



My Ex's

BILLIONAIRE

Brother

HARLEY ROSE

My Ex's Billionaire Brother

Harley Rose

OceanofPDF.com

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Chapter 1: Tina

“**T**here you go, Mrs. Gladys,” I said as I gave her the medicine for one of the chickens, a cute ol’ girl named Penny, who was having some issues with bowel movements.

“Oh, goodie! Thank you for this. And how is Irma the cow doing?”

“All fine. I ran some tests, and it looks like her milk production is back to normal. So you should be getting a steady supply quite soon,” I told her.

I stood near the cows, checking them one last time, my brown ponytail bobbing up and down as I did so. Their heartbeat, respiration, and even their digestive and reproductive movements were what I made sure were fine.

As I finished up, Mrs. Gladys smiled.

“Thank you for everything, Tina. And here’s what I have. I know that we’re on a payment plan, but money’s been tight and—”

“It’s fine. Just having that is good enough for me.”

“Thank goodness. I’m trying to make sure that we have everything secured for the farm, but ... it’s been a challenge.”

That was the plight of many people here in Rainsville. It was a place with few rich people, and many others were poor or could barely afford it.

“I’m glad that I can help you. Don’t worry. As long as you make the monthly payments, we should be—”

My phone buzzed. I looked at it. It was a text from my receptionist and appointment booker. It was another job.

This time, it was for a horse. Naturally, I couldn’t leave an animal in need. So, I texted them to say I’d be there soon and to send the address.

“Duty calls?”

“You bet. I have to see a man about a horse,” I joked.

Mrs. Gladys laughed. “Thank you so much! I appreciate everything. Oh, and if we have some extra eggs, consider them yours!”

“You’ve got it.”

I walked back to my car, setting the directions in the GPS for the next location. I looked in that direction. It was going towards the north portion of town. That was where all the rich guys lived.

I paused, realizing this could be one of those rich douchebags asking me for help. Or it could be one of the older

members of the community.

Either way, my job involved ensuring I didn't leave a single animal stranded. So, I turned on the car, put it in drive, and sped out of the driveway and over to the next animal.

I didn't know the details. But I had a bad feeling about this. I turned right on Mahogany Drive, and soon, a series of large-scale farms were here.

The GPS told me to keep going. I had to. But, as I continued, I realized I knew exactly what this place was. Right now, this was the last location I wanted to be. As soon as I pulled up to the mansion, bile formed in my throat, and I thought about calling out.

It was the Branson mansion. The mansion where my ex-boyfriend lived.

I thought about turning back. There was no way in hell I would even talk to David, let alone in a civil manner. But there was something about this place that intrigued me.

Maybe it was because his car wasn't there, or perhaps it was because it didn't have that fuckboy energy that David had. I decided that there was only one thing I could do.

I pulled up to the gate. When I pressed the button on the intercom, there was a pause and the sound of a man's voice on the other end.

"Hello, there," he said.

Okay, that sounded nothing like David. David had a much higher voice, and it sounded less ... sexy, for lack of a better

word.

“Hi, uhm, I’m Dr. Tina Grayson. I’m here because of a call about a horse,” I stated, wondering if the guy on the other end knew about it.

There was a pause, and I wondered if it was just David fucking with me. He always took things far less seriously than the average person, including the seriousness of cheating on your girlfriend. However, after a moment, the voice spoke again.

“Oh yes! Sorry about that. I just didn’t expect you to get here so fast. Come on in.”

“Thank you.”

The doors opened, and I drove inside. My heart fluttered coming back to this place. But I didn’t see David’s car. Maybe he moved out or something.

Good, because the last thing I wanted was to see that asshole again. I cut him off ages ago for that reason.

When I pulled up, the door opened, and I noticed a figure standing near the entrance. I parked in the guest parking spot, aptly marked as such, and took a deep breath as I sat in the seat.

I was the town’s large animal veterinarian. I had to do this. People praised me to the high heavens for the work that I did. So what if this was the same location as one of the shittiest exes I’d ever had? That didn’t mean David would be there. I wanted to leave, though.

Could I get out of here? I could pretend that I had another animal appointment and leave. But I knew that'd bite me in the ass at some point. People knew me as one of the most responsible veterinarians in the area. I was the only one that most places trusted to help their animals in need.

There was no way in hell I could leave them. I opened the door, assessing the surrounding area, knowing there wasn't much else.

I guess this was it. This would be where I would have to go to get the patient and give him the treatment.

I walked toward the doorway, expecting David to jump out. I could just deal with this situation and then forget all about it. I was here for the animal, after all.

But when I walked up, I noticed no sign of David whatsoever. A feeling of relief coursed through me, but it was soon replaced by something else.

A feeling of dread. That was because right in front of me was a guy I thought I'd never see again.

It was Caleb. David's brother and the oldest brother.

When I stopped in front of him, I took in the sight. I always thought Caleb was attractive, but there was no way in hell I'd ever make a move on him. He was the brother of my ex. Probably the same douchebag I dated back in the day.

I learned from my mistake the last time.

However, as soon as we stared at one another, I got lost in his blue eyes, totally at the mercy of his stares. And when I

looked back, I realized even I struggled with holding back that little desire that flooded in.

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Chapter 2: Caleb

I knew she looked familiar! But I did not expect my brother's ex-girlfriend to be the veterinarian who would come in here to help my horse, Blaze.

However, when she came up, her brown ponytail bouncing with every single step, I felt tongue-tied and stuck in place when I looked at her. She was super cute! And yet ... I was already entranced by her, even though I barely knew her.

David told me that his ex was a piece of trash and to avoid her. I thought he meant one of the girls in town, not this cutie.

She walked forward, looking at me as she stopped in front of me. "Hi there, I'm here to see your horse."

"Well, hello to you, too. I didn't know they had veterinarians in town who were this cute," I said.

She rolled her eyes. "Flattering, but I have a job to do. Please show me to them."

Cuts the crap and was a cutie. Wow, I was a winner. I motioned for her to follow me over to the barn. Her eyes

looked around at the place.

“So, I didn’t know there was another person living here,” she started.

“Besides David? Yeah, he moved out a couple of years ago. He said he was getting married to some girl in Aruba,” I said.

I remember when David brought it up. Dad was pissed, of course, but I thought it was admirable. The guy chased after what he wanted.

I didn’t know that he cheated on that woman in Rainsville until after the fact, but damn, even my brother makes foolish mistakes.

She tensed at those words. I thought I had struck a nerve. Maybe she didn’t want to talk about David.

“I see.”

I laughed, seeing her pretend to hold back those feelings. “Hey, no sense in being so aloof. Trust me on this. You’re a welcome change of pace.”

“Thanks.”

“Anyway, here’s where Blaze is.” I opened the door, showcasing the horse barn that had been in my family for decades.

“Wow, this place is pretty big,” she said, looking up and down at the place.

“Yeah, I’m the guy left with the responsibility of taking care of the place. My brother hasn’t been back since his little

getaway to Aruba, and my dad decided to retire to Tahiti with his third wife. So, it's just been me," I explained.

"Very interesting."

"Why? Do you think you'll be here more often?" I teased.

She rolled her eyes. "I'm asking because it's my job, and I wanted to make sure that there weren't any other animals that might need help."

Damn, she was a little touchy. But there was something fun about it.

She looked at the horse, checking his vitals. Then she grabbed a stethoscope, listened to his heartbeat, and checked his respiration.

"So, what's happening with it? What made you want to call me?"

"Oh well, I noticed Blaze wasn't as chipper as he usually was. I thought maybe it had something to do with his food, but I tried different foods, and he's still feeling kind of bad. Plus, I noticed a strange pus in his stool," I said.

She looked at it, checking the rest of the horse.

"I see. I think he's got a cold, but we should monitor him for the time being. These types of things might not clear up right away. Horses can't tell us what's going on with people," she replied.

I chuckled.

“You sure do know your stuff. You know, my brother was right about you. You definitely don’t mess around,” I said.

She stiffened at the mention of my brother. “I’m the vet for most of the townspeople. I have a job to do, and my goal is to ensure all animals get the proper care they need.”

Damn, she really does just shut people down and refuse to elaborate. She was so cute, even if a bit aloof.

She continued to look at the animal, also checking his legs. “Say, did you notice that one of his bones is partially fractured?”

“No ... how did that happen?”

She assessed it, wrapping it in a cast. “I put it in a split cast, but I believe it’s a stress fracture. You ride him a lot, don’t you?”

“I sure do. Blaze is my main horse!” I exclaimed.

She looked at me, sighing with annoyance. “Then please make sure he gets some rest. Right now, he’s fatigued and overworked. So, you should ensure he gets the rest he needs.”

I mock-saluted her and nodded. “Will do, sir!”

She laughed. “Come on, enough with that ‘Sir’ shit. It’s just Tina.”

“Well, it’s also just Caleb. Not some random guy who is trying to make your life a living hell,” I told her.

She nodded. “All right.”

Tina finished the checkup, and she gave me a bottle of pills.

“Here. This is the bottle I have on me right now, but if you need another bottle, call the office, and I’ll have our receptionist take care of it. Give him one pill twice a day and monitor his results. If you don’t see any changes in a week, call me. I’ll be over weekly as well to check up on him,” she explained.

Damn, she knew her stuff.

“Thank you, Tina. You’re a gem,” I said.

“Thanks ... Caleb.”

“Say, if you’re free, maybe after you’re done, you can head back over here, and we could get some drinks,” I offered.

Tina hesitated. I could see that she wanted to. But then she sighed. “Sorry, I’ve got patients for the rest of the day,”

“See, and that’s why you should take a breather and—”

“After that, I’m going home. It’s been a long day. Have a good afternoon, Caleb.” Without another word, she opened the doorway.

But before she left, I spoke. “You know, you’re kind of cute when you’re upset like that. All mysterious. I guess I can see why you’d attract a moron like my brother.”

She held onto the doorknob, looking back at me. “Don’t compare yourself to your brother. There’s a reason why we don’t talk anymore.”

Then, without another word, she closed the door. I thought she was cute, but man, she did spend way too much time with

a stick so far up her ass that it might come out of her mouth.

She was cute, but damn, I guess David really did do something to her back in the day. But, of course, it happened back when I was in college and David was in high school, so I wasn't really around. But I remembered what David said about her.

Total bitch. She always acted like she was too serious for her own good. Someone I should avoid if I didn't want to deal with someone so cranky and mean.

Honestly, my brother was right about that point, but he was also slightly wrong. Yes, Tina didn't like me. Yes, she acted way too damn serious for her own good, but also, there was that part of me that wanted to talk to her more, even though I knew it might get my ass in trouble. To find out a little bit about what made her tick.

I was going to talk to her again, and I was going to learn more about it. I was sure she would start to crumble with the right words and the right amount of teasing. And with what happened, I would get in there, find out the little details about her, and make her mine.

That I was sure of, and she could continue to play those little games, and then, once she opened up, I would get to know the real her, the one deep down that she kept hidden, and I would find out the real sides of her.

Chapter 3: Tina

As I closed the door to Caleb's place, I felt like an entire weight had been lifted off of me. It was as if I were carrying a hundred or so extra pounds, and then it disappeared.

In a way, I was grateful for that, but ... I didn't know what the hell I was going to do next.

Caleb was a douche. I saw him staring at me the entire time, leering as he looked at my body. The guy made it so pathetically evident that it was hard to hold back my desires—that urge to call him out for his shit.

I didn't like him, but I had to stay for the horse. I was only there for him and nothing more.

Of course, when I got back to the office, I saw a message from Caleb, thanking me for the help, followed by him asking me if I wanted to go out and get some drinks this Friday.

Fuck that. I didn't want anything to do with the Jackson brothers. After what happened with David, the last thing I

wanted was to get my heart broken again by another one of these.

Still, Caleb seemed different and more mature, and I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. But also, I knew that the Jackson boys were known for being rich billionaires who only cared about women as property.

Caleb was probably the same. David cheated on me, and when I found out, I cussed him out, only to discover the next day he left with that whore in the next town over.

Now, he was off in Aruba somewhere with her. It shouldn't have bothered me when Caleb said that, but that little inkling of annoyance came with this, and it upset me when I thought about it. I didn't want to think about that part of my life.

And when Caleb looked at me, it differed from how David did. David only wanted to get in my pants, and he could do so, but with Caleb ... it seemed like there might be potential.

No, I couldn't just forgive Caleb. Not for what his shithead of a brother did.

Over the next week, I'd get texts and updates from Caleb about Blaze. Sometimes, they were small texts about him doing better. Others were more drawn out, telling me about the foods he ate and how he was doing.

Still, interspersed between them were little comments like "I hope your day brings you a ray of sunshine," and "Smile a little. It'll help."

A man telling me to smile. As if that wasn't a red flag at all. But, still, there was that small part of me that felt a little inkling of excitement when we stared at each other, and when it was time for me to come in to check on the horse, there were a few butterflies when I looked at Caleb.

“Hey there, Tina! You doing all right?”

“Yeah, I'm fine.”

I walked over to the barn, checking on Blaze. I looked at his leg, noticing that it was healing a little bit better. “Looks like it's getting better.”

“Sure is. He's not walking around yet, but he can stand a little. He's got more energy. I'm just glad that Blaze is well here,” he said.

“I get that. I'm glad he's doing okay.”

“Yeah, it's because you're such a great veterinarian. Taking care of animals like that, it's ... it's super admirable,” he said.

“Thanks,” I muttered, going back to the horse.

He walked a little closer, practically invading my bubble a little bit. “You know, David told me you were such a bitch, but honestly, I think he's wrong. You're like ... the nicest person I've met in a minute.”

“Thanks,” I said.

“I'm serious. You're really sweet, and I am thankful for everything you did for Blaze. I mean it.”

“You're welcome.”

He stepped forward, grasping my hand. "I'm serious, Tina. You've got a good heart. I want to give you something as thanks for this."

I pulled my hand back, shaking my head. "Flattered, but I'm busy. I have a clinic to run."

"All right. Just so you know, though, I'm not like David. I know that ... he was a shithead to you, but I never knew the full story or who you were. David just called you a bitch and left it at that," he said.

"Well, he's an asshole for cheating on me with another woman and then running off like he did nothing wrong, calling me the bad guy. I get that you're trying to show me that not all the Branson boys are dicks, but I don't ... I don't trust you like that, Caleb. No offense, but I just can't. Not after everything I've done," I said to him.

"That's fair. I'm just trying to be a nice guy."

"Well, try a little less, will ya?"

I finished redressing the wounds, stood up, and stretched.

"You're done?" he asked.

"Yeah, it looks like Blaze is off to a speedy recovery. I'm excited to see how he does," I told him.

"Thank you so much, Tina. And I'm sorry if I've been a little much. I'm just trying to be a bit friendly," he said.

"Okay. Thanks," I told him.

I got up, about to walk out the door. I looked at my phone, and there weren't any more appointments until four. It wasn't like I had to leave immediately, but honestly, I didn't want to be around Caleb.

He wasn't a bad guy, but he was ... way too overbearing for my tastes. I didn't know what to make of him. Part of it might have been my own bias, but there was also that little part of me that couldn't trust him, even if I wanted to.

As I reached for the front door, he walked over, stopping me from opening it.

“What are you doing?”

“Giving you the money, isn't it obvious?” He grabbed a check from his pocket, scribbled something, and gave it to me. I looked at the amount, my eyes wide.

“This is way more than what it costs to help Blaze.”

“Consider it a bonus. I appreciate what you've done for Blaze. I mean it. This isn't me just trying to get in your pants,” he told me with a wink.

I was stunned.

Caleb didn't ... act like he was some fuckboy who could get away with murder. He was just a guy with a horse he cared about. I felt the urge to ask him more about Blaze, but that was something I'd inquire about next week.

“Thank you, Caleb. That's ... really nice of you,” I said.

“You’re welcome. You’re nice and pretty cute, and you’ve saved my horse’s life. I’m really grateful,” he said.

The sincerity left me stunned. Did Caleb actually have a cell in his body that showed just a bit of empathy? Was this what I saw? I still didn’t believe it.

I put the check in my bag, flashing a small smile.

“Thank you, Caleb. You flatter me. I should get going.”

It was not like I wanted to leave, but I might let Caleb in if I stuck around. And there was no way in hell I was going to do that.

He was nice, but he was the brother of David. No way in hell I would let a man like him in. I learned my lesson with the last one.

So why did I feel that strange urge to do otherwise?

I went to the car and sat in the driver’s seat, unable to move. As much as I wanted to just drive off and forget that interaction, my heart fluttered just thinking about Caleb. It was not like I could just ignore that.

He did care. And even though he was related to them, perhaps I had him pegged incorrectly. As I grabbed my bag, I looked into Caleb’s eyes, noticing they were a soft, brilliant blue and beautiful.

“By the way, Caleb, keep an eye out on Blaze. I gave him some new food, so it might take a little bit to adjust, so be mindful of that,” I told him.

He saluted me, leaning against the post and nodding. “Will do, chief. So, when will you be back? If you want, we can get some dinner together after and—”

“I’ll be back next week. I’ll nurse Blaze back to health, but I have a job to do, Caleb, and I’d rather not mess with that.” I always put my foot down when it came to my job.

Caleb clearly had a similar womanizing manner that his shitty brother did, but there was ... something different about him. Maybe he didn’t see women as property and nothing more. Regardless, I wasn’t interested. I had to take care of the animals.

I walked back to my car and then drove back to the clinic. As I did so, I opened my phone up, scrolled down, and looked at my receptionist’s name. She was the one who handled all the scheduling.

I thought about getting rid of Caleb. Maybe I’d give him some excuse that I couldn’t continue this. Then, I could refer him to Sariyah in the next town over. She was a great veterinarian and helped me with some big animals that required a little more TLC.

But I didn’t. I had to continue to see Blaze. And well, the money that Caleb offered me was more than enough for the clinic. If he kept this up, the clinic would be in the black for, like, the first time ever.

That’s why it is tucked around. It was to keep this place going and not get involved with the clients. I had a job to do, and I didn’t trust Caleb. He was nice, but so was David, and I

fell for that mess until he cheated on me. I was a fucking moron for that, so I wasn't going to make the same mistake again.

Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me.

I pulled up to the clinic, stepped out, and when I got there, I saw Laura on the phone. She waved for me. And I walked over.

“Hey, so how did it go with Caleb?” she asked.

“Good. He gave us a bonus for a job well done. The horse is doing okay. Why?” I asked him.

She pulled up the screen showing the financials, and there was another deposit there.

Five fucking grand.

Caleb gave me five grand on the way home. That was, of course, on top of the two that he shoved in my hands.

“What the hell?”

“I don't know what you did, but that Caleb guy is more than grateful for your help. We should definitely keep him around,” she said.

I teared up, and my face was pale with shock. So that was the case. However, Caleb liked us and wanted to ensure the place was taken care of.

Still, the way he did it even subverted my expectations.

Now I knew that I couldn't give him up. For all the bullshit he did, Caleb helped our animal clinic. And while I didn't

approve of him entirely, I still appreciated the offer. So ... for now, I'd just have to suck it up. Caleb couldn't win me over with money, but it helped the clinic, and that's what mattered.

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Chapter 4: Caleb

I saw my phone light up and a text from Tina saying thanks for the money. I told her it was no problem and that I'd look forward to seeing her the next time.

Tina was super sweet and down-to-earth, and when I watched her take care of the animals, I knew that underneath the sassy exterior, she had a wonderful heart.

I felt my heart light up whenever I saw her like this. She was different from the other ladies in town.

I knew David had some past history with her, and he warned me, and yet, I couldn't stay away.

The visits became a weekly situation. Blaze was doing better, but occasionally the guy would relapse, and that'd require Tina and me to check on him, run tests, and analyze his vitals. Blaze's recovery was slow, but that also meant I got to spend more time with Tina, and that made up for it and then some.

Tina looked after Blaze like he was her kid or something. The horse was super sweet, and he loved Tina. I'd never seen a horse enjoy someone like this.

After it nuzzled her a third time, and she pulled back, she laughed. "Come now. You don't have to be that excited."

I laughed, sitting on the hay bale we kept inside the examination room. "I think he's taken a liking to you."

"No way, I'm just his doctor."

"Yeah, but you've got the magic touch. I've never seen Blaze act so sweet."

That did surprise me. Blaze was always friendly to me but rarely got along with others. But Tina changed him. He was super nice and sweet, and he seemed to care so much about her. I honestly ... loved it.

Having someone who cared about my horse as much as I did was refreshing. Granted, it was for a paycheck, but when Tina looked at Blaze, she seemed happy with the results, and there was a care that sat there.

We started spending more time together. At first, it was because of Blaze, but after Blaze began to do better and, after two months of being in a cast, he could walk, I asked her to help with the other animals.

"Hey, since you've done such a great job with Blaze, could you possibly help with the other animals?"

"You have others?"

I nodded, smiling. “My dad used to have Sariyah take care of them in the next town over, but she’s been booked up for months. So, I figured ... you could come to check on the cattle.”

Tina looked at me with abject surprise. “Wait, you have cattle? And you didn’t ask me beforehand?”

“Yeah, I do. I just figured that you’d be busy with Blaze, so I never bothered to ask. But I do. Come with me,” I said.

We’d been doing this whole weekly checkup thing for about two months. Normally, I’d dismiss the veterinarian as soon as they got better, but when I was around Tina, I felt the urge to keep her here and show her a bit more of the farm.

We went to the fork in the road, and I got one of the four-wheelers we had out.

“Come on, sit behind me,” I said.

Tina hesitated, and I laughed.

“Not making it weird or anything. I just want to go see them,” I said.

With a sigh, she got on the four-wheeler, putting her bag in the basket. She rested her hands against my waist, and I turned to her, winking.

“Now, let’s go see them,” I said.

We drove down to the other side of the property, where the farm was. A series of troughs decorated my right, and an

electric fence where I kept the cows resided near that. A couple of the cows were out, but most of them were inside.

When we stopped, she got off, stepping forward and looking around the place. “Woah! This is insane.”

“Like it? This is my baby. My father gave this one to me. It’s a cattle farm.”

She looked at the cows all around, nodding. “I didn’t know.”

“Well, come on in, and I’ll introduce you,” I said.

We walked inside, and Tina’s eyes looked around at all the cows. “There are at least a hundred cows here.”

“A hundred and fifty, to be more accurate,” I told her.

She looked around the place, and then she nodded.

“I didn’t know any of this was here. Back when I came here with David, I never saw this place.” Tina walked towards one of the cows, checking his vitals, and I stood near the door.

“David never wanted this type of life. Dad asked if he wanted to take care of the cattle, and he gave him a huge hell no. David ... never liked the farming aspects of the estate. Partially why he ran off with that one girl.”

“Yeah, that one chick from the next town over. I sure remember that,” Tina muttered.

That had to be the girl that David saw after Tina.

“You know, I do believe that David, as good a man as he is, made a huge ass mistake when it came to you,” I told her.

She finished checking on the cow, sitting there next to me. The closeness of our bodies was nice, to say the least. I looked at her, noticing her eyes filled with annoyance at the mention of David but also a strange sweetness too.

“So you know that ... David cheated on me with that girl then.”

I whistled. “Well, I knew David was a skirt chaser, but I didn’t know he’d be that cold. I put it together after a little bit, but yeah. Honestly, I never understood why David did that. He didn’t know how to commit, and it upset even my father.”

I knew I was the favorite of the three brothers. Glenn did his own thing and was out in some skyscraper, making millions in stock trading. I never liked that. David was impulsive, and we rarely got along.

But ... I never wanted to leave this place. Did it make me the black sheep? Perhaps, but I also never thought it was wrong of me either.

I looked at Tina, and I could sense the conversation was awkward for her. So, I put my arm around her shoulder. “Listen, I know David is a hard subject for you, but I’ll say that ... it’s not easy for me either.”

“It’s not?”

I shook my head. “He’s a good man, but he makes absolutely terrible decisions. I told him this, and I reckon that one day it’ll come back to haunt his ass, but for now, you’ve

just got to move on, live your own life, and let your idiot brother make the biggest mistake of his life.”

Tina laughed. “I doubt I was the biggest mistake. Not by far.”

“Oh, you’d be surprised, hun. Even just one conversation with you told me that David was a dumbass for cheating on you,” I said.

She turned towards me, and I could see the threat of a blush creeping on her face. “You’re sweet, Caleb. Not like ... David,” she admitted.

I laughed. “So, you finally admitted it.”

“It’s not that I like you; it’s just ... you’re different, that’s all.”

I’d take different. I stretched out, watching her do her work.

“I suppose I am.”

She continued to check the cows, and then, after an hour, the general assessments were done. She sat along the side, and I grabbed a bottle of water from the little cooler I kept here.

“Thanks.”

“Hey, no problem. You’re helping me.”

We each sipped on the water, and she turned to me.

“So, you’re a cattle farmer?”

“Rancher. I usually sell these bad boys off for me, but there’s a couple I do keep for milk.”

She nodded. “I’m surprised. You’re a billionaire, and yet here you are, taking care of cows like it’s nothing. I thought that maybe ... you’d just sit on your ass or something.”

God, Tina had billionaires pegged all wrong.

I laughed, holding the water tightly. “Unlike some of those armchair billionaires, I’ve always made sure that I was out doing something. My father he ... he instilled in us at a very young age that hard work is worth it and that if you want a good life, you have to work hard and don’t rely on others. This farm is self-sufficient, and unlike David, I learned that lesson at a young age. I’ve been doing the farming things for years, and this is but one of the many ventures I have out here.”

I had the land; I just made sure to use it.

She nodded. “What else do you do out here, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Oh, I don’t mind at all! I do some dairy farming, but I’ve also got some sheep that I shear, alpacas, and some vegetable and wheat farming. The estate that you’ve seen is only a small part of the entire property. Father gave this to me because he knew that out of all the brothers, I’d take care of it the most. The guy made his money in two areas: stocks and farming. I took the farming, and Glenn handled the stocks,” I explained.

“Wow, that’s impressive.”

“Of course. Glenn’s a good man. Hates the rural life, but a damn good man.”

I respected Glenn for everything he did. He took care of a part of the estate that others wouldn't dare touch. So I told her a little more about it, and Tina listened.

“That’s so cool. I admire that a lot about Glenn, so ... thanks for telling me,” she said.

“Hey, no problem. I’m glad that you enjoy all of my dumb little stories.”

I could tell she was impressed, even if it was a little bit. After that, she talked to me for a lot longer, and we spent hours discussing the business.

Then, when she looked at her watch, she stopped. “Shit! I have to get back to the office.”

“Hey, I’ll pay for your time. You’ve done a lot for me,” I admitted.

The blush on her face was too darn cute.

“Thanks, Caleb. I’m sorry for keeping you so late,” she said.

“Hey, it’s been a pleasure. I’ll drive you back.”

When we started to head on back, she got out, grabbed her bag, and said goodbye. As she left, I watched her hips move, and I knew from the way she stuck around that she was having a damn good time.

A part of me wanted to freeze time and spend as much as possible with her. I wanted to spend all my days with her and enjoy it. But I kind of wondered what she thought about me.

Tina was different, and when I looked at her, I didn't see David's ex, but instead, a beautiful woman.

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Chapter 6: Tina

I couldn't believe I spent over three hours at Caleb's place, talking about animals and having fantastic conversations.

He was ... not what I expected. I thought he'd be a total dick, but he's not. And he had a whole ass farm, too! So I wanted to spend more time over there with him.

The next day, I called him, and after two rings, he spoke.

"Hey there, Tina," he said.

"Hey! So, I wanted to ask you if you wanted me to come in and check up on the cows on top of the stuff with Blaze."

"Sure thing. And if you could add some more time, that'd be great. I'm about to start fattening them up, and I want to make sure that every cow is nice and healthy.

I agreed to it, mainly because Caleb was a great client, but also, I kind of liked him. Maybe it was the time we spent together talking about some of the different cows, but he wasn't that bad to be around, either.

I'd be lying if I said that I didn't like the time that we'd shared.

Blaze was soon able to move around, but then, his cows needed some medical attention. He wanted to make sure they were ready for sale and that their meat was of the highest quality. Seeing how Caleb took care of the cows was different from the guy that I expected.

I thought Caleb just cared about the money, but with every interaction he had with those cows, it was like ... he was a different person. I didn't mind it.

Still, when we spent time together, I enjoyed it. After the third checkup, before it was time to sell, Caleb took a deep breath, stretching his hands.

"Thanks for this, Tina," he said.

"Hey, you're paying me. So, in a way, it's on you," I told him.

"Nah, it's really all thanks to you. You've been helping me with the horse and the cows. I mean, you are pretty cute, but you've got a great heart. If you ever thought of getting into farming, this is the way to do it," he said.

I nodded. Sure, it was nice, but I didn't think I'd be fitting for that.

"I see," I replied.

Caleb grabbed some feed and put it out for them. He stretched his body, sighing. "Would be nice if my helpers showed up soon."

“You don’t have anyone helping right now?”

“Until it’s time for them to be fed, nah. The cows are good, though. I can do it mostly myself,” he explained.

I looked around. That’s one thing that surprised me. Caleb had this whole farm all to himself, and, well, I always thought he had a gaggle of people—he could afford it.

“I’m surprised there aren’t others.”

“I do have some come in to feed and milk the cows, but a lot of this is all on me.”

“Why is that? If you don’t mind me asking.”

He laughed. “Simple. I’m a one-man army. I love doing things on my own. And well, given how much David and Glenn helped our father, and myself being the only one that stepped up, even a little bit, I’m sure that played a part in it too.”

Wait, Glenn and David didn’t? Granted, I never saw the guy on the farm, but holy shit.

“Wait, you’re telling me that David never helped out?” I leaned forward, invested in all of this.

Caleb laughed, grabbing another bag of feed and putting it out. “You’re only interested when I bring up David, aren’t you?”

I blushed, tensing up as I closed my bag. That was so not true. “No, I just ... you mention him a lot, so I have to know.”

Caleb grabbed another bale of hay and put it in one of the stalls. “Well, that’s the truth of it. Dad and I built this place together. We’ve been the main guys behind, well, everything. Dad and I built this farm from the ground up, really. Glenn was always a numbers dude, and he helped dad with the stocks. It’s thanks to his ass that we have the farm, so I can’t hate the guy.”

That kind of made sense.

“Yeah, these farms aren’t cheap.”

“Oh, you’re telling me. But my dad had a great meat business, and we sold off a chunk of it. Between that and stocks, we’ve created some amazing businesses. But David, he ... he’s an asshole,” Caleb said.

I busted out laughing at those words. I continued to laugh, unable to form words.

“You find that funny?”

“Yes, yes, I do. David *is* an asshole, but hearing it straight from your mouth is not what I thought.”

He adjusted his cowboy hat and then nodded.

“Yeah, well, even as a little kid, David wanted nothing to do with any of the farmwork. He’d lie to Dad to get out of it. Sometimes, he’d even lie to me,” he explained.

“Damn,” I told him.

He nodded. “Yup. David was always the black sheep of the family, which is why after he screwed up his life, I couldn’t

feel that bad about it.”

Hearing Caleb talking about his brother like this, revealing the truth in such a transparent manner, was ... relieving.

“Well, I’m glad that I’m not the only one who dislikes the guy.”

“Oh, trust me, the feeling is mutual there, Tina.”

Talking to him felt super refreshing. Maybe that was why Caleb and I got along so well. But, instead of being from two different worlds like David and me, Caleb was ... different, like he understood what was going on and wanted what was best for everyone.

We spent more time together, where Caleb bore all, telling me all about how David screwed them both over. He told me stories about how David would skimp out on work, other stories about how David would pick on him, and how Glenn hated him.

“Oh, most of us hate him. Glenn refuses to speak to him, which is why we brushed him fucking off to Aruba,” I said.

“I don’t blame you,” I replied.

Over the next couple of weeks, he’d tell me story after story, and each time, I’d listen. Caleb believed in hard work and dedication. The guy didn’t fuck around like David did.

He was his own person, and that’s something I admired more than I expected.

After a little bit, and as the cows got ready to be sold, I sat down with Caleb and talked about life. He then stood up, looked around, and grabbed something from his desk.

“What are you doing?” I inquired.

He suddenly grinned. “I got this the other day. Thought maybe you’d like to go.”

Over the last couple of weeks, we’d been getting pretty close. But I never thought he’d make any moves. Caleb was a gentleman, totally friendly, and after I refused a date from him for the third time, he just about gave up. But then he placed something on my lap.

I looked it over, reading the contents. “It’s a ... barn dance?”

“Yeah, you ever been to one of these?”

I shook my head. “Nope. I’ve always wanted to go, but ... never had a date.”

“Well, if you want a date, I’m looking for one,” he said, grinning.

I paused, looking to see if Caleb was fucking with me. His expression stayed serious.

“You’re not fucking with me, right?”

“I’m sure as hell not. I wanted you to come out with me,” he said.

I nodded. So, he wanted to go on a date. Well, maybe this wasn’t a date in his eyes.

“You’re sure about this?”

“I sure am,” he said.

I took the invitation and pocketed it, nodding. “Fine, let’s do it. We can go ... together.”

The smile on his face warmed my heart. Even though I wanted to hate Caleb, when I spent time with him, learning about who he was and what he wanted, I wanted nothing more than to embrace all of this.

“Then let’s do it,” I said.

“Great! If you want to meet here, we can. Otherwise, I’ll pick you up Friday.”

We exchanged information, and Caleb agreed to pick me up from the clinic this Friday. Of course, I didn’t expect him to actually show up, but I had a good feeling about everything.

Still, when I left his place that night, there was a little flutter in my heart, and for the first time in a long time, I felt excited about a date, even though I never thought in a million years I’d be with another Branson boy ever again.

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Chapter 7: Caleb

After Tina left, I sighed with relief. It was ... the first time I'd asked her out like this, and I was happy to hear her say yes.

I expected her to outright say no, but she didn't, which surprised me even more. However, when Friday came around, I looked at the address, and then I drove out to see her.

I thought their clinic was further away, but it was only about five minutes. When I pulled up, it looked like the lights were still on. I figured that she would be working kind of late. When I walked inside, a brunette with little bits of gray in her hair looked up.

“Oh, how may I help you?”

“Hey, so I'm Caleb. I'm here for Tina and—”

The grin on her face told me everything. Shit, so she knew who I was.

“Oh ... you're that guy. She told me she had a date tonight, but I didn't expect it to be with Caleb Branson. Well, I'll tell

her that you're here. She is finishing up with a dog that came in about thirty minutes ago, and then she's all yours."

I waved in agreement, sitting there and flipping through some magazines while I waited for her. After about twenty minutes, Tina emerged, wearing a blue polka-dotted dress. She blushed when I looked at her, and I smiled.

"There you are. I've been expecting you," I purred.

She smiled, and I saw the little glimmer of excitement in her eyes. She was...so perfect in her own way. She stepped forward, taking my hand as she looked into my eyes.

"Sorry, I had a dog come in last minute. I tried to keep my Friday open, but—"

"Hey, it's not a problem at all."

We took one another's hands, the little shocks of energy slipping through my body. Then, after a little bit, we got in the car and started driving down to where the dance was.

When we pulled up, there was a barn lit up and little fairy lights that decorated the outer façade, sparkling as we went over to it. As we got to the entrance, I noticed Tina being a little bit off.

"Something the matter?"

"No, it's ... I'm excited. That's all," she admitted.

I laughed. "Well, I am too. And don't worry about what anyone says. I'm just happy to be here with you."

The doors opened up, and there were people inside already dancing. I grabbed Tina's hand, leading her to the dance floor. A couple of people were doing a typical polka dance, and I held her hands, grinning.

“Ready to dance?”

“I've never done this before.”

I took her hands, held them tight, and looked at her with a smile. “Then allow me to lead the way, princess.”

We danced as the twang of a banjo resonated in the distance, and music allowed us to move to the beat. It'd been a while since I did this, but every single moment with Tina was like a whole different world for me.

“She laughed as I twirled her around, grabbing my hands as she moved her foot forward as I moved my own back. Together, we danced the night away, enjoying one another's presence.

I looked at the people who were nearby. A couple of them were watching us, and a few of them pointed out that Tina was the town veterinarian, and I, of course, was that eccentric country billionaire that people knew.

“They're staring,” she whispered.

I leaned in, purring against her ear.

“Let them watch. Let them see that I'm happy.” I continued to move and dance with her, and the stares soon became more commonplace.

Good, let them watch. This was ... the first time I'd done something like that in a while.

As we finished that number, I brought Tina to the bar, grabbing two beers. After that, we sat together, watching some other people dance.

"That was super fun," she admitted.

"Really?"

"Yeah. I'm serious. I'm ... I'm happy I came out. I thought about saying no, Caleb, but you're way more fun than even I expected," she told me.

I grinned when I heard this. "Good. See, I'm the refreshing change you need."

She grinned, moving towards me and hugging me. She rested her hand against my shoulder.

"Not really, I'm glad that I ... I got to come out here with you."

Some more people started to watch us. To my surprise, she didn't move a muscle.

"You're staying here," I pointed out.

"Yeah, because I want to be with you, Caleb. If people talk about this tomorrow, then we'll let them talk. But, for now, I'm happy," she admitted.

I smiled softly and reached out, touching her soft hair. She didn't flinch but instead moved towards the touch.

God, Tina was adorable. It was rare for me to be even this intimate with most people, but when I looked at Tina and how she acted around me, it made me want to express intimacy with her in ways I knew how.

I wanted her, and I knew that, even if she was nervous, she wanted me.

The people cleared the floor, and then we got up, heading back toward the floor once again. Again, our bodies moved as one, and our hearts were entertained together. As we continued to move around, enjoying the mere presence of one another, I pushed my body near hers.

Suddenly, the music changed. The country music used for square dancing and polka was replaced with a smooth ballad. All the other dancers were now moving slowly, holding onto one another in an intimate pose.

I looked at Tina, and she nodded.

“Go right ahead,” she said.

I grabbed her hands and then placed them on my shoulders. Next, I grabbed her waist, and we moved slowly as they played a rockabilly ballad for the audience.

We shared every move. Every touch we shared together, every movement of our bodies, was ... perfect, to say the least.

She pulled me close, hugged me, and refused to let me go. I sighed into the touch, enjoying her presence as we stayed together.

The sheer movement of our hearts and minds, the desire that was there between our bodies—it was ... all so damn perfect that I wanted to just enjoy the ride and share this moment.

We continued to hold on to one another, sharing the thrill of our warm bodies. Finally, I leaned in close, looking into her eyes, and then I did it.

I wasn't sure what prompted me to do this. Maybe it was my desire to have her, or maybe ... maybe it was the fact that she was right here with me, enjoying every moment we could.

But as I covered my lips with hers, a moment of tenseness followed, but her lips kissed me back. We kissed softly, enjoying one another's touch.

I expected her to pull away after the first brush, but then, she deepened the kiss, staying there for what felt like forever.

I didn't want to leave. The touch of her lips, the feeling of her body against mine, and the enjoyment this filled me with was ... relieving. Deep down, it was everything I could ever want from another person—that much I was sure of.

After a little bit, she moved back, looking at me for a brief flash of a moment before she smiled. “I had a great time tonight.”

“I did too.”

The barn dance continued, and we held one another's hands, both of us happy to be near each other, and the innate desire increased between us.

Chapter 8: Tina

After we finished dancing for the night, people began leaving the barn. Still, the whole time I thought about one thing.

The kiss we shared. I hated to admit it, but I liked it. After the majority of the people left, I looked at Caleb, and then I did the unexpected.

I kissed him again.

His soft lips mingled with my own. We stayed like that, sharing another sweet kiss, before I pulled away.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Just enjoying what I got to experience with you tonight,” I told him.

We kissed once more, and there was a desire within me. Caleb was a true gentleman, and I wanted to savor this moment. After a bit, he moved back, smiling.

“Well, want to take this somewhere a little more private?” he asked.

I nodded, even though I was never the type to do this. I tensed up when David kissed me back in the day, and most dates never got this far. But the anticipation rose as he took my hand, bringing me back to the car and driving back to his place.

I wanted him, and I knew that he wanted me as well.

After a little bit, we got inside, but then he brought me somewhere else.

It was a barn. We went inside, and as the doors closed, our lips were on each other again. He felt so soft and wet, like candy, and as he kissed me, I felt that urge within me begin to grow.

He started pushing his tongue against mine, and I eagerly accepted, moaning softly as I enjoyed the touch. Every second spent with him was a little bit of heaven, especially with how his body felt against my own and that little hint of desire that started growing between us.

With that raw need and desire for each other, it was clear that with every moment we shared together, we could feel the anticipation growing between us.

He pushed me down onto a bale of hay nearby, and I landed with a soft thud. His hands started to explore my body, enjoying the touch of my skin.

I shivered as I felt his hands loom against the tip of my dress, and I blushed as his hands touched my breasts ever so slightly with his soft hands. He was ... astounding. The way he touched me and the fact that I was at his mercy felt strangely ... nice.

His hands snaked under my dress, tugging on the edge of it. I tensed slightly as he pushed the dress upwards, and I gasped as his hands reached out, caressing my breasts.

It felt good, but ... then I remembered it.

The reason I hadn't seen anyone since that incident back in high school.

My eyes widened, and Caleb stopped and looked at me with concern. "Everything okay there, hun? You look a little spooked."

"No, I'm ... I'm fine," I lied.

I sure as shit wasn't fine, but there was no way I was going to tell him the truth right now.

"All right, but if there's something you don't want, just holler," he said.

I nodded, and then he reached up and pushed my dress upward until he got to my bra. He teased me from the outside, and I let out soft little gasps. Next, he pulled the garment downward, teasing the tips of my nipples with his hands and tongue.

Holy fuck, that felt good. I moaned softly, enjoying the touch this man provided. My anxiety lessened, and I gasped

softly, moaning as he continued to pinch my nipples, enjoying the soft moans that escaped me.

His hands reached out, tweaking my nipples ever so slightly, and then he moved his hands to the side of them, and then he pushed his tongue towards the sides of it, licking them slightly.

I gasped, enjoying everything he did. But then, as his hands snaked downward, skirting against my panties.

My eyes widened. “Wait!”

He stopped with his hand against the waistband of my panties. He looked at me with confusion as I stared at him. “Something the matter?”

I looked at him, attempting to figure out how to tell him how I felt. What the fuck do I say? That I remembered what his brother did to me, and it made me scared of the idea of sex?

I looked into his eyes as he cocked his head and sighed. “It’s not you. I’m sorry about this.”

I moved back, the atmosphere tense, and I sat there, wrapping my arms around myself. Why was I so nervous about his? I mean, shit, I wanted this, right?

Caleb sat here, looking at me with concern. “Something the matter?”

I nodded. “I’m sorry for getting upset, Caleb. It’s just ... I haven’t ever ... done it before.”

It was probably a little pathetic that I was a virgin, but he nodded.

“Shit, I didn’t know.”

“I’m sorry. But ... it’s not just that,” I said.

He looked at me with a slight concern. “What else is it, then? If you don’t mind me asking.”

How the fuck did I put this nicely? It was not like I was used to talking about this with him. And well, I thought I’d be over it, considering that it was so long ago.

But then, I sighed. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but I tensed up because it reminded me ...”

“Reminded you of what?”

I bit my lip, trying to figure out how to approach this. How did you put something like this nicely? Scream it out loud and hope to God that he accepts my words? Or just lie?

I couldn’t lie to him, not after all he’s done for me. So, with a deep breath, I sighed, looking at Caleb as I told the truth, and told him about how I really felt.

“It’s because ... it reminded me of him. Of David.”

Chapter 9: Caleb

Wait, did she really bring up David at a time like this?

I pulled back, looking her dead in the eyes as she said this.

“Wait, you’re not serious, right?”

“I’m sorry, Caleb. I’ve just ... I haven’t really been intimate with anyone since him, and I’ve struggled to overcome the problems that I’ve had in the past with him.”

I pursed my lips, nodding in agreement. “I see.”

I thought that Tina was different and would finally overcome the trauma, but whatever David did to her messed her up. I slunk back, sitting on the hay bales, sighing. I put my head in my hands, rubbing my temples as I tried to figure out what to say.

“You’re not mad at me ... right?” she said.

I shrugged. “I don’t know how to feel right now, Tina. I thought you got over him forever ago.”

“Well, sorry for not getting over the one guy that broke my heart,” she snapped.

I tensed. I wanted her to get over this.

“I just thought, given that happened a decade ago, you’d get over it. That’s all.”

She tensed as she looked at me. “It’s not like I can just turn off how I feel, and the fact that you think I can is kind of fucked, not going to lie.”

I didn’t want her to feel uncomfortable. It just bothered me that she saw things that way. I wanted Tina to get over her past so we could have a normal relationship.

Clearly, I was asking for way too much crap, and even just mentioning that moving back was a stupid idea. “Sorry.”

Tina sighed. “I don’t hate you, Caleb. I really don’t. In fact, I had a wonderful time tonight. I just ... I need to take some time and get over this, you know,” she said.

“Right, I get it. You’re not comfy with the idea of us yet,” I told her.

“That’s not it! Well ... maybe it is, but intimacy like that is a huge step. It’d be my first time, too,” she explained.

She never had sex with David? I was surprised, that was for sure. I thought she did all of that and had other boyfriends before. Maybe I had her pegged all wrong.

“I see. I’m not going to force it. We should just ... get you home,” I told her.

We got back to the car, and the tension between us made things super awkward. I didn't know what to say, and it was clear from the way Tina reacted that she was still at a loss for words, too.

We got back to her office, and when she got out, we looked at one another for a brief moment.

"I had a good night tonight," I told her.

"I did too. I'll see you around," she said.

She got out, and I could sense she was pissed about what had transpired.

The truth was that I was upset, too.

I thought she wanted this. I thought this was what Tina wanted. But I guess not. I guess she thought that ... we would take things slower than before.

As she walked away, I thought about telling her the truth about my feelings and how I felt about her, but I couldn't. So, I held back, and I hoped that maybe, just maybe, after it was all said and done, we could discuss this like civilized people.

And maybe ... I didn't know. Continue this.

I half expected Tina to just stop showing up at the farm. But a week later, I saw a car pull up to the parking lot.

"I'll be damned," I said.

It was Tina. After she asked for the gate to open up, she drove up, and when she got out, a slight feeling in my heart

became more prominent—the flutter of anticipation and the worry that I had messed everything up.

She walked to the door, knocking, and after a second, I got up to open it. We locked eyes, and my mouth was dry as I tried to figure out what to say to her.

“I’m sorry, Tina. I was just—”

“I’m here to check on the horses.”

I nodded. “Very well.”

I followed her out, showing her the new stables. The entire time, there was an odd tension there, and when she looked at each of the horses, checking them as she went about her duties, I stood there, trying to figure out what to say.

Where does one begin with this sort of thing? How did you bridge the gap in an awkward relationship? And, well, where were we now? I stood there, and she turned to look at me as she finished.

“Good news! The horses look nice and healthy.”

“That’s good.”

She walked past me, our hands brushing. She stopped, tensing slightly as she looked at me.

As we stared at one another, the awkward atmosphere was back, and I took a deep breath. “Tina ... if you don’t mind, I’d like to talk about what happened last week.”

I half-expected her to say no and keep things as they were.

But then she nodded. “I think we should talk about that, too.”

I felt terrible that I got so mad at her, but I thought that was what she wanted. The signs were all there, making me wonder if I had done anything wrong.

We finished with the duties, checking the last of the animals before we sat outside, neither of us saying a word. Then she took a deep breath.

“I’m sorry for acting that way, Caleb. It’s just ... when you kissed me like that and touched me, I got reminded of back then,” she said.

“Want to talk about it?”

Tina tensed up, putting her hand through her hair. “Kind of. Well, it’s kind of because of David. I hate to bring him up, but what he did was uncalled for. And it’s kind of the first experience I’ve had. And it’s partially why I haven’t been able to date others.”

“I see.”

She took a moment to collect her thoughts. I touched her hand, grasping it slightly. Even though these feelings probably sucked to talk about, I wanted to ensure that she was okay. I needed to convey to her that I cared, even though I knew others didn’t.

That bastard. I hated David for a while and was so glad he was gone, but I was worried about Tina. She took a moment to get her bearings together, then spoke.

“The truth was, David was the first guy I got super intimate with. He tried to ... have sex on one of our dates. I wasn’t ready, and he tried to force it, but then I kicked him off. We had a fight, and he called me terrible names. Shortly after that, he was sleeping with one of the cheerleaders. Since then, I’ve been worried that if I move too fast, I’m making a huge mistake,” she said.

That bastard. I knew he was scum, but I didn’t think he’d go that far.

“Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry,” I said.

Tina shook her head. “No, it’s my fault for not getting over it. You’re the first guy who’s treated me with respect, and I was kind of an asshole to you. I’m really sorry about that. You’re an amazing man, Caleb, and I don’t want to lose what we have because of my stupid faux pas.”

“It’s not stupid. You were hurt by someone, and you don’t know how to cope with those feelings. Trust me, I fully understand why you’d react the way you did,” I said.

I got it. I knew I couldn’t magically make all the bad things disappear, but being able to at least help was ... the least I could do.

“Thanks for understanding, Caleb. I’m sorry for ... acting like an idiot back then, but it just surprised me that someone actually cared. I knew you were better than the others and that you cared so much, but I’m just ... I’m so happy to have you, and I don’t want to lose this. So, if ... if you understand me taking things slow, then I’d appreciate that,” she explained.

I could take things slow. It's not like we had to rush into anything.

"That's totally fine. If you want a slow, steady relationship, I'm right here, ready to help," I told her. I wanted this, and I'd stop at nothing to ensure this was good for all of us.

She smiled, grateful for the words that I uttered.

"Thank you for that. I'm really glad that you understand my feelings and how I feel," she said.

"Course I do. You've been really stressed about things, and I understand feeling the way that you do." But I didn't want her to think she was alone in her feelings, either.

I took her hands, holding them. "I like you a lot, Tina, but I also understand that if we have to take things a bit slower, I'm fine with waiting."

She grinned. "I'm glad that you're understanding. When I tried to date in the past, most guys didn't get it. They were too busy asking when I'd be comfortable dating someone. They never respected how I felt, but when I talk to you, I feel like you care. So, thanks."

"You're welcome."

She smiled, holding my hands once again. The soft touch between us sent shivers through my body.

"If you want, we can take things ... a little slower, if that's okay. But I still want to spend time together and go on dates."

"We can certainly do that," I replied.

She got up, telling me she had to see another patient.

As she left, I rushed towards the front door, holding it open.
“You’re free to go out this Friday, right?”

“Yes, I’d love that,” she replied.

If needed, I’d take things slow. I didn’t want to lose her.

As she left, I spoke again. “Can I ... can I take you for a ride? Just around this place? I figured it’d be a good way to salvage things.”

The farm was the perfect place to talk, and maybe she would finally open up about the idea of us being together.

She nodded. “Sure, Caleb, I’d love that.”

I grinned. “Then I’ll see you here this Friday then!”

She walked off, waving goodbye, and I felt my heart grow twice in size. A warm, fuzzy feeling enveloped me. I didn’t want to lose her, and I’d make sure I did everything to make Tina smile.

That mattered to me—making her smile and feel good about everything and anything.

Chapter 9: Tina

I still felt a little nervous, even though I could see Caleb had honest eyes. I didn't want him to think I disliked him, though.

The truth was, I wanted to do it that night. I wanted to have sex. But I was worried about ... how things might go.

Caleb would be my first if we did go that way. That was ... a little scary, but maybe my doubts and bullshit were holding me back.

Oh well, the only way to find out would be to see him this Friday and hope for the best.

Every day, Caleb sent me sweet little messages. They ranged from a simple "have a good day" to "I can't wait to see you!" I smiled to myself, thinking about each one. He did care in his own unique sort of way.

I liked that a lot about Caleb. It wasn't every day you met someone who gave enough of a crap about you that they wanted to send you little love notes and messages. It made my

heart feel warm and happy, and I enjoyed each as they came around.

Friday soon approached. I took off from the vet's office after noon. I went over to Caleb's place; the gate opened for me. I smiled. He was ready to see me.

I pulled up to the familiar mansion, and when I got out, I saw two horses next to the front door. That was odd. Then again, this was a farm.

As I walked out, Caleb stepped out from the doorway, grinning. "There you are!"

"Yep, sorry, I had a couple of pieces of paperwork to fill out. I hope I'm not late."

"Nope, you're just in time. I got these two out for us today," he said.

They were beautiful. Two wild stallions that looked ready to ride wherever it was that we were going.

"Those look pretty. Is Blaze not coming with us?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"Nah, Blaze needs the rest. He helped me earlier with the cows. Come on. These two are my next-best horses. Meet Clover and Iris." He gestured to the horses as he uttered their names.

I took Clover, a thoroughbred mare with little gray and black markings. She was small, but not like a pony, more like

a horse made for my petite frame. As I got on, I grabbed the reins, holding onto them.

“You know how to ride?” he inquired.

I nodded. “Yep, I’m good at it. I’ve ridden in the past.”

It was also because my job required me to know how to control horses. Luckily, I’d never had to worry about one taking me down, but it was a valuable skill for various situations.

“Great! Follow me then.”

I grabbed the reins, motioning them, so the horse moved in the direction Caleb was going. Clover was brilliant. She knew where all the obstacles were, and she followed Caleb like it was nothing.

We crossed the expanse of land, and as we did so, I looked around, marveling at the sight in front of me. I didn’t even know that this was all here.

Sure, Caleb did have a ton of land, but I never thought I’d get to see everything like this. So we continued until he moved through a thicket. I followed him, and then he stopped.

“This is the edge of the property. I rarely come here, but I used to shoot guns in these woods. I loved shooting, and my father taught me everything I needed to know about it,” he explained.

“That’s cool. I’ve only ... shot at ranges,” I told him.

I shot guns and had a permit to carry them, but I never went hunting. It didn't sit right with me to do that.

“Yeah, I haven't shot out here in forever, but this place is great for paintball, too.”

“Oh, I love paintball!”

He grinned. “We should go out shooting sometime. I have a lot of paintball guns.”

He then moved to another part of the farm. There, a large expanse of land with cows of all kinds appeared. There were dairy cows with trademark white and black colors, and as we approached, they mooed at us.

Some cows were raised for meat. A cow near us looked really plump, and as we approached, Caleb laughed.

“Looks like he's about to be a nice little steak,” Caleb teased.

“I'm sure,” I replied, rolling my eyes slightly.

The jokes were a little corny, but Caleb tried his best.

We then went to another part of the pasture, where a couple of goats and alpacas sat.

“Woah, I didn't know this was there,” I told him.

“Yep, these are my pride and joy. I take care of both, and we supply milk to some of the local stores. The alpacas are great for textiles,” he said.

I looked around, marveling at the cute animals of all kinds. They were super well taken care of, and the entire time, I felt

like a kid in a candy store looking at all of these creatures.

“They look great!”

“Thanks! I’m happy to have animals that are being raised successfully.”

We went around other parts of the farm until we went up a small hill. As we approached the top, he turned to me, the excited grin still plastered on his face.

“I have something cool to show ya,” he said.

We approached the very top, and when I got there, I gasped.

It was the most beautiful overlook I’d ever seen. You could see the nearby forests, some other houses in this town, and a large expanse of farmland. I didn’t realize we were this high up until we arrived. There was a small willow tree nearby. Caleb got off his horse and laid down a black blanket there.

“Here, come take a seat,” he said.

I joined him on the blanket, blushing at the closeness of our bodies. It felt nice, though, not gonna lie. As we sat there, the tension increased, and then Caleb sighed.

“This place is beautiful,” he admitted.

“Sure is. It looks like you take care of this place well.”

“Sure do. This is my baby, my pride and joy, and I love being out here.”

I could see why. It was one of the prettiest places I’d ever seen, and just being here with Caleb next to him was nice. I

moved slightly closer, resting my head on his shoulder, and he chuckled, rubbing my temples.

“It’s great out here. It’s nice to come out here and just forget about all of your problems,” he explained.

This whole place had a lovely energy. It felt relaxing and alluring.

“I get that.”

“I’m glad that you do. I’ve never brought anyone out here before,” he admitted.

I turned towards him, noticing the slight blush on his face. Was he really this nervous? I didn’t expect that; not gonna lie.

“I’m glad we can share this together then,” I said.

“Agreed. You know, you’re kind of the first person I’ve shown all this to. Nobody cares that I enjoy farm work usually. I’ve built most of this ranch on my own. Sure, I hired help, but a lot of this is run by me,” he explained.

I could see that. The cows, the horses, and the other animals looked like they weren’t raised just for profit but were labors of love.

“That’s impressive, though.”

“I know. My father ... when he left me with this place to retire, he told me I could do whatever I wanted with it. I was left with a legacy, and I can only hope that I am able to carry on with this legacy in the way that he wanted it,” he said.

A legacy. This whole place certainly felt like the start of a legacy.

“I think you’re doing a good job,” I admitted.

He blushed, smiling.

“Thanks. I don’t hear that all too often. My father ... he just wants this place taken care of, and he rarely cares about whatever happens here. It sucks, but it’s the way that it is. I grew up listening to him, getting my ass kicked by everything that needed to be done, only to build this for myself. Sometimes I look back, though, and go ‘damn’ at the way things are. I made this possible, and I’m still ... still reeling about that to this day,” he admitted.

I smiled. “I know. You’re pretty amazing. I’m surprised that you’ve done all of this yourself.”

“It hasn’t been easy. And it also doesn’t help that lots of people look at me funny, too,” he said.

Look at him funny, but why? He was a beautiful, incredibly muscular man, and his dedication to his job was so awe-inspiring that it made me almost jealous.

“Why?”

He looked around, trying to figure out the right words. The sun began to set over the horizon, and he sighed.

“Because Tina, it’s mostly just ... people are scared of how I look. They think I’m some kind of bad guy, but I just want people to be happy. A lot are intimidated by me, and there is

another part of me that is worried that I'm judged based on my brother's actions," he explained.

"Why would they do that?"

"Simple, they know my brother is a dick, and they know Glenn just up and left everyone, so I'm the odd man out. I have my life kind of together, building this land for others. It's weird to them, you know?"

I didn't get that, but it did have to do with how people regarded him and how he looked at measurements of success.

"Well, I think you're an amazing man, Caleb."

"Really?"

I nodded. "I'm serious. I really like you a lot, and ... you're a pretty inspiring guy. I wish I could build half of what you have, and I wish I could turn my vet practice into something successful like this."

My fear of failure kept me going, but I was also worried about how others perceived me.

"I figured. Well, you're doing great, Tina. I mean it. I'm ... I'm happy I finally got to say this to someone. I've gone all this time hiding my feelings, holding back from others, but the truth is, I feel like I can tell you just about anything," he said.

I smiled. "I feel like I can too. Thanks, Caleb, for...taking another chance on me despite what happened earlier."

Caleb pulled me in closer, our warm bodies touching. Then he spoke. "You're welcome, Tina. I'm glad we can talk about

this together.”

Our bodies inched closer, my heart practically thumping out of my chest. Before I knew it, our lips were on one another’s, kissing softly.

The kiss was chaste and innocent, but the way Caleb deepened it was far from that. I groaned softly, enjoying everything that came from this. For a moment, we just sat there making out with one another. I couldn’t pull away, though.

I wanted him so badly, and I knew there wasn’t any chance of me getting away from these feelings anytime soon.

He moved me down on the blanket; my body splayed out along the sides of it. We continued to kiss, his divine tongue meeting mine, kissing me passionately. As he did so, his hands touched my body, skirting upwards in a soft, almost cautionary, manner.

However, as his hands stopped, I pulled back, looking at him.

“I want ... to continue what we did the other day. If that’s okay,” I said.

He looked too surprised for words, but then he nodded. “All right. I’ll take things slow to make sure that you feel good.”

Before I knew it, his lips moved along the sides of my neck, causing me to shiver with delight as I felt his soft lips brush against the sides, hovering downwards until I started to feel my whole body tense up.

His hands moved towards my shirt, pushing it upward until it got to where my chest was. I leaned forward to help him get it off.

I lay there in my bra, blushing as he stared at me with hungry eyes. I wanted this; he seemed just as excited about it as I was. His lips trailed downward, kissing the edge of my neck, causing me to shiver and moan softly. He nibbled on my collarbone, and as he kissed downward, touching the edges of my breast, he looked at me with expectant eyes.

I smiled.

“Continue,” I whispered, almost embarrassed by how those words sounded as they came out of my mouth.

His lips slowly moved towards the center of my breasts, and a skillful hand trailed to the back of my bra, popping it off without any problems.

I gasped at my nakedness, but then he moved downward, taking one of my nipples in his mouth, and his hands moved towards my other nipple, pinching and rubbing the tip of the bud. Next, he traced his fingers along the ribbed sides, letting them skate along the tip of my nipple.

Every touch felt like sparks were being sent through my body. I moaned in response, enjoying every single moment of this. Everything that he did was...divine. I craved it so badly, and every single touch was enough to drive me utterly crazy.

He pushed his lips against the tip of the bud, flicking his tongue over it. The chorus of moans that escaped me made me

lose my mind.

He pulled back, smiling as he rubbed the tip of it. “You good?”

I nodded. “Continue. Please.”

I didn’t know what came over me. Hell, I still struggled to figure out why I felt the way I did, but there was a raw desire for him—one that I couldn’t hold back. There weren’t any means to stop this now.

His hands moved downward, touching my taut stomach, moving down to where my pants were. I gulped, and he touched my fly, looking me in the eyes.

“You ready?”

Without another thought, I nodded. “Ready.”

Caleb wasn’t like David. David never asked me if I wanted this, but Caleb, with his soft words and sensual touch, had me losing my mind as he continued to push them downward, causing me to gasp as the cold air hit me.

“You good?” he inquired.

“Amazing,” I said in a breathy voice.

He slipped my pants off, the cool air hitting me.

As he grasped my panties, I could feel my body tense up. He stopped, but I shook my head.

“No, keep going. I want this,” I said.

It’d be my first. He would be my first. And I wanted it to be this way. Caleb slipped his hands under the waistband of my

panties, sliding them off with one fell swoop.

My face was as red as a tomato, probably the moment he did that. He stopped, taking in the sight, and the whole time, I felt the blush grow more and more.

“It doesn’t look ... bad, right?”

“Why would you say that? You look beautiful,” he purred.

He slipped a finger against my entrance, and as he did so, I shivered, moaning softly as I felt the first finger breach inside.

It was tight, but his fingers moved slowly, almost gracefully. I gasped as he pushed them upward, touching my sweet spot. I held onto the blanket, trying to keep my legs apart as he thrust a finger in with gentle, sweet moments.

The whole time, I felt like I was on cloud nine. I didn’t expect this to feel so good, but his touches were so sweet, and it didn’t feel like he was trying to force anything.

He added a second finger, pushing them inside, letting them rest against my folds, and then a third finger. The tip of the middle finger brushed against that bundle of nerves, causing me to let out a choked gasp, moaning in surprise.

“You good?”

“Amazing,” I finally said, suddenly feeling like I was losing my mind. He continued to do this, brushing the tip against there, and every time he brushed that bundle of nerves, I felt as if I was about to lose my shit.

After a second, he pulled back, looking me dead in the eyes.

I nodded. "I think ... I'm ready."

"All right," he said with a soft groan. He moved down, taking his pants off, and as he revealed his cock, my eyes moved down to it.

He was pretty big, but I knew I could handle it. He slipped inside me, thrusting softly, and when he was all the way in, he stopped.

I cried out slightly at the tightness, but as he adjusted, my body grew used to it.

"You okay?"

"Amazing, really."

He slowly moved in and out, and as he did so, I clutched onto him, moaning as he hit my sweet spot.

"Holy shit! This is ... nice." I could barely form words together. Whatever Caleb did to me was enough to drive me insane.

He continued with the thrusts, causing me to let out a series of garbled sounds. The whole time, I held on to him for dear life, moaning as he continued to push himself inside of me. The entire time, I could barely form words.

His thrusts were soft and slow, but they hit every fiber of my being. He sped up slightly, and I could feel the closeness as he did so.

"I'm ... I'm so close," I told him.

"Then let's come together," he said.

He angled his hips, and after a couple more thrusts, I tensed up and cried out slightly as I felt him inside.

He moved his body, filling me up completely, and as he did so, I could feel my entire being come undone at the mere motions of this man.

After a brief second, he pulled back, looking me dead in the eyes as he smiled.

“Pretty good, isn’t it?”

I nodded, barely able to form words. We lay there, cuddling for the rest of the night, and as he held me in his tight arms, I realized I had finally done it.

I overcame my past, and I could finally, after all this time, move on with my life and look forward to the future.

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Chapter 10: Caleb

I woke up early the next morning with Tina against me. Her soft breath tickled my hand, and I sighed with contentment as I felt her there.

This was the happiest I'd been in a long time. Finally, sharing this bond together under the night sky, cuddling up in each other's soft, warm bodies, was just ... perfect. I wouldn't have it any other way.

Her eyes slowly opened up, looking directly into my own. I gave her a small smile as I pulled her close. "How's your sleep, hun?"

"Amazing. Really, it was some of the best sleep I'd gotten. Thanks for that."

"I'm glad."

We didn't say a word for a bit, just cuddling and enjoying one another's soft embrace. I didn't say a word, but Tina turned to me, smirking.

“You know, I could go another round before we head back to the farm if you’d like,” she purred.

Pulling me close, our lips crashed into one another. I groaned, my cock hardening against her soft stomach.

I pulled back, grinning. “I thought you’d never ask.”

I spread her legs, making love to her again, hearing those soft moans and gasps as I took her once more. When we were done, I looked at my watch, noticing it was close to noon.

“Shit, do you have work today?” I asked.

She shook her head. “Nah, I’m on call, but the animals should be fine. We should head back, though, before it gets too late.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. The last thing I wanted was to be the man responsible for animals and their problems because of us spending the night together like this.

“Well yeah, we should go back,” I told her.

I grabbed her hand and went back towards the horses. Last night was amazing, almost mesmerizing. I never shared a part of my life like I did last night with Tina, and I’d do it again if I had a chance.

That was how much I enjoyed her, how much I wanted to be around her, and honestly ... I had it bad.

It was rare for me to feel this kind of connection with anyone. I never enjoyed a person like I enjoyed Tina, and I

wanted nothing more than to preserve these moments together, no matter what.

When we got on the horses, Tina pointed toward the farm. “Last one there is a rotten egg!”

“You’re on!”

We each grabbed the reins, both of us speeding down the pathway, laughing as we tried to one-up each other, moving as fast as we could with the reins in our hands.

The horses moved fast, and as we sped past some of the farmland, now teeming with cattle because of my assistants who brought them out, Tina looked over at the cows and grinned.

“They seem happy,” she said.

“They are. I’m glad I got to show you the whole farm.”

“Next time, we should go camping out there. Make a little fire and make food out there. Tell stories and stuff.”

“I’d love that.”

Most of the girls I dated or tried to date in the past weren’t into the outdoors, and usually, they weren’t all that interested in camping and the like. But when I talked to Tina, I felt like she truly did care.

That was what I enjoyed about her. She cared, and I loved that about her.

When we got closer to the farm, I noticed a couple of silhouettes nearby. What were those people doing there? I saw

a familiar black car as well, parked near Tina's car.

Wait, was that ... my father? What the hell was he doing there? We stopped near the fringe of the farm, and Tina pointed to the cars there.

“Do you know who they are? I hope they're not patients that found out I was here with you,” she said.

I sighed and looked forward. “Yeah, I know who they are. And this isn't looking good.”

We slowly made our way up to where the cars were, my anxiety rushing through my body. I had no clue what was going to happen or why my father, of all people, was here.

He knew better than to show up to the farm uninvited, though, so it pissed me off that he was even here.

I disembarked off the horse, heading to the two men in suits in front of me. One of them was my father, whom I was sure of; the other was a guy I didn't know, but he was here with my father, so that could only mean one thing.

Bad news.

When I approached, I looked at my father and the other guy in the suit.

“And who might you be?” I asked.

“Well, aren't you going to at least say hello to your own father first?” my dad said.

“What's there to discuss? This is the first time you've come to see me in years. What could you possibly want?” I asked

him.

My father looked at Tina, who stood there. “And who is this?”

“She’s a friend. My girlfriend,” I told him.

“Hmph, that won’t slide,” he said.

Tina looked at him, biting her lip. “I’m right here, you know.”

“Yes, but I’m the one in charge of this estate, and I make the ultimate decisions for my son,” my father said. He placed his hand on my shoulder, and I moved back.

“What the hell,” I said to him.

My father looked at Tina and then at me.

“I have a business matter to discuss with you. It’s imperative. And I’d only like *you* there if that’s okay.” He glared at Tina like she was some sinful creature or something.

“Fine,” she muttered.

I looked at her, smiling, and gave her a small kiss. “I’ll text you. I’m sure this meeting won’t be very long.”

“Alright,” Tina replied.

I didn’t know what to tell her. My dad never showed up uninvited like this, so whatever he needed to say had to be important.

At least, that was what he thought in his mind. I never understood my dad’s way of thinking. There wasn’t much that I could do.

Tina went back to her car and drove off.

As soon as she left, my dad scoffed. “Having relations with commoners like that. Didn’t you learn better than that?”

I looked at the man. His brown hair had long since started to gray, and he still had the mustache he always had since I was a kid. His tall frame was bulkier than before, hidden under his tweed suit.

Next to him was a blonde-haired guy around his age, except he still had some blonde in his hair. Or maybe that was the gray he tried to cover. He was smaller and wore a navy blue, almost black, suit as I approached him.

“You’ve still got our meeting room, correct? Come,” he said.

I followed him inside; he turned to me as he closed the door. “We have to talk, Caleb.”

“About what? You two have been so cryptic since you showed up at my property uninvited!” Seriously, did he realize just how rude this was?

“I’m here for a reason, Caleb, and I’d like to discuss this with you right now,” he stated.

I sat across from him, and then he took a deep breath.

“Caleb, I know you’ve spent all your time here on the farm, but I’d also like to discuss your future. The future involving children and the heirs to take over,” he said.

I looked at him, lowering my eyes. “What does this have to do with anything?”

“It has to do with what I’m about to say next. Caleb, you’re thirty. You need to start settling down and thinking about the future. You’re the only one of my children who isn’t married or expecting. Glenn’s about to have a child, and David, as frustrating as he can be, is now getting married to that girl who’s—”

“Oh, you mean that one who cheated on Tina back there? The one he just up and left the country for?”

My father’s gaze lowered as he looked at me. “I don’t condone nor criticize what he’s done. Nor do I care about what he did to someone else years ago. The point here is that you need to start focusing on your future, Caleb. You’ve built an amazing lifestyle here. It’s time for you to share it with someone.”

But I didn’t want to share it with anyone else besides Tina. So, what the hell was he trying to get at? “What are you saying, Dad?”

He coughed, and the guy in the suit extended his hand toward my own.

“I’m Leo Ferguson. Nice to meet you,” he said.

“Hello,” I said, my eyes sizing him up. What was the purpose of this?

“What I’m here for is a proposal, Caleb. Leo here has a daughter named Abby, and she’d be perfect for you. I know

you love taking care of the farm, and he tells me that she loves animals. But right now, I'd like for you two to maybe go on a date, see if it works out, and start focusing on your future," he said.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing from my father. He wanted me to date someone like that and pretend I wasn't just with someone.

"You've got to be shitting me," I said.

"I'm not. I'd like for you to meet Abby. She's a great girl and perfect for your needs, and—"

"Not interested. I don't want to date anyone right now," I said.

"Come on, Caleb, she's a great girl, and I've told her about the farm and—"

I banged my head on the table, my dark eyes narrowing toward them. "What part of 'I'm not interested' do you two not understand? I'm not going to meet her, and I'm not going to be with someone I'm not interested in. That's that."

My father turned to Leo, and then Leo cleared his throat.

"I figured you'd say this, Caleb. It's a shame, but I really wish you understood the current situation you're in," he said.

I looked at him and then at my father. What in the world were they planning?

"What do you mean?"

“What I mean is this, Caleb. You need to go on a date with her, or else, if you refuse to, I’m going to come in and take the farm away,” he added.

I looked at the man like he was insane. “Did you hit your head or something? I own this farm.”

My father grabbed a piece of paper, rolling it out. “Not according to this contract.”

I looked at the contents, realizing what the hell was going on. Where it said that I owned the farm, there was a minor condition that said that my father could take the farm away whenever he wanted to, and I wouldn’t have any say in it, provided he could give a legitimate reason for doing so.

“You wouldn’t—”

“Oh, but I will. This whole place will be taken away, especially if you refuse to listen to what I have to say. Now, what do you think of my offer? Do you think you could go on a date with Abby and work things out?” he asked.

I looked at him and then at Leo.

“And if things go south, you won’t push this on me, right?” I asked him.

“Nope, we just want you to see her. I’d love it if you did that,” Leo said.

“Well, if you don’t end up together, you have a month to get married, or else I’ll step in and take over,” he said.

He was insane! How could my father do this? I looked at him, struggling to figure out what to do about any of this. I was pissed, and there was nothing I could do right now.

“Fine.”

“What was that?”

“Fine, I’ll do it. I’ll go on one date. But only one date. If I don’t like it, you promise not to force anything on me,” I said.

My father cleared his throat, turning to Leo.

“That’s fine, right?”

Leo nodded.

“Very well. I’ll humor your words. Make your decision, but remember that your future relies on this,” he said.

They walked out, closing the door, and as I sat there, the anger flooded through me. How in the world could my dad do this after everything I’ve done for this damned place? I raised my fist, slamming the table with it.

“That son of a bitch!”

I didn’t want this. All I wanted was to be with Tina, but for now, there was nothing I could do. At least until I figured out a solution.

Chapter 11: Tina

After I pulled out of the driveway, I saw the suits following him inside.

I didn't know what was going on, but I felt terrible. Like I wanted to do something to help Caleb, but there was nothing I could do.

I continued to see Caleb's animals that following Monday. However, I noticed that Caleb wasn't himself. He seemed distant, even when I was out there with the cows.

"Hey, you want to come and help me hold them?" I asked.

"Sure," Caleb added.

He came over, holding the cow, allowing me to take his temperature using a rectal thermometer. When I pulled it out, I checked it.

"Perfect temperature," I said.

"I'm glad," Caleb said.

The lackadaisical energy made me question what happened the other day. I tried to ask Caleb about this, but I couldn't.

“Say, Caleb, is anything wrong?”

“Hmm? Oh, nothing. Don't worry about it.”

Okay, that told me something was very wrong.

“You're a shitty liar. You know that?”

Caleb turned to me, moving his hands to his pockets. “It's nothing, Tina. I'm just ... there's something we have to talk about, and I've been trying to figure out the best way to tell you.”

Something to tell me? What had him so worked up, however? He looked like he'd seen a ghost, and it was clear, judging from the way he reacted, that something had happened after I left the farm the other day.

“Want to talk about it?”

He shook his head. “No, it's fine.”

I tried to ask him more about this, but I couldn't. So, I continued to check on the animals, and then, at the end of the day, I went back inside. Caleb was in his office, and when he looked up at me, there was a look I had never seen before in his eyes.

Sadness.

Something had him really upset. I wanted to probe and ask, but I wasn't sure what he'd think about that.

“Say, Caleb, is there anything you want to talk about? You’ve been distant with me all day, and earlier, when I called you, you didn’t say anything. Is it about the animals?”

He tensed, holding the papers in his hands and looking at me. “No, it’s not that.”

I grimaced, sitting in one of the chairs in his office.

“Then tell me, what the hell is going on? You’ve been acting all weird and—”

“It’s about us.”

I stopped, looking forward and trying to discern what he meant by that. “About ... us?”

He nodded.

“What do you mean?”

He took a deep breath, his eyes roaming around.

I slammed my fist on the table, looking at him. “Tell me! I’m willing to listen. If there are problems that you’re dealing with, I can always help and—”

“It’s not that, Tina! It’s ... it’s about the relationship that we have. I think for right now, I’d like to have Sariyah come here and check on the animals,” he explained.

What the—he didn’t want me around?

I trembled, holding onto the desk and looking at him. “What do you mean? I thought you wanted me to take care of them because of my skills and—”

“Well, right now, I’d just prefer Sariyah, and your clinic is growing. You should handle those animals. Don’t worry about me,” he said.

“Then what about me coming over? Do you still ... want that?” I asked.

He didn’t say a word. That told me everything that I needed to know.

“I see. So that’s how you view me. I’ll be going then, and you can, I guess, when you’re ready, talk things out like an adult,” I said to him.

I didn’t look back. I refused to look back. I marched out of there, slamming the door behind me, trying to quell the anger that made me shake at the reaction to what I had heard.

Caleb didn’t want anything to do with me. I was nothing more than a means to an end. He didn’t ... want me at all. I thought he was different, and now I was stuck with this life and the revelation that I had given my virginity to a guy like him.

I went back to the car, gripping the steering wheel as I cried.

It isn’t that I was fired that bothered me. Money wasn’t as much of an option these days, thanks to Caleb and word of mouth.

No, what upset me was the relationship that we shared. He didn’t want anything to do with me, and that hurt.

Is that why he acted so strangely? He’d been acting weird since those two guys in suits showed up. I deduced that one of

them was his dad, but I don't know who the other was.

Was there a business scandal that happened? Did the company go under, and he didn't want to tell me that? The fact that he refused to give me answers pissed me off to no end.

"Ugh, why do you have to be so damn cryptic," I muttered to myself, trying to quell those aching thoughts that rampaged through me.

I didn't understand, and he didn't make it any easier for me, either. I was pissed as all hell, and the only thing I could do was move on with my life.

That was what I did. Two could play at that game if he didn't want to talk. The hours turned into days, and the days slowly turned into weeks. So, for about six weeks, I was on my own.

It was like old times. When I focused on my work and didn't care about what others did. Well, in this case, it was not caring about what some rich bastards did with themselves.

But, as I tried to ignore the feelings within, they only worsened. It pissed me off that Caleb acted that way and tossed me to the side like I was nothing.

Was that how he viewed me? Or was it just because of his job or something? Either way, I was on my own for the next few weeks.

I guess that was for the best, though. For the next couple of weeks, I focused on my other clients, who came in based on

word of mouth from Caleb's situation. Some of them had animals of all kinds, including goats and sheep.

I also cared for someone's ox that ended up having some kind of heart condition that the owner didn't know about, which was fun. Though, the whole time, I thought about Caleb, wondering what he was doing.

Was he happy with me? Or was he upset that I did something wrong? There were so many questions, and right now, every attempt at talking to him had ended up being nothing more. I didn't know what to do anymore or what to say.

However, I persevered. But I noticed after three weeks of this I was more tired than usual. Even just daily checkups had me practically falling asleep. When I returned to the office, I wanted to nap the second I entered.

Rebecca glanced at me and said, "Hey, you doing okay?"

"Yeah, I'm alright."

"Are you sure? You look exhausted."

"I'm fine. I've just been dealing with some kind of stomach bug, and it's made me super tired."

Over the last couple of weeks, I'd been going to the bathroom more often and vomiting everything I tried to eat. I thought it was a stomach bug, but when it started to happen more often, I wondered if something was wrong.

My receptionist got off her chair and looked at me. "You seem to be okay. But you look tired, and I heard you vomiting

in the bathroom the other day. You are sure you're okay?"

"I'm fine. Don't worry about it." Though, thinking about it didn't sit right with me.

"Well, if you're not sure, maybe take a pregnancy test. You might be pregnant."

I laughed. "I can't be pregnant. I haven't—"

I stopped. The realization of what happened dawned on me.

I did have sex with Caleb, and I wasn't on the pill. He didn't use a condom, either.

"Oh shit," I said to myself.

"I'm sure it's just a temporary thing. Sorry for spooking you about the whole pregnancy thing."

"No, it's fine. It's just ... I have to go."

Without another word, I raced to the door, opening and slamming it. I drove to the nearest pharmacy, grabbed a pregnancy test, and bought it. Afterward, I went to the bathroom, sat on the toilet, and opened the applicator.

I prayed it'd be negative. If it was positive ... no, I couldn't think about any of that. I grabbed the test, and after a moment, I pulled it out.

My eyes widened as I saw the plus sign in front of me.

"Shit!" I cried out.

I was pregnant. How far along was beyond me. I assumed a couple of weeks at least. As I held the test, my hands shook, and I tensed.

“Nobody needs to know about this,” I said.

Not even Caleb. If word got out that the child was his ... I’d be in deep shit. I knew that I’d be in deep shit.

The town loved to gossip. I couldn’t even tell my receptionist because I damn well knew that if she knew, they’d spill it to everyone.

That’s what pissed me the hell off. I couldn’t do anything without people knowing. If I even told a friend, it’d get spread everywhere.

That’s what worried me. If Caleb found out, I’d be in deep shit. He didn’t want a child with a lowly old doctor like me. He was a billionaire, and the guys there didn’t regard me highly the other day, so that told me everything.

I was screwed if word got out.

I hid the test in my bag, smiling to myself. “Just got to fake a smile and move on.”

I walked out, trying to pretend that everything was okay. I could hide a pregnant belly for a while. I was small, but there were ways to do so, right?

I walked back to the clinic.

Rebecca looked at me with wide eyes. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just got an emergency call.”

“I see. You’re not ... pregnant, right?”

I shook my head, scoffing. “Why would I be? You know that I’m single and that I don’t date. I’m dedicated to this

practice.”

That was the most well-rehearsed lie of my life, but it was enough to convince her.

“Alright, but if you need anything, let me know, okay?”

“I’m okay,” I said.

I looked at her and tried to play it off, smiling a fake smile, pretending it was all right. So that was what I did.

I deleted Caleb’s number from my phone, trying to pretend that he didn’t exist. He didn’t bother to contact me either, so I figured he didn’t want anything to do with me.

I guess that was the way shit happened, I suppose. Two people who were fated to be together ended up separating. Ain’t that some shit?

I continued to distance myself, keeping it this way. That way, I didn’t get hurt, and neither did Caleb.

In a way, it was best for both of us to live our separate lives and be in our own worlds. Nobody encroached on the others, and that alone made it worthwhile.

Chapter 12: Caleb

Not talking to Tina killed me. For the next few days, my father and Leo hyped me up, telling me that Abby would be in town at the end of the month. I talked to her a little bit, and she seemed nice over the phone.

She didn't say much but instead listened to me. So I figured I could at least get through this date and then go from there.

Telling Tina that I couldn't see her hurt me more than I thought. I missed going out and seeing her with the cows and horses. I missed having her around, checking on the animals for me.

Sariyah came over and checked on them until it was time to slaughter. She told me the animals were nice and healthy, and I wanted to be excited, but I wasn't.

I only thought about Tina and how much I missed her.

The day of our first date was nigh. I wanted to feel some inkling of excitement, but I couldn't. My dad made all the arrangements. We'd drive over to the next town, go to a fancy

restaurant there, and I'd get to know her. I looked in the mirror, smiling a fake smile as my thoughts muddled.

“Why the hell am I doing this?” I asked myself.

Was it for fame and fortune? Or to make sure my dad didn't get pissed off? Either way, it upset me knowing I told Tina everything I did.

It made me wonder if there was any way for me to overcome these lingering thoughts.

After a bit, I got in the car and drove to the hotel where Abby was supposedly staying. When I got up there, I saw her walk out, and immediately, my face fell.

Her pink kitten heels clicked against the pavement; her blonde hair was tied in a ponytail. She wore a pastel pink dress, which added to all the pink that was there.

She was cute, I suppose, but she didn't hold a candle to Tina.

She got to the car, slinging her purse to the floor. “There you are! I was wondering if you'd show up.”

“Hey, I wanted to make sure everything was good for you.”

“Well, I suppose this is all right. Dad said your father had everything arranged for tonight. I hope it's good.”

Her bored expression already bothered me. What was the point of coming out here if you didn't want to be here? I didn't say a word, instead driving to the restaurant. It was only

twenty minutes away, but it was the longest twenty minutes of my life.

Unlike the time with Tina, which flew by, being around Abby made time come to a screeching halt. It didn't help that Abby only talked about herself.

“So yeah, that was the story about the one time I partied at the top of this skyscraper in New York! God, I miss that place,” she said.

“It seems alright,” I said.

“You should move out there. Get rid of the farm and all of that. It's fun,” she said.

I pulled into the restaurant, looking at her. “I thought you liked being on the farm?”

“Well, I like that it makes money, but I don't do any of that farm work. That's not my thing.”

That was an immediate red flag. I didn't say a word, pursing my lips as I made my way inside.

“Well, maybe you can come out with me to the farm, and we can try it together,” I offered.

“No thanks. I don't like getting myself dirty,” I said.

I couldn't do this. There was no way in hell I could date someone like this.

We went inside and sat at one of the tables, and the whole time Abby talked about everything but things that genuinely interested me.

It was all parties this and meetings that, and she talked about some hot guys she boned at a premier party. I tried getting any sort of word in but was shut down.

“I mean, there’s some cool barn dances here. We could go to one of those and—”

“Eww, no. I’m not doing any of that. The fact that we’re even sitting here is so gross,” she replied, wiping her hands on her lap.

I looked at Abby, wondering if my father had told her anything about me. From the way she acted, I presumed not.

She was ... the exact opposite of the type of woman I wanted in life. A princess who didn’t even want to get dirty? Please, that was the last type of woman I desired.

But I had to keep it quiet. I didn’t ... want drama. So, I sat there at dinner, listening to Abby prattle on about everything, only to discover that ... my thoughts weren’t on her at all.

They were on Tina.

Abby tapped me on the shoulder, looking at me. “Hey, have you been listening?”

“Want the honest response? No, I haven’t been. I’ve been ... thinking about things.”

“What kinds of things?”

“Just the farm. I’ve been putting together some new pastures for the horses. And I plan to expand upon the cows and—”

“Oh, that stuff. Daddy told me that you’d give up the farm if you came with me. Wouldn’t you want to give that up?”

I looked at her, my eyes practically boggling out of their sockets.

What the hell? Did my dad really say that?

“Well, that’s not happening. I’m sorry, but the farm is my life. And I love it too much,” I said.

She scoffed. “I knew you’d be boring, but my daddy said that if I went on a date with you, I’d get a chance to marry into your family, and he said you guys were rich.”

I mean, we were rich, and I didn’t know what to say.

“I appreciate the thought, but I’m not interested in that.”

“Why not?”

Wasn’t it obvious? She was nothing more than a bitch! A stupid little asshole who only cared about herself. But I couldn’t say that out loud. The way she stared off into space and the boredom evident on her face told me everything.

She hated this, and she hated me as well.

There wasn’t anything I could do about that, though. I was ... doing my best, trying to keep it together, and trying to make things at least partially tolerable for everyone involved. And it was clear that Abby had no intention of wanting the same things that I did.

“Abby, my goal is to have this ranch. I want to continue to do this,” I said.

“So you’re telling me that if you wanted me to stay, I’d have to live in this shithole, right?”

“Well, yes, and—”

She laughed, holding the knife in her hand. My heart raced and uneasiness flooded my body.

“Please, that’s so cute. I can’t believe you actually think that I’m interested in something like that. I’d rather die than stick around and try to make a life in this place.” Her laugh echoed throughout the restaurant, and a few people looked at her.

“I see,” I said.

“You know, your dad must be painfully desperate to be asking me, of all people, to date you. I mean, it’s clear from the way you’ve been acting that you don’t want anything to do with me.”

Was it that obvious? My thoughts were filled with one person and one person only.

Tina. I wanted to see her again, to hold her in my arms, and to just ... tell her that everything would be all right.

I hated my dad for this, and I hated that this was ... happening this way. I turned towards the waiter, motioning for them to come over here.

“Yes?”

“I’d like the check, please,” I told her.

I looked at Abby, who shook her head.

“That’s fine. I definitely would’ve said this date was a disaster myself. I mean, look at you. You’re clearly looking for someone or something that isn’t me. Just ... just get it over with then,” she muttered.

I looked at Abby, seeing the downcast look in her eyes, and felt regret flood over me.

I felt bad that I led her on like this, but also ... I couldn’t keep doing this.

“I’m sorry, Abby, but I don’t want this either. I know that my father had these big plans for you, but I’m ... I’m not interested,” I told her.

“I see.”

We walked on out, and I turned to Abby. She was pretty, but she wasn’t Tina. I needed to see her once again, and I wanted to ... I wanted to talk to her one last time.

“I’ll drive you back to my place and—”

“It’s fine. I’ll call a limo,” she said.

I looked at Abby, who seemed completely unfazed.

“You’re not mad about me calling it off, right?”

“Why would I be? I don’t want this either, you know.”

In a way, I breathed a sigh of relief. Hearing that she didn’t want this either was... relieving for me. I didn’t have to worry about doing the wrong thing anymore.

“Okay, well, I hope you have a nice life then, Abby.”

“I’m sure it’ll be all right without you around and all.”

I looked at her, shaking my head. “You know, you’d be a great fit for my brother, David. He’s a dick, and you’re a dick, too, so it’d be good for both of you.”

She glanced up from her phone, shrugging. “Is he available? He probably is more interesting than you.”

I was a little offended, and I didn’t know what to say.

I scoffed. “You’re hopeless. I’m leaving.”

Without another word, I got back in my car and drove over to my place. I couldn’t believe that my father thought she was a good idea for me.

I hated this. I gripped the steering wheel and drove on in, but when I got there, I noticed another car there. Who was ... that? I looked, and my face fell, seeing it the moment I approached.

It was the last person in the world I wanted to see—the biggest asshole in our entire family.

It was David, and he sat there with a shit-eating grin plastered on his face. I wanted to punch the lights out of him, but I also had no clue what that son of a bitch was doing here. The only way to figure that out was to get out and find out.

I stopped the car and walked out. I saw him there, and as he grinned, I could feel the bad feeling course through my body.

I didn’t ... I didn’t know what to think or say other than to grimace in anger and glare at this son of a bitch, trying to hold my hands back from punching his lights out.

Chapter 13: Tina

Coping was hard, and I guess that was ... the best thing to do. So I went to the clinic, seeing the animals there, and I tried to hide my pregnancy. But there was no way I could go see Caleb right now.

Not after everything we did.

So, I focused on my work and tried my best to ignore the biting feelings within. I tried to ... I tried to keep it together, but I looked at my phone the entire time, hoping there was some kind of response from Caleb. Even if it was a little one, it would be enough for me to feel better about myself and quell the racing thoughts.

However, that started to be easier said than done. Sariyah was in charge of the animals on his farm, and she insisted that she would make sure that they were all taken care of, but about a week after the fact, I got a call from her.

I was finishing up with a couple of chickens and some cows from another couple in the area. Their chickens were having a

weird allergic reaction, which we deduced was from the feed. After I was done, I went to their bathroom and threw up again.

The exhaustion ate away at me like a festering wound, but I could not let this get in the way. I was the only doctor in town, so I had to keep it together, even if there was a part of me that wanted to just give up and die.

As I finished with the cows, giving them the bill and the payment info, my phone lit up. It was Sariyah.

“What the hell could she want?” Sariyah already agreed to see Caleb’s animals for me because of what happened, but I picked up anyway.

“Hey, Sariyah, how are things?”

“Oh, they’re good. Say, I have a small problem. My car broke down, and I can’t make it out to you guys. I was supposed to see Caleb’s animals today, but I don’t think that’ll be possible,” she said.

Shit. Of course, she was roping me into her bullshit.

“Isn’t there anyone else you could get to look at them? I’m a bit busy today, and—”

“No, there’s nobody else. You have to go out there. I thought about my assistant maybe, but she’s taking care of the workload that I have here. Please, I know that you’re trying to avoid Caleb, but it’s important that you make sure that you see them.”

That’s right. I couldn’t just leave them hanging.

“All right, fine, I’ll do it,” I muttered.

“Thank you so much! I promise I’ll make it up to you. I can go see one of your clients next week. I just need to figure out my car situation.”

“It’s fine. Take your time,” I lied.

She hung up, and I sighed. I didn’t want to go over there. Not just because my day was already swamped, but also because I didn’t want to see Caleb.

Especially not after the pregnancy reveal. But I couldn’t just leave these animals hanging.

I sighed, trying to figure out what to do. I could just cancel and say that I’d be coming later, but I’d also have to get Sariah’s agreement. Or I could go pick her up, but that’d be way out of my way.

I sighed, realizing my options were few and far between. I had to go see him. I called Rebecca, saying that I’d be back at the office around four or so.

“Alright, keep me posted. There were a couple of people with animals who were looking to have you check up on them, but I can fit them in another slot.”

“Thanks.”

I drove over there, and the entire time, my body tensed just thinking about this. When I got there, I looked at the parking area.

There were two cars there. One of them I remembered being his dad's, but I didn't recognize the other. A feeling of worry overtook me. I stepped to the door, knocking, and then, moments later, the door opened.

"Oh, Tina!"

"Hi, I'm here to check up on the animals," I replied, cutting the crap. I didn't want to be here and judging from the other cars that were here, I didn't want to be around during all of that either.

"Right, I'll show you where they are and—"

"Yo, is that Tina?" the voice said.

I tensed up when I realized who it was.

No ... it can't be ...

I looked, and I saw it. The one person I vowed never to talk to again.

David

He grinned, looking at me with that shit-eating grin. I hated him so much. I looked around, trying to keep it together, but the whole time I felt confused and unsure of what to say.

Caleb looked at me, and he tried to give me a reassuring smile. "Hey, sorry, Dad and David are here. Can we talk later?"

I shook my head. "I'm here for my job. If you wish to talk to me, do it another time."

I walked right past him, out to the fields. As I looked over at the cows, I could feel a haughty grin from David.

“Well, look who it is. You’re the same as ever, Tina. You’re always working so hard. The same old nerd I always knew,” David said.

I looked at him, trying to ignore the jeers and looks. “And what do you want?”

“Oh, I just wanted to say hi. You’ve been looking well, I suppose,” he said.

“Why are you here?” I muttered, checking the cows and looking at them.

David laughed.

“Well, I was here because things with that girl didn’t turn out so great. And well, I’m divorced. Back here with my dad again, trying to figure out what to do. Say, you’re looking pretty good these days,” he said, eyeing me up and down.

I ignored him, but then he stepped forward.

“I said, you’re looking great. What, do your ears not work now? I know it’s been a long time, but I always liked that you’d listen to me, you know,” he said.

“Yeah, because I was the only one willing to listen to your shit,” I said.

“Ouch, you’re such a spitfire. Same as always. You know, you definitely are the same old woman that I knew before.

Maybe I should've stuck around with you. Told you about how I liked you. But also ... you never put out," he added.

I ignored him, trying to keep it together as I looked at the animals. That's why I was here. To look at the animals and not be the emotional punching bag for this overgrown man-child.

"Come on, don't you want to say something? Or did you forget how to use your words after all this time and—"

"Hey, leave her alone," Caleb said.

Caleb walked on over, glaring at David, and David sneered. "What, you jealous?"

"No, I'm not jealous. Didn't dad say he was going to talk to you about Abby?"

"Well, yeah, but it's time for me to say hello to old friends, right? It's been so long since I've seen Tina, and I figured she wanted to say hi before I disappeared again. I was going to take the girl that he tossed to the side. Such a shame. She's quite the looker. Got bigger tits than you, and—"

"Enough!" Caleb said.

I looked at Caleb and David, seeing him there.

"What's the matter there, Caleb? Something bothering you?" David sneered.

"Yeah, your fucking attitude. You come here, insult Tina, and continue to harass her after I say no? You're nothing more than a piece of shit," he said.

David rolled his eyes. “And you’re just super overdramatic. You’re always acting like you have a stick so far up your ass that it would come out of your own throat and—”

“And you know what? I’m tired of this. I’m tired of you always acting like you own the place. You may be younger than me, but that doesn’t give you the right to be the shittiest little brat in all the land. You’re supposed to represent our family, and you know what you represent? Everything that’s wrong with this family. No wonder nobody wants to be around you,” he said.

David didn’t say a word, just listening to the words that Caleb dished out at him. I continued to work with the animals, quietly watching as they decked it out.

“My, did something bother you about what I said there, Caleb? You’re so stressed. Has all that time you’ve been working here on the farm softened you and—”

Without another word, I watched the sight. Caleb threw a punch, hitting David square in the mouth. He did it again, and the sound of bones being cracked echoed through the area.

“You shut the fuck up! Get off this property and get the hell away from Tina. She’s not here to listen to you. She’s a damn good veterinarian, and she’s helping me. She’s done more for me than you ever could. Now get your shitty ass out of here before I make you leave,” he snapped.

David ran off, holding his nose.

I turned to Caleb, and he sighed. “I’m sorry about that. I just ... I had to do it.”

“I would’ve done the same, you know.”

“Thanks for understanding. So ...”

I stood up and looked Caleb in the eyes. There were so many things I wanted to say, but I’d leave it for later.

“Why don’t you come to my clinic later on? We can discuss this ... personally. It seems like there’s a lot going on that you need to take care of.”

Caleb nodded. “I do. Thanks for coming over. I’ll pay you once I’m done here. Cows are okay?”

“Yeah, they’re okay.”

“Good.”

We made our way back, and I saw his dad with a crying David. I wanted to feel bad, but the guy deserved it. But as I slunk into my car, I gave Caleb a reassuring smile.

Whatever happened next would change everything, but I figured that if Caleb was serious, he would come and find me, one way or another.

Chapter 14: Caleb

Punching David was one of the best things I'd ever done. I knew it'd get me in deep shit, but I didn't give a fuck. After Tina left, I turned to my father and a sniveling David, who cried crocodile tears.

“What’s the meaning of this, Caleb? Why did you hit him?”

“Because he was out here disrespecting Tina. She’s an amazing veterinarian, and she’s been a big help around the field and—”

My father laughed, pulling David closer. “See, this is why I’ve always liked your brother over you. You’re always acting like you’re the toughest shit in the family. Hitting others and abusing them—you’ve reached the lowest of the lows there, Caleb, and you should be ashamed of yourself.”

I tried to hold back my feelings, praying that whatever happened, I'd at least get these two out of there.

My father looked me up and down, and then he sighed. “Inside. Now.”

I followed him in, and David did the same. As they closed the door, we sat down at the table.

“Now, Caleb, I’ve told you, if you refused to date Abby, then—”

I gritted my teeth. He was there because of that disaster of a fucking date. I tried to keep it together, but it was impossible.

“Dad, with all due respect, I don’t want to be with her. I never liked Abby, and I didn’t appreciate the way that she treated me.”

She was whiny, a total bitch, and disrespectful. And I felt no connection whatsoever whenever I was around her. He shook his head.

“But didn’t you tell me, Caleb, that you would go on a date with her, at least to see if it was good for you?”

“Yeah, and I did. She was awful. She’s a better fit for my brother.”

I tried to figure out the best way to tell him that I wanted to be with Tina, but then he scoffed.

“You can’t make decisions like that. You’re supposed to be the older brother, and here you are throwing all of my opportunities away and—”

I slammed my hand on the table, rousing David from his thoughts.

“What the hell are you doing?”

“What I’m doing is simple. I don’t want to do this, but ... I’m not going to sit here and take this shit anymore.”

I looked at both of them and took a deep breath, trying to keep my wits about me the entire time.

“Well, what are you throwing a temper tantrum about now?”

“I’m not, Dad! I’m just tired of all of you. Of everyone coming here and trying to dictate my life. I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to go on dates with women that I hate, nor do I want to continue to live under your yoke. I want ... I want freedom!”

My brother didn’t say a word, just trying to stop the bleeding.

“But you have freedom, Caleb. You have this whole farm, and you can do whatever you want, provided that you follow my instructions and—”

“That’s not freedom, Father. That’s a load of crock, and you and I both know it. I’m tired of you running my life and always getting in the way. David, you hurt Tina in ways you probably wouldn’t understand. You’re a selfish piece of shit who doesn’t care about anyone but yourself. You deserve Abby because she’s as selfish as you are.”

I watched David’s eyes widen. “I’m not selfish and—”

“Oh, you are. You’ve only cared about yourself. You’ve fucked off to different countries when we needed you the most, and you treat women like they’re commodities designed to do your bidding. And you know what? I’m so tired of that! I

don't want that, and I don't want to associate with you, either. You have a lot to learn and a lot of fucking growing to do, and I'm not going to be the one to provide that information to you. You know what? I want you to ... to disappear," I snapped.

David looked at me, and my father gasped.

"You shouldn't say that about your brother and—"

"He stopped being my brother the second he started to disrespect people. Honestly, you're the same too, Father. You only care about yourself, and you only care about your image. You just want the wayward middle child to have some eye candy on his arm. Well, I don't want that. I want to forge my own path, and I want to ... just be myself," I told him.

He looked at me, startled by the outburst. "Who taught you to speak like that? Especially to your father."

"You did, Dad." I leaned back and put my arms over my head.

He grimaced, looking at me and then at David. "Come, David. It's clear that your brother is just as selfish as ever. I should tell Glenn about what you've done here."

As he got up, about to walk away, I saw the look in his eyes. The fear that resonated there. He was scared, and I didn't mind that.

"Go ahead, tell him. Trust me, this feeling's been around for a little bit then, Dad."

He didn't say a word, instead encouraging David to get out of there with him. As the doors closed, I sighed, trying to keep

it together. I didn't know what else to say or what to do.

Being a Branson boy was hard. My own father didn't believe in me. I made sure before I did this that he didn't have complete control over this place. According to my accountant, that claim was a bald-faced lie, and my dad said that to scare me. I owned this place, and I could say what I'd wanted to say for a long time.

As they left, the house quieted, and I sighed.

It was ... the first time I ever stood up to my father and my brother. David was a lazy shit and a total douchebag. He didn't deserve the coddling that he got, but it wasn't my place to say that. If I told my dad, of course, the bastard would get pissed.

But now, they were both gone, and I could finally have some peace and quiet.

As I watched them leave, I stood at the doorway, waving goodbye to them. "And don't come back," I muttered under my breath.

I didn't know if my dad would come back. He wasn't looking very good during this visit, with his salt and pepper hair looking oiled and a little mangy. He looked tired, and the hint of pot belly that he had was pretty obvious. He was starting to look older, and I was pretty sure the whole purpose of his visit was to scare me into getting married or something.

Typical dad, that's for sure.

As for David, I didn't know why he was there. He just showed up, and my dad told me that he was going to spend

some time with him for a bit. Hearing that he got divorced again was not a surprise in the least, but also ... it frustrated me, knowing that I was the brother who had a little bit of decency and respect toward women.

As I sat there, taking a deep breath and trying to figure out what to do, my thoughts returned to Tina. That was ... the first time she saw me since the mess. She'd been ignoring me and didn't seem to want to talk either. But I meant what I said, defending her whenever I could.

I needed to talk to her, even if it was just to clear the air and discuss what was going on and why she was ... acting so distant towards me, even though I didn't feel that I had done anything wrong.

I checked the clock. She was probably off work by now.

I went to my car and drove down to town. I locked the gate, making sure that I didn't leave it open again. The last thing I needed was for my dad to come back if things got spicy and fun between Tina and me.

I went down the street, approaching her clinic. There was only one car there, hers, sitting in the employee parking lot. I got out and walked towards the office. When I opened the door, the bells jingled, and then I saw Tina walk over.

When she approached, her eyes were fraught with surprise. "Oh, Caleb! I didn't ... know that you'd be back."

I laughed. "I didn't know for sure either. But I wanted to talk to you. I'm really ... sorry about earlier. About what my

brother said. I didn't expect it myself, and I was shocked and appalled that one of my brothers could even say that shit."

"Believe me. It surprised me knowing that David hadn't changed."

"The feeling is mutual on that. But I wanted to talk to you if that's alright. Can we ... at least be civil to one another?"

She paused, looking around. "I mean ... I do want to talk."

"Then let's do that. Let's talk. Tina, I don't want you to feel all alone in this world. And it's clear that ... something's bothering you, and it's not just how David acted earlier, and, well, my response," I replied.

I usually wasn't the violent type, but I wanted to punch my brother in the face for a long time.

"Let me finish this up, and then we can sit. And talk. I'm done for the day," she replied.

"Good. I'll wait."

She finished with a couple of pieces of paperwork, and the entire time, I sat there, trying to figure out how to approach this situation.

I wanted to find out the truth, why Tina had been acting so distant. It couldn't just be because of what happened at the farm or even Abby. Something else was bothering her, and I wanted to talk about it rather than pretend that there was nothing going on.

Because lying wasn't it for me, and I could tell from the way that Tina reacted, whatever was eating away at her had something to do with us, rather than anyone else.

She finished her work, sitting on the waiting room sofa with me. The air was tense, our bodies very close, and then I took a deep breath.

“Tina ... I know that you've been ignoring me and—”

“I'm not trying to,” she said.

“I know that you're not, but you have been. Ever since the mess with Abby, you've been ignoring me and—”

“It's because you moved on. I wanted to ... to let you move on,” she added.

I listened to her, shaking my head. “I'm not moving on. I never moved on.”

Her eyes widened with surprise. I wanted to reach out and reassure her, however I could, that I hadn't moved on.

“But what about the date and—”

“Oh, please, it was a disaster. My dad forced me to go on a date. I told him to leave me alone if it was a disaster, and it being a disaster was putting it nicely. It flopped, and then I came back to my fucking brother being at my door. It turns out that he got divorced, and he's been back. My dad insisted we talk about this, but there was ... nothing to talk about. Because I didn't want to discuss this. I knew where my feelings laid, and they weren't with her,” I admitted.

That was the truth. I didn't feel anything for Abby, but the whole time, my heart ached for Tina.

"You're ... sure about this, right?"

"Yes, I'm sure about this. I've been thinking about you, and only you, ever since we parted ways. The truth is, Tina ... I love you. I've loved you for a long time. And I want you to know that," I told her.

The words came out like it was nothing. I prayed it didn't seem weird, but Tina listened.

"I ... understand."

"I'm glad that you do. After the Abby mess, I told my father that I couldn't do this anymore, that I'd rather not be associated with him and pretend that he didn't exist than continue to live a life of lies. I might be disowned. I'm not totally sure, but the farm is in my name," I told her.

"I see."

There was some relief, but there was still ... more that we had to talk about. But I knew that ... whatever was bothering her couldn't be burned away anymore.

"So, tell me, you seem tense. Please tell me what's going on. I promise not to leave you, and I reckon that, whatever it might be, we'll be able to face it together."

I rested my hand on hers, and she looked at me. Her lip trembled, and I tried to figure out what to say, but all I could do was stare in anticipation.

Chapter 15: Tina

How did I tell him? The fact that he was here, confessing all of this to me after so damn long, was just ... a little scary, to say the least.

I looked at Caleb; my lips were dry as I stared into his eyes.

“I love you, Caleb. I really do, but I can’t be with you,” I told him.

His eyes widened as I spoke those words.

“But why?”

How did I tell him? How could I break it to him that I was pregnant with his child, and he wouldn’t want a woman like me? Caleb reached out, touching my hands and looking into my eyes.

“Listen, Tina, if something is going on, please let me know. I hope there ... there isn’t another man, but if there is, I’ll take my chances and leave and—”

“No! That’s not it. There was never another. Seeing David the other day made me feel nothing. I didn’t want him back, and I never wanted to see him again. It’s just that ... something happened while we were apart, something I’ve struggled to tell anyone about. I’ve been ... meaning to tell you, but I didn’t have the chance,” I explained.

I didn’t even tell anyone at the office. I might be showing a little bit, but it was still too early to tell.

Caleb took my hand, grasping it and holding it softly. He squeezed the flesh, staring into my eyes. “I’m sure whatever it is that you need to tell me, I won’t get upset. What, are you pregnant or something?”

I stiffened. Was it that obvious? I looked around, biting my lip.

Caleb’s eyes widened. “Holy shit, you are.”

“Yeah ...”

I tried to figure out how to stifle the awkward silence between us. Did I tell him that I was about five weeks along? I didn’t know what to do about anything here other than to just ... wait it out and see what occurred.

“I see. So, you’re pregnant, and you’re ... you’re keeping it, right?”

“I have a week to decide. I don’t know Caleb. But I don’t want to raise a child alone.”

That was the one thing I was worried about. Raising a kid all on their own, without the father in the picture.

“I see.”

“I don’t want to raise it alone, Caleb. But there’s the mess with Abby, and of course, David’s back in the picture and all,” I admitted.

Caleb scoffed, looking at me and laughing. “Nah, that’s where you’re wrong, Tina. That Abby girl ... was a fucking nightmare, if I put it lightly. She was nothing more than a selfish bitch who only seemed to care about herself, and we had nothing in common. So to say the date was a disaster was an understatement.”

I turned to him, nodding. “Then what about David? Why was he back?”

Caleb shrugged. “I don’t know, and honestly, I don’t care. I told my dad and him to leave me. It caused a rift, but ... I talked with my accountant. I’m in charge of the farm, so I’m not too worried about it.”

So, would it be okay? I didn’t know for sure, and I couldn’t help but wonder if I was making a huge mistake just telling Caleb all of this.

He reached out, touching my shoulder and looking me dead in the eye. “Tell me, Tina ... what do *you* want to do?”

I bit my lip, trying to figure out how to formulate words for this.

I sighed. “I want this child, Caleb. I don’t ... want to give it up.”

I wanted a child, I really did, but I refused to let a child grow up on their own, without their father in their life. Caleb flashed a grin toward me, nodding at my words.

“Then we’re going to raise that child together,” he said.

My eyes widened in surprise at his words. Did he ... want to raise this child? Was he really happy about any of this? But then, as if reading my mind, Caleb shook his head.

“You have to realize that I’m not some guy who will leave their girl to take care of their child and to fend for themselves, right?”

“No, but—”

“So don’t paint me like that, dear. I want to be a father to our child. I know that ... it’s a little bit scary, but I’m serious about it,” he said.

I listened to him as he sat down, holding my hand.

“My dad was a father to me, that’s for sure, but I never had a mom in my life. Sure, she had us three, but I’m not sure why. She just ... disappeared one day. She left our lives, and since then, I’ve tried to figure out what to do, how ... how to cope sometimes. I’ve kept it to myself, and my dad didn’t seem fazed by her leaving, but it bothered me for a long time. This is why I want to do better this time around. I want to be a better father to this child than the one I had. I want to be a parent and take care of them,” he said.

“You’re ... sure about this, though, right?”

I didn't want someone who would just leave at the last second. Caleb laughed, throwing his hands into his hair and threading them through it.

“Does it look like I'm kidding around, Tina? I'm serious about this. I want to be a father figure for our child. And well, my father always told me to take responsibility for my shit. We Branson boys should be a better example in that regard. My brothers are ... they're not the poster child for any of this; yet, I want to do better this go, to be a better parent to my child than my parent and brothers have exposed me to. I'm tired of always having to pretend like I don't care. I want to help you, Tina. Because I love you. I've loved you for a long time. That night we made love...I wanted to tell you, but I was scared,” Caleb admitted.

“Scared? But why? You're Caleb Branson. Wouldn't it be easy to say that?”

Caleb let out a roar of laughter.

“Oh, honey, you forget that just because I'm rich doesn't mean that I have feelings, too. And those feelings have been a part of my life for a long time. Since meeting you ... I've been able to come to terms with them. And one thing I'm coming to terms with now is that I love you, and I want to be with you. Forever.”

The way he said those words stirred something within me. Nobody had ever told me that they wanted to be with me forever.

“Forever is a long time, you know,” I pointed out.

“Then I’ll do whatever it takes. I want a future with you, and my dad and brother will have to deal with it since I don’t want to keep myself hostage anymore.”

I listened to him, nodding.

“If you’re sure about this ...”

“I’m damn sure about this, Tina. I love you. I love you so much, and I’ve fallen for you. I’ll do whatever it takes to ensure you’re happy and taken care of.”

The seriousness in his words differed from the casual nature the guy always had. I looked at him, nodding.

“Yes. I love you too, Caleb. I always have ... and I always will,” I replied.

I leaned in, pressing my lips to his and kissing them softly. The touch of his soft, sensual lips was enough to drive me crazy. I missed the feeling of them, especially since it’d been so long since we kissed like this.

He pulled me closer, our lips touching and moving against one another. I didn’t want to deepen this too much, but then his tongue poked out. So, I opened my mouth; our tongues were dancing wildly, enjoying the sensation of one another’s lips as we continued this.

I couldn’t get enough of Caleb. I wanted this moment to last forever.

I didn’t care what his brother or family thought of me or what they considered healthy. I just ... I wanted him, and I wanted him forever.

As we kissed, his lips devouring my own, my panties wettened at the touch. It'd been so long since I experienced those lips. I needed him. I needed him badly.

I couldn't wait. I pulled back, touching his shoulder. "You know, I wouldn't mind continuing what we started."

His eyes lit up, and a small grin ghosted his face. "Is there anyone here?"

I shook my head. "No, everyone's been gone for the day and —"

"Come, let's go to the office."

He took my hand, pulling me upwards. I practically fell all over my feet, being whisked away like this.

"And yet, I didn't mind it in the least. I wanted him to sweep me off my feet, make me enjoy every moment, and make me cry out those sounds I always wanted to let out.

I wanted him. I needed him, and in truth, I craved him far more than I desired anyone in the past and more than I could ever desire someone in the future.

That much, I was sure of.

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Chapter 16: Caleb

I couldn't keep away from Tina anymore. I needed her, and she was like a drug for me, one that made me go crazy just looking at her.

To think that a woman like that could drive me to the brink, making me enjoy every single moment that I could with her like this, was astounding.

I never fell for someone as hard as I did with Tina. I had tried to fall in love in the past, but one look at her beautiful face, and the little glow from her pregnancy ... how could I not fall in love with her?

I touched her face, smiling. "I want to make tonight special. For both of us."

She nodded. "I want that too."

I whisked her off her feet, carrying her bridal style down the hallway. The examination rooms were all closed, and only the office at the very end with the light on appeared to be open.

"Straight back, right?"

She nodded.

“You don’t have to do this, Caleb. We could go back and—”

I shot her a look. “I don’t want to head back to my place. I want you right here, right now.”

I couldn’t wait. If I had to drive home to make love to her, I felt as if I’d go crazy just waiting. I wanted her so badly that I could barely stand it. I needed her right now.

The love of my life. Love was something I still struggled to understand. I never really ... felt that kind of emotion for another person. And yet, when it came to Tina, I was willing to experience every moment I could, madly in love with this woman, savoring every possible second that I could with her.

I brought her to her office, slammed the door closed, and placed her on the desk. Our lips met. Hot kisses between one another. Our bodies were so close, yet I wanted to be closer.

I needed her. Tina just ... made me feel things I never felt for another person.

And I wanted to savor every possible second that I could with her.

I pushed my tongue into her mouth, allowing our tongues to move and mingle. My pants tightened at the little moans that escaped her.

I didn’t think there was any way that I could take any of this slow. If I took it slow, I’d go completely mad.

Which was why I savored every second, every moan and touch, and I continued to indulge in what was mine.

This beautiful woman and the things that she gave to me.

I slipped my lips downward, kissing and peppering little motions against her neck. I bit down on the side of her neck, sucking on the crook there. She let out a small cry, holding onto me, enjoying every possible moment that came with this.

I groaned, my cock so hard I couldn't think straight. But I needed to savor every moment I that could with her, even if it meant waiting a little bit for my personal needs.

I peppered little kisses downward, listening to the sounds that echoed from her lips. I pushed my tongue against the crook of her neck, teasing that area, and she gripped the desk, moaning out loud.

My hands made quick work of her lab coat, reaching upwards to touch her breasts through the V-neck shirt. She gasped, and with quick work, I pulled her shirt off, tossing it to the side.

My lips moved like a rampage, kissing and tasting every part of her that I could. From the little parts of her shoulders where the freckles lay to all the way down her pale chest, I took every opportunity I could to indulge in everything that was here.

When I got down to her breasts, I kissed the outside flesh that spilled out of her bra, the small moan of surprise echoing through the atmosphere.

“You’re making it so hard to hold back,” I purred, the desperation filling my ears as I listened to her breathy moans and cries. Everything made me mad, and I was like a wild animal, and she was my prey.

But I wanted to take every moment and hold it in place for as long as possible. She was mine, all mine, and I wanted her to know this.

My hands cupped her breasts, massaging them through the bra, teasing her nipples until I could feel them harden through the bra, and the gasps and cries that escaped her were like a litany, a pleasurable litany that drove me crazy.

I pushed my hands around, touching her soft back until I descended all the way down to her bra. My hands made quick work of the garment, sliding it off and revealing her naked chest before my eyes.

My lips licked on instinct. She was beautiful, and Tina knew it, even if she refused to show it on her face.

I moved forward, pressing my hands to her supple chest, touching every part I could. My thumbs teased her nipples, and the little sounds that escaped her, the tiny mewls of pleasure that I longed to hear every moment I could, echoed through the office.

“You good?” I asked.

She nodded. “Y-y-yes. It’s just ... it’s sensitive.”

I pinched one of the nubs, causing a moan of surprise that escaped her lips.

“That’s what I like to hear,” I purred.

My lips took one of her supple nipples into my mouth, flicking my tongue over them, sucking on the soft flesh there. She let out a small cry of surprise, moaning and rocking her hips upward as I did this. I couldn’t stop. I wanted to hear everything I could from her lips.

I continued to suckle on the flesh, causing a moan to emit from her lips. I then flicked my tongue over the tip of her nipple, causing her to cry out in surprise, moaning softly, the ache and need driving us both completely mad.

I needed her. I wanted her, and I ached to hear everything that came out for her.

I pushed my tongue against the sides, touching and moving against the edge, pressing my lips to the tip and suckling to finish off. My other hand rubbed the tip of her nipple with my palm, and then I pinched it lightly, but then with a little more force.

The entire time I heard her delicious noises. I could get off on that alone, but I didn’t want to.

I needed more.

My hands trailed up her thighs, pushing her skirt upward. There, my hands touched and massaged her creamy thighs, eliciting a gasp of surprise. I slid my hands upward until I was between her legs. Her panties were wet, and I could feel them from the outside.

A finger slipped against there, rubbing her pussy through the outside. As I teased her, she gasped, holding onto the desk as I continued to rub one finger, then two, gently over her. She moaned wanton noises that made me struggle to hold back, period. It was like she couldn't get enough, and neither could I.

“Fuck!” she cried out.

“You like that, don't you?”

“Yes! Please, more!” she screamed out. The desperation clung to her lips, making the sweetest noises, almost as succulent as honey.

And I wanted to enjoy this again and again. I slipped my hands to the sides of her panties, pushing them downward without another thought. Her eyes widened as I pushed a finger inside her tight heat, allowing it to suck me in.

As my finger gently thrust inside, my lips teased her flesh, moving against her folds, savoring the sweet taste of her and her body as she cried out against me.

Every time she let out a moan of surprise, I couldn't help but feel that ache grow even more. It was the sound of desperation, the sound of need, that escaped her, and it made me want to take every moment and savor this as well.

I added another finger, lightly pressing against her heat, thrusting up and down, and feeling her squirm against me, the moans of surprise echoing through the office. In a way, this

was our own little world, a world that both of us indulged in and absolutely loved.

I continued to move my fingers there, watching her cling to the desk, desperately needing me.

“That’s right. You’re so beautiful!” I cried out.

I thrust once more, pushing against that bundle of nerves that I knew she loved, and she screamed out, moving her hips upward in response.

There we go.

I continued to move my hands skillfully, adding another finger inside. I arched them upwards, listening to the little cries that escaped her mouth.

She looked so hot, desperate for touch, and needy for my hands.

After I added the third, I teased the flesh for a moment before I pulled out, spreading her apart.

I looked at Tina there. The glowing radiance she possessed drove me crazy. I wanted her, I needed her, and I craved her.

I slipped my hands into my pants, undoing the buckle and then the fly, sliding them downward to reveal my aching member. I looked at her and saw the desperation for me in her eyes.

“It’ll be soon, babe,” I groaned, completely lost in her beauty. Then, after a second, I slipped inside, taking inch by inch inside of her.

As I slid inside, she grasped the table, moaning in surprise as I thrust in deep. She cried out, holding onto the desk, and then reached out with one hand, cupping my face.

“This feels ... amazing, Caleb,” she said.

“Good, I’m glad I can make you feel good.”

I slipped deeper inside, pushing in so my body could feel her tight heat. She moaned, and I thrust inside, pushing deep within, watching her eyes widen with surprise as she took more of me inside.

“There we go,” I said.

I thrust in once more, holding onto her there as she cried out, completely lost in the touch of our bodies together. With every thrust and every touch, I could feel the desperation growing and the need for her to drive me closer and closer to the edge.

I thrust in deep, listening to her moans. She wrapped her arms around me, holding me tightly as she cried out, the litany of moans of pleasure driving me closer and closer to the edge.

“Holy fuck, Caleb!”

“You good?”

“Yes, now keep going. I’m so close that I feel like I’m going to cum at any time,” she said, her voice laced with desperation.

I wanted to savor this moment even more. I pulled her into my arms, my hands resting on her backside. As I did this, she

wrapped her hands around my shoulder, holding herself as she braced her body, and my hips moved, thrusting upwards to enjoy every part of her.

The tightness of her flesh and the touch of her body against mine were all just ... driving me crazy. I needed her. I craved her, and every part of her was driving me crazy.

After a few more thrusts, I pushed my hips further upward. Again, I could feel my entire being change as I felt her tight heat suck me in. At this angle, though, I could feel her pussy quiver, and my thrusts were angled in a way that touched upon that bundle of nerves in the most perfect way possible.

She screamed out, holding onto me as she thrust upward; the deepness of my thrusts was enough to drive the woman completely mad.

After a few more thrusts, though, I could feel the buildup being too much to hold back, and with every motion, every touch, and every thrust, I knew I was near my limit.

After a couple more thrusts, I cried out, holding onto her as I tensed up. I reached forward, teasing between her legs, rubbing her clit as she held onto me, moaning and crying out my name as her climax hit her hard.

My thrusts grew deep, and soon the feeling of my orgasm hit me like a ton of bricks. I laid her back down, pumping inside of her, and then, as I finished, I looked at her, smiling warmly.

“How was that?”

She didn't say a word; instead, she smiled placidly.

"That was amazing," she admitted.

I kissed her, pulling back and touching her face. "That's what I want to hear. I'm glad that ... you enjoyed this."

I missed Tina and felt her clench against me like that, moaning in surprise and pleasure. After all of this time, it was heaven on earth for me.

After a moment, I pulled back, looking her in the eyes.

I touched her chin, staring at her, and that's when the words spilled from my mouth.

"I love you, Tina. I love you so much that I don't see myself with anyone else, ever. I want to ... share the rest of my life with you. And I promise that this next step of our lives will be an amazing one, one that we can share forever," I said.

She looked at me, her eyes still wide from the pleasure, and I could tell she was still riding the high of her orgasm.

She touched my face, smiling. "I love you too, Caleb. Always and forever. We'll be the best damn parents I know we can be together."

I took her hand, holding it against my own, squeezing the soft flesh. "Yes, we'll make this work. Together."

I wanted to give her the best life I could, a life full of happiness and joy. She'd struggled with trusting people for so long, myself included, that I wanted to make her happy.

She was a big part of the farm and part of my life, and I wanted nothing more than ... to share the rest of my life with her and indulge in these moments together whenever we could.

Whatever the future held for us was still up to fate to decide, but I knew for a fact that Tina was the one, and I wanted nothing more than to indulge in this moment, together with her, and forever.

Forever wasn't too long for me. But it was only the beginning and precisely what I wanted.

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Epilogue: Tina

Some say that confessions and revelations can make time stand still, but for me, it was the beginning of a new life and many beautiful things.

Three years had passed since that night at the office, and while I remembered it like it was yesterday, so many things happened during that time.

The first and most significant thing was moving in with Caleb. After he found out we were going to be parents, he pulled me to the side, insisting I move in with him.

At first, I was hesitant, but I learned shortly after that domestic life wasn't that bad. Caleb took care of me; honestly, living in his home was almost like something out of a fairy tale.

Our lives also changed for the better in ways I couldn't be more thankful for. Being pregnant was a massive change to my current life, yet I didn't mind it. It was like a switch that turned

on, and I learned from this that these changes were big, but when they happened, it was all okay.

“It’ll be fine! You’ve got this, babe! I’m proud of you,” Caleb said, encouraging me as I went into labor.

After five hours of hard labor, we were blessed with a beautiful girl. We named her Annette, and soon, our lives changed for the better.

Being a mother was a newfound life, and it certainly was a hard thing to balance, but with the help of Caleb, I was able to make it so that I could be a mom and still run the clinic.

Speaking of the clinic, everything started booming. Word spread to others about how I helped Caleb, and soon, people who vaguely knew of Caleb but wanted to work with me came clamoring to the office, insisting that I help them with their animals. Soon, the clinic was way too small for just the office we had, so we got a bigger property.

The clinic boomed, and I hired other people to help me with the place, including another doctor named Alexis. She was sweet and also a very caring woman to animals. She helped me with everything I needed and was a godsend when it came to taking care of some of the bigger animals.

Then, of course, our lives changed. I balanced being a parent while also running a clinic and being a vet, but Caleb also stepped up to the plate.

When I came home, I’d see him reading to Annette or feeding her some bottles. He always had a grin on his face as

he pointed at her.

“She’s doing great. Having her food, and she loves spending time with me out here,” he said.

“Thank you, dear,” I said.

We continued to grow closer, both of us still in love with one another. We decided to wait on another kid since it would take a lot of our time and energy, and I didn’t mind that.

But, during this whole time, as we continued to grow a family and stay in love with each other, I noticed two things. First, David was nowhere in the picture. Rumor had it that he went off to Tahiti again, this time with that Abby girl that tried to get with Caleb.

His father also didn’t want anything to do with us. I tried to reach out, and we tried to be civil, but the guy was insistent upon not accepting us. It was a shame, but at the same time, we made it work.

Caleb continued to be a rancher, and while he worked long hours, he still made time for everything. In a way, he was the best guy for the job, being both a kickass parent and a great rancher.

Three years passed like that, and when I got home that night after a day at the office, I saw a note.

Come to the barn. I already put Annette to sleep. I have the monitor, too, in case she sleepwalks.

I looked at the note in confusion but went outside. I saw Caleb sitting there. The dim light from the lamp was the only

thing illuminating us.

“Hey there, babe,” he said.

“Hey ... what’s this?”

“Oh, I just wanted to come out here. Spend a little bit of time with you. Annette will be fine. I made sure to close the door and make sure that we’re notified if she sleepwalks. But there is...something I wanted to ask you.”

I turned to Caleb, confused. Caleb’s eyes glowed in the moonlight, and then, before I knew it, he moved downward, holding something.

“What are you—”

In his hands was a ring. It was a beautiful diamond that glowed in the moonlight. As I stared at it, he spoke.

“Tina ... you’re the best thing to have happened to me, and I love you. I feel like I’m falling in love with you more and more every single day, which is why I’m asking. I want to spend forever with you. Will you ... grant me that choice?”

I looked at him and then at the ring. Words couldn’t describe how I felt, but then I smiled.

“You don’t even need to ask. Forever is already sealed.”

He took the ring, placed it on my finger, and then pulled me into his arms, kissing me passionately. I stayed there, holding him close, and as we kissed under the stars, I knew there was one thing that I was sure of.

Forever was real. And I wanted to stay together with the man that I loved, even if it killed me in the process.

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