

A woman with long, dark, wavy hair is shown from the waist up, wearing a white, lace-trimmed corset. She is looking upwards and to the right, with her right hand raised near her face. The background is a softly lit room with a window and orange curtains. The overall mood is romantic and elegant.

*sweet
as a
tangerine*

JENNA ROSE

SWEET AS A TANGERINE

JENNA ROSE



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ABOUT THE BOOK

Yara's life hasn't been easy, but after losing her mother and having survived her teenage years with an alcoholic father, she decided to escape the big city of New York to make a better future for herself. But the small town of Tangerine Forks, New Hampshire is not at all what she was expecting.

As soon as she steps off the bus, her entire future is nearly changed forever, but she's saved by a gorgeous stranger named Lyle, a man so gorgeous he sends a spark straight into the center of her soul. He's strong, confident, and ready to take care of her. But there's just one problem; Lyle's girlfriend just happens to be Yara's new manager.

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YARA

THE BUS HISSES as it comes to a stop. What *is* that noise anyway? It sounds awful, but I don't care. I've arrived at my destination, and I couldn't be more excited.

Tangerine Forks, New Hampshire. The picturesque, postcard picture-looking town I've seen online and been dreaming about coming to for the last five months. I'm doing that thing I do when I get excited where I bounce my right leg and chew the right corner of my lower lip as the bus doors open. Even though I had to take a seat in the back, I'm the third one off and nearly running in the direction of my motel.

It's a brisk autumn afternoon, with yellows and reds and oranges all around me. Only a few cars pass me on the road as I walk, and none of them honk or shout obscenities at me. This town couldn't be less like New York City, and I couldn't be happier about that.

A pickup truck passes with a bumper sticker on the back that reads *If this truck's a rockin', I'm in here masturbatin'*.

Well, that's classy, I think as I shoulder my bag higher up onto my back. I'd love to go for a hike and see some foliage, but I really need to get to my motel and get settled in. It's my first day of work tomorrow at The Tangerine Diner, and I have to make sure I make a good impression on my new boss. That

means a good night's sleep and waking up early so I can spend a good chunk of the early morning making myself look semi-passable as a human being.

The foliage really is gorgeous here this time of year. But tires squealing ahead of me cause me to look away from the hills and back up the road where I see the pickup with the trashy bumper sticker pulling a U-turn and heading back in my direction. I move out of the way to let it go by but feel my whole body go tight as the old Ford creaks to a halt beside me and three men hop out.

“Well, hey there, little sparrow.” The driver grins. “Where'd you fly in from?”

“Excuse me?” I reply.

“My name's Jacob,” the man beside him says with a drunken bow, his blond hair as greasy as a slab of carnival fried dough. “What's yours?”

“Who cares?” the third man laughs. “See the headlights on her?”

“That's true, Tommy,” Jacob chuckles. “Big enough to signal the space station!”

My body's starting to tremble now as I back away from the truck, but the driver is already circling around behind me like some kind of wildcat. These men move like predators, and I feel like a prey animal who is definitely not going to escape.

“I...I just want to get to my motel—”

“Don't worry, little sparrow,” the driver whispers as his hands grip my waist and pull me close. “It is a *hell* of a lot nicer in my truck. Ain't it, boys?”

I want to fight back as the three men grab me by the wrists, hips, and ankles and carry me to the truck, but my body simply will not respond. I feel like one big block of ice – like my muscle have been shot through with paralytics.

I want to scream as I'm pushed into the back seat and the men climb in after me and begin to strip out of their shirts, laughing and glaring down at me like hungry hyenas, but my larynx will not move and my tongue feels foreign inside my mouth.

This is really happening, I think as a sense of absolute horror pours through me.

Things like this don't happen in Tangerine Forks, New Hampshire. That's why I came here.

I hear the sound of rusty hinges as the door behind my head tears open. The driver cries out and falls backwards out of the truck. Jacob's eyes go wide, but only for a second before a fist impacts his nose and sends him sprawling unconscious into the passenger side door.

"Holy shit!" Tommy blurts out. I look up to see a man lean into the cab, a hardened look on his face. He reaches past me, dodges Tommy's flailing punch, and snatches him by the throat.

"Duck," he tells me, his voice firm and commanding. I do as I'm told as the stranger drags Tommy across the seat and out of the cab into the street. I hear the sound of punches landing and turn around and look out to see Tommy and the driver lying motionless at the man's feet. I can tell by his face that he's not a local. He's been around. Seen some things. "Did they hurt you?"

“No,” I say quickly, shaking my head. “They...they almost did, but...”

“Come,” he says, extending a hand. I take it, and he helps me from the truck by lifting me into his arms like I don’t weigh a thing and carrying me over the fallen men who lie on the ground like slain soldiers. “I’m Lyle. What’s your name?”

“Y-Yara.”

“You’re new here?” It’s a question, but barely.

“How’d you know?” My tongue is working again. And my larynx. I was just nearly...oh God, I don’t even want to put it into words. This was supposed to be my postcard town. My getaway. And the first thing that happens to me after I step off the bus is this?

Lyle smiles like he’s in on a joke I’m not in on, and it’s the first time I realize just how incredibly handsome he is. High cheek bones, a strong chin, *really* great almond-colored hair with eyes that match. This man could be a model for a company that sells some kind of rugged men’s fashion. Also, he’s nearly stretching the sleeve of his olive T-shirt beyond its limit around his thick, taut bicep.

“Well, Yara,” he says. “Tangerine Forks isn’t exactly Chicago or New York City. It’s a small town and pretty easy to spot newcomers. On top of that, you were probably walking in from the bus station, and this is probably your bag, right?”

He reaches into the truck and pulls out my bag. Such a stark difference from city life. Back in New York City *maybe* a passerby would have done something to help me out, but I wouldn’t be having this conversation with them. If anything, I’d be talking to a cop now who wouldn’t be interested in my life whatsoever.

“Right on all accounts,” I say, doing my best to get my heartrate under control. “Mr. Sherlock Holmes.”

Lyle laughs. “Nah, just maybe a bit smarter than your average bear. I do want you to know that not all the men in Tangerine are like these perverts here. Okay?”

“I sure hope not,” I reply. “Because this is where I’m staying for the foreseeable future.”

“Where are you staying?” he asks, pointing to a car that I hadn’t noticed until now parked on the side of the road, which must be his. “I’ll give you a lift.”

“Pine Tree Motel—”

“Nope. Mmm-mmm.” Lyle shakes his head, and still holding my bag, takes my hand in his, leads me to his car, and opens the passenger door for me.

I feel like ever since I stepped off the bus I’ve been nothing more than a leaf being swept along the rapids of a rushing river. I had it all planned out – my picturesque town, my motel, a brand-new start to my life, and now apparently none of that is going to go according to plan.

“What do you mean ‘nope’?” I ask him.

“Well, do you like being surrounded by junkies, thieves, and drug dealers?” A shiver runs through me. Whatever happened to the heavenly little town I found on Google?

“Not...particularly...”

“Well, that’s what you’ll find at Pine Tree Motel,” he replies. “So hop in the car. I’ve got a studio apartment above our garage we’ve been meaning to rent out and haven’t gotten around to. You can stay there until you find an apartment. Cool?”

After what just happened to me, and those three men being my first introduction to Tangerine Forks, I really shouldn't even be considering Lyle's offer. This could all just be one big plan to get me off the road and back to his place where he can do whatever he wants to me.

But then again, would that really be that terrible? I mean, *look* at the man. My heart is still racing, and I'm not one hundred percent sure it's from the aftereffects of the attack.

He's unbelievably handsome, but that's not all. There's something calming and comforting about him as well. I feel safe around him. But there's something I *don't* understand, and that's why I feel something familiar about him already, and we only just met.

"Okay," I smile. "Cool."

Lyle's eyes brighten, and he waits for me to get in the car before closing the door behind me like a valet. He puts my bag in the back and gets in the driver's seat and pulls away. I think I see one of the men whose butts he kicked getting up in the rearview as we're a ways down the road. Am I a total bitch for wishing all three of them would just stay down forever?

"So what brings you to Tangerine?" Lyle asks me. God, his voice is *so* smooth. He could make a fortune reading audiobooks.

I would never share my story with a random stranger, but he did just totally save my butt, and I feel so incredibly safe around him already that before I know what I'm doing, I'm spilling my guts to him.

"My mom got hit by a car when I was thirteen. We didn't have money for long-term hospital care, so I basically became her nurse until she passed away a few months later."

“I’m so sorry,” Lyle says, looking like he means it.

“Dad, instead of helping, spent all his free time at the bar and turned into this massive manipulative asshole and like emotional abuser. So to get away from him, I got fake IDs and started working as many jobs as I could.”

“All while going to school?”

I nod. “My mom really cared about my education, so I made sure I graduated. Then, I found Tangerine Forks on Google Maps, bought a bus ticket, packed a bag...and the rest is history.”

“Good for you.” He smiles. “That must have taken a lot of guts.”

By the way Lyle’s looking at me, I can’t tell whether he’s actually admiring me for sticking it out or if just feels bad for me. But either way, I can feel myself blushing. I mean, he’s *so* handsome, *so* obviously confident in himself, with such a strong jaw and such full lips and hair that blows perfectly in the breeze. *This guy must get all the girls.*

It doesn’t take us long to reach Lyle’s house. We make that sort of polite but meaningless conversation for the drive, and I pray that I’m not coming off like a total moron, because I am feeling so anxious around him that I really have no idea what I’m saying.

By the time we’re pulling into his driveway, I’m a hot mess and can barely even remember what I’m doing here.

“It’s up there.” He points to two windows above a white garage. “I’ll show you up.”

I’m about to protest and tell him that’s fine and that he doesn’t have to take me up himself and that I can figure it out on my own, but he’s already opening the side door to the

garage and heading up the stairs before I can. So I just follow him on in and up to the apartment.

“It’s not much, I know, but I hope it will tide you over,” Lyle says.

It’s nice. Really nice, and would no doubt cost somewhere around five thousand a month back in New York.

“It’s great,” I tell him, admiring the queen-sized bed, the massive closet I’ll never fill, the flatscreen and the many windows to admire the foliage. “Seriously.”

“Bathroom’s in here.” He points. “There’s no fancy Japanese toilet to heat and clean your butt, but there is a nice shower with a bathtub I installed myself.”

I can’t help but giggle. “That’s okay. I can keep my own butt clean—”

The sound of tires scrunching outside causes Lyle to freeze. He raises a hand for silence and instantly looks out the window and then back to me.

“Delilah...” he mutters. “Okay, I need you to stay here and stay quiet for me. Cool?”

“Yeah,” I reply, confused. “Cool. But what—?”

“Seriously,” he says, his voice firm. “Stay here, stay *quiet*, and stay out of sight. My...girlfriend’s home.”

With that, he quickly leaves back out the door, leaving me standing there stunned. I have no right, but I feel lied to... cheated and blindsided as I hear him going down the stairs.

Is every guy in Tangerine some kind of dickhead?

“Girlfriend...?”

LYLE

I GRAB a wrench off the workbench before stepping out of the garage so I can have something in my hands when I wave to Delilah as she pulls her car into the driveway. She knows that I wouldn't have been upstairs working on the apartment after coming home from the shop, but I could have been working on the John Deere.

She's smiling as she gets out, having just got back from Melissa's baby shower, and immediately starts spewing off all the details to me at a speed I can barely even process. Of course, the fact that there's a strange, gorgeous female upstairs in the apartment isn't doing much for my focus.

"Melissa was *so* happy, Lyle, and her husband, John, you know the one you met at the lake? He was just *so* supportive and amazing. He's just right there for her with whatever she needs. All the girls there were just talking about how perfect he is."

I try to ignore every instinct I have to look behind me and glance up at the studio windows to see if Yara is looking out at us. I warned her to stay out of sight, and she seems like the kind of girl who listens, but you never know.

I finished all the work on the studio four months ago, and one of the reasons we haven't been able to find someone to

rent it out to yet is because Delilah is so specific about tenants; she *will not* rent to a female who could be considered even remotely good-looking or a threat to her and my “relationship.”

“That’s great,” I nod, circling over to the steps so her line of sight will be on the house and not on the garage.

“Yeah, it is.” She says, excitedly. “She told us all about how John proposed to her out at the docks where they went on their first date.”

Delilah isn’t the most subtle girl in the world. It doesn’t take Albert Einstein to figure out where *this* conversation is headed.

“Did you guys eat there?” I ask, trying to change the topic. “Are you hungry? Cause I’m hungry—”

“It must be nice,” she sighs dramatically, tilting her head up to the sky. “Don’t you think? Having that kind of bond with the person you love? Knowing that you’ll love them and they’ll love you *forever*?”

Delilah has been bringing this up for about two months now, which is crazy considering we’ve only been going out for five.

The first time she did it, she slipped it into the conversation with a bit more stealth and a little more tact. But now it’s almost weekly I get some kind of reminder that she’s waiting for me to propose. Not exactly the most romantic relationship in the world, but then again the relationship between Delilah and I has never been what I’d define as romantic. Can an arranged relationship be romantic?

Her father, Clint, is a hard ass drug dealer that controls Tangerine Forks as well as all the towns within a ten mile

radius. Everyone knows him and I've seen what happens to men who go up against him, so when he came to me at the shop one day and told me that his daughter had a crush on me and wanted me to be her boyfriend, there really wasn't any saying no on my end.

"Now, you make her happy," he told me. "Or you won't be happy with what I do to you."

So, knowing I had no choice in the matter, I asked Delilah out and put on as much charm as I could muster. To this day I'm still not sure if she even knows how just how much of a hand her father had in getting us together. Part of me suspects she does, but as long as she gets what she wants, she just doesn't care.

Our relationship has always been dull and grey for me, like flavorless food or music played through headphones sitting on a table far away.

After months with Yara, I settled into the fact that this was my life and I would never find love. But then today when I rescued Yara from those three men and took her into my arms, I felt a spark inside me that I thought I'd never feel again.

And it's not just her looks either...her flowing, dirty blond hair, her sea-green eyes or her tits that belong on the chest of a fertility goddess. No, it's more than that. It's the way she made me feel when I first set eyes on her. Like something inside me had suddenly been unlocked by her gaze. What something? I couldn't say. But whatever it was, the town of Tangerine Forks feels a whole lot bigger now with her in it.

A whistle jolts my senses, and I blink to see Delilah gawking at me. "Hello? Lyle? Are you with me?"

Yes, unfortunately...

I realize this whole time I've been thinking of Yara I've been staring vacantly off into space like an idiot, probably completely missing out on whatever it was Delilah just said to me.

"Huh? Sorry," I reply. "I was...thinking about something."

"Thinking about something?" she snorts. "Thinking about *what?*"

Now for whatever reason, I *cannot* lie to Delilah. Maybe Clint taught her some kind of incredible perceptive abilities or something when she really young. It's like if I was to try and bluff her in poker, she would win every single time. So, I either come clean and tell her the truth right now, which will result in her going to her father and me ending up with several broken bones, or I tell her another truth right now that will satisfy her. And I have about two seconds to come up with one.

"Well, I saved this girl today from being assaulted by three guys in a pickup truck."

Delilah's jaw drops, and her eyes go wide as dinner plates. "What!?" That worked. "You did *what?*"

"Yeah, I was coming home from the shop, and I saw this truck pulled over and these guys..."

I proceed to explain the whole story to her, leaving out key elements like Yara's name, my insane attraction to her, and the fact that at the end I brought her home and put her up in our studio apartment. Because after all, leaving out some of the truth isn't lying, and I'm still able to pull that off.

Once I'm finished, Yara is just staring at me. I already know what's coming next.

“Are you *kidding* me, Lyle!? You could have been killed!” I don’t know where Delilah got the idea that she could speak to men this way, but it must have been from being raised by Clint who she knows would always step in to protect her if anything ever happened to her.

“Well, I wasn’t,” I reply, biting the inside of my cheek.

“You did all this for some girl you don’t even know? What if those guys had guns? You could have gotten your head blown off!”

“Imagine what those guys were going to do to that girl,” I reply. “What if it was *you* in that truck—”

Delilah shakes her head. “I never would have let myself get into that situation to begin with! Don’t even go there with me, Lyle. Now you still stink from work. Go into the house and take a shower. And don’t *ever* do something like that again.”

She brushes past me and goes into the house. I can see from the way she has her shoulders hunched and how she practically kicks the door open on her way in that she’s pissed off.

“Oh, well,” I sigh and glance up at the clouds drifting slowly above as I wonder what my life would have been like had her father never come to me that day.

There has to be a way out of this, I think. But Clint and his goons run all of Tangerine Forks and all of the towns around here. I’m one guy and he’s got an entire organization working for him. Hell, I can’t even imagine what he’d do to me if he even heard I pissed Delilah off, let alone tried to leave her.

It’s like being held hostage from a distance and not even being able to confront your hostage taker.

A minute passes and I follow her inside and go into the bathroom. One thing Delilah's right about though; I do still stink of work. Being a mechanic means constantly getting your hands dirty, getting covered with grease, oil, all kinds of industrial cleaners that I've gotten used to at the garage but don't want to bring home and end up covering the house in.

I strip down and climb into the hot water and start to scrub myself down. I use the shower downstairs, not the one connected to our bedroom, as we like to keep that one nice and uncontaminated by whatever crud I bring home from the garage.

I tilt my head, embracing the heat, and lean against the tile as I start soaping myself up.

Yara...

I can't stop thinking about her, and somehow standing here naked is just driving the image of her even closer to the front of my mind.

I haven't let my anger get ahold of me like that in a while. A *long* while. But seeing those men on top of her like that just brought it out in me - the rage...the fire...the side of me I've worked for so long to suppress. And until today I was sure I had.

But then I saw *her*, and something inside me shifted. The next thing I knew I was slamming on the brakes, out of my car and tearing those men to pieces.

And I don't feel one sliver of remorse.

Those bastards deserved it and so much more.

Yara came here to start fresh – to get away from her terrible father and her hard life, and she expected to find escape in a quaint little New England town like out of the

movies. And instead, the first thing that happens to her when she steps off the bus is a group of men assaulting her.

I gave her a studio apartment, but it's not enough. I'd give her the world if I could.

I'd give her all nine inches I've got morning, noon, and night. No doubt the last thing on her mind right now is sex, and I feel guilty as hell even thinking it right now, but I am a man, and I'm dying to know what she looks like under those jeans and that sweatshirt she was wearing.

I open my eyes and look down to see I'm hard as a steel bolt. Using some soap, I lube up my hand and begin slowly stroking myself, picturing what Yara would look like standing in front of me just as naked, using her hands on me as I explore the curves of her body.

I'd move up her thighs, on the outsides first, then cup her ass and squeeze it as I kept my eyes on locked hers to watch her reaction.

"Play with my balls," I'd tell her, and she would. I'd already be on the verge of blowing my load, so I'd move up and stroke her perfect tits before pulling her close. Then, right as I was about to come, I'd thread my fingers through the back of her hair and bring my lips to hers.

But I wouldn't kiss her. I'd whisper right into her mouth and tell her, "I'm gonna come all over you, baby."

My little fantasy is enough to get me there quickly. I shoot a load all over the shower wall. And boy is it a big one too. The first shot splashes against the tile with an audible splat, and I have to brace myself as I empty my balls with an orgasm far more intense than I was anticipating.

“Fuck,” I groan, gritting my teeth as my cock flexes, pumping my seed everywhere. This may be the work-contamination shower, but I still have to fill my hands with cups of water and use them to clean the tiles off before I finish and grab my towel. “Jesus,” I mutter as I dry off and begin to trudge slowly upstairs toward the bedroom.

That was intense.

I don't think I've had an orgasm that heavy purely from jerking off since I was back in high school. What has this girl done to me? There's a window in the hall that looks out over the driveway to the garage, and part of me stirs inside just knowing she's out there, *in* there, so close and within reach, yet so far away.

When I step into the bedroom, I see Delilah laid out on the bed in her favorite set of lingerie and try not to audibly sigh. This isn't going to go well.

“Hey, mister,” she whimpers, tilting her chin down and running her tongue across her lower lip as she makes sexy-eyes at me. “All clean? Because I think it's time for us to get *dirty*.”

This is classic Delilah – let her anger get ahold of her, take it out on me, and then try to pretend it didn't happen by making up with sex. She figures all men are just *that* primal that we're that easy to manipulate. I can't even explain to the guys at the shop why I resent a tactic like this. To them, I should just shut up and stop complaining. But none of them even understand why I'm with Delilah. They all think it's my own choice.

“You look nice.” I lie, trying to keep my tone level. I can already feel the tension in the air as I hang my towel and

quickly go to the dresser to grab some fresh boxers. “But, uh...maybe another night?”

Delilah clears her throat. “Another night?”

Yeah, this *definitely* isn’t going to go well.

“I got up early, ya know? And it was a hard day at the shop, and I just—”

“Lyle,” she snaps. “You know you can’t lie to me. What’s going on? Does this have something to do with that girl from today?”

Shit. Think fast.

“I jerked off in the shower.” I blurt out, giving her a dose of ninety-percent truth. She’s quick, Delilah. It absolutely does have something to do with “that girl” from today, but I’m going to leave that part out of my explanation.

Delilah’s jaw drops, and she sits up, gawking at me like I just told her I murdered twelve people at the Drunken Mug Pub downtown.

“You’re kidding, right?”

I shake my head, knowing I’ve just popped the top off an argument or possibly even an actual fight that could lead to a phone call from her dad. Either way, it’s still better than exposing the truth about the gorgeous young woman I’m sheltering in our studio. *That* could lead to something serious, like a group of his guys paying me a little visit after work.

“Why!?” Delilah’s shouts. “Why would you do that, Lyle? Why the hell would you jerk off when you have a beautiful woman waiting upstairs for you in your bedroom?!”

I shake my head and sigh. I’ve gotten used to her rants and outbursts, but am wondering what Yara is thinking if she can

hear her from where she is.

“I’m sorry,” I reply, keeping it simple. But it doesn’t matter. Delilah isn’t listening. She’s already up and stuffing her legs into her pajamas and grabbing whatever she needs to go downstairs and sleep on the couch. Most girlfriends would kick the guy out of the bedroom and tell him *he’s* sleeping downstairs tonight, but not Delilah. There’s something much more dramatic to her about going downstairs and suffering on the couch – the cold, uncomfortable couch, while I’m upstairs in the nice warm, comfortable bed.

“I’m sleeping downstairs,” she mutters, brushing past me in a huff. “Enjoy your nice big bed tonight.”

I just watch her go, thinking as I hear her trudge loudly downstairs, what I could be doing with all this extra space in the bed tonight...

About what *other* girl I could be sharing it with.

YARA

LIKE I TOLD myself I would, I wake up nice and early, have a shower, and do my make-up so I look at least semi-passable as a human being before I start off for my walk into work. Of course this would all be a whole lot easier with a car, but hey, we can't all be Jeff Bezos, can we?

I make sure that Lyle and his girlfriend Delilah's cars are both gone before I leave out the side door of the garage.

Lyle and his *girlfriend*. Of course a guy like him has a girlfriend. Why wouldn't he?

It's not too cold on the walk into town, but as Winnie the Pooh would say, it's a pretty blustery day, and by the time I'm approaching the Tangerine Forks Diner, I feel like all the work I did on my hair this morning was for nothing.

I really don't know what I'm doing staying in this town anyway—not after what happened with those men. I'm still walking to get around too, and it's not like I'm any safer than I was when I first got here. I'm still vulnerable out on the road, like a deer walking around with a broken leg being stalked by mountain lions or bobcats or whatever animals they have out here in New Hampshire that hunt deer.

What I should be doing is getting another bus ticket and moving on to another town immediately. But that would also

require finding another job, and it took me long enough to find this one. Who would have thought, right? Finding a job as a server at a diner taking a long time?

But I also don't *want* to leave. This whole thing was my plan. I wanted to come to Tangerine Forks, and I'm not about to let one bad event ruin my whole plan. Plus, I had no idea that the most handsome man in the world also lived here. Am I really going to just catch a bus and leave him behind?

And so what if he has a girlfriend? Girlfriends and boyfriends break up. It happens all the time. Not that *I* would know...but I've seen it happen.

No, I'm staying here in Tangerine Forks. I'll buy some bear mace or something off Amazon, and if those jerks in the pickup truck come and mess with me again, they'll get a face full of fuck-you from yours truly.

An old bell rings as I push open the door of the diner and step inside to the smell of old coffee and burnt bacon. There are only a couple customers at the counter and two in the last booth in the corner. I'm supposed to be meeting the manager here, so I go up to the register and wait a couple minutes before dinging the bell.

A moment later, the swinging door to the kitchen opens, and a girl who looks to be in a *very* bad mood storms in, places one hand on her hip and one hand on the counter and glares at me.

"Yes? What can I get you?"

"Oh, um, my name's Yara," I say, countering her bitchy-energy with every ounce of happy-energy I have inside me. "I'm here for the servers job. I'm supposed to meet with—"

“The manager?” she interrupts. “Yes, that’s me. Nice to meet you. My name’s Delilah. I’m the manager and owner.”

The world seems to freeze as she extends her hand, and my heart immediately sinks into my toes. Luckily, I’ve had so many jobs since I was thirteen that my body is on total autopilot and reaches out for me and performs the shake so I don’t have to think about it.

This can’t be. Lyle’s girlfriend is my new manager? There’s just no way.

How can *she* be Lyle’s girlfriend? She’s not even that pretty.

Don’t be a bitch, Yara.

That was a horrible thing to think, and I immediately feel bad about it. That was pure, unadulterated jealousy flowing through my veins, and I’m completely disappointed in myself. I just met the man, and he has every right to be in a relationship, and here I am physically judging her for simply being the woman in that relationship instead of me.

Yes, I’m being a bitch.

“Here’s your apron,” Delilah says, handing me one from behind the counter. “I assume you know how to use the Square POS system to take and send orders to the kitchen?”

“I do, yes,” I reply, forcing a smile.

“Good. Now let me show you the rest of the diner and the other staff you’ll be working with.”

Delilah may be in a mood, but she definitely knows what she’s doing. She takes me into the kitchen and introduces me to the two line cooks, Andy and Max, and shows me where to pick up the food when it’s ready and where to drop off the

dirty plates for Nate, the dishwasher who looks to be about seventeen and is so thin I wouldn't be surprised if a light breeze carried him away.

“Are there any other servers?” I ask as she takes me back out front. I've got my hands in my pockets to hide the fact that I'm shaking. I don't want my new boss thinking I'm nervous about the job when I'm actually just shaken up by the fact that I'm hiding on my new boss's property after work and completely jealous about who she's dating.

“Just you for now,” she replies. “We lost Katie to a school. Thinks she's going to get her psychiatry degree or something.”

Delilah groans as though she just said Katie had wanted to run away to be a Vegas singer.

“Well, that's good for her, isn't it?” I suggest. Delilah's reaction makes me instantly regret it.

“No,” she replies, scolding me with her eyes and shaking her head. “This is something Katie likes to do every year or two—go back to school for whatever new degree she's decided she's going to get, then drop out after a semester or two. Last time it was marine biology. And what happens? I lose a worker. Real pain in my ass.”

“Ah, I see.” I nod, not wanting to take this conversation any further. Thankfully, the bell at the door dings, and I see my first set of customers step in and take a seat over at the second booth by the window.

“There you go.” Delilah points. “If you need anything, let me know. I'll be in the back.”

I nod and watch her go. It's only two customers. I should be able to handle them without a problem, and the last thing I

want to do on my first day is rely on my boss for basic things that I should be able to know how to do.

I'm a bit distracted as I take their orders, thinking about Lyle and the insane coincidence that I end up working for his girlfriend, but I manage to get through it without issue, and get their plates from the kitchen to their table without dropping them or spilling them or mixing them up when I get back. They don't tip well, but I figure it's my first table in a new town, so I don't let it get to me.

Things go well all morning, staying at a pretty decent pace that I can keep up with fairly well. But then lunch hits, and all hell breaks loose. Every booth in the house fills up with truckers coming through town and the high top as well. I'm racing around doing my best to fill orders and not get cussed out by the kitchen staff for leaving food waiting too long out back.

Delilah is no help, sitting in her office making phone calls the entire time while I handle what should be a three-person job on my own. I even motion to her once when I feel like I'm drowning, and she just waves me away like she's fanning at a fly.

Somehow, and I'm not sure how, I manage to make it through lunch and earn a decent amount of tips. I try not to glare at Delilah, reclining back in her chair, as I pass her office with arms filled with dirty dishes on the way to the kitchen.

How can Lyle date this woman? I wonder. He's so kind and caring, such a gentleman. And she's like this psychotic, fire-breathing dragon who seems to only care about herself. It just doesn't make sense to me. Maybe she has dirt on him and is blackmailing him to stay with her. That's the only thing I can think of as to why those two are together.

Later in the afternoon, she comes out of her office and refills the napkin holders before telling me she's leaving for a bit.

"I have some things to do – errands to run. I'll be back later. You'll be okay on your own?"

I want to tell her that I have been so far. That she hasn't helped me at all one bit and that this is a three- to four-person job being done by one girl and her question is a complete insult, but I also want to keep my job. So I answer diplomatically.

"Yeah, I'll be all right," I say with a smile.

She smiles right back. "I thought you would be. See ya later."

And then she's out the door.

Yeah, how are you dating her, Lyle?

Delilah is gone until ten minutes before closing time, at which point I'm the only one left. Andy and Max have left, having cleaned up the kitchen, and Nate bailed around 4:30, guaranteeing me that we'd have no more customers before five.

"I promise you," he told me. "No one ever comes in after 4:30."

"Just you left?" Delilah asks as she comes back with bags that are obviously from shopping and not errands like she had said before.

"Just me," I reply.

"You can go."

“You sure?” I ask, acting like the model employee. Truth be told, I’m ready to get the hell out of here.

“Sure. I’ll close up,” she replies. “We never get anyone after 4:30. But I won’t be paying you for the half hour. Okay?”

I shrug. “That’s fine.” I’m already slipping out of my apron and into my sweatshirt. I could really care less about the extra half hour in wages. I made enough today in tips from the lunch rush that it really doesn’t matter, and if Delilah wants to be that stingy with me, then that’s on her.

I slip out the door into the cool autumn breeze and start the walk home. My new boss hasn’t even asked me why I’m walking, why I don’t have a car, or where I’m living. That’s something I’d expect from a boss in New York City, but not here. Maybe my expectations for Tangerine Forks, New Hampshire were completely misguided.

Thankfully, I manage to get back before Delilah, but Lyle’s car is already in the driveway. He spots me as I’m coming up the driveway and comes out from inside. I practically scream at him as he walks over to me.

“You!” I point. “Your *girlfriend* is my frickin’ manager! My boss!”

“What?” he replies, looking genuinely confused.

“Delilah! The diner! I work at the frickin’ diner where *your* girlfriend—”

“Oh, God...” Lyle groans, putting a hand to his head.

“Yeah!” I snap. “Exactly! Do you know how awkward this is? How bad this is?”

He pauses for a second, like he’s collecting his thoughts, then takes a deep breath and looks up at me and nods.

“Was she...nice to you at least?”

“No! No, she wasn’t.” I almost want to laugh at how preposterous that question truly is. “I mean, what are you thinking, Lyle?”

He stares at me with a look in his eyes I haven’t seen before. He’s still unbelievably handsome, but there’s something there now...almost like a vulnerability, a chink in his armor I would have never expected.

Should I come right out and say it?

He did save me from something truly awful. He did give me a place to stay. I owe him so much already, and to tell him what’s on my mind right now...just seems so wrong.

But on the other hand, my day at work and everything I had to deal with is still sitting heavy on me, and before I know it, my lips are moving.

“She’s awful, Lyle! She’s *terrible!* What are you doing with her? I don’t understand!”

And there it is. My cards are on the table, and there’s no taking them back.

Lyle looks at me for a moment, and I can’t tell whether he wants to yell at me or simply hang his head at what I just said. He opens his mouth but doesn’t speak.

I’m trembling again. My palms are sweating. What have I done? This man’s relationship is none of my business. This is bitchy-Yara coming out again, and I couldn’t stop her.

Please, Thor, strike me down with a bolt of lightning so I don’t have to endure this any longer.

“Okay, look. I should explain—” Lyle starts to speak, but then in the distance, I hear the sound of a car approaching.

And although I've only heard it once, I recognize it immediately.

It's Delilah's.

"Shit," we both say in unison.

"Get upstairs," he snaps.

"I'm on my way."

I rush past him, grab the door and tug it open, then take the stairs two at a time up to the apartment, wishing I'd been able to just keep my stupid mouth shut. I did it at work, why couldn't I have just done it here too?

LYLE

A GUY ROLLED into the shop today with the spare tire on his car so worn down from driving that it had blown out on him on the highway, and instead of getting it towed, he just drove it over to us on the rim, shooting sparks and tearing up the road on his way over. I guess someone forgot to tell him the donut is only meant for temporary use until you buy yourself a new tire for the old one.

We normally never see that level of idiocy at the garage, but it got me thinking about what Yara said to me yesterday – about what I’m doing with Delilah.

Sure, maybe I didn’t have a choice when I first started to go out with her, but that doesn’t stop me from feeling like a total idiot now after being confronted by Yara.

It’s like she completely emasculated me. I want *her* and I’m screwing around with some girl I have absolutely no interest with, completely unable to date the girl who I can’t get out of my mind every second of the day. How the Hell am I supposed to explain that to her?

At the beginning of our relationship, I thought I’d never be able to deal with dating Delilah. But then slowly, I started to get used to things, like this moron driving around on his spare tire. He probably told himself at first to keep on top of it, to

not forget, but then after a while he just slowly let it become part of his life.

I glance at the clock hanging over the door to the front of house and see that I've only got seventeen minutes left until it's time to head home, and today, rather than just accepting that it's time to go back to the house and see my "girlfriend," I feel a sense of hesitation come over me.

I want to do something that actually makes me feel good for once. Maybe take Yara out for dinner, for example.

With a deep sigh, I reach into my pocket and take out my phone to dial Delilah, but quickly think better of it and send a text instead.

Bad news. Pete's making me stay late and work overtime.

It's a lie, but if she can't see me or hear the tone of my voice, she can't know that. She also knows I'm not supposed to answer my phone at work when she calls, so when she instantly calls back five seconds later, I have a reason not to pick up.

Are you joking? she texts back. I can almost hear the vitriol in her voice.

Sorry I write back.

There's a long pause before her next reply – long enough that I start to wonder if she's going to reply at all. When she doesn't, that's when she's *really* angry.

Well, there goes my dinner plans.

Sure, I'm making this all up, but if I wasn't, Delilah would be guilt tripping me over something completely out of my

control, and that's just completely not okay. I bet if I showed Yara these texts, she'd have something to say about them.

Sorry, I text back. She won't respond again – I know that.

Next, I send a text to my longtime friend Jim asking if he wants to hang out after work, to which he enthusiastically replies that he would. I don't get much time to see Jim anymore now that Delilah takes up so much of my time, which I hate, considering he's been my best friend since high school and has always been there for me. He's also the only one I've told about Clint forcing me into dating his daughter.

“Pete!” I call out to my boss, who's finishing up putting a caliper back on a Ford F-150. “You need me for anything else?”

“Finish up that genius's donut?” he asks with a chuckle.

“He's good to go,” I reply. “Until his next blowout.”

“Then you're set. I'll see ya tomorrow.”

“Thanks!” I grab my coat off the wall and head to my car.

Jim looks at me like he's seen a ghost when I knock and he opens the door to his apartment.

“Holy shit, there he is!” He throws his arms around me and yanks me in for the biggest bro-hug I've ever experienced.

“How you doing, man?” I laugh.

“I thought she'd killed you,” Jim replies. “I thought that crazy girl had finally had her dad cut your dick off and choke you to death with it.”

He backs up and looks at me, shaking his head like a proud father whose son has just returned from the war – or maybe just done really well in a soccer game.

“Still here.” I shrug with a smile, feeling suddenly exposed. But Jim, always knowing how to read a situation, hands me a cold beer and ushers me inside.

“Well, get your ass in here, pal. I feel like I haven’t seen you in years.”

I nod as we go over to the couch. “Well, you know what it is.”

“It’s that woman of yours,” Jim says, taking a swig of his drink. “And her criminal overlord father. Don’t you think it’s time to put those two in your rear view?”

“Yeah, I’m thinking it might be,” I reply

“Say what?” Jim almost jokes on his beer. “Damn, bro. I never expected *that* to come out of your mouth.”

“Me neither...” I take a sip of my drink and sit back. I feel as though my life has changed so much in the last couple of days that it’s almost like I’m an entirely new man. And by the way Jim’s looking at me right now, he can tell.

“Bro, what’s going on?”

I need to say it.

I want to say it.

But it’s a lot harder than just letting the words bounce around in my head. Vocalizing what’s on my mind would put that truth that I now know out into the world, and that’s going to change everything.

But I have to. It’s why I came here.

“I can’t do it anymore. I can’t just be his bitch and do his bidding. Not after what’s happened.” I thought the words would sting coming out of my lips. I thought I’d get that

sinking feeling in my stomach that you get when you say something really difficult.

But to my surprise, it's like a massive calm comes over me once they've left my mouth, and I'm staring at the world through new eyes.

Jim's eyes light right up like he can't believe what he's hearing.

"Bro!" he blurts out, clapping me on the shoulder. "I cannot believe you just said that. What brought this on? You take some shrooms and have a revelation or something?"

"Not quite." I laugh and take a few minutes to relay the story to him about coming upon Yara on the side of the road, the truckers and me kicking the shit out of them, and how I've got her hidden up in my apartment, unable to tell Delilah about it. When I'm finished, Jim's got this sly look in his eye.

"What?" I ask.

"So it's her. You've got a thing for her."

"Yeah," I reply. "I guess I do."

"You guess?" he laughs. "Bro, you're ready to knock her up and make her have fifteen of your babies!"

Jim's always been the yin to my yang, and I guess that's why I knew I had to come over here after work today. We're both cracking up and I have to set my beer on the coffee table so I don't spill it.

Having a child with Delilah is the last thing I'd ever want to do, but is something I know she and her father would want to have happen down the line, but picturing Yara pregnant, with a baby belly and nice big swollen breasts, has me instantly turned on in a way I've never felt before.

“You know, I’m glad we’re boys, Jim,” I smile.

“I’m glad you finally made it back over here,” he laughs. I reach out and give him a pound, then get to my feet. “Whoa, you already leaving?”

“Sorry, man. I gotta get back.”

“For Delilah? I thought you said—”

“Not for Delilah.” I shake my head with a smile. Jim gets it immediately and grins.

“I getcha. Good luck, bro. Let me know how it goes with baby number one.”

Laughing, I head back out the door to my car and start the drive home. I can’t remember the last time in my life I felt this excited for anything. I check the time on my phone, and as long as everything is normal today at the diner, I should have a little bit of time once I get home to see Yara before Delilah gets back. That is of course unless she rushed home in a bad mood to pout, but let’s hope that didn’t happen.

Thankfully, her car isn’t in the driveway when I pull in, so I quickly rush up to the apartment and knock.

“Yara? Yara, it’s Lyle, can I come in?” No answer. I check the lock – it’s open, so I go open the door and go inside to find myself in an empty apartment. “Shit.”

It looks like neither Yara nor Delilah has made it back from work yet. Somehow I, with my fake working-late story, made it back before either of them, even with stopping off to see Jim at his place.

Rather than going inside the house or waiting outside, I decide to just take a seat at the foot of the bed and wait for her. If Delilah comes home first, so what? I’m not worried about

getting her upset anymore. This is my house, my garage, and my studio apartment that I built. If she wants to snap at me and question me as to why I was up here, well, I'll just tell her the truth. I've had enough of this being-held-hostage shit. Yara must have felt like a hostage back at her home with her emotionally-abusive father and she found a way out.

I wish I could have been there for her earlier. I wish I could have made all of that go away. Someone as beautiful as her, someone with such a wonderful spirit should have never had to go through such terrible pains as she did.

The sound of the bathroom door opening causes me to turn my head, and when I do, I see Yara emerge, towel wrapped around her hair, but otherwise completely naked.

She yelps when she sees me, and though I want to avert my eyes for politeness's sake, I'm completely unable to.

“Jesus, Lyle, what are you doing here!?” she blurts out.

Her body just does not quit. Her tits are absolutely flawless, her waist is narrow and just asking for my hands to be firmly latched around it, and her thighs meet at a mouth-watering crux, a perfectly bare pink slit just begging for my tongue.

She backs up and hides herself behind the corner of the doorframe, but it's too late. I've seen everything, and my cock is already pumped full of blood and solid beneath my work pants.

“I was waiting for you to get home from work,” I reply. “I didn't realize you'd already gotten back.”

“Yeah, well, I'm here,” she stammers, her face red as a tasty marinara. “Is there...something I can do for you?”

I can think of about a thousand things she could do for me right now, and a thousand things more I could do for her. But as I get to my feet, I keep my distance.

“You were right.” I let my words linger in the air – let them sink in. I can see Yara’s mind working to process them, but it doesn’t take her long.

“About?”

She’s playing dumb. She knows.

“Come on.” I smile, stepping closer. “You know what about.”

Another step closer.

I can smell the shampoo she used in the shower now. It’s uncomfortable to walk with this hard-on. I need to unzip.

Her lips are *so* plump and kissable. I can’t imagine what they’d feel like wrapped around my cock right now.

“D-Delilah...” she finally says. I knew she understood.

I nod. “She *is* terrible, Yara, and I *shouldn’t* be with her, Yara.” I reach out and gently run the back of my hand down her arm. Her skin is so soft. I can’t imagine what the rest of her must feel like. “There’s someone else I should be with, Yara...”

Yara’s beautiful green eyes widen as she looks at me. Looking at her just feels so right. Here. *This* is where I’m meant to be.

“W-who?” she whispers.

“You, Yara,” I say, leaning in. She opens her mouth slightly, ready for what she knows I want. And what I want is

to kiss her - to kiss those beautiful, juicy lips. But I can't. Not yet. "But I can't have you."

"What!?" she gasps. "Lyle, why? Do you think I don't like you? Because I—"

"No." I smile. "It's not that."

"Then what is it?" She looks hurt, confused. And that's the last thing I want for her. I reach out and take her hand in mine. I can see it comforts her, but it only makes holding back on my part even harder.

"I'm still with Delilah, Yara," I reply. "*Technically*. If I were to make a move on you right now, I'd be a cheater, and I don't want you to think of me that way. Understand?"

A tiny smile and sense of relief fills her gorgeous face. She nods her head. "I understand."

"Do you have any plans tomorrow night?"

She smiles at the silliness of my question and shakes her head. "I did, but I could move them if you had something in mind..."

"Well, I was thinking that tomorrow night, you and I could go out for dinner."

Her blush deepens. "Are you sure you can make that work, Lyle?"

I nod, stroking the red on her cheek. "Don't worry, beautiful. I'll make it work. But first, let me explain to you why I've been with her in the first place."

YARA

MY ALARM WAKES ME, and I open my eyes to the two glowing squares of light on my ceiling that are there every morning from the sun that comes through my windows. For some reason, they seem brighter today as I get up and go to the bathroom to start my morning routine.

Going to dinner with Lyle tonight, I think as I shower. I couldn't be more excited, but I also don't see how he's going to make that happen. Delilah is my boss, and he also lives with her. *I* live right next door to the house he shares with her, and they're in a relationship that he's been forced into by the local drug kingpin.

Part of me was *so* relieved when he told me the story of how her father came to him and forced them into dating, as it meant he never was into her in the first place, but another part of me now wonders how in the world he's going to ever leave her.

But he said he would make it work, so I guess I'll take his word for it.

I want to make myself look extra nice today, but I know that will only raise questions at work. Delilah will want to know why I've put in all the effort, who it's for, and then I'll

have to start lying to her, and that's the last thing I want to do while juggling all my other responsibilities.

So I put on my normal work clothes and start walking. I figure I'll come back and change once my shift is done. I'm going to want another shower then anyway to get the smell of the diner off me.

I can't stop thinking about Lyle the whole way there. He was *this* close to kissing me last night, and I was totally ready to let him. His eyes had me hypnotized. The way he was slow-walking toward me, speaking slowly, charming like a prince... I would have let him do whatever he wanted to.

But when I think about how he held back, I can't help but smile. A warm, fuzzy feeling fills me up inside.

"If I were to make a move on you right now, I'd be a cheater, and I don't want you to think of me that way."

Those were his words to me, and I realize just how right he was. If he had kissed me then, no doubt it would have been incredible. But I would have always had that thought in the back of my mind that if he was able to cheat on Delilah, he'd have been able to cheat on me.

So what if he wasn't with her voluntarily? It still shows a lot of character for him to break up with her first.

The fact that he waited just means that when our lips finally meet, it's going to be so much sweeter.

When I get to work, I don't even have to go inside to know that something's wrong; I can hear Delilah screaming at the back of house from outside.

"What are these dishes? These look clean to you? We're serving *people* here, Nate! Not pigs! And Max, I thought I told you to have the soup ready an hour before lunch? Andy,

you're supposed to remind him of that, aren't you? You've been here the longest."

I take a deep breath. *Oh, boy.* And I decide to take the front door instead of the back today. If Delilah's in a scary mood, I'd rather catch the tail end of it rather than get picked up and carried away by the full force.

Luckily, there are fresh aprons on the counter, so I grab one and quickly start setting up for breakfast service while Delilah continues to badger the boys out back.

What could be going on? I wonder.

Then a thought creeps into my mind.

What if...?

"No," I whisper to myself. "Don't even think it."

If I think it, I'll jinx it. Lyle said he would make it work, and it's up to him to make it work. Their relationship is complicated to say the least. I can't just go expecting things to happen overnight, and I'm not about to put that out there either. There are a million things Delilah could be upset about...especially with her personality.

The swinging door to the kitchen bursts open, and Delilah enters like a storm. Her eyes lock on to me like lasers, and I do my best not to flinch.

"Oh, you made it," she snaps, acting like I'm not three minutes early. I don't mention it.

"Yup." I smile. "Made it."

"Okay, get everything ready for the breakfast service," she continues, which is precisely what I'm already doing. "And make *sure* all the plates are clean. Nate did a shit job with the dishes last night. Okay?"

“Yup, no problem.” I give her my best charm, not wanting any of the vitriol I heard earlier to land on me. For a moment, she looks like she wants to curse me out or something, but then she decides to pull her phone out of her pocket and check it. As I’m re-checking the coffee mugs, she goes into the back, and I’m pretty sure I hear her step outside.

The rest of the day goes pretty much the same. Delilah is short with the kitchen staff mostly, although I do catch a couple stray missiles from her toward the end of lunch during the rush when I’m completely swamped and on my own and don’t perfectly stack my dirty dishes in the back like they’re being set up for a photoshoot.

I can’t stop watching the clock throughout the afternoon either, thinking about Lyle and our dinner tonight that’s supposed to be happening, which of course just makes my shift feel twice as long. And when 4:30 rolls around, Delilah tells me she needs me to stick around and make sure Nate does the dishes right this time and doesn’t “fuck them up royally” like last night.

So of course I stay. What am I going to do? Tell her I’ve got a date with Lyle? Yeah, that would go over *real* well. But by the time I’m headed home, I’m practically sprinting back to the apartment.

I dive immediately into the shower and start to wash all the smell of coffee, bacon, burgers and everything else that comes with the diner off of me. If this happens tonight, I can’t remind Lyle of a discount diner where his girlfriend, or maybe ex-girlfriend, works that you can get a burger and fries and a drink for under ten dollars.

I’m just finishing doing my hair when I hear the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs – heavy, manly footsteps.

My heart starts to beat faster, and I try to relax and not burn off my ends or my fingertips on my flat iron. There's a knock and I take a deep breath. "Come on in!" I call out.

I hear the door open and Lyle's voice call out, "Yara?"

"Two seconds!" I call back.

This is it, I think as I suck in another deep breath. Why am I so nervous? I don't even know if we're going anywhere tonight. It could be that the whole thing fell through and I'm just going to be sitting here alone in the apartment for the rest of the evening.

"All set to go?" he asks as he comes into the room. He looks even more handsome than normal, with blue jeans, a black T-shirt, a black leather jacket on, and his hair even styled a bit in that messy look that totally suits him. I immediately want to throw myself into his arms. He looks me up and down, sees the dark jeans and white blouse I'm wearing, and nods. "You look great."

I know he's just being nice. I don't really have any great date outfits, so I'm wearing the best I've got. But I smile anyway. "Thank you."

"But you know what?" he says, a sly look on his face. "I feel like you would look *amazing* in this..."

He steps back out of sight, and when he comes back, he's holding a pair of black heels and a beautiful, sleek, not-too-formal, black dress.

I audibly gasp. "Lyle! Where did you..."

"I picked it out on my lunch break." He smiles, coming over to me. "Do you like it?"

“Like it?” I ask, examining it. “I...can you read minds? It’s *so* me!”

Lyle laughs and hands it to me. “Come on, go change. Let’s get going or we’ll be late.”

I want to ask him how we could possibly be late in such a tiny town as Tangerine Forks, or where we’re going, or what he ended up doing with Delilah, but I know better than to ruin this moment.

So I go into the bathroom and quickly change out of my boring date outfit and into his incredibly perfect black dress that I just love myself in, and come quickly back.

“Yeah, you look incredible. Just incredible.” He smiles when he sees me. I don’t think I’ve ever had a man look at me the way he’s looking at me now.

He comes over, takes me by the hand, and leads me downstairs to the car like he’s escorting royalty. The whole time I pretend like I know how to walk in heels without falling, and I manage to do a pretty good job of it too. He opens the car door for me, helps me in, and then we’re off – driving, but in the other direction of town.

“Where are we going, Lyle?”

“A few towns over,” he replies. “It’s not far. I’ll explain when we get to the restaurant. Don’t worry, you’ll like it. It’s really nice.”

“Not *too* nice, I hope,” I laugh. “I’m not *that* fancy of a girl.”

Lyle chuckles. “Hey, I’m a mechanic. I’m not that fancy either. I do a good job pretending, though.”

It's hard to look at him right now and not think about those thick, callused, mechanic hands peeling this dress off me. Hard not to think about that missed kiss we almost shared last night. Hard not to think about how badly I want him right now. With just how busy it was at work, I've only had a handful of French fries to eat all day, so I should be hungry. But my desire for Lyle is completely canceling that out right now. I don't know if I'll be able to get anything at dinner into my mouth.

Lyle wasn't lying when he said the drive to the restaurant wasn't far, which is good, because I'm so nervous I can barely make small talk on the way there. He parks, and I quickly open my door and let myself out, not waiting for him to come around and help me. I want to get inside and get seated as soon as possible so we can alleviate all this awkwardness.

I think Lyle must notice, because he's smirking as I walk up to the door with him. He's made a reservation, and we're seated immediately in a nice little table out of the way in a corner all by ourselves. I take a deep breath and pick up my menu, but before I can even start reading, Lyle pushes my hand down against the table.

"I broke up with Delilah."

His words hit me with the biggest punch of sweltering relief I've ever felt in my life. The one thought I didn't even dare think to myself, and Lyle has vocalized it.

"Y-you did?" I'm so hot inside I can barely even speak. He's never looked sexier than the way he's looking at me now. No wonder Delilah was in such a foul mood today and screaming at everyone. "Aren't you worried about Clint? About what he'll do to you?"

He nods. “He won’t be happy, and I guess before you came to Tangerine Forks, I didn’t see any hope of escape. But now,” he squeezes my hand. “Now I see that I want more, and I’m not going to let that son of a bitch threaten me any longer.”

I feel my eyes starting to well up with tears, but I do everything I can to push them back. This is the last moment in the world I need to be crying. Nothing has even happened between us yet. But hearing a man talk about me like that, a man like Lyle...I just can’t help it.

So I pretend I have to scratch my nose. “Excuse me,” I say awkwardly with a smile. “That’s really sweet, Lyle. I should have known something was up when I saw Delilah at work today.”

“Was she upset?”

“To say the least,” I laugh, leaning over the table to be closer to him. “I barely got out of there with my life!”

Lyle laughs as the waitress comes over to take our drink orders. We order dinner too, and Lyle asks her if she could ask the kitchen to put a rush on our order because we have to hurry back to the house as we only have a sitter for our kids for the next hour.

“Sitter for our kids?” I hiss, laughing once she’s gone. “What was that?”

Lyle chuckles and takes my hand. “Just an excuse so I can get you out of here and back to the house as quickly as possible.”

He soaks me in with his gorgeous eyes as he stares at me from across the table. I feel completely taken by him as I sit there and barely even notice when our dinner is placed in front

of us. The meal itself goes by in a flash, and before I know it, we're back in the car headed home again.

My heart is fluttering in my chest. *This is really about to happen, isn't it?*

The last hint of sunlight is going down over the horizon as we pull into the driveway, which is surprisingly empty.

"No Delilah? She's not staying here anymore either?" I ask.

"She's back with her dad," Lyle replies. "Let's not talk about her right now."

The thought of Delilah being back with her drug-dealing, criminal father worries me a bit to say the least, but Lyle leans in and kisses me, sweet and soft, with just a hint of his tongue between my lips.

My whole world blooms, as though someone just turned the dial up on the universe past where it's supposed to be.

An electric tingle shoots up my spine, causing me to shake in my seat.

So this is what it's like.

I feel an enormous sense of loss when he pulls away and leave my lips hanging open, my entire body waiting for another kiss.

"We should get upstairs," he says. He opens his car door, but before he can exit the car, I take him by the wrist.

"Lyle, there's something I should tell you first." I really hope this doesn't put a damper on his plans, but I also shouldn't be concealing this from him either.

"You're an alien?" he teases.

“No,” I sigh and giggle, feeling semi-relieved. “I’ve never done...*you know* before.”

Lyle gets my meaning immediately and reaches a hand down between my thighs. “And you thought I’d be worried about that?” I nod nervously. “Well, don’t be, silly. That means you’ll be mine. *All* mine.”

Before I can react, Lyle comes around to my side of the car, lifts me into his arms, throws me over his shoulder, and starts to carry me up into the apartment. I knew he was strong, but he carries me like I weigh absolutely nothing, using one arm, and uses the other to open the door. The next thing I know, he’s laying me down on my back on the bed and pulling his shirt off.

Muscles. So many muscles. His physique is unbelievable. If he ever got laid off at the shop, he could definitely get a job in the fitness modeling industry.

He stares down at me with a possessive intensity in his eyes that makes me feel so small in such a good way. I feel owned by him, like nothing else in the world matters at this moment but him and me.

“I’ve been thinking about you since the moment I saved you from those men.” There’s an unmistakable lust in his eyes too, but a lust that I welcome – that I want.

He leans down and takes the hem of my dress and pulls, lifting it up over my knees, my thighs, and then my waist.

“Look at you with no panties on,” he says, his voice low, almost a growl. “Look at that cute little pink slit.”

I’m blushing now, but not from embarrassment. This is all just new to me. I *want* Lyle to see me. He leans down and kisses me right on my sex, sending a jolt of sensation through

me that shakes my whole body. Just one kiss, that's all. Then he stands and unzips his pants, letting them drop to his knees. And then I see it.

I may be a virgin, but I know enough to know when a man is blessed with size. And Lyle has more than enough inches to never be threatened by any man. In fact, I can feel my eyes go wide when I see it.

“Oh my” is all I say.

“That's right.” Lyle grins. “I'm going to spread your virgin hole nice and wide, baby.”

Up until now, he's been such a gentleman, and now hearing him talk dirty to me does something to me inside. My arousal level skyrockets and I let out a moan beneath him.

“Yes, please,” I whimper back.

He leans down on top of me and lifts my dress up and completely off of me so I'm completely naked, then cups my breasts and kisses me on the neck just beneath my ear. I gasp and reach out, taking hold of his muscular back with both hands as the sensations ripple through me.

I feel weak beneath his massive frame, knowing he could lift me or pin me down with ease if he chose. And I love it. He has complete control over me, and after spending my entire teenage life in control of others – my mother or my own life – giving up control to Lyle feels incredible.

When he enters me, everything changes. A mixture of pleasure and pain floods through me. At first, it's the pain I feel, but Lyle waits and doesn't move for a minute and lets me get used to it.

“Just breathe, baby,” he whispers. “You can do it.”

And he's right. The pain goes away, and I'm left with only the incredible pleasure of being filled by his cock as he penetrates me, stretches me, goes deep inside and begins to thrust. It's the most incredible thing I've ever experienced.

He kisses me all over, exploring my body with his rough hands as he fucks me, treating my body like a temple. I feel worshipped. He's *so* hard inside me, and as he picks up the pace, I can feel his balls slapping against my asshole as he groans into my ear.

"Christ, you feel so good," he growls.

He spins me over onto my knees, doing me from behind. I have to adjust again to a tiny bit of pain, but it's gone in an instant. The feeling of Lyle's hands on my waist is simply divine. I have to brace myself with both hands against the headboard from all the force he's driving into me.

From this angle, he seems to be hitting the spot perfectly, because I can feel myself getting closer and closer to orgasm. I let out a moan, which Lyle answers.

"I'm gonna come, baby."

"I'm not on birth control."

"Is that a problem?" he asks.

His question hits me out of left field. Is he asking me what I think he's asking me? Is he saying he wouldn't care if he got me pregnant?

I can't really think about it right now either. My orgasm is about to pounce on me.

"I'm close," I tell him.

"Let's come together," he replies. "Take it all, baby. Take it all."

Before I can even reply, Lyle buries his cock deep inside me. And then I feel it: the hot, wet spray of his orgasm. His cock jerks as he sprays, and that's all it takes to send me over the edge.

I come too. My whole body quivers, and I collapse forward onto the bed. Lyle falls on top of me, pinning me against the mattress as we share the most incredible experience ever together.

I'm gasping for breath with my heart pounding and my palms sweaty by the time it's over. Somewhere in the back of my mind is the fact that Lyle just came in me unprotected, but that fact is completely overridden by just how insanely incredible the experience we just had together was.

I'll think about those consequences later, I tell myself as I take a deep breath and turn my head back around to look at him. He's all smiles, looking even sexier than he normally does, with just a thin glaze of sweat on his face.

"That was incredible, baby." He grins, leaning in for a kiss.

"Yeah, it was." I smile back, entranced by the look in his eyes that tells me I belong to him now.

LYLE

I WAKE up in the morning with my arms wrapped around Yara's warm, naked body curled up in bed beside me.

Now this I could get used to.

Yara stirs beside me, pressing the soft skin of her butt against my dick, which is already hard from the morning. I lean closer and inhale her scent, kissing her gently enough that I don't wake her, then guide the tip of my cock between her legs, spreading her gently open.

She gasps and wakes as I penetrate her. I groan with the sensation and find her mouth with mine as she turns her head to me. I cup her breasts as her back arches and begin to work in and out of her as I trace every inch of her body with my fingertips.

Our bodies move together in perfect sync. I can feel the trust in her as she presses back against me. She's given herself over to me completely, and it's more than just sex. This may be only our second time, but it feels like our two hundredth – we're that comfortable together.

I haven't felt this at home in a long time. Yara is my one, and I'm never letting her go.

We finish together again, and again I finish inside her. It's what feels right. Pulling out would only ruin the moment between us. I wasn't sure I was ready to be a father with Delilah, now or ever, but if Yara gets pregnant, I'm fine with that. Nothing in the world could get me to leave her.

Breaking up with Delilah has me feeling like a free man again, although now it's only a matter of time before her father comes knocking at my door. I've taken the first step to forging a new life for myself, but this is only the beginning; it's not going to get any easier from here.

"That's a nice way to wake up," Yara whispers with a beautiful smile.

"Yeah, I could wake up like that every day," I reply, stroking her cheek with the back of my hand.

"Didn't you?" she asks. I can hear the hesitance in her voice.

"You mean with Delilah?" She nods. "No. We didn't have a super-active sex life. Most of the time I was making up excuses to avoid being with her."

Yara's face brightens and she doesn't even bother hiding it. "Really?"

I run my fingers through her hair and press a kiss to her forehead.

"You know what I think? I think we should get out of Tangerine Forks."

"Get out?" Yara asks, surprised. "But...I only just got here."

"Clint is going to come looking for me," I reply.

“Come on, I saw you handle those four guys in the truck,” she teases, running her fingers along my bicep.

“If it was just him, I wouldn’t be worried about it,” I smile. “But he’s got a *lot* of guys working for him. And I can’t protect you every hour of the day either.”

She thinks about this for a second, then nods her head like she gets my point. “Yeah, I understand. But where would we go?”

“Someplace sunny,” I reply. “I’m tired of these snowy winters. You know I’ve always wanted to see San Diego.”

“San Diego...”

“I could open up my own shop,” I continue. “Bring my buddy Jim with me. It would be a fresh new start away from all of this.”

Yara looks back at me, her eyes filled with a combination of excitement and hesitation. I can understand too. She just got here, and now I’m asking her to leave with me. But as I place my hand on her chest, I get a feeling that where I go, she will follow.

I DROP Yara off a few blocks from her work to avoid us being seen together, and then drive myself to the garage for one of the most frantic days at work we’ve had in a while. It’s one of those days where the guys are cussing each other out over little things like who stole the other one’s wrench, and where Pete’s shouting at us to hurry up and get one car out of the bay so we can get the next one in because he went and overbooked.

Normally a day like this would get to me. I'd be searching for some kind of upbeat music to keep my spirits up, but today I'm not bothered by any of it. Today I'm just thinking about Yara, last night, and the whole rest of our lives laid out in front of us.

For the first time since I can remember, I feel *truly* happy. I'm not worried about what kind of mood my supposed girlfriend is going to be in when I get home or whether or not we're going to get in an argument or not. I just genuinely can't wait to get out of work so I can see Yara.

San Diego. A fresh start with all that sunshine. How incredible would that be? I reach for a screwdriver, and it's then that I see the tall, shadowed silhouette of a man behind me on the shop wall. Slowly, I drop the screwdriver and grab a much larger torque wrench before turning around to see Clint standing there in front of his truck, looking at me like he's angrily confused.

"You're not living up to your end of the bargain," he says.

"Bargain? What bargain?" I reply.

"The one where I tell you to do something you do it so I don't break your legs," he replies, taking a few steps forward. Some of the guys notice him and give him space. "*That* bargain."

"I see," I nod. "Well, Clint, I'm going to have to pull out of that *bargain* unfortunately. Sorry to disappoint you."

Clint steps close, so close that he's right up in my face. I can smell the beer and cigarettes as he stares into my eyes.

"Me? Disappoint *me*?" He shakes his head. "If you'd have seen my daughter this morning, then you'd have known why I'm here right now, son. Now for whatever reason, she's got a

thing for you, and until she decides she don't, that means you're gonna be there for her if she wants you to be. You understand me?"

Only a few days ago before I'd met Yara, I would have nodded and begrudgingly accepted this. But now I have something in my life to fight for, and there's no way I'm going to stand down to this man. I don't care who he is or how many men he has at his disposal. My future is with Yara and that's all there is to it.

"Sorry, Clint," I say, shaking my head. "Can't do it. You're gonna have to break the news to that daughter of yours yourself if she doesn't understand what I've already told her."

I see the rage flare in Clint's eyes. He's not a man used to being talked back to. He goes tense. He wants to hit me, but even for a man as powerful as him, there are too many witnesses here for him to do anything to me. He nods and sucks his upper teeth.

"All right, boy. If that's how you want to play it."

I want to laugh in his face as he turns to go, but I bite my tongue and keep my mouth shut. It's only after he's back in his truck and pulling away that Pete comes over to me.

"The Hell was that all about?" he asks. "You're not mixed up in Clint's business, are you?"

"Oh no," I reply. "I guess you could say it's something... personal. Don't worry, I'll deal with it."

I'M ALREADY PLANNING on the quickest way to get out of Tangerine Forks on the drive home, but when I get back to the house, I see Delilah's car parked in the driveway.

A pit forms in my stomach, and I do my best to push it away, praying Yara's still at the diner and no drama has occurred between the two of them. Delilah still shouldn't be here though. There's no way this goes well.

I park beside her but don't see her anywhere. As I get out of the car, she comes out from inside the house. I sigh as I realize I must have forgotten to ask for her spare key back. She has a sweater in her arms, an old beige sweater she never wore anymore, and waves happily at me.

"Hey!" She's forcing a smile so hard I'm surprised her lips don't tear the rest of her face to shreds. "How's it going, Lyle?"

"Delilah, what are you doing here?" I don't even want her to answer. I just want her to take her sweater, get in her car, and drive away. But I know that's not going to happen.

"Oh, I just came to pick up some things," she replies, holding a single sweater. "I didn't think you'd be here."

"I get home same time every day, Delilah."

She tosses her sweater into her car and comes over to me. I can smell a perfume on her she doesn't normally wear. She also has her hair all done up and is wearing more makeup than usual.

"You look handsome today," she tells me.

"Don't, Delilah."

"What?" she asks, acting innocent. "I'm not allowed to say you look handsome? Did you already go and get yourself a new girlfriend already?"

She can't know already...can she? That would be impossible. I dropped Yara off several blocks up from the

diner, and if Yara was home right now, they'd be outside having the catfight of the century. No, she's just teasing me – trying to get in my head.

“Delilah—” I try to say, looking for a way to come up with something to say to get her out of here, but before I can even start my sentence, Delilah leans in and kisses me.

Just came to pick up some things my ass.

“Oh my God.” The sound of Yara's voice behind me causes my heart to drop into my stomach. I instantly break the kiss and whirl around to see her standing there behind me, mouth agape, staring at the two of us like her heart's been torn out of her chest and stomped all over.

“Yara!”

But she's already running, and boy can she run. I try to run after her, but Delilah snatches me by the wrist. “So you *do* already have a new girl?”

“Would you give it a rest!?” I shout back, tearing my arm away. “You've already done enough damage here.”

“That girl works for me, Lyle!” she screams as I race after Yara. “Have you been cheating on me since she showed up!?”

“Cheating on you!?” I laugh. “I never wanted to date you to begin with, Delilah! But you know that, don't you? You just had your dad threaten to break my legs if I didn't. But that's not going to work this time! This time I've found someone I *really love!*”

YARA

MY HEART IS SCREAMING inside my chest as I sprint away from Lyle and Delilah.

Two terrible people who deserve each other.

I don't want to accept what I just saw, but it was plain as day. They were kissing, right there in the driveway. Right in front of me.

I'm such a fool.

I show up to town, Lyle gets his eyes on me just like those asshole guys in the pickup truck did, but instead of just using force to get me, he decides to manipulate his way into my pants.

He decides to charm me.

And what a great job of it he did...

I wonder how many other girls he's done it to before. I wonder if he's got some kind of arrangement with Delilah too – whether she knows about his extra-curricular exploits, or whether he just cheats on her without her knowing about it.

Either way, I don't really care right now. I just feel like an idiot who fell for an emotionally manipulative man who got me to open up to him and give myself to him for the first time. And that's something I'll never be able to get back.

I should have been able to recognize his bullshit. After living with my dad for so long, I can usually tell when a man isn't being real with me, and everything about Lyle pointed to him being truthful. I even felt like he was open to me about his life too. I guess he's just a really good conman.

"Yara!" I hear him calling after me and quickly duck off the road and into some bushes. I can't face him right now – not after what I've just seen. All I can think about are Delilah's lips pressed up against his, right where mine were this morning...

I peer out through the leaves as he passes. Part of me wants to leap out and give him a piece of my mind. I want to shout at him and ask him how in the world he could do something like that to me and whether he even has a heart under that incredibly muscular chest of his, but I stay hidden and watch as he goes by.

A few seconds later, Delilah's car goes by in the same direction, and it's only then that I come out of my hiding place and race back to the apartment to get my things.

Lyle was right about one thing this morning: It is time to leave Tangerine Forks, but I won't be going to San Diego. I won't be going anywhere with him.

I TAKE the back roads into town to the bus station and buy a one-way ticket to Portsmouth leaving in a half hour, but when I go to take a seat to wait, I see a guy with red hair eyeing me from the door. He's not just looking at me like he thinks I'm cute or something either. There's more to it, and it's giving me the creeps. I look around to see if there's a security guard at

the station or something, but it's too late; he's already coming over to me.

"Yara, right?" His question sends a shiver down my spine. Nobody in this town should know my name other than Lyle and the staff at the diner. He's not one of my regulars; in fact I've never seen him come in at work before, so I know we haven't met.

Do I have a stalker? Could it somehow be one of Clint's men?

"Who are you?" I ask, backing away.

"Don't worry," he replies, putting his hands up. "My name's Jim. I'm Lyle's friend. He's out looking for you but thought you might be here, so he sent me."

My heart rate increases. I guess it's not too crazy to think that in a town as small as Tangerine Forks, I'd be found out.

"Well, I've already got my ticket, Jim. One-way to Portsmouth, so..."

Jim approaches me like a hunter afraid to spook its prey. "Listen, Yara. I know what you think you saw—"

"Oh, please!" I laugh. "He sent his bro here to make excuses for him?"

"That's not what's happening, Yara." Jim quickly takes the seat beside me, a very earnest look on his face. Either he's a really good actor, or he truly believes what he's about to say next. "Delilah was coming on to him, Yara."

"Oh, come on!"

I'd say I'm about sixty-forty on believing him, with the sixty not believing him. But I want to believe him, because

that would mean the man that I have let myself fall for actually didn't con me.

"It's true!" Jim's eyes are lit up like he's about to tell me he won the lottery. "He never wanted to go out with that succubus in the first place."

"Succubus!?" I almost laugh.

Jim nods. "You know why they were together, right?"

"I mean...I know what he told me..."

"Her father," Jim says. "That wasn't a lie. He showed up at his work today too after he heard about the breakup, trying to force him to take her back."

"Seriously?"

I'm sixty-four now on believing him. This is starting to make more sense, either that or it's the most elaborate con ever.

Jim nods. "Clint's gunning for him now, Yara. He's in real danger if he doesn't get back with Delilah."

"Which he's not going to do, right?"

Jim nearly bursts out laughing. "Of course not! The last thing I heard was that he wants to get the Hell out of here and take you two to San—"

"San Diego?"

"Right," Jim nods. "San Diego, where it's always sunny."

I feel tears beginning to well up in my eyes. I don't even know why. This should be good news. I should be feeling relieved and happy, not sad.

"I promise you," Jim says. "He loves *you*, Yara. I've been his friend forever, and I can tell by the way he was talking

about you that there is *no way* he would ever go back to Delilah.”

“You’re sure?” I ask, one step away from full-blown tears.

“I’m sure.” I gasp and look up to see Lyle standing by the door, phone in hand, smiling at me like my wonderful prince. He walks toward me, eyes focused on me the entire time, filled with focus and certainty.

Jim leans close and whispers, “I texted him when I saw you buying your ticket.”

I try to keep it together as Lyle gets closer, but it’s impossible. I break down when he’s just a few feet away, collapsing into full tears.

He drops down in front of me and wraps his arms around me, pulling me into what feels like safety – what feels like home.

“I don’t know why I’m crying,” I whimper into the warmth of his chest.

“It’s okay, baby,” he whispers back, threading his fingers through my hair. “I’m here. I’m right here.”

EPILOGUE

LYLE

FIVE YEARS LATER...

I TAKE a deep breath and gaze out at the setting sun. Being able to leave the garage doors open in January is just one of the benefits of living in San Diego. Working five blocks from the beach is another.

“Hey, boss, you want us to start on that three series in the morning? Or should we put it off and finish up on the Toyota?”

I turn around and see Jim standing behind me, covered in grease, grinning with a wrench in his hand.

“Finish the Toyota,” I grin back. “The three series can wait.”

“Roger that,” he says with a salute before turning around and heading back inside.

Starting my own shop out here and taking my best friend with me has been one of the greatest achievements of my life.

Yara and I knew we had to get the Hell out of Tangerine Forks if we ever wanted to be together, and that’s exactly what we did. We caught the first bus to Logan Airport and the next

flight to San Diego. Jim helped send out my stuff over the course of the next month and then helped me put my house on the market. Then, slowly but surely, I put everything I had into starting my own shop.

It wasn't easy – in fact it was pretty rocky at first – but after a year or so, things leveled out to the point that they're at now. I'm not rolling in money, but I'm doing well enough and things are picking up to the point where I think I'll be able to expand soon and start hiring more men and maybe even look for a bigger garage.

From what Jim told me, Clint and his men scoured the Tangerine Forks for me for the few weeks after Yara and I left. They questioned everyone at the shop, checked all the local motels and apartments and are still convinced I'm living in Vermont somewhere. As far as I'm concerned, they can keep wasting their time hunting through New England for as long as they'd like.

THERE ARE a few things left for me to do in the office, but my day's mostly done. I say goodbye to Jim and the rest of the boys, let Jim know it's his job to lock up tonight, then hop in the car and head home.

It's good being the boss. No more being told I have to clean up the shop, no more having to open, and no more having to stay late and miss seeing my wife.

My wife. What would I do without her?

She's my rock. My anchor. She's the reason life gave me to finally stand up to Clint and get out of that prison I'd been put in. She's the reason I'm here in San Diego with a business of my own, being my own boss, starting my own family.

Yara.

She's standing in the living room when I come home, wearing nothing but a cute little pink thong and a crop top T-shirt with her hair up. It's not an outfit she would wear if she was trying to be sexy for me, and I think that's what makes it sexy.

She turns when I open the door and smiles. "You're home earlier than I expected."

"I'm the boss." I grin. "I can do that."

I go right over to her and take her by the waist and pull her to me. I'll never get tired of just how small she is in my hands. She smells delicious, and I lean right in and kiss her soft lips. No matter how hard of a day I've had at work, coming home to Yara erases everything I've gone through. She's like my own personal anti-depressant.

"Where's Kyle?" I ask.

"He's in his room sleeping," she replies. "Do you want to see him?"

I smile. "I'll be quiet."

With my wife still under my arm, we quietly tiptoe into my son's room. He's facing me with the covers pulled up almost completely over his head, which is still how he likes to sleep, ever since he was a little boy.

I never knew it was possible to love someone so much. I love Yara with all my heart, but I love Kyle in a different way. He's my son, and it's difficult to explain. It's just...different. But not a day goes by that I don't thank my wife for giving him to me.

“Can you believe that one day he’ll be as big as you?” she whispers.

I simply shake my head. “Doesn’t seem possible.”

I lead her from his room and across the hall to our bedroom, closing the door behind us. Seeing my wife barely clothed like this has awoken something within me, but as I always do when I get home from work, I stink like the garage.

“I need a shower,” I tell her with a coy smile. “Care to join me? You’re not really dressed anyway.”

Yara’s lips twist up, and she brushes the back of her ankle with one foot. “I wouldn’t mind a nice hot shower.”

Hooking a thumb into the strap of her thong, I delicately lead her to the bathroom and turn on the water of the shower. She looks up at me with wide, permitting eyes as I slip off her shirt, exposing her breasts. They grew a cup size with her pregnancy and just never went back down like everybody assured her they would. I guess my wife is just blessed with incredible genetics, but I could have told you that.

She reaches out and unbuttons my pants as I take off my shirt. I’m already hard as we step into the shower together. Five years of marriage and I haven’t grown the least bit tired of her. In fact, I think all the sex we’ve had has simply made us more familiar with what we both like and made our sex life even better.

Yara takes the loofa and begins to suds up my body with the grapefruit bodywash she recently bought as I use my fingertips to explore her body.

“Smell better than the shop?” I ask with a smile.

“Much better.” She nods.

I trace her curves with my hands, cup her plump ass and pull her close. My cock is swollen hard and begging to be inside of her. I lean in and kiss her gingerly on the lips, then quickly spin her around and press her firmly up against the tile wall. I can hear her gasp as I use my fingers to part her pussy lips in preparation for what's to come.

“Lyle—”

Yara loves to say my name just as I enter her, and I love to hear it. Her voice is so sweet and trembles as I give her my inches, completing our bond. I wrap my arms around her, holding her tightly as I begin to thrust. She moans, reaches back, and pulls me deeper.

This is heaven. I kiss her warm back, then move up the back of her neck to her cheek as she moans even louder and turns back to find my lips with hers. Two lovers wrapped in a lovers' embrace. Once I'm inside Yara, I never want to leave – never want to pull out.

I pump faster, feeling her body go rigid as her climax approaches. I know just how to angle my cock to hit her spot that will make her come. Sometimes my wife can be loud, so I reach up and put my hand over her mouth to stifle any sound that she might make when she goes off. I love to hear it myself, but our son is sleeping, and we have to be good parents as well as incredible lovers.

My cock pumps inside her. I feel her pussy lock down as her climax approaches. I'm right there too. I move my hips like a piston, drilling her with all the passion and love I have to give. She bucks back against me, returning that same passion in her own way.

She moans into my hand when she comes, and I groan and press my chest against her back when I unload inside her. It's

incredible, as it always is. I feel Yara's legs start to give out from under her and hold her up as she starts her post-orgasmic giggle she always goes into.

"Woo, baby," she laughs. "Boy do I love you."

"And girl do I love you." I smile back.

"You're gonna end up knocking me up again, you know that?" she asks.

"Well, that wouldn't be the end of the world," I reply. "Seeing as how you're the best mother in the world."

Yara's face softens, and she leans in for a kiss. "You mean that?"

"Of course I do," I reply. "You know I'd never lie to you."

We dry off together and go back into the bedroom to get dressed. After that, we go to the kitchen and make dinner together – just a basic steak and potatoes with broccoli, but it's not *what* you make, it's *who* you're making it with.

Sometimes I think about just how lucky both of us are and wonder whether or not I believe in fate or not. If I hadn't come upon that truck that day, those men would have done terrible, unspeakable things to Yara. She and I never would have met, would probably be back still trapped back Tangerine Forks, never having known the incredible life I was missing out on.

It's like it was all meant to be. It's like meeting Yara was my destiny.

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My father is a good man, with one vice; he loves to gamble and he got himself deep in debt to the mob. Now they sent a man to collect, but we have no money left to give. So what does that man demand for payback? Me.

Leia will be mine – my wife, my love, and the mother of my child. So what if I had to go through unconventional means to get her? I come from a broken home, and for a long time now, the mob has been my family. But finding her was a miracle, and now that I have her, I'll be able to forge a family of my own.

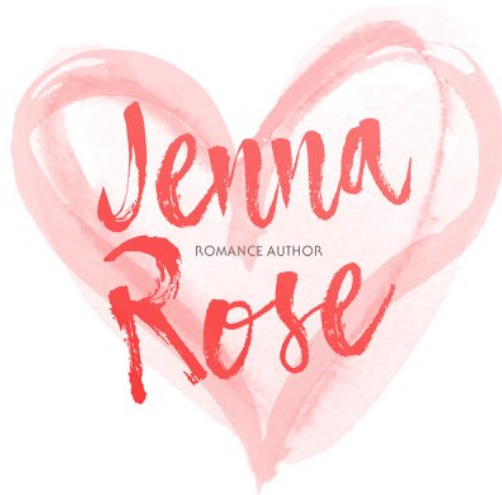
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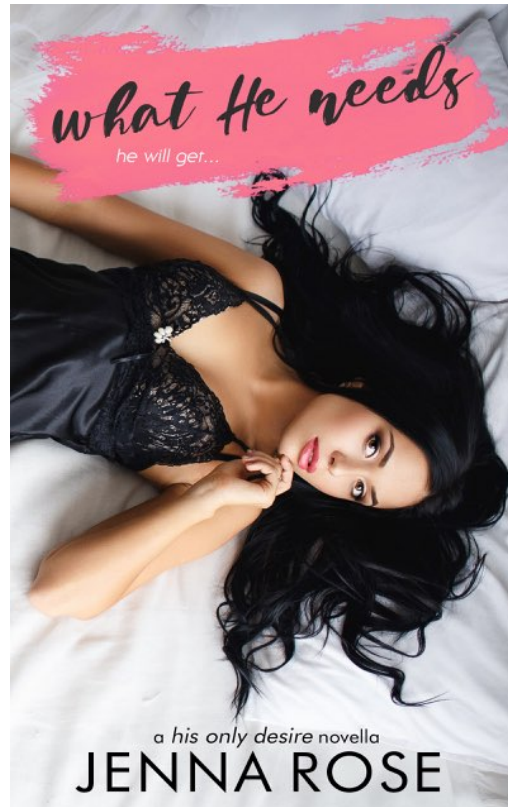
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I always look forward to reading this author books and can wait to get my hands on all her new releases. This is book #1 in the series His Only Desire #1 and I cant wait to read the second in the series. This book is a real romance story and a real Insta love book that I totally loved.

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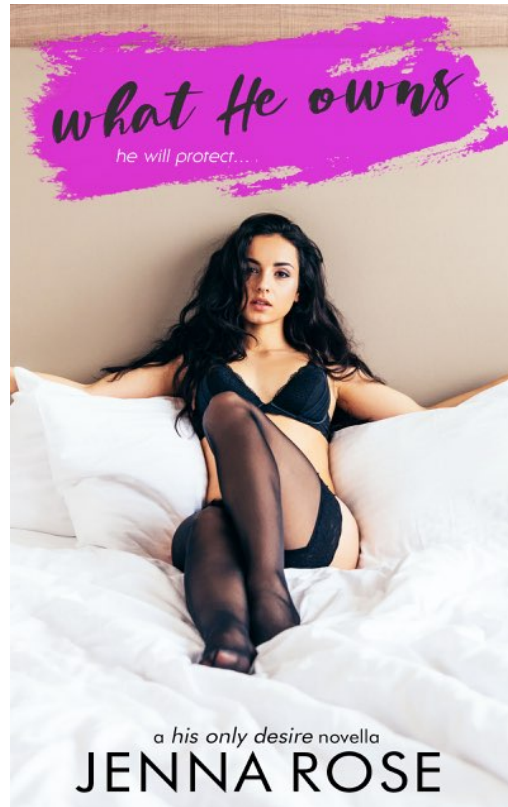
WHAT HE NEEDS



Percy Rankin is professional fighter, but he's also a professional ladies man who needs to clean up his image. So when his manager suggests paying a nice girl to be his fake-girlfriend and stand by his side when the cameras are snapping, Percy figures why not? What's the worst that could happen?

But then he sees Whitney, a proper, gorgeous, innocent music student studying violin, and everything changes. There's nothing fake about his desire—a desire he's never felt for anyone. But Whitney isn't falling for it. She knows guys like Percy and won't be convinced that this "relationship" is anything more than just business. But Percy has fought for everything he has in life, and he's not going to stop until she's his...

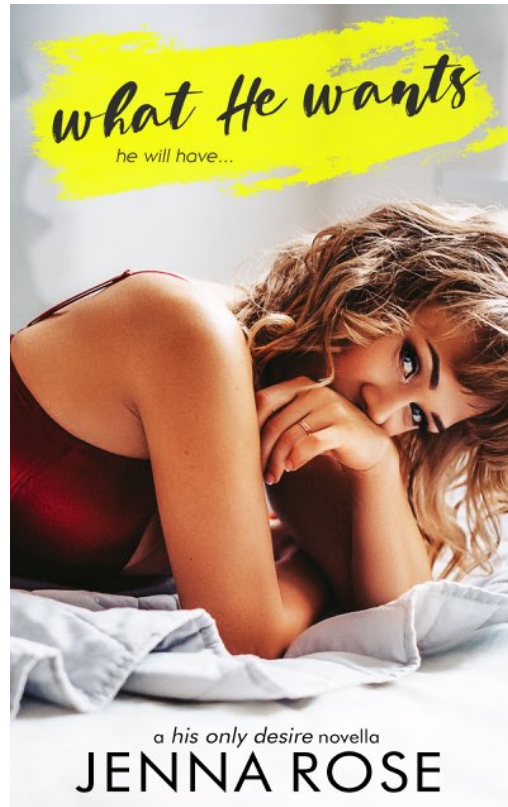
What He Owns



Gwen Thompson is hot on a story involving town development and corruption. The trail leads her to the home of Harrison Night, billionaire-playboy-business-man. All she wants is an interview, but when the rakish bachelor looks at her, Gwen knows he wants to do a lot more than answer her questions.

But Gwen won't sacrifice her integrity; she backs off. But Harrison wants her, and didn't get to where he is today by giving up on what he wants. He agrees to the interview, but on one condition: he and Gwen have dinner together first. Gwen agrees, but she is a professional. She's here for the story and just the story. At least, that's what she keeps telling herself...

What He Wants



While working undercover to bring down a dangerous crime boss, Fletcher becomes entranced by the girl living across the street. He keeps his eyes on her. Watching. Waiting. She's an angel in the wrong part of town, and he's going to make sure she's safe—no matter what.

AURORA IS STRUGGLING, working, saving her money for school, but one night she sees something she shouldn't have and suddenly, she's whisked away by a mysterious man who claims to be her protector. But he wants something from Aurora—something she's never given—and she's not sure if she can.

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