



He's too good to be true.

NOBLE LOVE

USA Today Bestselling Author
ELLA GOODE

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CONTENTS

Summary.

Chapter 1

Noble

Chapter 2

Autumn

Chapter 3

Noble

Chapter 4

Autumn

Chapter 5

Noble

Chapter 6

Autumn

Chapter 7

Noble

Chapter 8

Autumn

Chapter 9

Noble

Chapter 10

Autumn

Chapter 11

Noble

Chapter 12

Autumn

Chapter 13

Noble

Chapter 14

Autumn

Chapter 15

Noble

Chapter 16

Autumn

[Chapter 17](#)

Noble

[Chapter 18](#)

Autumn

[Chapter 19](#)

Noble

[Epilogue](#)

[Also by Ella Goode](#)

[Connect with me!](#)



NOBLE

I know my frat is questionable, even on its best days, so when Autumn wanders in to clean the rooms in order to pay for her tuition, I know I need to take care of her. First step? Get her away from the brothers and into a safe spot. But this girl is too kind, too gorgeous, and too smart to ignore, and now I'm left wondering who is going to save Autumn from me?

AUTUMN

I don't belong at this expensive college, but a degree from here will make me set for life. If I have to clean a few toilets to graduate, that's no problem. Dealing with a bunch of rowdy frat boys isn't on my wish list of college activities, but there are worse things. I can keep the frat boys at bay by being careful and keeping my head down. It's easy, except where Noble White is concerned. He's the only I trust—to both save me, and corrupt me, both in perfect measur



CHAPTER 1

NOBLE

I HEAR THE CONVERSATION AS I'M PASSING ROB TRACK'S room.

"You don't mind if I change, right?"

"I'll wait outside," says a soft female voice.

"Nah. That will take extra time and I'm only going to take a minute."

"I promise I'm fast."

Rob chuckles. For some reason, I stop. I don't know why. I don't like Rob and wouldn't go into his room if I was paid.

"Yeah, I bet you are but you're not leaving."

I hear a small yelp followed by "Hey, what're you doing?" from the girl.

"Why don't you reach inside my pants and find out?"

I stare at the ceiling and blow out a short breath. Of course, the dickhead is harassing some poor girl. We're not even a week into the start of classes, and he's already a problem.

I shove the door open—hard. Inside, Rob has his paw wrapped around the girl's upper arm. Her hands are up in a defensive position. At their feet is a bucket. It's an ugly scene, but five minutes later, it could've been far worse.

With a jerk of my head, I motion for the girl to get lost. She twists out of Rob's grip, drops down to grab her supplies, and scuttles past me, leaving behind a scent trail of bleach and nervousness or maybe fear.

Rob puts his hands on his hips. "What the hell, Noble? There are rules here. Rule number one: Respect your brother's space."

"You're not my brother, and if I hear you're harassing other women, I'll cut off your balls and feed them to you at the next chapter meeting." I slam the door shut and start down the hall.

The girl is plastered against the wall, her bucket clutched tightly in one hand and the mop in the other. I check my watch. My old man is due to hit the front door any minute, and I want to head him off. The last thing I want to see is my fraternity brothers falling over their dicks to get his autograph. He's an asshole and is only here for a photo op because his PR scheme to make my mom look like the devil is failing. I can't leave this girl alone, though, because the minute I'm gone, Rob is going to be in her face.

I'd heard he was a problem, but Somerset is a big campus. Prior to this year, I have had zero interaction with Rob—even within the fraternity. With over three hundred members, there's no way you can know every single person, even though that's what they try to sell you on. I wouldn't even be in this fraternity if my grandpa Noble Patton III hadn't attended. He's my mom's dad and a stand-up guy. Practically raised us after my old man noped out of the scene to chase hookers and blow.

"Come on," I say. "You're with me now."

She doesn't move, doesn't say a word. Instead, she stares at the rubber tips of her worn Converse tennis shoes. Maybe she didn't hear me.

"Let's go. Downstairs." I point toward the landing.

Still nothing.

"If you don't come with me, Rob's going to come out here and hassle you again. I won't be able to save you, so either come with me now or stay here as prey. Your choice."

"That's no fucking choice," she snaps. Her head comes up, and her blue eyes pin me to the wall.

My breath stops at the sight of her face. She's gorgeous. Drop dead, movie star gorgeous. I feel the urge to drop to my knees and beg for forgiveness for sins I haven't even committed. I run a hand through my thick hair. This animal house is no place for a girl that looks like her. Even the best-behaved guys are going to lose their shit around her.

"You're going to be a real problem, aren't you? Who hired you?"

“Why does it matter? I got this job fair and square.”

“You’d be better off cleaning at a hotel than this shithole. Look, we’ll sort this out later, but for now I—”

“Mr. White. Dude, I can’t believe you’re here,” cries someone downstairs.

“Ah hell. Too late.” The old man showed up, and now it’s going to be impossible to get rid of him. My brothers in the house are going to fawn over him like he’s the second coming of Christ, and he’s going to eat it up because he’s a megalomaniac who lives off the adoration of others.

I give the girl a rueful look. “Be careful around here, okay? I’m not around much, but if you need a place to hide, I’m the last room at the end of the hall. My code’s 1759.”

I force myself not to stare at her because she probably gets enough of that. I’m at the top stair when I hear a soft voice say, “Thanks.”

Downstairs, I hear more guys rushing to the front. More people asking for my dad’s autograph. More people gushing over how great an actor he is, how they loved his last movie, which has to be a lie because he hasn’t had a hit in at least a decade, and the last movie was this wasteful navel-gazing mess where he played an old man who all the teen girls in the neighborhood desperately wanted to fuck.

I turn abruptly, grab the girl’s hand, and stride toward my room. There’s no reason for me to see my old man. He wants me to join the throng of adulating fans, and I hate his guts. Might as well chill in my room with this gorgeous girl.

“What are you doing?” she says, not really protesting.

“Like I said, you’re with me now.”



CHAPTER 2

AUTUMN

I'M WITH HIM? WHAT DOES THAT EVEN MEAN? STILL, curiosity has piqued my interest as he enters the code to his room. This is the only room I don't clean because of the lock on it. He pulls me inside with him, shutting the door behind us.

I swallow, realizing I've let a man lead me into his room after I barely escaped another's. Would someone save you only to harm you? Probably. I should know better. I escaped one horrible foster home growing up, thinking I was going somewhere better. But I'd been sadly mistaken and was put into another equally as bad, if not worse. I take a deep breath and push those terrible memories to the back of my mind.

"I should probably—"

"You want something to drink?" The handsome stranger cuts me off by pulling me deeper into his room.

It's bigger than the others in the frat house. I'd say it's at least twice the size of the ones I clean. An open door even leads into a private bathroom. I glance around the room. A bed sits on one side with nightstands on each side of it. He's even got a sofa and desk in here.

"I'm not thirsty," I lie. He leads me over to the sofa before letting my hand go to walk over to the fridge and grab a couple of bottles of water and a can of soda. He brings them back, setting them on the coffee table before he drops down on the sofa.

"You can sit."

"I need to finish cleaning." I was almost done before that jerk Rob grabbed me. I've had a few of the men say offhanded gross comments to me before, which I ignored. This is the first time one has actually grabbed me. I'm starting to see why this job was open. I'd been on a waitlist with the university for a job opening. It's easier to work on campus when you don't have a car. The pay is not the greatest, but it's better than nothing.

“You’re not cleaning Rob’s room ever again.” He grabs my hand and pulls me down on the sofa. “You want the Coke or the water?”

“Water.” He grabs the bottle, twisting the top off before handing it over to me.

“Thanks.” I take it from his hand and chug half of it down.

“How long have you been cleaning here?”

“I’ve only cleaned a few times now.” From what I’ve seen, his room is spotless. “Who cleans your room?”

“Me.”

“Really?” I peek over at him. The sneakers on his feet are designer and cost more than I could make in a week if I cleaned full-time. As a matter of fact, his entire room reeks of him coming from money. Not in a bad way or anything.

“I don’t want people in my space.”

“I’m here.” I point out the obvious.

“You’re not people.” I furrow my eyebrows, unsure of what the heck he means by that. I should probably ask him, but I don’t see the point in it.

“I really need to get back to work,” I say again.

“What do you have left to do?”

“Why, are you going to help me?” I laugh. “Or come be my bodyguard?”

“If that’s what it takes.”

“Why are you being so nice?” I shift in my seat. I’m not used to people going out of their way for me. There’s always some kind of ulterior motive.

“What’s your name?”

“Autumn.”

“It fits.” He smirks.

“And you’re Noble.” I’ve heard Rob call him that. It’s an interesting name and one I’m pretty sure I’ve heard before.

“Yeah, Noble Patton White.” A few things click together in my mind. I know of the Pattons. I’m here under one of their scholarship programs for kids coming out of the system from group homes. They select a hundred each year from the state to receive financial help. I suddenly feel very awkward. The Pattons are not rich. They’re wealthy.

“You’re a Patton,” I confirm. He said it as his middle name, but with Noble in front of it, I’m pretty sure he’s one.

“Yeah, White is my father’s last name.”

“Well, Noble, it was nice meeting you. Thank you for helping me with the Rob thing.” I start to stand. He snags my wrist to stop me.

“You can’t go in and out of men’s rooms. Whoever approved you to have that job should be fired over at the Student Staffing Office.”

“I need this job, and it’s all that’s available right now.” Is he going to report this? Will I get fired because honestly, I don’t think he’s completely wrong. I had a brief moment of panic when Rob grabbed my arm.

“What does it pay?” His thumb wrapped around my wrist starts to stroke back and forth against the inside of it. It’s hard to think when he’s doing that. His eyes hold mine. He’s too damn handsome too. Why is he so interested in me?

“Like a few hundred a week.”

“Fine. I’ll pay you a few hundred a week to clean my place. Cash.” I jerk my hand from his hold. I’m waiting for the other shoe to drop because his offer is too good to be true.

“You’ll pay me a few hundred a week to clean your room. Seriously?” I jump up from the sofa. “I’m guessing there are other services you want to go along with that.”

“Hey, I didn’t—” A knock sounds at his door.

“Noble? Are you there?”

“Fuck,” Noble mutters, standing from the sofa and glaring at the door. He clearly doesn’t care for whomever is knocking. “That was not what I meant.” A knock sounds again. “Hold

on!” he shouts. “I’ve got to deal with my father, but this isn’t over.” Before I realize what’s happening, he’s pulled my phone out of the back pocket of my jean shorts. He holds it up to my face, and it unlocks.

“What are you doing?”

“How’d you crack your phone?” he asks, clicking away on the screen.

“I got it cracked.” A phone starts to go off but stops after one ring. He hands it back, and I realize he just called his phone with mine.

“Noble!” His father knocks again, sounding agitated now.

“You should get that, and I’m going to go.”

“Not to Rob’s room,” he reminds me.

“Not to Rob’s room,” I agree. I’m going to go back to my own dorm room and shower and pray my roommate and her boyfriend aren’t there. If they are, I’ll end up spending my evening in the library to escape them.

“You can start tomorrow.”

“I didn’t agree to your deal.”

“You’ll start tomorrow,” he says again.

“It’s safe for me to clean your room but not the other males that live here?”

“Yeah, it’s safer for them.” He walks over to the door, opening it as his father starts to pound harder.

“What the hell took—” His father stops talking when he sees me standing there. He takes me in, his eyes roaming up and down my body. I fight not to fidget. I can tell he’s judging me. His father is in a fancy suit and looks oddly familiar. I can’t place him, though. I’m sure he’s wondering why I’m in his son’s room as much as I am.

“I’ve got to go.”

The man steps out of my way so I can pass by. I don’t make it but a few feet out of Noble’s room and I hear his

father ask him why he's slumming it. Honestly, I'm a bit curious too.

It's likely a pity thing, and that's the last damn thing I need.



CHAPTER 3

NOBLE

“CHRIST. THIS IS WHAT I GET FOR ALLOWING YOU TO LIVE with your mother for so long.” Earnest David Winne, aka Nick White, aka my father, rakes a hand through his styled hair. “Why aren’t you downstairs? Didn’t you hear me? It was embarrassing as hell to wade through those losers looking for you.” He pushes by me and walks over to the beverage fridge. “Water? Soda? Are you ten? Where’s the booze?”

“I don’t have any.” I usually have a few beers in here, but I poured them down the sink when he texted me that he was in town. Dad’s an asshole when sober. A drunk Nick White’s a nightmare.

He slams the door of the fridge hard enough to make the entire thing rattle. When I was a kid, he’d scare the shit out of me with his loud mouth and his violent behaviors. Mom would rush me out of the room or try to shield me with her body, but I could still hear his shouts, his fists against the table. I guess I’ve seen and heard so much, he doesn’t have the ability to move me anymore. I see him for what he is—insecure and pathetic.

He throws himself onto my sofa, puts his dirty shoes up on my wood coffee table, and reaches inside his coat pocket to pull out a flask.

I rub the spot between my eyebrows and swallow a sigh. “Why’d you ask me for something to drink if you already had a supply?”

“I might need this later.” He wiggles the silver container in the air. “I’ve got some faculty function I agreed to do.”

“Why?”

“You know how much shit I’ve gotten the last two years for not showing up here? Your mom is all over social media getting praises for best mom, true mother shit because she dropped you off while I can’t even search my name without seeing someone curse me out.”

“So, your team thinks that you making a surprise visit and a few photo ops will, what, magically bring about a special role in a Spielberg movie?”

“Nah, he’s old now. I want in on this—” He cuts himself off as he realizes, belatedly, that he just revealed the true reason he is on campus. “Anyway, I’m here to see you and donate some money.”

I shake my head. “You do what you want, but I’m not gonna be a part of it.”

“The girl you were with, where’d you pick her up?” He continues as if I hadn’t spoken. “The scholarship section? Is this some kind of humanitarian act?” He barks out a laugh. “You must be into some dirty kind of shit to be scraping the bottom of the barrel like that. Those girls will do anything for a dollar.”

He waits for a sign of approval from me because that’s what he lives for. I fold my arms against my chest and contemplate whether throwing him out my window would cause too much drama.

When he gets zero response, he heaves a big sigh and gets to his feet. “Fine. I’m here because I want to take some pretty photos so that a social justice warrior will cast me in her next movie. She’s got a period piece with big funding that the Academy is already saying is going to sweep the awards show, and I would be perfect for the lead role.”

“You’re forty-five.”

“Perfect age.” He hitches up his pants, and I spot a slight gut that he didn’t have before. He notices where my eyes have fallen and covers his stomach with his hand. “Now that the cat is out of the bag, let’s just talk like real men. We need to get you a girl. Take me to one of the sorority houses, and we will pick one out.”

“You can’t shop for a woman like you do a pair of shoes.”

“Sure you can. You just go over there and say you’re my son, and you’ll have the pick of the crew.”

“First of all, I don’t need you to pick up women. Second of all, I’m not doing that. I’m not doing anything with you. You just need to go home.”

“Christ, you are so difficult.” He throws his hands in the air. “I don’t know what you were doing with that piece of trash you had in your room, but girls like her aren’t worth spending time on. She looked like she dressed out of a garbage bag of clothes that were left outside of a church that even homeless people didn’t want.”

“I don’t really care what you think.” I open the door to throw him out and meet Autumn’s shocked and hurt gaze.

“I guess this is why people say that eavesdroppers never hear anything good about themselves.” She pushes away from the wall she was leaning against and bends down to pick up her bucket.

“Hmmmph,” I hear my dad huff over my shoulder.

“You should never listen to anything Nick White has to say because he’s never had an original thought. Pretty sure that was a line from a movie he was in, but I wouldn’t know for sure since I don’t watch them.”

“What the hell are you saying, son?”

I pull the bucket from her hands. “I’m going to clean that last room. You go on now and don’t come back until I tell you to.” I try to say it gently so as not to add to her hurt, but I need to get her out of here before my dad thinks she’s a convenient target.

I guess she gets the message because she turns and hurries down the hall.

“Worthless cu—”

I whirl on my old man. “Don’t even say it,” I warn. “Or you’ll regret it.”

“What’s gotten into you?” He scowls. “All this over a piece of ass you can replace in a second.” He snaps his fingers.

“The only person I’m replacing in my life is you. Get out. I don’t want to see you again.”



CHAPTER 4

AUTUMN

I GLANCE DOWN AT MY PHONE AS THE SCREEN LIGHTS UP WITH a text from Noble. It's been two days since I saw him, but he's been texting me since. I haven't responded to any of them. He doesn't get mad about it. He keeps sending random messages—from telling me good morning and good night to even giving me details about his day. He's persistent. I'll give him that.

Noble: Do you think they changed the coffee at the stand by the library? Horrible today.

Noble: All they had left this morning was turkey bacon, egg, and cheese sandwiches. Turkey bacon should be illegal.

I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing. Professor Quinn is reading word for word off his PowerPoint. A PowerPoint he gave to us a few days ago and I already went over to be prepared. The one upside to having a roommate that is always bringing her creepy boyfriend back to our room is I'm forced into the library a lot to get away. It keeps me ahead in my studies.

Noble: I'll take your nonresponse as confirmation that it indeed should be illegal.

After I'd gotten an earful of what Noble's father Nick White said about me, it stung. Noble brushed it off, taking a jab about his father only reciting a line from one of his movies. When Noble said his father's name, it clicked who he was and why I thought I'd seen the man's face before.

I thought for a second that Noble was standing up for me until he said for me not to come back until he told me to. What the hell was that all about? He clearly didn't want me near his father. Was it because his dad's a dick or that he was embarrassed of either me or his father? I'm not sure. Either way, he hasn't said for me to come back. Not that it matters because it's my day to clean the Sigma Theta house. I wonder if I'll see him there.

He said he wanted me to clean his room exclusively, but how is that supposed to work if he told me to stay away? My father isn't Nick White, and my mom doesn't come from an uber wealthy family. I'm noticing more and more of the Patton name on things around this university. I might have also done a Google search and read their Wikipedia pages as well. Yeah, they all have one. Unfortunately, I don't come from money, and I have to earn a living. So, I can't wait around for Noble to make up his mind.

The Patton scholarship covered a lot. Not only my classes, dorm, and a meal plan with the cafeteria but they helped with some of the books too. Even with all of those things covered, I still need some cash for essential life items. Plus, what happens when I graduate? I'll need some kind of money in order to survive. I won't have a dorm then. I make sure if I have a spare penny that I save it. I won't end up on the streets or in the system again. I've seen how that's turned out for so many others.

Pretty sure my father is in jail, and I really don't want to think about where my mom could be. I'm almost positive it's not anywhere good. I might have had a few shitty foster homes, but I was thankful the state took me from my parents. They weren't fit to have a child, and I can't even imagine how my life would've turned out if I had been left in their care.

I push the thoughts of my childhood to the back of my mind and try to act as though I'm paying attention as Professor Quinn's presentation winds down. When the class ends, I pack up my stuff. I peek at my phone to see if I have another text from Noble but nothing.

"Are you going to the party over at Sigma Theta tonight?" I hear one girl ask another. This school is so freaking big that this lecture hall had over a hundred students in it, which makes it hard to remember anyone's name.

"I don't know. Noble is never there. What's the point?" the girl answers. I dig through my bag like I'm trying to get my things straight and not eavesdropping on their conversation.

“I think we need to get there early. I’m guessing he grabs up a girl quickly and takes her to his room. Where the hell else could he be?” A weird sense of jealousy fills me. I push it away, pulling my bag over my shoulder, and head out of the classroom and toward my dorm to drop my crap off and change.

When I slide my key into the door to my room, I realized it’s not locked. Renee must be here. I thought she had a class at this time. I push open the door and pause when I see her boyfriend Nathan sitting on her bed. He’s in jeans and a polo shirt. It’s what he always wears.

“Autumn.” The door falls closed behind me. The room isn’t that big, and it’s clear my roommate isn’t here.

“Nathan.” I drop my bag down on my bed. A sense of unease fills me. There’s just something about him that bothers me. “Are you waiting for Renee or something?”

“Or something,” he responds.

“I need to change and get to work,” I tell him. He doesn’t move.

“Have at it.” He winks at me. My mouth falls open. Seriously. I’m not a fan of my roommate, but I would never strip down in front of someone’s boyfriend. I ignore him, going over and grabbing my change of clothes before dumping some of the books out of my bag to shove them inside. “Don’t be a prude!” Nathan laughs like it’s a joke as I leave without another word.

“Crap,” I mutter when I see there is a line for the bathrooms. Not wanting to be late, I rush over to the Sigma Theta house. I know this time of day is when it’s less likely to run into people. I’ll just keep my head down and do my work. The last time I was here was only the second time I’ve cleaned the fraternity house. I might have gotten lucky the first time.

I still have an unsettling feeling from my encounter with Rob last time I was here. I’m not so sure Noble isn’t wrong about me going in and out of the rooms by myself. I leave the

doors open when I clean a room, but that hadn't stopped Rob from coming in out of nowhere.

The door is never locked when I make it over to the frat house. I head toward the bathroom on the main floor.

"In here!" someone shouts when I wiggle the handle.

Noble told me not to come back here until he said I could. I roll my eyes even thinking about that. I head up the stairs. He also said I could use his room if I ever needed to. The hallway is empty as I make my way to his bedroom. I knock, but no one answers. I punch in the code and slip into his room.

I'll be quick. I'll change and get to work. Noble will never even know I was here.



CHAPTER 5

NOBLE

“WHY ARE YOU ON YOUR PHONE SO MUCH THESE DAYS? IF IT WAS ANYONE ELSE, I’D THINK THEY WERE WAITING FOR A GIRL TO TEXT THEM BACK, BUT SINCE YOU DON’T DATE CAMPUS GIRLS, IT MUST BE SOMETHING ELSE.” Fleming watches as I punch in my keycode.

“Can’t a guy check his messages?” The green light flashes to indicate that the lock has been disengaged.

“Sure. Ordinary guys but not—”

I slam the door shut.

“—you,” Fleming finishes. “Problem?”

“Yeah.” I take him by the shoulders and turn him to face the hall. “You have to go.”

“What? I thought we were hanging out before the party starts.”

“Do your pre-gaming downstairs. The bar is fully stocked.” I give him a shove.

“We were going to play some tunes.”

I walk him farther away from my door. “Tomorrow. We’ll jam tomorrow as a cure for our hangovers.”

“But—”

“Bye, Flem.” I leave him in the middle of the hallway and race back to my room. I give a knock of warning before re-entering the keycode and then opening the door. Inside, Autumn is sitting on my couch, fully dressed, her hands pressing her knees together, her cheeks stained pink.

She looks edible. I bite the side of my lip and shut the door behind me.

“Sorry. Didn’t expect you here.”

“I could say the same.” I cross to the fridge and take out two chilled coffee drinks. I pop them open and set one in front of her. “Drink,” I order.

She hesitates and then takes a tentative sip. “Are you keeping coffee in your room because the stuff by the library is bad?”

“So, you did read my messages. I wondered, and no. I always keep coffee around here. I’m an addict. It’s my one vice.” I lean against my desk and watch her over the top of my can.

“I would’ve answered you, but I didn’t know what to say,” she replies.

“Hi works. I would’ve accepted things like ‘you’re funny’ or ‘I’d like to see you again’ too.”

“Hi.” She gives me a small wave.

I snort. “You’re an in-person sort of gal. I can get behind that. I guess we’ll be spending a lot of face-to-face time together since you don’t like texting, and I don’t like not knowing what’s happening to you. Since we’ve squared that away, care to tell me why you were naked in my room?”

“My roommate’s boyfriend was in my dorm room and wouldn’t leave. I had to change.” She plucks the front of her worn T-shirt. “I’ve got cleaning to do.” She starts to stand up, but I motion for her to take her seat.

“I thought we agreed that you would only be cleaning my room from now on.”

She takes another drink and then stares at her can for a moment before answering. “That sounded pretty silly, if you think about it. Some random guy offering to pay me a couple hundred dollars to do two rooms? When a deal looks too good to be true, it’s probably a scam.” She sets the can down and gets up. “Thanks for the coffee. Sorry for using your space without asking. I’m going to get to work now.”

“The place was cleaned earlier today by new staff. We’re having a party tonight.”

She stops at the bucket of cleaning supplies that she dropped near the door. “New staff? As in new staff just for today or for always?”

“For always but not this place.” I knock the remote off the coffee table. “It’s a disaster in here at all times, so I’ll need you to clean it probably every day.”

She arches her eyebrow. “I could eat off the floor in here it’s so clean.”

The floor starts vibrating underneath our feet. The boys downstairs have turned on the sound system in anticipation of the party. Pretty soon there will be a half a dozen guys at my door to drag me downstairs.

“The party is starting,” I tell her. “You can hang out here or come down with me.”

“I heard you never attended these parties.”

My lips twitch at the news that she’s been checking up on me. “Never had a reason to before.”

“I also heard that you pick some girl and spend all your time in your room with her during the party. Is it my turn tonight?” Her chin comes up. She doesn’t want to be one of a crowd, and I don’t blame her.

“People say a lot of shit that they don’t know anything about. You can ask any one of my brothers about what I do during parties, and you’ll hear the same answer. I’m not interested in them because it’s the same scene every weekend, every year. A few guys will get drunk doing beer bong, and they’ll puke in the bushes. A couple of girls will get wasted and have to be carried out of here back to the dorms. There will probably be at least one fight over a girl and at least one couple breaks up because one or both are caught making out with someone they aren’t dating. The police will be called around midnight, and I’ll have to go down to pay them off because me and maybe two other guys are the only ones sober enough to do so. If that sounds like something fun, then by all means, let’s go.” I walk over to the door and open it. Outside, I see Fleming and three other guys about to knock. Their eyes shift from Autumn to me and then back again.

“Is that a girl in your room, Noble?” Fleming says in surprise.

I turn to Autumn and spread out my hands. “See? I’m not the devil you think I am. What’s it going to be? Here or downstairs?”



CHAPTER 6

AUTUMN

I TURN AROUND AND BOLT BACK INTO NOBLE'S ROOM. ALL the guys out in the hallway stare at me with surprise. I guess Noble wasn't lying.

"Here it is." Noble closes the door behind us. The lock clicks into place. I still can't believe he caught me pretty much naked. I swear I have the worst timing. He's not being pervy about it either. A lot of boys would have made a few remarks.

"I can't go to a party dressed like this." I motion down to my worn short and ripped jeans.

"You can change back into what you were wearing previously." I chew on my bottom lip. My other clothes aren't much better.

I'm not sure if I'm up for a party, but being alone with Noble sounds scary. The man wreaks havoc on all parts of me. I still have no idea what to make of him. He's nice—a little too nice—and that freaks me all the way out.

There is always a catch. I'm not sure what his is yet. It can't be purely sex because I don't think it would be hard for him to get laid. Not with how I heard the girls talking in class earlier. Then again, it could be the thrill of the chase for him.

"I don't know." I worry my bottom lip between my teeth.

"You don't know if you want to change or you don't know what you want to do?"

"All of the above?"

"All right." He gives me an easy smile. "Then we'll hang out here." He walks over to me. His hand reaches out to wrap his fingers around a piece of my hair. "Don't have to do anything you don't want to. Just as long as whatever you pick includes the two of us hanging out." He releases my hair, and his eyes drop to my mouth, but he quickly turns away. I let out a puff of air I didn't know I was holding in.

I watch as he walks over and flicks on the TV. He flips through the channels, stopping when *The Office* pops up. Then

he heads back over to the sofa, sitting down. I stand there like a dumbass.

“Shit, are you hungry? I should’ve offered you something already. I can have something delivered.”

“I’m fine.” I shrug. The coffee will hold me over for a little.

“When did you eat last?” I think for a second. “It shouldn’t take that long to answer.” He pulls out his phone and starts tapping away.

“I think I’ll change.” I grab my bag from off the floor and head over to the bathroom, needing a second to think.

I put my jean shorts back on and my oversized hoodie. I stand in front of the mirror wondering why Noble has some kind of fascination with me. He’s sweet and ungodly handsome. And I’m just my plain old self. I don’t understand it.

He did make me lose my job. One he is still trying to pay me for. Now he’s getting me food and trying to take me down to the party? I’d stand out like a sore thumb. People would stare and wonder why Noble was here with me. I already saw the looks of bewilderment on his friends’ faces in the hallway.

I yank open the door. Noble looks up from his phone. “Food will be here soon. Wasn’t sure what you liked, so I got a bunch of stuff.”

“I’m not a charity case,” I blurt out. “I don’t need your handouts. I can take care of myself.”

“Handouts?”

“What else would you call it? You’re being all extra nice to me and getting food. Then the whole job thing. I get that you’re uber rich, but I don’t need your sympathy.” The need to get out of here hits me like a ton of bricks. I bolt for the door, only getting it open a few inches before Noble’s hand comes down over my head, shutting it.

“Sympathy isn’t what I’m feeling.” I find myself leaning back into him. I wanted him to chase me, and he did.

He meets me halfway, pressing his body into my back. The hard outline of his cock presses into me. My breath hitches as desire sparks to life inside of me. His other hand goes to my hip. He doesn't take the other off the door.

"You're hard." It's a stupid thing to say, but again, my body is going haywire. I don't like to be touched. Ever. Still, I push my ass into him more. His hand on my hip flexes. Why does he feel so damn nice against me? I want to turn around and bury my face in his chest, but I can't. I won't allow myself to even dream that this could amount to anything.

"Yeah, I'm hard. I walked in on my girl all but naked. Of course, I'm hard. I get hard when I text you."

"Noble." I whisper his name. Did he call me his girl? My stomach dips. I've never been anyone's anything. Yeah, Noble scares me but in a different kind of way.

"Yeah."

"I don't like to be touched."

"Tell me to stop." He relaxes his hold on my hip. I miss the tight hold instantly but don't say anything. "All you ever have to say is stop or no, and I'll back up. Even if it kills me." I turn around to face him. He towers over me. I should be freaking out. I'm all but pinned against the door alone in a room with him, but I'm not.

"What are you doing?" I search his face, trying to find something.

"Truthfully?"

"Always, please."

"I'm trying not to spook you. You're a runner, Kitten."

"Kitten?" I scrunch my nose.

"I've got to slowly earn your trust." He drops his hand from the door. "Come on." He snags my hand, leading me back over to the sofa. "Are you good with *The Office*?"

"I've never really watched it before." He pulls me down to sit next to him.

“You’re joking, right?”

I shake my head. “I mean, I’ve seen a few here and there but not really.” *Only if it’s been on a random TV somewhere or something.*

“Think I love the idea of getting to see you watch it for the first time.” He grabs the remote and turns it up some.

I suppose I could stay. What else was I going to do? Go back to my dorm where my roommate’s boyfriend still is? I try to let myself relax. Slowly I find myself leaning toward him until he drapes his arm over my shoulder and tucks me into his side.

I melt into him. It’s both terrifying and exhilarating all at once.



CHAPTER 7

NOBLE

THE LINE OF STUDENTS EXITING THE CLASSROOM SLOWS TO A trickle and then dries up. I wait another five minutes before going into the lecture hall to find Autumn. She's at the front with the lecturer, discussing something serious. I take a seat in the back and watch. I swear I could look at her all day and never be bored. It's not just because she's gorgeous but because there's so much life in her expression. Even from the back row, I can see the sparkle in her eyes. Her hands move as she explains her point to the professor. There's something engaging about her that makes you want to lean in.

She laughs so easily. When we were watching *The Office*, she would point to the television during a particularly funny part and laugh loud. She was unconcerned with what she looked like but instead completely enjoyed the moment.

I wanted to eat her up the other night, but she was so relaxed and happy that I didn't want to erase that by coming on strong. She said she didn't like to be touched. I wonder where that came from and who I was going to have to rub out because of it.

There's no reason to rush things, I decided. It's best she gets used to me, which is why I'm here waiting for her to be done with class.

The five minutes stretch into ten. I lay my head against the edge of the thin wooden seat and contemplate our dinner options. Mexican bowls, bahn-mi sandwiches, or fried chicken all sound appealing. I don't know if she has any food allergies. I'll have to figure that out.

"Noble Patton White?"

Lazily, I roll my head to the side to see a pair of legs and short shorts. I have no idea to whom they belong. "Yeah?"

"It's Lia. Lia Melbourne from your marketing class. I didn't know you were taking English Comp."

I shove myself upright. "Is that what class I'm in?"

“It is in thirty minutes. I’ll sit beside you since you look like you’re alone.” She steps between my legs. I don’t know if I shift or she moves or we both do it at the same time, but in the next moment, her hands are on my shoulders and her boobs are about one inch from my face. I throw my hands up to her waist to prevent her from giving me an unintentional motorboat.

“Noble?”

I hear my name again, but this time I recognize the voice. Hastily, I push Lia off of me and scramble out of the seat, the desk catching my shin and nearly making me fall on my face. “Autumn. I was waiting for you.”

“Sure looks like that.” Her eyes flick over my shoulder to Lia. “Don’t mind me. Go back to whatever you were doing.”

A hand comes over my shoulder, and I feel Lia pressing herself against my back. “Who’s this, Noble?”

“My girlfriend,” I snap, and step out from Lia’s touch.

Autumn gives a laugh. “No, I’m not. He’s all yours, but you should be careful. I think he lies a lot.”

“Not to me he doesn’t,” Lia chirps.

I give her an incredulous look. I don’t know Lia at all, and we’ve never spoken more than a half dozen times and all in the context of classwork.

Autumn waves her hand dismissively and walks off. I do something I’ve never done before in my entire twenty-two years. I chase after her. “Wait a minute.”

She doesn’t slow down, but I’m six-foot-three and she’s five-foot-nothing, so it’s no time before I catch up to her.

“Don’t put me in that position again,” she snaps.

“What position? The one where I tell everyone you’re with me? I thought we decided that the first time we met.”

“We never decided anything. You said things because—I don’t know why you said them. Maybe you were feeling kind in the moment, but I’m not someone you can use as an excuse

or a cover for shitty behavior.” She throws open the door to her dorm and storms through.

“What shitty behavior?”

“Obviously you led that girl on and now you regret it.” She stops in front of the elevators and punches the button. “Can you leave? This is an all-girls dorm and last I knew, you weren’t a girl.”

“I’m sure you can make exceptions.”

“Don’t make me call security.” Autumn punches the button once more, and when the elevator doesn’t arrive, she spins on her heel and brushes past me to a door that is marked *Stairs*. I follow.

“You’ve got it wrong. I was waiting for you. Lia showed up, and she was taking a seat. She tripped and fell. I caught her because I didn’t want to have her end up in my lap. Next time I promise I’ll push her down the stairs.”

Autumn stops and halfway turns toward me. “I don’t want to see you again. I don’t want you waiting for me after class. I don’t want your money or your pity job. Leave me alone, or I’ll report you as a harasser. I know it won’t go anywhere because your last name is Patton, but maybe someone with principles will take my case, and you’ll get a taste of what it’s like to live like a normal person.”

With that, she races up the stairs. I start to give chase and then stop because it feels like I’m scaring her. I drag my hands down my face and scrub my scalp. This isn’t how I thought the afternoon would go. My plans were to wait for her to get done with class, take her out to dinner, and then lure her back to my room, where we’d watch more of *The Office* and I’d get her used to my presence. If one thing led to another and our clothes ended up on the floor, all the better.

But somehow, one thing went wrong, and now she’s treating me like a leper. I want to storm her castle gates and insist she let me inside, but I have a feeling she would call the police on me. A rueful grin curls up the corners of my lips. I like that, to be honest. I like that she’s strong and principled

and doesn't care about the size of my bank account. It only makes me want her more.



CHAPTER 8

AUTUMN

THERE IS SOMETHING MAJORLY WRONG WITH ME. A STUPID sadness has been hovering over me for the past five days. Ever since I left Noble standing in the stairwell of my dorm. I miss him. It's crazy, and I know I shouldn't, but that doesn't stop me from feeling this way. I'm not sure how I can miss him with him still randomly texting me. I always seem to pass him on campus when I'm going from one class to another.

Have we always crossed paths and I've never noticed, or is he going out of his way to see me? I'm guessing the latter. Pretty sure I'd remember if I saw Noble before. Not only because he is ridiculously handsome, but he towers over everyone. There is no missing him. There is also no missing how girls always turn to stare his way when he passes by. It only brings all that anger back, and I remember why I'm not talking to him anymore.

"How long have you been waiting?" I look up to see a dark-haired boy. He screams freshman. I'd know because I am one.

"Twenty minutes."

"Right." He checks his watch.

"If you have a class or something you can go before me," I offer. I've been waiting to talk to one of the work placement advisers. I don't have a class to get to, and he might.

"Nah, it's cool. Thanks, though. I'll wait." He drops down in the seat next to mine. "I'm Dax." He gives me a chin nod.

"Autumn." I give him a smile in return.

"You a freshman too?"

"Yeah."

"Major?"

"I'm not sure yet, to be honest." I'm doing my basics at the moment. I'd love to major in social work, but the pay is crap, and I hate that I have to factor that in. I can't bust my ass

through school and still struggle to make ends meet. What if I majored in something that would pay well and then I could volunteer or even foster?

“You have one?”

“Pre-law.”

My phone vibrates in my hand. I flip it over and see a text from Noble. Who else would it be? I suppose it could be my roommate telling me she needs the room to herself.

You think Jim should have gone for Pam even if she was with Roy?

I don't know why out of all the texts he sent me that my fingers itch to respond to this one.

Probably wouldn't make for good TV. They have to do the terrible tease. Guessing they're the new Ross and Rachel?

Pretty much

Good thing it's only fiction. In real life I wouldn't want to see the person I end up with date other people. No thanks. I'll pass on that.

Yeah, it's a jab but I can't help myself.

“Autumn.” I stand when Amy calls my name to come back to her tiny office. “What's going on?”

“I think there is a glitch or something. I haven't been cleaning the Sigma Theta house, but I'm still being paid.” I hate telling her that, but I have to if I want her to get me placed into a new job.

“Correct, you're not cleaning the Sigma Theta house any longer.” She clicks away on her computer. “You're responsible for Noble Patton-White's rooms. That's why you're still getting paid.”

“Does it really say that?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve never cleaned his rooms.”

“Really?” Her brows pull together. “You must be doing something because a raise went into effect as of yesterday.” She leans forward and whispers, “Noble must have requested it.” Right, because he can do anything he wants. That’s what happens when you have money.

I want to be annoyed, but I honestly don’t know what I feel right now. “Do you know Noble?” If I recall, the last time I was in here during our small talk, she mentioned having worked here for over ten years.

“I know his mother, and I’ve met him a few times. They’re good people.” I want to pepper her with more questions, but I don’t want to seem too interested. Or to make her uncomfortable with the questions that I really want answered.

I can’t ask a staff member of the university if Noble is known as a fuckboy. I’d been so sure he wasn’t after his friends were so surprised that he had a girl in his room, but then I remembered later how he said he doesn’t like people in his space. That must mean he goes to theirs. It has to mean that after what I’d seen. It would add up then why his friends reacted the way they did when they saw me in his place.

“Are there any other job openings?” I ask instead. I need to make sure I have something solid in place. I don’t want a handout from Noble.

“We can only give out one job per student.”

“No, I mean a different one.”

“A different one? This one is now the highest paying on campus, and I’m guessing Noble must think you’re excellent at your job being his room was off the cleaning list until you got personally assigned to it.”

“Okay.” I stand and begin to gather my things, seeing that this isn’t going to go anywhere. “Thanks.”

“I didn’t really do anything, but you’re welcome.” She laughs, standing with me. We walk back out of the office. I pause when I see Noble sitting where Dax had been.

“Hi, Noble. We were just talking about you.”

“Really?” He gives Amy a bright smile. She freaking blushes. I fight not to roll my eyes. “Good things, I hope.”

“Not really,” I say dryly. Amy’s eyes widen, bouncing between the two of us. A moment of silence hovers around us all.

“Did Dax leave?” Amy asks, finally breaking the tension in the room.

“Yeah. He found a job,” Noble responds.

“Thanks again, Amy,” I say before I head out of the building.

I bite the inside of my cheek so that I don’t smile when I hear the quick thud of steps coming up behind me.

“Did you do something to Dax?” I keep walking as Noble comes up beside me.

“I gave him a job.”

“Is that job to stay away from me?”

“Little bit.” I stop walking and turn to glare at him. It’s really hard to stare someone down that towers over you. “You told me to.”

“I told you to?!”

“Your text. You said that no one wants to watch their person cozy up to someone else.” I gape at him. “Before you say I’m not your person, I am.”

“You’re crazy. You know that.”

“Yeah, Kitten. Got hit with a case of it about a week ago.” When we met. I drop my head, a small smile escaping me. He’s persistent. I’ll give him that.

“Noble, I can’t do this.”

“Because you don’t like to be touched?” I shake my head no.

I find I rather enjoy his touches. Growing up in the system, there were always people jammed together. Now since getting

away from that, I enjoy my space. In fact, sometimes if there are too many people crammed together, panic starts to rise inside of me. That fear of being sucked back to where I felt like I had no say in my life rises to the surface. It's irrational, but I can't stop it.

"Then why can't you do this? I swear that girl wasn't anything." I want to believe him so badly.

"I've got trust issues, Noble. Hell, I've got all kinds of issues. Why would you want anything to do with this mess?"

He steps in closer. "I don't think you're a mess, but if that's what you want to call it, then fine. But I want everything to do with *all* your messiness." I swallow a lump forming in my throat.

"Noble." I whisper his name. His hand comes up, his thumb and forefinger gripping my chin gently.

"I'm going to kiss you, Kitten." I lick my lips as he continues, "Anyone ever kissed you before?"

"No." He's making his intentions very clear.

"Good, because I've never kissed anyone," he says before his mouth claims mine right in the center of campus.



CHAPTER 9

NOBLE

“GET A ROOM!”

“Someone take a video!”

“Is that Noble Patton-White?”

“Is this a prank?”

“My turn next!”

It’s the last shouted phrase that causes Autumn to wriggle out of my grasp. I scowl at the girl standing directly behind her. She grimaces and slinks away into the crowd that seems to have gathered while I was kissing Autumn.

I dismiss them from my mind and return my attention to the girl in front of me. Her lips are wet, and her cheeks are rosy. If the crowd wasn’t here, I’d eat her up, lick her from the tip of her forehead to the bottom of her feet. She tries to move, but I hold her in place.

“I need your protection,” I say.

“From what?”

I direct her gaze downward where my thick shaft is bulging against the denim.

“Oh,” she says with widening eyes as she realizes to what I’m referring.

I let out a small rueful laugh. “This is an actual dilemma. If you move, everyone is going to see my hard-on, and if you don’t move, my erection isn’t going away. Thoughts?”

“I could punch you in the nuts.”

“Drastic but probably effective. Let’s try a little space.” I move her back two steps and wave my arm toward the crowd. “Show’s over, everyone. Go back to your regularly scheduled programming.”

There are some grumbles, but the crowd disperses enough that the entire campus won’t be talking about my woody by dinner.

I jump up and down a little, re-adjusting myself as surreptitiously as possible. After about ten seconds of thinking of the most gruesome things possible, I say, “I think I can walk now.” Autumn’s cheeks are still red. I guess knowing that she turns me on is embarrassing for the little virgin. I slip her hand into mine. “Where to? You have another class? Dinner? Workout?”

“I hate working out.”

“You hate—okay, me too.” I actually love working out, but if my girl says it sucks, it sucks.

“I don’t believe you, and I have my doubts about the whole never kissed anyone before either.” Some of the sparkle has faded from her eyes.

“That good, was it?” I know I could swear it was the truth, but some things are hard to accept with just words. “There’s more where that comes from. No worries.” I grip her hand tighter, tugging her forward. I’m going to have to stick by her side because it’s obvious when we’re apart she has second—and third—thoughts about whether I’m a player. I’m not sure why I give off that air. Other girls have assumed that I bed anything that shakes their ass in my direction, as if I have no control or I’m some untrained dog that gets rabid at even a whiff of a tit. I haven’t touched a woman since I stepped foot on this campus—save for Autumn. So, I have no clue where this idea comes from. I’ll never be my father.

“I didn’t say I was worried,” she replies. “I don’t even know if I have time for this—whatever this is.”

“Kitten, I’m the easiest person to be around in the whole world. You don’t have to make time for me. I’ll be wherever you are.”

“I need to study, and I have work. I’m not here to hook up with random guys.”

The thought of her hooking up with random guys makes me want to puke. “Yeah, I’m not going to be happy if that happens either. I’ll have to beat that man’s ass, and then someone will report me to the honor’s counsel and then my

mom will show up and pay off the school. After that, she'll give me a sad look and say how I disappointed her, which I don't want to do, so for my own family harmony, please don't be chasing after other men."

Her mouth falls open, and she appears to be at a momentary loss for words. "Good, I see you agree with me. Glad we're on the same page." I check the time. "Looks like it's dinner time. Let's go eat. I don't have a campus meal plan, so we'll go to the hot pot restaurant down the street."

"I can't," she says, but her stomach rumbles.

"Your body disagrees."

"I have to study."

"Good thing that this restaurant allows you to bring your books inside. I heard some campus eateries have a book ban."

"Really? Which ones?"

I stop and pinch her cheek. "Kitten, you are adorable. I was being sarcastic. Even gunners like you have to eat. I'll order and cook your meat and veggies while you pour over your assignments. After we stuff ourselves full of broth, noodles, and dumplings, we'll get an order of donut holes to go and head back to my room where I'll watch *The Office* on mute and you study. When you're done studying, I'll give you a massage. We'll make out a little and then go to bed."

"You think you have it all worked out, don't you? But put yourself in my shoes. I'm a scholarship student. I can barely afford the used books. Let's say you are being totally sincere, and you are taken with me—which I don't fully understand—I can't allow myself to be swept up by you. There's no guarantee in this life, and you can't make a promise to me right now, a week after we met. If things were different, maybe I could take a chance with you, but I have too much at stake." Regret pours out of her, and the sadness in her eyes drives home the realness of her words. She's not saying this to put me off but because she believes she can't take a risk on me.

"So, hot pot?"

A small laugh of disbelief spills out of her. “Didn’t you hear what I said?”

“Autumn, I heard every word, but you still need to eat.” I’m going to have to prove myself to her, in actions and deeds, since words don’t move her. “Let’s go. I’m starving.”



CHAPTER 10

AUTUMN

“YOU DON’T ALWAYS HAVE TO WALK ME BACK TO MY DORM,” I tell Noble. He’s got his arm thrown over my shoulder. He’s always touching me in some way, but it never goes far. A few brushes of his hand here or there.

In fact, he hasn’t kissed me since our one and only kiss over a week ago. It’s irritating me, which I know is irrational considering I’m the one that made it a point to tell him I don’t like to be touched. The only one I should be upset with is myself.

“Yes, I do. It’s night out.”

“When has that made a difference?” I laugh. It could be the middle of the day and he’d insist on walking me back to my dorm. “Besides this place is lit up.” They keep the campus well lit. There is always security walking around too.

“I walk you home.” His voice is sterner this time. I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from smiling.

Noble is always so sweet and considerate that when he has these assertive moments, they make my insides light up. They should probably have the opposite effect on me, but I can’t help how my body reacts to him.

Again, it’s irrational. I don’t want anyone bossing me around, but I think with Noble it comes from a place of care and concern. Sometimes I wish it came from a place of dirty dominance, but that’s likely me reading too many of those over-the-top romance books. I’ve always been drawn to that but stuffed it deep down inside of me, never thinking that there would be a safe place for that. Noble is trying to prove otherwise. He’s making me trust him in a way I’ve never trusted anyone.

“Fine, you walk me home.” I give because I would be disappointed if he didn’t. Over the last week, any time Noble or I aren’t in a class we’re together up until I go back to my dorm.

With all his small touches and always being around, there has to be some kind of romantic feelings on his side. He made it clear early on that there were, but I'm worried we've slipped into some friend-zone. Which is part of my irrational irritation.

I told Noble I didn't have time for a relationship or flings and now he's giving me friendship? Yeah, I don't want that either. I'm questioning myself now. I have no clue what I want, but the more time I spend with Noble, the more I hate it when I have to leave his side.

"You want a chocolate muffin or croissant tomorrow?" It's on the tip of my tongue to tell him he doesn't need to bring me food, but it's pointless.

"Surprise me." He drops his arm from around my shoulder as we enter my dorm building. He insists on walking me up to my floor.

"See you in the morning, Kitten." He tucks a piece of my hair behind my ear. I stare up at him, my eyes dropping to his mouth. He leans down, and I close my eyes. Then I feel his lips brush my forehead. "Night."

"Night," I mumble, opening the door to my floor.

Frustrated, I jam my key into my door and fling it open. I freeze when I see my roommate Renee straddling her boyfriend. The two of them are making out. Thankfully, they still have their clothes on. They both glance my way. Renee slips off Nathan's lap.

"I need to shower," Renee says, grabbing her bathroom bag. She's pretty, with black shiny hair and legs for days. If she wasn't a major bitch, I'd say she's way out of Nathan's league. "Nathan is staying over," she says as she approaches me.

"That's against the rules."

"Only if you're a snitch. Don't be a prude. He's moving, and his new place isn't ready for a few days." She bumps my shoulder, walking past me and out our door, leaving me alone with her boyfriend.

“Why do you dress that way?” he randomly asks me. I glance down at my hoodie and jean shorts.

“It’s comfortable?” Also affordable. I leave that part out. I don’t need to explain myself to him.

“Going to change into your pajamas?” He leans back on the bed against the wall, putting his hands behind his head like he’s waiting for a show. What the hell is with this creep? I glance to my bed and then back over to Renee’s. My anxiety starts to grow thinking about him being in here while I sleep.

I ignore him and proceed to find a pair of sleep shorts and a shirt. “You really fucking Noble?”

“No.” I glance over my shoulder at Nathan, who is now openly staring at my ass as I’m bent over shuffling through my drawer to find my panties, but I can’t find any. What the hell? I stand, turning around and running right into Nathan.

“Not the word around campus.”

“I don’t care what the word around campus is,” I straight-up lie.

I don’t mind the idea of people thinking Noble is mine. I don’t miss the way other girls stare at him. I also don’t miss how he doesn’t pay it any attention. In fact, at times, I’m pretty sure it annoys him. The man has no ego to be stroked, which only makes him hotter.

“You know who his father is? He fucks girls about your age. Got a new one every week.” I do know that. Over the past week, I’ve gotten to know Noble, and his father is not his favorite person. Now, his mom, he adores. Yet another thing that makes him more attractive.

“Why do you care, Nathan?”

“Just wondering what kind of girl you are.” He licks his lips. “Renee doesn’t mind a third.”

“What?!” I try to step back, but I bump into the dresser. Panic starts to rise in my chest. This room is too damn small. The door flies open.

“Forgot my...” Renee trails off. Her eyes narrow on Nathan and me. She doesn’t look like a girl that shares. “What’s going on?” She puts her hands on her hips.

“I, ah. I’m leaving.” I grab my bag, shoving my clothes inside of it.

“Yeah, that’s probably a good idea.” She glares at me. Of course, she thinks I’m the one doing something wrong here. She should be glaring at her boyfriend; he’s the creeper. She steps back to let me by. I practically run to the Sigma Theta house. My chest is tight with anxiety.

There is a party going on, but it looks to be a small one. A few people linger outside on the porch. None of the guys bother me as I hurry up the stairs into the house. I make my way straight up to Noble’s room. I go to enter the code to his door but stop when I hear a groan come from inside. What the hell?

My heart sinks. That is until I hear my name following it. I pull my hand away from the keypad and knock instead.

“Leave me the fuck alone,” he shouts.

“If you say so,” I shout back but don’t move. Two seconds later, the door swings open to a bare-chested Noble, who is only in a pair of sweatpants. I don’t miss the outline of his erection.

“What’s wrong?” He pulls me into his room, shutting the door behind me.

“Nothing. My roommate’s boyfriend is staying the night, and I didn’t feel comfortable staying there too.”

“You’re not staying there.”

“That’s what I kinda just said.” I laugh, the anxiety in my chest melting away. Noble is my cure. He could also be my downfall.



CHAPTER 11

NOBLE

I POINT HER TOWARD THE SOFA. “BE RIGHT BACK,” I SAY AND escape into the bathroom. Right now is a bad time for Autumn to show up at my door. I’m trying to cope with my lust, which is building like an unsteady mountain of blocks piled one upon the other, ready to crash down at any moment. I’ve spent a week being a perfect gentleman, and I am not cut out for it. Every moment I’m with her makes me want her more.

I’ve jerked off more this past week than I did all of my teen years. It’s to the point where I don’t even enjoy a little self-pleasuring because the pleasure isn’t there. If I can’t have the real thing, I don’t want it. The real thing is just outside this door, sitting on my sofa with her knees pressed together and her wary eyes scanning my space. I blow out a long breath and throw open the door.

Her head jerks around in surprise.

I scowl because her hand is on the doorknob, and she looks like she’s about to flee.

“I thought you came here because your roommate’s boyfriend was being a dick.”

“I did, but I thought maybe you had something going on.”

“I don’t, so get your tush over to the sofa before I put you there myself.” My patience is at an all-time low, so the words come out short and sharp.

She moves fast as if she was waiting for my order.

I lean against the desk because I don’t trust myself to get any closer to her. “What’s the deal with the boyfriend anyway?”

“He just makes me uncomfortable.”

“Because of PDA or what?”

She scrunches her nose. “Not really. I mean, I don’t love that, but I could deal with it. It’s just that sometimes he makes

suggestive comments or stares at me too long. I'm probably imagining things."

I straighten up. "The hell you are."

"Where are you going?" she asks, hopping to her feet.

I look over my shoulder. "To go beat this guy's ass."

"No. Please, don't. First, you could get kicked out, and second, like I said, I'm reading too much into things."

"I doubt it, but I can beat his ass later, I guess." I let go of the doorknob. My eyes fall to the bag she brought with her. "You wanted to change?" I toe the satchel.

"I was going to get ready for bed, but I can't really do that here. I don't want to walk back across campus in my sleep shorts and shirt."

"You'll sleep here." I pick up the bag and toss it into the bathroom. "Go and change."

Autumn immediately moves toward me and then stops, almost as if she was surprised by her own actions. Testing out a theory that pops into my head, I say, "In the bathroom. Now."

She scurries inside and slams the door closed behind her. I contemplate the closed door and review my facts. When we get food, she likes me to order for her. When I tell her to sit down or get to her feet, she obeys without question. For the last week, I haven't pressed her to do anything because I wanted to make her comfortable, but maybe it came off as if I wasn't fully interested. At least when it comes to us, she seems to enjoy being ordered around, not having to make decisions. Quickly, I pull a chair into position. After dousing the lights, I seat myself on the sofa, throw my arms across the back, and wait for her to come out.

The moment the door opens, I bark out a command. "Put your ass in the chair."

"What's going on?"

"No questions, Autumn. Not unless I say you can ask them. Go and sit."

She does as she's told. Need surges through me. Blood pounds in my dick. I might not make it through this.

"Pull down your shorts."

"My shorts?" she squeaks.

"Yeah, and don't make me repeat myself."

"I don't know if I'm ready."

"You're ready or you wouldn't be here. You saw I had a hard-on when you arrived, and you didn't leave. Take down your shorts." I enunciate every syllable.

Autumn sucks in her lower lip but puts her hands on the waistband of her pajamas. She fumbles with them. My chest tightens, and my breath begins to grow labored. The slow speed at which her shorts travel from her thighs to the floor is a torment I didn't know existed in this world.

I crack my neck to one side and then the other. "Pull your legs to your chest."

Again, she moves so slowly, so deliberately that I have to bite my own tongue until I taste blood. She keeps her thighs tight together and dangles her feet in front of her, hiding her sex from view.

"Drape your legs over the arms of the chair."

"Are you going to take your clothes off?" she asks.

"No. The only thing keeping me from hammering into your innocent pussy is my sweatpants. Legs apart. Don't make me repeat myself. I don't like that."

She draws in a ragged breath and does what I ask. I nearly pass out at the sight. She's wet between her legs. Moisture coats the inside of her thighs. Her pussy glistens like it's decorated with priceless jewels. All doubts about whether this was the right move evaporate. Autumn is turned the fuck on. I palm myself through my sweatpants and give my cock a hard jerk.

"Dip your index finger inside your pussy, Kitten. Let's hear your slick sounds of want. Get yourself good and wet

because I'm going to take you soon, and you need to be ready." I pull out my cock and squeeze the tip until pre-cum covers the cockhead.

She gasps at the sight of my monster, and her finger slips in knuckle deep. Her next groan comes from her own touch. "Put two more fingers inside yourself, all the way to your palm. You gotta make yourself ready. I need to know you want it." I stroke my cock roughly. "You can see how much I want you, but you're not getting this until you can prove that you're ready. Can you do that, Kitten? Nod if you're with me."



CHAPTER 12

AUTUMN

MY HEART RACES. ANOTHER SIDE OF NOBLE HAS COME OUT. I wonder if it's always been there or if I've sparked it the same way he's done to me. Those dark thoughts I have about him when I'm alone rise to the surface.

"Kitten." His tone is stern. I bite my bottom lip as I slide another finger inside of myself. It stretches me. If this is already making me full, how will Noble ever fit inside of me?

He strokes himself as he watches me slowly work my fingers in and out of myself. My legs are spread wide, making me feel vulnerable. He can see every part of me. I've never been this way with anyone. I didn't know I was capable of showing this much vulnerability, considering how I grew up.

I didn't think he could get any more handsome, but seeing him this way is a whole other level of hotness. I can't help but love that I made him like that. He looks like he's hanging on to his self-control by a very thin thread. I know he's waiting for me to give him the go-ahead to touch me. He's been holding back from the start, trying to earn my trust. He said that in the beginning. That he was going to lure me out to him. He's done it because now I want to pounce. Better yet, I want him to pounce on me.

"Noble." I lick my lips, getting up the courage to say something I've never said to anyone before in my life. "I need you. Please."

Before I even know what's happening, Noble is on his knees with his face between my thighs. He pulls my hand away to replace it with his own. His fingers slide into me as his tongue laps at my clit. I arch into him, the pleasure overwhelming me. He devours me. The first orgasm hits me hard. I grip the arms of the chair as my ass rises up.

Noble's forearm comes over my hips, pinning me back down, his mouth never leaving me. He drinks down every drop of my orgasm and demands more. He thrusts another finger inside of me.

“I’m going to have to work you up. You’re so damn tight. Break you in with my fingers.”

“Yes,” I moan. I think I would agree to anything right now. Watching Noble on his knees in front of me, going to town between my thighs is the hottest thing I’ve ever seen in my life. It’s not only the act but the intensity coming from him.

He strokes my clit faster with his tongue as he hooks his fingers inside of me, hitting something deep that I didn’t know was there. This orgasm is different from the last. It explodes out from everywhere, my whole body humming with pleasure. I feel a sharp pain for a second, but it’s gone as quickly as it was there. Noble continues lapping at my sex, drinking up my orgasm before he slowly pulls his fingers out from inside of me.

“Don’t move,” he orders when I start to close my legs. Then he pushes my shirt up, revealing my breasts as he rises to his feet to loom over me. I watch as he strokes himself. “Kitten,” he groans as he starts to come. Ropes of cum spray across my thighs and sex. He keeps stroking himself as more comes from him, this time hitting my stomach and breasts.

He stares down at me, his eyes taking in what he’s done to me. He marked me. It’s a crazy, almost barbaric thing, but I love it. I feel claimed in a way. No one has ever staked a claim on me. I should probably feel otherwise, but I can’t help but love that he wants himself to be all over me.

“You’re stunning, Kitten. But more so with me on you.” He leans down, letting my legs drop together, and kisses me long and hard. “Come on. I don’t want to wash this off, but I do want you to soak in the tub so you’re not sore tomorrow.”

“Sore?” He slides his hand between my thighs, cupping my sex. I tense when he starts to push a finger inside of me. He stops.

“Sore,” he repeats. “Let me get the tub going.” I watch as he walks back into the bathroom, and the sound of water coming on fills the room a few seconds later. When he comes back, he’s got a white hand towel, and he’s put his sweats back

on. I can still see the hard outline of his cock. “Open for me.” I do without question.

How does he suddenly have this much control over my body? I really must subconsciously trust him. He’s been so patient with me. I tense again when he wipes between my thighs. When he pulls the towel back, it’s then I see the blood. It hits me what that pinch of pain I’d felt was.

“Noble?”

“The first time I slide my cock inside you isn’t going to be painful.” Emotions fill my throat, but I only nod in understanding. He’d taken my hymen in the least painful way possible. I was so lost in my orgasm I barely felt it.

He tosses the towel down before he lifts me, carrying me to the bathroom and sitting me down in the tub. I let out a soft moan. I can’t remember the last time I had a bath. It’s only ever been shower stalls. It’s a luxury a lot of people don’t realize they have.

Noble drops down onto his knees beside the tub. “What are you doing?” I ask when he starts to put soap on a loofah ball.

“Taking care of you.” I close my eyes, but I can’t stop the few tears that escape. Until this very moment, I hadn’t realized how much I’ve yearned for someone to say those words to me. “Autumn, baby.” He grips my chin to turn my head to face him. I open my eyes. “You’re killing me. Did I hurt you? Kitten, I’m sorry if I went too—”

“No.” I stop him. “You didn’t hurt me.”

He lets out a breath. “Why are you crying?”

“I can’t explain it. It’s not bad, I’m just not used to someone taking care of me.”

Noble’s jaw ticks, but he forces a smile onto his lips. “You’ll get used to it, or I’ll die trying.”

I lean over and press my mouth to his.

No, Noble hasn’t hurt me, but he could. He’s taking something no one else has ever gotten close to. My heart.



CHAPTER 13

NOBLE

I CHECK THE TIME AND TURN THE PAGE OF THE POETRY BOOK I'm reading.

Escape me?

Never—

Beloved!

While I am I, and you are you,

So long as the world contains us both

SO SAYETH MR. BROWNING. Autumn would approve. I mark a passage. The next time I have her in my room, I'll tie her hands and feet together, lick her to the point of orgasm, and then sit back and read her some Browning while she fights the urge to come. If we do this enough, just reading one line from this collection could put her on the edge. I flip to the next entry.

“There you are, my boy.”

I hear the voice of my dad, but since I can't stand him, I continue to read. Or pretend to continue to read.

He doesn't take the hint. Instead, he settles his coke-addled ass on the bench next to me. “Your girl should be coming out soon.”

My book snaps shut almost by itself. “What'd you say?”

He smiles like a snake waiting to bite would smile and waves a piece of paper in my face. “Your girl's class is almost done. I got her schedule right here.”

I snatch the paper out of his hand and scan it. My blood grows cold as I scan the text. I crumple the printout in my hand and stuff it into my jeans pocket. “Where the hell did you get that?”

“The register or something.” He grins. “The ladies were really helpful. Just wanted a photo and an autograph.”

“It’s registrar, and this is private information. They shouldn’t be giving it to you for any reason.”

“The lady there, the one with the brown hair and glasses that are too small for her round face, told me that she didn’t see a problem since she printed it out for you.”

I clench my jaw.

Dad laughs and slaps me on the back. “I don’t blame you, son. I’m proud that you’re taking the initiative. To tell you the truth, I had a tasty experience the last time I visited, if you know what I mean. These college girls have no inhibitions. If I knew what they were like, I would’ve gone to college myself. What’s your girl like to do?”

“If you weren’t my old man, I would’ve decked you by now,” I say coldly. “Out of respect for your advanced age”—he hates to be reminded that he’s older now—“and that your bones are probably brittle and you lack health insurance because you’ve snorted so much coke that you’ve got more pre-existing conditions than a Hollywood prenup, I’m not going to touch you this time. But you talk like that again about her, the fact that you’re my sperm donor isn’t going to stop me from putting you in the hospital.”

The door to the Franklin Building where Autumn takes her sociology classes opens, and the students start pouring out. Before I can separate myself from my old man, Autumn spots me and waves excitedly. She runs forward, her eyes bright and her cheeks pink. I want to eat her up and also take her away from here. I cross over to her, trying to intercept her before her eyes can land on my dad, but I’m too late. Her gaze darts over my shoulder, and I can tell by the slight widening of her eyes that she sees him.

“You don’t have to say a word to him,” I say in a low voice when I reach her. “Pretend like he’s not there.”

“But—”

“Autumn, isn’t it?” Dad booms.

“It’s Nick White!” someone calls. A few people run over. “Mr. White, can I have your autograph?” “How about a selfie?”

“Me next.”

I grab Autumn’s hand and try to use the commotion as cover to sneak away, but Dad’s on a mission.

“Sorry, folks. Another time, but for now, I’m spending the afternoon with my son.” His heavy hand falls on my shoulder.

“Noble Patton is Nick White’s son?” someone murmurs.

I grab my dad’s elbow and drag him away from the crowd. “I don’t want you coming to campus again. If you want to talk to me, call me.”

“I would, but you don’t answer my calls.” He leans around and smiles at Autumn. “Does he answer yours? Don’t take it personally if he ignores you. He probably isn’t doing it intentionally.”

“No. I’m purposefully ignoring you.” I stop when I reach the edge of campus, just before restaurant row where the sandwich, taco, and pizza shops line up in the storefronts underneath the off-campus apartments. “Sorry,” I say to Autumn. “I need to deal with this.” I pull out some cash. “Why don’t you get us some dinner? This won’t take long.”

“I’ll take a turkey club, hold the bacon and the mayo.” Dad pulls up his shirt, which makes Autumn avert her eyes.

“Go. Now,” I order because she’s not moving fast enough. A flash of hurt speeds through her eyes. I guess demanding things of her outside the bedroom is the wrong way to go about it, but I’m desperate to separate her from this fuck ass scene.

“If you get tired of my son—”

“One more fucking word out of you, and I’m going to beat you senseless,” I say through gritted teeth. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Autumn’s mouth fall open. If she won’t move, then I have to get out of here. I clamp my hand around my dad’s elbow once again and march him toward the parking lot

beyond restaurant row. He waves over my head toward Autumn.

“I don’t see the two of you lasting long,” he says.

I’ve never struck my dad, and he’s never hit me, but I feel about two seconds away from some real violence. “How much money do you need?” I ask. I’m furious at him for putting me in this position, and furious at myself for not being able to predict that it would happen and prevent it in some way.

A sly grin comes across his face. “For now? Fifty grand. I’ve got some debts to pay off.”

“Fifty—are you fucking kidding me?”

“I know you have it. Your granddad has a nice trust fund set up for you, some of which you got access to when you turned twenty-one. You’ll get another seven figures when you graduate, and then the bulk of it comes when you’re thirty. I’ll pay you back when I get my next acting gig. Otherwise, I guess you’ll be seeing more of me. What would you like?” He nods his head toward restaurant row. “Because I can see me and Autumn getting real close. Real, real close.”



CHAPTER 14

AUTUMN

I WORRY MY BOTTOM LIP BETWEEN MY LIPS AS I WAIT FOR Noble at the sandwich shop. I skipped getting the sandwich his father requested. I'm almost positive he won't be joining us. It was clear that Noble was set on getting him far away from me. I'm not sure what to make of the whole thing, to be honest.

I still remember that first day when I met his father. Well, I didn't exactly meet him. I was fleeing Noble's room as his father was entering. I recall him saying something to Noble about slumming it with me. Now today he's trying to be nice?

Actually, nice is the wrong word for what he was being with that comment about me calling him if I get tired of Noble. The whole thing was strange, especially Noble's behavior. I've never seen him that irritable and snippy.

"So, Noble? That's your type?" I glance up to see Nathan standing next to the table I grabbed for myself and Noble. Our sandwiches remain untouched.

I ordered us food even though my appetite was gone. The exchange with his father caused a knot to form in my stomach. There's just something about that man that doesn't sit well with me. That goes for the boy standing in front of me as well. I mean, could this day get any worse?

"Is there something you want, Nathan?" I hate how he's looming over the table. I try not to fidget, not wanting him to know I'm uncomfortable. I think he'd enjoy that. That's the type of person he is.

"Is it the money? I should have known you'd spread those pretty legs for some cash." Nathan shakes his head. "I've got money too, so when he's done with you, come find me." I stare up at him in shock. His words are like a physical slap to my face. "Why the shocked look? Do you actually think he is going to keep you?" He barks a laugh. "Take you to the country club?"

"Why don't you—"

“There a problem here?” Noble’s hand comes down on Nathan’s shoulder.

Nathan winces. “Just saying hi,” he lies.

“Time to say bye.” Noble doesn’t actually give Nathan a chance to say anything. He shoves him when he releases his hold on his shoulder. Nathan stumbles, tripping over his own two feet. He almost falls to the floor but catches himself at the last second.

Noble leans down, placing a soft kiss to my lips before sitting down at the table. “How was class?” he asks, bypassing any conversation about his father or what just happened with Nathan.

“How was class?” I’m stunned that’s what he’s asking me right now.

“Yeah, your exam. How’d you do?”

I soften. He helped me study for hours to prepare for it. “I think I aced it.”

“Knew you would, Kitten.” He pushes my sandwich toward me. “You need to eat. A chocolate chip muffin for breakfast isn’t going to hold you over long.”

“You’re bossy today.” I pick up my sandwich and take a bite.

“Only when it comes to taking care of you or when we’re alone at my place.” Heat rushes to my face. I’m still trying to wrap my mind around our bedroom play. Is that what it is? Play? Nathan’s words linger in my mind. He’s not wrong. I’m not the type of girl you take to the country club. Noble and I don’t make any sense.

I take a few more bites of my sandwich. The silence grows between us. “Noble?”

“He’s an asshole, and I don’t want him near you,” he finally says.

“That the only reason?”

Noble puts his sandwich down. “What other reason do you think there would be?”

I shrug. Something flashes in his eyes. I lick my lips, knowing what that something is. It’s the same look he gets when things switch over to sexual side. When we’re alone, and that’s often. We still haven’t gone all the way, but we get each other off often.

“If you don’t want to tell me now, I’ll definitely get it out of you one way or another later.”

I glare at him, but my traitor body squirms in my seat. He knows he’s got me. Or does he? “Maybe I’ll stay in my room tonight.” See how he likes that. I take another bite of my sandwich.

“Good luck with that, Kitten.” I’ve been in his bed every night. We’ve developed a routine. It’s been nice. Too nice, which freaks me out. Things always go wrong. Nothing good ever lasts for me. So I’m always waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“I’ll do whatever I want,” I huff.

Noble smirks. “What is it you want to do, Kitten?” His hand goes under the table to rest on my thigh. He pulls my legs apart as his hand drifts up the inside till he gets to the edge of my jean shorts.

“How do you do that?” I let my legs fall open even more, knowing what Noble can do to my body. He’s making me grow addicted to him, but what happens when this ends? Everything ends. I don’t fit in his world. I have no clue what world I belong to, but I know for a fact that it’s not his. “Be bossy and sweet at the same time?”

“I do what I think my girl needs.” He leans over and presses another kiss to my mouth. “I still haven’t dealt with your roommate’s boyfriend. Till then, you stay with me.” He has no idea he dealt with him a few moments ago.

“How are you going to deal with him?”

“Not for you to worry about.”

“You wanna know what I think? That you’re not going to deal with him, and that way I can’t leave your bed.”

“That sounds pretty damn good to me.”

I roll my eyes. “He’s not worth your time.”

“You’re right. There are other ways I’d rather spend my time.” He pushes my shorts up, and finding the seam of my panties, he dips his fingers inside. I close my eyes and take a deep breath when he finds my clit.

“Noble.”

“I know, Kitten.” He pulls his hand out and rights my shorts. “No one sees or hears you come but me.” He brings his fingers to his mouth, licking them. “Just stealing a taste of my dessert.”

“You’re terrible.” I fight a smile.

“You love it.” He winks at me.

I do. That’s the problem.



CHAPTER 15

NOBLE

NATHAN WALKS OUT OF HIS NIGHT CLASS WITH HIS HAND ON the ass of some girl that is not his girlfriend. He chats her up for a minute before waving her off. Once he's alone, I peel away from the tree I was using as support and approach him.

"Nice night, isn't it?" I say. Autumn and I went for a walk earlier before she went to my room to study. I told her I was going to work out.

He looks up from his phone and does a double-take when he recognizes me. "Noble? What're you doing here? I thought you were a business major. This is the Arts & Sciences department."

"Let's take a walk." I motion toward a path under a cove of trees that leads to the athletic center. The overhanging leaves provide a pretty canopy during the day and a dark umbrella at night.

"Is this about the Sigma Theta party this weekend because I've been wanting to go to one of your events. My past invites must've been lost in the campus mail."

"Something like that." I stop halfway down where the shadows are the darkest. I can barely make out the features in Nathan's face. When the invitation isn't forthcoming, I sense his unease.

He laughs nervously. "What? Are you going to beat me up?"

He sounds like a tough guy, but I can tell he's one mean word away from pissing his pants.

"Physical violence is an easy route, but it really doesn't have a lasting effect. Me breaking your nose isn't going to change your behavior."

There's an audible sigh of relief that fills the space between us. "Then why are we here?"

"Because I believe in delivering bad news face to face." I get straight to the point. "This is your last week of classes. I

don't know what you plan to tell your parents, but I'd spend the next few days thinking of some good excuse."

This time his chuckle is even more forced. "Yeah, right. I paid my tuition, and I haven't done anything wrong."

"I used to think that I could turn a blind eye to people like you, but I was wrong. You and Rob Track, are not just assholes, you're dangerous assholes. You make women feel unsafe, and I don't like that."

"What did that bitch say to you? 'Cause it's all lies. I've got a girlfriend."

I shove my hands in my pockets so I don't punch this guy's face in. "She didn't say anything to me, but the fact that you're bringing her up means you know you did wrong. You're not man enough to change, so I'm going to remove you from the equation." I give him a chin nod and walk away.

I don't get far before his hand is on my shoulder.

"You can't get me kicked out." It's almost a question rather than a statement.

"We both know I can. My last name isn't Patton for nothing. My grandfather practically funded the endowment here himself. There isn't anything the administration won't do if I ask." I shrug his hand off and keep walking.

He chases after me. "What the hell, Patton? I was complimenting her. Do you get it? Girls want to feel wanted. I was making her feel good."

I stop and face the dumb ass. "No. You were scaring her, and you did it repeatedly. I'm not interested in your excuses. Just pack your bags and get out, or security will come and do it for you."

"I'm going to sue this fucking college and you personally." Even in the dim light, I can see his face turning red.

"Go for it."

"Fuck you, Patton. Fuck you and fuck your money and fuck your grandfather!" Nathan screams. The few students around us stop to watch Nathan fall apart. Ignoring him seems

like the best plan, but he has a different idea. This time when he grabs my shoulder, he tries to pull me around. His fist comes up, but Nathan's not a fighter. I duck low, causing him to lose his balance. He stumbles and catches himself on the ground. When he straightens, there's a rock in his hand.

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Nathan. Don't embarrass yourself like this. Go to counseling or cut your dick off. I don't know which one you need to do, but straighten your life out and stop acting like a fool."

He mutters something unintelligible and then comes at me, a roaring, sputtering mess of a child. I almost feel some regret when I plow my fist into his jaw. He falters but surprisingly manages to stay upright.

"Let's not do more of this," I say. I want to get back to Autumn. She'll be wondering where I am. I push past him.

Someone gasps and yells, "Watch out!"

I lean to the side and hear the whistle of wind as the rock thrown by Nathan zips by my ear. I close my eyes and then retrace my steps. Nathan is scrambling for another weapon. I grab the back of his collar and haul him toward me. He tries to squirm away, but he's weak, and I'm angry. I punch him three times in quick succession, his head bouncing against my fist. Blood spurts from a cut on his cheek. I toss him down and wipe my bruised knuckles against my jeans. "I can either turn your face into meat pudding or you can go back to your dorm and pack your bags. You're leaving tonight. Someone will escort you to a hotel. I'll even pay for it, but you are not spending another night on campus."

Nathan's right eye is swelling up, and I think I might've broken his jaw. "Just nod if you understand."

He gives me a short, miserable bob of his head. I wait for campus security to show up and watch until he's hauled away. The witnessing students give statements. In the meantime, I send Autumn a text.

Sorry for the delay. Had a run-in with a punching bag and had to fix things. Will be home soon.

A punching bag?

Yeah, those things aren't made like they used to be. Weak, easily broken.

Ok. CU soon

I tuck my phone away. One asshole down. One more to go.



CHAPTER 16

AUTUMN

“BABE.” NOBLE’S HAND COMES TO MY CHIN TO TURN MY FACE toward him. My attention was lingering on other people as we made our way across campus.

“Huh?” When I stare up into his eyes, I forget about everyone else. I don’t know how Noble does it, but when he looks at me, I feel like I’m the only girl in the world.

“I said good luck on the test.”

“Oh, right. Thanks.” He drops a kiss on my mouth. Noble is wicked smart. He’s always down to help me study, having done all of his core classes years ago. “Have fun in your Comparative Economic Systems class.” I’ve looked over some of his coursework for that class and wanted to jump off a cliff.

“I’ll try.” He kisses the tip of my nose before he taps my ass to go into my classroom.

I head inside, almost running into someone. The guy jumps back, holding his hand up. “Shit, sorry. I didn’t see you, I swear.” His eyes are wide, and he looks a little jumpy.

“It’s fine. It’s my fault, I wasn’t paying attention.” He nods and quickly goes to the other side of the classroom to find a seat as far away from me as possible. Which is weird because while we might not have assigned seats, people tend to sit in the same spot, and I believe he’d been two seats in front of me in this class up until now.

I drop down in my own chair to wait for class to start. I play with my phone as I wait for the professor. What I should be thinking about is the test, but all I can think about is Noble demanding I sit on his face last night. I have no clue how he still managed to be in full control with me in that position, but he was.

His bedroom is a safe space for me. The second I walk into his place, my whole body relaxes, and my worries fade away. The man is making me fall in love with him. It’s scary, but I can’t make myself run away at this point. I’m already too far gone for him.

“You’re dating Noble, right?” A girl with long, blond, curly hair drops down in the seat next to me. I don’t recognize her from around campus. But it’s giant, so it’s not uncommon to not recognize some people. But it is when you’ve been taking a class for a few months. I might not know everyone’s names, but I know the faces.

“I suppose you could call it that.”

“Did you happen to date Rob Track or Nathan Long?”

“Rob who?” I ask confused. I think Nathan’s last name is Long, if I’m remembering correctly.

“Rob Track. He used to be a part of Sigma Theta but has recently transferred.” Maybe she means the Rob that freaked me out the day I met Noble.

“No, I’ve never dated any Rob nor Nathan, but my roommate’s boyfriend’s name is Nathan.” She must have me and Renee mixed up or something.

“Does Renee count as your roommate if you never stay in the dorm?” Well, she definitely doesn’t think I’m Renee based on that statement. I stare at her, wondering where this is going. The hairs on my arms stand up. This is starting to feel like an interrogation. I was on the end of a few of those when I was in the system.

“I don’t think that’s any of your business.”

“Everything that happens at this university is my business.” I go back to playing with my phone, deciding the best thing to do is to ignore her. I swear I can sense people stealing glances my way. I’d felt it when Noble walked me to class too. “I’m with *The Campus Recorder*.”

“The school paper?”

“That’s the one,” she chirps. “Now about Noble Patton-White getting Rob and Nathan removed from the university. What can you tell me about it?”

“Wait, what?” I jerk back to face her.

“You don’t know that Noble and Nathan had an altercation last night?” It’s on the tip of my tongue to tell her Noble was

with me last night and the only time he left was to go to the gym, but I bite the inside of my cheek to keep my mouth shut. “I’ll take your silence as a no.” I really don’t like this girl.

“I have nothing to talk to you about,” I say dismissively.

“You don’t care about your boyfriend’s abuse of money and power?” White-hot anger hits me at her negative words toward Noble. Before I can lash out, the professor walks into the room, telling everyone to put everything away but a pencil.

“We’ll finish this later.” The blonde jumps up from her seat and hurries out of the room.

I can only surmise that Nathan was Noble’s workout. He got him removed from the school? And I’m guessing the same went for Rob. I suppose that’s why I hadn’t run into him again at the frat house. My thoughts are interrupted when the professor drops the exam on my desk.

Why didn’t Noble tell me? Now I understand why people are staring. Oh, crap. This explains why the guy I bumped into leaped away from me so quickly.

A mixture of emotions fills me. For so long, I’ve tried to slide by under the radar to not draw attention to myself. I just wanted to get an education. It was better to not make a fuss. At least that’s what had been ingrained into me. Both Rob and Nathan are assholes who get off on making women uncomfortable. It’s kind of nice knowing this time they got a taste of their own medicine.

“Begin,” the professor announces. I let out a breath and focus on the task at hand. When I’m done, I drop my test on the professor’s desk before I head out. I’m done early, so Noble won’t be here. I exit the building and head across campus, not sure where I’m going.

That overwhelming emotion to run fills me. No one has ever stood up for me. Why does this scare me so much? Emotions build in my chest, the pressure consuming me. Now Noble is going to get in trouble because of me. I don’t understand why he wants to be with me. What do I really bring

to this relationship? We don't make sense. This can't work. It won't work.

“Kitten.” I spin around to see Noble standing there. “You run, I'll just chase you,” he says softly. I burst into tears, the floodgates opening. “Baby.” Noble wraps his arms around me, pulling me into him. “I've got you,” he whispers. Words no one else has ever said to me before.



CHAPTER 17

NOBLE

AUTUMN KEEPS SNEAKING PEEKS AT ME OVER HER BOOK, AND while I'd like to think it's because of my charisma and sexual magnetism, I have a suspicion it has something to do with the reporter from *The Campus Recorder*. We haven't really addressed her earlier tears. Her initial excuse that it was just stress-related sounded like a lie. I toss my pen aside.

"Want to talk about it?"

"About what?"

"What the reporter was asking you about. Why you cried."

She shrugs lightly and runs her highlighter across a page. "I told you earlier that I was feeling overwhelmed with all my schoolwork."

"There are tutors here, if you need them."

"You'd be okay with that?"

"If they were women, sure. If it was a guy, then I'd be jealous as hell and would want to sit in on every session so that I could glare at him and reassure myself that he wasn't going to make a move on you."

Her lips twitch. "You're a little silly if you think I'm that attractive to other people. I hardly know why you're with me, Noble Patton White."

"You're wrong. Guys are always eyeing you. I nearly have nervous breakdowns every time we leave my place," I joke.

She doesn't look up from her paper when she replies, "If I feel the need, I'll get a tutor, and if it's a guy, we'll have it here so you won't have to go far to stare menacingly at the tutor's head. As for earlier today, if you want to tell me something, you would tell me."

I don't think she meant it as criticism, so I don't know why I feel guilty suddenly. "Shitty things happen in this world because shitty people exist. I can't prevent everything bad in this world from affecting you or us, but the things I can take

care of, I will, because that's the privilege I have as your man."

"Is this you admitting that you had two students removed from campus?"

"Yes. Is that a problem?"

She sets her highlighter on the table and contemplates me for a long, uncomfortable moment. "I think I'd like it if you said something to me first."

"I didn't want to place that burden on you. The whole purpose of me telling you what to do when we're in here"—I gesture toward the bed—"is so you don't have to think. You just enjoy the moment, experience the pleasure. I get off on that too, so don't think it's a one-way street. It's something we both want."

"I'm not saying that I'm going to object or that I don't want you to take action, but that I'd rather know what's going on than find out from a nosy campus reporter. I wouldn't have that embarrassing deer in the headlights look, and I'd be prepared." Her smile is sweet, and there's no bite to her words. I feel like shit.

"I was wrong. I'm sorry." I get up and cross over to her. By her side, I get down on one knee and press her hand against my mouth. "Forgive me."

She cups my chin and then moves her hand around to stroke my hair. "I'm not mad at you at all. Just keep me in the loop."

I nod. "Will do. I got the school to expel both Rob Track and Nathan What's-his-face, and it wasn't just because it wasn't fair to any of the other students to be at risk. This university is funded by my granddad's money, and I don't need Track or the other kid to be blackening its name."

"So, you wouldn't have done it just for me?"

I hesitate because I'm not sure if I should lie. "I would've done it just for you."

Her hand tightens, and she blows out a long stream of air, almost as if she's controlling the urge to cry again.

"You mad?" I wish I'd kept my big mouth shut.

"No. It's that I've never been this important to someone, and it's really affecting me in a big way. You're wrecking me, Noble. What happens when you are done with me? How do I move on?"

My head comes up, and I pin her with a hard stare. "When you move on? You're never moving on, and I'm not ever going to be done with you. This is forever, girl."

"How can you say that? We've only been together for a few weeks, and we're young. You could find someone else after college. You're graduating, and I have three more years to go."

"First off, I'm going into the MBA program. Second, my family's company headquarters are here. Third, even if the first two weren't true, I'd still be on your tail. I'm going to be around so much you're going to wish I had hobbies that weren't loving you, fucking you, feeding you, and buying you shit."

Her eyebrows shoot up. "Loving?"

"Yeah, loving. Isn't that what's going on between us? I'll never let you go. Or are you going to toss me away once you finally get my virginity?"

She bursts into tears again, but this time her cries are mixed with laughs. "You dummy. Of course I'm not tossing you aside. You'd better be serious, though, because I'm not giving you up. I'm sticking by your side like a leech."

I gather her into my arms, my heart feeling lighter than it has in hours. "Can we think of something less slimy to compare you to? Maybe a bird or a cat?"

"Birds don't stay, and cats hate their owners."

"Puppy then?"

"Do I look like a puppy?" She bats her eyelashes at me.

“You’re as cute as one but less slobbery. I wouldn’t mind leashing you.”

“I do not want to be walked around like a dog,” she warns.

“Leech it is.” I pick her up and carry her over to the bed. “I love you. I’m never leaving you. I’m going to remove all the rocks in your path so that you don’t even so much get a stubbed toe. All I want is for you to love me back for all of eternity.”



CHAPTER 18

AUTUMN

“I DO LOVE YOU.” I REACH UP, NEEDING TO TOUCH HIS FACE. “That’s what this has to be. I’ve never felt anything like this before. I think that’s why it scares me. It’s all-consuming.”

“Good. I want to consume you.”

“Then do it already. You technically took my virginity forever ago,” I tease him. “I’m way past being healed.” He’d said the first time we have sex he didn’t want it to be painful, which I thought was super sweet. It’s days later, and even though we are still doing all kinds of dry humping and oral, there still hasn’t been full sex.

“That wasn’t the only thing I was waiting on.” He brushes his mouth against mine.

“What else were you waiting on?”

“For you to realize that I’m safe. That I love you. That I’m not going anywhere.”

“Noble.” Tears start to sting my eyes again. I had no idea men like him existed. I’m starting to wonder if Noble is my payback. For all the bullshit and lack of love I had to endure growing up in the system, I was rewarded and found Noble. Or maybe he’s the one that found me. Over and over again.

“Don’t cry on me. I hate it when you’re upset.” He presses kisses to my cheek.

“You really live up to your name.”

“Yeah, I think my mom wanted to make sure I wasn’t anything like my father.”

“You’re nothing like your father. She clearly did a good job raising you.”

“She’s going to love you. Already been on me about meeting you.”

“What?!” I gasp.

“Calm down, Kitten. Not happening today. I promise you have nothing to worry about. She’s going to be over the moon

for you.”

“Okay.” I relax, trusting Noble. Honestly, it feels good to be able to let go and have trust in someone. I never thought that would be in the cards for me. “Can I ask you something?”

“You can ask me anything.” He smiles down at me, tucking my hair behind my ear. I love when he’s on top of me, the weight of his body pressing down into mine.

“How are you still a virgin?” A small part of me thought he might be with his whole ‘first kiss’ comment. Sometimes I find it hard to believe, but other times, I don’t.

“Why do you think I am?” he asks back.

“As much as your mother didn’t want you to be your father, you didn’t want to be him either.” He nods his head. “But you’re good at like, ah... dirty stuff.” I hurry the words past my lips, feeling my face warming.

“I don’t know what it is, Kitten. It’s natural with you. Can’t help myself.”

“Then don’t.” I pull at his shirt, wanting to be skin to skin with him. I’ve never been so close to another person in my life, and I want to be closer. To be connected to him in a way no one else has ever been for either of us.

“Kitten.” His tone turns firm. I freeze. Excitement blooms through my whole body. “Good girl.” He drops a kiss to the top of my nose before he starts to strip my clothes from my body until I lie on the bed completely naked.

I lick my lips, sitting up on my elbow to watch as Noble removes his own clothes. He wraps his hand around his cock and strokes himself. His eyes are eating up every inch of me. A bead of cum drips from the tip.

“Take a picture, it will last longer,” I tease.

“No fucking way,” he growls. “That shit can get hacked or whatnot.” I want to point out that if someone hacked anything of Noble’s it would be for money or something. Not dirty pictures of me, but I know he’d argue the point so I bite the inside of my cheek.

“Noble?” I ask when he doesn’t move for a long moment.

“Just imprinting this into my mind.”

“Come make love to me.”

“I give the orders.”

“It was only a suggestion.” I fight a laugh. It dawns on me that I don’t have an inch of hesitation or worry about what is about to happen.

“Spread those thighs, Kitten. Just so we’re clear, that’s not a suggestion. It’s an order.” I pull my feet up toward my ass before I drop my thighs apart the way he likes. “So damn beautiful, Kitten.” He puts one knee on the bed. “And all mine.” He strokes his fingers down my thigh toward my sex, slowly caressing me.

I want to tell him to hurry up and get his mouth on me, but I keep quiet, knowing I’ll only get in trouble. He’ll draw it out more. So, I do it properly. “Please.”

He shakes his head but smirks. “And here I think I’m in charge. I can’t deny your pleas, Kitten.” His mouth descends on me. I moan when his tongue swirls around my clit. He thrusts a finger inside of me. I whimper and try to lift my ass, but he pins me down, putting his forearm over my hips.

“Noble,” I moan as he works two more fingers inside of me. Every time he’d slide his fingers inside of me, he’d tell me that he was breaking me in for his cock. I don’t know why, but that always turned me on so much. The man can make me orgasm with words alone if he wants.

“Give it to me, Kitten,” he says against my sex as he hooks his fingers inside of me. I cry out his name as the orgasm hits me. It rolls through my body. I’m so lost in pleasure it’s not until Noble is pushing inside of me that I realize he’s over me. He lets out a groan and explodes inside of me. I gasp, feeling his warmth flood me.

“You came?”

“Can you blame me, babe? I’m inside of you. Not only the sexiest, most incredible woman I’ve ever met but the woman I

love.” His cock jerks inside of me. I can’t believe he’s still hard.

“I love you too.” I wrap my arms around his neck to pull him down for a kiss.

He claims my mouth as he slowly starts to thrust in and out of me. He makes love to me, worshipping every inch of me.

I worship him back. He’s worth it. He’s worth everything to me.



CHAPTER 19

NOBLE

AUTUMN IS PRACTICALLY SHAKING AS WE APPROACH THE restaurant. Mom wanted me to bring Autumn home, but I felt like neutral territory would be more comforting. Now I'm not so sure.

"She's going to love you." I reach over and squeeze her clasped hands.

"Easy for you to say. I'm not the type mothers like—or dads, for that matter." She smiles as if it's a joke, but we both know the truth.

"Some people aren't cut out to be parents, but that doesn't mean their kids aren't great. I know you don't think I'm an asshole because my dad is, right?"

She straightens up. "No. I would never say that."

"Exactly."

Autumn pinches my hand lightly. "You're getting smug again."

"Again?" I swing in front of the restaurant. The valet comes over to open Autumn's door.

"It's the look you get in your eyes after we're done. Very satisfied with yourself."

"I think it's you satisfying me rather than me doing anything." I toss the keys to the valet. "Thanks, man."

"No problem."

"I'm never going to get used to this," Autumn says as I join her on the sidewalk.

"To restaurants, being with the best-looking guy on the planet, or valet parking?"

"I appreciate you slipping some self-love in the list," she laughs, "but I was specifically referring to the parking. That's some rich person stuff." She smooths her hands over her jeans. "I think I should've worn a dress."

“Nah. Totino’s is a family restaurant. Everyone here uses valet parking because the closest lot is a good fifteen minutes away.” I stop her at the door of the restaurant. “The valet parking, the nice things that are going to start hanging in your closet, the house we’re going to live in when you’re done with school, you deserve all of those things. You deserve every good thing in this world, and my purpose on this earth is to provide them for you.” I give her a quick but firm kiss on the forehead and then pull the door open.

She pastes a bright smile on her face and walks bravely into the noisy restaurant with its waiters dressed in red checked shirts and white aprons, carrying trays of pasta to happy families. My mom spots us immediately and stands up to wave enthusiastically in our direction.

“Does that look like a woman with a rod up her ass?”

“Um, no, but please don’t talk about your mother like that.” Autumn hurries forward. “Mrs. Patton. I’m—”

“Autumn, I know!” Mom grabs Autumn’s hand and pulls her in for a hug to be engulfed by a cloud of Chanel No. 5. “Noble told me all about you. This here is Noble’s grandfather, my dad, Noble Patton III, but we call him Paddy.”

Granddad nods his head and pats the seat next to him. “Let the girl sit down, Erin. She’s probably hungry.” He pushes the basket of bread toward her. “Women don’t eat enough these days.”

I pull out Autumn’s chair for her and wait for her to settle in before going over to assist my mom. Once we are all seated, Granddad raises his water glass. “To Autumn. Thank you for taking on Noble. We understand he’s a handful.”

“Hear, hear.” Mom raises her glass and clinks it against my granddad’s. “He’s never had a girlfriend before, so we were silently—” I cough loudly, remembering all the times I’d come home from college or even high school alone to the onslaught of *Why are you single* questions, “—or maybe not so silently,” she revises, “despairing no one would take a chance on him.”

“He’s very popular. I’m the lucky one,” Autumn says.

“You’re both lucky,” Mom announces. She taps Autumn’s glass. “I can see you two are a perfect fit. We’re very happy for you both. What do you have going on next weekend?” She directs the question to Autumn.

“I’m cleaning and studying.”

“Cleaning?”

“Yes, my work study program is cleaning the Sigma Theta house.”

“The whole house?” Mom gapes. “Impossible. You should get her out of that,” Mom orders.

“I’ve got her down to cleaning my room,” I offer.

My granddad groans. Mom’s mouth thins out. “Noble Patton, please tell me you aren’t having your future wife clean your room? She should not be working at all. This is her first year. She should just be studying and enjoying herself. I hope you take care of that first thing tomorrow morning.”

I hide a smile behind my napkin. “Yes, ma’am.”

“But Ms. Patton, I want to work.”

“I know you do, dear, but you will have plenty of time to do so after college. If you don’t let Noble take care of you, what’s he supposed to do? He’ll feel useless, and you don’t want that, do you?”

Autumn shakes her head in a daze as my mom snowplows over her. “Good, I’m glad we have that all worked out. Next weekend, you and I will go shopping together. There’s a new collection being shown at the salon, and I’ll need someone to help me spend Paddy’s money. He worked too hard for it to just sit in the bank and gather dust and interest for the damned bankers. Oh, here comes the waiter. Let’s all order the special today. Who is that walking toward us? Do you know him?”

I turn in my seat to see Rob Track’s father storming through the crowd. “Yeah, unfortunately. I think he’s about to make a scene.” I just handled my father last week, threatening him with a restraining order that would be very public along with the threat of leaking some things to the press that would

make sure he never landed another acting job if he didn't stay away from both Autumn and me. She doesn't need to deal with his bullshit. I watched my mom do it for too long. I won't let it happen to another woman in my life if I have the power to stop it.

Autumn looks like she wants to slide under the table. I get to my feet, but I'm too late. Mr. Track reaches us before I can cut him off. He doesn't even glance in my direction but instead points a finger at my mom. "Your son has been throwing his weight around on campus like he owns the damned place. I paid Rob's tuition just like everyone else, and he is damned well going to get his degree. I don't know who you have to call, but he needs to be back at school tomorrow morning."

"Mr. Track, let's take this outside," I suggest. I reach for him, but he wards me off with a raised arm.

"I know that your son has a crackhead for a father, but I expected better out of you, Erin."

"I don't even know who you are," Mom responds without even looking in Track's direction as she is busy rearranging her napkin on her lap.

"Be gone," Grandad says with a wave of his hand. "You're disturbing a family dinner."

Track clenches his jaw. "You know that this girl at your table is nothing more than hired help. My boy wanted a little taste, nothing more, but your precious grandson had to slum it."

I don't even realize my fist is in the air, but it is, and then it's in Track's face. Half the patrons scream.

Mom, though, gestures for the waiter. "You need to take out the trash here." She points to Track, who is leaning against an empty chair, breathing heavily, with a trail of blood seeping from the side of his mouth. "Come sit down, dear. No need to exert yourself over that man." She reaches across the table to grab Autumn's hand. "Sometimes you'll run into people who are terrible, but remember that you're not alone. The family is here to protect you."

Autumn's lower lip trembles, but she manages not to cry. "Thank you."

"No, thank you for making Noble happy. It makes us happy." Mom pats the chair again. "Sit, Noble. The wait staff will take care of the mess." She hands me a napkin for my hand. "Put this on your knuckles. They're going to swell. Autumn, please take care of him."

"I will."

"I can't wait," I murmur.

That comment earns me a mild kick in the shin. I wink at her, and she pinkens. Across the table, Granddad gives me a grunt of approval while Mom sighs in satisfaction. I pick up my glass and propose a toast. "To Autumn for taking me on, and to my family, who loves me and will love Autumn, too."

"To Autumn," Mom cheers.

"To all of us." Autumn says.

Under the table, she grabs my hand, and she doesn't let it go throughout the entire lunch or when we leave for the car, and not even when we get back home, where I make love to her in the fading sunlight of the afternoon. We're bound together, her and me, forever.

EPILOGUE

AUTUMN

Ten years later

“NOTHING FITS ME,” I HUFF, GLARING AT ALL THE CLOTHES IN my giant closet. How can I own so much shit and none of it fits? Well, anything that one wouldn’t wear to bed.

“I enjoy you naked.” I spin around to see my husband standing in the doorway of my closet. He’s in slacks and a buttoned-up shirt. The top few buttons are undone, and his sleeves are rolled up. He works from home three days a week, and today was a home day. I loved being able to pop into his office whenever I wanted. I hadn’t today, though. My hands have been full.

“Okay, I’ll go naked.” He narrows his eyes on me, not liking my suggestion.

“Don’t think because you’re pregnant I won’t spank your little ass.”

“It’s not so little anymore.”

“You’re being—” he pauses.

“What? What am I being?!” I stomp my foot. Okay, my hormones might be getting to me. I thought all that would cool down after my first trimester. I’m halfway through my second, and they seem to be getting worse. I’ve been dying for my baby bump to pop out. Well, it’s here now, and nothing fits!

“Sexy? Adorable? Incredible?” He smirks.

“You’re full of shit. That’s what you are.” I laugh.

“You’re about to be full of me.” He walks toward me. I hold my hands out. “No way. We don’t have time. I have to find something to wear and get the boys ready. Not to mention the heaters aren’t working for outside. We can’t keep everyone locked inside the house. People enjoy being outside. The backyard is one of the best parts of our home.”

“Kitten.” Noble places his hands on my hips.

“Don’t ‘Kitten’ me. Also—”

He cuts me off, his mouth taking mine. I melt into Noble. His hand slips into my black stretchy pants. “No panties,” he growls against my mouth.

“It would show panty lines.” I wiggle my hips, needing his fingers to do their magic.

“There are people all over this house today. You can’t go without panties. You didn’t even come to feed me lunch.” He cups my sex. By feeding him lunch, he means lay me out on his desk for him to have his way with me.

“I’m sorry.” I puff out my bottom lip.

“Liar.” He claims my mouth again but gives me what I need. His fingers go to my clit. Dirty words of what he’s going to do to me later tonight spill from him as he strokes my clit. My husband knows exactly what to do and say to get me off quickly. I cry out his name, which he muffles with his mouth.

“Mom!” I hear one of my boys call.

“Little cock blockers.” Noble pulls his fingers out of my pants, licking them clean a second before both boys burst into my closet. Jeremiah and Connor came into our lives when Connor was only two while his brother was three.

I’d met both boys when I’d gone to one of the shelters in the city. The second I laid eyes on the brothers, I knew they’d be ours. I glanced over to Noble, who’d been with me that day, and he’d given me a nod in understanding. No words had been needed. We took them home three days later. Now they aren’t even teens, and they’re almost taller than me.

“I hate these things!” Jeremiah shakes the tie in his hand. He’s not one for getting dressed up.

“I’ll come over and help you in a second. Let me finish getting dressed.”

“I’ve got the boys,” Noble tells me. “Also, my mom got you a dress. I laid it on the bed.”

“Seriously? Gosh, I love that woman.” She is always a million steps ahead of everyone. I might not have grown up with my parents, but Erin has filled those shoes for me.

“Hey,” all of them say.

“I love you guys too.” I laugh, as all my boys continue to stare at me. I didn’t know I could actually love this much. My life is filled with it. Noble’s persistence made this all possible.

Noble had talked about building us a home, but Erin wanted us to come live back at the family estate with her and Grandpa. This place is giant, and I wanted to be close to everyone in our family. That’s something I never had. I wanted that for our boys too. Plus, we got married here.

“All right, let’s leave Mom alone so she can get ready. I’ll be over in a second.” Each of them gives me a kiss on the cheek before they go.

“They’re getting so big.” My eyes start to water. I don’t know where the time has gone. It feels like just yesterday that Noble and I met.

“None of that.” Noble rubs my small baby bump. “We’ll have a baby girl here shortly.” I place my hand over his. This man has given me everything and more.

After I graduated from college with my degree in social work, Noble’s mom, who I even call Mom now, asked if I would be interested in coming on board with the Patton Foundation. At first, I was hesitant, not wanting to be handed something. I didn’t think I’d agree, but Erin can be as persistent as her son.

I thought maybe I’d lend a hand at first, but I was quickly sucked into the foundation, helping not only to distribute

funds, but I've also created a new organization, which is launching tonight. Its purpose is to help other women entering college get prepared for other things they might need beyond room and board.

There are a lot of essentials that slip through the cracks; not only that, some of them can be overwhelmed. I know I had been when I first started college. I didn't really have that much direction, but thankfully, Noble found me. I know not everyone gets a Noble, but maybe I could help in some way. It's why I named the new branch of the foundation Noble Needs.

"I love you so much," I tell him. Love is not even a strong enough word for what I feel for him.

"You're really going to love me because I got the heaters working." Of course, he did. I don't know why I let myself get worked up over anything. Noble always finds a way to make everything work out.

"Is there anything you can't do?" I tease him.

He drops his head, resting his forehead against mine. "Let you go."

"I'd never ask you to."

How could I? For so long I never felt like I belonged anywhere until him. He changed everything for me. Noble is and always will be my home.

MY LOVES!

It's a new year! I can hardly believe it. 2022 went by in a blink and here we are in a new year. I'm planning to give you a lot of gifts this year so stay tuned.

Eat well and be happy.

xoxo Ella

ALSO BY
Ella Goode

Wrap With Love

(a collection of past holiday stories)

Christmas Stalking

Chasing Series

Chasing You

Chasing Us

Swiped for His Taking

Claiming His Bride

Heiress

Knocked Up by Love

Justice Series

Socialite and the Cowboy

Heiress and the Cowboy

Princess and the Cowboy

Billionaire and the Cowgirl

Secretary and the Cowboy

Insta Holiday

Connected to Forever Mine

Making Her Mine

Protecting What's Mine

Friends to Lovers

Forever Mine

Make Me Yours

The Vieth Orphans

(loosely based fairy tales)

Claiming His Queen, Stealing His Princess

A Cherry Falls Romance

123 Secret Ln

Like bachelor auctions? Check out my latest!

Make Me a Match

Got a hankering for young love?

FU High: [Ace of Hearts](#), [Deuces Wild](#), and [Two of a Kind](#)

[Loyalty Card](#)

Others: [Pitched](#)

[Sweet Spot](#)

Other stories that feature safe, sexy heroes and a safe, sexy romance.

[Cuffed for Love](#)

[Captured by Love](#)

[Protecting Her](#)

[Built for Love](#)

[Against the Rules](#)

[Always Loved You](#) / [Still Love You](#)

[Killer Love](#) / [Killer Crush](#)

[King's Castle](#) / [Alpha's Castle](#) / [Beast's Castle](#)

[Secret Baby](#) / [Love's Secret Baby](#) / [Rock 'n Roll Baby](#)

[Spark](#)

[Priceless](#)

[Smooth Kisses](#), [Sweet Kisses](#), [Saved Kisses](#)

[Finding Home & Bring Him Home](#)

[Captured](#), [Kept](#), [Stolen](#)

[Make Me Yours](#)

[She's All Mine](#)

[Pretty Prize](#)

[The Wolf's Mail Order Bride](#)

[Beauty in Summer](#)

[My Secret Valentine Baby](#)

[Three of Us](#) (Twins #1) and [Belong Together](#) (Twins #2)

I wrote a few motorcycle romances when I first started out.

[Their Private Need](#) (Michigan, Easy and Annie)

[His Bold Heart](#) (Chelsea & Wrecker)

[Her Secret Pleasure](#)

[Captive Ride](#)

My one and only LGBTQ romance.

[She's the One](#) & [My Only One](#)

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If you want to chat with me, please join the [newsletter](#) drop me [an email](#) day or night. I love connecting with all of my readers.



The image shows the words "thank you" written in a black, cursive script. A small, light pink heart is drawn over the letter 'o' in "you". The text is centered on a white rectangular background with a subtle drop shadow.

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