my lips, over my shoulder. Hands gliding and possessing every inch of my curves.

“L, what are we—” My words break with a moan.

“I'm,” He rasps. Lifting and pushing me onto the table. Plates and bowls smash to the floor. Wet, gooey spreads across my back, but fuck if I care. L is turning into an insatiable beast because of me. “I'm going to have your pussy, sweet girl.”

My shirt falls open. L's mouth falls to my breasts, kiss and pecking. L is like a man possessed with one goal only, and all I can do is worship every little thing he does. The firm hands pulling my legs apart, a thick finger splitting me open to find my clit, and the kisses crawling back to my lips.

"Fuck." He says. "I can never get enough of this gorgeous wet pussy. Do you know how long I have wanted to taste it?"

I shake my head, biting my lip and swallowing my moan down.

"Do you want me too, sweet girl?" The thumb rubs harder. My body writhes under the intense pressure. Suddenly, he pinches. Lust sparks up my spine. It's heaven and hell. Pain and pleasure. It's raw need and desire.

"Yes," I cry.

"Sorry, sweet girl. But fuck, the things you make me do."

"Keep. Keep. Going." I stammer. Oh, fuck how is my body so hot already? The pressure is pooling in my bore already threatening to explode. But this is bad. L is going to make me scream. The entire city will hear me. Hear us. Of fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. I want it.

I snap my eyes close. Fingers grip onto my legs, yanking me further off the table's edge. A long, warm breath bathes my wet slit. My legs spasm, trying to push it away. Trying to draw him closer.

"Too good. Too good." L's tongue slips between my wet folds, giving every inch a long possessive lick. It's as though he's licking the world's best rum and raisin ice cream making sure it is his and his alone.

He pushes my legs open, burying himself. Lips suckle and kiss my clit, teasing it so lightly it makes my stomach quicken.

"Oh, fuck sweet girl. You are good, so fucking good." L gorges himself on me. Grunts and groans vibrating up my body.

I grip onto the edge of the table, sending more plates crashing to the floor. And just when I think he has me a finger

presses into me.

The pressure of orgasm is too much. There's no way I can control myself. I am screaming and moaning in a voice I don't recognize. Chanting his name as L is the sex god himself.

"L," I whimper. "I'm going. Going."

"Good girl," He growls on my clit, pushing me over the edge.

My fingers tangles in his hair, pulling him down. Hips grinding on his flat tongue and finger pumping. The orgasmic pleasure explodes, ripping me apart from head to toe.

It keeps going and going. L keeps lick and sucking, his moans making it seem like the orgasm will never end. And I don't want it to. I don't want this to ever end.



# Chapter Twenty Six

## Faye

The elevator doors open. I jump to the corner before Cleo or anyone can see me. What the in the best banana split ever, was I thinking coming here. Everyone will look at me. They will all know the truth. And the questions and empathy...

Charlotte is going to be running around grabbing tissue boxes and cake, trying to not make a deal out of my failed bank loan, only to make it worse.

And it's a big deal.

I failed with another application. I had such faith in it, L had faith in me. All my savings are gone, and even with all these new contracts L has helped me with. It's not enough. I using all my energy, and it won't be enough to keep this going. I am only one person. I need to expand. Expand means money. To open a centre it means money. Everything means money. And I can't keep scraping by.

I am so tired of grinding away and seeing no light at the end of the tunnel. So exhausted, feeling so close yet so far away from my goal.

This was my chance, and I blew it. Wasting my time chasing around the perfect guy instead of focusing on what's really important.

No, that's not fair. The elevator doors close. But the car stays still. My heart drops at the thought of it moving and not seeing L.

I need L.

I wipe my eyes with my sleeve, and hit the door open button. I can face the eyes and questions so I to see him. To have his arms wrap around me. A tear breaks free. Oh fuck, I just want L.

I pull out my phone, hitting the open door button again.

**Faye:** L?

Unelegantly, I sniffle. The phone buzzes.

**L:** Yeah?

**Faye:** Can you come to the elevator, please?

**L:** Where?

**L:** ???

**L:** What wrong? Where are you?

**Faye:** I am here.

**L:** Where's here?

I sniffle a laugh. It's not funny, but there's something about a flustered L.

**Faye:** You're building.

**L:** Which one?

**Faye:** Wor—

"Faye." L's voice stutters across the lobby. His eyes widen on me. Oh, how am I going to tell him? I can't I... A sob break free.

L's phone drops, smashing to the floor. He runs towards me. A hand slamming on the elevator door, forcing it to open.

"You didn't—" He says.

I shake my head, staring at the floor.

Suddenly, the arms are wrapping around me. My feet aren't touching the floor. "Oh Faye," L whispers.

I curl into him, as if he is my safety blanket. Every ounce of strength that was holding back my tears rip away. A guttural sob leaps from my mouth and the water and snot works start.

L moves, sandwiching my hands between the back of his shoulders and the metal wall. The box echoing with my defeat falls to a red hue and an alarm bell rings.

Oh shit. I am getting snot all over his shirt and jacket. He's going to look like a used tissue for the rest of the day. I need to stop. This is over the top. Take a breath and calm down. You can think this through logically.

But L doesn't tell me to stop. Or to pull myself together. L hugs me as tight as I am hugging him.

And for the first time in a long time, I let the need for logic, allowing all the awful emotions to take over.

I am a failure.

L slides down the wall, taking me with him until I am a ball of sobs on his lap. My tears still soaking the shoulder of his shirt. I cry and cry. And just when I think there is no way I have more liquid in my body to spare L hums the song I don't know and strokes my hair.

"I am so sorry L," I croak out after a long moment.

"Why would you be sorry?" L's low voice rushes over the top of my head.

My stomach knots. I am sorry for so many things. Ruining his shirts, his day, our lunch date, for making him stop whatever he was working on to hug this pathetic girl.

"You have nothing to be sorry for, Faye."

"I wasted your time L. All that time. And during your launch."

Warm hands cup my face, pulling my gaze to his. The dark eyes mirror my sadness.

I shake my head, clutching the destroyed business shirt in my hands. "But I failed, L." I rasp. "I failed you."

L pushes my chin up once again, forcing me to look at him. "You could never fail me. You did not waste my time. If I didn't help you, where would I be right now?"

"Not here. Not wasting more of your on someone like me. I am so sorry." I blubber.

"No, I would be in that office that wouldn't have the memories of us, hating myself for not even taking the chance on you, you Faye, someone so beautiful, and smart and funny even think of being with me. And I wouldn't be holding you tight now."

A stray sob leaps out. “That makes it worse, because now I have to move L. I have to leave.”

“No, you don’t Faye.”

“This is my dream.” The welcomed warmth of spite sparks in my chest. This is my dream and I will do anything to achieve it. I will have my rescue centers. I will help as many dogs as possible find their homes.

A vice tightens around my heart. I want my dream so much, but now... I don’t know what I will sacrifice for it. And I don’t know if sacrificing a potential future with L will be worth it.

I can’t choose between them.

“You can have everything you want, Faye. Anything.”

I meet L’s eyes. This man, this gorgeous man would do anything for me. But I can’t even let myself be open to entertaining the idea of relying on him to make my dreams come true. That isn’t me, and it’s not who I want to be.

“L,” I sniffle. “We talked about this. I don’t want your money. And I especially do not want to feel like I am indebted to you. Especially now. Especially for the future. That’s not fair to us.”

L lets out a deep breath. “I know, Faye. I wouldn’t go against your wishes.”

My heart freezes, and a breath sticks to the back of my throat. “So, this is it?” Tears sting my eyes but there’s nothing more I can squeeze out.

“No, sweet girl. This is not it. We still have Plan B.”

“There’s a Plan B?”

“Of course,” L smiles. “Do I look like someone who has only one plan? Or someone that will give up on you. I could never do that to you, Faye.” The alarm stops and the metal elevator doors open. “I am completely and utterly in love with you.”

He’s... what. L is... he’s...

In love with me.

“Well, if this is what you two were doing we would have waited.” Charlotte’s voice echoes around us.

Out of the corner of my eye, there are pairs of legs three or four people. But I can’t look away to identify them. All I can do is focus on L and the soft smile. He loves me.

He leans up, capturing my lips with his own.

“Quick, lock them back in again.” A voice erupts, pulling us apart.

“You said you loved me.” I whisper, finally looking up at our audience. Charlotte, Cleo, Gareth and a maintenance man all staring at us. What is L and attracting attention to us?

“I did Faye. And I do. So fucking much.”

## Chapter Twenty Seven

### L

The hotel penthouse fills with silence. Even Marty the bartender has stopped wiping the glasses.

Charmant clears his throat. “Corni,” He says. “Do you have any Queens?”

Corni smirks, and an eyebrow twitches up a fraction. Oh, don’t do it Corni. “Go fish.”

“Ha!” the table yells out. “Bluff!”

“No, I am not.” Corni sinks into his chair, a finger resting on the left card in his hand. “Go fish. You charming dick.”

“Corni,” I sigh. “Just hand it over. It’s not like you need it to win.”

“You don’t know that.” The queen of hearts skates across to Charmant.

“L!” Dirk cries, downing his drink in one. This is going to be the last hand. Got to cut Dirk off before he buys a thirty gallon chocolate fountain again and put it up as a prize. I haven’t used the big thing since I got it. All it does is take up room in storage. “Do I have to remind you we have money on Corni? Stop helping Charmant.”

I look to Hugh. It’s one thing to read people’s facial cues to see if they are winning or not. On some level, every one of us around the table does it. It’s what has made each and everyone of us elite business men. And it’s also why poker only lasted two sessions. It’s not that much fun when every flip of the card is a giveaway.

Go Fish though. Go fish is ridiculous and exciting. The starting hands are bigger and while there is still the luck of the draw similar to poker, this is us playing against each other. Working out who has the cards we need, or if they are still in the deck. Add in the bonus of all five of us being bastards and collecting random cards, or straight out bluffing. The game is twisted.

But the true to key to this game is Hugh. He is the reason poker became too easy. One of those mathematical brains that counts cards even if he doesn't mean to. Go Fish has thrown him off, but I know after all this time he can have figured out some of it, or at least all of our tells. So all I have to do is watch him. And right now, Hugh is not happy.

"We are fine." I say.

Dash leans over to me. "Hey, lover boy. You won't lose my car will you?"

"No. Corni has this." If I am right, he just needs to fish for a ten in the deck, a ten Charmant doesn't have. This is a game of chance now, not taking from Charmant.

"Got any eights?" Corni smiles.

Charmant leans back. "You know I don't."

Corni takes a card from the deck and slaps it down with his hand. "Bazinga you mother fucking rich prick."

"Bastard." Charmant drags a hand down his face.

The room bursts into laughter and chatter, divvying up the winnings. The buy in pot goes straight to Corni, and we settle the side bets on the last two men standing.

"Alright, unlike most of you, I have a gorgeous lady I need to prepare for." Hugh says.

"I thought Arabella was at your mums?" Dash asks. Arabella an answered prayer. And maybe it isn't the answered prayer Hugh wanted, but it was the one he needed.

"Don't remind me. All of tomorrow will be Daddy. Grandma says I need a horse. Daddy, what does rhinoplasty mean?"

I swallow down the gnawing pit in my stomach. The one thing I needed to do tonight and I haven't. I know I don't need to go through these charades to get my friends to help me, but it's just simpler this way. I guess I can understand Faye's tenaciousness for trying to make things work for herself more and more each day.

“And I am sure L has places to be...” Charmant laughs. “... surprised you didn’t bring Faye tonight.”

“Oh, you should have!” Corni says, swiping a lock of blonde hair away from his glowing face. I know his family is in cosmetics and is big on skin care. But fuck he could make any girl melt into their panties even if he just rolled out of bed. “We didn’t have time to get to know her.”

“It would have been hard with L’s tongue in her mouth.” Dirk snips.

“You’re one to talk.” Dash laughs. “I saw you eyeing up the receptionist.”

“She was really mean to me.” Dirk pouts. “Said it was improper to hit on her at work.”

“She was right.” The room agrees.

“You should invite Faye. I bet she could whip all of our asses.” Dash says.

Charmant sweeps up the cards, shuffling them in a deck. “Anything to meet the woman who can make L smile.”

All the eyes are on me. I am not smiling.... shit. I am. When did I start smiling?

“Yeah, well, you forget one thing.” I say, “I actually like her and meeting the lot of you... well...”

Laughter fills the room, my own mixing with it.

“Isn’t it every woman’s dream, though? Six billionaires in one room.” Charmant says.

“You would know.” Dirk mutters with every ounce of jealousy he no doubt feels. New money does that to you, especially for someone so young. All you can do is compare yourself to others.

“Alright. We have hurt my pocket enough tonight. Next month? Here again.” Hugh says, standing.

Marty walks over, placing the bowl with all our phones into the middle of the table.



Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. They can't leave yet.

"One more hand," I rush out.

Everyone freezes, looking at me.

"Just one more." I say.

"Why?" Dash cocks an eyebrow, a sly smile on his face.

"Winner takes all." I say, shrugging.

"And all would be?"

"Both my cars."

The room hushes. "

"Fuck it," Dash says, tossing his phone back in the bowl. "I am getting my car back."

"And if you win?" Charmant says.

I ring my hands together. "Contacts."

"I like your glasses." Dirk says.

I laugh. "No, I mean phone numbers. For the gala I am hosting."

"Wait, you are hosting a gala."

"Yes."

Questions bombard me. Most of them disgust for not inviting them yet. "It's for Faye's dog rescue. She needs to network and sponsoring. What's better than rich people drunk crying at photos of cute dogs?" I nod to Spud passed out on the rug in front of the electric fireplace. "And yes, you can come."

One by one the boys take their places back at the table.

"Dash can deal." Charmant slides the boxed deck to him.

"You know." Corni says. "This Faye. She's a good thing."

I know.

"Yeah," Dirk grips my shoulder, shaking me. "The Hell Hound finally having a party of his own. It's about time."

“It’s not my party.” I say.

“Nah it is. Do you know how long I’ve been waiting for this?”

I collect my dealt cards. “You should be worried.”

“Why?”

“Because the party king’s crown is about to find a new home.” Hugh laughs. “No more pressure for him.”

The table laughs, sinking Dirk back into his chair.

“Yep, I like Faye.” Corni laughs.

“You haven’t met her properly.” I say.

So far, two pairs, eights and twos with one more card to go. This is good. I can do this. All the Manhattan elite will come to the gala. Faye will get money, and stable money at that. That’s the thing about money. The rich will waste it as long as you have cause and a good time to show for it. It’s how Naked Brush launched their graduate sponsorship program. The artists of tomorrow... that might not be a good example. We all threw in money as an apology for not attending a four hour one man show about post nut clarity.

“No one needs to meet her. Look at you L.”

“He’s so grown up.” Charmant comments.

“Grown up? He’s a teenager in love.” Dash sings.

Hugh hasn’t picked up his cards yet. His attention is on me. “More like one of Charmant’s romance books.”

“Speaking of which,” Charmant leans on the table with an elbow. “I need a good muse. I was thinking of setting up Dirk. But even the challenge of that is too much.”

“What do you mean by that?” Dirk spits out some of his drink.

“Nothing. Just once you are over your night club infatuation, we can talk.”

“It’s not a nightclub. It’s a club for adult pleasures.”

“So a sex club?”

“You’re not that much better Corni.” Dirk snaps. “Mr Prince Charming.”

“You know this is coming from the most single guy at the table.” Dash quips.

“Who is an expert on human motivation, goals and relationships?” Charmant says, slapping a hand on the table. “Thank you very much.”

Corni’s eyebrows arch. “And when was your last date?”

“I am happy for you L.” Hugh says. “You look good.”

“That’s cause his face is no longer frozen.” Dash says ignoring Charmant, Dirk and Corni’s bickering threesome.

“Makes it harder to guess what he has.”

“Yeah, so are we playing?” I ask, clearing my throat.

The room falls into silence. One by one, everyone discards their hands into the middle of the table.

“Come on L, a party or a car?” Dirk laughs.

“You will let us help yeah?” Charmant asks.

“And we mean it.” Hugh takes his phone. “If you don’t let me choose the catering, I will tell Charlotte.”

“Hey, aren’t Charlotte and Faye friends?” Corni asks.

“Yep, so now the threat is doubled.” Dash laughs. “It’s great.”

A hand shakes my shoulder. “You better text us Faye’s number or else this party will get weird.”

One by one the guys leave discussing the party. It’s not what I wanted, but this will help Faye. It will help us be together.

Marty clears his throat. I turn to the young man, smiling. A glass of scotch in his hands. “Think you need a drink Mr Hunnd.”

I laugh to myself. “Yeah, I do.”

“Would you like me to book this room for next month?”

“Please.” I say, moving to fix the table up.

“I’ll do that.”

I nod, standing up. With a breath, it sinks in how much different tonight was. I feel different. There isn’t the weight on my shoulders wondering if I said something to annoy someone. And they are no thoughts tugging in the back of my mind whether everyone had fun, and I didn’t waste their time. I laughed. I joked. I won. Maybe Faye has been the piece I have been missing all along.

“Marty,”

“Yes, sir.”

“Can you arrange for someone to call me tomorrow about \_\_\_”

“Hosting the gala. Preferably in the gardens?”

“Please.” I say, making my way to the balcony. “And thank you for tonight. Well, every game night. We all appreciate it.”

Marty’s lips part. “Thank you.”

I pull the balcony door open and point back at him, glass in hand. “And it will be smaller than what ever those muppets have planned. Can I hire you for point man?”

“Ummm,” He runs his hands over his pants. “I think I need to check with management.”

“Then I will make sure it won’t be an issue. I will have Faye contact you. This is her show. And *only* her show.”

“Understood.”

I walk outside, the warm night air blows over my bare forearms. It’s beautiful. The city dazzling with all the potential it has. Home to all the souls, all the love and laughter we humans offer. Faye would like it here, that I am sure of. I need to ask Marty to reserve a room for that night as well.

Nails tip tap on the concrete tiles. I put my hand by my side, stroking Spud’s head.

“I know, boy. It’s a long night for you.”

“But he was spoiled as fuck.” Dash’s voice turns me around.

“That’s true.” The guys loved him. I’ve never seen them dote on someone so quick. Maybe that time Hugh brought Arabella in his arms the first time. But they didn’t order her steak tartar. “I thought you left.”

“I was worried about you.” Dash says, joining me to lean on the railing.

“Worried?” I take a sip of my scotch and pass to Dash.

“Oh, come on, brother. I am not sure who you are even my brother. Look at you.” Dash pokes my cheek, making me smile. Yeah. He has a point.

“I think... I am happy.”

Dash nods, looking down at Spud between us.

“What no funny quip? Or dramatics?”

“No,” Dash shakes his head. “That’s the funny thing about being happy. It’s not that funny.”

“Well, I give you one thing.”

“Which is?”

“Not your car back.” I smirk.

“Damn.”

“I understand what you said that one time.”

“Well, I am quite wisdomous especially about hummus.”

I shake my head. “I was talking about Mom and Dad.”

“How they really fucked us up? I have a good therapist now if you want his number. He’s heard all the stories, so you don’t need to tell him.” Dash’s eyebrows raise high eyes scanning my face. “Oh, you are thinking about it.”

Maybe. Another gift from Faye, and something I can’t shake. I thought I didn’t want to be selfish again because of turning down the company hurt my family. But that seed was deep in my mind before that. I don’t want to be selfish, because I don’t want to be like my dad. “Not now. But...”

“It doesn’t make you weak. And if anything. I am a better partner because of it.” Dash turns around, hooking his arms

over the railing. “Charlotte made me a good person. But there’s a lot of stuff underneath. What did I say, anyway? About Mom and Dad.”

“Charlotte and her family. They make you understand what it means to love others. And what it means to accept love. Mom and Dad loved us in their own way, but it was...”

“... different.” That’s all it was. They screamed and yelled at each other. We had nannies and staff. Everything we could have wanted and more. As long as it was perfect in my mother’s eyes and could make her look like the best person with her magazine photo ready rooms. But that’s not what life is. Life is not perfect. It’s messy, and it’s fun. It’s Faye and I, dancing in the middle of the park. It’s me getting the world’s greatest macaroni and cheese on my tie. It’s Spud. All the hardships will never know he had to endure, but he is still willing to love me.

“You loved me.” Dash says on the edge of his breath.

“I still do.”

“I know. But back then. You were...” Dash shakes his head, takes a mouth full of scotch and passes the glass to me. “I’ve missed you L. I’ve missed this L. I am happy having this L back even if he still has my car.”

My hands tighten on the glass. “Dash.” I say after a moment.

“Yeah.”

“Do you hate me? For what I did?”

“Taking my car. No. You won that fair and square.” He smiles. “Mind you, I will win it back.”

I shake my head, shifting my weight from foot to foot. “For forcing you to take the company.”

“What?” Dash says, jaw tightening.

Our eyes meet, and my stomach drops. “I am sorry.”

“L,” Dash draws out.

“It wasn’t fair to you. And I should have taken over. I was only thinking about myself. I just... I didn’t want to turn into

him.”

“Is this...” Dash’s eyes widen. “All these years... You’re feeling guilty about that?”

“I’m sorry Dash.”

“Don’t be.” He laughs, turning back to the city. “It made me grow up. And fuck knows what I would be doing without the responsibility. Not starting my own widely popular and super successful company with a truly awful name, that’s for sure.”

“It’s a good name.” I mutter. There’s something about Dash, though. He’s not being silly like he is normally, and the seriousness isn’t throwing me a bone. He doesn’t hate me or my decision. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, you weirdo. I like the business. I am grateful.”

“Thank you.” I say not knowing what else. A new lightness in my chest eases over me.

“Wait, you don’t think I am going to turn into Dad do you?”

“No.” I laugh. “You talk way too much.”

Dash raises his eyebrows at me.

“I am.” I say, letting the words in. After all this time running away from him, I headed straight to him. A man who focuses only on his business, not letting anyone in. He wasn’t cruel or mean. But set in his ways.

“You were.” Dash corrects.

“You should have told me.”

Dash laughs. “And how would have that turned out? L you are turning into Dad. Stop working on your dreams and find something else to do.... Well, I suppose you did at least find something else to do.”

“Dash.”

“What? Its true isn’t it? L and Faye sitting in a tree k-i-s-s-i-n-g. First comes loves, then comes a smiling happy L who changes the world.”

“That doesn’t rhyme.” I roll my eyes.

“You love her don’t you?”

“She’s the one. Always, has been.” I say. “Just... has to wait for her to walk into my elevator.”

“Awwwws, look at my big brother. He’s so cute.”

“Oh, shut it.”



# Chapter Twenty Eight

## Faye

I open the front door and head down the street. If I am lucky, I can get to the store and back before Honey gets home, which means I am in control of the television. Bwhahahaha. I so need a chill out night between being thrown into the deep end with this gala, dates with L, normal work and the last puppy adoption for this round. It's a surprise I am not sleep walking.

“And here, I thought I was going to have to call you.”

I freeze at L's voice. I take a moment to breathe, and another to turn to him.

He's here... and he's not wearing a suit. And he's here, leaning against a black sports car with its top down. I do a double take. No, it can't be him. A white business shirt and jeans. Jeans. What the fuck is this?

“Faye?” He cocks his head with a smile.

“I'm sorry. I do not know who you are.” I say, walking to him.

“Oh, then. My mistake. You better keep going before your boyfriend sees you. Wouldn't want to make him jealous.”

I snort a laugh. “Oh, he would never get jealous of someone in jeans.”

L wraps his hands around the small of my back. Our lips collide with a burning passion, as if we didn't wake up in the same bed this morning.

“They're really itchy.” L mutters.

“Maybe you should come upstairs and take them off then.”

“Tempting.”

“You said you were busy tonight.” I say.

“I am.” L digs into this pocket, pulling out a set of keys. “Praying for my life.”

No. Nooo. “Are you letting me drive?” I take the keys before he can answer. “Where are we going?”

“Anywhere you want.”

L opens the door, and I slide in. The seats are luxurious. This differs from L’s other car, even though that one was fancy. This is incredible. Black leather with dark red decals. A tablet in the middle of the dashboard. The steering wheel is supple leather melding to my fingers.

“Though, no speeding.” L says, getting in the passenger side. “But I don’t think that will be a problem.”

I don’t care about the city traffic or not driving like a lunatic. This is already fun. There’s something about driving that is freeing.

“And seat belts.”

I put mine on.

“And check your mirrors.” L says.

“I have my license. Wait... Maybe...”

L’s eyes widen.

“It’s that weird card in my wallet where I look like this.” I make the same face as my license. The quick ‘don’t smile, click. Look.’ “Right?”

The engine clicks over. Now, I understand what they mean about a quiet, powerful engine. The light purr of the car sends tingles up my spine. Wind blows through my hair. All my attention falls onto the driving. Well, more don’t hit anything. Especially not a mailbox like last time.

“How was your day?” L asks as I relax. This car might as well drive itself with how it steers.

“Good, good. Dog walking, and I groomed Ms Harrison’s toy poodle. Then check in on these two cute cats. They’re new clients. I am pretty sure they are evil.”

“What type?”

“Like plotting to lure you into a tummy scratch, then claw your arms type.”

L laughs. “I mean what type of cats?”

“Oh rag dolls.”

“And tomorrow? The gala?”

My chest tightens, and I flick a gaze to L. “I’m nervous.”

“Good.”

“Good? How is that—” I cut myself off. “Because it means I care.”

L smiles, and a burst of pride erupts in my chest. “Turn left here. We get out of all of this earlier.”

“Okie dokie artichokie.”

“Are you okay, though?” L asks.

I nod. As okay as I can be. Between L, his rich friends, Charlotte and Honey, oh and Mary. I think it’s okay. It would have helped if I didn’t have to google what a gala meant. But free drinks, and music for outstanding entry fee is what it is at its heart. A place for the rich to show off.

Oh, by all things sparkly. I am lying to myself.

This is everything. This is L’s world, not mine. And I can’t fail him not again. Or if I make a fool of myself, or say something I shouldn’t I am going to embarrass him.

“I will be by your side, Faye.” L reaches out, placing a hand on my thigh. “And I know who are the ones with the money are. You will get sponsors in no time.”

I nod, focusing back on the car. We break free of the city traffic, and onto a long quiet road. In the back seat, Spud’s seat belt catches the light of the passing street light. “Where’s my boy, by the way?” Solid subject change there.

“Charlotte and Dash’s.”

“You don’t trust me with him in the car, do you?”

“Nooooo...” L tightens his hand on me before letting go. “I don’t know what type of driver you are. Do you want me to let

him be in a car with just anyone?”

“I am a good driver!”

L smiles. “The car has a fourth gear.”

“Fuck.” I curse, shifting gears. “I am not used to handling a stick.”

“Sure you can. You are wonderful with mine.”

“L!” I roar with laughter.

“Watch the road!”

“I am watching it.”

“You were looking at me.”

“Because you told a dick joke.”

“It was a bit limp, though.”

I shake my head, trying my best to contain myself. It’s like pushing toothpaste back into its tube.

“Pull over.”

“I can drive!”

“Faye, pull over.” A hand moves across my field of vision pointing to the side of the road. “I’m serious pull over.”

I pout, throwing him puppy eyes. But the stern face is giving me nothing to work with. I over-dramatically sigh and pull over.

L gets out of the car and comes to my door.

I take the keys out and hand them to him. “Here.”

“Fuck, sweet girl. You can keep the car for all I care.”

“Then why—” L stops my words, dropping his mouth onto mine. The kiss is passionate and hungry. Hot enough to burn the world down. Everything in mind is screaming more, more, more, more.

“You looked so fucking divine, laughing like that.” L whines with a broken breath.

I push on the door. L opens it for me, and before it closes, we are back in each other's arms. Kissing L is as natural as breathing, my body reacting with every shared moan. Butterflies batter on my ribs desperate to be free. My fingernails scraping down his broad back, asking for more.

His firm body pins me to the car. The growing erection pushing against my stomach.

"L," I whimper, catching my breath. "If you keep touching me, I am going to ruin your car."

"What?" L's voice is coated in lust. Lips fall down on my neck. Oh, I need more, so much more.

No. Fuck. We are on the side of the road. There's cars driving past. But... I don't care.

I pull L's hand off my ass, guiding it under my dress and up my thigh. A finger presses between my folds.

"Oh, fuck sweet girl. So fucking wet for me."

Yes, I will ruin your car, I want to tell him. But they're not the words that come out. "So needy for your filthy cock."

L pushes his forehead on mine. Our eyes lock together. "Later, Faye. Later. No condom."

That's not stopping L, though. His thumb finds my clit, polishing as if it's a priceless jewel. Now and then flicking it hard. White hot need grips my core.

"You'll have to come for the both of us." L groans.

My breathing sticks to my chest. The drenched thumb working harder and harder. I spread out, giving him as much access as I can.

"Come on my fingers, sweet girl. Let me feel what you want to do to my dirty cock."

Blood pulses in my ears. Wild excitement taking my hold. "Here?"

A thick finger delves into me. I gasp, squirming in surprise. Lights explode in the back of my eyes. "Here. Show everyone going by what I do to you."

My muscles tremble, knees shaking. L's finger is twisting, curling and thrusting. Dragging the thick tip over my sensitive spot. Fuck, he knows every inch of me.

"Fuck, sweet girl." His lips press against my ear with a groan. "Milk my finger."

It's as though L is the true commander of my body. I writhe and clamp down on every fucking finger movement. The thumb keeping its steady place.

Another finger presses against my soaked entrance.

"Take another for me, sweet girl."

"I—"

"I know you can take it."

L drives the second finger in deep, pulsing me hard. My lust fills the warm night air with my whimper.

"That's right sweet girl. It's just like fucking my filthy cock isn't it?"

I swallow a moan. "No. No. Cock. Better."

L pushes me harder into the car, pinning my hips still. The threat of orgasm spikes in my blood with every pump.

This is wild. It's naught. It's consuming.

And I am losing control. I am going to cum in public.

L groans, sending my body into a wild frenzy. "Fucking smiling like that, sweet girl. You know how hard it makes me. How fucking turned on a get."

The fingers are pumping, pumping, pumping. Thumb rolling, rolling, rolling.

The world explodes. I scream, crying for L. Hungry lips crash on mine, swallowing my moans down. The fingers stroking me until I am a trembling mess.

L pulls his fingers out, and they shove in my mouth. I suck and lick, cleaning every drop of myself off him. Our eyes lock. "Such a good fucking girl."

I slide my lips from the fingers. “Oh, you don’t even know it. And I can use my mouth for so much more.”

L clears his throat. “When we get home, sweet girl.”

“Why?” I whine.

“Because I got you something.”

“The jeans?” I ask, running my hand over the hard erection. L’s body shivers. “Cause they are nice, just not very.... you.”

“That’s a shame,” L pushes me back into the car door. Our chests clash together with every breath. The steel erection press on me with all its heat. “They’re growing on me.”

“You could always cum in them...”

L sighs, a wicked smile on his face. “After your present.”

“Oh, right?” I swallow. A present I am sure I don’t deserve.

L takes the keys from my hand, popping the trunk open. Grabbing my hand, he leads me to three black boxes. “If you don’t like them, I can come up with something else.”

“What is it?” I ask.

“Open and find out.” The smile on L’s face sends my heart racing. Oh, he’s proud of the gift is.

I open one box revealing a bright pink and yellow cat and dog print material. “What—” I pull it out. It’s a dress. A gorgeous dress fit for a princess going to a tea party.

L opens another one. The dress is just as bright but with a jungle parrot theme.

“Animal themed for the gala,”

“L,” I manage out. “You shouldn’t have.”

“You don’t have to wear them. Of course you don’t. You don’t do you. Shit, I should have known.” L rakes a hand through his hair. “This was stupid wasn’t it? You probably have a dress already picked out.”

“Not like these.” I murmur, fingers rolling through the material. It’s so soft and luxurious. There is no doubt he made these for me. And they are so, me. Bright and bubbly. A fun,

wacky print that makes me smile. This is better than the red dress and cat ears I had chosen.

L... he knows me more than I think. "Thank you L. I would love to wear one of them tomorrow."

"Really?" His head jerks back.

"Yes. This is incredibly kind of you. The only problem is knowing which one to wear. What's the last one?"

"Oh, nothing. Don't worry about that one. These two, I couldn't decide which one would be the one for you. The jungle is cute. But the dogs and cats wearing little crowns..."

I giggle. "Reigning cats and dogs."

"Exactly!"

Well, I don't need to decide. It's obvious I am going to the Queen of the strays. But my eyes keep drifting to the last box. Curiosity gets the best of me. I fold the dog and cat dress and place it in its box.

"Oh, Faye, I," L says as I take the last box. It's smaller than the other two, with a small gold label sealing it shut.

"I just want to—". Inside is a sea of black, a large gold sequin paw print in the middle.

"It's a bit more... conventional." L says.

I take it out of the box. It's a form fitting cocktail dress, three paw prints curve up from the waist. "It is." I say, but it doesn't make it any less gorgeous.

"I just thought you might want the choice."

"It's not me."

"I know. Like I said, it's just an option."

But now the other two dresses feel stupid. Is this what everyone else is going to wear? Stunning clothes that show everything off. This isn't me, but I am the organizer of this gala. It's my name. It's L's name.

"Faye?"



I shake my head, pushing away the thoughts. It's no use though they are sinking deeper. I do not know what I am doing. None of this is me. Not the dress. Not the gala. This is prime fuck up material.

Comforting hands run down my arms. L's breath cascades down the back of my neck. I pull away, utting the dress away. "What's wrong?"

"Everything." I whisper. "Everything is wrong, L."

"Okay," His body tenses. "Tell me sweet girl."

"This is all too much."

"I can take the dresses back."

I shake my head. "The gala. The dresses, it's just. So much." And it's us... we are too much. Near proposals, holding galas together, having date night to go home and sleep like a couple on the first date. Falling in love with me. And spending every night together.

It's slowly suffocating me.

L knows me. He might be the first person to know me and I don't want to fuck this up. But I will. In front of his friends and his world. Because I am nothing but a dork with a billionaire.

L turns me around to face him.

"Faye, I will be by your side."

"I know."

He takes my hands in his. "I will not leave you. You have done so much already, sweet girl. And I am so fucking proud of you."

"L,"

L pulls me into his chest. "So proud of you, my love. You are nearly there."

That's the thing, though. As soon as it gets too much, L makes it all better. I know he is proud of me. I see him smile when I tell him who I chose for catering, and how with all the

early tickets sold, none of the cost is coming from my pocket. And he's right. I am nearly there. With some long term sponsors, I can set everything up. I could even reasonably open an adoption centre next year if I am lucky enough. I just got to push through this.

“And you will be with me?” I ask.

“Always.”

# Chapter Twenty Nine

## Faye

My fingers run over the sequins of my dress, scanning over the crowd. Shiny jewels and beautiful clothes twirl in the moonlight.

My other hand tightens around my speech. I can do this. I can so do this. This is my dream, and everyone has worked so hard. A gala set up and filled with Manhattan's elite in such a short amount of time. This is incredible. And it's all because of L. With the word of mouth and first round of invitations there were enough entry fees to pay for this soiree. Everything else will go into funding the Dog Fairy Adoption Centre proposal.

L said it first. I am so close. Maybe I should have asked for his help, instead of him sweeping me off his feet when I was down to my last straw. Cause this is... unbelievable.

It's just a matter of how... how do I even talk to these people? I move further from the edge of the crowd. It's like I am a clown who has shown up at the wrong party. I don't know what to say to do. And when I try... they look at me like an alien. And L, he isn't here, making feel alone and stupid.

"It's hard isn't it?" Charlotte says, handing me a champagne flute. The peacock feather dress is beautiful on her. "Being on the outside."

I nod, shoving my speech between the tightest part of the chest of the dress. Which isn't very much. The damn thing is doing no justice to Paul and Ringo.

"At least we have each other. And you know we can have some fun."

"Yeah," I force a smile. "Do you know any of these people?"

"Not as well as Dash. Look at him mingling." Charlotte nods through the crowd.

Dash is standing with beautiful women and gorgeous men next to a screen playing through Spud's story. The screen was Corni's suggestion, and it makes sense. Who can say no to sad

puppy eyes? Hugh helped with the food, Dirk with the drinks. Dash and Charmant with the decorations. And Charlotte and L helping with the all the little details I didn't even know I should care about. Like having the animal theme for the night. L's friends are something else. But he took the cake with the feature piece in the garden. A huge champagne glass pyramid. A fountain of champagne trickling into the glasses. And rubber ducks. Little dickie ducks floating everywhere. If his purpose for it was every time I look at it, to make me smile and calm down, it's working.

But it won't be with the speech I have to do.

"I counted, Charlotte. I know seven people here." The boys, Charlotte and Marty running around yelling at the staff. Seven. That's it.

"You don't want to talk to anyone?"

"And what do I say? Hey thanks stranger for buying an outrageously priced ticket. Can I have some more money?" I tug my dress back up over my dress. Should have sucked it up and gone for the cat and dog one. But no, I chose the slipper dress to fit it.

"Yeah, but tactfully." Charlotte's smile is uneasy, making the butterflies in my stomach worse.

"I need L." I say.

"No word from him?"

I bite down on my lip. "He said he would be here, Charlotte."

"Do you want me to send Dash to the office?"

"No," I gulp down my flute. He's distracting the guests from me. But what if something has happened? My stomach flips.

"Oh, sweetie. No one cares about the host. All they care about who is with who, and who got what done to which body part." Charlotte says, the squeak in her voice a clear giveaway that is not her first champagne. "Have you texted him?"

"Yes."

“Called him?”

“Yes.”

“Called the office?”

“No answer.” My stomach knots, and I fight back the tears.  
“What if something has happened?”

“It’s L. The man is bulletproof. He’s probably in the car now and left his phone somewhere.” Charlotte lightly squeezes my arm. “He’ll be okay. And if he said he will be here, he will be here.”

Yes. This is L. “You’re right. I am just nervous about the speech that’s all.”

“Speech, psssh. It’s just a two second thing. And a photo. It’s nothing.”

I sip the champagne again, but the glass is empty.

“Speaking of which. I think it’s time.”

Dirk stands in front of the champagne fountain throwing a thumb up to Charmant and the boys in the crowd. If anyone was to show up to this in a tight tiger onesie, it would be him.

“I’ll go up with you,” Charlotte grabs my arm before I can protest.

Dirk taps on the mic. Horrible screeches echo. Corni rushes up to my side. “Where’s L?”

“I don’t know.” Oh bananarama, I am going to vomit.

“Good evening everyone. You may know me. Who am I kidding? Of course you know me.” The crowd laughs at Dirk.

“You know what you’re going to say?” Corni brings me back to him. The cat nose and whiskers on his face cannot make me laugh. Oh no. I am broken.

“Yeah. Thank you. Please give me more money.”

Charlotte and Corni stop and look at me as if I am the naughty girl in class.

“But nicer.” Corni says. “These people are...”

“You will be fine.” Charlotte says, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear. “Everyone is drunk anyway. No one will remember anything.”

Suddenly, Charlotte lurches forward. Champagne flies. It hits me. My eyes sting. And curses fill the air.

“Holy fucking shit,” Corni says. “Are you okay?”

I blink and blink. The stinging only gets worse.

“Faye, I’m so sorry, someone bumped me.”

“Sorry,” a man in a blurry tux says. “That would be me.”

Tears sting my eyes. I look at the ceiling, and it just makes everything worse. I can’t do this.

“So, how are you doing? You look nice wet.” The tux man says.

“You are seriously not hitting on me right now.” I yell.

“You’re the one showing her tits.”

Oh fuck! I cover my chest with my hand.

“Get out of here!” Corni and Charlotte shout.

Fingers I can only hope are Charlotte’s help heave my dress back up. “It’s fine. It’s fine.” She says. “Not even a nip slip.”

I blink again, and the vision clears. Corni’s back to me, his arms spreading out his jacket providing privacy.

“Just ummm...” Charlotte says. “Where were you keeping your speech?”

“In my dress.” Charlotte opens her hand to a crumpled wet piece of paper. “Oh please. Do not tell me that is my speech.”

“It’ll be fine.”

My phones buzzes in my other bra cup. I pull it out, wiping away the drops of liquid.

**L:** Coming.

I let go of a huge breath. There has never been a better text to receive.

“Uh, Faye.” Corni says, flicking a glance over his shoulder.

“It’s L. He’s okay.” I say.

It takes a second to realize the entire gala is silent. Hundreds of eyes are on me.

“And here she is...” Dirk gestures.

Oh fuck. I can’t do this. I can’t do this. I don’t make speeches.

“You’ve got this, Faye.” Dirk whispers, pulling my stiff body up the stairs and onto the makeshift platform. “Just be yourself.”

My heart hammers with every step toward the makeshift stage. Dirk hands me the microphone, patting me on my arm. “I’ll stay here with you.” The stench of vodka hits me like a wall.

I nod. “Thanks.”

My hands tighten on the microphone. I cast a look out over the crowd, searching for L. If I could just see him, I will know everything will be okay. But among the animal masks and prints, there is no sign of him.

“Ummmmm.” I clear my throat. “I would like to thank everyone for coming tonight. Your donations mean a lot for dogs in need.”

I swallow, flicking a look at Dirk. He gestures to keep going.

Yeah, Charmant, keep going with what? Like I can remember what I am meant to say. There was a paragraph about dogs, and thanks. Oh, by all things sparkly, everyone is lucky I just haven’t passed out yet.

Charlotte jumps up and down, catching my attention. She points to a small paper bag. Oh, right? Sponsorship. We made take home packages with information.

“If you would like to sponsor my dog in needs further, there will be information to take home with you.”

And... I just did what everyone told me not to. Thank them for money and ask them for money in the least charming way

possible.

Dirk walks back next to me. If looks can kill my tombstone would read death by a sympathetic smile.

No. I can't go out like this.

“And,” I say way too loud into the mic. “Tonight would not be possible with Mr. L. Hunnd and his friends. Oh, and Marty. Where ever you are. Cheers.”

Dirk spins around eyes wide. Oh no, what did I do? “You need a glass to do that. One minute!” He turns to the crowd, signaling them to put their glasses down.

Time slows. Charmant eyes lock onto the champagne tower. Every muscle in my body freeze. My breath catches. “Dirk don't!”

Too late.

Glasses shatter. Screams and gasps erupt. A wave of champagne and rubber ducks flood the courtyard.

“Ducking fucks.” Charmant laughs. He turns to me, eyes widening. “Oh, Faye. Your dress is falling.”

Shit. This can't get any worse.



# Chapter Thirty

## Faye

“I am so sorry Marty.” I say for the billionth time.

“It’s fine, Miss Faye. Accidents happen.”

“Are you okay?” Charlotte says from behind.

“No.” I say, wrapping my arms around my stomach. Even if Dirk said he was going to pay for the damages, this whole thing was a bust. All the prepping and planning ending in a literal disaster. I can just imagine it now, all the women tomorrow talking at their wine clubs or country clubs or whatever they do about this.

“Well, it’s not all bad.” Charlotte says wrapping an arm around my back.

“Yeah, L didn’t see me flash like everyone he knows.” I force a laugh. It changes nothing, though. I embarrassed him, everyone.

“You didn’t even show nipple and Paul and Ringo are a good pair.” Charlotte says. The champagne on her breath is stronger than before. Then again, it could be the new river near us. “And... no one will remember your speech.”

I laugh, moving into her body a bit more. “By all the floating ducks it was bad, wasn’t it?”

“No. No. You were just... very on point.”

Charlotte pulls me tighter into a hug. “You will come out of this smelling like roses, Faye.”

“And champagne.”

Charlotte barks out a laugh letting me go. “Let’s go get drunk with the boys at the bar.”

“You go,” I say. “I just... I think I need some time before I see people again.”

“Are you sure?”

I nod. "I'll come later."

Charlotte pushes her tongue against her cheek. "Fine. And when I see L, send him your way?"

"No." I say way too quick. "No. I will be in soon."

"Okay," Charlotte stumbles like a newborn elephant, kicks off her heels and heads inside.

I move to a garden bench, staring at my disaster.

I have to give it to Marty and his team. They well cornered the flood zone off, and there is a discussion about the proper disposal of rubber ducks. Should have thought that one through.

What a mess. I am such a mess. There is no one to blame but me. Well, maybe Dirk has some of the share only for the duck-apocalypse. No, tonight was a disaster as soon as I put this dress on and be someone I am not.

That's the thing, though. Even if I wore the other dresses, I would have stuck out like a sore thumb and would have fumbled.

I sigh, staring at my hands. My fingers curl into my palms, showing my plain nails. It's not the dresses. It's me, and this world, L's world. Is not my world, and I don't think it will ever be.

A shadow looms over me. My stomach drops. Perfect timing L, just perfect.

"Can sit down?" L says in a low voice.

I nod, moving to the side.

L sits and places a hand on my thigh. "So," He says after a beat. "Do I want to know what happened?"

I follow his gaze to the disaster zone. "Nope."

"Are you okay?"

My mouth opens, but I can't find the words. "Where... where were you?"

"Our databases were hacked."

I swallow hard. Fuck. “Are they okay?”

“We think so.”

“Good... good.”

“Faye, I am so sorry. But I couldn’t leave. I just...” L sighs, leaning forward, sinking his head into his hands. “... I’m sorry.”

Tears sting my eyes.

“Tell me you hate me, Faye.”

My heart drops. Oh, L. How could I hate you? It’s not like you did this on purpose. “L, I don’t.”

He turns his face to me. The eyes I love so much gleam in the lights. “I hurt you, though. Didn’t I?”

“Yes.” I say.

“Oh, Faye,” L’s voice cracks, snapping everything strength I had to hold myself together apart.

L pulls me into him, suffocating me with a tight side embrace. Tears stream down my cheeks. “I wanted you here, L. I needed you here.”

“I am so sorry.”

“And I tried to ring you, and I thought you were hurt or you...” I squeeze my hands tighter around the muscular chest. “... I tried, L.”

“My phone was on silent from last—” L shifts. “No. There’s no excuse, Faye. I fucked up. This is all on me. I was selfish.”

I pull away, clasp onto his hand with everything I have. That’s not fair. It’s so not fair. But then again, I am thinking none of this is fair. “L, it’s your business.”

“And I chose it over you. I knew I would. And I knew the pain it would cause you. And I did it anyway.”

“L I understand your choice.” I say, my chest pulling tight. “I just... I wish it was different.”

“I hurt you, Faye.”

I catch L's falling head with my hand. "And I understand why. I do not hate you. Well, okay. I might have been not angry but disappointed. But I don't hate you."

L forehead presses on mine. I may not hate him, but I can see him. I know him. L hates himself.

"I will try harder, Faye."

"To what? Defeat the hackers before they think of hacking you?"

"If that's what's needed for this never to happen again." A hand glides through my hair, pulling me into him. My hand falls to his chest. The racing heart beat thuds under my fingers. "I love you, Faye." L whispers on my lips.

My heart fills heavy and every breath taking more effort. I want to tell him he has me. That I am here. That I love him... but the words aren't forming. This is all too much and those are words I you can't take back. And I can't have him looking like this, knowing I am the reason. I just, I want this to stop. I want time to breathe in a world where I have L.

I pull away from the kiss. From him. "L."

The hand on mine tightens.

"I... I..."

"You want to break up?" L says.

"No." No. No? No. "I just... L." I sniffle.

He turns to the cleanup, his hand never letting go. My hand is holding on tight. I can't let go. "Faye." He sighs.

"I just want everything to slow down." My shoulders are releasing tension. "I am so lost and confused. I don't even know what I am doing anymore. This isn't me." I gesture to the dress. The gold sequins glimmering under the lights.

"I told you that dress was not really an option. I would have loved if you wore anything else. Hell, even those strawberry overalls."

I know. I am understanding the impossible. L likes me, all the dorky pun snorting me. And that's what makes me scared.

“I know L. But I still put the dress on to impress everyone. To impress you. And it’s turning me into someone who isn’t me. I don’t make speeches or hold galas. I don’t mingle with people who are better than me in every way.”

“But you—”

I shake my head, cutting his words. “And maybe all of this is a sign. Maybe I shouldn’t be spending my time trying to start my adoption centers. I can’t keep doing these things, and I honestly, I don’t want to. There is no joy in networking for me.” My hands ball against my thighs. The truth I have been running from is flooding out. “And maybe, L. Maybe I am not good enough for you.”

L jerks back. “Oh Faye, you know that’s not true. You cannot believe that.”

“As much as you hate yourself for tonight.”

L’s lips purse tight.

“I don’t want to leave you, L. I just. I need to find my feet in all of this. And I need room to breathe and figure it all out. With you, L. But right now, we don’t seem to slow down. We see each other every day. Are together every night. You getting down on one knee.”

L laughs, bringing a smile to my face. “It’s not funny.” I try to straighten myself. “I was going to say yes.”

“What?”

“I didn’t even question it. I was going to say yes to marrying you on our first date.” I turn my body to him. My gorgeous man. The smile resting on his face. And his tie! The tie of Spud’s face covering it. I run it through my fingers. It’s so hideous it’s perfect.

L clears his throat, shifting on the bench.

“You better not be proposing now.”

“No,” L smiles, running his free hand through his hair. “But when I realized what happened... I wanted to. By the fountain with you looking so happy and free.”

“But it’s too soon. And it’s too much.”

L nods. “That changes nothing for me, Faye. Not really.”

“It does for me though, L.” I say. “I need to know that I can be me, or find a new me with you. And be comfortable with that. And if there is anyone who can help me through this, I know it is you. I just need time.”

“I can do that.” L says, moving closer to me. “But Faye, honestly. I love you with everything I have. I love you for you, Faye. The girl who laughs at her own puns. The person I cannot stop thinking about. A fairy and protector of animals. My beautiful sweet girl who is my heart and soul. I never intended to make you feel you couldn’t be you.”

I am speechless. I know what he is saying, but not. But I know. I know he likes me for me. Those dresses. Walking out of the fancy restaurant because he knew I was uncomfortable. L is probably the only person who knows me and wants me to be me.

But it’s different when all I will do is bring him down.

“So what do we do?” He asks after a beat.

I shrug, “Be like a normal couple that have just started seeing each other. And not you know,” a laugh slips out. “Not talk about marriage.” “If that’s what you need, Faye.” L stands, a hand digging into his pocket. “But before we do.”

“I am not joking, L. I swear if you propose to me,”

He pulls out a small box covered in red velvet. My heart skips a beat. Dang it.

L’s thumb slides the box open, revealing a dark gold sunflower pendant.

“I know you don’t wear jewelry, but I thought you might like it.”

“L,” I place a hand on my chest. “You shouldn’t have. You keep buying me things, L.”

“It was cheap. Well, cheaper than I would like. But I thought you wouldn’t panic if you lost it, or it broke. And... well,

Faye. I didn't think a gold and ruby one would have been you."

I shake my head. Once again, he is right on the money.

L pushes the box into my hand.

"And well, it's a locket. I put a photo in it."

The one of us on the balcony?

My fingers tremble, pulling the halves of the pendant open. Spud's face prime for a nose boop stares back at me. I laugh.

"Is it okay?" L takes my hand, helping me up.

"It's perfect." I say, passing him the necklace. I turn, lifting my waterfall of curves.

"It's not too much for you?"

I shake my head, holding the pendant against my chest. "What is it for?"

L turns me around. A soft smile rests on his face. His hands fall to my hips. "Because I am proud of you, Faye. Look at what you did."

"Created a duck-nami?"

I wrap my arms around L's broad shoulders, following his swaying movements. "Well, it is impressive."

"Yeah, only cause no one got hurt."

"You went out of your comfort zone, Faye. You pulled a gala together in so short an amount of time."

"Only to ruin it." I sigh. "And embarrass you. Everyone. Even before the tidal wave."

"But you tried Faye. And I am so proud of you for that, sweet girl."

It doesn't help, though. If anything, it makes all the thoughts worse. I don't belong with L. Not like this, and any moment he's going to see the truth and I will be waking up alone, cold, and heart broken.

# Chapter Thirty One

## L

Voice swirl together around the conference room. The databases are stronger than ever. And we need to look at expanding our team. When a ball rolls, it really doesn't stop.

I stare out of the window, dropping my hand down the chair to scratch Spud's head. Another night alone, maybe I should pull another all nighter. Spud has everything here, and I can order Chinese. Then I will be home tomorrow to get ready to go out with Faye. And then, Sunday night. I guess I can come back here and get started on the week's schedule.

Anything is better than going home to that empty apartment that has Faye everywhere. Even with Spud there, it makes me feel alone.

"L?" Gareth says.

"Sorry, what?"

"We are discussing a new social media push." Charlotte says clicking her pen. "I could make some new graphics focusing on the female users."

I nod.

"You okay?"

I bite down on my cheek. Sure I am okay. Why wouldn't I be? I have Faye. Spud. Deep Throb is going better than I could imagine, even if we are still in post launch. I am okay... but I am not happy.

I miss Faye. I miss seeing her every day. It's just not the same without her.

All the eyes are on me, drawing me back to the meeting. My wonderful employees who have done so much for me. I don't know when they started caring about me, but every one of them has a look of concern on their face. Well, except Cleo. She's scribbling in her notebook not caring. Then again, this meeting isn't for her. She's hiding from the phones again.



“You know what?” I say, leaning back into my chair. “Why don’t we call it a day?”

The room fills with murmurs. “L, it’s three o’clock.” Fuck, is that all it is?

“Good,” I say. “That’s what makes it better doesn’t it?”

One by one folders close, but no one makes a move for the door.

“I will still pay you. Now, go. Have a good weekend.”

The atmosphere changes. It’s like I have pulled the fire alarm.

Cleo grabs the door and hesitates.

“Thank you all for your hard work today.” I say with a nod.

It takes another moment for me to be alone... well, not alone. Charlotte is still at the table staring at me. I ignore her opening my phone. No new messages from Faye. My heart drops. I shove my hands through my hair, and scroll back through our chit chat. The exchange of dog pictures. Funny jokes. But one thing is clear, the spacing between the messages is growing longer and longer.

I know it’s only been a week since the gala, and Faye is busy working her ass off. But this... I am not getting a good feeling about. Maybe she wanted to break up after all.

“You want to talk about it?” Charlotte breaks the silence.

“Nothing to talk about.” I say. And it’s not like Charlotte will give me any information about Faye. She’s been sworn to secrecy. Or a cone of friendship. Or something. She’s decided to not get involved this time.

I focus back onto my phone, and open the group chat I am still not sure what is happening with it. Faye sent everyone a thank you for help with the gala, and it grouped us together. The conversation hasn’t died down since. But there are no recent messages from Faye. She has to be busy.

“I am worried about you.” Charlotte says.

“Why? I thought you would be happy. I am trying to be a better boss.”

“Oh that, that is bordering on horror movie level of scary.”

I smile with a faint laugh.

“See! Terrifying. And don’t get me started on you complimenting people’s work.”

Meeting Charlotte’s gaze, I lean forward. “I told you, Charlotte. I was tired. I was stressed. Everything was on this to make sure—”

“Dash told me.”

“Of course he did.” My shoulders fall. “I just, I needed to make sure that this worked to know I didn’t ruin his life for no reason. But since he doesn’t hate me, and this has gone well... everything is good. I am happy.”

“That’s the thing, L. I don’t think you are.”

I pull my lips tight. Dang it, Charlotte.

“And I am worried you are falling backwards.”

“I am not, Charlotte. I am fine.”

“Last week you were, I don’t know L. Someone I have never met before. You were engaging with us. You were happy. And this week you staring out of the window all morning. You are the first one here in the morning, and the last one to leave.”

“It’s nothing. I like my job.”

“Bullshit. You didn’t do it last week.” Charlotte’s cheeks speckle with red. “I just... I don’t understand. Why don’t you just admit you need Faye?”

“I do admit it.”

“Then why all of this? This weird distance. You staring at your phone all day. Faye setting alarms for when she can message you.”

She’s setting alarms? That explains the messages doesn’t it? Except why is pushing them further apart?

“She’s going to break up with me.” The words hurt like acid on my tongue.

Charlotte laughs sharp and loud. “What? You have got to be kidding, right? She will not break up with you. That girl,” she shakes her head, “pines worse than you L. Honey said she Faye even... cleaned behind the fridge.”

“Really.” I cock an eyebrow. Relief and nerves roll in my stomach.

“That’s the last thing you should worry about.”

I nod. Yeah. We are meant to be together. Faye knows that as much as me. No matter if she pushes me away, I won’t move. Not when it comes to her. And when I push her away, she sticks her feet in the ground. We are glued together.

“Charlotte,”

“Yeah,”

“What should I be worried about?”

Charlotte crosses her arms. I know the answer. It’s the same thing I am worried about. Faye’s dreams and hopes about adopting dogs in need. Well, she’s stopped talking about them, and she’s working harder than ever. Double booking dog walking, and working twelve hours a day, just to stay in the city.

“L,” Charlotte whispers. “Did Faye tell you about the phone call yesterday?”

“No,” My stomach drops.

“Honey over heard. It was the shelter asking her to take on a new litter.” Charlotte pauses. “She turned them down.”

“Faye’s not giving up.” No, she wouldn’t do that. She can’t give up on her dream. But Faye’s driving force is adoption for every dog in need. And to turn that away...

“She didn’t tell you anything?” Charlotte says eyes growing with concern.

“No. She wanted space to figure it all out.”

“And you’re okay with that?”

“No. Fuck, no. I want to help her. I want to be with her, figuring everything out. As much as this is her dream, it’s mine, too.”

“Have you told her that?”

“She knows. And it’s not like I don’t want to help. I spend every free minute thinking about it. But she hasn’t asked for help.” I’ve fucked up enough already. And the last thing I want is to make her think she has to do something because I suggested it.

“Because she is stubborn. She won’t ask.”

“I don’t want to push her, Charlotte.”

Charlotte sighs, leaning back in her chair.

“I don’t want to lose her... but I don’t know what to do, other than to wait until she is ready for help. Or to figure out who she is, and what she wants.”

And I will wait. I will wait until the end of time.

“Go home, L. Don’t give Dash the opportunity to steal his car back.”

# Chapter Thirty Two

## Faye

L hasn't texted because I haven't texted. And yet, I am staring at my phone waiting for something anything.

This is what I wanted though, isn't it? Time to breathe. Time to think. Tomorrow I don't have to be at the Thompson's at five am. There's no new puppies, even though that breaks my heart. But it would not be fair to them if I am an enormous ball of nerves, only caring about me. So if there was a night to figure this out. It's tonight.

I wriggle my butt, shifting my whole body to the edge of the mattress and let my head drop backward. My room turns upside down. Let's see if the extra rush of blood will make everything magically all right.

So from the beginning.

I want to help dogs, and create my version of adoption centers around the city to help as many as I can.

To do that, I need money. Pfft, always with the money.

The way I am going with rent, utilities and everything in between I have to put in extra hours to save. Which means, less time to be with L and my friends. Less of a life.

Even if I increase all my fees, I will still have to work hard. And honestly, I don't know if I can. I am so tired. So exhausted.

The other option is to get a normal job... with no qualifications. Which still means more hours. Less L. Less life.

What's the point of all of this?

I move further off the bed until every muscle in my body is burning, trying to balance. If I move, I lose L. If he does something stupid and moves with me I would hate myself and feel like I owe him. Same with the money.

I raise a leg, pointing my toes out.

I can't do that to him. To us. And that's what I want isn't it?  
I want us.

"FAYE!" Honey yells.

I jolt, dropping to the floor with a bang to my head. "What?"  
I say under the racing heartbeat in my ear.

Honey smiles. "I didn't think you would fall. Sorry."

Yeah, well, it was a kind of silly thing to do. "What's  
wrong?"

"I'm going out for the night. You know it's like seven  
o'clock? Why aren't you in your pajamas?" Honey enters my  
room, reaching out a hand.

I don't take it. The floor feels like where I belong. The  
lowest of the low.

"You doing okay?" She asks.

"Yeah."

"When's the next date night?"

Butterflies erupt in my stomach. "Tomorrow. I don't know  
where yet, though."

Honey returns my smile.

"What?" I say.

"I miss you."

Huh? "What do you mean I am here?"

"Are you?" What does that mean?

"Well, if not, I will stop paying rent."

Honey sighs, and falls to the floor, crossing her legs.  
Kneecaps poke out of the on-purpose rips on her light jeans.  
"It doesn't feel you are here. I miss coming home to you  
surrounded by puppies, or gushing about L over tea." She  
pokes my nose. "I miss your smile."

"I just..." I swallow. This is just proof that I can't keep  
doing this. I am scared I am going to lose myself. But none of  
these options sound like me. "... I don't know what to do."

Honey laughs. “Oh, sweetie, you do.”

“Can you tell me, or is this one of Honey’s great life lessons things where I have to guess?”

Honey pulls her legs close to her chest. Her eyes pierce into mine. She’s wearing makeup. Deep red lipstick but also a light eyeliner. She must be going out, out. “What are your current options?”

“Move and leave everyone and L. Keep going and risk breaking up with L cause I don’t have time.” And he figures out I am not good enough for him or his world. “Or... find something else and put my dreams on hold.” The words are bitter on my tongue.

“See, you know what to do.” Honey lets her legs go.

“But... if I put my dreams on hold... I don’t know if I will ever pick them up.” And yet, if it means staying with L... maybe that’s what I need to do. Have faith in myself that my goals will be there when I am ready.

A hard flick lands in the middle of my eyebrows. “What was that for?”

“Cause, sweetie, you are being fucking stupid. You don’t want to give up. So why are you thinking about it?”

“Because what if I have to? Let’s be real here, Honey. I don’t have many options.”

Honey shakes her head, stands and tugs her tight band shirt down.

“What am I missing?”

She turns, walking away.

“Honneeeyyyyy,” I pout.

“Faye, listen to what you just said. In all your options, it’s not just involving you, is it?”

“But—”

“A partnership takes two people. A partnership is there to help you, not hinder you. Maybe, you should ask L for help. If

he is everything you say, he will be there for you.”

“I know he will.” But I don’t want to let him down again. What if I fail another one of his plans? What if I embarrass him because I am me, the girl who just nearly knocked herself unconscious for falling off the bed?

My phone vibrates on the floor. L’s name dancing over the screen. I snatch it. “L?”

“Faye?” His voice distorts almost cracking, but not because of the phone. Chills run down my spine.

“L what is it? What’s wrong?”

“I can’t find Spud.”



# Chapter Thirty Three

## Faye

L rips the door open. His open shirt flies with the movement. “I don’t know what to do.”

My stomach drops. Oh god.

“I shut the door, Faye. I swear I shut it. But he’s not here. I’ve looked everywhere.”

“Okay, okay.” I grab hold of his shoulders, look into the eyes wide of saucers, and breathe. More for me, not him. “Let’s look again.”

“I’ve looked everywhere. He’s not here.”

My heart beat is racing, and the adrenaline is surging.

L shoves his hands through his hair. His eyes swelling with tears. Every part of me is breaking. Hold it together, Faye. Hold it together. “Unless he went off the patio. But he can’t do that. Faye. He doesn’t have wings. He can’t do that.”

I sniffle a laugh. “No, he hasn’t flown away, so he has to be here, right?”

L turns around, calling for Spud. The silence is defeating. There’s no movement in the room. Then again I am not sure. There are papers and sticky notes everywhere. It’s like L thought Spud was hiding in his briefcase.

I shut the door behind me and lock it. If Spud is here, that’s the last thing we need. “Have you called the lobby?”

“They haven’t seen him. Why do you think he used the elevator? That means he could be on any floor.”

“L,” I say, “Look at me.”

L stills. I step to him, pulling his head down to mine until our foreheads are pressing together. He takes in a deep, rattling breath.

“We will find him. He’s got three legs, for goodness’ sake.”

“Okay,” L sighs. “Yeah. Yeah. Three legs and one eye. He can’t go far.”

“Did you call anyone else?”

L shakes his head with another breath. He’s calming down, though. This is good. We don’t need emotions we need logic.

“So this is what we are going to do.” I clear my throat. “I am going to look around the apartment to make sure. And you are going to ring the boys and tell them. If Spud is on the streets, we need help.”

“They’ll be bus—”

“Ask for their help. You know they will come.”

“Yeah. Yeah.”

I let L go, running my hands down his arms. “Call them.”

I walk to the hallway. With every step, tears stream down my face. Oh fuck. Spud’s not here is he. He’s gone. Spud is gone, what is happening? It’s dark outside. He won’t know this side of town. He’s going to get hurt or—

“Faye,” L calls from behind me. He tugs my arm, and I fall into his arms. “We can do this.” He soothes.

“Yeah,” I sniff after a long moment. “Let’s stop wasting time.”

I pull away, not daring to look at L.

Right. Where would he be? I run my hands down the skirt of my lemon dress, fingers holding onto my pendant.

Bedroom.

The huge room bursts into light. A breath catches in my throat. Nothing seems to be out of place. “Spud?” I call, making my way to the closet. It’s a mess. Okay, not a mess, but a mess for L. But there are suits on hangers piled up on the chair next to his mirror.

Spud isn’t in here.

I go back to the bedroom. A strange vibration rumbles. I move closer and closer to the bed. Closer and closer to the

sound.

“Spud?”

A pillow moves.

“Spud, you stupid dog.” I burst out, ripping all the pillows away to a sprawled out Spud on his back. He wags his tail. “L! L!”

Footsteps thunder.

“What, what is it?”

Spud rolls over, lifting his head above the rest of the pillows.

Relief washes over L’s face. My heart fills with happiness. I explode into a fit of laughter.

“We found him.” L says to his phone falling back against the wall, and sinking to the floor.

Spud slides off the bed, stretching and taking his time, and makes his way to L. Sitting next to him.

L laughs and laughs and laughs, pulling Spud into him. “You muppet.”

L moves his free arm out, gesturing me to him. I sit on the other side of him, scratching the confused-looking Spud.

“Thank you.” L says, kissing me on the top of my head. “Thank you.”

# Chapter Thirty Four

## Faye

L hangs up the phone, fielding another concerned call. I shift on the bar stool.

“Thank you.” He says, looking at me. “You were a rock during my meltdown.”

“Ha. No, I wasn’t. You didn’t see me all the over here.” I follow L’s gaze to Spud. He loves that dog. I guess it’s something about L, when he loves, he loves hard.

The kettle on the stove whistles. L busies himself by setting up the teapot, as I have shown him. A bubble of pride floats in my chest as he even starts the timer on his phone.

Tension fills the room. Since when has it been so awkward between us? I guess that’s my fault.

“So? How was your day?” I ask.

“Other than losing the dog to a pile of pillows?”

“I told you, you had too many.”

“Well, I think Spud can agree with me. They are too comfortable.”

The timer beeps. L turns away, and I slide off my stool, making my way to the lounge area. Paper covers the deep white couches. Different colors of stick notes are stuck to the huge glass coffee table. I don’t quite understand what I am looking at. It’s like a genius scientist is on the brink of discovery a cure for the common cold. But my name... is everywhere.

“L, what is all of this?”

“Faye don’t.” He calls out. “It’s nothing. Really. It’s nothing.”

I pick up a note.

*Doggy clothes. Wacky patterns.*

Another one.

*A bake sale... A lot of bake sales.*

*L to dress up as a dog.*

*Dog sports drink company.*

*The dog fairy.*

*Dog tooth fairy.*

*Sell Dirk.*

What is this? "L?"

"I just." His shoulders sink. "They're just ideas. I did not mean for you to see them."

All these rows of sticky notes... they're ideas for me... Even the stupid ones like travelling dogs performing his and her acts.

I suck on my bottom lip. L would do that too, wouldn't he? Travel the country with me wearing stupid costumes to raise money.

A single yellow sticky note on his laptop catches my eye. I pick it up. All it has on it is a large love heart, and Faye Hunnd on it, like a teenagers note book.

L's sigh pulls my attention to him. One by one everything clicks together.

He would never leave me.

He would never want me to be anyone else.

And if I embarrass him or make a fool of myself, he will stand next to me.

He loves me for me. No matter what, there is no condition here between us. Just love.

L rubs the back of his neck, looking away from me. "I just wanted to have a good idea if you needed help. If you wanted my help."

"I love you," I blurt out.

L's face drains of color, his hands dropping to his sides. "What?" He whispers.

Every nerve tingles, my heart racing as if I just had all the ice cream and toppings I could have. "I love you, L."

"Are you sure?" He stutters, closing the distance between us.

"No, I was talking to the dog."

L sweeps me up. Our lips colliding together in a beautiful slow burn of passion. It's a kiss that says so much. The need for one other, the promise to be there. The love between us.

"I love you," I whisper.

"I love you too," L pulls me into the tightest embrace. Kisses rain down on my neck. "Say it again,"

"I love you." I laugh, and every time it gives me power. It gives me relief.

"Again." L growls, grabbing a leg he picks me up off the floor. I wrap my legs around his legs, kissing him and promising myself never to let go.

"I love you." I laugh.

"Fuck, that's the biggest turn on." L says, moving us towards the bedroom.

"Your huge filthy cock loves, I love it doesn't it?"

L groans on my lips. My heart beat pounds in my ears.

"Cause I fucking love you." Every time I say it, the more powerful it feels on my tongue. Three little words that a magic spell, sealing us together for the rest of eternity. Because no matter what, I will always love L.

L drop me, my back crashes onto the mattress. I squeal but not for the sudden act but for the erection. Damn, L is right. It's a big turn on. The thing could poke out my eye.

He catches my eyes and follows my gaze. "Look what your love does to me, sweet girl."

I smile, biting on my lip.

“Fucking going to cum in my pants if you say it again.” L rips and pulls his shirt off. I sit up copying him. Stripping myself off and throwing the clothes away.

“I love it. You. And everything about that full cock.” The words leave a glorious taste in my mouth, sweeter than vanilla ice cream.

L eyes roll in the back of his head. He pushes his pants down, and the hungry cock bounces free.

Something burns in the back of my mind. I lurch forward, sucking the swollen tip into my mouth for a sloppy kiss.

L roars, shoving me away. “Fucking hell.”

I poke out my tongue.

“Do not make me cum in your mouth.” He threatens, as if that turns me off.

I pout, giving the best puppy eyes I can. “But, it’s so full for me,”

L grabs my head, yanking me to his hot lips.

“What’s my rule?” He seethes. “My sweet girl comes first.”

I laugh, collapsing back onto the mattress. L eyes lock onto my finger, drifting down my stomach. “You sure you can last that long? My love.”

As soon as my love leaves my lips, it feels like I am floating on air.

“Fuck.” L rasps. He rips a bed side drawer out. It clatters onto the floor with a bang. “Shit, fuck shit.”

“L,”

“What?” He snaps, bending over to clean up. A condom is thrown on the bed next to me followed by lube. “Sorry, I just, fuck, I need you sweet girl.”

“I don’t have to—”

“Here.” L hands me a small white box and grabs the condom. “Open it for me.”

I slide the box open. There's a purple toy inside, all prepped and ready.

"Clit sucker," L says, squirting lube on it.

My cheeks burn with heat. L bought a toy for me... for us. I press the button, and the machine whirs into action. "Oh," I gasp.

"Not what I planned for it,"

"But you just love to see me cum." I raise an eyebrow at the perfect wrapped cock. It's so red and angry. L pushes himself way too hard for me.

"There's no better image on this earth." L pushes my legs apart, and guides my hand with the toy in it down. The whirr of the machine sits lightly on right on my clit. Oh, the pressure pulls in my stomach. I don't think it's from the toy, though. But L's lust blown eyes and fingers twitching by his thigh. I collapse back on the bed, tearing my gaze off from the real best image on earth.

"Fuck. I can't."

"Can't, my lo—"

Huge hands clasp on my body, flipping me over and dragging me toward the end of the bed. I press the toy onto my clit, ensuring the pressure doesn't leave me. L lifts my hips, pressing his heavy tip against my slick folds, sliding up and down. Up and down. Already trying to fuck me.

My eyes roll back in my head with a moan. Satisfaction shiver every cell in my body.

"Fuck, I love you filthy cock. So fucking bad. It can't help itself." I manage out between sharp breaths.

L thrusts in. Every single inch sinking into me and filling me whole. His firm, panting body flattens me. I wriggle, moving the toy back in place.

"Going to cum. Cum. Cum." L pants into the nape of my neck. His teeth grazing and nipping my skin. Oh fuck, this is too much too quick. L's body slaps against mine, rutting into



me like a wild animal. The toy whirring and struggling without movement.

Groans vibrate on my shoulder.

My clit throbs faster, faster, faster. Every thrust of the glorious, filthy cock pushing me further and further.

I grip onto the sheets, crying out in a voice I don't know. The rush of orgasmic pleasure explodes. My chants of love you tangling in the harsh moans. My fingers tremble, dropping the toy.

"Fuck. Fuck." L says with a sawing breath. "Yes, sweet girl. Love you."

L grabs a bunch of my head, yanking it, arching my weak body back. He thrusts deep and hard. The bed creaking under us. I am at his mercy. I am his. For his pleasure. For his love. Forever.

"Mine," He groans, burying himself deep into me. My walls quivering around the spasming cock. The controlling hand lets my hair go. I collapse on the bed, wriggling back, taking everything I can of the final small thrust.

L pulls out. My stickiness runs down my thighs. He falls backward beside me. Chest gasping for air. He spreads an arm out and I roll into it, resting my head on his chest.

"That was..." I say after a second.

"Intense. Sorry sweet girl. I just..." L lets go of a shuddering breath.

"Love me as much as I love you."

L nods, pulling me in closer. "Always, Faye. I will always love you. Do anything for you."

# Chapter Thirty Five

## Faye

I stretch my hands above my head, pushing against the headboard. “It’s still dark.”

“Mhmm.” L hums, sealing my lips with a kiss. The sharp stubble tickles.

“How long was I out?”

“Twenty minutes.”

Jeez, was that all it was? I feel like it’s the first sleep I have had all week.

“Do you want something to eat? Drink?” L asks, the mattress moving with his weight.

I snap my hand out, grabbing hold of his arm. “Stay. That’s what I want.”

Over his shoulder, he looks back and smiles. I tighten my grip, and he submits to me.

We stare into each other’s eyes. And with no words, it’s as though it’s the loudest conversation we have had. The utter joy of being together.

This is us. Here and now. Together as a team. A partnership. And to think we are anything else is wrong. We aren’t a normal couple. We are a couple who know who they are and know their story ends in happily ever after. No matter what.

“I’m sorry.” I say after a long moment.

“Don’t worry, I barely felt it.”

My cheeks catch a wave of heat. “I mean for everything.”

L’s eyebrows knit together.

“On our first date...”

“Yes, I waited for you in the elevator.” L says.

“I knew it!” I jolt up, playfully hitting his arm. “You do like me.”

“Of course I do. You are... Faye. You make my day.”

“Every week?”

“Not the first week.” L says. “Anyway, you were saying,”

I lean on my elbow, using the height difference to my advantage, and kiss down onto his lips. “You said the restaurant wasn’t us.”

“Yeah,”

“Well, neither is what I did to us. And I am sorry, L. I shouldn’t have pushed you away. This is us, not pretending to be a couple on our whatever it is date. I am head over heels for you and I know, L,” I run my thumb over his cheek. “You are the love of my life.”

“You are mine too, Faye. All my life, I have been waiting for you.”

My chest warms.

“Wait... does this mean I don’t have to wait for you to text me?”

“I never told you to do that.” L grabs his phone off the side table. “I saw some a duck today.”

“A duck?”

L opens his gallery to a wall of pictures of a single duck sitting next to a fountain. Our fountain. “How cool is that?”

“You go to that park?”

“Yeah,” L says with a shrug. “Every morning.”

What? “That’s out of your way.”

“Maybe. There’s a nice coffee cart though in the daylight. And... wonderful memories.”

“L,” I sigh. How did I ever get a man like him to love me?  
“Wait.”

“What?”

“How come you’ve never taken me there?”

L laughs to himself, locking his phone. “We can go for breakfast. And you can meet Spud’s girlfriend.”

“What?” I say louder. “What other secrets have you been keeping from me?”

“I was going to tell you.”

I slump back into the bed. “I can’t go tomorrow. I am booked out.”

L holds my hand, lying back as well.

“L?”

“Yeah.”

“Can you help me?” I force the question out, even though it feels weighted. “Help me get to my goal?”

“Of course.” L smiles. “Where do you want to start?”

“Oh, I don’t know.” But suddenly, the thought of my future, our future doesn’t seem so scary anymore. “What’s your best idea? And don’t say gala. Or a travelling dog act.”

“Honestly?” L says after a beat. “Partnership.”

“A partnership with?”

“Me, Faye.”

I roll to my side. “Are you asking me to marry you?”

“Not here.” L scoffs. “What do you think this is, a fancy restaurant?”

I bite down a laugh.

“Faye’s what is the goal. Like the big overarching goal.” L sits up. There’s a familiar look in his eye. The same one when his hands were waving around in the bath, telling me his goals.

I don’t contemplate the answers. “To help as many dogs in need to find their true homes as I can.”

“Exactly,”

I don’t get it.

“We’ve been thinking about this wrong. Our goal, I mean your goal—. This is your goal. But it’s my goal too, Faye. All of your dreams are my dreams for you.”

“Our goal.” I agree.

“We shouldn’t be looking at building up slowly. But that’s not us,”

“Nope, so what’s us?”

“A global sensation.” L spreads his hands out as if it’s a headline. “A dating app for dogs in needs and families to be.”

“A dating app.” I hesitate.

“Just. I know it’s weird, but think about it.” L is barely stopping for a breath, making me just as excited. “A user could log in, and receive matches to dogs, all animals really, in their set radius.”

“They could—” My mind is whirring. “Could you put all the things they want as well, like a young dog, old dog, sporty dog, plays well with cats?”

“Yes, it would filter it could filter it all, I am sure of it.”

“And... and.” Oh fuck this is brilliant. “It wouldn’t just be one shelter.”

“All of them.”

“No need to website hop, or social media or... L.”

“Yeah,” He beams.

“This is... a really fucking good idea.” This is perfect, something so outside the box, but it’s not. It’s something I never would have considered. There could be so many dogs who can find their homes easier. So many people who can find the dog that will fit in with their family. And it will be easy. It will be fun swiping through cute pictures instead of going to a puppy farm.

“And the best thing all the systems should be in place. I mean there will be some tweaks, but Deep Throb already has the framework.” L cups the sides of my face, the spark of

playfulness fading. “And it would be yours, Faye. I won’t lie, it will be work.”

“I am not afraid of that.”

“No, no, you are not.” L smiles, planting a kiss on my lips. “But it will be networking with the shelters. It might not be galas, but—”

“You will be with me though,” I say, swallowing down my racing heart.

“Always.”

“Then there’s nothing I, we, can’t do. But it won’t be my app.”

L frowns. “Yes it will, Faye. That’s what a partnership is. It will be us standing together side by side. Supporting each other.”

My chest warms, and tingles run down my spine. “Our app.”

“I am not arguing with you on this.” L falls back into bed, pulling me down with him. “I don’t think it matters who it belongs to, not even when we register it in your name. Anyway, it’s just an idea.”

“No, L. This is *the* idea. I love it.”

“Really? Cause you will need to find time with the team.”

“I can do that.”

“And it won’t pay much. Not if we try to keep everything low cost for the shelters. But with advertising revenue... if you still want to open your own adoption centers. We should be able to make it work. Maybe a five-year plan? A ten-year plan? We will make it work.”

“We will, L. I believe in us.” I say, curling up into his side. I never want to let this man go. Never doubt us. He is my world, my everything. And together, we will be unstoppable.

“I just have one question.” L asks.

“Which is?” I giggle. This is all too perfect.

“What are we going to call it? Cause I have an idea.” My head moves up and down with L’s heavy laugh.

“Oh no. You can’t name it. Look what you did with Deep Throb.” Though, it is a good name if you understand it.

“You will like it. Are you ready?”

I hold my breath.

“Deep Bone.”

# Epilogue

## Some time later

### L

“We’ve got this,” I say to Spud, fixing his collar back up.

I cast my eye over the patio. The table is covered in Maybelle’s and Laurels food. Fried chick. Potatoes. Green beans. And an enormous tub of mac and cheese. There is ice-cream in the freezer and caramel sauce... and everything is perfect.

Why am I so damn nervous?

I walk inside, whistling at Spud. He finds his bed, and I tell him to stay. My hands run down my pants. Faye should be here soon. She has to she lives here. And... well, she fucking lives here. So what’s keeping her?

Maybe I’ve screwed up. Forgot a meeting or an appointment. I pull out my phone, open our shared calendar, ignoring all the unread messages and the ones still popping up. There’s nothing that would explain why Faye is late. Except... She would only be walking into the lobby now.

Okay. Okay.

This is fine. Everything is wonderful.

Candle. Shit. I grab the candle and lighter on the counter, speed walk to the patio and create a quick little centre piece.

Out of the corner of my eye, Spud lifts his head towards the front door. My stomach flips.

With a big breath in and out, I try to act cool and head inside.

Faye pushes the door open, and my heart skips a beat.

She looks gorgeous. Curly hair wild and untamed despite it being in a bun. Her light overalls fitting her like a glove, the logo for Bone Deep, proudly on her chest. Though, I still think Deep Bone is a better app name.



Faye looks to and smiles, melting me to the core. “Hey,”

“Hi,” I say. So far, so good.

The beautiful eyes scan over my face. Faye knit her eyebrows together. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Nothing is wrong. Why would anything be wrong?” Fuck me, keep it together. You are a businessman. No more than that, you are one of the leading business men in this city. You can talk to the love of your life without making a fool of yourself.

“L,”

“Yeah?” I rub the back of my neck.

“Is everything okay?”

Damn you Faye. I close the gap between us, hand sliding around her back, and pull her into a long, soft kiss. Everything is more than okay. I have never been happier.

“It’s been a long week,” our lips part with just enough room to speak.

“You’re telling me.” Faye places a hand on my chest. “Speaking of which. I think I found a place.”

“Really? For the adoption centre.”

“Yep. Would you like to come with me tomorrow for a look? I need your opinion.”

I smile, shaking my head. “No, you don’t.”

“It would make me feel more confident.”

“Then it would be my honor, sweet girl.”

Faye’s eyes light up, a smile dancing on her face. “Where’s Spud—”

“Resting.” I blurt out. “Leave him, he’s exhausted. Puppy-sitting is hard work.”

Faye pulls away from me, her hand taking hold of mine. The warmth floods my skin with goose pimples. “So how was your day off, Rebel?”

I laugh. Rebel? Not likely. You can't rebel with a day you booked off weeks ago. But I have to admit, it's been nice. "I missed you."

"No, you didn't." Faye laughs, dragging me to the puppy pen.

"Of course I did."

I tighten my grip on her hand and spin her around until I press her back against my chest. Our eyes fall to the sleeping puppies. The five sweet bundles of fur are piled in the corner. This litter has been the hardest one so far, needing constant care. So young they should still be with their mother. They still need more weight on them, though. "Fed. Watered. Played and cleaned." I whisper, swaying our hips from side to side to an invisible tune.

"Thank you. I appreciate it. And you didn't have to ruin your day off looking after them."

"It was good. Though Dirk chewed one of your socks."

"Dirk?" Faye laughs. "I told you not to name them."

"They have to have names." I say. And why not after the boys?

"You'll get attached. And then what we are going to do?"

"Buy a castle and have our own puppy kingdom."

Faye turns to me. Fingers run through my hair, and a sweet giggle bubbles on my lips. "That actually sounds nice."

"Do you want—"

"No. I don't want you to buy me a castle."

A breath catches in my throat. "How about a bigger place?"

"What?" Faye jerks back.

I shrug. "Maybe it's time for us to move."

Faye's lips part open. "Out of the city?"

"What. No. No?"

Faye shakes her head.

“I was just thinking of something with a yard for the puppies.”

“Oh,”

“Just an idea. Let’s focus on the adoption centre first.” And the wedding. “But I think it would be a good idea. Are you hungry?”

“Yeah. What do you want?” Faye asks.

“I went by Laurel and Maybelle’s. Picked up some already.” I nod to the patio.

Faye beams. “You are a mind reader.”

I take her hand and lead her outside. As we walk past Spud’s bed, he lifts his head. “Stay.” I say under a breath.

“Spudkins!”

Fuck too late. Okay, this is it. My stomach knots. Faye drops to her knees, patting and making a fuss of Spud.

Dang it. I should have planned this better. I should be the one on my knees. Or at least have done something else. The image of Spud trotting up to Faye as she eats ice cream is gone. It’s here and now. And it’s the moment that will change everything.

Faye frowns. Her fingers dig into Spud’s shiny finger, twisting his collar around until the small ring box is staring at her.

“L?” she says. “There’s something on his collar.”

“I know.” I swallow hard.

“Where did you guys go—” Faye’s thumb flicks the box open. The gold and diamond band sits pretty on a small cushion in the box. She looks at me. To the ring. To me. To the ring. “L?”

“Faye,” I smile. The words are resting on my tongue, but they aren’t releasing. My chest is full of love, my brain consumed by her blank smile. I have a speech. A speech I have practised in my mind since we danced at the fountain.

But it's gone, and there's no hope of recovering it. "Will you marry me?"

Faye stands, her eyes twinkling. "I— I—"

I reach out, cupping her cheek with the palm of my hand.

"Yes." she whispers on the edge of her breath. "Yes. I mean of course. Fuck, L."

She wraps her arms around, and I hug her as tight as I can. We are laughing. We are smiling and hugging harder. My shirt grows wet on my shoulder. "You're not crying are you?"

"I—"

I pull her away, holding onto my shoulder. Sweet, blissful tears run down her cheeks. "Oh, you're speechless." I scoff. I don't know how much more I can take. I love this sweet girl so damn much.

"I'm... I didn't expect it."

"We talked about this since our first date, sweet girl." I chuckle.

"I know. I just... tonight? We aren't even in a fancy restaurant."

"Ouch," I jerk back, feigning hurt.

Faye searches my eyes, taking deep, calming breaths. The smile on her face grows larger than possible. "I love you."

"I love you, too, sweet girl."

My hands fall down her arms, hands finding hers. My thumb rubs on the bare finger. "Where's the ring?"

"Dang it!" Faye says.

We turn to Spud, licking his balls. The ring glistening on the floor.

"I guess that's a sign I should never take it off." Faye says, picking it up.

"Never?"

"Never."

**Caramel dripping all over her body. A masterful tongue licking it all up... Faye has no idea what's coming for her.**

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# About The Author

## Ophelia Jewels

*Fifi write billionaire boss romantic comedies with strong female characters.*

Fifi Jewels spends most of her days battling spiders, snakes and drop bears. Her life goal is to devour every type of candy, chocolate, cake, and baked good.... And coffee... And ice-cream...

Look, let's get real here for a moment. I need a billionaire to make this happen.

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