

A close-up photograph of a man with a short beard and intense gaze. He is wearing a white tank top and has his right hand raised near his face, with fingers slightly spread. The background is a soft, out-of-focus bokeh of light spots.

PROTECTED

NICOLE BAKER

Protected

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Chapter One

Mollie

“What kind of trouble are we getting into tonight?” Avery asks me over the phone.

She’s been my best friend since we met in second grade.

“Ugh, I’m not even back yet and you’re already trying to get me into trouble,” I sigh into my phone as I check my shoulder before merging into the right lane.

I’ve been on the road for eight hours, and still have three tortuous hours left. I was looking forward to a night in, but I don’t think Avery is going to let that happen.

Shoot, I *know* Avery won’t let that happen. Once that girl has an idea, no one is going to stop her from carrying it out.

“Whatever, Molls. We’ve both worked our asses off for the past four years to get our undergrad. Tonight, we celebrate!”

I’ve seen her social media photos over the years, even though we were miles apart. Avery has *not* been lacking in nights out

as an undergrad student. She's the queen of socializing, which bodes well for the communication job she just scored.

I, on the other hand, have spent many nights in the lab making sure I keep up my 4.0 GPA for med-school. Nights out with friends were scarce for this overachieving drag.

My brother's words, not mine.

"Where are we going to celebrate our freedom?" I ask her.

"Freedom? Girl, the last four years were freedom. I start my job in two weeks! No more summers off. EVER. How depressing! And you, you're about to start med-school in the fall, officially saying goodbye to any semblance of a life. Tonight, we're celebrating the beginning of the end of our freedom!"

Oh, boy! She is in rare form. I think she is having trouble grappling with the fact that she is officially an adult, living out in the real world with real responsibilities. I've never had a problem with the idea of growing up. I'm an old soul, always have been.

"Okay, tonight we celebrate before our lives are *officially* over and darkness comes upon us," I mock.

"That's more like it. I'll be at your house by eight. Be ready! And for the love of God, *please* don't dress like a forty-year-old. Tonight, we are trying to attract some hottie's!."

"Oh, come on! I'm not that bad," I try to defend myself.

I admit that I'm not one to flaunt my body, but she acts like I'm a prude. I've loosened up with my wardrobe over the

years, thank you very much!

“No, I’m serious, Moll. I’m bringing backup clothes just in case you don’t listen to me and dress like your mom. I want to see legs and cleavage. I won’t take no for an answer. So, if you don’t want me dressing you, I suggest you listen to me and pick out something good the first time around.”

“Ugh, fine! I’ll see what I can come up with. I’m gonna stop and grab some dinner on the road. I’ll see you soon.”

She squeals. “I can’t wait to see you. Bye, biotch!”

I click off the phone with a big smile on my face. Some would say Avery is a little too much for them, but to me, she’s everything. She is the perfect yin to my yang. Where I’m the more guarded, quiet one, she is the outgoing, open one. She brings the best out of me.

I’ve spent the past four years in New York, where I’ve kept my head down and worked my ass off to get into med-school. My parents, a doctor and a lawyer, are both thrilled that I’ve gotten into med-school, and that it’s in Chicago where I’m from.

My brother moved back home from California about two years ago to partner with my dad in his law firm. This will be the first time my family is all back together in the same city since Ryan went off to college eight years ago.

After a grueling eleven-hour drive, I’m finally pulling into my parent’s driveway at seven. The sun is beginning to set and basks my home in an orange glow. It feels good to be home.

I'm going to take advantage of the food and backyard pool while I live here this summer, before I'm back to living on a budget.

Just because my parents have money, doesn't mean I expect to live lavishly through them. The fact of the matter is, I'm a broke college student like all the rest of them.

I notice my brother's car in the driveway. Mom must have guilted him into being here when I arrived. I can't think of any other reason he would be at my parent's house on a Friday night. Although, his girlfriend might have something to do with it. He's been seeing Alicia for a year now and I'm so happy for the two of them. I never thought I'd see the day where he would settle down, but Alicia seems to have a hold on him.

He's even started inviting me out when I'm home for the holidays because I've hit it off with her and she begs him to bring me. There's a five-year age different between him and me, so we've never been on the level where we go out together. It was a strange, but very welcome, change to our relationship. We've grown closer since she's come into his life.

When I open the front door, I hear voices coming from the kitchen. Dad's laugh echoes throughout the house and I'm instantly brought back to my childhood. Dad has a laugh that is loud and boisterous. He's always laughed without any inhibitions, it's contagious. I've never seen him in the courtroom, but Ryan claims he's a totally different man. I

prefer the one I have at home, who doesn't have a mean bone in his body.

Walking into the kitchen, my parents, Ryan, and Alicia are all standing around the massive island as they share a glass of wine.

"I'm back," I say softly.

I take after my mom, being the one who's too insecure to have her voice take over the room.

Mom's face lights up as she walks over to me and wraps me in her arms.

"My baby is back!" she whispers.

"Get over here, sweetie pie," Dad opens his arms to me.

As I get lifted off the ground in my father's arms, Ryan rolls his eyes.

"Geez, I've never got this kind of welcome home before. This is why you're such a brat. They spoil you like you're still five," Ryan complains.

Alicia swats him on the chest. "Get over yourself. Maybe they don't act this way because your ego doesn't need any encouragement."

We all laugh at Alicia's insult. I knew I liked her. She fits perfectly into our family dynamic.

"You're my favorite person, Alicia. Did I ever tell you that?" I nudge her arm.

“No, but you can tell me whenever you please,” she smiles at me.

I look down at my watch and realize I now only have forty-five minutes left to get ready before Avery gets here. The last thing I want is to risk not being dressed when she gets here. I will then become her little doll to dress-up.

No, thank you! I need to get moving.

“As much as I’d love to stand around and catch up, I need to go get ready. Avery is meeting me here soon. Mom, are we still on for lunch tomorrow?”

Mom beams at me. “Of course, we are. At our favorite spot,” she winks.

Mom and I love going to our favorite sushi restaurant, paying far too much money for our platter, and stuffing our faces.

“Where are you guys going? Ryan and I were thinking of going out tonight. Maybe we could meet you guys,” Alicia asks.

Ryan groans. “I never said I wanted to go out tonight.”

“Well, this is your sister’s first night home. And since she refused a graduation party, we owe it to her to take her out and celebrate in some way.”

“She’s the loser who didn’t want all the attention for a party,” Ryan whines.

He plays this name calling game with me all the time, but he’s the first one to defend me if I need it. He likes to say he’s the

only one with the right to pick on me.

I hit my fists together like Ross and Monica in *Friends*, their sibling gesture for ‘*fuck you.*’

“We’re going to Indigo tonight. You and my loser brother are welcome to join us if you want,” I offer to Alicia.

Before Ryan can fire back at me with another insult, I head to the stairs and drag my suitcase upstairs.

I know I don’t have time to bring everything in from my car, so I open my suitcase with my essentials and dig through the contents to see what I can find to wear. It takes a little patience, but I come up with black shorts and a white spaghetti strap silk top that falls in the front to reveal a respectable amount of cleavage. Avery will have to get over herself if she has an issue with my outfit. It’s more than I used to show in the past. I’m not dressing any sexier in front of my brother. That’s just weird.

I hop into the shower to rinse myself off before I set off to work on my hair and makeup in the bathroom. My honey-brown hair is down, and luckily doesn’t have any ponytail creases from wearing it up all day. I’m just digging through my jewelry when I hear Avery plow through the door downstairs.

She has been around since we were seven, so she is comfortable enough to let herself in and find my room on her own.

“Hey, buttface,” I hear her holler to my brother before she comes charging into my room.

Ryan and Avery fight like brother and sister. He tells her she’s annoying and will never find someone who she doesn’t annoy the hell out of, and she tells him he’ll never find anyone to be attracted to his ugly ass. If it weren’t all said in a loving manner, I’d be worried.

“Oh my gosh! What did you do with my best friend?” she screeches as she enters the bathroom, eyeing me up and down.

This is part of the reason I don’t dress like this, I’m not a fan of being the center of attention.

I settle on a simple pair of gold earrings and a necklace. I put them on before I spray a few squirts of my favorite perfume, one that my parents get for me every Christmas. When I glance down at myself, I feel pretty proud of what I was able to pull together in under an hour and only one suitcase of clothes.

“Does this mean I passed the Avery sexy test?” I smile at her.

She’s dressed in a red skirt with a black tank top that’s molded to her skin with her blonde hair down in loose curls. Her clothes leave nothing to the imagination. Every guy in the bar is going to know she has a killer figure.

“You did good, Molls. I approve.”

“And you look fabulous, as always,” I tell her. “Oh, my brother and Alicia are going to join us tonight if that’s alright?”

They want to celebrate my graduation since I didn't want a party."

"The more the merrier. Alicia is welcome anytime, even if she is lacking in her taste in men."

I chuckle. "I'm ready. Let's get out of here."

We head downstairs where Alicia and Ryan are waiting at the island for us.

"You guys ready?" I ask as I throw essentials into my clutch.

Ryan is looking down at his phone while he responds. "Yeah, hang on. I just saw Logan pull in across the street. I wanna see if he can come out with us tonight. I need a bit more testosterone around me if I stand a chance of making it through the evening."

My stomach drops at the mention of Logan's name. I haven't seen him in over a year. Nothing has been the same since the night I begged him to kiss me at my high school graduation party. It went from the best moment of my life to the worst within minutes. After he gave me an earth shattering kiss, he freaked out and told me it was a mistake.

I was young and naive, thinking that it meant we were going to be together forever.

How could something that felt so amazing be a mistake?

But he was adamant, telling me that I was too young for him. I was eighteen and he was twenty-three. After that night, he became cold and distant from me. The smiles that were reserved just for me disappeared, replaced with scowls.

Avery is watching me like a hawk right now. She's the only one who knows about that night. I cried in her arms while she told me all the reasons that I'm too good for him. It took a while, but I got over it.

Well, I did the best I could. When I'm away at college it's easier.

When I'm home, I can't escape the mention of his name or worse, his company. Then it all comes flooding back to me.

Chapter Two

Logan

“Four of a kind, motherfucker,” Lucas calls his hand as he throws his cards on the table.

The guys around the table erupt in a chorus of moans and cuss words as Lucas runs over to the whiteboard and erases his name off of the chef role for the week. That leaves me and Jeff to pick up his slack for the remainder of the month.

I’ve been with the Chicago Fire Department for five years now. These guys instantly became my second family. Not that I needed any more of that since I’m the youngest of five kids.

Jeff leans into me to whisper. “I say we put laxatives in his food. Teach him a lesson. He’s always trying to get out of shit around here.”

I laugh to myself. It would serve him right. Lucas is the youngest of all of us and is constantly trying to bet his way out of responsibilities. If it doesn’t have to do with saving lives and putting out fires, he doesn’t seem to care. I, on the other

hand, love to cook. It's a stress reliever for me. But I'm still gonna milk this and pretend it's a hardship to pick up his slack. Honestly, Lucas can't cook for shit. I'd rather not have his food.

It's been a pretty slow day, which is always a good thing. My shift is over in an hour, and I look forward to a night in. It's been a long two days at the firehouse. I head over to my locker and begin to collect my shit when my phone rings in my pocket. I pull it out and see *Mom* flash across the screen.

"Hey, Ma," I answer.

"Hi, dear. How are you?" she asks.

"You know me, living the life. Just about to get off my shift, but I'm looking forward to having the weekend off."

My bag is packed so I nod and wave to the boys as I head out to my truck.

"I hate to bother you, but could you stop here on your way home? I know it's out of the way, but your father is out of town and our smoke alarms have been beeping non-stop. It's driving me crazy and waking your nephew up during his naps."

Driving over to my old stomping grounds is the last thing that I want to do right now, but I know my mom. If I don't do it tonight, she's going to do it herself, and I don't need her getting on a ladder at her age.

"Sure thing, I'll stop over. I'm just leaving the station now. I'll be there in twenty."

“Oh, thank you, sweetie. I’ll see you soon.”

As I start to pull into my parent’s driveway, I notice Ryan’s car in the driveway. The red car sitting behind his makes my stomach drop. I heard she was moving back home for the summer before she starts med-school. I have mixed feelings about seeing her again.

When I met her, she was nine and the sweetest, nerdy little girl. Her face would light up when I came around and I found it to be incredibly endearing. I’m not sure when things started to shift, when I noticed her for the woman she was becoming. But it became harder to turn my head when I was hanging out at their pool, and she would walk out in a bikini.

Normally, she was a jeans and t-shirt kind of girl. I remember the summer she got her license and she walked out in this purple string bikini. I almost tripped and fell in the pool. I felt like such a creeper. She was sixteen and I was twenty-one. But I was able to pull myself together and be my usual self around her, especially when she was fully clothed.

It wasn’t until her graduation party that it all changed. I recall that night like it was yesterday.

I’m so proud of her. She’s leaving this town behind and going to achieve her dreams of being a doctor. She got into a prestigious school in New York and is leaving in two months. It’s gonna be sad to not see her hanging around the driveway whenever I’m at my parents’ house. I have been working as a firefighter for two years now and just got my own place, so I don’t see her as often.

Ryan has repeatedly made sure I look out for his baby sister while he's away at law school.

I bought her a little present that made me think of her. It's a shooting star necklace, since she's been obsessed with astrology since I've known her. I'm kind of embarrassed to give it to her, but I'll suck it up and act my age for once. Mom told me I needed to get her something if I was going to stop by.

When I walk into the backyard, it's filled with tables and chairs surrounding the pool. The food and alcohol are further in the back, under a white tent.

I find Ryan talking to his uncle and make a beeline for him. His uncle gets pulled away just as I approach.

"What up, man?" I punch his shoulder. "Long time no see."

"Shit. It's been awhile. How's life at the station?" he asks.

We walk towards the bar so I can get something to drink.

"Awesome. Having a blast with the guys. How's law school? Have you turned into a prick yet?"

He laughs. "Never. I'm not like most of the guys on that campus."

I love that about him. He's smart as hell and ambitious, but he never brags or acts like a dick. But there's a lot to feel inferior about when I'm around him. I'm just a college dropout with ADHD who decided to become a firefighter. But Ryan is going places.

After I get my beer, we settle at a tall bar table by the pool. I'm about to ask where Mollie is when I spot her on the opposite side of the pool with her friend Avery and a couple guys. She's wearing a white dress that's molded to her body and she looks beautiful. I get a weird feeling in my chest and find myself rubbing it to try to make the feeling going away. Ryan is talking about some chick he scored with the other night that we went to high school with, but I can barely follow his words. I'm too enamored with his little sister. She's telling a story and seems more animated and confident than I've ever seen. One of the guys she's talking to puts his hand on her lower back and my hand flexes around my beer bottle, threatening to shatter in my hand.

What is going on here? Why aren't Ryan and Mr. Price noticing this? Someone should be watching her, protecting her from these teeny boppers so they know to keep their hands off her. Ryan is completely unaware as he goes on and on about this chick that I care nothing about.

The kid's hand is finally back where it belongs, at his side, and I can relax again.

As the night goes on, I do my best to keep my eyes away from Mollie and stay out of her line of sight. I don't want to give her my gift with all these people around.

It's not until midnight, when most of the crowd has filtered out, that she spots me. Ryan is helping his dad move some of the drinks into large coolers now that the bartending staff is gone.

Mollie's face spreads into her usual smile, reserved just for me, and I can't help but return it. She's by herself right now standing in the center of their deck, so I decide it's the perfect time to join her.

"Congrats, Molls," I say as I approach.

I open my arms for a hug, and she willingly lets me wrap my arms around her.

"Thanks for coming. I didn't think you'd show up," she whispers.

"Nah, I'd never miss your graduation party. Although, there were a lot of squealing girls tonight."

She giggles. "Sorry, I'm sure a night with a bunch of teenagers is super lame."

"I'm just kidding. It was nice to catch up with Ryan."

She starts twisting her hair around her finger, an act I know she does when she gets nervous.

Not sure when the right timing is, I pull her gift out of my pocket and hand it to her. I wrapped it in shiny silver paper that I found at my parents' house.

"I didn't get you a card. Sorry," I hand it to her.

When I hear Ryan and his dad making noise behind us, I suddenly feel self-conscious. I don't want them to see what I got her. I'm afraid it will reveal something I haven't even admitted to myself yet.

“Let’s go over here,” I point to the side of the house where there’s a stone bench next to a small pond.

She sits down and begins to open the gift.

When she opens the box, her eyes begin to flood with moisture as she bites the bottom of her lip. My heart is beating weirdly fast, probably because I’ve never actually given a girl jewelry before. I can’t say I’m a fan of the feeling.

“Logan, it’s so beautiful. I love it,” she takes it out of the box immediately and hands it to me. “Put it on me?”

“Sure,” I croak out as she grabs her honey-colored hair, revealing her delicate neck.

“How did you know I loved shooting stars?” she whispers.

I smile. “Molls, I know a lot about you. You’re constantly talking about stars and space.”

I slide the shooting star necklace around her neck and work to get the tiny clasp to open. It takes several frustrating tries, but I finally get it on.

“How does it look?” she asks as she turns around.

It looks even better on her than in the box. I want to tell her that, but the words get stuck in my throat.

“Good.” I can see the look of disappointment on her face when that’s all I can come up with. I decide we need to change the course of this conversation. “So, are you excited for school to start in the fall?”

She looks a little sad. "I guess. I mean, yes, of course I am. But I'm gonna miss everybody. It's going to be so weird."

"You're going to do great." I'm not lost on the fact that Mollie is the only one in my life who I can have these serious talks with. I've always been known to be the jokester in life, never taking anything too seriously. I kind of like that she brings out this other side in me.

She nods her head unconvincingly. "Yeah, I guess. I just..." she pauses as she appears to contemplate her next words. "I was hoping to leave for school with a little more... experience."

Is she talking about what I think she's talking about? I shift in my seat, not sure I can handle this conversation right now.

"What are you talking about?" I ask, my voice husky.

"Come on," she shoves me in my arm. "You know what I'm talking about."

I should just walk away now. There's no reason for me to engage in this topic, but I don't.

"Exactly how inexperienced are we talking?"

She can't meet my eyes when she answers. "I've never kissed anyone before."

I'm shocked by her answer. She's beautiful and smart, has so much going for her. And I watched the guys tonight, they're interested. How could she be going off to college never having been kissed before?

I'm not sure what to say.

"Will you kiss me, Logan?" she says as she looks me right in the eyes.

I'm not sure I heard her correctly. Did she just ask me to kiss her?

"I can't kiss you, Mollie," I tell her sternly.

"Why not? I trust you. And it will help me go away to college with a bit more confidence. You don't want me leaving here feeling inexperienced and terrified, do you?"

Why is she asking me this?

I stand up and begin to pace back and forth on the grass. Out of everyone, she's asking me? I'm five years older than her, and her brother's best friend.

I hate that there's a part of me that wants to. Why do I want to kiss her? It makes no sense.

"Mollie, there are a thousand reasons why I can't kiss you, you being eighteen is one of them."

She stands up and meets me in the grass. I don't like her being this close to me. It's making me nervous, and that's not something I've ever felt around her.

"Ok. I'm eighteen and you're twenty-three. There's nothing illegal about this. Besides, all I'm asking for is a kiss. I'm not asking you to sleep with me. Please?"

She puts her hands behind her back and looks at me all innocent and sweet.

What if I do kiss her? I mean, she's right, it's just a kiss. This way she doesn't go out and experience it for the first time with some asshole who will just pressure her to go further when she's not ready. She can get this out of the way and then focus on her studies.

I rub the back of my neck as I try to contemplate what the best decision is.

"If I do this, you know it's just so you don't go out and find some dickhead that doesn't appreciate you to do it instead."

She falters a bit at my words but regains her composure and nods her head.

"I understand."

Shit! I'm going to do this, aren't I?

Without even thinking, my hand reaches up and cups her cheek. She leans into my hand and my heart feels like it's about to beat out of my chest. I take a step in her direction until our bodies are only an inch apart. She is so small compared to me, and she's looking up at me with no fear in her eyes. It's like she's about to get what she's always wanted.

I lean down slowly, and our eyes are locked in with each other. When I'm only a breath away from her, I stop.

"No one ever knows about this," I say.

"No one," she whispers.

I close the distance as my lips slowly touch hers. She tastes like vanilla and feels like heaven. I'm not sure what I was

expecting, but it wasn't to feel like this. I'm suddenly moving on instinct and unable to stop myself from going harder. Our lips move together perfectly as we slowly explore each other. My body feels light, like I'm floating.

When I move my tongue into her mouth, she follows my lead and gives me hers to play with.

What I don't expect is the soft little moan that comes out of her. It drives me crazy and makes me grab her around the waist and pull her body against mine. The kiss becomes more urgent as we both can't seem to get enough of each other. Our lips are becoming greedy as our tongues continue their song and dance. I've lost track of why I'm doing this, and the realization that it's the best kiss of my life breaks the fog.

I quickly pull away from her.

"That was a mistake. We should never have done that. I'm sorry, Mollie," I say before I run away.

A pounding on my window brings me back to the present.

"What on earth are you doing just sitting there?" my mother shouts through the window.

I cut the engine and open the door.

"Sorry, Ma. I got lost in thought."

I open my arms and give her a hug before we head back inside. I grab the ladder while we walk through the garage, and get to work right away.

It doesn't take me longer than fifteen minutes to get all of the batteries changed out. Mom told me I just needed to change the one making the beeping, but it'll make me feel better knowing all of the smoke detectors have new batteries. I've seen too many homes go up in flames to not just spend the extra five minutes being safe.

"Alright. You're all set, Miss Beverly," I say as I wrap my arm around my mother.

She rolls her eyes at my formality. "Thank you. You really didn't have to change all of them."

I shrug my shoulders. "It's no biggie."

Just as I'm about to take off, my phone beeps, alerting me of a text message.

Ryan: Dude, save me. Come out with me tonight. Alicia conned me into spending the night with my sister and Avery.

He wants me to spend the evening with Mollie? That doesn't seem like a good idea.

I don't know how to be around her anymore. Ever since she gave me the best kiss of my life without even trying, and I ran away like a coward. I worked so hard to move on from that night. Distanced myself from her and slept with several different women to get my head out of my ass.

I don't know why, but I resent her for that evening. If she just kissed a guy her own age and didn't try to guilt me into it, things could be the same between us.

Logan: I don't know, man. I'm beat from my shifts at the station. Was looking forward to a night in.

“Who’s that?” Mom asks.

“Just Ryan. He wants me to go out with him and Mollie tonight.”

“Oh, that’s right. Margie told me she comes home today. Oh, she’s just so happy to have Mollie under her roof again. You should go, I’m sure Mollie would be thrilled to see you again.”

Yeah, I’m not so sure that’s true. I’m not sure I even blame Mollie for her hatred towards me. She trusted me and I bolted like a toddler afraid of his shadow. The worst part about being in her presence now, is that I can feel the hatred she feels towards me, and I don’t like it one bit.

“I’m kind of tired,” I run my hand through my hair as I put my boots back on.

“Nonsense. You’re young and active. How are you ever going to meet someone if you just go home and waste your evening on the couch?” Mom asks with her hand on her hip.

“Who says I even *want* to meet someone? I’m perfectly happy with my life the way it is.”

That’s the truth. I don’t need all the drama that comes with monogamy, but my mother seems to focus all her worrying on me now that all of my siblings are married.

“Knock, knock,” Ryan interrupts us at the front door. “Hi, Beverly. Looking beautiful as always.”

“Oh, Ryan. Flattery will get you everywhere.” Mom’s face lights up as Ryan joins us inside. “Have you come to talk some sense into Logan?”

“Not at all. That would imply that I was giving him a choice. I’ve come to drag him out with me.”

Great. I guess I’m not getting out of this. I’m gonna need several drinks to make it through the night.

Chapter Three

Mollie

“Shots!” Avery shouts as soon as we take our seats at a table in the back.

Avery insisted we all Uber together. I went straight for the back seat so I didn’t have to face Logan right away. I needed time to pump myself up and remember why I hated his stupid face.

When Ryan dragged him across the street to our driveway, I saw him look me up and down as his face morphed into what I can only assume was disgust. Screw him for judging how I dress. I’m not a prude like I used to be, and he can get over it.

After Avery made all of us take some fruity shot that Ryan and Logan bitched and moaned about, we all settled in with our drinks.

“How’s your boyfriend, Mollie?” Alicia asks across the table.

I look over at Logan and see his body visibly tense.

“We aren’t really together anymore. It just didn’t make sense to try long distance. We weren’t together long enough for that and I have school to focus on.”

“Aw, that’s too bad.” Alicia offers me a sad face.

I nod my head and shrug my shoulder. I mean I liked Lucas and all, but we were casual. Both of us are going to med-school, and I think we both knew there was an expiration date. There’s no way we were gonna survive med-school and residency halfway across the country from one another. He went back to California for school and I ended up back on my old stomping grounds.

“What are your plans for the summer?” Ryan asks.

“I’m gonna work at the café again to earn some extra money before school starts. Aside from the week reprieve I’ll get at the lake house.”

Logan sits up taller at my words. “*She’s* gonna be there?” he spits out like the mere thought of my presence irritates him.

My head whips towards Ryan. “You didn’t tell me Logan was going.”

Ryan shrugs his shoulders like it’s nothing. “I didn’t think to tell you. Why does it matter anyway?”

“It doesn’t,” I try to recover, slightly embarrassed that I let my feelings show. “I just didn’t know he was coming.”

“Yeah, I’ll be there. One *whole* week together. Isn’t that amazing?” Logan says, sarcasm obvious.

“Yay! Can’t wait,” Alicia claps her hands together, completely oblivious to our sarcasm.

When Alicia asked me to join them for a getaway to our parents’ lake house in the beginning of July, it seemed like a no brainer. I should have known Logan was gonna be there. Him and my brother still have a ridiculous bromance going on. This means in just two weeks, I’ll be stuck next to Logan Brady *every single day* for an entire week!

I’m not sure I’m going to survive.

After another round of drinks, Avery breaks off to go flirt with some guys while Ryan and Alicia start smooching on each other by the juke box, leaving Logan and me together at the table.

Logan starts looking around the room like he wants to find any reason to step away.

“You can just get up and leave. You don’t need to sit here with me looking for a pathetic excuse to walk away,” I sneer at him.

He rolls his eyes at me. “Oh, good. You’re still being a brat. And here I thought we were older and mature enough to get past that.”

Ugh, he drives me insane. I start twirling my hair around my finger as I try my best to find some inner strength to put my stupid teenage pain aside and move forward with our relationship.

He’s right...we’ve probably taken this little mutual hatred a tad too far. I’m going to be a doctor. It’s time I start acting like

the bigger person. I don't totally believe this, and I'm still angry at him, but maybe if I fake it, I'll find some inner peace.

So, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to do my best to pretend he doesn't annoy the crap out of me. That every stupid, sexy move he makes doesn't get under my skin.

"You're right, I shouldn't have said that. Maybe we can call it a truce?" I stick my hand out.

He looks a bit baffled at my peace offering. I swear I even see a smirk threaten to break across his stupid face like he's won. Before I can rescind my offer, he extends his hand to shake mine. The contact of his rough, but extremely warm hand, makes my body shiver.

"Truce."

We both sit in awkward silence, not sure what to do now that we're not ignoring each other or making passive aggressive comments. I take a sip of my wine while he takes a sip of his beer and we both look around the bar. Honestly, it really shouldn't be this hard to be around the guy. I've known him half of my life. We both must come up with something to say because we start speaking at the same time.

This pulls a laugh out of both of us.

"You go first," he tells me.

"How's the fire station? Ryan mentioned something about a really bad fire you were part of putting out a couple of years ago. It sounded like it was pretty rough."

I see a hint of sadness in his eyes and feel badly for bringing it up.

“Yeah. It did a lot of damage, more so mentally for a lot of people. But it’s going good, I was promoted to lieutenant last year.”

Ryan never told me about that.

“That’s amazing, congratulations!”

He waves his hand in the air, trying to pass it off like it’s no big deal.

“What about you? How was college?” he leans forward on the table.

I try to avoid the flutters that take flight in my stomach at his nearness. He smells the same and yet he smells different. Sometimes at night, when I’m not in control of my feelings, I bring myself back to the night we kissed, and I can still smell his scent and taste his lips. Those are my weaker moments, when I can’t hold onto the facade of hating him.

“It was probably your typical college experience. Lots of studying and partying.”

He laughs, but it feels sarcastic. “You partied?”

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

Ugh, this is why I can’t be cordial with the guy, he makes it impossible. Is it that hard to make polite small talk for five minutes? Is that too much to ask? I consider myself a pretty

reasonable person, but there's something about him that just brings out this ugly side in me.

"I'm gonna continue to take the high road here and ignore the sarcasm that you're so maturely displaying," I say with a little extra cheerfulness to my voice. His annoyed look means my comment got to him, and it makes me feel slightly vindicated. "Yes, Logan. I went to college *and* partied like everybody else. While maintaining a 4.0 GPA. I'm not the innocent, prude girl I was before I left for college. I learned very quickly that people aren't who you think they are. Let's say I'm a little more *jaded* these days."

I think I see guilt flash across his face, but he recovers. My snarky little comment clearly wasn't lost on him, but maybe it's about time he knows the truth about that night. It changed me in so many ways. I'm more guarded and protective of my feelings and don't trust so easily. People that you think you know, turn out to be entirely different people.

"Girl, you have to come over here. Those sexy guys over there want to know if I could bring my beautiful friend over," Avery interrupts us.

I look over at the group she was just talking to, and sure enough, they are all smiling in our direction. Honestly, I'm not feeling it, but when I see Logan give them a look that can only be described as predatory, I suddenly feel this urge to show him just how much I've changed. It's not the most mature move, but I already admitted that I'm lacking in that department when it comes to Logan Brady.

I smile up at Avery. "I'd love to."

"Woo-hoo. Let's go, girl!" she hollers while grabbing my hand and dragging me across the bar.

Everything in me wants to turn around and get another glimpse of Logan's face, but I hold back. I need to focus on having fun and not worrying about what he thinks of me.

A couple hours, and one too many shots later, I'm finding my rhythm on the dance floor next to Avery when I feel a hand sneak around my waist. I look over and spot one of the guys from earlier, Kevin, I think his name is. I continue to move my hips to the beat while his hands move with me, Avery offering me a wink over her shoulder.

I get lost in the song and don't quite realize that his hands have started to move until they are basically groping my breasts. Before I can even say a word, I'm jerked away and land against a solid surface. I look over my shoulder and see Logan wearing a dark scowl.

"Back off," he growls at the guy.

Kevin throws his hands up in defense. "Sorry, man. We were just having some fun."

Clearly not interested in putting up a fight, Kevin leaves the floor and goes to join his buddies in the corner. Even though I have no interest in that man touching me like that, I'm feeling irrationally angry that Logan thinks it was his job to step in.

I swiftly turn around as I cross my arms across my chest. "What was that for?"

He steps in my space. “I’ve watched you down several shots tonight. You’re drunk, and clearly can’t take care of yourself. I guess college didn’t make you smarter.”

My jaw falls open at his remark, but I’m lost for words. Instead, I stomp my foot like a petulant child and storm off to find Avery.

Logan doesn’t seem to be far from me the rest of the night. If not with his presence, then with his stare. I wish it wouldn’t affect my body the way that it is. There’s just something about having the steady attention of someone like him. It makes my body tingle all over. I feel like he could get me off with just his eyes, just like the girl in *40 Days and 40 Nights*, where he blows flower pedals down her stomach until she literally has an orgasm. Talk about a sexual tension!

It’s so different to see him now and have such dirty thoughts. When I was younger and would fantasize about him, it was all so innocent. I pictured him cuddling with me or giving me gentle kisses. Declaring his love for me. I’m a world away from those fantasies now.

It’s after one by the time we are all loaded up and in the car.

Somehow, I got stuck next to Logan. I try to do my best to keep my body to myself, but his legs are massive and take up so much space. At some point on the drive, while Avery is shouting at Ryan about how dorky his bouncy ball collection was growing up, and Alicia is cracking up at the two of them, Logan’s leg moves an inch to the right and presses against mine.

To anyone else, it's barely noticeable, the result of being smashed in the backseat. To me, it sets my body on fire and it starts to feel like a sauna in the car. I start to think about what it would feel like to have his entire body pressed to mine, sans clothes. One night, that's all it took for my stupid childhood crush to come crashing back into my life.

In this moment, I loathe myself and my weakness for this man.

"Hey, Molls," Avery shouts for my attention. "Remember when Ryan and Logan got caught stealing a beer from your parents during one of our sleepovers? They got caught and both of them started crying like babies."

Logan sighs next to me, but I chuckle at the memory. That night, it was obvious how much the two of them looked up to my dad. They hated to disappoint him. I remember wanting to run up to Logan and give him a big hug. I didn't like to see him upset.

"Ha! Logan, remember when Molls and Avery snuck a ridiculous amount of cookies and cake from my sixteenth birthday party and Avery ended up puking all over herself?"

Logan and I both can't help but laugh at that memory. Avery and I thought we were so sly at eleven years old, taking all of those sweets for ourselves. Little did they know, we had also eaten a bunch of candy prior that Av brought over. It wasn't our brightest moment. I didn't throw up, but I was stuck with a mean stomachache all night.

When the car arrives back at my parents' place, we all climb out. Logan gives us a peace sign and heads over to his parents'

house to crash for the night. The rest of us make our way back into the house with plans to have another drink and hang, but none of us make it that far. We all end up falling asleep within the hour.

Chapter Four

Logan

“Pass me the ball next time, dickwad,” Lucas shouts at Jeff after his pretty abysmal shot.

It’s a sunny day outside, has been quiet all morning and afternoon, so we decided to head outside for a quick game of two on two.

“I don’t think that’s gonna help,” Gabe rebukes.

I laugh as I take the ball out to center court.

It was my idea to play. The past two weeks I’ve been doing anything to stay active and keep my mind busy. If I sit around, my brain goes straight to her. My body gets more tense the closer we get to the trip. I’ve done what I can to avoid seeing her since that night. The night where she seemed to bulldoze herself back into my life, and my thoughts, with her newfound sense of confidence and adventure. It took everything in me not to rip the heads off of every guy in that bar that looked at her, which was all of them.

What guy wouldn't be looking at a girl like Mollie?

Ryan was completely useless, following Alicia around like a puppy dog. He didn't even notice when that sleazeball started groping her breasts. Shit, I haven't been that angry in a long time.

I finally got some sleep last night after three consecutive nights in a row of tossing and turning. Trying to get our kiss from all those years ago out of my mind.

I shake my thoughts away and get back to the game as I charge down the court dribbling the ball, faking left but going right to escape Jeff. It's a good, sweaty mess of a game and so far it has been able to keep my thoughts away from my best friend's little sister, until now.

After we finish up our game, I head to the bathroom to take a shower. Now, I'm standing by the lounging area trying to figure out how I can keep my distance from Mollie during our trip, when Lucas smacks me on the head.

"What the fuck was that for?" I shove him before grabbing a seat on the couch.

"I was trying to knock some sense back into you. What's gotten into you anyway? You've been distracted all week," Lucas takes the chair opposite Jeff.

I run my hands through my hair, feeling agitated that anyone has even noticed my shift in mood.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I tell him.

It's worth a shot trying to play dumb.

“Did you hear that, Jeff? He doesn’t know what I’m talkin’ about,” Lucas mocks me.

I love this kid, but sometimes I want to strangle him. There is literally no filter on him.

“You can play stupid or just fucking spit it out, so I don’t have to listen to you two idiots go back and forth for ten minutes,” Jeff chimes in.

I am so grateful that Jeff doesn’t hate my guts since I made lieutenant over him. His time will come, he’s an amazing firefighter. Honestly, I’m not sure why I got it over him. All my life I’ve been a fuck up, this is the first time I was recognized for something good. It felt kinda strange. I didn’t even tell anyone about it for three months until Ryan was out with me and the guys one night and they let it slip.

But right now, Jeff is apparently not on my side as he joins in on trying to make me talk.

“It’s nothing. Just had a weird night a couple weeks ago and it’s been playing on my mind.”

Jeff and Lucas look at each other then back to me.

“Cryptic much? What the hell are you talking about?” Lucas asks.

“It’s just this girl from my childhood. She’s back from college and it’s kind of throwing me off. There, I fucking said it. You happy?”

“I knew it was a girl,” Jeff slaps his leg looking all too pleased with himself for being right. “So, what happened? She went

away to school and broke your heart?”

I’ve never talked about that night with anyone, and if I’m honest, it’s starting to get to me. Maybe if I let it all out to the guys, they can help me figure out what the hell to do.

“It wasn’t like that. She’s my...uhhh...buddy’s little sister. She asked me to give her her first kiss four years ago before she went off to college. The kiss felt good...too good. I kind of freaked out, pushed her off of me, told her it was a mistake and ran away. We haven’t been on great terms ever since. Now she’s back, and I have to spend an entire week of my vacation with her.”

“At the lake house? You’re not talking about Ryan’s little sister?” Lucas’ eyebrows are raised in surprise.

“It sounds to me like you really like this girl,” Jeff smiles at me.

“I don’t like her. My body just reacts to her, there’s a big difference.”

Jeff and Lucas fall over themselves laughing. I’m not sure what the hell is so funny about this. I think I would know if I liked a girl or not. Is this what it’s like to open up to people about feelings? Fuck that, I’m not a fan.

“I can’t believe you think that you’ve this messed up because you just think she’s hot,” Lucas says in between fits of laughter.

Just when I’m about to defend myself, because he’s wrong and an idiot, the alarm sounds and our conversation is instantly

over. My lungs cinch tight, making it hard to bring in air. The same feeling that always happens when I'm about to go into an emergency situation on the job, not knowing what lies ahead. We run over to our trucks and gear up before we hop in and speed off.



Later that evening, I'm back at my place as I pack my bags for the trip. I wanted to leave first thing in the morning, and I'm not a morning person. If I leave it for tomorrow, I will likely forget half of the shit that I need to pack. I've tried the coffee route, but it still doesn't wake my brain up enough to function properly. That doesn't mean I forgo coffee, that would just be insane.

My phone chimes just as I'm shoving my hoodie into the suitcase. Ryan's name flashes across the screen.

I stand up straight and roll my shoulders to release some tension. "What's going on, man?" I answer.

"Same old over here. Alicia and I are just about to turn in for the night, but I was wondering if you could do me a solid."

"What's that?" I ask as I throw a box of condoms into my suitcase.

I do this for every trip. It has nothing to do with who will be there, at least that is what I tell myself.

“Molls needs a ride to the lake house. Her car is in the shop, and Avery can't come for a couple days. We were gonna bring her, but she said she wants to leave first thing in the morning to get some grocery shopping done before everyone gets there.”

Swallowing down the lump in my throat, I try to come up with a good reason why I can't. Surely, there has to be a good reason, but I cannot seem to come up with a single excuse.

“You still there?” Ryan questions.

“Ugh, yeah. Sure, I can take her,” I say with a bitter edge to my voice.

And there it is, not only am I going to spend two weeks with her, but I'm starting the trip off with just the two of us in a car...alone...for two hours.

Ryan and I hang up with the promise for me to pick Mollie up at her parents' house at seven in the morning.

Chapter Five

Mollie

I'm going to kill him. He's clearly lost his mind and maybe a couple thousand brain cells from too much partying over the years. Why did my brother think that I would want to be alone in the car with his asshole best friend for two hours?

I mean, honestly. Alicia asked me at the bar a couple weeks ago what the animosity between the two of us was all about. Even she picked up on it the first time she saw me in the same room with him. My brother on the other hand, still has no idea that I was in love with Logan for half of my life. I swear, I love Ryan, but I sometimes wonder how he passed the bar exam.

I aggressively start shoving clothes into my suitcase as I picture all the ways I can cause physical pain onto Ryan. I'm going to put a laxative in his coffee every morning on this trip. I smile to myself as I picture him whining on the toilet the entire trip. That'll show him!

It's five to seven by the time I'm packed and zipping up my suitcase. That's right, Ryan didn't tell me until midnight last night that there was a change in plans. It was too late to find another ride. Plus, if Logan agreed to it, I wasn't about to be the one to back out like a coward.

At seven on the dot, my phone flashes with an incoming text from a number I'm not familiar with.

Unknown Number: I'm here.

Well, I guess I have Logan's number now. That'll be dangerous if I ever get sad, lonely, and drunk.

I force myself to do a slow inhale through my nose and exhale out of my mouth as I count to four. It doesn't do shit, but there's no time to center myself.

I grab my luggage and head out the door. Logan is leaning against the front of his truck with one leg crossed over the other. In his blue shorts and grey top, sporting his aviators. You can tell being a firefighter has kept him in shape, with his muscles bulging out of the arms of his shirt. I wish he didn't look better with age. It would be so much easier to get over this stupid *thing* between us.

Why can't he age like most men and get a beer gut with a small bald spot on the top of his head?

When he spots me, there's no smile or even a hint of happiness to see me. His lips remain in a straight line. Figures he can't even fake a smile for me.

I walk my suitcase and bag over to my side of the truck. Before I can turn around to lift them into the back, Logan is there opening the door to the backseat and lifts my things inside.

“Thanks,” I say before opening my door and hopping in.

I’m not used to being in such a large vehicle. All the guys I’ve dated have had small sports cars or some kind of luxury car. I feel kind of powerful being this high up.

After he jumps into his driver’s seat and reverses out of the driveway, I notice the cab smells like him. It’s a woodsy kind of scent with a hint of smoke. I’m not sure if the smoke is natural from his job or if it’s his cologne. Either way, it’s distracting and makes my stomach flip.

We spend the first ten minutes of the drive in silence. Each minute that passes without any words spoken makes my nerves grow stronger until I can’t take it anymore.

“Thanks for picking me up,” I concede.

His right shoulder lifts in a slight shrug. “It’s fine.”

Silence fills the cab once again. Okayyy, I guess he has no interest in talking. This is going to be an agonizing drive if this is what I’m going to get from him.

“Can we, um, put the radio on or something?” I ask hesitantly.

“Whatever you want,” he mutters under his breath.

Well, that doesn’t really make me feel very welcome to turn the radio on. Not wanting to piss him off anymore, I lean my

head back and close my eyes.

I must have dozed off because I wake suddenly to a quick jolt of the car. Logan's arm reaches across the seat to stop me from flying forward.

"Fucking idiot," he mumbles. "Sorry, person in front of me slammed on their breaks."

Removing his arm, I look around feeling a bit dazed.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to fall asleep."

The side of his mouth quirks up. "It's alright. I got to listen to you snore. Oh, and you drool. You're a pretty hideous looking sleeper."

"I do not drool," I say as my voice rises an octave.

When I look down at my shirt and feel my chin for any sort of evidence, he starts to chuckle.

I swat his arm. "That's not funny. I wasn't snoring, was I?"

"Maybe a little. Don't worry, I won't tell anyone."

He turns to me and winks, making my skin prickle with goosebumps. I feel like he flipped a switch when I was sleeping and pulled a stick out of his ass or something. I huff out a breath, crossing my arms across my chest which gets another snicker out of him.

"What's gotten into you? Did a priest come in and perform an exorcism to remove the demon within you while I was sleeping? Why are you so happy?"

Logan lets out a loud, uninhibited laugh. I haven't heard that kind of laugh from him in years. I can't help but look over at him and feel like I just got a sneak peek at the Logan I used to know.

"No exorcism. I guess with your mouth shut and no sarcastic comments, you looked innocent. Like the little girl I used to know," he smiles to himself as he looks out the window.

The little girl he used to know.

But I'm not the little girl he used to know. Why can't he just see me for who I am? Not for my age or who my brother is.

We manage to stay silent for the rest of the drive. I'm distracted with thoughts swirling through my mind. I don't even realize where we are until the engine cuts, and I look around.

"Ryan said you wanted to come early to do some grocery shopping," Logan tells me when he notices my confusion.

"You didn't have to take me."

"Well, I could have let you take my truck once we got to the house, but I have a sneaking suspicion that it's a bit more than you can handle," he holds my eyes.

I feel like he is implying so much more with those words than just his truck. Does he not think I can handle *him*?

We hop out of the truck, grabbing a cart on the way in.

"Where to?" he asks.

“Let’s just start over here in produce and make our way through the store. We need a bit of everything.”

The walk through the store is actually kind of nice. Neither of us seem to feel the need to fill in any silence, and with an agenda in place, we don’t have time to argue or overthink anything. I start to feel myself loosen up around him. Maybe this trip won’t be that terrible after all. Maybe Logan and I can find a way back to friendship.

When I look over at him, he’s standing by the bakery with his arms filled to the brim with goodies while he sports a childish grin on his face.

I can’t help but laugh. “What on earth are you doing?”

He runs over to me. “It’s vacation time. I have no rules on my diet, and I’m taking advantage.”

He begins to place the entire contents into the shopping cart. I see donuts, an assortment of cookies, cheesecake, and cinnamon rolls. He holds the last item up to me like it’s made of gold.

“Did you know this was a thing? It’s brownies and cookies mixed TOGETHER!”

I have to bite my lip to suppress the smile that wants to break free, but he seems so serious about this that I don’t want to make him feel bad.

“Apparently they are called brookies,” he continues. “Whoever created these is a genius!”

“Did you get the bread I asked for?” I ask, knowing he definitely did not.

“The what? Oh, shoot. No, I got distracted.”

“I can see that. Come on, let’s go get a couple loaves.”

On the way to the bread aisle, I notice I’m smiling. Logan follows the cart, standing next to me while he starts to whistle along. This is the silly, carefree Logan I used to know. Even though I’m relieved that we seem to have broken some barrier, I’m slightly terrified. Fun-loving Logan mixed with his looks is a killer combination. I’m just hoping my heart remembers to stay away this time.

Chapter Six

Logan

“That’s not how you do it,” Ryan complains next to me.

“That’s too much lime juice.”

“Fuck off,” I shove him out of my way. “Which one of us was a bartender?”

Once Ryan and Alicia showed up, the girls insisted on making tacos for dinner. Once they got going with ideas, they insisted on margaritas to end the night.

“That’s not enough lime juice. It’s gonna be too strong for the girls.”

I choose to ignore his criticism, knowing my margaritas are going to taste like pure perfection. Placing the slice of lime and pineapple on the side as a garnish, I grab the drink tray and head outside.

“Fine. I’ll make it my way. Then we’ll see which one they like more,” I hear him shout from behind me.

“You do you, man,” I reply as I open the screen door that goes out to the massive deck which overlooks the lake.

Alicia and Mollie are cracking up when I walk back outside. I take a second to watch Mollie while the sun is setting behind her, as colors of orange and red cast a glow around her. She’s too beautiful to even look at for an extended length of time. I find it’s easier if I only look at her for seconds at a time.

Thankfully, today has been much easier to be around her without losing my temper. Something happened when I was watching her sleep in my car this morning. It brought me back to the little nine-year-old who would follow me and Ryan around. I suddenly felt guilt for all of these years of being a dick just because I couldn’t handle my own attraction.

She’s back now, and clearly going to be around since she’s friends with Alicia. It’s about time I grow a pair and learn to ignore this temptation that I have.

“Did anyone order margaritas?” I lean forward, offering my tray out for the girls to grab their drinks.

“Ooh, yummy! You’re the best, L-Dawg,” Alicia smiles up at me.

I grunt at her nickname for me.

“L-Dawg?” Mollie chuckles.

“Yeah,” Alicia starts chuckling. “Logan got trashed one night and started...no wait...*tried* rapping for everyone. It was the funniest thing I have ever seen. I nearly peed myself.”

Great. I swear, Alicia will never let me live that night down. It wasn't too long after the huge fire that nearly killed me. I wasn't in the best place and drank way too much that night. Alicia has a video of it. I'm still determined to figure out the password to her phone and sneak in one day to delete the evidence.

Mollie throws her head back laughing. "I wish I could have seen that."

Crap.

"Oh, I have a video," Alicia grabs her phone off the table.

I take a huge gulp of my drink while the video comes on. Both girls are laughing so hard they have tears running down their cheeks while I decide to throw my entire drink back in one chug.

"What's so funny?" Ryan comes out with his own tray of margaritas.

"We're...watching...Logan....," Mollie can barely get out.

"Oh, shit! I know that sound. L-dawg at his best," Ryan places the tray down then grabs a seat.

I feel Mollie's hand on my arm as she tries to settle her laughs.

"You're so talented," she whispers.

"You have no idea how talented I am," I counter.

In case she isn't aware of what I'm referring to, I slowly run my tongue along my bottom lip. She shifts in her seat as I see a small patch of red form on her cheeks.

What was supposed to be a remark that put her in her place, has completely backfired. All I can picture now is how much I want to be the reason her cheeks are red, but for an entirely different reason.

My dick begins to twitch in my pants.

“What are these drinks for? I’m not even halfway done with my first one,” Alicia says as she notices Ryan’s tray.

“He says I made the margaritas wrong. He claims he can do better,” I say.

Ryan stands up and passes the drinks out to everyone. “I can and did do better. He didn’t put enough lime juice in his. Tell me those drinks aren’t way too strong for you.”

Alicia and Mollie look down at their drink then back at Ryan.

“They taste fine to me,” Mollie says.

I grab my drink and take a sip before spitting the contents out. “What the fuck. Ryan, how much lime juice did you put in this?”

“Oh, come on. You’re being dramatic. It’s perfect,” he says as he takes a sip.

Mollie and Alicia grab their drinks. They take a small sip before spitting the contents back into their glasses.

“Oh, babe. Wow! That was...a lot,” Alicia tries to soften the blow.

“That was fucking awful!” Mollie covers her mouth.

I look at Ryan with a big smile spread across my face as I wiggle my eyebrows. He flicks me off then shrugs his shoulders as he continues drinking his drink.

“Fine. More for me,” he grabs all of our glasses.

The night got out of hand pretty quickly after that. Ryan was completely gone, having pounded all four of his drinks within an hour. Alicia had to drag him inside to their room by eleven.

Mollie and I remain in our lounge chairs facing the water while they stumble inside. Mollie softly exhales once it’s just the two of us.

“Does it feel good to be done with school?” I ask her, genuinely curious to hear her response.

“It does. I’m really looking forward to starting med-school in the fall though.”

I smile to myself. “You’re such a nerd.”

“I am not,” she gasps. She opens her mouth to say something but seems to change her mind. “Never mind, think what you want. You always do anyway.”

She leans forward to get up, but I stop her with my arm. “Whoa, whoa, whoa. Not so fast. What the hell does that mean?”

“I don’t really feel like doing this with you, Logan.”

I swing my legs up and place them on the deck between our chairs so I’m facing her. “Tough shit. You don’t get to make a comment like that and not elaborate.”

“Fine,” she matches my posture so that we are both facing each other, our knees touching. “You always looked at me as some innocent, nerdy little prude. It’s why you ran away like a chicken shit the night I asked you to kiss me. You did, and then the idea of having let your lips touch mine was so appalling to you that you bailed on me. You left me standing there alone, and what’s worse, you’ve treated me like a stranger ever since. But I’m twenty-one years old now. I’m not a prude and I’m not innocent. I’m a grown woman, and yet you refuse to see me as that.”

So, we’re going there. The night that we have never once talked about or admitted ever happened, is now out in the open. Mollie thinks she has me figured out, but she couldn’t be further from the truth.

“Mollie, you don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, really? Well, enlighten me why don’t you.”

“Fine! You want the truth?” I stand up and start pacing back and forth before stopping and facing her once again. “I ran from you that night because that was the best kiss of my damn life. Because I wanted to do so much more with you. I wanted to press you against the side of that house and rub the evidence of what that kiss did to me across your stomach. I was twenty-three and wanted to fuck an eighteen-year-old. I ran away because that’s sick, and you deserved better!”

Mollie’s mouth is hanging open as we both sit in silence with the truth finally revealed. But I can’t wait around and hear her tell me how fucked I am for having those thoughts of her when

she was that young. She wanted me to give her her first kiss because she trusted me, and I was the sicko with the fucked-up attraction to her. I stand up and storm back into the house, heading straight for my bedroom.

As I lay there that night, the reality of what I just admitted becomes clearer. I think I just fucked up.

Mollie's room is right next to mine. I lie awake, listening to her come inside and get ready for bed. What is she thinking right now? Is she disgusted with what I just admitted to her? I would be if I were her. What kind of twenty-three-year-old gets that aroused by an eighteen year old? And I was supposed to be her protector, her second brother. That's how it was all our lives. Until she grew into a beautiful woman, and I could no longer look at her and see anything but her beauty.

Chapter Seven

Mollie

“You’re being weird,” Alicia says as I cut watermelon on the counter.

Avery just showed up this morning after an awkward day yesterday where I did anything in my power to be alone.

“She’s always weird, Alicia,” Avery argues.

“No, it’s different. She wouldn’t look any of us in the eye yesterday. It wasn’t until Kevin showed up last night that the tension in her seemed to loosen up a little.”

I just shrug my shoulders, trying to play it off like it’s nothing, as I focus on the task at hand. Placing the cubed slices of watermelon in a red plastic bowl to join the other sliced fruit.

I’ve been a complete mess the last thirty-four hours, trying to distract myself from Logan’s admission. Part of me doesn’t even believe him, thinking he still hates me and just wants to mess with my mind. If that’s his goal, he succeeded. I can’t do anything without thinking about it.

In my eyes, that kiss was perfect. It was everything that I had dreamed it would be with him, and yet so much more. But I had always assumed he realized kissing his buddy's sister was weird and remembered he wasn't even attracted to me in the least bit.

Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that he liked the kiss. That I made his body react. What I don't understand is why that is so gross. I was eighteen, completely legal, and it's only a five-year age difference. It's no different than us dating today, and nobody would blink an eye to our ages now.

If he did like it, if it was his best kiss ever, that changes *everything*.

I can't just know that we both shared something that was so life changing and ignore it. Would it still feel the same today? I was eighteen at the time, and blindly in love with the man. I didn't really know him or even myself. I wonder if we are even compatible in that department after all these years. I shouldn't want to know, but that's all I can think about now. Would his kiss still rock my world?

"You're right. She's on another planet right now," Avery agrees.

I just let them talk amongst themselves while I daydream some more.

One thing Alicia is right about, once Kevin showed up last night, I felt like there wasn't so much pressure for me to be around them and was able to fade into the background more easily. Well, Logan wouldn't stop looking at me, but at least

no one else noticed anything. Kevin went to high school with Ryan and Logan and just recently moved back to Chicago. He's a serial flirt and would probably fuck anything that walks, but he's fun to be around so I'm not complaining. We all need fun right now.

When I'm done with the fruit salad, I grab everything and bring it out to the large table outside on the deck.

"Ah, there's my girlfriend," Kevin hollers at me. "Come sit next to me, babe."

I roll my eyes, but can't help it and smile at him. I decide to take the seat next to him. He's a great ice breaker for me right now.

"Dude, stop hitting on my sister," Ryan smacks Kevin upside the head.

While everyone is laughing, I sneak a glance over at Logan who is glaring at Kevin. Ordinarily, I would think nothing of it, but the other night really messed me up. Because, what if he's...jealous? Is there a possibility that he might be tempted for more...for a repeat?

That thought plays in my head the rest of the day and into the evening.

After we've had a little backyard barbeque, Kevin and Alicia suggest we all get in the hot tub. I head upstairs to change into my bikini. It's a cute little red, string bikini that I've been told looks killer on me. Thank goodness I opted for a Brazilian wax before the trip. I don't have to run into the bathroom and

sneak in a quick shave, but I do want to go freshen up my makeup. It's been a long, hot day and I'm sure the evidence of it reflects on my face.

Once my bathing suit is on, I grab my towel and make a pit stop in the bathroom across from my room to check my face. A little touch up would definitely do me some good. My foundation is pretty much gone and I'm not sure where my mascara went, but at least it's not running down my face. I lean over the counter, my barely covered ass sticking out, to get a closer look.

I hear someone clearing their throat behind me. Looking into the mirror, my eyes are met with his smoldering green ones before they go back to looking not so subtly at my ass.

When I look a couple inches south, I'm met with the sexiest set of abs that I've ever seen. No joke, he could be on the front cover a firefighter calendar. It would sell out in an hour. His arms are crossed across his chest, showcasing his muscular pecs.

"Don't look too long, your boyfriend might get jealous," he says with a smug look on his face.

I give him a confused gaze, not sure what he means by that.

"Kevin. I don't think he would appreciate you ogling me," he raises his eyebrows suggestively.

Oh my gosh! I cannot believe he just said that. He is totally jealous!

“What’s your problem? Are you jealous, Logan?” I turn around and ask with my arms crossed under my chest, hoping he gets a view like the one he gave me.

All signs point to yes, that the view is a good one since his eyes are bugged out as they stare directly at my breasts. I think I see him shake his head before he steps into my space.

“Jealous? Ha,” his head falls back in a mocking laugh. “I don’t think so. I don’t get jealous.”

“Whatever, Logan. I don’t feel like playing this game with you right now.” I try to walk forward but his strong body doesn’t budge. “Would you mind moving?”

“No problem,” his silky voice held a challenge.

It takes him a minute, but he steps aside. When I walk by him, I get a whiff of his scent again, but keep walking so I don’t lose myself and fall under his spell. Things between us are getting hotter by the second ever since that night. Did he tell me because he wants things to change between us? I’m all kinds of confused at the moment.

When I get back outside, the rest of the gang is already in the hot tub at the bottom of the deck. I place my towel on the railing and settle into a seat next to Avery.

“Took you long enough girl,” Avery says before reaching behind her and handing me some kind of pink and orange concoction.

“Yeah, I got held up in the bathroom,” I whisper before Logan walks out.

Ugh, why? Why is he so freakin' good looking? His grey and blue swim trunks seem to be hanging even lower on his hips now. My body quivers at the sight as I bite my bottom lip.

Avery looks over at Logan then back at me. "Stop drooling, kid."

I straighten my back and push my chest out in an act of confidence, afraid that everyone else knows exactly what I'm thinking. An arm catches me off guard as Kevin scoots closer to me, pulling me into him.

"Hey, Ryan. Look who I've got," Kevin says with amusement in his eyes.

"Get your hands off of her, *now*," Logan's voice insists with authority.

I look over my shoulder to see Logan standing right behind us with a fiery look that is unfamiliar to me. It's not an anger that he's portrayed the last four years to me, this is something different. Kevin seems to pick up on the tone and scoots away to the corner of the hot tub.

Logan proceeds to get into the hot tub, taking a seat in between Kevin and I before looking at me. I look away hastily, feeling restless with this new version of Logan sitting right next to me. His body is invading my space, and I'm finding it hard to think of anything else.

"Thanks, man. I'm glad I didn't have to beat someone up tonight," Ryan nods a look of appreciation in Logan's direction.

If only he knew what was really going on.

“Hey, you know what we should do,” Alicia says with bubbled up excitement. “We should play truth or dare.”

The guys all groan at the same time Avery shouts, “Yes!”

My eyes flicker in amusement at the two different sets of opinions from the crowd. Leave it to the girls to pick such a high school game to play. Part of me kinda wants to play so we can make the guys do ridiculous shit or at least get them to admit to something embarrassing.

“Shut up, I’m not sitting around listening to you three reminisce about stupid high school crap or talk sports all night. We’re playing,” Alicia says with authority.

“Oldest goes first,” Avery adds.

“Isn’t it like youngest goes first or some shit?” Kevin feigns ignorance to the rules.

“Yes, but I decided it’s oldest tonight. You’ve got a problem with that?” Avery’s voice rings with attitude.

Kevin smirks at her. “Not a problem at all. You’re the boss.” He offers her a wink.

“And that would mean Ryan is up,” Alicia claps her hands together.

Ryan rolls his eyes. “Truth.”

“I’ll come up with the first truth question,” Avery insists.

She taps her finger over her chin as she contemplates. “Oh, I got it! Where was the craziest place you’ve ever done it?”

“I’m not listening to this.” I cover my ears with my hands, having no desire to hear my brother’s answer. “Tell me when it’s over.”

We go through the list, from Kevin down to Alicia, until Logan is up. He continues the pattern of everyone before him and picks truth. I’m not sure when it happened, I think when I was trying not to hear Ryan’s truth bomb, but Logan’s arm is on the back of the hot tub, making it feel like his entire body is open to me.

“Logan, what’s the best kiss you’ve ever had?” Alicia asks with an innocent smile.

I try my best to show a noncommittal smile but become more uncomfortable by the second. Oh, my god! Is he going to say our kiss? I’ll die if he does...and yet...I’ll die if he doesn’t!

“I was twenty-three, she was a bit younger, very inexperienced.”

My heart is pounding out of my chest. Logan’s thumb is now on the back of my shoulder, rubbing circles as he continues.

“She claimed she didn’t know what she was doing, but she sure as hell kissed with confidence. It started shy, kind of hesitant. But once she got going, she put all of herself into that kiss. It felt like she was the first person who really saw me for me, who kissed me because she really wanted the real me.”

I stare at him, tongue-tied and frozen in astonishment. He looks at me with a heart rendering tenderness in his gaze. My

entire body is on fire, having nothing to do with the temperature of the hot tub.

“Wow,” Avery whispers as she looks at me. She’s the only one who knows about that kiss, and she must know he’s talking about me. But I can’t even look her way, too focused on holding Logan’s eyes as he focuses on me intently.

“Sounds like one heck of a kiss,” Alicia whistles.

Kevin moves the game along, distracting Logan from his admission. Avery surprises me and picks truth even though that girl is an adventure junky. I think everyone is too lazy to get out of this hot tub, but I’m starting to feel like I need the escape.

“Truth or dare, Molls,” Avery exclaims.

“Dare,” I speak eagerly. Truth is the last thing I need. I have way too many secrets that need to stay locked up, and I’m beginning to feel overheated.

“Ooh,” the group says collectively.

“I dare you to go jump off the dock into the lake,” Avery’s smile broadened.

I mean there are worse things she could have made me do. With my brother here, there’s only so much we want to share or experience with each other. But it’s early July, so the water isn’t going to feel very comfortable, especially directly after the hot tub. This is Lake Michigan after all, it’s not like we’re in Florida.

Shit, it’s actually going to be frickin’ freezing.

I make my way out of the hot tub and grab my towel off of the railing.

Kevin leans back on his elbows. “Good luck with that one, Molls. I’ll be here in this delightfully warm hot tub enjoying this delicious beverage.”

The rest of the gang bursts out in laughter while Logan remains still, and his expression grows hard.

“Don’t you think that’s a bit dangerous. It’s pitch black out there. No one would find you in time if you were struggling, *and* you’ve been drinking,” Logan’s rough tone is laced with concern.

I’m not really worried about it. “I only had a couple drinks, and I’m a good swimmer. I was a lifeguard all of those summers at home.”

I raise my eyebrows with amusement and start to walk down the stairs onto the grass. It tickles my feet as I take large strides until I’m on the dock. As I walk on the wood, I hear the echoes of my steps underneath me until I am on the edge of the dock.

I can hear the water splash against the rocks on the shore as it breaks. It’s a soothing sound and yet, surprisingly eerie.

“Sucks to be you right now,” I hear Avery shout from the hot tub.

Taking a deep breath, I push off my feet and crash into the water. My body doesn’t fully register the temperature until I come up and break the surface. It feels like I jumped into a

freezer. This June has been unseasonably cold, making the lake chillier than usual at this time of year.

The sound of something large hitting the surface of the water startles me and makes me squeal in fear. It creates a tidal wave around me. What the hell was that?

“Mollie?” Logan’s voice cuts my train of thought.

“Logan? What the hell are you doing in here?” I ask as I tread the cold water.

“What am I doing? You’re the one who took off on your own and jumped in the dark water like a maniac. Where are you?”

I stick my hand out until it finds his. My body gets pulled swiftly through the water until it slams into his chest. He wraps his arm around my body and holds me against him, like I’m his to protect. It makes me wish I was.

“You didn’t have to come in after me,” I say through chattered teeth.

“It wasn’t even a question in my mind. Your brother is a fucking idiot, letting you go in alone. I can’t imagine what I would do if something happened to you under my watch.”

I feel the warmth of his breaths against my lips as he speaks. It’s extremely distracting. My body is trembling but even more now, but not from the temperature. It’s from the presence of this man, the feeling his protective words evoke in me.

My voice shakes as I speak. “Logan”

“I should never have told you the truth.” His hand comes up and caresses my cheek. “It just makes this so complicated.”

“No,” I shake my head. “It finally makes sense now. To know the reason you acted like you hated me all these years.”

He tightens his arm around me and leans his head closer to mine. His breaths are coming faster and stronger as I wait to see if he will press his lips to mine. My body feels like it’s standing on the edge of a cliff waiting to see if it will fall.

Just when I think he’s about to close the distance, a bright light shines on us. Logan releases his hold on me as we look over at the dock and see Ryan standing there with a flashlight.

“What’s going on?” he asks. “We were calling for you guys. No one answered.”

“We’re coming. She’s safe, no thanks to you,” Logan calls before we swim back to the shore.

Walking up the beach, my entire body shivers. I take off in a sprint until I’m almost diving back into the hot tub for warmth.

“You suck, Avery,” I huff out as I plop down next to her.

“Hey, you picked dare,” she defends.

When Ryan and Logan join us again, I feel the distance between Logan and me. He takes a seat next to me again but is sitting as far away from me as he can, like he’s afraid to be near me. I’m not sure what almost transpired there, but I think he was about to kiss me.

Do I want that or not? Of course my body does, but I don't think my heart can handle it. I can't take the humiliation of being kissed and pushed away by him again.

Chapter Eight

Mollie

I've been awake for almost an hour and have yet to get up and face the day. After thirty minutes of Logan refusing to even look me in the eye last night, I gave up and called it a night. Now, I'm lying here in my bed even though it's almost eleven and I can hear the commotion buzzing around downstairs. Something feels like it's bubbling at the surface between us. I think it's been that way for years and our close proximity is forcing us to face the music.

What I thought was hatred all these years, or at least complete disinterest, has turned out to be something that has me questioning everything. I'm not foolish enough to believe that just because he enjoyed our kiss all those years ago that it means he has some deep feelings for me. But I don't understand why the mere concept of him not hating the kiss has him so out of sorts. What the hell is wrong with enjoying my kiss? Am I that unappealing that he hoped it would make his stomach churn?

Knock. Knock. Knock.

“Wake up, biotch,” Avery busts into my room without waiting for me to tell her she can come in.

I lift myself off the bed and lean against the headboard. My hair must be a mess and I’m pretty sure I forgot to take off my makeup last night. I probably look like a drugged out crazy person.

“Thanks for waiting for permission, Miss Intrusive,” I mock.

She jumps onto the side of my bed, wearing her green bikini with her sheer white coverup. “Oh, puh-lease. When have I ever had manners? Just because we’re college grads doesn’t mean it’s going to miraculously happen now.”

I’ve missed our relaxed banter that admittedly could get out of hand. My brother used to get involved just to put an end to it.

“You’re right. I forgot there’s no hope for you,” I joke.

Her laugh ripples through the air. “Never say never. Anyway, my Peter Pan complex is not why I’m here.”

I eye her with curiosity. “Do tell.”

“I’m here to talk about how that man downstairs that clearly has some serious unresolved feelings for you.”

Her words send a fluttering of goosebumps all over.

“What makes you say that?” I ask, trying to play it cool.

“Where the hell do you want me to start? At the fact that he basically gushed about you being the best kiss he’s ever had? Or him being jealous every time Kevin so much as looks at

you. Or him losing his mind when Ryan let you go down to the lake alone? He is clearly all over the place with his emotions right now.”

Relief floods my body. Maybe he is fighting something bigger underneath all his indifference.

“Avery? Molls?” Alicia’s voice echoes behind the door. “Are you guys in there?”

“We’re here. Come on in,” Avery shouts.

I’m a little apprehensive about having this discussion in front of Alicia. I love her and completely trust her, but she *is* my brother’s girlfriend. What if she tells him?

Alicia spots us on the bed. “What’s going on?”

“Just a little girl talk. Care to join?” Avery offers.

“I love girl talk. I’m rarely invited to partake. Girls aren’t the nicest to me.” Alicia jogs over to the bed and hops in like a child excited about Christmas morning.

“Bitches be jealous,” Avery tells her. Alicia has that classic kind of beauty. I can imagine it has made girls jealous all her life.

“Well, what have I missed so far?” she asks.

I try to give Avery a concerned eye, and I recognize the subtle nod she gives me, telling me she understands.

“First things first,” Avery starts. “What is discussed in this room never gets shared with anyone, not even your annoying boyfriend. Understood?”

Alicia locks her lips and throws away the key, making Avery and myself chuckle.

“Okay. We were just talking about Logan and Mollie.”

“I knew it!” Alicia slams her hands on the bed.

“What?” I turn to her in surprise.

“Oh, come on! The sexual tension between you two is off the frickin’ charts.”

Is it that obvious? I thought I was doing a pretty good job masking my feelings.

“Does Ryan know?” I ask.

“Please. Ryan’s completely oblivious. I love that man, but he wouldn’t know it unless you two were straddling each other while making out.”

“Maybe not even then,” Avery adds.

“I don’t know. I think you guys might be seeing things. Logan may have admitted to enjoying a kiss with me years ago, but I don’t think there’s more to it than that. I think he just feels weird about it and doesn’t know how to act around me now.”

Even though I say those words, I don’t totally believe it myself.

“Not a chance. He totally wants you. He’s just being a wuss about it. And I plan to push him to his limits.” Avery has a mischievous look on her face.

It’s a bit concerning. Avery with a normal plan is cause for concern, but with that look on her face, it makes my body

break out in goosebumps.

“I like the sound of that!” Alicia chimes in.

She clearly doesn't know Avery well enough to understand never to encourage the woman.

“What are you talking about? What are you planning, Av?” I demand.

“Don't you worry your pretty little face.” Avery stands up off the bed. “Come on, Alicia. We've got some planning to do.”

“This is the best day ever,” Alicia follows suit and leaps off the bed as the two of them skip out of the bedroom with an annoying amount of cheerfulness.

I'm glad my life can cause such entertainment for them.

There's really no use sitting around feeling sorry for myself though. I whip the covers off of my legs and try to find my outfit for the day when a text comes through.

Avery: Plans are set. Wear a bikini, preferably your skimpiest one. Don't put on your sunscreen yet. Save it as a little show for your man. He's down here with no shirt on lookin pretty fine. Kevin is being a doofus. He keeps stealing my drink and telling me to go home. I want to punch him in the nuts. Ryan has the worst taste in friends.

Avery doesn't normally care what any guy thinks or does, so her comment about Kevin takes me by surprise. But then again, you never can tell what you're going to get with her. Her comment about Logan not wearing a shirt, I don't know how much I can handle seeing him this exposed nor do I think

I want to play her game of *watch me rub lotion all over my body*. That only works in the movies. I'll end up feeling like an idiot when he doesn't even glance my way.

In any case, my bag is packed and I'm on my way downstairs. The girls are packing some snacks in a bag when I meet them in the kitchen.

When Avery's eyes fall on me, she smiles. "I like the bathing suit."

"Thanks," I reply.

I went for my purple bikini that shows a bit more butt than I normally feel comfortable with, but since that's the trend these days, there weren't many other options in the store unless I wanted to wear a high waisted two piece. Avery would shit a brick if she ever saw me in something of the kind.

"Okay, we're all set," she grabs the bag and starts for the door.

"Where are we going anyway?" I inquire.

"Jet ski time," Kevin shouts as we join them on the gravel driveway.

I guess that answers my question. Everyone begins to load up the SUV with coolers and towels before they jump into the car. Logan fixes his eyes on me, only for a second, before he jumps into the backseat. My body feels tingly at the brief attention. Something is wrong with me. I should have masturbated more often this school year. I think I'm too pent up. Why is my body reacting to his gaze on me? It only lasted a half a second.

“Take your time why don’t you,” Kevin shouts out the passenger window.

I open the door to the backseat where Alicia, Avery, and Logan are sitting.

“Are you gonna scoot over?” I raise my eyebrows at Avery, waiting for her to move.

She looks around the car before finding Alicia’s eyes and smirks.

“I don’t think there’s much room back here,” Alicia offers.

“You can sit on my lap,” Kevin wiggles his eyebrows.

Logan looks visibly agitated as a muscle clips angrily in his jaw.

“Not gonna happen,” Ryan punches Kevin’s arm.

“Why don’t you sit on Logan’s?” Avery suggests. “It’s safer to be in the backseat in case Ryan demonstrates his stupidity and crashes.”

“I agree. It’s safer back here,” Alicia chimes in.

“Get in!” Ryan shouts, not noticing my reservations nor seeming to have any issue with the idea of me sitting on his best friend’s lap.

I don’t have time to think of a reason why this is a bad idea. Well, a reason good enough to air out to the crowd. Alicia and Avery can’t wipe the smiles off their faces as I climb over them.

I feel like a fumbling idiot as I struggle to figure out how to go about this. Do I try to sit in between his legs so my butt is on part of the seat and not touching him. Do I just go straight for sitting on his lap. My arms are wrapped around the front seat headrest as I try to figure out what to do when I feel Logan's hands grab me by the waist and bring me down on top of him.

"Your ass is hanging out in those bottoms," he whispers into my ear for only me to hear.

"Are you complaining?" I whisper back.

I hear a small growl come from his chest, but he doesn't give me an answer.

As Ryan drives, the ride to the marina becomes bumpy when he takes sharp twists and turns. My ass is positioned just over Logan's package.

Logan starts to grow tense underneath me as my ass keeps rubbing left to right across his lap with each twist and turn.

"Dude, do you have to drive like a fucking maniac?" Logan roars over my shoulder.

It's only another couple minutes to our destination but Logan has gone completely stiff. I don't know what's gotten into him until I feel the slight twitch of his growing erection. It catches me off guard.

Holy shit! Logan is hard as a rock right now because of me. Surprise quickly turns into confidence. The idea that this man is fighting an erection because of me makes me all kinds of excited. I decide to let go off the door handle, which I was

clutching for dear life, and lean my back on his stomach, settling further into his lap.

“Motherfucker,” he whispers.

I have to bite my lip to fight the smile that wants to take over. Who knew teasing him would be this much fun? I kind of understand why Avery and Alicia were all excited about this.

As soon as the car comes to a stop, Logan has the door opened and me thrown off his lap in seconds. I chuckle to myself at how easy it was to rile him up, and it wasn't even on purpose. Well, I guess it was since Alicia and Avery concocted the whole thing.

With my newfound sense of power, I throw my bag over my shoulder and head for the dock. Avery rented three jet skis which means one girl goes on with one guy. When I turn around to ask who goes with who, Alicia and Avery are flashing me an amused look.

“Kevin. You're with me,” Avery looks over her shoulder at him.

He tries to cover his smirk, but I see it. Kevin is normally so out there with his flirtation, it's weird to see him hold back. I wonder if there is some kind of attraction between them. It certainly seems that way.

“I guess that leaves you and me,” I stand in front of Logan.

His mouth dips into an even deeper frown. “Yeah...I noticed.”

I tilt my head to the side, appreciating the empowerment the car ride gave me. “Aw, don't be grumpy. I used to be your

favorite person. Remember when you used to smile when I walked into a room instead of pout?”

The beginning of a smile tipped the corners of his mouth.

The instructor calls everybody over to the jet skis at the end of the dock for our safety talk. Once he finishes going through his spiel, we are all given our life vests. The girls pull out their bags and dig out sunblock, reminding me that I've yet to put mine on. Everyone starts to get their things in order, so I pull my sheer white cover up over my head and dig out my own sunblock.

Knowing we are going to be outside for a while, I make sure to lather my body well. I work it into my thighs and try my best to look over my shoulder as I rub it into my exposed bottom. This amount of cheek has never seen the sun so I want to make sure I don't get a nasty sunburn there.

If by chance the girls are right about putting on a show for Logan, I look up and sneak a peek at him. Sure enough, his gaze bores into me with silent expectation like he is waiting for me to continue. I'm not sure what he is hoping for, but I hold his eyes while I continue to rub the lotion on my cheeks. His tongue dips down to lick his lower lip and I swear my bathing suit bottoms are wet from my body's reaction.

“Logan,” Avery pulls us out of our private show. “Why don't you help Molls get her back? You know how she burns easily.”

Alicia chuckles loudly which warrants a glare from me. As luck would have it, none of the other guys seem to be paying

attention while Logan takes the couple steps over to me. He sticks his hand out and I give him the lotion.

“Thank you,” I mutter to him.

The first touch of his hands on my shoulders makes my body break out in shivers. Time feels like it stands still as his large hands work the lotion into my back. Alicia and Avery are enjoying the show which is enough of a distraction to pull me out of my trance.

Once everybody is ready, life jackets on, we all get settled onto our jet skis. Logan reaches his hand out to guide me on until I’m settled behind him.

“Do me a favor and hold on tight so you don’t go flying off,” he warns with a cold, hard tone.

I try to suppress a giggle. He is such a grump right now, which is the exact opposite of Logan’s personality. He is normally the free spirited, light one.

I’m going to push him today. Something has gotta give between us. I’m not going to spend the rest of this trip tip-toeing around this push and pull we seem to have going on.

Listening to his request of not flying off the jet ski, I wrap my arms around his stomach and place them on the vest. I’ve never hated life jackets more than I do right now. It is creating this maddening barrier between his body and mine.

The engine comes to life and the six of us are out on the water. It takes a bit to get through the no wake zone, but the second we get past it, the guys crank up the speed and we are cruising.

The wind begins to whip around as the water of the waves splash us. It's a freeing feeling.

The speed and rush of the moment quiets my brain and allows me to be in the moment. I rest my head on his back. I've missed this man so much. He was a constant in my life, so much more than a little crush. I've forgotten how calming his presence was to me.

Keeping my head on his back, I close my eyes and enjoy the fact that we can't talk or bicker right now.

My hands begin to have a mind of their own as they start to move down his life jacket until they reach his exposed stomach at the bottom of his vest. I can feel his abs tighten the second my hands meet them. Even sitting down, his stomach is rock hard. It just spurs me on more and I continue to run them up his stomach, under the vest.

When I lift my head and look down, I notice his toned legs. Is it a thing to have athletic looking calves? Because Logan totally does. I want to run my hands up his legs.

Out of no where, he abruptly veers to the right, away from the rest of the group. I'm not sure where we are going but he continues to put distance between us and the crowd until we are going back into a little pocket of the lake, hidden by trees. He cuts the engine and grabs a rope to wrap around a large tree trunk in the water before ridding himself of his vest and jumping into the water.

Even though his behavior is a bit perplexing, I find myself following his lead and going in after him. I'm not one to pass

up a nice dip in the lake.

Chapter Nine

Logan

I'm furious with her right now. Maybe even more furious with myself for not being able to control my body's response to her touch. I'm aching to get my hands on her, to taste every inch of her, and she seems to know it. She's no longer shy about her attraction to me. This new version of Mollie likes to play with me.

Once my feet can touch the bottom of lake, I walk the rest of the way up the small hidden beach.

I begin to work off my excess energy by pacing. My hand reaches behind my neck to try to rub away the tension.

"What the hell was that for?" Mollie walks out of the water.

I throw my head back in agony. Why must she look like a walking fucking wet dream? She is dripping wet and her bathing suit is molded to her skin. Her ample breasts are on complete display, and her toned ass cheeks are basically begging me to squeeze them.

“Fuck,” I say to no one.

“What is your problem?” she continues until she is right in front of me.

“What are you trying to do to me, Molls?” I ask in a low, clipped tone.

She gives me a twisted smile.

“Is this funny to you?” I turn around and stomp away.

I’m in complete disbelief of her right now. Here I am, trying like hell to do the right thing, and she finds it funny.

“I’m just trying to get you to loosen up,” she quickly answers behind me.

I stop in my tracks and face her. “You don’t want to see what happens when I loosen up around you.”

She folds her arms under her chest, only making her breasts look more inviting. “Maybe I do.”

I move in closer to her, watching her face change from challenging to surprised. She looks up at me through her lashes, meeting my eyes.

“Are you sure about that?” I continue.

I wrap my arm around her waist and pull her against me roughly. Her breathing becomes uneven as I feel it’s rhythm against my chest.

I had only meant to scare her off, call her bluff on what I thought was a game. But she is looking up at me with longing in her eyes while her gaze boldly rakes over me.

When my hand cups her cheek, I know I've lost control of this situation.

"We shouldn't be doing this," I whisper to her.

"It's all I can think about," her silky voice responds before she reaches up and touches her lips to mine.

That first touch of her mouth to mine is all it takes for me to completely break. I engulf her in both arms and squeeze her tiny frame to mine. Our lips part and open for each other to explore. There is nothing soft about this kiss, we are both smothering each other's lips with demanding mastery. Her hands reach around me and grab my neck and shoulder. She is clawing at me like she can't get enough.

I moan into her and slip my tongue inside her mouth. Our tongues mix together in a soul-reaching massage. My hands move down her back until they cup her fucking edible cheeks and I press her into my growing erection. Before I have the time to explore her mouth any further, I hear laughter in the distance and immediately jump back.

I look around and see that the rest of the crowd is approaching us. Thankfully, we are far enough into the beach that they couldn't have seen us until they make the last turn to the right.

My body instantly misses the feel of her warmth on me. Her lips are swollen and show the evidence of our rough kiss. It makes my dick twitch in excitement, knowing that look of euphoria on her face is because of me.

I turn around so I can adjust myself in my swim trunks before my body gives away what we were doing back here.

“Nice spot,” Avery shouts from the distance.

Once the jet skis are tied up and they are in the water swimming towards us, Mollie and I begin to walk to the edge where the water meets the sand.

“What are you carrying over your head, Av?” Mollie shouts.

Avery is treading the water with a bag over her head, so it doesn't get wet.

“It's some alcoholic beverages you twat. What are you guys doing out here?” she responds as she finally gets to where she can touch.

The rest of the gang is right behind her.

“Just came across this spot and wanted to check it out,” I lie.

I should feel more guilty that my tongue was just down my best friend's little sister's throat, but I don't. I'm too focused on when I can get her alone again and finish what we started. It feels inevitable that this was going to happen. There is far too much history and pent-up sexual frustration, and with her showing this new daring side, I have no chance in hell in resisting.

“Nice work. This is the perfect spot to chill and sneak in a drink,” Ryan says as he sprawls out on the sand. “Avery, fetch me a drink!”

“Get it yourself. I’m not your pet,” Avery replies, throwing her bag in his face.

There was a time I thought Avery and Ryan had a secret thing for each other. I now realize they just look at each other as an extended siblings.

Mollie takes a seat on the sand and looks at me with apprehension on her face. I’m sick of being the reason she has that look on her face. I’m done with pretending not to care or hiding my desire from her. I wink at her and offer a smile which makes her bite her lip as a smirk breaks free.

Shit, she is so damn cute.

Knowing no one will think anything of it, I take a seat next to her.

She lies down on the sand, extending her arms above her head. Her body looks fucking fantastic in that position, like she is splayed out just waiting for me to do what I want with her.

“Are you trying to torture me right now?” I lie back and turn my head towards her, making sure to keep my voice low.

She doesn’t look at me, but the beginning of a smile tips the corners of her mouth.

“I’m just trying to get some sun,” she replies with a trace of laughter in her voice.

“I know your game. You’re trying to drive me crazy right now,” I whisper. “Guess what? It’s fucking working. I’m picturing diving in between your thighs right now and tasting the one place I’ve only dreamt of tasting.”

She softly whimpers at my words. Looking around, I see that no one is really paying attention to us since it looks like we are just lying out getting some sun.

I continue. “Your nipples hardened when I told you I wanted to taste your pussy. Did that turn you on? You know what else I dream about? How good your mouth would feel around my cock. I used to be good all day, fighting the urge to let my fantasies about you go, but when I was asleep, I couldn’t control it.”

“I’ve always wanted to taste your cock. I used to fantasize about your cum shooting down my throat,” she says with a shaky voice, this time meeting my eyes.

That’s about all the control I have. I stand up and dive into the water to attempt to rid myself of this massive hard on. When did my little Mollie learn to talk like that? No woman has ever said words like that to me. I’m a complete mess of a man as I try to think of anything to calm my body down. It takes a minute, but thinking about fires and the dangers of my job does the trick.

Once I feel like it’s under control, I swim back to shore and plop down next to Kevin, knowing I can’t risk another round of who can turn the other one on more with Mollie right now.

“What have you been up to, dude? I haven’t seen you around our hang out spot in the last couple weeks,” he asks me.

He’s right, I’ve been distant from everyone since Mollie got back in town. I’ve usually been able to avoid and distract

myself until she goes back to school. This time, she's here for good, and it seems like facing our attraction is the only option.

"Been working a lot. Summertime, man. People are taking vacations and I gotta fill in for them."

He seems to accept my excuse.

"When this trip is over, we need to go out. I'm in desperate need of some action."

That's another problem. I've had zero interest in other women since a certain someone entered my life again. Even the idea of sleeping with someone else is less appealing to me than sushi, and I hate that crap.

"Okay, everyone's had a drink. Let's get back on those jet skis. We only have two hours with them," Alicia says as she starts corralling the group.

I meet Mollie out at our jet ski where she is treading water, waiting for me.

"I'm driving this time," she says as she grabs onto the step.

Grabbing the side of her stomach under water, I squeeze a couple times which grants me a squeal from her.

"Who says you get to take control?" I joke.

The warmth of her smile echoes in her voice. "I like to take control."

With that, she climbs up onto the seat first, flashing a killer view of her ass.

Fuck, she's gonna get it for teasing me like this. I smile to myself, knowing she has no idea who she's messing with.

After I'm on the seat behind her, I grab onto her hips and she starts the engine. We're making our way out of the cove when she picks up speed. I look around and see the rest of the gang are spread out behind us, minding their own business.

Good. I need them distracted for what I have planned for this girl.

The wind is whipping through our hair right now while the sun beats down on our skin. It feels amazing to be riding with her right now, knowing I'm done battling against this draw between us.

I move my hands from her hips and start to run them down her thighs until I reach her knees. Her skin feels so soft, I've never felt anything better. Moving my hands back up her thighs I slide them inward, so they graze her inner thighs right by her bathing suit.

She wiggles her ass on the seat, trying to fight off the reaction my hands are causing. I repeat the motion a couple more times until she finally glances behind her shoulder for a second. The desire in her eyes is enough for me to know that I'm gonna go for it.

This time on my way back up her thighs, I slide underneath her bottoms until my fingers graze her clit. She flinches in my arms and lets out a loud gasp.

"What are you doing?" she calls out.

I move my lips to her ear and whisper. "I'm paying you back for flashing your sexy ass cheeks in my face."

Biting on her earlobe, I feel her entire body shiver.

My fingers start to rub circles over her swollen clit as she instinctively opens her legs wider. My girl loves this, she wants me to get her off in public.

I need to feel how wet she is. Dipping my fingers down, they fall to her entrance which is absolutely drenched in her arousal. I could thrust inside her without any problems, even with my size.

I growl into her ear. "I wish this was my dick right now, but my fingers will have to do."

Then I shove two fingers as far as I can into her. She lets out the most delicious scream which is drowned out by the wind.

I do my best to curve my fingers in this awkward position so I can hit her in just the right spot. I know I'm there when she starts panting and leans her head back on my chest.

"Don't crash us, baby. I would hate to die before I make you come," I whisper.

"Rub my clit again," she begs.

My fingers are now coated in her wetness giving me the ability to rub fast circles over her clit.

"Oh, shit. Keep going. I'm almost there," her silky voice requests, head still lying on my chest.

I don't let up as my fingers take what they want from her. She releases onto my fingers as she lets out a dick throbbing moan. We're still flying through the water as she keeps us on a straight path. I feel her body come down from the high and relax into my arms.

I kiss her temple with an unexpected feeling of affection for her. It's a foreign feeling to me after doing something so dirty, and I find it a little unsettling.

Chapter Ten

Mollie

I'm in heaven. There's no other explanation. Nothing in life has ever felt so good. I'm driving around on a jet ski with my dream man hanging onto me from the back, recovering from the best orgasm of my life.

How did he even do that? I don't come very easily. It normally takes laser sharp focus on my part to stay in the moment and get out of my head enough to come. I'm normally spending too much time worried about what my partner wants me to do.

Logan took all my thoughts away and I just basked in the attention. His fingers knew exactly what to do, how much pressure to use, where to use it.

I didn't even care if someone was looking. Speaking of, *did* someone see?

Shit! What if my *brother* saw? Oh my gosh, he is going to murder Logan.

I'm running through all the possible things I could say to Ryan if he claims he saw. Maybe I can say there was a bee and Logan was swatting it away. Not sure what bee spends several minutes between ladies thighs on a jet ski, but it could happen. While we park, my brain is racing. Yet when we climb onto the dock, no one says anything. They are all laughing and acting the normal.

I give it a couple minutes of analyzing the group as we all head back to the car before I finally breathe a sigh of relief.

Rather than climbing onto Logan's lap with reservations like the ride here, I hop right on and he grabs my hips with ease. How can two hours on a jet ski completely change the state of our relationship?

I feel the difference. He is no longer fighting anything.

It's only a ten-minute ride, but Logan is hard again. Only now, he is pulling my ass into his erection and moving me around on it. I'm wet again and feel my center tingle with need.

Ryan parks the car but before we get out, Logan whispers in my ear.

"Meet me upstairs in my room."

The smile in his eyes contains a sensuous flame.

He lets me off his lap, and I wonder if I would look desperate and pathetic if I ran as fast as I could into his room. It's what I want to do, but instead I take my time and stroll into the kitchen where everyone else is.

“You did not. Tell me you didn’t,” Alicia is scolding Ryan right now.

He lifts his arms up playing innocent. “What can I say? Avery was a brat. It was easy to pick on her.”

“Come on. Let’s go jump in the water,” Kevin interrupts with a drink in his hand.

“Heck yeah. You joining us?” Avery asks.

“I’ll be right there. I’m gonna go....to the bathroom.”

I’m such a horrible liar. Why did I stall like that?

I start to run up the stairs, my heart pounding out of my chest, stomach clenched tight. Nerves are making an appearance as the gravity of the moment sets in. I’m now standing in his bedroom, waiting for *Logan* to come in. What are we going to do? Are we going to have sex?

My thoughts are starting to spiral when he walks in. Still in just his swimming trunks, his perfect abs and arms on display, every fear and worry go out the window and I smile at him.

His easy smile takes up his face and reminds me of the boy I remember.

He openly studies me as his steps close the distance between us. He takes me in his arms and presses his lips to mine. This kiss is slower and more thoughtful. He demands control as he takes soft yet firm kisses from my lips. His tongue comes out and traces my lips before dipping into my mouth and stroking my own tongue. It draws out a long moan from my throat that seems to only spur him on.

Before we can go any further, I hear someone running up the stairs and we jump off each other. I start to panic because it's too late for me to escape his room and my brain isn't coming up with a reason that we're in here together. Luckily, I see Kevin run into the bathroom.

"I think we need to go outside," I whisper.

He nods a painful look of agreement, and we take the opportunity to escape now while Kevin is still in the bathroom.

The rest of the crew is already outside sitting on the dock. Logan and I each grab a drink and meet them out there. I take a seat next to Avery.

"So, I'm no fool. Something happened, and we're going to talk about it later," she whispers.

Alicia looks over at me and winks while Logan takes a seat next to Ryan as he chews with a mouthful.

"What are you eating?" Ryan asks.

Logan struggles to answer through his mouthful. "A brownie cookie thing. It's delicious."

I try to hide my smile at his adorableness. He has always been such a big go-with-the-flow kind of guy. His energy was so effortless and addictive. Whenever he entered our home, you knew it. I've missed being invited into that part of him. I finally feel like I'm getting him back.

But what if what we are doing is just going to make it worse in the end?

I shake the thoughts from my head. I'm not going to worry about that right now, because I'm finally doing something that I've always dreamed of.

"You and your sweets. Don't you just want a big, fat piece of steak instead of a brownie?" Ryan questions him.

"Nuh uh. Brownie all the way. I'm addicted to sweets. Probably because I have to refrain from eating them most of the time."

"I'd say you have a little wiggle room to cheat," Alicia says as she looks down at Logan's stomach.

I agree. The man's physique is frickin' perfect. Maybe I'd be able to control my hormones around him if he didn't look so damn perfect.

"Are you hitting on my best friend?" Ryan cuts in.

"Of course not," Alicia kisses his cheek. "You're the only one I have eyes for."

Logan laughs out loud. "She was totally checking me out."

Ryan punches Logan in the arm which somehow leads to the two of them on their feet as they begin to wrestle. Alicia stands up and gives them both a shove until they fall over the dock and into the water. Avery can't contain her excitement at seeing the two go overboard.

"You guys got owned," she shouts over the dock.

Kevin comes running by all of us and does a cannon ball into the water.

I look over at the girls and we all shrug before jumping off the dock and joining them.

Avery and I do our usual swim through the poles of the dock until we get to the large rocks off the small beach. We always used to come over here and sit on the rocks. It's where we would have our deepest conversations about life.

She pulls herself up on the lowest rock and climbs to our usual spot on a big, flat rock at the top. Once I join her, we lie on our backs and catch our breath.

"Spill it," she says after a bit of silence.

"How do you know there's something to spill?" I tease.

"First of all, the rest of the gang are idiots if they think you two went to a hidden beach to just stand there like fools. You also had swollen, red lips when we joined you and were looking all swoony at each other."

I can't help but smile at her words.

"Fine. Something happened."

"Yeah, I know. Now tell me."

We both stay on our backs as I take her through the events of the day. From the first kiss to the jet ski incident, to our second kiss upstairs. It all feels like a dream, even as I relive it in my head. When I'm done, I wait for her to say something.

"I want someone to finger fuck me on a jet ski," is her reply.

Typical Avery.

“That’s what you get out of all of that?” I sit up and look down at her.

“Dude. That’s the hottest thing I’ve ever heard. I don’t care if today was like the biggest moment of your life. I’m gonna dream about that shit tonight.”

“You’re impossible.”

Avery sits up this time to join me.

“In all seriousness, I’m happy for you. For real, but just be careful. I don’t want you getting hurt after of all of this. Just have fun with it, but don’t expect for him to fall in love and you two to live happily ever after.”

I nod my head. I don’t want to hear it, but I know that she’s right. I have to guard my heart. Right now, we are just having fun and finally giving in to years of pent-up frustration and attraction. I’d be a fool to believe it means anything.

“I know. I promise I’m being careful. This is just fun while we’re on this trip. I’ve got med-school starting up in a month, I don’t have time for a new relationship.”

“Good. I feel better. Just enjoy it while it lasts, we only have two days left. Now, let’s get back out there and have some fun.”

Avery and I jump off the rocks and swim back to where everyone is treading water and joking around. The water feels cool and refreshing, giving my body a much-needed jolt to the system.

Later that night, we are all hanging out on the deck while Ryan stands over the grill making cheeseburgers for dinner. I've done my best to avoid eye contact with Logan most of the afternoon and evening. There is no way I would make it the rest of the day without touching him if I kept up with the stares and flirtatious smirks. A woman can only handle so many dimple-faced smiles from her lifelong crush.

"You excited for school to start?" Alicia sits next to me on the patio furniture.

Oh, gosh. Am I excited? I don't even know how to answer that question. I've always wanted to be a doctor. Taking care of people has been in my blood since I was little. I would play doctor with my dolls while little girls would play house. My room would be lined up with patients just waiting for me to fix them up and make them feel better, and most importantly, my mom is a doctor. I always looked up to her and envied the idea of her getting a chance to save lives. She seemed so happy and fulfilled. I wanted that to be me, I always knew it.

"I'm excited to get closer to actually seeing patients. It's gonna be a long road ahead of me, but definitely worth it."

"Any room for a boyfriend in those plans?" she looks at me with concern.

"I haven't really thought about it to be honest. I've never done med-school before. I don't know what I'll have time for."

It's the truth. I have no idea what the demand will be. Will I even have time to devote to a boyfriend? Probably not.

“So, this thing with Logan. It’s just for fun?” she asks me.

“I think so. I don’t think it’s anything more for him anyways.”

She looks over at him while he laughs at something Ryan says. It doesn’t take long for his eyes to search out mine. When they find me, I see a gleam of interest in them.

Alicia sighs. “That’s not the look of someone in it just for fun. Even if he doesn’t know it. There are some real feelings there.”

Logan having real feelings for me? I don’t think so. I’m not his type. I’m the quiet one who takes life too seriously. There’s just no way he would have any interest in settling down with someone like me.

“I think you’re seeing things. We’re just attracted to each other.”

I lie. I’ve always felt way more than attraction for Logan. It’s gone deep into my heart and bones. But I’m older and wiser now, I know this can only be physical.

“If you say so,” Alicia says with little confidence. “Just be careful. I don’t want to see either of you getting hurt.”

I’ve now been warned by Avery and Alicia. I should probably take time to rethink whether or not going any further with this man is a good idea, but when our eyes meet again, I already know it’s hopeless.

Chapter Eleven

Logan

I've never made such stupid googly-eyed smiles at a girl before, but I can't seem to help it with Mollie tonight. Every time I steal a glance and she's looking at me, my face breaks out into a lovesick teenager's grin.

Once the evening has wrapped up and people start trickling upstairs to bed, I know I'm going to finally get another taste of those lips soon. Mollie gets up and announces to Avery and Kevin that she's turning in for the night, while she raises her eyebrows at me as she walks away.

Avery must know something is going on because she looks at me with a knowing stare. Luckily, she keeps her mouth shut because Kevin has no filter. He would end up having too much to drink and let it slip to Ryan. Last thing I need is Ryan beating the shit out of me on this trip.

You would think the visual of my best friend beating me up would make me change my mind about what I plan to do

tonight, but I stand up and make my way upstairs. I'm clearly thinking with another body part tonight. As I continue up the stairs, I think about how I'm finally going to take what I've denied myself for far too long.

She's just coming out of the bathroom in her pajamas when I get to the top of the stairs.

Her pink shorts and white tank top leave little to the imagination and my dick stiffens in excitement.

"Hi," she smiles at me.

"Hi yourself," I step into her space. "You look adorable in these jammies."

She smiles and tips her head down looking like the shy girl I remember. "Thanks."

I put my finger under her chin and lift her head so I can look in her eyes.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" I ask.

She nods back at me without speaking, no hesitancy at all. The answer is in her eyes as they scan my body up and down.

"Meet me in my room when you're ready," I tell her before walking away.

I try to remain cool, despite feeling completely ready to explode with need. Already having showered before dinner, there's not much I need to do to get ready. I settle for a quick squirt of my cologne and a glance in the mirror then move over to the bed to take a seat.

How long will it take her to come to me? I have no patience right now. My question is answered when my door slowly squeaks open and Mollie tiptoes in before shutting the door behind her and leaning back on it.

I have to gulp down the emotions that are coming to the surface as I watch and wait for the girl of my dreams to come to me. How many nights did I lie awake fantasizing about her in my bed?

Mollie just stands there, hands nervously clasped in front of her.

“Are you going to join me?” I ask her gently.

Without answering, she pushes off the door and takes slow steps my way until she stops in front of me. I open my legs and motion with my finger for her to come closer. As soon as she is in reach, I place my hands on her hips.

“You look nervous,” I tell her.

“I don’t know why. I feel like I’m eighteen again.”

She places her hands over mine where they lie on her hips.

“I feel like I’m twenty-one again,” I admit. “But this time...,” I move our hands, so they glide up her stomach together until they reach her breasts. “I’m not walking away.”

Her breath catches in her throat as both our hands start to knead her mounds. They are the perfect handful. I take my time with her breasts before pulling her in for a kiss.

As soon as our lips meet, her mouth opens for mine like she's starved for me. I give her what she wants and move my tongue along hers. It sends shivers down my spine the second she grabs a fistful of my hair while I let out an involuntary grunt.

She smiles over my lips. "Do you like it rough, Logan?"

I growl into her mouth, grab her by the thighs and flip her onto the bed until I'm lying halfway on top of her.

She lets out a squeal that could wake the house. "You've gotta be quiet or we're gonna get caught. We don't have the luxury of rough. If I'm rough with you, you're gonna scream and wake everyone up."

"Pffst. I'm not a screamer," she says in between kisses.

"Baby, you'll be a screamer with me."

It's not being cocky. I know I could get this girl to lose her mind. I hate the fact that we have to be quiet our first time.

Is there going to be more than once? There shouldn't be. This should just be about us, about taking what we both want, if only just for tonight. With that in mind, I need to worship every inch of her in case I never get the chance to again.

I start out by kissing a path down her neck until I reach the tops of her breasts.

"I need to see you naked," I tell her.

She sits up and lifts her arms up for me without any words. I crack a smile at her and grab the bottom of her tank top and lift it over her head, shedding it on the floor. She slowly lies

back down, and I stare down at her perfect pink nipples. I outline her nipples with my fingers, taking my time to admire the view. My fingers continue their path back and forth over her nipples as I'm lost in the sight of her spread across the comforter for me.

I lean down to pop one of her nipples into my mouth while I continue to caress circles around the other. My tongue follows the circular motion my fingers are making as I feel her nipple start to harden.

She is beginning to squirm underneath me, but I don't let up as I pop off and give the other nipple the same treatment. I lift my head and meet her eyes as I run my fingers down her abdomen and onto her thighs. She lifts her bottom off the bed, giving me the access I need to slide her shorts down her legs. Apparently, she decided to come over to me without any underwear. I push her left leg aside and get a view of her glistening pussy.

"Fuck, you're so damn sexy," I tell her.

She is biting her bottom lip as she watches me appreciate her.

My fingers start to move about her thigh, going along her hip, down to the other thigh. I repeat this motion, coming close to her clit but never touching it. I'm mesmerized as I watch her body show signs of arousal. I want to learn every way her body lets me know what she likes. Her impatience starts to grow as she sighs when I pass by the one spot that she wants me to touch, and continue grazing her thighs.

"There something you want to say?" I tease her.

She's breathless when she speaks. "I need you to touch me. Taste me."

That's about all the self-control I have. Hearing her tell me to taste her does me in.

"I will shove my tongue so far up your pussy, I'll be able to feel you clench around me. But first, I need to see what it looks like up close when you suck my fingers inside."

Her jaw falls open at my words. I open her lips up so I can see her entrance. It's the most beautiful shade of pink.

"Give yourself a squeeze baby. I want to see your pussy contract for me." She does as I ask, and my dick leaks a bit of pre-cum at the sight. "That's it. So fucking sexy. I can't wait to feel that grip my cock."

I take two fingers and move her arousal around from her entrance up to her clit, where I start to massage her bud. While one hand rubs circles, the other sticks two fingers inside of her and presses upward. Her juices start to leak down my hand as I begin to pump in and out, faster and harder.

My desire to taste her takes over. I pull my fingers out and replace them with my tongue while I continue my circles around her clit. She is so fucking into it. I don't even have to move, I just flex my tongue and she rides it. This woman is already my dream come true.

Once I've had my fill, I move my tongue to her clit and flick circles around her swollen bud. She begins to shake as her

orgasm hits her. I shove my fingers back inside of her so I can feel her release on them.

“Holy shit,” she recovers with her hands above her head.

I wipe my mouth with the back of my hand and climb up her body to let her taste her own release. “You come like a damn goddess.”

She wraps her arms around my neck and deepens the kiss while she pulls me flat against her body. My dick is trapped between our bodies as she begins to grind up and down. That orgasm has done nothing to calm her desires, if anything she seems even more aroused.

“I want to taste you now,” she tells me between kisses.

I flip us around in one quick motion so that she is straddling me.

“Taste away, baby.”

I mimic her position and put my hands above my head like I’m ready for the show. She smiles through her lashes before slowly crawling down my body while she watches me. My throat all of a sudden feels dry as I watch on.

When she is in between my legs, she reaches for the waist band of my shorts and briefs and pulls them down until my dick springs free.

“Holy shit,” she whispers.

I know I’m big. I’ve heard those words before, whenever a girl sees me for the first time, but those words meant nothing

compared to hearing them out of Mollie's mouth as her beautiful eyes open wide. The visual alone of her face right next to my stiff dick is enough to make me want to blow.

She wraps her delicate little hand around me and gives it a good squeeze before she offers several strokes. My eyes close in complete satisfaction. When I feel the first touch of her tongue on my tip, my eyes open quickly so I can watch. She's looking up at me with a hint of a smile on her face as her tongue swings around my tip before her mouth closes in around me. Her tongue continues to swirl as her lips suction around my dick.

It's the best feeling I can ever remember having. When she starts to go further down my shaft, she keeps expert suction all the way through. I'm afraid I'm about to embarrass myself and shoot my load in her mouth in seconds.

Her mouth feels so good as it moves up and down my shaft as she licks and sucks my dick like a fucking champ. Where the hell did she learn to do this? Fuck that, I don't want to know. All I know is that I've never been sucked off with so much enthusiasm and skill before. I'm in heaven. It feels too damn good, and I have to pull her off of me with a loud pop, so I don't ruin the evening and come right now.

"Fuck, I was gonna blow."

She wipes her mouth that is dripping with saliva and sits up. I reach for the condom that I put on the nightstand and roll it down my cock.

"How do you want me?" she asks.

Fuck, did she just ask me that? I want you every single way I can imagine.

“Come over here and straddle me. I want you to ride me our first time. If I take control, we’ll make too much noise and everyone will know I couldn’t resist your tight cunt.”

I know I should watch what I say to her, but my words don’t seem to offend her. Her desire is evident on her face when I talk to her like that.

She listens to me and places her knees on the sides of my hips before lining me up between her thighs. She slowly starts to sink down until she bottoms out. We both make uninhibited noises. Mine a hiss, hers a gasp, as we adjust to the feeling of coming together. It hits me in more places than just my cock. My entire body responds to being inside of her warmth. The sight of her seated on top of me, mixed with the slick, tightness of her channel.

It’s almost too much. I dig my fingers into her hips to keep her seated on me for a second while I regain control. I’ve never been this close to coming upon entrance. It must just be the build-up and anticipation of finally getting what I’ve secretly desired for so long.

She starts to lift herself up my shaft slowly before sinking back down quickly. When her head falls back in pleasure and she instinctively grabs her breasts, I can’t help the growl that comes out of me. She is beautiful as she takes what she wants without any reservation.

“Take it, Molls. Ride me until you strangle my dick.”

She starts to pick up the pace and I use my strength to help her fuck me. I grab her hips and lift her up before pulling her back on top of me. I start to feel my balls tingle and know that I'm close. Using my thumb, I massage her clit and am rewarded with her slack jaw at the contact.

"Fuck, I'm gonna come," she whispers.

"Do it. Come with me, baby."

We both grunt out our pleasure as our release happens together. Her channel squeezes the come out of me in perfect synchronization until she collapses on top of me. Our breaths are erratic as we bask in the aftermath of what just took place.

While I'm still inside of her, she lifts her head and looks into my eyes with a hint of a smile on her sated face. I'm not normally the affectionate person after sex, but I place my hand on her cheek and bring her in for a slow, languid kiss. I'm not sure I could ever tire of kissing her lips. They feel like they were made just for me.

She stops the kiss and lifts off me before curling into my side as she begins to draw circles on my chest.

"That was...", she begins, but can't seem to find the words.

"Something. That was something," I finish for her.

I hear a giggle outside the door and we both sit up.

"Shit. Who is that? Do you think they heard us?" I panic.

"I don't know," she jumps out of bed and starts to dress. "It sounded like Avery or Alicia. Hopefully it's just one of them. I

should get back to my room before we get caught.”

I nod in agreement, though feel disappointed that she has to go already. Fuck, I wish we were alone so we didn't have to sneak around like this. I don't even have time to go for a second round with her. I could get myself hard again in a second for Molls.

“I'll see you tomorrow,” she gives me a quick kiss on the lips and opens the door slowly.

The coast must be clear because she is tiptoeing out of the room, leaving me naked and alone wondering what the hell just happened. Did I just have someone blow my mind in the bedroom? I've had sex enough times to feel like there isn't much I don't know about it, not much I haven't experienced or felt before. But Mollie just completely flipped the script on me.

Chapter Twelve

Mollie

I didn't get much sleep last night. It took forever to calm myself down as I kept replaying my night with Logan. To say I enjoyed myself is a major understatement. His dirty talk is on a whole new level. I didn't realize how much words could have an effect on me like that until he started talking. I'm also not one to typically talk back, but I feel comfortable enough with him to say what I'm thinking.

There was something different about being with Logan. It was oddly comforting and thrilling at the same time.

Sex with him blew my mind. So much so, that my brain couldn't even rest for longer than a couple hours. It's on a high and can't seem to come down. It's eight in the morning right now, and I've already been awake for two hours.

Instead of tossing and turning in frustration, I decide to get up and cook everybody a big breakfast. Today is our last day at the lake house, so why not go out with a bang? Even the idea

of only one more day with Logan is enough to make my entire body tense with anxiety.

Are we really going to just spend two nights together when our bodies work together so well?

"Focus on the bacon!" I tell myself.

There's no use obsessing over what happens after tonight. This was about having fun and letting loose, not getting clingy and attached.

I look around the kitchen at the stack of pancakes, blueberry waffles, sausage, toast, scrambled eggs, bowl of fruit and now bacon. Okay, I *may* have gone a bit overboard. Who knew earth-shattering orgasms would give me this much renewed energy in the morning?

"What the hell happened here?" Avery comes downstairs in her t-shirt, hair pulled on the top of her head, barely looking awake. "It's eight in the morning. How long have you been up?"

She rubs her eyes and stumbles over to the coffee pot where she pours a cup from the pot I made earlier.

"It's whatever. Just got up early so I thought we could polish off the food we had left," I feign innocence.

I try to evade her eyes but fail miserably. She looks at me like I'm stupid for even trying to get away with my bluff. Luckily, Kevin staggers in before she can get in another word.

"Holy. Shit. Molls," he looks around the kitchen. "I thought I was just dreaming about bacon. This is freakin' awesome."

He comes around the island and wraps his arms around me, giving me a huge squeeze.

A deep voice clears his throat from the bottom of the stairs, making me jump. Logan is standing there with a mean looking scowl on his face.

“This is your final warning of the trip to keep your hands to yourself,” he barks out at Kevin.

Kevin removes his arms. “Dude, I was just giving her a hug for this breakfast she made. You need to chill the fuck out. It’s not like she’s *your* sister to protect.”

Definitely not his sister. Nothing brother and sisterly going on between us at all. Kevin is clearly oblivious to Logan’s motives for keeping him away from me. Alicia and Ryan walk in next as they take in the scene before them.

“I’m not even gonna ask. Give me some food, sis,” Ryan mumbles as he walks by me.

Logan smacks him on the side of the head.

“Dude, what the fuck was that for?” Ryan whines.

“Don’t talk to your sister like that. Have some manners and get your food yourself,” Logan demands.

I bite my lip to stifle the grin that wants to break free. Logan defending my honor makes my heart flutter. He turns his back to everyone and winks at me before grabbing a cup of coffee. I think he’s going to go take a seat and drink his cup when he surprises me and approaches me.

“Fix yourself a plate and go sit down. Take a load off, I’ll make sure these fools do the dishes.”

Swoon! I smile starry-eyed up at this man and simply nod my head, following his orders. Within minutes, everyone has a plate and has joined me at the large table by the windows.

“Seriously, sis. What gives? Why did you wake up at the ass crack of dawn and slave over this meal?” Ryan asks. “I’m not complaining. It’s just, I normally need this kind of breakfast after a good fuck, but we all know that didn’t happen.”

Alicia and Avery start snickering just as Logan begins to choke on a bite of his pancakes.

“Nope. She clearly didn’t get laid last night,” Avery grins.

Logan continues to cough as Kevin smacks his back.

“You okay, bro?” Kevin asks.

Logan puts his hand up. “I’m good,” he croaks before taking a sip of water.

This is a nightmare. How the hell are Ryan and Kevin so oblivious? Alicia and Avery are like two teenagers, who also have absolutely no poker face while Logan is choking on his food at the mere mention of me getting laid. I scarf down my food in about sixty seconds, put my plate in the dishwasher, and practically run outside to the deck to finish my coffee.

I enjoy my cup in peace and quiet as the rest of the gang works together to clean the kitchen up. Since they’re distracted, I use the time to go upstairs and freshen up for the day.

When I come back down, the kitchen is spotless and everyone is hanging out outside. As soon as I take a seat, I find out the guys are going to go golfing for the day while the girls go for a spa afternoon.

“Did you even call to see if there are appointments available?” I ask Avery.

“Yes, mom! I called and they can fit us in. Your loser brother already has a tee time set up for them in thirty minutes.”

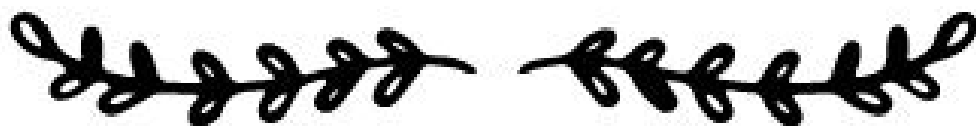
The guys run upstairs to change since they have to leave in ten minutes to make their time. We remain seated on the deck to enjoy the peace and quiet.

“Girl, you know you’ve gotta spill the beans when they leave,” Alicia says. “Avery and I heard your little moans and whimpers last night.”

“Ugh, I knew it. Logan and I heard you two schoolgirls in the hallway. Thanks for that,” I say sarcastically.

“Sorry. Lips sealed for the rest of the trip. But I mean, are you gonna tell us about last night?” Avery inquires.

I shrug my shoulders, not sure how long I’ll make them suffer for their antics last night.



I eventually gave in and spilled the beans to the girls in the car on the way to the spa about my night with Logan. The more I talk about it, the more real it becomes, and I start to worry that

I made a huge mistake in thinking I can handle this no-strings-attached, just-for-fun arrangement.

It's not like Logan ever said it was just for fun, but I'm also not naive enough to think he's going to profess his love for me and tell my brother about our night together.

I mean, he hated me for years because it was easier to do than just admit to himself that he enjoyed our kiss. I'm not gonna hold my breath here.

Avery did one thing right this trip though, and that was booking this spa appointment. It's exactly what I need in order to take my mind off Logan. By the time we are done, it's getting close to dinner time and the guys are on their way home from golf. We are going to grill out on the deck for our last night.

Needing to get all the oil off me from the massage, I settle on taking a quick shower when we get back. When I walk out of the bathroom in my towel, I almost collide with Logan as he walks towards his room.

He looks me up and down as an easy smile plays at the corners of his mouth. I shift from foot to foot as my body heats under his gaze. Before we have a chance to speak, Ryan comes barging up the stairs.

“Get showered, bro. We need your help manning the grill.”

Logan looks as deflated as I feel by the interruption. I take the opportunity to escape into my bedroom and change into some clothes. It's probably safer for me to be fully clothed around

Logan if I don't want to embarrass myself and end up throwing myself at him. Although, judging by his reaction to me in a towel, I don't think he'd mind.

After everybody has freshened up from their afternoon, we all meet outside to hang out on the deck. Logan looks breathtaking in his dark blue shorts, white t-shirt, and black baseball hat.

"How did you play today, babe?" Alicia asks Ryan.

"It wasn't my worst game, but Logan killed it out there."

Kevin chimes in. "Yeah, he played his best game ever. Dude was calm as a rock out there."

Logan smirks, amusement flickering in his eyes. "Must just be the time off making me feel so relaxed."

I walk over to him and rest against the railing while everyone else breaks off into separate conversations.

"Just the time off making you feel relaxed, huh?" I cross my arms, messing around with him.

"Well," he leans into me. "It could also be the fantastic night I had last night, but I didn't want to invite any questions."

A wide grin overtakes my face as I revel in his open praise of our night together.

"Are you planning on having another fantastic night tonight?" I ask, hoping there is no hint of desperation in my voice.

"If I have a say in it..." he looks around before finishing.

"Then, hell yes I plan on it."

He lifts his hat off his head and places it on mine before adjusting it. I smirk up at him, feeling giddy at his flirting.

“How do I look?” I move my head from side to side.

“Cutest thing I’ve ever seen,” he smiles down at me.

Why does this simple attention from him feel more powerful than an entire month with any other guy I’ve been with?

The rest of the night moves along quickly while everybody enjoys our last meal before reality awaits us tomorrow morning. This trip has already been the best one of my life. After sneaking a quick peek over at Logan, he raises his eyebrows with a mischievous look on his face before nodding his head towards the house. I take that as his signal to figure out a way to get us inside together.

No problem, I’m the goody two shoes of the group. No one will think twice about me heading off to bed early. Well, aside from the girls, who promised to be on their best behavior tonight. Avery doesn’t have any good behavior skills, but I’m hoping Alicia pulls through and can keep Avery in line.

I tell the group I’m beat and need to get some good sleep tonight. After some moans and boos, which I happily ignore, I walk inside. My stomach is fluttering as my heart begins to race when I walk upstairs, knowing it’s going to happen again tonight. I’m going to spend the night with Logan.

I decide to freshen up first before I sneak into his bed. He is nowhere to be found when I tiptoe into his room. Oh well, I’m gonna get under the covers and wait it out. He might want to

spread out the time between the two of us coming inside to avoid any suspicion.

Am I weird for sniffing the pillowcase because it smells like Logan? All these years and he still wears the same cologne. It's so interesting to me how smell is so connected to memory. I've always found the inner workings of the brain so fascinating. I'm excited to learn more in med-school.

"What are you doing?" Logan walks in and dives into bed next to me.

I giggle while adjusting myself to face him. "Did you know that the reason they believe that smell brings back memories is because smell goes to the olfactory bulb in the brain which is close to the memory hub of the brain?"

He tilts his head, amusement flickering in his eyes. "I can't say I do know that, weirdo. Why are you thinking about that?"

I lean back on the pillow closing my eyes, hoping it makes it easier to admit this to him. "Your pillow smells like you. It made me think of high school and how amazing you always smelled. You wear the same cologne."

The seconds pass by with no response, forcing me to open my eyes and turn my head.

Logan is propped up on his elbow, mouth curved in a smile with tenderness behind it. "You were smelling my pillow and thinking about me. I want to find that creepy Molls, but I find it oddly adorable."

I scuff. "I shouldn't have told you that."

His arm wraps around me and brings me into him. “Don’t be embarrassed. I know I’m irresistible.”

That’s it, I’m done with him having all the power. I’m going to show him I’m not this pathetic, younger sister who’s obsessed with him. I push his chest until he’s lying flat on the bed.

“What are you doing?” his eyes open wide in surprise.

“I’m shutting you up,” I tell him. “Plus, you said if you take control, there’s no way we’ll be quiet.”

He doesn’t protest when I climb on top of him and press my lips to his. He tastes like whiskey, and I want to drink every last drop of him. It’s in the back of my mind that this is my last night with him and for a second, my chest feels tight. But I quickly bring myself back to the moment. If it’s my last night with him, I’m going to make sure he always remembers it.

My hands find their way under his shirt and bask in the perfection of his body. I get lost in the ridges of him as my body starts to move and grind on its own accord. When I look up at him, the smoldering flame I see in his eyes startles me. He looks like a man starved, who is lost without his ability to control, to dominate. My pussy clenches at the thought of what Logan is like with no reservations.

“Get your clothes off right now,” he growls out. “If I can’t pound the fuck out of your pussy, I at least need to see your tits immediately.”

He strips himself of his clothes as quickly as I do mine before his hands are massaging my breasts. His thumbs brush across

my nipples before he pinches both between his thumb and finger. I gasp at the pain but revel at the satisfaction in his eyes. I hear laughter outside the window, a reminder that we are not alone and don't have much time.

I reach for the condom on the nightstand and roll it down his shaft quickly. Knowing I want him to recall this night often, I straddle his body with my ass facing him and my head at his legs. I've only done the reverse cowgirl position once before, not really a fan of my most intimate parts on such display, but I want Logan up close. I want him to see every inch of me, to watch his body enter mine over and over.

"Holy fuck, Molls. I'm not gonna last long with this sexy as fuck view," Logan palms both of my cheeks.

He spreads them far apart as I hear the manliest groan fall from his lips. He must have quite the view of my heat. His finger circles my entrance which is dripping with my arousal. I feel his dick start to run circles around me before dipping to my clit where he rubs circles around it with his tip. When I feel him line back up with me, his hands come to my hips as he slowly guides me down until our bodies meet.

Both of us try to remain quiet but the whimpers are inevitable as our bodies come together again. No one else has come close to evoking these sensations from me. My body is hyperaware of the fact that it's Logan inside of me.

"Move for me, baby," his husky voice demands. "Let me watch you ride my cock."

My hands clutch the bedspread as I start to move away from him, drawing him out of me. Logan is far bigger than any man I have ever been with, my body is still adjusting to his size. When I push myself back down, there is a little discomfort mixed with pleasure. It's *everything*.

Needing to find my release, I pick up the pace and ride him as quickly as I can. Since we left the bedside lamp on, the room is basked in a warm glow, and I can look over my shoulder and see his reactions.

He is biting his lip right now as he looks pained at his restrictions. An idea must have just come to him because he meets my eyes and grins.

“Promise me you can keep quiet,” he gleams.

“I promise,” I whisper, worried that I’ll fall short on my promise.

His hands caress my ass as I continue to move along him, my body tightening as my pleasure increases. He grabs my hips and pulls me off him as he brings my pussy up to his mouth. I’m now straddling his face as his mouth gets to work sucking on my clit. The pressure is almost too much, too stimulating and I let out a loud whimper.

He stops what he’s doing. “I told you to be quiet.”

My head falls on his stomach when he gets back to work. His tongue moves in expert precision as it swirls and flicks the perfect spot. When it feels like I’m going to burst, he softens

his tongue and gives me gentle licks. His thumbs part me further before he continues.

I lift my head and look at his thickness, raised in front of me still wrapped in the condom. I want to taste him again, to make him feel as good as he is making me feel right now. He groans into me when I pull the condom off and pull him into my mouth. We are both getting sloppy and messy as we work each other over.

The same moment I feel my orgasm start to form, Logan begins to pulse out his load inside my mouth. I drink down every last drop as I explode all over him. He tastes amazing as I drink down the evidence of our attraction.

Our hearts are racing together as the sound of our erratic breathing fills the silence. I climb off of him and he pulls me down into the crook of his neck. Words are not needed as we bask in the afterglow of the moment. I feel myself start to drift off to sleep as I lie in the frame of his large arms, until someone opens the sliding door downstairs.

I realize this is the moment where I need to leave. People are still wide awake downstairs and likely drunk enough to open Logan's door without knocking.

It's harder to do than I had originally anticipated, but I manage to remove myself from his warmth and start to dress myself. Logan doesn't say anything as he watches me get ready to leave.

I wonder what he's thinking. Does he want this to continue like I do? Was two nights enough for him? It certainly doesn't

feel like enough for me.

I'm fully dressed and there's nothing else for me to do now but leave. Disappointment rises as I realize he isn't going to say anything, not even about how amazing our time together was. Maybe it wasn't that way for him. Maybe I was just another notch on his belt.

"I had a great time with you, Logan," I speak in a broken whisper.

He looks like he wants to say something, even stumbles over his words before answering. "I did, too."

And with that, I'm back in my room where I climb into bed, feeling satisfied from our actions and yet sad at how we left it. I'm not going to cry, I knew what this was from the beginning.

Chapter Thirteen

Logan

“Who the fuck left the milk out?” I howl at the guys as I try to make myself some lunch. “Does nobody around here want to act like damn adults who can clean up after themselves?”

Gabe walks out of the bathroom at that moment and grabs his coffee off the island before pouring the milk into it then placing it back in the fridge.

“What are you growling about out here?” he asks.

My lip raises in annoyance. “Nothing.”

Everyone else that’s hanging out on the couch is now smiling at me as I have to eat my words.

I’ve been in such a bad mood the last couple days. Ever since we got back from the lake house where I acted like an idiot with Mollie. I can tell she was looking for me to say more that night, but I couldn’t find the right words. Typical of me, always failing with words.

Not in the mood to address the guys right now, I grab my sandwich and stalk in the back towards my office. It's a tiny, little thing with just a desk, chair, and small bookcase, but it's not the size of it that makes me loath the place. It's the work that needs to get done inside these walls. You know shit must be bad when I'm choosing to eat my lunch in this room.

The sandwich tastes bland and boring, like everything has felt since I've been back. I can't seem to stop thinking about Mollie. Her smile just keeps playing over and over again in my mind. And the memory of her taste, it's all I think about when I lie awake in bed, tossing and turning.

I put my plate aside after I've finished and stare down at the paperwork that needs to be done. This is the downfall of my promotion to lieutenant, all the paperwork. I have ADHD and struggle to stay focused and get these tasks complete. It's also the deep, dark secret I've carried all my life. My family knows, of course, but I don't talk about it with anybody else. There's a lot of shame I carry with the diagnosis. It doesn't help that my siblings are all accomplished individuals, extreme intellectuals. Shit, they are all amazing. They're VP's of Marketing, congressmen, surgeons, and detectives. How can I compete with that?

Ryan doesn't even know what I struggle with behind closed doors. He has no idea how inferior I've felt around everybody during all our years of friendship. I'm so damn proud of him for doing what he loves and working his ass off to get his law license, but it's just another reminder of how much smarter and more accomplished he is than me.

Mollie is no different, she's brilliant. It's part of the reason I've tried to stay away from her all these years, aside from our age difference and her brother. It's also because of how much she has going for in her life. I don't want to be the failure that she settles for in life. The one everybody looks to as the freeloader in the relationship, while she brings in the money and prestige.

Don't get me wrong, I'm proud of what I do. I work with the most amazing men and we save lives. But there's always something playing in the back of my mind telling me that I'm doing this because I have no other option. College was not gonna happen for me. Another four years of struggling to focus, to read even a page of a book. I used to get so angry while doing my homework. I would take it all out on my mother, the poor woman.

It took years of therapy to figure out how to control the rage and anger that I didn't even know was part of my condition.

I look down at the words on the page, trying my hardest to focus. My fist pounds down on the desk.

I can't fucking focus.

It hasn't been this bad in years.

Okay, I just need to remember my therapy sessions. Tools, what kind of tools do I have? I can write down my rambling thoughts to try to rid my brain of them. No, that's not what my issue is right now. Workouts help, but I can't exactly get up and leave my desk when I need this task done. Rewards, they

say people with ADHD thrive better when they think of a reward for finishing tasks.

What can my reward be?

Brownies. Donuts. Shit, why did I gorge on sweets at the lake house? Now that I've got my fix, the reward doesn't sound as appealing.

Mollie, she'd be the sweetest reward.

Hmmm, I've got her number. Maybe I just shoot her a little text when I'm done. That can be my reward. What's the harm in a little text? My entire body relaxes at the thought of being able to reach out to her. Okay, texting Mollie it is.

Thirty minutes later and I'm done. Got it done in record time. Damn, reward systems are my jam. I reach for my phone and don't find it in my pocket.

I don't even know where the hell I left it. Now I have to go back out to the guys that I've been bitchin' at all day. I probably left it on the coffee table. I push off the desk and walk out to the main living area where the guys are still sitting as they watch a baseball game. My eyes search the room, trying to find my phone so I can finally do what I've wanted to since I drove away from that lake house.

"Looking for this?" Jeff raises my phone from the table next to him on the couch.

I grab it from him before dropping onto the couch next to him as I stretch my legs out.

"Thanks," I grumble.

“No problem. You in a better mood or should we continue to walk on eggshells around you?” Jeff asks.

“I’m fine,” I rub the back of my neck. “Sorry about that. It’s been a rough couple days. I didn’t mean to take it out on you guys.”

“You gonna tell us what’s got your panties in a bunch?” Gabe inquires.

“Not likely. I don’t have it worked out myself.”

They shrug their shoulders and let me be.

I open my phone and go to my text message that I sent her the morning I picked her up for the lake house.

What should I say? I begin to type.

Logan: How are you?

Delete. That’s weird. What is she supposed to say back to that? I try again.

Logan: I had a great time with you. Wish it could’ve lasted longer...

Delete. Nope. I don’t like that. And what if she thinks I meant I wish I lasted longer in the bedroom? I feel like such a chick right now, I can’t believe I’m agonizing over a stupid text message. Stop overthinking this, just send something.

Logan: I keep thinking about you.

Send.

Fuck! Why did I send that? I sound like a pussy. Running my fingers through my hair, I start to fidget as I imagine what she

must think of that message.

Okay, I need to busy myself. I'm going to go wash the firetruck. It looks like it could use a good cleaning.

It's three hours later and I still haven't heard from her. What could she possibly be doing that she can't answer me for three hours? I'm going out of my mind, when I remember she was taking shifts at the café down the street. I can walk down the street to her work and buy some donuts or something. That's not weird and completely believable. Firefighters are known for eating donuts, right? No, that's police officers.

Whatever, I'm going. I can't wait around here anymore. I walk over to the guys as casually as I can.

"I'm going to the café to get some coffee and donuts. You guys want anything?"

They all look up at me with raised eyebrows. Okay, so I've literally *never* went to the café for anything, but they don't need to know that. I stand by my request. For all they know, I'm just in the mood for some good coffee.

"Any takers?" I ask again.

With a shrug of their shoulders, they begin to rattle off orders to me. I realize I need to get this shit down on my phone, I don't stand a chance in remembering any of it. This way, with all of these orders, I won't look like a fool if she's there. I can tell her the guys at the station wanted some mid-afternoon caffeine and were sick of the boring black coffee we usually have.

It only takes me a couple minutes to walk down to the café. The July heat makes my forehead break out in a sweat, so walking into the air-conditioned café gives my body instant relief. I feel my body temperature start to cool down as I walk up to the counter. I spot movement from the left of me and see Mollie walking towards a table with a tray of salads. My body is heating up again for an entirely different reason.

She takes my breath away. Her hair is tied up in a messy bun on top of her head and she looks like she barely has on any makeup. She's beautiful. I love how sexy she can look without even trying. It's always been such a turn on to me that she never cares to try as hard as other women.

She doesn't need to. She's captivating all on her own.

"Welcome to Market Fresh Cafe. What can I get you?"

I pull my head away from Mollie, who hasn't seen me yet, and place my order with the young man in front of me. He seems to be a young college student who might be on summer break.

"Logan?" her voice pulls me back into her orbit.

She's standing in front of me with her empty tray settled under her arm. The loose hair around her face, showing signs of running around the café, looks adorable. My hands itch to tuck it behind her ear.

"Hey, Molls," I try to sound surprised to see her.

I feel like a fool right now. I wish I could abort this mission.

"What are you doing here?" she says softly, her eyes narrowing.

I'm stalking you like a psycho. I should tell her to turn around and run because I don't even recognize myself right now.

"Just pickin' up some coffee and donuts for the guys at the station."

There, that didn't sound so bad. Totally believable.

"That's nice of you. I thought maybe you were here to see me." She smiles at me with a knowing look in her eyes. "I got your text."

"Yeah," I start to nervously rub the back of my neck. "I'm sorry if that was weird for you."

"Did you know I worked here for the summer?" she asks.

"Uh, you may have mentioned it," I stammer.

Her smile is eager and alive with affection and delight.

"Logan, are you here to see me?"

I hang my head in defeat. "I don't know. Maybe. I've just been thinking about you a lot."

She bites her lip, seemingly trying to hide the smile that still breaks through. There's a shade of red that forms on her cheeks. It gives me a little bit of confidence, watching her blush at my words.

"I've been thinking about you too. Far more than I should be allowing myself," she admits.

My coffee and donuts are placed in front of me. I know I need to get back to the station, but my feet stay rooted in place.

“Well,” my hand reaches out and tucks those stray hairs behind her ear. “Maybe we can see each other again.”

I cup her cheek with my hand while she rests into me.

“I think I would like that,” her silky voice replied.

Not realizing I was holding my breath, my entire body relaxes at her response. This feels like we are heading into dangerous territory, but I can’t bring myself to care. All I know, is that I need to see her again. I need to taste her lips.

“How about Friday night? I have three days off starting Thursday, but I could use that day to get some rest and do some grocery shopping.”

“I’m free Friday. Text me when you know the time and place.”

I grab my coffee trays and bag.

“See you soon, Molls,” I wink and take off, hoping I salvaged my image a little bit.

The walk back to the station is far different than the walk there. Instead of fear, I’m feeling calm and excited, knowing I get to see her again in two days. I just hope this decision doesn’t come back to bite me in the ass.

Chapter Fourteen

Mollie

“So, tell me what you’re freaking out about?” Avery asks from my bed as I wage a war with the clothes in my closet.

Why is it when you’re nervous, everything in your closet looks ugly or makes you look fat? I swear I was just in this same closet a week ago, and had no issues with the clothes I saw. Now all its contents are mocking me, telling me I’m not good enough to strut around in them.

I turn to Avery, surprise evident on my face. “Are you serious right now? Please tell me you understand why I’m losing it!”

She flips over to her belly, hands underneath her chin. “I mean, I kind of get it. But like, you’ve already slept with him twice now. You’re just going over there for a repeat.”

Needing a break from this hell hole of clothes, I flop down on the bed next to her.

“This feels different. The lake house was vacation. It felt like a *what happens in Vegas* scenario. This is real. He wants to see

me. He wants to cook for me...at his place. It's like...it's like a freakin' date...with Logan! I'm going on a date with Logan. Is this romantic? Or does he just want to have sex again?"

"Do you want it to be romantic?"

Do I?

I mean the teenager in me is doing cartwheels and saying, *hell yes*. The adult in me is hesitant. I've been burned by him before, and I'm not quite sure what's different this time. If he was embarrassed to admit he liked our kiss for that many years, what would make things different now? Was I simply too young and now he feels better that I'm older?

"I don't know. I mean...it's Logan. Of course, part of me wants to see where it goes. I just need to be careful, make sure we are on the same page."

"Sounds like a solid plan. I mean, I already spoke my piece at the lake house, so I don't need to beat you over the head with it. Now, for the fun part," she wiggles her eyebrows at me. "Let's find you something to wear. He needs to eat his heart out."

I sit up and watch her jump off the bed as she starts scanning my clothes. A small smile forms as she starts ruffling through everything. At least we are on the same page about that, he definitely needs to eat his heart out.

An hour later, I'm dressed in white shorts and a black tank top with lace at the top, along the breast line. Avery insisted on my wearing a matching white lace bra and panty set underneath.

When I questioned her about it being too boring, she told me this was perfect. Apparently, white is a mark of innocence, and she thinks the mix between white and lace gives it a hint of naughty versus nice. Which she believes is exactly how Logan likes to see me.

I decide to pick up a nice bottle of wine on my way. Well, the nicest I can afford with my café tips and what I have stashed away from bartending throughout my years at college.

I pull up to the address Logan gave me which reveals a cute, two-story home on the outskirts of the city. It's weird to see this side of Logan. He is all grown up, owns a home and became a lieutenant. I missed so much of his life in the last four years. It makes me feel sad for all the memories we missed out on with each other.

Putting my car in park, I take a moment to compose myself as I inhale and exhale several deep breaths.

When I knock on the door, I suddenly feel silly standing here in this outfit. I'm at his home, not a club or some trendy bar. A small part of my brain starts to think of ways I can bail when the door opens, and Logan appears.

He's standing there in jeans, a white button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and bare feet to go with the look. What the hell is so sexy about men barefoot in their home? I think it feels more intimate, like you're sharing something personal with them that nobody else gets to see.

He grins at me as his eyes drink in my body like I'm a glass of water and he has been lost on an island with nothing to quench

his thirst. I swallow back the mix of nerves and arousal that have taken over, wondering if it was as obvious of a gulp as it felt.

“Come on in,” his hoarse voice commands.

I step inside, clutching onto my bottle of wine.

“You look fantastic. Did you plan on making it nearly impossible for me to keep my hands off you tonight?” he leans in to kiss my cheek while his hands rest on my hip.

My body tingles at his touch. Feeling oddly shy, I blush at his words.

“I brought some wine. Wasn’t sure exactly what we were having for dinner, but I didn’t want to come empty handed.” As I handed him the wine I look around, noticing the beauty of his home. “Wow. Logan, your house is amazing.”

Now it’s his turn to look a bit shy from the compliment.

“Thanks, it’s taken a lot of work to get it where it is today.” He leads me down the hall and into the kitchen, which is just as nice as the front of the house. “I typically get three days off at a time, and it’s not always on the weekends when everyone else is free. One night, I got hooked on watching Chip and Joanna Gaines’ show, and decided to take a stab at my own home remodel since I had the free time.”

I look around his kitchen, taking in the stone wall, granite counters, and walnut-stained wooden shelves with dishes and glasses arranged on top. I think I’m in love with his place.

“I can’t believe you did all of this,” I walk around the kitchen as I take it all in. Logan works to open the wine I brought while I continue to admire his work. I notice the oven light is on and take a peek inside. I see the bubbling cheese and noodles. “Lasagna?”

He shrugs. “I may not be the best cook in the world, but I think my lasagna is pretty good.”

“I can’t wait to try it.”

He hands me the wine and we clink our glasses together.

He takes a sip while studying me. “I’m really glad you’re here.”

“Me too,” I reply.

He takes my hand and begins to lead me to the other room where couches center around the giant stone fireplace. He takes a seat on the couch and pulls me down to join him.

“So,” I say as silence falls between us.

He looks around the room then back at me. “This is kind of awkward, isn’t it? I never thought I’d have you sitting across from me on my couch like this.”

I nervously tuck my hair behind my ear. “It’s definitely not something I ever expected to happen, that’s for sure.”

“How about we start off by getting to know each other again. We’ve missed out on a lot in the last several years.” He reaches out and fixes the hair that keeps falling from my ear. The gesture is sweet and eases some of my nerves.

“Okay, I’ll start.” I take a sip of wine as I think of one of the first things I want to know. I begin to think about his family and what I feel like I’ve missed out on. Logan pushing me away made me miss more than just him. I never got to stop over anymore and say hi to his parents or siblings. A lot has happened in the last four years. A huge tragedy where his brother Liam’s wife passed away immediately following the birth of their daughter. I try to picture Logan as an uncle and immediately see him as the goofy, entertaining one. “How’s life as an uncle?”

The grin that spreads across his face is an answer in itself. He obviously loves being an uncle, and it makes my heart flutter. “It’s the best. There’s quite the crowd we have at family dinners now. It’s chaotic, but everything we all had envisioned for our future.”

I didn’t realize there were so many grandkids. “How many kids are there now?”

“Let’s see,” he leans back to think. “Harper, Liam’s daughter, is three. Will, Jackson’s son, is seven and Colton is two. Peyton has a baby on the way through a donor and is due pretty soon. Liam’s wife is pregnant with their second baby.”

“Wow. I missed a lot! I had no idea there were that many. I bet you make the best uncle.”

He smiles, leaning his head to the side as he studies me. “Why do you say that?”

“Because you’re just so fun and carefree. You’ve always had this enticing goofiness about you, I imagine the kids have a

blast.”

I think I catch a glimmer of sadness on his face, but it’s gone before I can say anything. “I *am* the fun uncle, that’s for sure. All of my other siblings are buttoned up and serious far too often in my opinion.”

There is something deeper to that statement. He says it with a bit of pain lingering in the background.

“My turn,” his hand rests on my thigh, making it a bit harder for me to concentrate on anything but his touch. “What is your most memorable moment of college?”

Wow. I don’t think anyone has ever asked me that question. I’m not sure anyone would really care, but Logan is looking at me like he can’t wait for my answer.

“I hate to disappoint you, but I wasn’t the crazy, dancing-on-bars type of college student.”

He pinches my thigh and I flinch at the touch, giggling at the spot he hit.

“I’m not surprised, but that’s a good thing, Molls. You’re too special to be like all the other girls running around campus like that. You still haven’t answered my question though.”

“Well, I would have to say my spring break trip to Egypt was definitely what comes to mind. It was incredible to be standing somewhere so ancient. I mean three thousand B.C. Can you imagine what that time was like? And the pyramids, they were architectural geniuses to construct those with no modern

equipment, and for them to still be standing. It was the most amazing experience.”

I always get swept away in the magic of that trip when I recall it. I’d love to continue to travel the world, see how other cultures live. I find out on that trip that I have a passion for learning how others live. This world is made up of so many different people, it’s fascinating to discover our differences and similarities with others.

When I look back at Logan, he is smiling at me with his hand resting on the side of his head, as his elbow supports him on the back of the couch.

“Sorry,” I laugh. “I got carried away. You didn’t ask for all of that.”

“I’d love to hear more about it. I’m sure that was an amazing experience. It’s just another thing that makes you so amazing. While other students were going to Florida to consume an abundance of alcohol, you were experiencing our world’s history. You have always impressed me in that way.”

I didn’t realize he ever looked at me in that light. I always thought I was Ryan’s nerdy little sister in his eyes.

From the kitchen, a loud sound interrupts us.

“Looks like dinner is ready,” he stands up and leads me to the kitchen.

Oddly, it’s sexy as hell, watching him maneuver around his kitchen. He takes out a prepared salad from the fridge and has us set up at the kitchen table within minutes. Everything looks

and smells amazing. This is a world away from what I'm used to doing on a date, and it just highlights the age difference between us, but it feels comfortable. It feels right.

Our conversation continues during dinner. I tell him about college, and he tells me about the fire department. I learn about his buddies at the station and his favorite aspects of the job.

After I finish cleaning up the dishes with him, we retreat back to the couch with a glass of wine. My nerves have settled this time around, and I feel confident enough to snuggle up right next to him. He pulls me right into his arm as I lean my head against his chest. My body is instantly at peace in his arms. The feeling is amazing and yet strangely terrifying. He has the power to completely break me if I let him.

I start to think about his position as a lieutenant again. For everything I learned about his buddies and the mundane parts of the job, we never talked about the scary part of the job. The part where he puts his life on the line. Just the thought of something happening to him makes my heart ache.

“Have you ever gotten hurt on the job?” I ask.

His muscles beneath me tense, and I know the answer isn't what I want to hear. Without even thinking, I scoot in closer to him and wrap my arm around his middle so I can squeeze him into me. His smell keeps me grounded as I wait for him to respond.

“I have,” he pauses.

I wait for him to continue, hoping that he does.

“I fell through a five-story floor onto a stairwell railing after the floor gave out. There was a child up there. I knew it was too dangerous to continue, that my life was almost guaranteed to end, but I couldn't not go up there.”

“Did the kid survive?” my voice breaks at the question.

I look up and see raw and brazen grief in his eyes. “No,” he chokes out. “He didn't survive. And I risked my crew's life because they had to come and save me. It was a stupid error on my part.”

He adjusts himself on the couch as he coughs, trying to regain some control of his emotions.

I grab his cheek and make him look me in the eyes. “I think it was amazingly selfless and brave. I would have done the same thing. If it meant saving a child's life. You're an amazing man, Logan.”

A faint smile forms beneath the pain as his thumb brushes over my cheekbone. “I wouldn't say that, but I'm not complaining if someone of your caliber thinks that about someone like me.”

Something in that comment, it's like he's subtly putting himself down without even realizing it.

“You've always been the hero in my eyes, Logan. Since I met you when I was nine-years-old.”

My eyes fall to the hand which has now landed on his chest. It's too hard to look at him when I exposed such a deep part of me. Is he going to laugh at me?

“A hero wouldn’t be thinking the thoughts I’m having about you right now,” his voice grows husky.

“What thoughts are you having?”

I want to know. I *need* to know, because his gaze just moved from my face, lazily raking over my body.

“What I’m thinking,” his finger skims my chest, over the lace of my tank top. “Is that I can see your bra from here, and I want nothing more than to pull it down and suck on your nipple.”

Holy crap, his words! And to think I don’t have to hold back from making a sound tonight. I’m not sure if he’s trying to avoid our serious conversation, from rehashing such a traumatic event, but I’m too hungry for this man to care.

“I’d like that,” my voice gives away his effect on me.

His smile spreads to a wicked grin as he slowly pulls my tank top down until my bra is exposed. You can see my nipples through the white lace.

Logan let’s out an audible groan. “Fuck, I’ve never seen anything so damn sexy.”

He massages one of my breasts while we both watch his hand in awe. When he pulls one of the lace cups down, my heart begins to beat erratically. As I watch his lips wrap around my nipple, something feels different about it. It feels different from the last two times. There is a slowness to the process that was not there last time. He is taking his time with me. It feels

like he's worshipping my body, and I don't want to miss out on watching him do it.

He bites down on my nipple, causing me to gasp at the pain and yet sigh when he soothes it with his tongue. The smile on his face at my reaction is so Logan.

I'm not sure I'll survive this night if this is what is in store for me.

Chapter Fifteen

Logan

I've never wanted to spend so much time memorizing every inch of a woman before. From the little noises she makes to which parts of her body make her go crazy, I want to know it all. If I wasn't so desperate to sink myself inside of her, I might spend forever seeing if I can get her off just by playing with her breasts. But I'm a very greedy man and I want to feel her wrapped around my cock.

Needing more of her skin exposed, I lift her tank top off her and quickly get rid of her bra.

"Lay back on the couch," I instruct her. "I'm nowhere near done with you yet."

She obeys my demand and lies down on my couch. The patient look she is giving me is filled with so much trust and innocence, my heart does something weird in my chest, something I've never felt before.

I bring my focus back to getting her naked as I slide her jeans off. She's lying there in only her white lace panties and my dick leaks pre-cum at the sight. My mouth waters as I lean in and kiss her right under breast. She is squirming beneath me as I kiss and suck the front and sides of her stomach, her hips, and anywhere else my mouth can find while my hands continue to play with her breasts.

"Oh, gosh, Logan. Please," she cries.

I kiss around her pelvis as I look up at her, watching her bite her lip.

"Do you need more, baby?" I ask her.

"I need you. I need to feel you inside of me."

"Not yet," I move down the couch until I'm right in front of where I've dreamed about since we got back. "First, I need to taste this sweet pussy of yours. But there's one rule, Molls."

I pepper kisses all around her clit. On her lips, her inner thighs, her pelvis...everywhere but where she wants it most.

"Anything, tell me," she begs.

Her begging makes my dick twitch, something I need to remember for next time. I could spend all night teasing and listening to her beg me to fuck her.

"You hold my eyes the entire time. If you close your eyes or look away, my tongue stops."

She nods her head desperately in agreement. Since I have her attention on me, I take my first slow taste of her from her

entrance all the way up to her clit. Her jaw falls slack, and I know she's gonna explode quickly tonight.

She's a good girl, keeping her eyes on me the entire time as I circle, flick, and swipe at her clit. I suck her clit into my mouth as I continue the suction for as long as I can. She is screaming my name as I feel her body start to shake, but she isn't following my one rule. So I stop.

Her eyes fly open and she lifts her head.

"Logan. Why did you stop?" she pants out in heavy breaths.

"I told you I want your eyes on me the entire time. You don't come unless you're with me the entire time. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she answers quickly.

"Good girl. You taste amazing, Molls. Better than I dreamed you would all these years."

I run my thumb from her entrance up to her clit and start to make slow circles, deliberate circles. Fuck, I love her eyes on me as I touch her like this. It's fucking hot and weirdly erotic. I want her to see it's me, I'm the one who is making her feel good. Finally, after all these years, it's me.

"Please, Logan. Put your tongue on me again."

I smile up at her, loving her boldness.

"Tell me how you want my tongue. What feels the best? Do you like it when I flick it really fast, or do slow but hard circles, or do you like it when I suck your clit? Or do you like

this...,” I ask, grabbing her lips and clit and squeezing them together before I flick the tip of my tongue on her clit. “Tell me what you want. I want to hear you say it.”

“Oh, gosh. I fucking want all of that. Just do it all to me,” she says.

“You want me to go crazy on your clit?” I confirm with her.

She nods her head up and down enthusiastically.

“I think I can manage that. But remember, keep those pretty, little eyes on me. Remember whose tongue is the one driving you wild.”

I suck her clit back into my mouth before I spend the next five minutes feasting on her pussy with more eagerness than I’ve ever felt or shown while doing it. She is a mix of whimpers and cries, before I can feel her tense up until she screams her release onto my tongue. It makes my dick hard as a rock.

As soon as she is done, I’m on top of her as I fill her mouth with my tongue.

“Do you taste yourself?” I ask. “You taste amazing, fucking addicting.”

She seems eager to lap up her own arousal. Her willingness to do what I say or follow my lead is sexy as hell.

“Are you on birth control?” I ask in between kisses. She nods her head. “Do you trust me?”

I’m greeted with another nod. “Yes, I trust you.”

Thank fuck. I'm unbuttoning and ridding myself of my jeans and boxers while she works my shirt off of me. I push her back down on the couch and slam into her so hard, I hear her breath taken away from her as she tries to moan.

Fuck, I've never done this bare before. It feels better than I thought it would, but I need this to last. I need to show her how much pleasure I can draw from her body.

I don't increase my speed just yet. I want her to feel every single inch of me as I slowly pull out of her before I slam back in. With my elbows on either side of her, I memorize her face each time I hit the right spot. Her eyes almost roll in the back of her head.

My body imprisons her in this growing arousal between the two of us. No longer able to keep the pace slow, I begin to pick it up until she is screaming unintelligible words. Her reactions are sexy as hell and not at all what I would have expected from a girl like her.

"Fuck me harder, Logan. I want to feel the proof that you took everything from me tomorrow," her hands scrape down my back.

"Ahhh," I grunt out, not able to stay quiet myself.

She's blowing my mind. I've never been with someone like her. Such a contradiction to the smart, studious woman. In bed, she's a tiger.

I listen to her request and fuck her harder than I thought was possible until we are both dripping in sweat. As her walls start

to clamp down around me I let myself go, knowing we are both about to come.

Our release happens together, it's pure and explosive. It rocks my world. I now understand why people say they see stars. I'm literally blacking out and seeing bright lights as I'm transported to another place.

My head falls on her chest as I do what I can to slow my rapid heart. It takes a while, but as soon as I have some control, I push off the couch and fall backwards on the other end as our legs tangle together.

I'm not sure how long we remain silent, but it doesn't feel weird. My brain doesn't even know how to form words after what we just did. One thing is for sure, I need a shower after that.

"Umm, I think I need to get cleaned up," she finally says with a trace of laughter.

I chuckle at her words. "I was just thinking that I need a shower. Come on," I sit up and slap her thigh. "Let's go hop in the shower. We can snuggle up to a movie after we get cleaned up."

We spent quite a long time in the shower with flirtatious stares and teen-like giggles that would normally make me gag. Yet I found myself not only enjoying it, but doing it myself.

I throw on a white shirt and jeans while Mollie asks for a shirt of mine to wear during the movie. I throw her one of my Chicago fire department t-shirts that has since shrank and my

dick takes notice when I see her in it, her creamy thighs on display.

We cuddle up next to each other on my large chair with a comfy blanket and another drink. It feels so normal to do this with her. Somehow, I just had the most amazing, mind blowing sex and now I'm about to watch a movie twenty minutes later and I'm not overthinking it. I'm not wondering if she is going to spend the night or worried about how to make sure she goes home. I want her to spend the night which is new for me.

"Any movie ideas?" I ask as I click through the guide.

She leans her head on my shoulder as I scroll through the guide throwing out our options.

"Oh, *Top Gun!*" Molls points enthusiastically. "Remember when you and Ryan would put on your aviators and dance around the house to *Playing with the Boys?*"

I try to bite back my grin. Yeah, Ryan and I loved that movie, especially that song. Now that I think about it, how is Mollie attracted to me after witnessing me as a punk teenager?

"Let's watch it!" she exclaims.

"You wanna watch *Top Gun?*" I ask her.

"Yes!" she replies while clapping her hands in excitement.

I shrug my shoulders. I'd never say no to watching this movie.

I turn on the surround sound while Mollie snuggles into my arms, and we get entranced in Tom Cruise and Val Kilmer.

Mollie is completely into the movie and begins to obsess over the 'hot' guys who are now shirtless as they play volleyball in the sand while the song Ryan and I used to sing around the house plays in the background. We both start to sing and laugh our way through the scene. I'm having more fun with her than I've had with anyone in a long time. By the end of the scene, we are cracking up at ourselves.

Later in the movie I see my sunglasses on my coffee table, which just so happen to be aviators, at the same time Goose and Maverick sing "Great Balls of Fire" at the piano. Feeling silly and a little high post orgasm, I jump off the couch, throw on my aviators and start to sing the song. Mollie's mouth falls open in shock as I get back on the couch and straddle her.

"Too much love drives a man insane. You broke my will, but what a thrill. Goodness gracious, great balls of fire!" I whip off my shirt and sing as she cracks up watching me from below.

The scene ends and I'm left straddling this woman in only jeans and sunglasses. Her hands run up and down my abs as she beams up at me.

"That was the best performance I've ever seen," she continues stroking my body. "You're sexier than all of the men in this movie combined. Where the hell did you get such a good body?"

My dick comes alive with each stroke. "I'm a firefighter, baby. It's my job to be in shape."

“I wish I could pour my wine all over your body and lick each drop off,” she spoke eagerly. Her eyes widen in surprise instantly. “I said that out loud, didn’t I?”

I throw my head back and let out a burst of laughter. “Yep, you said that out loud. And it’s kinda weird, but I’m also kinda digging it.”

She puts her hands over her face and groans. “That’s so embarrassing.”

“Let’s take this to my bedroom, Molls. I’ll let you lick anywhere you want in there. Plus, we have more room in my bed for me to do all sorts of things to your sexy little body.”

“What about the movie?” she smiles.

I move my finger in a come here motion. “Fuck the movie. I want to have some more fun with you. I’ll do another performance for you if you would like.”

I put the aviators back on and strike a pose.

She laughs but hops off the couch at the same time. “I get to pick the next song.”

“Deal,” I agree.

We both run to my bedroom in laughter before falling onto my bed together. This night turned out far better than I ever could have planned. I don’t know what this means for us, but I do know there’s no way I can see myself giving her up anytime soon.

Chapter Sixteen

Mollie

“So, did you talk to him about where it’s going?” Avery sits at a table in the café eating a chocolate chip muffin.

I’m cleaning the tables as I try to dodge her interrogation. I appreciate her concern, but I don’t feel like having anything dampen my mood. I’ve been walking around on a cloud the whole weekend. I didn’t leave Logan’s place until Sunday evening, knowing we both had to work in the morning. We ate food, had sex, watched movies, and laughed together. Rinse and repeat. Literally, we would rinse off in his shower and repeat the process all over again.

“I didn’t get around to it,” I spend more time than necessary scrubbing the table, not wanting to look up at her.

“Huh, you spent an entire weekend and never got around to it? Molls, you know you need to talk to him. I can already see you falling for him again, and this time it’s real. It’s not a teenage

crush, it's the real thing. You have to protect yourself, make sure he's serious about you, about this."

"I'm gonna talk to him about it. I promise. It's only been a weekend, Av. There's no way I've fallen in love with him again," I say without much authority.

The door chimes and my heart skips a beat as Logan walks in looking about as sexy as any man can in his tight, blue Chicago Fire Department shirt and well-worn jeans. He's wearing those aviators from Friday night and sporting a devastatingly handsome smile.

My face breaks out in a huge grin. "More donuts and coffee for the gang?" I tease.

He stops in front of me, greeting me with a deep chuckle. "Nah, I'm not gonna even try to play it cool this time. I'm here to see you, but the guys think I'm just in the mood for donuts lately."

"I'm glad you stopped in," I put my rag down and step into him for a hug. His body meets mine in a large embrace, and I feel like I melt into his warmth.

"Oh, uh hi, Avery," Logan pulls away from me. "I didn't see you there."

Avery rolls her eyes. "Oh, please. I already know about you two, no need to freak out."

Logan looks at me and I shrug. "I tell her everything."

He doesn't seem concerned. "So, you mean I can give you a kiss right now?"

When he steps into my space, I wrap my arms around his neck. “I wouldn’t say no to a kiss.”

His lips find mine for a sweet, tender kiss on the lips which has my entire body break out in a shiver.

“I better go put in an order for those donuts,” he kisses me one more time then heads to the counter.

Avery snorts while I kick nothing in particular on the ground, lost in thought with a smile on my face. “Yeah, you’re screwed girl. You are already a goner for that man.”

She’s right. There’s no use denying it. I’m completely smitten with the man.

Would I call it love yet? Shoot, I think so. I think it’s always been love for me from the moment I laid eyes on him twelve years ago.

Logan comes back over holding a big box of donuts. He places the box down on one of the tables surrounding us and grabs my hand.

“So, my shift ends at eight. Any chance you want to come over tonight?” he asks.

I didn’t expect him to want me over again so soon, but I’d be lying if I said I didn’t miss him already this morning.

I try to play it cool. “Yeah, I’m done here around five. It’ll give me time to run home and shower.”

“Good. I’ll see you tonight,” he leans in for a kiss on the cheek before grabbing his box of donuts.

Once he is out the door, I reluctantly look over at Avery.

“Just do me a favor and talk to him about it tonight.”

“That’s fair. I promise I’ll bring it up tonight,” I agree.



Okay, so I told myself it was the first thing I’d bring up to him, but he has me wrapped up in his arms on the couch as he peppers me with kisses. I can wait a little bit before I bring up such a serious conversation.

I’m stalling, I know that I am. I’m just afraid that his answer will force a decision to be made where I have to end this to spare my heart.

“How was your day?” he starts kissing a path down my neck.

I laugh at his question, like I can answer anything while he’s doing that to me. “I can’t really focus on anything but what you’re doing, Logan.”

“Mmmm... okay. I’ll stop.”

He doesn’t stop, his lips are now on my chest. When his tongue comes out, a moan escapes my lips.

“You’re not stopping,” I point out.

I’m not complaining.

“Okay, we’ll talk after.”

After he shows me exactly what he was thinking about all day, which was giving me several orgasms, we fall to the couch.

I'm lying in the crook of his arm while my hand mindlessly caresses up and down his stomach.

"Were there any fires today?"

He sighs. "No, just a smoke alarm that went off from someone burning something in the kitchen. Oh, and someone got stuck in an elevator."

I shudder at the thought. I'll go in an elevator, but the idea of getting stuck in one has my body feeling anxious.

"Oh, god. Were they freaking out?" I ask him.

He shakes with laughter. "No, they weren't freaking out. Just waiting patiently. There are people who have massive panic attacks while stuck in an elevator. Would that be you?" he tickles my side.

"No, I wouldn't be able to have a panic attack because I'd already have fainted."

"And I'm gonna call you doctor one day?" he laughs.

I smack him on the chest. "Excuse me. I could handle blood and broken bones. Being trapped in a small box that's dangling high in the air from a string is different."

"I'm just messin with you."

The kiss on my temple feels so natural, like affection has always been something we've done. It makes me feel precious in his arms.

"What do you think about spending the night again?" he whispers.

I snuggle deeper into his arms, feeling like I'm living somebody else's life. How could everything I've ever wanted to happen, really be happening? And how can it feel even better than when I used to dream about it?

"Only if you wake me up like you did this morning," I tease him.

I woke up this morning to his face between my legs as he ate me out with such hunger.

"I'll wake you up like that every morning. Your pussy makes for the best breakfast. It was definitely the best morning I've ever had."

Those words, they hit me right in the heart.

"Same," I whisper back to him.

With that he grabs my hand, and we make our way back to his bedroom for the third night in a row. One thing is playing in the back of my mind. *You didn't have the conversation with him.*

It'll happen, I'll talk to him eventually.

Chapter Seventeen

Logan

I'm an idiot. I jumped into this whole thing with Mollie without even considering what we were doing. Now here we are two weeks later, and she's spent most of the nights at my place. Her parents think she's been staying with Avery.

I've basically dodged all of Ryan's calls. I can't bring myself to answer the call and lie to him. *What the hell have I done?*

This is exactly why I've kept my distance all these years. I knew it would get messy if I ever gave into temptation, and I don't do messy.

Now Ryan's texting me about meeting him at the bars tonight with Kevin. I can't ignore him any longer or he will get suspicious. He's a lawyer, there's only so much you can get past the guy.

But when it's just Mollie and me, it feels different. I've never wanted to spend so much time with a woman before, never craved them when they're not around and felt so content when

they were in my arms. I don't know if I could end this even if I wanted to.

There is just something about her. She's always been different in my eyes, but it's more than that. When she looks in my eyes, I feel like she sees the real me. And yet, she doesn't know the truth about me. She doesn't know what it takes for me to function like a normal adult, the kind of struggles I go through daily.

How stupid would she think I am if she knew the truth? I shudder at the thought of telling her the truth about my ADHD. We're talking about someone who's going to become a *doctor*. She would laugh in my face if I told her I haven't read a single book since I was high school. That my brain just won't allow me to get past the first page. It's almost become a mental block now. A book holds so much power over me and who I think I am. I look at one and all I think is, "*Those are for smart people.*"

There's just no way I would be good enough for her in the eyes of her parents, in the eyes of Ryan. Where does that leave us?

Surely she would understand that. I'm sure she just sees me as a conquest. Screwing her teenage crush before she goes to med-school and then settling down with another doctor.

Feeling completely down on myself, I pull my phone out and reluctantly text Ryan to tell him that I'll be there tonight.

When I walk into the bar, I scan the room for Ryan. I catch a glimpse of him in the back by the pool table with Kevin. I grab

a beer at the bar before pushing through the crowd until I find them.

“You made it,” Ryan punches my arm. “I haven’t seen you since the lake house. I thought you were ghosting me.”

“Nah,” I take a big swig of beer, needing the edge taken off before I begin the lies. “I’ve just been catching up with things at work.”

“Glad you could make it. Kevin here has been annoying the fuck out of me lately,” Ryan jokes while Kevin rolls his eyes.

Somehow, I don’t think I’ve been missed. I don’t know if Kevin is capable of such emotion and Ryan spends most of his time with Alicia.

“It’s good to get a break from everything. Where’s Alicia tonight?” I ask.

“She’s right behind ya, man,” he points at the table at the other side of the room.

I look around to wave at her when I see Alicia, Avery, and Molls sitting together laughing at something. Shit, I didn’t know Mollie would be here tonight. Judging by her wide eyes pointed directly at me, she didn’t know I was coming either. I know we’ve only been talking for two weeks, but I’m somehow annoyed that she didn’t even ask me if I was coming.

Did she not want me to be here?

When a small smile forms on her lips and she wiggles her fingers at me, I release the breath I didn’t realize I was

holding. I wink at her before turning back around to the guys, trying not to show any reaction to spotting the girls.

“Nice. So, how’s everything been at the firm?” I ask.

Ryan goes off about another lawyer who he thinks is pissed off that Ryan came back to work with his dad. He spends the next half hour airing out his grievances as Kevin and I listen and poke jabs at him when we think he’s being a spoiled little brat.

The girls eventually join us at the table where Mollie is sitting on the opposite end. It’s nearly impossible not to look at her as she continues to joke around with the girls. She looks sexy as hell tonight in a red top and tight jeans. Another pang of jealousy shoots through me when I realize she dressed like that not knowing I was going to be here tonight. I don’t like her dressing like that for anybody else but me. In fact, it pisses me the fuck off.

“Did you hear me, dude?” Ryan waves his hand in front of me.

I shake my head back and forth. “Sorry, got caught up thinking about something. What did you say?”

“I said that chick over there can’t stop eye fucking you,” he points to some blonde girl a couple tables down. She’s definitely undressing me with her eyes. When she notices we’re looking at her, she smiles and waves.

Not wanting to be rude, I offer a small smile and nod before turning back to Ryan.

“Ok. And what’s your point?” I ask him.

“Sooo...go for it. She’s hot and she obviously wants you to go over there.”

What the hell am I supposed to say to him? No, please don’t do this! Your sister is right here, and she can’t see. We’re... what? Sleeping together? Together, together? I run my fingers through my hair as my heart starts to race. What other reason would there be for me to not want the attention of a beautiful woman?

“Nah. I’m not feeling it tonight. I’m too exhausted from work to put in the effort.”

Sure, it’s a dick thing to say, but I’d rather sound like a dick than have Mollie think I’m interested in anyone else. And yet, I should have known I was dealing with Kevin and Ryan tonight.

“Fuck off, you’ve never been too tired for a sexy chick,” Kevin says as he waves the girl over to us.

Ryan chuckles as I begin to sweat. Looking over at Mollie, I see the moment her smile begins to fade as the girl takes the empty seat next to me. Mollie looks between me and the girl.

“Hi,” the woman purrs next to me. I stiffen at the obnoxious desperation in her voice.

“Um, hi.”

“How are you doing tonight?” she continues.

I know I’m a dick, but not that big of a dick, so I respond. We spent the next several minutes making small talk. She tells me that she’s in marketing and I tell her that I’m a firefighter. She

tells me that makes sense because I ‘certainly have the body for it’ which she then proceeds to put her hand on my bicep.

Kevin and Ryan nod their approval. I risk a glance over at Mollie who is now sitting there with her arms folded across her chest, eyes shooting daggers at me.

The rest of the night is spent with Mollie’s angry stare and dodging the other woman’s advances. I should have realized there was a reason I wanted to avoid going out with Ryan, tonight is showing exactly why. Now, I have to figure out how to tell this chick I’m not interested, even though I thought my cold demeanor was taking care of that, and I have to get to Mollie.

We pay our tabs to the cocktail waitress, and I turn to Dayton, my new admirer.

“I’ve got an early morning tomorrow. I’m going to get going. Nice to meet you,” I tell her as I stand up.

When she realizes I’m not going to get her number her face falls, but I don’t have time to feel bad as Mollie is storming out the front door right now with Avery hot on her heels. I press my way through the crowd, not caring who I push out of my way.

“Mollie,” I call, grabbing her arm and spinning her around when I finally catch up.

“Leave me alone, Logan,” she barks back.

We both look around to make sure there is no one else around, besides Avery who doesn’t look too pleased with me.

“Look, I didn’t invite her over to the table.”

She laughs with obvious sarcasm. “Well, regardless of who invited her over, you two seemed pretty cozy together.”

“What? I was not *cozy* with her. I have manners Mollie and was just trying to not be a dick. All we did was talk and when the night was over, I didn’t get her number, didn’t make any move. I have no interest in her.”

“Whatever, I’m going home. Feel free to go back in there and get her number. I won’t be there to make things awkward if that’s what you were worried about.”

She heads towards a car without another word.

“Fuck!” I shout. Avery begins to make her way towards the car as well, but I stop her. “Avery, can you get a ride with Kevin? I’m not done talking to Mollie, she needs to hear me out.”

She looks up at my face, which probably looks pretty pathetic and really frickin’ desperate, because she rolls her eyes and agrees.

I jump into the back of the car and take a seat next to Mollie.

“What the hell are you doing here?” her voice is hard as she speaks.

“Change in address. Please take us to 58 Mitchell Drive,” I tell the driver.

“Logan, what are you doing?” she repeats.

I keep looking straight ahead as I reply. “We’re going back to my place. Our conversation is nowhere near over.”

She huffs out a breath as she folds her arms across her chest. I can't help but be reminded of a nine-year-old Mollie doing the same thing every time Ryan wouldn't let her play with us. I had a soft spot for her then, and it looks like some things haven't changed.

When we pull up to my house, I pay the driver while Mollie stomps up to my front porch. I try not to smile when she taps her foot, waiting for me to unlock the door. I wish she weren't so damn cute when she was angry.

Once inside, it doesn't take her long to find the bottle of wine in my kitchen and pour herself a glass. It's not lost on me that she didn't pour me one or even ask if I wanted one. That's fine, we have more important things to discuss.

She joins me on the couch, making a point to sit as far away from me as possible.

"Okay. You need to speak, go ahead," she says with an edge to her voice.

"Well, like I said earlier, what happened at the bar was not what it looked like. I had absolutely zero interest in her, Mollie. Shit, all I could think about the entire night was how much I wanted to get you alone so I could taste those lips of yours."

She rolls her lips. "It's one thing for them to call her over and you don't want to blow her off and be a dick, Logan. But to give her time and attention the rest of the night. That was *your* decision, nobody else's. How would you feel if I talked and flirted with another guy right in front of you?"

My muscles tighten at the mere thought of her flirting with anyone else. I would have punched that fucker in the face.

“Well, what was I supposed to do, Molls? Tell her I wasn’t interested and wanted her to stop talking to me? Your brother was right there, if I said I was...*involved* with someone else, it would have raised questions. I don’t know how to answer those questions yet.”

The tensing in her jaw betrays her deep frustrations. “Now’s as good a time as any to figure that part out. What *are* we doing, Logan?”

Shit. She wants to label us *now*?

“I don’t know, Molls. We’re enjoying each other’s company.”

Even as the words come out, I know they’re not an adequate description of what’s happening between us.

She replies through stiff lips. “Enjoying each other’s company? Is that all that’s happening? We’ve known each other for twelve years and have been spending almost every single night together for weeks...and you want to call it enjoying each other’s company?”

“What do you want from me? Are you suggesting we tell your brother about us? And how do you see that going?” my voice raises as my frustration grows.

“Are you saying this could never go anywhere? Am I just a good fuck?”

“Don’t fucking talk about yourself like that. You know you’re so much more than that to me!” I ground out.

“No, Logan, I don’t know that actually. *Am* I more than that? Because what I hear you saying is that this could never be more than a secret. That all we are doing is having some fun in the bedroom. Am I still not good enough for you?” she questions me while the pain in her voice is evident, and it hits me deep in my heart.

“What the hell are you talking about?” my voice raises.
“Where did you come up with something so absurd?”

“I wasn’t enough for you all those years ago. I was too young, too inexperienced, your best friend’s sister. Now what’s your excuse?” a tear runs down her cheek.

“Molls,” I whisper. Does she really have no idea? “You’ve got it all wrong.”

More tears, more daggers to my heart.

“Do I, Logan?” her sad eyes meet mine from across the couch.

“Molls. It’s me, I’m the one not good enough for you.” Her head jerks up, looking at me like she isn’t comprehending what I just said. “*I’m* not good enough for *you*. You’re... incredible. You’re beautiful, funny, generous, kind, determined...and smart. You’re going to be doctor. I didn’t even go to college. I’m just a firefighter. I could never provide for you the way you deserve.”

“Are you serious, Logan? You think you’re not good enough for me? That’s ridiculous. What you do is the most honorable thing. You put your life on the line every day for your community.”

She still doesn't get it.

"It's not just that. It's....," the words are right there on the tip of my tongue, but I don't want to say them.

"It's what? Tell me! Or are you just trying to make me feel better by letting me down easy? It's not you, it's me. That's such bullshit...."

I cut her off. "It's me! Fuck, Molls. It's me. I have... I have ADHD. I'm not like you. I don't read books. I *can't* read books. I can't get passed the first fucking page of a book. I can barely get the mindless tasks of my damn job done without utilizing all the tools I've learned from *years* of therapy. Do you know how many times I would let you down if we were together? I can't juggle everything swirling around in my head. I forget dates all the time. I would forget your birthday...forget our *anniversary* half the time. If you knew the real me...fuck...you'd be embarrassed." If that's not humiliating enough, I continue. "It's haunted me my entire life. My dirty little secret. The idiot who can't sit still, can't focus. I'd be nothing but a disappointment to you. You're the one who deserves so much more than me. Staying away from you has always been about protecting you, Molls. Protecting you from me."

The tears are there, sitting idle in my eyes. I won't let them out. I refuse to cry in front of her, to let her see any more of my weakness. But the pain in her eyes, the pity. It was all there in each agonizing tear that fell from her eyes.

“Logan!” she chokes out. Then she moves forward on the couch, scooting closer to me. I look away, too afraid to let the bubbling emotions free. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t know. But Logan, ADHD is nothing to be ashamed of.”

I turn my head from her, looking out the window, anywhere but at her. Mollie is having none of this, she grabs my face and makes me look her in the eyes.

“Logan, the brain is the area of focus I want to study. I’ve done research on many disorders, including ADHD. What you are going through is normal, struggling is normal. It’s nothing to be embarrassed about. And it definitely doesn’t make you less than me or anyone else. Completing tasks easily or quickly means nothing to me. I don’t give a shit about that. I care about your heart, and how you treat people.”

“But what do you think your brother and parents would think if they found out about us? I can tell you. They would think you were settling. You should be with a doctor or lawyer, someone who is your intellectual equal.”

“I want you. Damnit, Logan. You’re all I’ve ever wanted since I was nine. And being with you these last couple of weeks, it’s only made me realize you are nothing like my fantasies, you’re *better*.”

With each word she speaks, I feel my resolve breaking. My secret is out in the open, and she still wants to be with me. Could it be possible that someone like Mollie could want me for who I am?

“But your family...,” I repeat.

“My family loves you. Are you kidding me? My parents look at you like a second son, but none of that matters if you don’t want me like that. If all this is to you is something sexual, tell me now. Because it’s so much more to me, and I.”

I cut her off again, this time smothering her words with my mouth. She parts her lips and raises herself to meet my kiss. I try to convey just how much her admission has touched me by putting everything into this kiss. When I break our contact, we are both breathing heavily as I look deep into her beautiful eyes.

“What was that for?” she stammers.

My mouth curves into a smile. “That’s me telling you that we are so much more to me too. I’ve been terrified to admit it. It’s taken me four years to admit it. I’m done denying it, done hiding from the truth. If you want me, the real me, you’ve got me.”

Chapter Eighteen

Mollie

If I wasn't hopelessly in love with this man before, I am now. The pain and sorrow he just let me see, the shame he feels for something that is completely out of his control. How could he think that he isn't good enough for me? I've spent years watching people flock to him because of his natural charisma. He is so much more than a man who struggles to concentrate.

We all struggle with different things in life. Some people struggle with confidence, trauma, procrastination, body image. The list goes on and on with our inner demons. When I look at Logan, I see someone who is strong and confident. It breaks my heart that there is so much self-doubt buried beneath the surface.

I grab his face and kiss him again, never wanting to stop showering him with my love.

"You're perfect." I kiss him again.

"And sexy."

Kiss.

He smiles.

“Really sexy.”

Kiss.

I move my hand down his chest until it reaches the top of his jeans. Wanting to make his pain go away, if only for a moment, I drop to my knees in front of him.

His eyes turn dark as they take in my movements. I unbuckle his belt and pull his zipper down.

“What’s happening right now?” he croaks.

I smile seductively. “I’m showing you just how sexy I think you are.”

Pulling his jeans and boxers down, his length pops free, already standing tall. My hand reaches out slowly to stroke him. I can’t say I’ve ever cared much for doing this to any other guy. With Logan, just the thought of touching him, tasting him, has my body igniting. It’s just as much a treat for me as it is for him.

I lean in until my tongue just barely swipes his tip. When I look up at him, he’s biting his bottom lip, eyes hooded while he drinks in the sight of me on my knees. Once I wrap my lips around him and glide down his length, he lets out the most glorious sounding groan.

It’s this, right here, that makes me wet. Knowing that I’m the one making him sound like that, making him lose control.

I want this to last, so I take slow, calculated sucks up and down his length. I find that he grunts, seeming most affected when I loosen my suction in order to make sure my tongue is flat against him the entire time. I get lost in the movements, not sure how long I spend in the rhythm. Then I switch to more tight, fast movements as my hand grabs the base of him and pumps at the same pace with my mouth.

“Fuck, Molls. I’m gonna come down your throat if you don’t stop.”

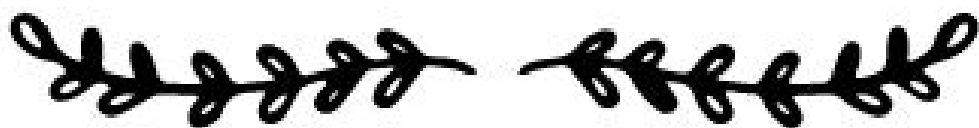
I don’t stop. I need to taste this man again. I want to drink down every last drop of him.

I move his hands to my hair so he knows he can own me until he finishes. His face turns dangerous with desire when he realizes what I’m telling him to do, but he doesn’t hesitate as he grips my hair until it stings as I bask in the pain. He fucks my mouth with such fervor I feel it in my bones.

“You’re such a good girl, letting me fuck your mouth like this. I’m gonna reward your cunt after this.”

Oh, shit. There he is. This man and his dirty talk are going to be the end of me one day, and I love it!

He grunts and growls as he spurts his release down the back of my throat.



I'm standing in Logan's kitchen making myself a coffee when I feel his arms wrap around my waist. His lips find my neck and kiss a trail down to my shoulder.

"Morning, beautiful."

I turn around and smile up at him. "Morning, handsome."

"I think I need an IV of caffeine straight to my veins if I'm gonna make it through this day," his deep-timbered voice drags.

I wrap my arms around his stomach and rest my head against his chest. "Well, you were the one who had superhuman stamina last night."

His chuckles vibrate against me. "What can I say, I can't get enough of you."

I smile into his chest. We talked more about our relationship last night, agreeing that we are giving this a serious go. First, we want to enjoy some time alone before we let everyone know, especially Ryan. I know Logan is terrified to tell Ryan, even though he was trying to put on a brave face for me last night. He's terrified he will not approve. Ryan may be angry that we hid it, but of course he would approve of us in the end. Logan's his best friend for a reason.

"No. Complaints. Here. The feeling is mutual."

"What are your plans for the day?" he asks as we both sit at the island with our coffee.

"I actually need to start booking some appointments to look at apartments. Fall semester starts in four weeks."

He appears caught off guard. “I didn’t realize you were getting an apartment that soon.”

I shrug my shoulders. “I don’t want to live with my parents through med-school. No offense to them, I love them, but I have no interest in spending that much time with them.”

He has a faraway look on his face. “Ah, I see. I’d like to come along with you when you look.”

I wasn’t expecting that. “Oh, um, sure.”

“I just want to make sure you pick a place that’s safe,” he clarifies. “If it’s going to be close to school, I’m guessing it won’t be the best of neighborhoods.”

“I was thinking of looking on Thursday. Are you working?”

“I’m free. Count me in,” he stands up and kisses me on the cheek.

Don’t smile.

Too late, I’m grinning like a fool.

After Logan makes breakfast, he heads to his room to take a shower. Since I don’t have my car with me, I call for a service knowing that Logan would insist on driving me to my parents before work. Not only is that ridiculously out of the way, but knowing my luck, my parents would be outside and have all kinds of questions about why Logan drove me home at seven in the morning.

My dad’s a lawyer, you don’t get lies past him.

I spend the morning researching apartments near campus, even nailing down three appointments on Thursday. I'm still surprised Logan insisted on joining. It's weird, but it feels like once he made the decision in his mind that we are serious, he flipped into protective boyfriend mode.

Just thinking about Logan makes me miss him. I wonder what he's doing right now. Hopefully not anything dangerous. I guess he could be just hanging around the station if there's no action. I remember his giddiness at the store when buying all those sweets and all the donuts he bought at the cafe. Would it be weird to stop by the station with a box of desserts for the guys? I'd love to see where he works. Sneaking in a kiss would just be an added benefit. After all, once I start school soon, I'm going to be way too busy for drop-ins.

The thought makes me sad, not having a lot of time to spend with him in just a few short weeks. Instead of dwelling on it, I run upstairs to get ready. I'm going to stop by my favorite bakery to bring some treats for my favorite man with a sweet tooth.

I walk through the front door of the office to a young blonde sitting at the administration desk. She greets me with a bright smile and yet, I see her eyeing me up and down like she's sizing me up.

"Welcome. What can I do for you?" she says to me, still holding her smile.

"Hi, I'm here to see Logan Brady."

Her smile fades. I don't think she likes the idea of me being here for Logan. It takes a second for her to recover.

“What do you want with Logan?”

What's with this woman? Was there something between her and Logan?

“Ummm...I just came here to drop off these desserts.” I lift up the box for her to see.

She sighs. Apparently random acts of kindness are annoying and interfere greatly with her day. She puts a call into the station, maybe the PA system, I don't know. All I know, is that I feel weird standing here with my desserts and this woman who clearly hates me.

Minutes later, Logan walks through the door. He sees me and looks completely stunned, but that doesn't stop the smile that spreads across his face. My nerves are instantly gone when he looks at me like that.

“Hey you. What are you doing here?” he walks up to me, the creases near his eyes from his smile making me melt.

“I figured you wouldn't be stopping at the café today, and I had some free time, so I brought you guys some sweets. It's from my favorite bakery.”

Logan leans in and gives me a kiss. I can't help but steal a glance at the receptionist who is now shooting daggers at me. Yeah, I will be asking Logan about her later.

“That's thoughtful of you,” he grabs the box from me. “Come on in, I'll show you around.”

I follow him into the station as I take in my surroundings. We walk past the fire trucks as he gives me the general run-down of what they do when they receive a call. It's all pretty overwhelming and an eye opener into the magnitude of what he does. I know it's heroic, but to see the equipment and gear close up, it's surprising.

When we turn the corner, there are several guys sitting around a large sectional couch as they watch baseball. Is there some fireman code in this city that has a requirement that you must be devastatingly handsome to work here? Because all these men are extremely easy on the eyes. All of their eyes are now on me as I fidget next to Logan. Suddenly, I wish I were the one holding the box of desserts so I had something to do with myself and could hide my awkwardness.

"Gentlemen," Logan holds up the box before placing it on the coffee table in front of them. "My girl here has brought us some treats."

He flips open the lid and a group of rugged, fearless men suddenly dive in as they slap away hands and start calling dibs. Logan goes straight for a brownie square with fudge on top. He takes a large bite before joining my side again, wrapping his arm around my waist.

He lets out a moan. "This is amazing. Thanks, babe."

Something about this entire scenario feels so natural, like Logan and I have been together forever.

"No problem. I'm glad you guys are enjoying it."

“Everyone, this is Mollie,” Logan introduces me.

The guys are all smirking at us while they look around at each other. One of them speaks up.

“Ooooh, so this is Mollie. Things happened kind of quickly, I see.”

“Fuck off, Lucas. Have some manners.” Logan looks sternly at him.

Lucas raises his hands up in innocence. “Hey, I meant nothing bad by it. I’m glad you finally pulled your head out of your ass and realized your sour puss mood lately has been because of this beauty. Looks like he finally manned up, Mollie.”

I chuckle at this man’s honest observation. It’s clear these guys have a close bond, I can already sense it.

Logan goes down the line of the couch, listing off the names of all the guys. I know I’m not going to remember all of them just yet, but I’m trying to catalogue them in my brain.

“Now, if you will excuse us, I’m going to continue showing her around,” Logan tells the group.

He grabs my hand and starts for the back. I’m not quite sure what else there is for him to show me, but as we turn down the hall, I see a row of doors. We come to the end and Logan opens the door, gesturing for me to go in first. It’s a small office with not much room, but I imagine this is where he gets all his work done.

Before I turn around, his body is pressed against mine as his hands come around to my stomach.

He whispers in my ear. “That brownie was delicious, but you taste so much better.”

He spins me around and slams his mouth onto mine. How many times is my body going to react like this the second our lips connect? I would have thought the explosiveness would have started to die down, but it’s still just as powerful. Before we can go any further, a loud siren plays throughout the building.

“Shit!” he pulls away from me reluctantly.

“You go,” I pull the door open quickly, wondering if it’s just like the movies where they have seconds to get dressed and in the truck. “I’ll let myself out.”

“Thanks,” he runs out of the office, confirming my thought.

“Come over tonight,” he shouts as he’s turning the hall.

Chapter Nineteen

Logan

We walk around the small apartment, Mollie looking interested while I'm clenching my fists in anger. This place is a shithole. I mean, I know she's still a student and is on a budget, but I don't like the idea of her living here.

The entire kitchen and bathroom are outdated. I'd be surprised if the oven even works.

It's the third place that we've seen this afternoon, and I'm not impressed by any of them. While she talks to the landlord, I'm looking at the sliding door that leads to the patio. I could easily break into this place. She can't live here.

She should just live with me.

I stop in my tracks. Where the hell did that come from? Mollie living with me, it's completely insane. We've been dating for two weeks, only labeling it dating for three days.

But I have known her for twelve years. We know each other's parents and siblings. Heck, we know each other's extended

family. I think that moves our relationship forward several steps.

I mean, it's not a totally crazy thought. I picture not only telling Ryan that we're seeing each other, but that we're living together.

Never mind, it was a crazy thought. But it didn't scare me, which in itself is a monumental moment for me.

"Okay, I think you've answered all of my questions," I hear Mollie say. "I'll be in touch."

Once we are in my car and driving back to my place, I inquire on her last statement to the landlord.

"You're not really going to consider that last place, are you?"

She looks mildly confused at me. "What was wrong with it?"

I grip the steering wheel. "Mollie, it was horrible. Small, old, and unsafe. I wouldn't sleep a wink at night if I knew you were living there."

"Logan," she says gently. "I'm not bringing in any money while I'm in med-school. I can't afford anything nicer."

It's the answer that I knew was coming, because it's the truth and completely obvious. I still don't like it.

"I just want you to be safe," I tell her.

Her hand wraps around mine on the clutch. "I appreciate your concern. I promise wherever I choose, you can add safer locks to it if that makes you feel better."

I nod my head, pretending her offer pacified me. In reality, I'm still stewing over the idea of her living alone in such bad neighborhoods.

As soon as we get back to my place, I fall to the couch.

"What do you want for dinner?" she joins me, snuggling up under my arm.

I think again about having her here all the time, living with me. It would be kinda nice to come home and wrap her in my arms, to have someone to eat dinner with every night. I didn't even notice all the things I do alone. Shower, clean, eat, relax after work. I'm beginning to realize I may have been lonely for a while, now that she came around.

"I can just call and order something. I haven't had the chance to grocery shop," I tell her. I'm also not in the mood to cook dinner tonight.

She looks up at me through her long, dark lashes. "I can run out and grab something to put together."

"You don't have to do that."

But Mollie is already up and grabbing her purse. "No, I want to. You've cooked for me several times now. I want to cook for you." She comes over and kisses me. "I'll be back soon."

When she leaves, I turn on the television and try to relax. After ten minutes of attempting to watch, I realize my mind won't let go of the apartments we just viewed today. If she isn't going to live with me, I have to find her a better place.

I get up and head to my office on the second floor. After opening the browser, I type my criteria into the search bar and wait for listings to pop up. The list is daunting and makes me a little nervous.

It's okay, you can do this. It may take you longer to get through the listings, but you can do it. This is about keeping Mollie safe.

With that weak-ass motivational speech to myself, I open the first listing. I start to look through photos, not exactly impressed by what I'm seeing. In the middle of reading the specifications, my mind starts wandering to work. I don't even realize it until five minutes later. I slam my fist against the desk, as the little voice in my head starts to ridicule me.

This is why you shouldn't be with her. You can't even focus long enough to find her a safe place. You can't protect her. You're not good enough.

It's the usual dialogue in my head when I can't complete a task. I do my best to ignore it and focus on what I need to get done. Mollie walks in the room, and I look at the clock. It's five, that means I've been doing this for an hour, and I've seen...two listings. My head falls forward in defeat.

"Hey, what are you doing in here?" she says as she stands next to me.

"Nothing," I bark back.

"Um, okkkay. Is there something wrong?" she asks with concern.

That's a loaded question. One I'm not in the mood to answer.

"I'm fine, Mollie," my teeth clench together as the words are spoken.

Mollie isn't having it. She scoots in front of me, leaning on the desk between my legs.

"Logan," she breathes. "Look. At. Me."

My head rises until my eyes connect with hers.

"Tell me what's going on," she insists.

I blowout. "I was trying to look at safer places for you. I can't stand the idea of you living in one of those apartments. I tried to relax and watch TV but couldn't focus on anything but what could happen to you. So, I came upstairs to do some research, and I couldn't focus for the life of me. It's been an hour, I've looked at two places, and I barely recall a thing about them. I'm just...I'm already failing you. I can't protect you. I can't take care of you like you deserve."

"Why do you think I'm so vulnerable, that I need someone to take care of me? I love that you want to help me, but I can take care of myself. I don't need that from you. All I need is for you to treat me right, to be my partner."

I shrug, not sure what to say. "I just feel like you're so precious, always have been in my eyes. I want you to be safe and have everything you want."

"You know what I want right now?" her eyes turn hooded.

I shake my head back and forth, wondering what she is going to say.

“I want you to make me feel good,” her silky voice holds a challenge in it.

My eyebrows raise at her request. “You want me to get you off?”

“Unless you don’t think you could focus long enough right now.” She begins to move away from me, like she’s already made up her mind and I’m not up to the challenge.

My hand lands on her thigh as I push her back against the desk.

“Are you insinuating I couldn’t get you off right now? I’ll have you know, I may struggle to focus on things but I could play with your pussy all day long.”

Her quick intake proves that my words affect her. I like that.

“Now, let’s get rid of these,” I unbutton her jeans and push them down her legs. “Because I’m going to need room to lick your cunt.”

“You know, some women would be offended by the use of that word,” she says with a glint in her eyes.

I smile up at her as I toss her panties to the side. “Yes, but you’re not one of them.”

“And how do you know that?”

“Because...you’re soaking wet right now,” my fingers swipe through her folds before I hold them up to her, showing the

glistening of her arousal.

She smirks and shrugs. "I'm not ashamed."

I chuckle before grabbing her hips and lifting her onto the desk, placing her feet at the edge and opening her up wide for me. Then I begin to prove to her that being between her legs is a place I will never lose focus. I show her twice in a row until she is exhausted.

"Okay, point taken. You are a laser focused champ down there. Now let me go downstairs and make us some dinner with the little ounce of energy I have left."

I chuckle at her words, but scoot away from the desk to allow her to get dressed and head downstairs.

While Mollie is cooking and dancing to country music, I sit at the island as I watch her move around my kitchen like she lives here. There I go again, thinking these thoughts of her living with me. Thinking about what she just did as she helped talk me out of my self-loathing spiral, something no has ever done, I wonder what the harm *would* be of us rushing into this.

I decide to throw it out there, if nothing else, to see her reaction.

"You know my house isn't that much further away from campus than those places you were looking at. It adds ten, maybe fifteen minutes."

She turns her head around while stirring vegetables in the skillet. "Yeah, I guess so."

When she doesn't add anything else, I realize I'm being too subtle. I just need to come right out and say it. I clear my throat, trying to summon the courage.

“What do you think of living here with me? It would save you tons of money, it's not too far from campus, it's clean...and safe.”

She stops suddenly and slowly turns around. Her eyes widen as she watches me intently, perhaps waiting for the part where I laugh and say I was kidding. When I remain silent, patiently waiting for her response, she realizes I'm being serious.

“You want me to move in with you?” she whispers.

I nod my head. “Yeah, I want you to move in with me. I know it's sudden, but I keep thinking about it. And every time I do, it just makes sense to me. You don't have to answer right away. Maybe just...think about it.”

She continues to stand there, frozen like a statue with the spatula held in the air. My face breaks out into a wide grin. She's cute when she's completely shocked. Who am I kidding? She's cute all the damn time.

“I think your food needs some attention,” I wink at her.

She spins around quickly and starts to focus all of her attention on the food. You think I would be self-conscious of her lack of an answer, but something tells me she'll come around. She just needs time to process.

I decide to give her some space and go back to the TV room. It's not too much longer before she is calling me back to the

kitchen for dinner.

We are sitting down at my table, digging into the delicious stir-fry that she made, when she grows silent.

“This is damn good. Thanks for cooking for me. I don’t think anyone besides my mom has done that before.”

I try to steer the conversation to lighter territory, wondering if maybe I grossly underestimated her response to my question. Did I freak her out that bad?

“Yes!” she blurts out of nowhere.

I look at her confused. “Yes, what?”

“Yes, I’ll move in with you,” she smiles sweetly at me. “You were asking me, right? It wasn’t just like a hypothetical. Shoot, nevermind. Forget I said anything.”

She takes a huge bite of her stir-fry and anxiously chews, not meeting my eyes.

“I was asking you. I think.” I stop to consider it. I may have just been bringing it up to see what she thought, but now that she said yes, I know I want it to happen now. “Yes, I was definitely asking.”

We both look at each other and start to laugh. When she walked back into my life a month ago, I never would have thought that we would be sitting here celebrating a decision like this one. It’s certainly a huge step for the both of us, let’s hope her family will see it as something to celebrate.

Chapter Twenty

Mollie

I'm sitting across from Ryan at our parents house while we watch TV, knowing that I'm going to Logan's house after this. His best friend, his brother, and someone he trusts with everything. How are they going to react when we tell them? At first, I thought it would be no big deal, but now I'm a bit nervous since we added a whole new element to it.

Moving in with Logan was not on my radar. It took me by complete surprise when he asked. Now that we've had a couple days to sit on it, it feels right. Why would I waste my money on rent when I already spend most of my time at his place right now? Sure, it's only been weeks, not even months, but I don't see anything changing anytime soon. Worst case scenario, we break up and I move back in with my parents until I find a place of my own. It's not like I'm in New York and don't have family to fall back on.

Plus, this is Logan we are talking about. I already know so much about him, and I trust that he wouldn't ask if he wasn't

completely committed to us.

“You excited for school to start?” Ryan interrupts my thoughts.

“Yeah, I am. A little nervous, if I’m being honest. Luckily, my first year will be just courses and labs. So I can dip my toe into it.”

“What do you have to be nervous about? You’re the smartest person I know.” Ryan seems dumbfounded by my insecurity.

“It’s med-school, Ryan. This isn’t just undergrad biology class. You don’t get into med-school without being extremely intelligent. I’m no longer going to be the smartest one by a long shot. I’ll have to put everything I’ve got into it to outshine others and get the attention or recognition. And even if I do give it my all, there’s a good chance I’ll still be mediocre compared to the other students.”

“I didn’t even think about that. Yeah, I guess you should be nervous.”

I gasp at Ryan’s insensitive comment. Picking up the pillow I was resting on, I pull my arm back and chuck it at his head.

“Way to be supportive. Don’t worry Mollie, it’s all gonna be okay.”

“What? You said it, I’m just agreeing with you.”

“Ugh, whatever. New subject. How are things going with Alicia?”

My brother’s face lights up at the mention of her name. It’s still a bit strange to see the same guy who was too cool to

catch real feelings for any girl become such a softy. He better realize what he has and put a ring on her finger soon.

“She’s perfect, as always,” he says with wonder in his voice.

Maybe I could slip in some covert questions about Logan. I never talk about Logan with my brother anymore, ever since that night. Maybe I could get a feel for how it will go when we tell him.

“How’s Logan handling Alicia monopolizing all of your time?” I ask coolly, hoping that he doesn’t detect the adrenaline coursing through my body at the moment.

He lifts his shoulder nonchalantly. “I don’t know, he doesn’t seem to care. He’s a serial dater. If anything, he just misses having me as a wingman. But he has Kevin for that now.”

“Serial dater?” I sit up, my attention solely focused on Ryan while he is mesmerized by the show. “Does Logan date a lot?”

Ryan laughs. “He’s with a new girl every other month. That boy has no intention of settling down anytime soon. I’ve seen him with so many women, it’s hard to recall any of their names.”

Well, that’s new information. So, Logan has been with a lot of women. I mean, I guess I kind of knew that already. He has the loose, carefree spirit to him. I’ve never seen or heard of him being in a serious relationship, at least that I can recall. I’ll have to ask him about that. Maybe there was someone serious in there. He is twenty-six after all, there has to be somebody.

Although, I don't really have much room to talk. Looking back at my college boyfriends, I never got too emotionally involved. I enjoyed spending time with them, even enjoyed the intimacy, but my heart was never really in it. Perhaps they detected it. Looking back on my breakups, they always said it seemed like I wasn't that serious about the relationship. I never actually cried when we broke up, so they may have had a point.

"Dinner time, kiddos," Mom shouts from the kitchen.

Ryan and I stand as we sluggishly walk over to the table. There's something about lounging around at my childhood home that brings out this lazy, relaxed side of me. Mom puts out her roast and vegetables as we all dig into the delicious display.

We discuss Ryan and Dad's work stories for a while, as they chuckle over some of the quirky people in the office. Sometimes, I feel like I know their co-workers just as well as they do with the amount of times their names frequent the dinner table. I appreciate when they talk work at dinner, it's anecdotal stories of colleagues and not discussing their work cases or any serious matters.

Mom takes a sip of her wine then leans her chin on her hand as she looks at me.

"So, Molls, have you found an apartment yet? The semester is sneaking up on you. It's three weeks away already."

Oh, crap! I'm such a shit liar.

I survey my family as their eyes rest solely on me. “Umm, yeah I looked at couple this past week. Still trying to nail down which one I want to go with.”

“You better get on that. You’re welcome to stay here as long as you’d like, but you don’t want to worry about moving all of your things over from storage to your new place too close to your first day. That will be too stressful on you,” Dad says before taking a swig from his beer.

“I know, Dad. I’m going to make a decision this week, I promise. Luckily, they all can start the lease right away.”

My parents seem appeased by my answer as they move on to the topic of my uncle who’s about to marry his fifth wife. My mom’s brother has had a difficult time finding the right one. Largely due to the fact that he’s very wealthy and can’t tell the difference between real and fake love.

“I actually like this one,” Mom admits. “For starters, she’s his age. But she also seems like a very simple person, doesn’t need all of the frills and luxuries money can buy.”

“Maybe don’t say that to Uncle Ken or his future wife, Ma. I don’t think anyone would appreciate being called simple,” Ryan smiles over his bite of food.

Mom looks flustered, Ryan likes to mess with her a lot. “Oh, Ryan, shut up. You know what I meant.”

Ryan raises his eyebrows with amusement, knowing exactly what his comment would do to Mom. He loves it when she gets so annoyed that she talks back to him.

“Just saying, I wouldn’t like being called a simple person. Super insulting.”

“I have a couple of other choice words I could call you right now,” she throws back at him.

Dad and I share a smirk across the table. He and I sometimes instigate their little tiffs, knowing Mom and Ryan have always shared a special bond. Most of the time, their insults are done with smiles, neither of them good at being serious.

After dinner wraps up, I hear my phone buzz.

Logan: Just got off work. I need to work off this adrenaline from a house call we had. Any clue how I can accomplish such a task?

I chuckle as I stare down at the phone. With every day that passes by, the Logan I remember from childhood comes back. It’s so easy and natural with us.

Me: I have a couple of ideas. You could go for a run, take a bath, meditate...

Logan replies instantly.

Logan: Those are horrible ideas, Molls. I thought you were going to be helpful. :(

Such a little baby, but I love it.

“What’s that smile for?” Mom calls from across the room.

I look up and see her curious face.

“Oh, Avery texted something funny.”

Mom and Dad laugh, not doubting that at all. Ryan rolls his eyes and mumbles, “*Doubtful.*”

His typical response to any compliment given to Avery.

I transfer my gaze back to the phone and respond back to Logan.

Me: Well, there’s one other option. It involves your dick and my mouth. I’m just not sure if it would help.

I know this man is going to be on the edge of his seat until I get to his place. Plus I miss him, so I grab my purse and begin to say goodbye to my family.

As soon as I start my car, his response comes.

Logan: My dick just twitched. I think he is saying that he would very much appreciate that form of therapy. Get your sexy ass over here...NOW.

It takes twenty long minutes to drive to his place. When I get there, he is nowhere to be found on the first floor. So I make my way up the stairs until I reach his bedroom. The bathroom door is wide open and I hear noise coming from within. When I approach the door, Logan is standing there in just a towel as he trims his beard.

I stand there, taking in the scene in front of me. Logan doing something so personal in front of me, it gives me goosebumps. When he notices my presence, he turns his body my way and leans his hip against the counter.

“My therapist is here,” he smiles.

I can't help but laugh. "Call me that again and I'll show you a therapist. I'll make you sit for hours and talk about your feelings. Don't forget, I'm a chick. I can talk feelings all day long."

His face has an adorable grimace to it. "Never mind! I take it back."

Opening his arms, he waves me towards him with his fingers. Once I'm right in front of him, he wraps me up in a huge bear hug. I think I'm obsessed with this place right here. The feel of his chest hair on my face, the smell of his body wash. I feel so relaxed and at peace.

"Mmm...this feels nice," I whisper.

He moans back and it reminds me about our text exchange. I don't like the idea of him coming home stressed from work. I want to take that stress away any way that I can.

I look up at him. It's those damn crinkles at the corner of his eyes, they get me every time. I want to kiss them. It shows a lifetime of smiles from this man. Smiles that may sometimes have been forced while he battled the struggles with his disorder. But they show how much he tries to make everyone happy, to put on a facade for the world. I'm so honored that he trusted me to show his wounds to. I'm going to make it my life's mission to heal those deep wounds within him. To show him that he is just as deserving of everything life has to offer as anyone else.

I grab his towel and yank it until it falls to the ground.

“I believe your therapy session starts right now,” I smirk up at him as I get on my knees.

I spend the next ten minutes showing him exactly what I can do to make his troubles disappear, at least momentarily.

Afterwards, he insisted that he needed to taste me. I told him he didn't have to, but the man is an animal and feasted on me like he hadn't eaten in weeks. We worked up such a sweat, we had to jump back in the shower.

Now, as we lie together on the couch, I remember the words Ryan spoke to me earlier at my parents' house. Curiosity gets the best of me.

“So, Ryan and I were talking today, and you came up,” I tell him as I rest my head on his chest.

“Uh-oh. Am I in trouble?” he says as his hand rubs up and down my back.

I giggle at his boyish response, wondering what he did wrong already. “No. We were talking about how much time he spends with Alicia and if you miss him at all. He said all you would miss is him being your wingman, but otherwise, you were too preoccupied being a man-whore. Those aren't his exact words, but that was the gist.”

Much to my surprise, Logan laughs. “Don't tell him I said this, but Ryan is such a drama queen.”

“I think Avery would agree with you, but...what do you mean?”

“I think sometimes Ryan would compete with me. He would never admit it, but I saw the jealousy when a girl showed more interest in me. Most of the time, a girl would show interest in me and ask for my number, but I never actually called her. Don’t get me wrong, I was no saint...but it’s not nearly as many women as I’m sure Ryan thinks it is. And half the time if I left with a woman, I was just trying to get her home safe.”

“So, have you ever been in a serious relationship? I don’t think I’ve ever heard Ryan talk about you being with one girl for very long.”

He squeezes me tighter. “Maybe a couple girls here or there that were a bit longer, but only like six months tops. I’ve never been in anything particularly serious. What about you, anyone serious while you were away at school?”

“No, none for me. Actually, I never even thought about it until today, but there seemed to be a trend in my breakups, if you even want to call them that. More like, conversations not to take it any further.”

“Oh, yeah? What was the trend?”

I sigh. “They all said they could tell I wasn’t really into them. Claiming I never really called much or showed that much of an interest to get to know them.”

“Was that true?” he asks.

“I mean, I guess so. Like I said, I never really thought about it. There was always just this feeling like...I can’t explain it. Like

I'd know when the right guy came along, or maybe that the right one came along already, but the timing wasn't right."

"You think you were waiting for me?" his soothing voice asked hopefully. "Because I think I was fighting against my feelings...never settling long on anyone else because deep down I knew..."

"It was always you," I finished for him.

"Exactly."

I smile against his chest. Life is perfect right now, in this moment. I do my best to soak in the feeling, knowing life isn't always this beautiful.

Chapter Twenty-One

Logan

“How are things going with your girl?” Jeff’s voice echoes from under the fire truck.

He majored in engineering and grew up working on cars with his dad before deciding to take a different route with his career. That leaves him as our go-to guy when it comes to engines and anything mechanical.

“It’s going, man. We’re actually moving in together in a couple weeks.”

There’s silence under the truck, and I’m not sure if he heard me or not.

“Are you sure about that?” he says. “You’ve only been together for a couple of weeks.”

My stomach churns at his reaction. I was worried that was how this was going to appear to the outside world. To me and Mollie, it feels like it’s exactly what is supposed to happen. I’ve known her forever, pined for her for years, and I’ve never

felt like this before in my life. I trust her, open up to her about thoughts and feelings that nobody else in my life knows about.

“I’ve never been more sure about anything in my entire life,” I tell him. “I know it seems sudden, but I’ve known her for twelve years. We are so much more to each other than two people who’ve dated for a couple weeks. There’s history between us.”

Jeff slides out from under the truck, all greased up as he wipes his hands and face.

“All set, we should be good to go.” He throws his tools in the box. “Anyway, I know you two have history, but there’s still a lot to learn about each other. There are habits and things that you don’t know until you’ve been with someone for awhile.”

I run my hand along the back of my neck where my stress always seems to take root. I understand his concerns.

“I’m not worried about that. I’m concerned about what her family will think. It’s the whole reason I’ve stayed away from her in the past. I’ve never been good enough for her, but she knows me... all of me, all my demons and still seems to think I’m worth it. And call me a dick, but once I got a taste of her, I knew there was no way I was going to be able to back away. As for habits and stuff,” I smile as I think about Mollie. “I know that girl’s habits and quirks like the back of my hand. And I think every damn one of them is endearing as hell. I don’t think we have any issues there.”

Jeff chuckles. “I don’t doubt that you know her well. I could sense the connection between the two of you in the couple

minutes I saw you two together. I guess it comes down to how her family reacts. Of course you're good enough for her. You're the best guy I know. I'm just worried that the secrecy will be an issue. Better to get it out in the open sooner rather than later. They don't need to be finding this shit out on moving day."

He's right about that. Mollie and I need to get it over with and tell her family about us. The longer we wait, the more awkward moving day will be for everybody.

Later that night, after we've eaten dinner and are relaxing on the couch, I decide it's a good time to bring it up.

"You know, I think we need to tell your family about us soon. You start classes in almost two weeks."

Mollie looks up at me from lying her head on my shoulder. "I know, you're right. I'm not sure why I'm so nervous, my parents love you, they are going to be happy about it. Ryan may be a little taken back, but he'll adjust."

"I think you're being a little overly optimistic about this whole thing," I warn her.

I don't want to be the pessimist, but I'm worried she will be let down when our announcement isn't met with the warm welcome she is expecting.

"I think you're not giving yourself enough credit."

I smile. One thing is clear, this woman is going to be my best cheerleader in life.

“How about you come over for Sunday dinner this weekend? We can tell everybody then,” she suggests.

I swallow hard as my body becomes increasingly anxious. An official date makes everything so real. What if I lose my best friend over this?

“Hey,” Mollie pulls me out of my thoughts. “I feel you tensing up on me. It’s going to be okay. I promise.”

I love you. The words are on the tip of my tongue, and it dawns on me that I’ve never said them to anyone before. But they’ve been playing in my mind since I broke down and told her about my disorder. The way she loved me for it, made me feel strong.

“Molls,” my voice shakes. “I love you.”

She stiffens in my arm, remaining still and quiet for a minute. Before I can panic and create a whole tragic scenario in my head where she tells me it’s too soon and she doesn’t feel the same, she looks up at me with tears in her eyes.

“I love you, too,” her voice croaks.

We are both smiling at each other, my heart feeling light and open for the first time ever.

This woman, this amazingly bright and sophisticated woman, loves me. I almost can’t believe it. I’ve told myself over and over for years that someone like her was way too good for me. That if only she knew the truth about me, about how I basically have to operate like a child half the time, giving

myself rewards for completing a task, then certainly she wouldn't find me at all attractive.

“Why are you crying?” I ask as I wipe a tear that has escaped her eye.

She shrugs, looking slightly embarrassed. “I can't believe you just told me you love me. I think the nine-year-old in me just fainted.”

My chest vibrates with laughter. “I've always had a soft spot for that nine-year-old.”

“So, are we good for Sunday?” she asks.

“Yeah, let's do it!” I lean down and kiss her lips.

Her head falls back on my shoulder, my arm pulling her in closer to me.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Mollie

I find Logan in his garage where he has a small gym setup, lifting some ungodly amount of weight, his arms bulging with muscles. I know I came in here for a reason, I'm just having a really hard time remembering that reason. Muscles, sweat, ripped, sex...those are the only things flying through my brain.

He must sense my presence because he drops the weights, wipes the sweat off his face with the bottom of his shirt, revealing his abs. Ugh, it's so damn sexy when guys do that.

"You keep looking at me like that, and I will be finishing this workout very differently than I had originally planned." He gives my body a raking gaze with his burning glare.

"Is that a promise?" I say playfully.

"Get over here, Molls. Right. Now," he says with a clenched jaw, eyes fixed on me.

I push off the door frame as my body moves slowly and seductively until I am standing in his space looking up at him

with eagerness.

“Did I ever tell you that you have a sassy little mouth?” he squeezes his fists at his sides.

I nod my head left and right. He’s never brought it up, but I know I do. What is he going to do about it? He seems so angry, but in a hot way. It’s making me tingle all over.

“Well, you do. And do you know what I do when you sass me like that?” he fists my hair and pulls my head to the right so I’m forced to look at him exactly how he wants it.

Holy shit! My panties are soaked. This is a kink I had no idea that I had. Once again, I find myself shaking my head at him, too stunned to form any words.

“I’ll tell you what happens. You get punished. Do you want me to do that, Molls? Do you want me to punish you for talking back to me?” his eyes slightly soften at me, like he’s trying to tell me it’s okay if I don’t want that.

But I do! Oh my gosh, I want that so badly.

“I do,” I manage to say hoarsely.

A small smile forms on his face before it’s replaced with his smoldering gaze.

“Rest your hands on this bar right here,” he barks as he guides me over to his bench press bar.

I place my hands on the bar, following his demand, and look over my shoulder.

“Good girl,” he praises me. “I’m going to pull down your shorts and teach you a lesson.”

It dawns on me, I’m about to get spanked. My hands grip the bar tighter, nerves beginning to settle in the pit of my stomach. I nod my head to let him know to keep going, hoping I don’t freak out and run away.

My shorts and panties are on the ground in an instant while Logan makes a deep, growling sound at the sight.

“You look so sexy bent over like this, waiting for me to punish you.”

His hand comes out and first rubs gentle circles on my cheek. I can’t stop looking over my shoulder, mesmerized by this beautiful man standing behind me, looking at me like I’m everything he’s ever wanted.

“Look at you watching me like that. You can’t wait to feel what I’m going to do to you,” he smirks at me, but not a happy one, a devious one.

It happens so fast. I narrowly see his arm wind up before his hand connects with my skin. A foreign noise rips through my throat, one of painful surprise and yet...satisfaction. My skin already burns, but it makes me feel alive. He does it again and my noises get even louder as the pain heightens, but so does the pleasure. After several more whips, Logan soothes my skin with his hand before leaning over my shoulder and whispering in my ear.

“You survived your first punishment. What did you think?” his warm breath hits my ear.

I turn my head so our lips are touching as I speak. “It makes me want to be punished again.”

His lips meet mine in a searing kiss that is felt all over my body. Our lips are moving quickly against each other’s as we both begin to moan. He stands up and rips his shirt off before dropping his shorts. His dick springs free and is ready to go.

“I need you now, no more foreplay,” he says before grabbing my hips and slamming inside of me with a grunt.

Catching Logan in this mindset, where he’s lifting weights and getting in the zone is the best discovery I’ve ever made. I don’t think this side of him comes out often, but it’s hot as fuck. His fingers are clutching my hips so hard that I know I’ll have bruises. As he pounds into me with such force, I feel the bench I’m leaning on move.

What we’re doing, it’s animalistic and loud. I can hear the evidence of my slickness every time he slams into me.

Within minutes we are both coming apart. My walls clenching around him as he jets into me.

While he’s recovering on top of me, our rapid breathing sounds in the room, he leans his cheek on my back.

“Are you okay?” his voice sounds fragile, like he is doubting what just happened.

I lift myself up as he pulls off me, before I turn to face him. “I’m more than okay. I may need a bath to sooth my body a

bit,” I begin but he cuts in.

“Shit,” his head falls. He works the back of his neck with his hand. “I’m sorry, Molls. I don’t know what came over me. I... shouldn’t have treated you like that.”

My eyebrows raise, surprised at how affected he seems by what we just did.

“What are you talking about? It was...amazing. I’ve never felt anything like that before.”

His head shakes left to right repeatedly. “No, you’re too good for that. You don’t deserve to be degraded like that.”

“Logan,” I take a step towards him as my head leans to the left. “Have you ever done that before? And this is not a trick question, I’m not going to freak out and get all jealous about your sexual history.”

He looks down at the ground, nodding his head up and down.

“And did you feel ashamed about it with those women?”

This time, his head shakes as he admits he didn’t feel ashamed with the other women. I think I know what this is about. Same thing with his ADHD, he has me on this pedestal.

“Well, then there’s no reason to feel that way with me. I’m no different than those women. I want you to do those things to me, I liked it.”

He looks through his annoyingly long lashes, voice sounding a bit more hopeful. “You really liked that? You don’t feel like I disrespected you?”

I can't help it. I wrap my arms around his stomach. "I love that you care so much about my feelings, but I promise I will speak up for myself if I don't like something. And Logan," I look up at him. "I liked every second of that. You are sexy as hell when you're angry. I may be picking some fights in the future."

His face creases as his smile breaks free. "I think I could handle that. Nothing wrong with a little angry sex here or there, right?"

"Exactly." I hold him a bit closer, squeezing my love into him.

"Sorry I just freaked out," he puts his hands on my shoulders and pulls me away so we can look at each other.

I shrug. "No biggie. I'm sure I'll have my moments."

He chuckles. "I might not handle those moments as good as you handle mine."

"I wouldn't think so, men usually don't." I bite my lip and wink at him, letting him I know I'm joking...kind of.

He laughs. "What were you coming out here for anyway?"

"Oh, um, we're all set for dinner at my parents' house tomorrow," I tell him as we walk back into the house.

He stops us in our tracks. "How did you manage to do that without them questioning why *you* are the one inviting me?"

"It wasn't that hard actually. I just told them we ran into each other at the café and I invited you over since it's been a while. They didn't really blink an eye to it."

We continue on in the house, holding hands as we naively believe that things are going to fall into place for us. They never have in the past, why would it be any different now?

Chapter Twenty-Three

Logan

When I woke up this morning, fear knotted inside of me at the idea of telling Mollie's family tonight. I couldn't eat breakfast, and sitting still was not an option. After a long, strenuous workout in the garage, I took a shower and felt a little bit more like myself. Anyone who doesn't work out must have some other seriously amazing coping techniques during times of stress. I couldn't imagine not sweating out all the excess energy.

Now that the moment is here, I feel an odd sense of calm. Mollie decided to spend the night at her parents' house last night so she could help her mom with dinner. We also thought it would be a good idea if we didn't drive together and make it completely obvious what was going on before we even had the chance to tell them.

I wanted to bring something, so I picked up some beer for the guys, a bottle of wine, and flowers for Mrs. Price. When I ring the doorbell, Mollie opens the door looking stunning in a

white, floral dress. Her hair is down in waves and her skin is sun-kissed to perfection. Her wide grin is infectious, and I can't help but mirror her expression.

"Hey, you," she greets me.

"Hey, yourself," I reply. "You look exceptionally beautiful today."

I want to lean in and kiss her glossy lips, but I resist the urge. Instead, I hand her the flowers as we make our way into the kitchen.

"These are gorgeous," she admires the bouquet of white lilies, pink roses, and some kind of greenery that I do not know the name of.

"Mom, look what Logan brought," she holds up the flowers.

Mrs. Price is standing over the stove when she turns around.

"Oh, Logan. You are such a charmer. Thank you so much. They are beautiful flowers."

"You're welcome, Mrs. Price. I also brought some drinks." I hold up the beer and wine, shrugging my shoulder.

For as many times as I've eaten at their home, I've never come with such items before and I wonder if I'm trying a tad too hard. Hopefully, they don't think I'm trying to butter them up.

"I'm sure Ryan and Greg would appreciate a beer. You can go ahead and join them on the deck out back if you would like. Mollie and I are just finishing up in the kitchen."

I look at Mollie who gives me a nod to go join the guys.

Okay, I think I could manage that. It's exactly what I would have done before Mollie and I were a thing. It would be nice for Ryan to see that nothing is going to change between the two of us just because I'm in love with his sister.

With that, I grab three beers, turn on my heel and stride to the sliding glass door that leads to the deck.

To my surprise, Alicia is outside with the guys. She's laughing at something Mr. Price says, and I get a glimpse of my possible future. Coming over here for family dinners, hanging out with these people as we share laughs.

Ryan turns around and dips his head as he gestures at the drinks in my hands.

"What up, bro? One of those better be for me," he holds his hand out for the beer.

"Nah, your mom told me to bring one out for Alicia and Mr. Price. She said only people whose brain cells haven't been fried."

Mr. Price chuckles, accepting the beer I hand over to him. "Nice to see you, son. It's been a while."

"So, you run into my sister and beg to come to my family dinner?" Ryan opens his beer. "If you wanted to see me, you could have just called. You've been MIA this summer."

Shit, I'm already stuck and not sure what to say to him. I look back inside, hoping Molls will come out and save me when Alicia steps in.

"Leave him alone, Ryan. He's busy saving lives."

She winks at me, and I realize she must already know what's coming tonight. I wonder if Mollie forewarned her, or if she is just putting it all together.

I fall into a chair next to Mr. Price as we all settle into easy conversation. After one beer and some laughs, I start to feel like tonight may go well.

Just then, the sliding door opens. Mollie and Mrs. Price walk outside followed by a man I've never seen before. He's tall and looks to be around my age with dark hair and dressed a little too nicely for a dinner at the Prices.

"Everyone this is Luke. His mother is a dear friend of mine. I thought it would be lovely to have him join in our dinner tonight," she introduces him.

I notice Mr. Price give a slight eye roll, and I'm not sure what has him so annoyed. It doesn't sit well with me.

We all say hello, as he takes a seat. Mollie sits next to Alicia while Mrs. Price heads back inside. Mollie looks a bit nervous. She isn't making eye contact with me. I wonder if she thinks it will give us away if we look at each other right now. We should just rip off the band-aid and tell everyone. I guess we can do it after we've all enjoyed our dinner. If things don't go well, at least we wouldn't have ruined the meal.

"Okay, everyone. Let's gather inside, dinner is ready," Mrs. Price smiles brightly at all of us as she motions for everyone to come inside.

As the group enters the kitchen, I follow in behind Mollie whispering in her ear. “Everything okay?”

She looks over her shoulder, offering me a nod and a small smile, one that is obviously forced. Is she having second thoughts about telling everyone?

Just as we enter the dining room, Mrs. Price is pulling out a chair. “Luke, you can sit here,” she says. “Oh, Mollie, sit next to Luke.”

That makes me stop dead in my tracks. Why does she want Mollie to sit next to Luke? Mollie clearly doesn’t know what else to say, so she takes a seat next to this new guest of theirs. I end up at the opposite end of the table from Mollie, next to Ryan.

“The food looks delicious, Mrs. Price,” Luke engages in some annoying flattery.

My eyes are sharp as they assess Luke sitting next to my girl. Mollie looks at me with what could only be described as a look of panic. Does she know something that I don’t?

“Oh, sweetie. Call me Margaret,” Mrs. Price offers.

She’s never corrected me before, telling me to call her by her first time. It’s never bothered me though, and I’ve never compared it to anyone else, until now. But something just isn’t sitting right with me.

Maybe twenty minutes into the meal, Mrs. Price starts again with her Luke obsession.

“So, Mollie. Luke is a surgeon at Memorial Hospital. I thought you two would have a lot in common. I told you Mollie was starting med-school in a couple weeks.”

It dawns on me. Mrs. Price is trying to set Mollie up with him. How the hell did I miss that? Mollie meets my eyes with a sympathetic look. Clearly, she knew nothing about this, but doesn't know how to stop it.

Suddenly, I feel like such an idiot. Look at the man she envisions her daughter to be with, a fucking surgeon. I've never felt more inadequate in my entire life. This is worse than the time in fourth grade when the teacher called on me to read a page out loud. I got stuck on the word familiar and she was relentless in making me try over and over with no assistance until I got it. That memory still haunts me to this day.

“You did tell me,” Luke confirms. “Mollie, I'm here for you if you ever have any questions. I know the entire process can feel a bit intimidating.”

Mollie opens her mouth to say something, but Mrs. Price beats her to it.

“Aw, well that is so sweet. I'm sure Mollie will have a ton of questions for you along the way. I'm sure things have changed since my time in med-school. Plus, she doesn't want to talk to her mother about this stuff.”

“You're laying it on a little thick, Mom,” Ryan suggests.

“Ryan, don't be rude,” she barks back.

Luke and Mr. Price enjoy a chuckle at the two bickering at each other, while Mollie looks over at me with pleading eyes. I don't know what she wants me to do. Clearly, telling her parents about us tonight is not going to happen. That's the last thing we need is to expose our relationship on the night they are trying to set her up with a doctor. Instead finding out she's moving in with a firefighter, someone who never even went to college.

"Logan," Mollie interrupts the conversation. "How is work going?" her eyes brimmed with tenderness.

"Oh, I'm sure no one wants to hear about my work," I say feebly, a sense of inadequacy sweeping over me.

Mollie catches my eyes. She bites her lip and looks away.

"Nonsense," Mr. Price rejects. "It's been a long while since we've caught up. I'd like to know how it's going."

"What do you do for a living?" Luke asks casually.

I know it's not meant to be a stiff comparison, that he is just making conversation, but the question coming from him is a punch to the gut.

"He's a firefighter," Ryan grabs my shoulder. "He's badass."

I give a weak smile. That's me, the badass whose IQ is probably garbage compared to the people sitting around me at the moment.

"Ah, that's commendable. I just finished this fascinating book about the personality traits of first responders. It's a wonderful

book written by Charles Peterson. I don't suppose you've read that one?"

I chuckle to myself. Of course, his first question to me is about a book. What would he like me to say to that? I can give him the truth. No, Luke, I have not read that book. I don't read anything because I can't focus beyond one simple page. I can barely get through the back of a cereal box. Yes, you heard me right. I am a grown man who can't get through the back of a cereal box. Oh, and by the way, Mr. and Mrs. Price, I'm in love with your daughter and she is moving in with me.

What felt like embarrassment before, inadequacy even, has turned to anger. I don't know what or who I'm most angry at. I think myself for thinking that this was ever going to go over smoothly. That they would ever look at me as a suitable partner for their daughter.

"I don't really read," my voice hardens despite speaking with a smile.

"Oh, uh, ok. Well, that's alright. It's not for everyone," Luke stutters through his response.

Mollie rolls her eyes. She's trying to disguise her annoyance of the entire situation, but it's written all over. I know this woman. I can read her like a damn book. Ha, how's that for irony? Can't read an actual book, but I can read every little expression on her face, in her movements, in the subtle things that no one else pays attention to.

The rest of dinner is awkward as hell. I sit there in silence just waiting for it to be over. I wish I could erase this entire

evening from my memory.

When it's over, I stand up and place my dish in the sink. Mollie is right behind me.

"Are you okay?" she whispers apprehensively.

"Not now, Mollie. I don't want to fucking talk about it," I say with bridled anger in my voice.

I need an escape, so I head for the hallway that leads to the garage. I open the door to garage. Once it's closed behind me, I lean against the wall and try to take deep breaths to keep my anger at bay.

When I hear the door open slowly, I know it's Mollie. I don't know what to say to her. How can I tell her this entire night has given me doubts?

When I feel her heat, her hand connects with my chest.

"Logan, please talk to me," uncertainty creeps through her voice.

I open my eyes and can see the concern in hers.

"What is there to say?" I sigh.

"Well, are we still going to tell my parents?" she asks.

My head jerks up quickly. "Are you crazy? They are trying to set you up with a surgeon. Do you really think they are going to receive it well to know you settled for me? I doubt they'd ever approve. We should just cut our losses right now."

Her eyes become misty. "What are you saying, Logan? You're not suggesting we break up?"

My heart physically aches hearing those words come out of her mouth. “I don’t know what I’m suggesting. But I mean... fuck...maybe. Did you see how elated your mom was at the thought of hooking you up with a *surgeon*? Imagine how disappointed she’ll be if we tell her tonight.”

Tears are now boldly streaming down her cheeks. “Logan, please don’t do this to us.”

Her hands come up to stroke my cheeks and I do everything in my power to mask my emotions, to hide the tear that wants to fall free. That’s the last thing my ego needs right now, is to be the man crying in front of the woman he loves.

“I love you,” she cries. “I...”

“What the hell is going on?” Ryan’s voice breaks our connection.

Our bodies stiffen as we whip our heads to the left.

Ryan is standing there with venom in his eyes, looking like he’s ready to attack.

“What the fuck are you doing with my sister?” he continues, his voice raising several octaves.

“What’s going on out there?” Mr. Price’s voice echoes in the hallway.

Mollie takes a step back, so we aren’t in each other’s arms. When Mr. Price steps out into the garage, I can tell he knows instantly what Ryan walked in on.

“Ryan, why don’t we go inside so you can calm down,” he suggests with his hand on his shoulder.

“Calm down?” Ryan shouts. “There is no calming down when I walk in on my best friend kissing my sister!”

Mrs. Price is now standing at the front door, hand to her chest. Great, here we go. Time for the looks of disappointment.

“What is going on out here?” she looks between Mollie and Ryan.

“You wanna know what’s going on?” Ryan speaks up. “Did you know your precious daughter was being taken advantage of by my best friend?”

“Ryan!” Mollie shouts. “How dare you accuse Logan of that!” while a sob racks through her.

My head falls to my chest in humiliating defeat. He already thinks I’m only capable of taking advantage of his sister. That’s how he sees me.

“Please, Mollie! Don’t be naive,” Ryan insults her.

“Ok, I think we all need to take a deep breath here,” Mrs. Price suggests, her hands raising in the air to try to articulate her words.

“No! Mollie, he isn’t good enough for you!” Ryan’s tone is coolly disapproving.

Mollie sucks in a breath, knowing that’s exactly why I told her we shouldn’t do this in the first place. It’s all exactly what I feared would happen, and now it’s reality. Ryan doesn’t think

I'm good enough for his sister. The insults are barbed and hurtful. I know I feared this, but somewhere in my heart I had gotten my hopes up thinking they would approve of us. That they would shake my hand and congratulate us.

I try to hide my inner misery from the probing stares, but it's no use. I'm crushed and heartbroken knowing that I will never be good enough for her in the eyes of her family. There's no way we can continue down this path if they don't approve.

"Ryan, how could you say that about your best friend?" Mollie says accusingly.

I want to tell her not to bother, to make this madness end now. I don't need to hear another reason why I'm such a failure in their eyes.

"I say that because he's my best friend, Mollie."

That's about all I can handle, I push off the wall.

"I, uh, should go," I somehow manage to croak out. "I'm sorry for any pain I've caused."

"Wait, no, Logan. Don't go!" Mollie begs, tears running down her cheeks. "Please."

I wipe off the tears that I can. "I think we both know this isn't going to work. You heard Ryan, I'm not good enough for you, and you deserve the world."

I take off for my car as I hear her whimper of a cry behind me. It's killing me right now. Knowing that I'm leaving her as she breaks down, but I have to get out of here. My eyes water as I get in the car, but I will not let them fall. If they come out, it's

just proof that the opinions of others have gotten to me. I won't let that happen.

I will not let them break me.

I've uttered those words to myself my entire life. For getting picked on because I can't read like everybody else, for watching my siblings succeed at a level I knew I was never going to attain, for hearing friends say I'm the athletic one, not the one with the brains.

I always told myself if I let them get to me, if I cry, it means they won. Today is no different, I will put up my walls and make sure they don't break me.

But it's different, you lost someone you love. You lost Mollie.

I shake my head at my desperate thoughts.

No, I never had Mollie.

She was never mine. We were living in secret, fooling ourselves with the idea that we were compatible. It's better this way, safer. Then why do I feel like my heart has just been run over by a semi-truck?

Chapter Twenty-Four

Mollie

My heart is so broken it's physically aching. I just watched Logan's world get torn down when his best friend confirmed his life-long fear that he isn't good enough for the woman he loves.

After Logan's car is out of sight, I turn around to face my family. Ryan doesn't seem to grasp the magnitude of what his words just set in motion.

"Do you have any idea what you just did?" I ground the words out between my teeth.

Ryan's eyes open wide in shock. "What *I* did? What about what you two did?"

"Now, Ryan. Don't say anything you're going to regret," Mom warns him.

Too late, Mother. He has already done irreparable damage. I saw the look in Logan's eyes, he was crushed.

“Ryan,” my cries come back full force. “You don’t understand. How could you accuse him of using me? Of not being good enough for me?”

“Well, he’s not!” he yells back with confidence. “I know the guy. I know him better than any of you. Trust me when I tell you, he isn’t good enough for you.”

“He’s *everything* to me! You ruined the best thing I’ve ever had in my entire life! And he’s your best friend! How can your best friend not be good enough for me? Do you even know, out of everything you could have said, any words you could have used, what *those* words just did to him?”

“Oh, please. Logan doesn’t give a shit about anything. He’ll be off to his next flavor of the week without a care in the world.”

A mocking laugh escapes me.

“That doesn’t seem like a very kind way to speak of your friend,” Dad engages.

“What, you aren’t mad about this? You should be furious, it’s your daughter we’re talking about.”

I notice Luke and Alicia standing in the hallway behind my mother. This is such a mess, I’m so embarrassed.

“I know, and I trust my daughter enough to believe she is making smart decisions. She’s never done anything in life to prove I should think otherwise.”

“Thanks, Dad,” my voice drops in volume.

“Seriously, Dad?” Ryan continues. “You think he’s good enough for her?”

“Would you stop saying that!” I scream louder than I ever have at anyone. “Just...stop. You don’t even know why Logan and I kept this a secret this summer. It’s because from the beginning, he had it in his head that he wasn’t good enough for me. He has ADHD. That’s why he decided not to go to college and why he has struggled his entire life with feeling inadequate. He didn’t want to date me because he thought I deserved someone better, someone smarter. And you just confirmed his fear, you used the exact words he’s been trying to talk himself out of since he was diagnosed. You have *no* idea the pain you just caused your best friend.”

I can see the shock of my words start to resonate with Ryan. My mother makes an audible gasp as her hand covers her mouth. There are tears starting to form in her eyes as she registers what this entire event has just done to Logan.

“I had no idea,” Ryan mutters, feeling slightly ashamed. “But still...he’s my best friend. He shouldn’t have gone behind my back. And he *is* a womanizer. He goes home with tons of ladies, he’s not right for you. That’s what I meant when I said he’s not good enough for you.”

I let out a loud exhale, frustrated this conversation is even happening. I’ve seen Ryan be a man whore for most of his life, now he’s passing judgement.

“Ryan, before Alicia, you were a player. How would you like it if I used that as a reason to warn her off from you when I

met her?" I suggest.

His eyes grow dark. I can see the mere idea of that angers him to his core.

"Right! You would be furious with me. Think about that anger, now imagine what Logan must be feeling. Second, I've discussed that with Logan already. He said you've always had this preconceived notion that he is hooking up with these girls left and right. Most of the time, when he leaves the bar with a girl, it's to make sure she gets home safely. You just make these automatic assumptions without ever speaking to him about it. Thirdly, no one ever has and ever will treat me as good as Logan. He respects me so much he kept away from me for years even though he had feelings."

"I think we all need to take a breather. A lot of words have been exchanged today that we should all sit on for a while," Mom suggests.

"I agree, sweetheart," Dad joins in. "Let's all go inside and gather ourselves."

As everyone starts to walk back into the house, I stay back as I try to determine my next move. Alicia jogs out to me and wraps me in her arms. Not realizing I was hanging on by a thread, my head falls on her shoulder and I let out a loud sob.

I'm not sure how long she holds me while I let out all my pain, but eventually we let go of each other as I try to wipe the tears from my face.

"I'm sorry," I smile. "I'm such a mess."

“Hey, no worries. I’m sorry that Ryan behaved the way he did. I will be having a word with him when we leave. I think he was trying to be a protective brother in his own way. It was misguided, but still came from love.”

“But Logan...what do I do?”

“Talk to him. Tell him Ryan was just taken by surprise, and that he didn’t mean he wasn’t good enough for you in the way Logan took it.”

I take a deep breath. “Yeah, I should do that. Thanks for being so supportive.”

Alicia reaches out and squeezes my hand. “Anytime. Now get out of here and go find Logan.”

I nod my head in agreement and take off for my car. Just as I’m approaching it, I come to a screeching halt.

Shit, I need my purse and keys.

I sprint back into my house and take the stairs two at a time. Grabbing my things, I’m running down and almost out the door when my mom catches me.

“Mollie, can we talk?” she looks pretty shaken up.

My mother has always been a peacemaker, so I imagine this event taking place under her roof has her nerves all out of whack.

“I was going to go find Logan. I don’t care what you guys think, I’m in love with him.”

A small smile appears on her face. “It won’t take long.”

“Sure. Where do you want to talk?”

“Let’s go up to your room.”

We both walk in silence upstairs into my room. I take a seat on my bed while my mom pulls out the chair to my desk.

“Firstly, I wanted to apologize for Luke’s presence at dinner tonight. I’m going to assume the whole reason you and Logan were here tonight was to tell everyone about the two of you.”

I shake my head up and down, confirming her assumption.

“I want you to know, I would have never invited him if I had known. But more importantly, I want to know about you and Logan. When did you two start seeing each other?” she asks with interest.

“Um, at the trip to the lake house is when it began,” I explain with my head down.

It feels kind of awkward telling my own mother when I first hooked up with my brother’s best friend. She’s always been easy to talk to, but we never talk about sex. And I assume she knows Logan and I didn’t start this relationship out with a serious sit-down conversation.

My mother is a lot of things, but stupid is not one of them.

“And I imagine it moved rather quickly since that trip was five weeks ago?” she suggests with lifted eyebrows.

“Yes, it did. We’ve known each other for a long time, it was different than any of our other relationships. Plus, I’ve loved him for a long time.”

“I know you have.”

My eyes dart up to meet hers. “You do?”

She chuckles. “You’ve walked around with googly eyes at that boy since you were nine. And I noticed that he’s been in love with you for quite some time as well.”

I’m not understanding what is coming out of my mom’s mouth right now.

“What?” is all I can manage to say.

“I’ve been onto you two for quite a while. I was taking out the trash on the side of the house on your graduation night....,” she stops, her eyes gentle and understanding.

It dawns on me what she is referring to. “You saw us.”

“I did. And I observed him pulling away from you ever since that night. I’m a woman, and women can tell when a man is fighting his feelings. He’s been doing that ever since that night. When you told me that he was coming over for dinner tonight, I had an idea.”

Mom looks guilty, stains of scarlet coloring her cheeks.

“Luke.”

She nods her head. “I didn’t know you two were already together. Had no idea the reason you were coming over tonight. I thought if I brought Luke over, maybe showed Logan he was running out of time, made him jealous, he might just open his eyes.”

“Did Luke know?” I ask.

She nods. "I'm not that cruel. Luke knew it was strictly platonic, that I just wanted you to have a connection to someone in the medical field. I know it was silly, your father told me it wasn't a good idea. I normally don't act so recklessly. I'm so ashamed."

I see the immense amount of pain she's putting on herself. "Mom, you didn't know. Honestly, the Luke thing didn't help, but I think Logan would have gotten over that. It's Ryan's words. Knowing Ryan thinks that about him, it just confirmed so much of what Logan has been telling himself for so long."

Tears blind my eyes as I try to hold them at bay.

"I had no idea about his struggles. Ryan had no right to be so cruel to him. I think Ryan's anger was more a feeling of betrayal."

I sigh heavily. "I know, we shouldn't have hidden it for so long. But I imagine whether we told him in a day or a year, he was always going to feel betrayed that Logan ever went for his little sister."

"Ryan's always been protective of you. He would never leave your side when you were sick or the time you needed surgery on your foot. From the moment we brought you home from the hospital, you have been his to protect."

"But I'm old enough to make my own decisions. He doesn't need to protect me."

"Maybe you need to have that talk with him."

"First, I need to go find Logan."

“That’s probably a good idea. Make sure he’s okay. Tell him I’m sorry,” her voice sounds weak again.

“Mom, stop being so hard on yourself. But, yes, I’ll let him know.”

I’m in Logan’s driveway half an hour later, but he’s not home.

I’m trying to rack my brain with where he would go if he were that upset, but I can’t come up with anything. Maybe his friends at the station, but I don’t have their numbers. I barely recall their names. Maybe I don’t know as much as I thought I did about Logan. Were we crazy for jumping in so fast?

Sure, I know more deep, personal details about him that others don’t. But the things you only know the longer you’re together, like his friend’s information or where he might go when upset, I’ve yet to learn those details.

It’s only eight at night right now. After several ignored phone calls and texts, I shut my car off and recline my seat. I’m going to hang out here until he gets back. I can’t imagine going to sleep tonight until the two of us talk.

With every passing minute, more fear begins to seep into my blood. It’s been almost four hours. He hasn’t picked up his phone and is still not home. It’s midnight, where could he be?

This time as the tears come, I’m alone, where I can let the sadness take over. I don’t have the energy to hold it back or try to be strong.

All I can do is feel the disappointment at how the evening turned out. When I woke up this morning, I thought I was

going to spend the evening telling my family that I'm the happiest I've ever been. Instead, I'm crying by myself in my car.

An hour later, I give up. I don't know where he is, what he's doing, or if he's even okay. On the drive back to my parents', I'm torn between being worried about him to being furious with him. I just want to know that he's okay. That doesn't seem to be a lot to ask.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Logan

Why the hell does my head hurt so bad? I roll over just as I realize I'm not in my bed and go crashing down to the floor.

My eyes shoot open as I take in the scene. What the hell? Am I at Jeff's house?

Memories of last night start to come back to me in waves. Ryan screaming at me, confirming my fears of not being good enough for his sister. Me leaving the Price's house and making Jeff meet me at our favorite pub.

"Did you just fall off the fucking couch?" Jeff walks in holding two cups of coffee.

I slowly pull myself back up to sit on the couch.

"There's medicine and water on the coffee table. You might want to take that first before you drink any coffee."

He places the mug on the coaster to my right.

“What happened last night? I remember you meeting me at the bar and having a couple of drinks...but things get fuzzy after that.”

He chuckles before taking a sip of his coffee. “You had more than a couple of drinks, man. You could barely form words by the end of the night. I didn’t want you driving home so I drove you back here. The owner agreed to let your car stay in their parking lot all night.”

Shit. I can’t believe I got that messed up. I remember just wanting the constant criticism in my head to go away.

“Thanks for lookin’ out for me,” I rub the back of my head, slightly embarrassed that he saw me at such a low point.

“That’s what friends are for. How are you feelin’ about everything this morning?”

I groan. “I don’t know. What exactly did I say last night?”

“That you could never be with Mollie if you knew her brother spent the entire relationship thinking she deserved better. That you knew deep down all along that you weren’t enough. You said you wished you didn’t start to believe in such a fantasy that someone like her would settle for someone like you. Do you still believe that?”

A mocking laugh escapes me. “Of course, nothing’s changed. I’m definitely still not worthy of Mollie.”

Jeff doesn’t look happy with me. His head shakes disapprovingly. “I said it last night, but I’ll say it again. There is no woman on this earth that is too good for you. You’re one

of the good guys. Shit, you put your life on the line for a career. Not only that, you treat everyone with respect and never flaunt what you have. I don't give a shit if you have some stupid disorder. The time it takes you to complete a task doesn't mean you aren't smart. You have instinct, natural intelligence. Don't sell yourself short because of some title a doctor gave you. You have ADHD, and this may sound cliché, but you're more than your diagnosis. My brother has depression, but that diagnosis is more for the doctors to have a category to put him into for treatment options. But he himself isn't depression. That does not reflect on whether or not he is worthy of the things in life that he wants.”

I look away, feeling self-conscious as hell that a tear just dripped down my cheek. Men don't cry, especially in front of each other.

“You can fucking cry in front of me, dude. That shit don't bother me. When you've been through your brother's darkest moments, you witness a lot. Life is no joke. To live is to suffer. But maybe try to think of it in this perspective. If a young boy came up to you and told you that he was diagnosed with ADHD, and he is embarrassed to tell anyone. If he tells you that he wants to keep it a secret from everyone forever, what would you say to him? Would you tell him, ‘Yeah, good idea. You should be embarrassed by that.’ “

I look at him in disgust. “Of course I wouldn't say that to him.”

“Okkkay,” Jeff draws out. “Then what exactly would you say?”

I shrug my shoulders. “I don’t know. I’d tell the kid he’s got the world ahead of him and can be anything that he wants. That it doesn’t matter what people think of him, and all that matters is what he thinks of himself. I’d tell him he will find people in his life that will love him regardless of how long it takes him to get things done or how far he goes in his education, and to cling to those people and never let them go. Fuck, I’d tell him life is too short to worry about such trivial things and to just do what he loves.”

The corner of his mouth turns up. “Good, now imagine that little boy is you and say it again.”

“Excuse me?” I question him, thinking he’s lost his mind.

“You heard me. If that’s what you would say to the little boy, then that’s what you should be saying to the little boy within you who still holds all of these beliefs.”

I begin to realize what he is trying to say to me. I’m not sure I’m quite ready to do that, but I nod my head in understanding.

I smile. “Were you a therapist in another life? This feels kinda awkward.”

“I told you my brother suffers from depression. I’ve learned a thing or two about these things. Read up on some books in an effort to help him. It’s actually pretty interesting stuff. We all have major wounds that need to be healed. I think you might need to look deeper into what yours is.”

After taking down the coffee, I feel mildly better.

“I think I should head home. Thanks for everything, man. I really appreciate you.”

Jeff follows me to the front door. “Don’t mention it. I expect the same in return when I hit a low point.”

“You got it. I’ll see you at the station tomorrow.”

As soon as I step outside, I notice I have no car. Shit, I need to Uber back to the bar. I can’t believe I got that bad last night and Jeff had to step in and take care of me. I’m the guy’s boss, I really should have behaved more professionally.

On my drive from the bar back to my house, I charge my phone. It died sometime last night, but I didn’t expect to see so many messages and missed calls from Mollie.

Shit! She was really worried about me last night.

I know I should call her, but I feel like I need to get in a workout first so I can focus and think about what I should say.

Me: I’m sorry. My phone died last night. I was out with Jeff from the station. I’m alright. We’ll talk soon.

It’s not that I don’t want to see her or talk to her, I just don’t even know what to say. I’m not in the right head space to make any decisions.

My body tenses as I lie on the bench and struggle to bring the weights up from my sides. I’ve been going for a solid hour. My light gray shirt is now sweat through so thoroughly that it appears dark gray. My muscles are screaming at me to stop,

but I'm no closer to knowing what to say to Mollie than I was when I started.

One thing I know for sure, her and I need to take a couple days to really think about this. Think about if being together despite her family's reservations is really a good idea. Or will it always be this shadow hanging above us?

After my last rep, my arms officially give out and I accept defeat.

Time to be a man and call her.

I pick up the phone and take a deep breath before hitting her name. My body begins to pace back and forth in my garage.

"Hello," she answers, the hint of sadness evident in her voice.

"Hi," I reply.

We both sit in silence for a minute.

"I was worried about you last night," she tells me.

I blow out a breath. "I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking very clearly."

"So, what happened?"

"I was out with Jeff at a bar, trying to calm down. I had too many drinks, so he drove me back to his place where I crashed on the couch."

"I see."

"I'm sorry I didn't text or call you back," I apologize.

She sighs on the other end of the phone. "It's alright. I was just worried. I'm sorry about how the entire night unfolded. I know

it wasn't exactly what we had in mind."

A bitter chuckle escapes me. "Yeah, definitely not what we had in mind."

"I haven't had a chance to talk to Ryan yet, but my mom and I had a good conversation last night."

I scratch my head, somehow doubting that the conversation could have been called good. No matter what she says, I saw the way she looked at Luke, like she couldn't have dreamt up a better companion for her daughter. The scene makes my blood boil and the anger, bitterness, sadness, disappointment...all of it comes flooding back to me.

"Look Molls, I was just calling to tell you that I think I need some time to think about things. Get my head on straight before we can sit down and have a conversation about this."

"You...you don't want to hear about what my mom and I discussed?" she sounds defeated.

As much as I loathe myself for being the reason she sounds like that, I know that I'm not okay right now. I can't bear to hear what her mom had to say about it. Mrs. Price doesn't have a mean bone in her body, so I'm sure she was very kind with her words. But I was there last night, I know what I saw. I know the standard she has for Mollie.

The thing is, I don't even blame her. Mollie does deserve the best, and a surgeon would be able to provide a certain lifestyle for her that I never could.

“I do want to hear it, I promise. It’s just all a little much right now. Before we even begin to dive deeper into this, I need to make sure I know what I want.”

Her voice shakes as she speaks. “You mean you don’t know if you want *us* anymore?”

“Mollie, I will always want us. But I don’t know if that’s what is right. What Ryan said, he has a point. I’ve done nothing in my life to prove that I am good enough for his little sister.”

She starts to cry, and my head falls forward. I wish I knew the right thing to do. That’s why I need some time.

“Ryan was wrong. It doesn’t matter what he thinks.”

“He’s your brother. You’ve always cared about his opinion.”

“I don’t care about this. I just want you,” she cries.

Dammit, I ball my fist up and punch the bag hanging from the ceiling. My muscles cry out in protest at the strain.

“Mollie, I’m not going to be the reason you and Ryan have a strained relationship. I grew up around you two, you’ve always been close. I just...I *can’t* do that to you guys. I’m not saying it’s over. I’m just asking for some time. A couple of days.”

She doesn’t put up a fight. I sense the resignation, and part of me wants to beg her to fight for us. To somehow show me that the way I’m seeing this is wrong.

“Okay, I can give you some time.”

Instead, she gives me what I said I wanted, and yet none of it feels right. All I want is for her to be back in my arms, laughing around my house...what was going to be *our* house.

“I’ll talk to you soon,” I whisper.

She barely gets out her whimper of a goodbye before she hangs up.

Suddenly, I don’t care what my muscles are trying to tell me. I throw my phone down and start to go at my punching bag. Each punch just fuels my anger instead of diminishes it. I’m not sure how long I go for, but eventually, my body gives out and I fall to the ground.

Each breath I breathe feels harder and harder to suck in. My chest feels like it has a ton of bricks on it. It feels like all my life I have been running from this feeling, this monster that’s breathing down my neck just waiting for me to crumble.

I’m not sure if this is a panic attack, but we’ve been on plenty of calls where the paramedics have to help people calm down. I know shocking your body with a drastically different temperature is one way to do it, so I muster up all of the strength that I can manage, and make my way up to my bathroom. I strip out of my clothes and turn the shower on, making it as cold as I can.

As soon as I step underneath, my brain focuses immediately on the cold water pouring down on me. After I feel like the episode has passed completely, I turn the shower temperature to warm and lean against the tiles. The steam begins to sooth

my irking muscles as my thoughts begin to settle. I've never experienced something like that before.

It makes me realize that I definitely need to sit down and think things over. Whatever is happening feels out of control, and it's fucking with my head.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Mollie

“It’s over,” I cry as I lie in my bed.

Avery pulls the hair out of my face, as the tears come streaming down. She’s lying next to me as our bodies face each other. I called her as soon as I got off the phone with Logan, hardly able to get a word out.

She was over here within ten minutes.

“That’s not true, Molls. Logan is crazy about you, I can tell. His best friend just shook him a bit, I don’t think he was expecting such a strong reaction from Ryan.”

“What am I supposed to do about that? I can’t control how Ryan reacted. It’s not fair for him to just push me away because my brother was a dick.”

My best friend takes a deep breath before speaking.

“I know it doesn’t feel fair, but Logan and Ryan have been joined at the hip since they were kids. Ryan’s reaction is only

going to make him feel more guilty. Guilty enough to feel like jumping right back into your arms is just continuing the betrayal. I'm not saying he's right. I'm just saying he's trying to do what's best for everyone."

Her words make the anger I thought I had settled come back.

"What about what's best for *me*? Is anyone thinking about me in this?"

"I am. And despite what it looks like, Logan is, so is Ryan."

I lift my head up off the pillow.

"Did you just *defend* my brother?" my voice raises an octave in surprise.

Avery mouth turns up slightly. "Didn't you hear that hell finally froze over?"

I burst into laughter.

"Ah, now it makes sense," I say between hysterics.

"You're gonna be okay, Molls. Just give him some time. Trust that you two were meant to be."

I nod my head. "It's hard to do when your heart is on the line."

"No one said love was easy," she tucks a piece of hair behind my ear.

There's no one else on earth that I could imagine having by my side in this moment. Avery always knows what to say. She knows what I want to hear, and what I need to hear. But that's what best friends are for. They know your soul. You don't need to lay it out when you need them to bad mouth a guy or

take your side, regardless of if you were right or not. They also know when it's time for a little tough love.

“Don't you think it's time to finally talk to Ryan about everything?” she suggests.

I roll onto my back as I let out a moan of protest. “I've been avoiding it. I'm still just so *angry* with him.”

“Well, I texted him and said you wanted to meet him here in about,” she looks at the watch on her wrist. “Ten minutes. So, you better get over that quickly and talk to him.”

My eyes open wide as my head turns to face her. “You did what?”

Avery shrugs her shoulders. “I know you. You were going to pout and stew in your anger, waiting for Ryan to reach out. Well, we both know your brother. He's about as mature as a puppy. You want this thing with Logan worked out quickly? Then rip off the band-aid and talk to your brother.”

I scoff, crossing my arms over my chest. I'm not able to get any words out, nothing comes to mind to retaliate with.

“I'll take your silence as an indication that you know I'm right,” she boasts.

“Fine. I'll talk to him,” I surrender.

“Good,” she smiles at me then nudges my arm. “Let's go downstairs and pour a glass of wine first. It will take the edge of.”

Honestly, it's like the girl thinks we're still in college. It's two in the afternoon, and she wants to start drinking. A glass of wine in this heat doesn't sound appealing.

I raise my eyebrows at her. "If you make me a margarita, I may consider drinking at this hour."

"Ha," she throws her head back in laughter. "You think drinking tequila over wine will make you less of an alcoholic?"

We climb off my bed then begin to walk downstairs. Avery makes a stiff margarita that I insist on drinking near the pool, it feels more acceptable. She believes I overthink everything. I tell her if it weren't for me, she would have been arrested by now...or worse. Funny enough, she doesn't deny that either.

Just as we are finishing our drinks, I hear a ruckus from the kitchen before Ryan and Alicia walk out the sliding door.

I didn't realize how nervous seeing my brother again would make me. Truth of the matter is, we have always been close. I've never been this upset with him, and it's an unsettling feeling.

"Hey, guys," Alicia says cheerfully.

I appreciate the buffer that her presence provides. Her disposition is always warm and genuine.

"Molls," Ryan says, not sounding nearly as cheerful.

Alicia looks between the two of us before settling her eyes on Avery.

“I think Avery and I will just leave you two alone,” she suggests, as she motions for Avery to follow her back in the house.

When we’re alone, Ryan is standing in front of me with his hands in his pockets, looking more timid than I’ve ever seen, at least directed my way. I’m not exactly proud of it, but it makes me feel gratified that there seems to be some guilt or remorse that he’s feeling.

“You can sit down. You’re making me nervous just standing there,” I finally call out.

Ryan takes a seat next to me, still not having said a word. I’m not exactly sure how this is supposed to go. Avery sprung it on me, and I haven’t prepared anything to say.

“Do you have anything to say?” Ryan spits out the words contemptuously.

I’m slightly baffled by his ridicule.

“Umm, no. Is there something you think I *should* be saying?”

He narrows his eyes at me, frowning in exasperation.

“How about ‘I’m sorry’ for starters?”

My head extends forward in shock. “Excuse me? You want *me* to apologize? For what?”

“For going behind my back and sleeping with my best friend! Seriously, Mollie?”

I sigh in frustration. I can’t believe he thinks I should start this out with an apology. He’s the one who made the entire

situation blow up in everyone's face.

“Ryan, after everything that went down, you really think I should be the one starting out with an apology?” I ask softly, mockingly.

“Why are you acting like it's no big deal what you two did *behind my back*?” he emphasizes the last few words.

“Is that what this is all about? That you didn't know about it from the beginning? Do you really think Logan, who has been fighting these feelings for years, was going to approach you and tell you he thinks your baby sister is attractive and would like to sleep with her? And you would you have been okay with it? It's not like we knew afterwards it was going to awaken all these repressed feelings for each other. We thought it was just scratching an itch.”

His face turns up in disgust. I'm sure it's still not easy to hear anyone talk about the idea of his sister and best friend sleeping together.

“The honorable thing to do would be to approach me first and ask for my permission,” he crosses his arms across his chest, not backing down.

“Ryan, you're not my father! Logan doesn't need to ask you permission to date me. Like I said, this is the real world, you know that's not how things go down. We fought our attraction until it was too hard, things happened one night, and it progressed from there, rather quickly. It turned into so much more. We were going to tell all of you that night that we were in love. That I was moving in with him, and that...”

Ryan sits up straight, cutting me off. “Hold up, what did you just say? You were going to move in with him? What the hell, Molls!”

“Why is that so surprising?”

“Umm...because it’s been like a month. Who does that?”

“Ryan, it’s not like Logan and I don’t have history. We have a ton of history, we know each other. We’re not strangers who don’t know one another. And it’s not like I have my own place and am giving it up. It was kind of forced on us. He was helping me look for a place to live and eventually, it just made sense to not waste the money if I was going to spend most nights at his place anyways.”

“But...it’s Logan,” he sighs.

“I know it’s Logan. *Your best friend*. How could you think he isn’t good enough for me? You completely broke his heart with those words. He cares so much about your opinion, and NOW...because of YOU...he is rethinking being with me all together.”

This time I can’t help it. The words start to come out like a scream. I can tell Ryan is a bit shaken by the way I’m speaking to him, but I don’t care.

“Do you understand how much insecurity he has because of having ADHD? He spends most of his days fighting a battle in his head on whether he is good enough for his job, for any woman, for you. And you just CRUSHED him. You confirmed his worst fears about himself. What’s worse, is that if anyone’s

words are going to permanently bring that man down and believe those LIES, it's yours. I don't know if he'll ever recover from them. He won't even talk to me. He got completely trashed that night and his friend had to take care of him. And what's crazy to me, is Logan is the BEST man I've ever been with. He knows the most about me, has paid attention to details about me that no one ever has, listens to me, believes that I deserve the world. I've never felt more loved and admired than I have when I'm with him, and you had the nerve to suggest he's not good enough for me. He's perfect for me! And now...," my tears catch up with me and start to run down my cheeks. "Now I may lose him. I'll NEVER forgive you if I lose him."

It may not be the most effective way to handle this situation, but all I can do in the moment is storm away from him, from everyone. Even Avery who is sitting on the couch with Alicia looking worried, no doubt having heard my outburst.

I head straight for my car and speed out of the driveway without looking back. I don't know where I'm going, I don't even care. I just know that I need to get away from everyone.

I find myself at the downtown strip of my hometown, parking and walking to get some gelato. The musky August weather makes for a perfect afternoon to walk around and enjoy something cold and refreshing. Although, by the end of my gelato, I'm dying of thirst and need to duck into a store for some water.

I always forget about the fact that ice cream will make your body crave a drink so intensely. I researched it one night and found out that the reason is because when your body takes in sugar, the sugar sweeps through you and sucks the water from your body's cells, depleting its supply. It's one of the reasons why cookies were always paired with milk. Downfalls of being so interested in medicine and the human body, you know too much information like this.

When it begins to turn to dusk, I'm still not in the mood to hear from anyone. Looking at my phone, I see several missed calls from Avery and a couple from Ryan. There are text messages as well, but once again, I'm not in the mood.

For just tonight, I want to be left alone. I don't want anyone to defend Ryan's reaction, don't want them to explain how he was just trying to protect me. I just want to hold onto my anger and stew in it. It's not the healthiest thing to do, but I do know that you can't force forgiveness or will your anger to go away.

I hop in my car and drive to the nearest hotel. Once I check myself in and get to my room, I flop down on the bed and take a deep breath. The silence is peaceful and yet...lonely. It's only been two nights without him, but I miss him so much. He calmed every part of me. I felt so safe and protected in his arms. And yet, it took only one person's words to make him rethink what we have. How could he do that to us?

I get another text from my brother.

Ryan: Okay, you made your point. It's been hours. Just come back home.

I can't with him. Made my point? Did he think I stormed out of there to prove something to him? None of that was about me trying to do anything but escape these feelings that are taking me under. I'm supposed to start med-school soon. I should be mentally preparing, not on some downward emotional spiral not knowing if I'm living with my boyfriend or defaulting back to my parent's house until I find my own place.

My stupid emotions get the best of me when I think about not living with Logan, about it really being over before it ever began. My tears betray me again. I've cried more in the last two days than I have in the last two years.

I need to turn my phone off and be alone. First, I text my mom through my blurry eyes to let her know that I'm staying somewhere for the night. As soon as I hit send, I turn my phone off and fall back on the bed.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Logan

Another painful shift where the guys won't stop berating me for telling Mollie that I needed time. Only Jeff knows the deep-seated reasons for my distance. And he keeps telling me to think of myself as that little boy.

Nonetheless, work isn't giving me any time to think or get distance from the situation. Jeff tried to get me to hang out at his place tonight after work, I declined.

I'm not much in the mood for company.

Truth is, the only company that I'd prefer right now is Mollie's. I've been itching to pick up my phone and call her. Now, as an alternative, I'm by myself on my couch nursing a warm beer that has lost its appeal.

It's beginning to get late, but I know if I climb into bed, sleep will not come easy. That's how it was last night, and I know that's how it will go tonight.

My phone rings and my body feels the signs of excitement.

Maybe it's Mollie.

When I look down, Ryan's name is flashing across the screen.

"Hello," I answer reluctantly.

"Is she with you?" he speaks aggressively into the line.

I sit up quickly, sensing that something is off.

"Who, Mollie? No, she's not."

"Dammit!" he curses on the other end. "Why don't you answer your damn text messages?"

I wasn't even aware I had text messages. When I look down, I see five from him over the last hour.

"Shit, I didn't get any of those. What's going on? Is Mollie okay?"

"I don't know. We," he pauses as I sense that he is pacing around. "Got in a fight. She screamed at me, stormed off, and has been missing for hours. She's not with you, Avery, or at home. We don't know where she is."

I look down at the clock which reads ten. I'm trying to manage the adrenaline that is taking root in me, thinking that ten is still a reasonable time to be out.

"Her phone is off," he continues.

Okay, that isn't like her. Mollie being out late without functioning battery to her phone, with no way to get a hold of someone, isn't something that sounds like her behavior, nor is it safe. Did something happen to her?

I jump off the couch and start wandering around the room, trying to work out where she could be.

“Fuck!” I kick the couch. “What the hell were you two fighting about?”

“I’ll give you one guess,” he combats sarcastically.

“Where are you?” I grunt out.

“I’m at my parents’ house.”

“I’m coming over,” I grab my keys and start for the door.

“I didn’t say I needed your damn help. You’ve done enough. I just wanted to know if she was with you.”

The line goes dead. My mood veers sharply to anger. I can’t believe he thinks he can call and even dare talk to me like that when he’s the reason she stormed off and is missing.

I sit on my couch and dial Mollies number, confirming that her phone is indeed turned off.

Shit, I hope she’s safe. What if she went to the bar like I did and gets too drunk to defend herself from a sleezy guy? If Avery isn’t there with her, she could be alone. I try to wait it out for thirty grueling minutes before I can’t take it anymore. I decide to drive to the Price’s home and wait until I know she is safe.

Pulling into the driveway, I’m struck with pleasant memories from childhood, mixed with the memory of the last time I was here.

Ryan's car is in the driveway. I'm not sure where him and I even stand right now.

I knock on the front door, and Mrs. Price opens it. Her reaction surprises me. Her smile is instant, like the one that used to feed me her famous apple pie like she was my second mother. When her arms wrap around me, I'm not exactly sure what to do.

"Umm, hi, Mrs. Price," I pat her back awkwardly.

"I'm so sorry, Logan," she cries.

I'm not exactly sure what to do with those words. What is she sorry for? Did something happen to Mollie? Icy fear twists around my heart.

"Did something happen to her?" I pull away, as my body braces for the worst.

"What?" she hesitated. "Oh, no. We haven't found her yet. That's not what I was talking about."

"Oh," my hands find my pockets as they look for something to do. I take a breath of relief. "Okay, good."

"Come on in," she motions.

"Um, Ryan's here," I point out, staying rooted in place.

Never have I been afraid to walk through this door. It was always the place I ran to when I got in a fight with my siblings or parents. It was always my sanctuary. And now, now I don't know what it is to me. The keys to my happiness and my possible misery.

“Yes, Ryan is here. And you two have some things to work out. No better time like the present.”

She holds the door open, waiting for me to move. My legs ultimately move and carry me past the threshold.

Here we go, time to face the music.

Ryan and Mr. Price are sitting on the couch, both in the same position. Elbows resting on their knees as their legs bounce up and down. Clearly, no one has been through this with Mollie. My little miss goody two shoes has never done anything to make them worry. I wonder if that’s suddenly going to be my fault as well.

Not sure what to do, I stop at the cut off between the kitchen and the family room.

Mrs. Price grabs my elbow and leads me to the couch opposite her husband and son. Ryan looks up and I see his mouth clench tighter.

“What are you doing here?” Ryan spits out with venom.

“Ryan, watch it,” Mr. Price warns.

“Now, you two. I think it’s time you talked through this,” Mrs. Price’s voice rings with command. “You guys have been friends for far too long to throw it away.”

“Okay, fine. You can start,” Ryan crosses his arms over his chest.

I look between him and Mrs. Price, not sure what I’m supposed to say. I guess I can start with the obvious, I love

Mollie too much to worry about my damn ego.

“I’m sorry for not telling you sooner. I know it must have felt like a betrayal to our friendship,” I say as I find myself in the same position now as Ryan and Mr. Price.

“How could you do that to me? You’re like my brother!”

A flash of sorrow crosses his face before it reverts to anger.

“I know it doesn’t make much sense. But it’s not like it was something that happened out of nowhere. I fought it for years because I didn’t think I was good enough for her. It just got to a point where we found ourselves not able to push away our feelings anymore.”

His eyes get smaller as he looks over at me. “When exactly did your feelings for her start to change?”

This is extremely awkward discussing in front of her parents. My hand tries to massage the mounting tension building in my neck as I look down at the carpet.

“Um, I guess it really started changing her senior year of high school. Her graduation party to be specific. She asked me to kiss her since she’d never been kissed, I did, and it messed me up. It just intensified my feelings towards her. I just...”

“What the fuck did you just say?” Ryan stands up. “Did you just say you kissed my eighteen-year-old sister at her graduation party? When you were...,” he thinks for second. “Twenty-three! What kind of sick motherfucker are you?”

I’m not expecting it, just trying to process his words. But his fist grabs the collar of my shirt as he grabs me off the couch.

“My baby sister. I thought we both looked out for her. And you took advantage of her when she was eighteen. I thought you were my friend,” he spits out.

Before I can defend myself, his fist meets my eye and I fall back against the couch.

Mr. Price is off the couch with Ryan’s arms trapped behind his back while I think I hear Mrs. Price scream.

“Oh my gosh, are you alright, Logan?” she scoots closer to me, her hand resting on my arm.

“You better calm the hell down, son,” Mr. Price warns Ryan, who is trying to break free from his grip.

Ryan eventually gives in. He takes a deep breath as I see his muscles visibly relax. I’m on high alert when he’s released, but he remains in his position.

“Now, you got your punch out of your system,” Mr. Price begins. “I think it’s time we move to a more productive conversation.”

“Whatever,” Ryan takes a seat.

“Ryan, don’t you think you’re overreacting just a little bit? I understand being angry, and feeling a bit betrayed, but when you think about it, wouldn’t you want someone like Logan with Mollie? Someone you trust, who’s worthy of her?” Mrs. Price asks hesitantly.

Wait, what did she just say? I’m looking over at her like my ears must have malfunctioned for a moment. There is no way she said what I thought I heard.

“You think I’m worthy of her?” I ask, trying to ignore the throbbing pain in my eye. Mr. Price magically appears with an ice pack. I hadn’t even realized he got up. “Thank you,” I tell him.

“Of course I do. Did Mollie not tell you about what really happened the other night?” she looks confused.

“Umm, no.” I try to think back to our conversation. “I guess she told me you two sat down and had a talk. I wasn’t in the greatest space at the time. I told her I wasn’t ready to talk about any of this and that I needed a couple days.”

Thinking back to those being the last words I spoke to her. If something happened to her, I’m never going to forgive myself.

“Well, what I told her was that Luke was a distraction. I was never actually trying to set him up with Mollie.”

As the words come out of her mouth, I’m feeling stunned. She goes on about seeing us kiss that night, noticing our reactions to each other over the years, knowing that we were fighting our feelings. And the most shocking of them all, that Luke was there to try to make me jealous enough to finally admit my feelings.

All along she wasn’t trying to set Mollie up with some rich, successful man. She was trying to get the two of us together. She thinks her daughter, the amazingly talented, annoyingly smart, and ridiculously nerdy girl, is perfect for me.

Someone like me.

It almost doesn’t seem real.

“I don’t even know what to say,” I hesitate, blinking with bafflement.

“Well, hopefully that clears some things up for you. When it comes to me and Greg, we’re one hundred percent in your corner.”

I look over at Mr. Price. He nods his head in agreement. “I may not have agreed with her little ploy that night,” he says as he chuckles. Mrs. Price rolls her eyes but smiles. “But, yes, of course I trust you with our little Molls.”

A sarcastic laugh comes from Ryan. I’m not sure what it is about this revelation, but I instantly feel this massive amount of confidence fill me.

“What the hell are you laughing at?” I bark at him.

“It’s just unbelievable that they trust you so much,” he concedes.

My brain immediately goes to what Jeff has been drilling in my head. Me as a little boy, waiting for people to tell me I’m good enough. Of course, I’ve heard it from my family, but I’ve always assumed it was because they felt like they *had* to say shit like that.

Here I am, two amazingly successful people in front of me, who think I am deserving of their daughter. Despite knowing I’m a firefighter with ADHD who will never provide a level of wealth that both of them have achieved.

I suddenly can see ten-year-old me, crying in the corner of my room as I try to study for a test that Renee Dawson told me I

was too stupid to pass. Believing she was right, believing I was too stupid.

I now want to go back to that boy in the corner and tell him he wasn't stupid. He had strengths in other areas in life. That he did understand the material when he could find a way to sit down and focus enough, even if it didn't happen very often. That all those years were what he needed to go through to grow thicker skin, to find himself.

I wouldn't take back a single day, because I still made the best friendships and have lasting memories. I also learned a lot. Truth be told, it would have been easier sometimes to hide away from the public embarrassment. But what good would that have done?

It was always my own issue to grapple with. Kids are picked on for how they look, being *too* smart, not having money, and many other reasons. Mine just happened to be because of my disorder. But I was the one who fueled the voices in my head.

"I forgive you," I say the words to myself.

I wish I would have seen the light sooner.

"And why shouldn't they trust me?" I find myself sticking up for myself to Ryan.

He looks at me like I'm crazy. "Because I've been around you with girls. You're a freaking player. When have you ever stuck around long enough to treat a woman the way she was meant to be treated? And now you want me to give you my blessing

with my baby sister? When I have nothing to go off of but one-night stands and short-term, meaningless flings?”

“Did it ever occur to you that maybe none of those women stuck because I’ve been harboring these feelings for Mollie for years? And that maybe none of them even compared to her?”

“How do I know you’re going to treat her right?” his voice raises.

“Just trust me!” I yell back. “Trust that I would NEVER jeopardize my friendship with you for something that I didn’t think was the real deal.”

“Trust you? Like you trusted me to let me in on the fact that you have struggled with ADHD for your entire life? How could you tell my sister something like that and not me? Was our friendship ever that strong if you couldn’t even open up to me?” his voice breaks.

What? He’s upset that I didn’t tell him that? Is he...upset that I confided in his sister before him?

“I guess I just thought we were like brothers. That we told each other everything,” he sighed heavily.

I’m momentarily speechless, not sure what to do with what he just expressed to me. The truth is, I do look at him like a brother, but I also have *four* brothers. I guess to Ryan, I was always his only brother.

I never took how much he valued our friendship seriously. It makes me feel like shit.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know it would mean that much to you to know that part of me. And honestly, it’s been a dark cloud over my life, following me around, threatening to swallow me whole. I kinda liked that you didn’t know. It felt nice not to have this feeling of sympathy for me, like I get from my family sometimes.”

He looks at me, contemplating. “I mean, I kinda figured you had something. It was easy enough to see in class that you struggled to focus. But I never knew it was something that affected you so much. You do know that’s not the reason I got mad about you and Molls, right? It was never about that.”

“I didn’t know that. Thanks for saying it.”

“But, I mean, do you get why it all caught me off guard? Why I may be a little bit angry and protective of my sister? It’s not like it’s about anything other than what I’ve seen of you...and I guess a little added dose of jealousy that she seemed to know more about you.”

He looks down at the ground, but I wait for him to look up at me and see in my face that I’m sorry.

“I get it, man. I always did get it, that’s why I tried for years to avoid my feelings. Our friendship means the world to me, and I never wanted to do anything to change it. But I’m asking you to trust that I can be the man for her, that she is the one I want, and that I do love her. And I’m sorry about the secrecy of my struggles all these years, that’s a me thing, not you.”

“Do you think you can do that Ryan?” Mrs. Price gives him a hopeful stare.

“Yeah, I can do that. But if you hurt her,” he begins.

I throw my hands up. “I won’t. But, yes, if I ever do, you may beat me to a pulp and bury me in the ground.”

He chuckles and I smile. Shit, I can’t believe we just worked through that. The feeling of pleasure only lasts for a second because my face is killing me.

I wince at the pain, trying to adjust the ice pack. “You got me really good, man.”

His mouth falls into a regretful frown. “Sorry about that. But let’s call it even now for going behind my back.”

My chest vibrates with laughter. “I can live with that.”

“There you go. Now, all we have to do is find where Mollie is,” Mrs. Price voice cracks as she looks at the clock. “It’s after one. I can’t believe we don’t know where she is.”

I massage my temple, trying to come up with a way to find her. Suddenly, something clicks in my brain.

“Do either of you guys have access to her credit card information?” I ask.

Mr. Price sits up taller. “I do. It’s all attached to my name, I wanted to be able to deposit money for her while she was away.”

“Okay, open that up. See if she’s made any recent charges.”

Mr. Price grabs his phone and is on his app instantly. We are all now on the edge of our seats, waiting to see if he comes up with anything.

His shoulders fall and he sighs. Is that a breath of relief or fear? I can't tell.

"What?" Ryan questions.

"There's a charge to a hotel down the street. She's staying at a hotel tonight," he says.

"Oh, thank god," Mrs. Price puts her hand to her heart.

I can finally take an easy breath as I fall back against the couch. At least she's safe.

I'd still feel better if she had her phone on, so we could hear her voice and know she was okay. But at this hour, that seems like it's going to be as good as we're gonna get.

"So, um, I think I might head out," I stand up, feeling the exhaustion begin to creep in. "I have to work in the morning."

"Thanks for coming over," Mrs. Price meets me and smiles.

"I'm glad everyone got the chance to talk."

"I'll walk you to your car," Ryan offers.

I shake Mr. Price's hand. Ryan and I walk side by side to the front door. I'm half expecting him to say he was bluffing in there with his parents and throw another punch at me.

He doesn't punch me, but he also doesn't say anything as we walk to my car.

"So, what are you going to do about Mollie?" he finally asks when we're standing in front of my car door.

I'm not sure if he really wants to hear my answer. I plan to apologize my ass off for doubting our relationship for a

second. She should have felt safe and loved unconditionally, no matter what. My stupid, wounded ego and pride got in the way. My lifelong insecurities proved too big and ugly, taking over my brain. No more. She will never have to doubt the two of us again.

“Well, I plan on making sure she knows how fucking sorry I am for making her wait for me to decide our future. She deserved my unconditional love and support. I want her to know it will never happen again. I’ve got my head on straight now. No offense, you, nor anyone else in the future, will make me second-guess my feelings for her.”

My instinct is to lean away from him, in case that sets off a fuse in him.

Instead, he nods his head at me in agreement. “That’s what I want to hear. If you’re going to be the man in her life, she deserves that and more. She’s sensitive and gives her love freely, sometimes too freely.”

“I’m surprised you aren’t still freaking out about this. I’m going to move her things in with me tomorrow. I don’t want to spend another night away from her.”

“Just...try not to talk about sex or anything like that in front of me. This is going to take a while to get used to. Even hearing you talking about spending the night with her,” he shakes his head. “It’s gonna take some time.”

“I understand. Thanks for being cool with this. Your opinion means the world to me, and to Mollie.”

I extend my hand out hoping we can shake on it.

His hand meets mine for a shake before he pulls me in for a hug.

“You better be on your A game tomorrow. She’s pretty hurt by how everyone handled this... you included.”

“Yeah, I’ve got some serious groveling to do.”

“Get outta here. Get some sleep. We’ll talk later,” he starts to back away.

On my drive home, I try to ignore the throbbing pain in my eye as I think on what I should say to Mollie tomorrow. I’m clearly not good with words, but I have enough faith in her love for me. She’ll know what I’m trying to say, I hope.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Mollie

Sunshine is shining through the window early in the morning as it wakes me from my sleep. It feels odd, I don't remember the sun ever shining through my window this bright before. When I open my eyes, I take in my foreign surroundings until it all comes back to me.

The fight with Ryan, Logan's distance, my lonely night alone in this hotel.

Gosh, it feels early. What time is it?

Ugh, the clock is blinking six. I squint my eyes as I look to my right, realizing I should have closed the curtains in the hotel room. Now that I'm up, I might as well get on with it. I had my escape last night, my own little pity party.

After I go to the bathroom and wash my face, I sit down on the bed and turn my phone back on. It goes crazy with notifications as soon as it turn it on. Thirty-one missed calls and fifteen text messages.

I read through messages from Ryan, my father, Logan, Avery, and...oh gosh.

When I open my mom's text thread, I see the message I sent last night still sitting there...not sent. I could have sworn I hit send, but I guess I was in tears. I remember not being able to see the screen very well.

Shit! They were freaking out last night. I feel horrible! I pick up my phone immediately and call my mom.

"Hello," she answers a bit groggy.

I know it's early, but my mom has always been an early riser. I'm surprised she sounds so sleepy.

"I'm sorry, were you sleeping?" I apologize, biting my lip as I wait for her to unload on me.

"What time is it? Oh, well I suppose I'm usually up at five, aren't I? We had a late night waiting up for you, I didn't get to bed until pretty late."

"Mom, I'm so sorry. I feel awful. I stayed at a hotel last night. I thought I text you before I turned my phone off, but it turns out the text never got sent. I feel sooo awful."

"It's alright. I'm just happy you're okay."

"I'm fine. Look you go back to sleep. I'm on my way home, you don't need to worry about me."

She yawns. "I think I might do that. I'll see you soon."

I text Avery real quick to apologize and let her know I'm okay. She was in touch with my mom, so she knew I was missing all

night.

After I get home, I set my alarm for eleven, knowing I have a five-hour shift at the café which starts at noon. As soon as my head hits the pillow, it doesn't take long for sleep to take me under.

It's after five when I'm untying my apron and grabbing my purse from my locker in the backroom. It was busier than I thought it would be this afternoon. We had a large burst of customers, and the night crew last night did not restock all of our ingredients, so I had to assist behind the counter whenever I had a spare minute to help cut and chop.

After I sit down in my car, I open my phone and my heart nearly stops beating.

Logan: Can you come over tonight? I'm getting off work around six. Would six-thirty work for you?

It feels so good just to get a text message from him. My eyes start to water. And yet, what if he wants to let me down easy in person and tell me it's over?

I don't know if I will be able to handle that in front of him without making a fool of myself.

Either way, I have to suck it up and go over there. I can't live my life in limbo like this anymore.

Me: I'll see you soon.

By the time I get home, I'll only have thirty minutes to get ready and look like a girl you would never want to break up with. I turn the key in the ignition and drive like a crazy

person back to my parents' house. I'm riding everyone's ass on the way back home. If they happen to quickly hit their breaks for any reason, I'm crashing into their ass, but I don't care.

I'm home now, time to get to work.

First things first, I'm a sweaty mess. I jump into the shower and rinse off all the evidence of a busy day at the café. I take the time to make sure I do not miss any spots while shaving, trying to be optimistic about what will transpire tonight.

After applying a subtle smoky eye, didn't want to make it too obvious, I pick a tank-top that fits snug around my breasts and cut-off jean shorts.

Luckily, my parents had a dinner party to go to with a client of my dad's. I don't want to have to explain where I'm going.

I park my car in his driveway promptly at six-thirty. My hands are stuck on the steering wheel, shaking with fear and anticipation.

Okay, I expand my chest and release the breath slowly.

You can do this.

I'm halfway up his walkway when his front door opens. Logan is standing there in his white t-shirt and jeans looking freshly showered. He offers a small smile which I reciprocate, but it all feels forced.

"Hey," he holds the door open for me.

"Hi," I say back.

When I get a look at his face, I notice a big black and blue mark around his right eye.

“Oh my god! Logan!” I run up to him. “What happened to your face?”

“Oh, this...it’s no big deal.”

He doesn’t exactly answer my question and tries to play it off like it’s nothing. After he closes the door, we walk into his family room, and I’m a bit stunned by what I see.

“What is all my stuff doing in here?” I ask as I scan the room.

My bed, desk, dresser, lamp, knick-knacks. Everything is here.

“Um, I wanted you to move in with me,” he says with his hand aggressively rubbing the back of his neck.

“You what? Logan...I’m so lost right now. You still want to move in together? How did you get all my stuff?”

“Oh, I, uh, talked to your parents. Ryan...and Ryan. And I thought that I wanted you to know that I’m....shit....I’m fucking this up.”

He begins to pace back and forth. “And I took your shit without even asking. I’m sorry, Mollie. I can put this stuff back in your storage unit for you.”

“Wait, wait, wait...just, hold on a minute. Slow down. I’m not mad, Logan. I’m just confused. You tell me you need space. We haven’t talked in days, and I just got in this horrible fight with my brother last night.”

He blows out a breath. “Ryan called me last night.”

“I figured that much since I have missed messages from you as well late last night.”

“Well, I drove over to your parents’ last night. Ryan and I talked and...,” he pauses.

I suck in my breath. “Your black eye. Did *Ryan* do that to you?” I ask, my voice rough with anger.

“Well, yes, but it’s ok...,” I cut him off.

Fury almost chokes me as I begin to move about the room.

“Oh, I’m gonna kill him. How dare he put his hands on you!”

“Mollie,” he says but I can barely hear him I’m so consumed with anger.

“He is being the world’s biggest idiot,” I continue pacing around the room

“Mollie,” he tries again.

“Did you punch him back? You should... you should just...”

“Mollie!” he shouts.

I stop in my tracks, swimming through a haze of feelings.

“What?” I lift my head at the sound of his voice and listen intently.

“Just listen for a second. Him and I talked it out. Yes, he threw a punch, but I deserved it. We worked through our shit. I’m not saying it’s perfect, but he’s okay with the two of us. And I talked to your mom, she told me all about her Luke plan.”

“She did?” I step closer to him.

A small smile spreads across his face, it looks incredibly adorable on him. “Yes. Look, I’m not saying that I don’t still have shit to work through. I think it might be time I go back to my therapist. Not for techniques this time, but to work through some scars I may have.”

I give him a knowing look.

“Okay,” he smiles. “Scars that I *do* have. But after hearing just how much your mom was in our corner, I don’t know, I feel like it was the start of some healing. I could never imagine in my wildest dreams, that two parents as successful as yours, would not only be okay with you and me, but advocate for us. It gave me enough courage to stand up to Ryan. I know I’m good enough for you.”

I take a shaky breath in. The familiar sting of tears pinches my eyes.

Logan takes a step closer to me.

“And the reason I know is because every thought, every worry, every fear I have ever had about you has always been the same. I want to *protect* you. I want to be the one to make your dreams come true. I want to do what I can to support you through the hard times in life and I want to be next to you to celebrate the victories. Knowing you, there will be a lot of those in your life. If you can forgive me for my moment of weakness, I promise from here on out you will never spend another minute questioning our relationship again.”

My legs feel weak as I try to process what he is saying to me. This moment in my life is going to be one that is vivid and

lasting. I can feel the magnitude of his declaration, the promise he is making me.

“And one other thing,” he reaches into his pocket. He pulls out a small blue box and I nearly faint. “Don’t worry, it’s not a ring. I’m not trying to get punched by your brother again anytime soon.”

I chuckle, but take the box with trembling hands. I open it and let out a loud gasp.

A shooting star necklace.

“Logan,” I whisper. “It’s beautiful.”

He tucks a chunk of hair behind my ear, making me look up at him.

“Last time I got you this necklace, there was so much more I was trying to say with it, but I was too much of a coward to realize it. I messed up that night because what I should have done was claim you as mine right there. Truth is, you’ve always been mine. Anyway, I’m sure you threw that necklace out that night after how I treated you. I would’ve done the same.”

My hand reaches up and caresses his cheek. He leans into my touch.

“I would have never thrown that necklace away. It’s tucked safely away in my jewelry box. That night was the best and worst night of my life.”

He shakes his head. “I don’t know what I did to deserve you. Will you accept this necklace and let me kiss you again? I’m

not going anywhere this time.”

I nod my head as we both lean in until our lips meet. My body instinctively moves in until it's pressed against his, right where it belongs. His arms wrap around me as our lips continue to move against each other's.

When we pull away, he smiles down at me.

“I love you, Molls. I always have.”

“I loved you first,” I smile up at him.

We both laugh and lean into another kiss.

How could this be real? My first crush, my first kiss, my first love. Standing here in his arms, my heart feels so safe. I know he will always protect it, it's what he does.

Epilogue

Logan

Eight months later

I've had the entire day off of work which has worked out great. The house is spotless, which is a huge feat in itself. I normally get so sidetracked and distracted when cleaning that getting one room clean is an accomplishment. And if I cleaned throughout the week, Mollie would have caught on because let's be honest, cleaning isn't my thing.

It's been eight months since the day she officially moved in with me. I'm not going to say everything has been perfect, because it hasn't. Things with Ryan have been different. Falling in love with his sister does mean our friendship has some boundaries now. I, for one, am not allowed to talk about sex with him for obvious reasons. It's taken some getting used to. I'm not accustomed to filtering myself around Ryan.

Like the other day, Mollie did this incredible thing with her finger while giving me a blowjob, the second I saw Ryan I

went to tell him and had to stop myself.

Today is Mollie's birthday. She is kicking ass in med-school, and I wanted to do something special for her. I invited some of her new friends from school, her family, and mine to our house tonight for a celebration. I'm getting the entire things catered so we don't have to worry about cooking or cleaning. I want this to be a nice time for our families to come together and get used to the idea of us together.

I glance at the clock in my kitchen and realize caterers will be here any minute to set up in the backyard. It's late April, and we are luckily having a warm weather day today.

When the doorbell rings, I'm expecting it to be the caterers.

"Where do you want these?" Ryan and Alicia stand there holding boxes of cupcakes.

"You can bring them into the kitchen for right now," I lead the way. "Right here is good."

They place the cupcakes on the counter as they survey the backyard from the kitchen window.

"Damn, you pulled out all the stops for tonight," Ryan says, sounding impressed. "Maybe you don't suck at this whole boyfriend thing after all."

Alicia elbows him in the stomach.

I smile. "Only for Mollie."

I may have gone a bit overboard with the backyard decor. I set up three long tables and have nice white table clothes covering

them. My sister, Peyton, came over last night and dropped off all of these tea lights, candles, and flowers to put along the tables. I even hang a white canopy above the tables and strung lights around it so it will give off a soft, romantic vibe as it starts to get dark. There will be a firepit going in case it starts to feel a bit cold as the sun goes down.

After the food is all setup outside, people start rolling in. My brother Liam and his wife Riley are the first to show up with my niece Harper, and their newest edition, Max. Not long after that, Jackson and Tiffany come barreling in with Will and Colton. Mr. and Mrs. Price arrive minutes later with my parents. They decided to drive together seeing as they live across the street from each other.

Grayson and Taylor walk through the door next, Taylor's belly really starting to show. They announced they were expecting at Christmas.

Peyton and James are the last of my family to arrive as James straps on baby Mia to his chest. It's crazy how quickly my family grew in the last couple years. I can't wait to ask Mollie to marry me so we can start a family together.

Once everybody is outside, the champagne is flowing and Mollie text me to let me know she is five minutes away. I may have told her that I wanted to go out to dinner for her birthday, asking when she will be home. Thankfully she actually responded. I head up to our family room and wait until I see her car pull into the driveway.

My neighbor was kind enough to let our guests park in their driveway. They said they were in for the night so it wouldn't impact them at all.

Mollie walks through the door with her signature smile on her face. The one that still makes me feel weird flutters even though this much time has passed.

"The neighbors having a party?" she asks as she puts her things down.

I shrug my shoulders, feigning ignorance. "No idea. I just need to run out back and check on something."

She follows me into the kitchen but doesn't make any effort to come outside with me. Instead of sounding like an idiot trying to come up with an excuse to get her outside, I just tell her to come with me.

She gives me a funny look and heads for the door. As soon as she is in sight, everybody standing outside yells *surprise!* I can tell by her face that she had no idea. Her jaw is on the ground.

"Oh my god!" she shouts as she starts to walk down the stairs and greet everybody.

I just stand by the door as I watch her mingle with everyone. I can feel the smile on my face, stuck there as our families become one in front of my eyes.

I still think back to that night at her graduation party sometimes, wondering what would have happened if I didn't freak out. Would we have been together all of these years? Or did we both need to grow apart before we could truly come

together? Eventually, I came to realize that I don't care how it happened, I'm just happy that we are finally together. Growing up I've always wanted to protect her. I just didn't realize that I would eventually want to protect her because she was *mine*.

I finally walk down the stairs until I'm by her side as she stands there talking to our parents. I place my hand on the small of her back.

She immediately turns her head to me. "I can't believe you did all of this. It's so beautiful, babe."

"I wanted to do something special for you. I figured what better than bring together all of the people who love you. Well, except for Avery. She sends her love, but as you know, she is tied up in New York for work."

"Thank God," Ryan mutters as he walks by.

We all choose to ignore it, knowing he's only kidding. Avery recently started dating someone seriously, and Ryan was all over the dude when he met him. Grilling him on his career, his childhood, anything you could think of. It was pretty clear that he looks at her like a second sister.

"I love all of it. Thank you so much," she says before leaning up for a quick kiss.

Our mothers are beaming at us when we break apart. Apparently, the two of them have *known all along* that we were meant to be together. My own mother told me if I didn't realize it soon, she was going to beat me over the head. Whatever the hell that really means when a mother says that.

When the food has been eaten, the drinks have been drunk, the crowd slowly starts to trickle down, until it's just the two of us. I thought Mollie was exhausted, but she surprises me when she grabs the last bottle of champagne.

“You going to come upstairs so I can properly thank you for my party?” she drops her dress straps over her shoulder one by one until it falls to the ground.

I'm stuck watching in awe as my woman marches towards our bedroom in just her underwear as she simultaneously pops the cork on the champagne. Fuck, I'm the luckiest son of a bitch in this world. I follow her in, stripping myself of my shirt and pants as I go. Never will I understand what she has seen in me, but I will always appreciate the fact that she sees a man worth sticking around for. As long as she is with me, I will do everything in my power to live up to the man she sees me as. A man who might not remember all our special occasions or might forget what she said ten seconds after she said it, but a man who will always realize the treasure he has in front of him.

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