



*Triccia's*  
MONSTER

LISA FREED

Tricia's Manster

Lisa Freed

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*DEDICATION*

*Black cats, starry nights, cool autumn breezes, the chill that invigorates and urges you on. Laughing ghosts running amuck with little princesses and superheroes. Dream on, my darlings, for Halloween is upon us and a night's fun is soon to be had. Let the wonder and the magic flow and may love find you.*

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# Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[PROLOGUE](#)

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

[CHAPTER TWO](#)

[CHAPTER THREE](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE](#)

[CHAPTER SIX](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT](#)

[CHAPTER NINE](#)

[CHAPTER TEN](#)

[CHAPTER ELEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWELVE](#)

[CHAPTER THIRTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FOURTEEN](#)

[EPILOGUE](#)

[\*OceanofPDF.com\*](#)

## **It was just a bit of fun, until he showed up**

### **TRICIA**

Getting together with girlfriends and doing a love spell was fun. I never thought anything would come of it. Except now I'm faced with a handsome man straight out of my dreams. He's perfect... and my client. It goes against professional ethics to even think half the things I want to do with him. I resign myself that it's not meant to be, and a silly spell is just that- silly. Then he kisses me...

### **MATTHEW**

From the moment she walks into the room for my massage, I'm thoroughly captivated. Her touch brings relief while tormenting me with what I can't have. As a divorced older man, I'm not the best catch for a wonderfully upbeat young woman like her. Yet all I want is the chance to prove that I am the man she's been waiting for.

You've Built a Bear, but have you ever Made a Manster?  
When 15 girlfriends spend a spooky weekend getaway in Manitou Springs, Colorado, they conjure up their perfect partner, but never expect to actually meet them.

This Halloween, join our heroines as they manifest the men of their dreams using a little earth magick, tequila, and lime.

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# PROLOGUE

We're gathered in Clarissa's kitchen—laughing, eating, and drinking on the last night of our girl's weekend. We've had an amazing time christening her newly inherited eight-room B&B in Manitou Springs, Colorado. It's the perfect time of year to visit, as the occult is strong in this tiny community and Halloween is its favorite time of the year.

Last night we watched witchy movies, did tarot card and palm readings, and drank midnight margaritas. Today, we spent the afternoon at the Emma Crawford festival, had dinner at the Loop—more margaritas—before attending a twilight seance at the cemetery where guides told local ghost stories.

Clarissa grabs our attention by handing each of us a notecard and a pen. “Ladies, I have the perfect way to end this magical weekend. I want you to write all the characteristics of your perfect man. Physical, mental, spiritual. Be as specific as you can, but here's the deal. Even if you have someone in mind—an old crush you've harbored for years—you cannot write his name or any detail that singles him out. For example: If David from high school has nine toes and is the only mechanic in town, you cannot write David with nine toes who fixes my car. Doing so violates his free will and would come back negatively on you tenfold.”

Some women cackle at the nine toes. “What are we doing, Clarissa?”

She smiles, grabbing a bundle of sage and sweetgrass from a drawer. “We're casting a love spell to bring the perfect man into our lives.”

“Really?” Sabrina asks.

“That's awesome!” Leonora laughs.

“Hell yeah.” Luna exclaims.

“I love this idea.” I take my pen and feverishly write.

“Will it work?” Stella eyeballs Clarissa skeptically.

“Of course, it’ll work. All you have to do is open yourself to the possibility of receiving love.”

*Love.* I feel a tug in my chest at that word. I don’t have to think too hard on what I want.

*A man who is honest and true*

*Kind, funny, and romantic*

*Must love animals*

*Tall and handsome*

*Great in bed*

*Wants a family*

Looking over my list, I can’t help scoffing over it. The man I want is perfect and doesn’t exist.

Still, this is just a bit of harmless fun.

One by one we make our way to the garden where the fire pit we sat around last night burns with a hint of sweet sage. Clarissa hands each of us a pink candle, instructing us to stand in a circle around the pit and hold the candle in our right hand, the notecard in our left. She then walks the circle with a bottle in her hand, placing one drop of oil on each of our cards.

“What’s this?” Sabrina asks.

“Ylang-ylang oil.” Clarissa says as she puts that bottle down and grabs a second bottle, giggling as she walks up to Melinda. “I’m not going to ask everyone to get topless, even though most of us have seen each other at least partially naked, but if you don’t want to get oil on your shirt, move it aside so I can mark your heart. This is rosewood oil, and it’s great for your skin as well as incantations.” Clarissa turns the bottle with her thumb over the opening, and then presses the digit against Melinda’s forehead, throat, and heart.

“Mind, body, and spirit align, let love be thine.”

She moves to the next person, and the next, until she’s marked everyone. Then she marks herself, puts the bottle down, grabs her card and candle, and smiles.



“Everyone ready?” Clarissa shakes her hair, her whole body really, as if loosening up. “Relax and open yourself up to receive the Goddess’ blessings. Envision your perfect mate. What do they look like? How do they talk and carry themselves? See the quirk of their lips when they smile, or the glimmer in their eye when they look at you. Hold on to that image as I ask for our blessings. You don’t have to say anything until the end, when you respond with ‘so mote it be’.”

A tall, dark haired man with gentle eyes pops into my head. He smiles and throws his head back in laughter and I smile at the image of him.

“Goddesses of the north, south, east, and west

Bestow your blessings, your power best

Fires of passion

Waters of our hearts

Winds of love

To us, will you impart

Bring us our soulmates, for this we plea

With open minds and pure hearts, we implore

So mote it be”

Someone murmurs *so mote it be*, so I say the words, holding on to the image in my head.

“Now, carefully dip your candle into the flames, and when it catches, drip the pink wax onto your card. Once you have seven drops, release your request into the Goddess’ care by dropping the card into the fire. Blow out the candle when you are done, but do not break it. I’m going to have you take it home.”

# CHAPTER ONE

TRICIA

I take a deep breath and hope my smile isn't as wilted as I feel. Getting together with the girls in Manitou Springs, Colorado, was great! All the laughs, the cool events, the endless drinks... Oh my, I hit that tequila way too hard. Two days after returning home, I'm still trying to catch up on hydration.

Reminiscing about the trip, my smile becomes more relaxed and natural. It was exactly what I needed, when I needed it most.

Though now I'm paying for it in more ways than one. Between the airplane tickets, the events, the tequila, and yes, the new wardrobe that I didn't need, yet splurged on, my bank account took a hit that I really can't afford. That's why I'm here on my normal day off, taking on a few extra clients to pay for my overindulgence.

My first client of the day is new, both to me and the clinic. After a brisk knock on the door, I count backward from five and enter the room. He's standing in the corner, facing the door, his hands held loosely at his sides. The white robe we provide for our clients stretches across his broad shoulders, leaving a wide V over his deep chest, showing off his collarbone and the springy brown chest hair that makes my fingers tingle with the need to run through that impressive pelt.

Quickly, I lift my gaze to his face, finding bright and gentle brown eyes quietly observing me. His chest isn't the only place his hair is plentiful. He has a huge shock of it on his head. The sides are clipped short, which makes the longer hair on top even more noticeable. White, even teeth flash from within a full beard. This man is the very picture of a hairy mountain man. The white robe looks so out of place and ridiculous that my lips twitch to form a grin far different from my professional smile and I fight back the laughter bubbling up.

Laughing at your client is a definite no-no.

“Dr. Smyth?” I ask, stepping forward and offering my hand.

A warm, long-fingered hand tipped with short, well-kept nails, very much at odds with the mountain man image, engulfs mine and squeezes oh so gently. A flare of something jumps between us at the contact, my eyes flying up to collide with his warm, whiskey brown ones. “Matt, please,” he says, his voice low and raspy.

“Matt,” I repeat after him, his name flowing smoothly from my tongue with a sense of rightness like it belongs there. “I’m Tricia. I’m your massage therapist today.”

His fingers withdraw from mine, his gaze intent on me. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.” He gives a brief chuckle. “This is my first time having a massage, so forgive me if I’m nervous.”

From the moment our eyes locked, I’ve felt off-kilter. I could blame it on lack of sleep, a mild case of jetlag, or just post-vacation funk, but it’s not any of those. Something in me is being pulled toward Matt, a tingly awareness of him that is leaving me on edge and feeling things I definitely shouldn’t toward a client.

Attraction. I’m attracted to him.

Which, okay, it happens to some therapists. We see so many people, and there are always attractive ones. This is a first for me, though. I guess eventually it was bound to happen. I can push through this and remain a professional.

“Being nervous is perfectly natural,” I tell him, trying to calm my own nerves. “You’re a doctor, so I’m sure some of your patients are anxious when they see you.”

“I’m an orthodontist, so yeah, they’re terrified. Normally of my bill.” The skin around his eyes crinkles merrily and my mind goes back to the information on his chart. He’s in his forties. He’s too old for me. Even if he wasn’t too old, he’s probably married.

Desperately I cling to that thought even while another husky chuckle from him has a flicker of heat flaring to life

within me.

“I guess it’s only fair that now I’m the uneasy one,” he says, his shoulders relaxing the more we chat.

“You’re scared? Of me?” The corners of my mouth lift at the thought of this big man being afraid of me and my touch. “No need for that. I promise you, once we get going, I’ll be your new best friend.”

I’ve said this line at least twenty dozen times since I’ve been a massage therapist, only now it strikes me how silly it is.

*Best friend?* I want to strip this poor man down and do wicked things to his body and have him do the same to me.

A heated vision of him spread out on the massage table and me riding him hard pops into my head and isn’t helping me maintain my composure at all.

I need to nip this in the bud, stat!

Going to the table, I pull back one crisp white sheet, showing him that there are two. “Let’s start by having you remove your robe and lying face down on the table. You’ll get between the linens, leaving your back exposed. From the waist down you’ll be draped. I’ll be primarily working on your shoulders and back per your request on the intake form.”

His eyes widen, his black pupils enlarging, and some heat flickers over his face. It’s so brief, I’m sure I’m imagining it.

What I’m not imagining is how stunningly built he is as he shrugs off his robe. Swiftly, I turn my back, my face burning while desire thrums through me.

I go through the motions of ensuring everything is properly set up. Endless hours of repetition mean I can do this even with my mind a million miles away.

In reality, only a few feet separate me from what occupies my thoughts. My fingers tingle, knowing that soon I’m going to be touching and exploring all that gloriously bare skin.

*This is so wrong!*

A few times over the years, I've had to terminate a client session because of inappropriate behavior. A man popping a boner isn't a big deal. It happens a good fifty percent or more with male clients. No harm, no foul. We ignore it and continue with the massage. It's the ones that have flat-out asked if I provide a happy ending service that have needed the boot.

I never dreamed that one day I would be the one on the other side of things and having to worry about misconduct on my part. Biting down hard on the inside of my cheek brings a shock of pain and sends a much-needed bit of clarity to me.

Even though this is my first time experiencing it, I'm not the first therapist to go through an attraction to a client. I'm a professional. I can handle this.

I hear the swish of the sheets as Matt gets arranged on the table.

"All set?" I ask, happy with how steady my voice is.

"I guess so," he says with another chuckle.

His deep and husky voice has my throat tightening up and I must swallow a few times before I can speak. "Great. Let's get started."

*He's just another guy.* I think, turning around.

*Just another guy.* I repeat when my hands make contact with his warm skin.

*I am so screwed!* Pounds through my head when his clean and enticing scent invades my senses and it's all I can do not to lean closer just to breathe him in.

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## CHAPTER TWO

MATT

*Don't get an erection. Don't get an erection.* That's my current mantra while Tricia's strong fingers knead and rub at the knots in my shoulders.

"You are really tense," she comments, digging in a little deeper and forcing a grunt from me.

My stubborn dick stays half-hard, keeping me on edge and therefore tense even under the ministrations of her skilled hands.

After Jared raved about the extra extension in his backswing following massage therapy, I made an appointment. I don't care about my golf game. What concerns me is how stiff I am most evenings when I come home from work.

It wasn't always like this. Middle age and putting in the sheer number of hours that I've been for the past two years have taken their toll. Hopefully that will ease now that we've added another partner to the practice.

Lord, I hope so. I wince when Tricia hits another knot.

"You said you're an orthodontist?"

"Yes," I say, my voice sounding hoarse even to my own ears. My sense of timing has never been the best, but leave it to me to truly goof things up.

In the almost three years since my divorce was finalized, I haven't had more than a passing interest in women or dating. Lack of time and, to be honest, lack of trust. Tricia walks into the room and it's like the blinders have been lifted from my eyes.

She's stunning with her long blonde hair and blue eyes. The shy smile clinches it for me. If I met her at a bar, I would have asked to buy her a drink immediately. Do guys still do that? I've been out of the dating game so long I no longer know the rules.

What I do know is that I can't let her see my hard dick. Having her think of me as a pervert is the last thing I want.

"I wouldn't have thought your line of work would lead to this type of tension in your neck and shoulders. Is it high stress?"

Honestly, it's not. I love my job and seeing the transformations in my clients and their confidence boosted. "No," I grunt out, feeling a muscle slowly easing under her hands.

She grows silent, my curt answers no doubt putting her off further conversation. She seems to know just where to prod and touch, and eventually my body gives up the fight and sinks into the relief she brings.

"Would you like me to work on your calves and hamstrings?"

Is it my imagination or does her sweet voice hesitate just the smallest bit?

Working on my legs means raising the sheet. Squashed between the table and my legs, my hard dick aches. Spreading my legs might give a bit of relief and the soft sheet and my boxers should still hide how affected I am.

"Sounds good."

Her hand rests on my shoulder. "I'm going to lift the draping up to your glutes, keeping your midsection covered. Would you like me to cover up your back as well?"

"No..." I clear my throat. "No, you don't need to do that."

Anticipation tightens my gut as she gently lifts the sheet exposing my legs. This is a professional service and I've just met Tricia, yet it feels like some sort of slow seduction scene is taking place.

Internally, I moan. That's how hard up I am. Turning something innocent into sexual. I need to get a grip.

Somehow, I make it through the massage and stumble down off the table when Tricia leaves for me to get dressed.

Tugging on my dress shirt and working the buttons, the ease with which I can move my shoulders is a welcome change and I exit the clinic with a spring in my step, ready to conquer the day.

\*\*\*

After a week, I've convinced myself that my attraction to Tricia is merely because a beautiful woman was touching me. It's me being touch starved and I would have had the same reaction to any massage therapist.

That's both embarrassing and depressing, rolled into one big pathetic lump. The lump being me.

When I call to make another appointment, I fully plan to request a different therapist to test that theory. That's not what comes out of my mouth, though. "Yes, with Tricia, please."

Hanging up after booking the appointment, I stare dumbly at my phone, as if it's to blame for my lapse in follow-through.

No matter. I can handle this.

All week, I mentally count down the days until my appointment. When the day finally arrives, I drive there with anticipation simmering low in my gut and my hands clenched on the steering wheel.

Despite that, while waiting in the room for Tricia to come in and start the massage, my dick is behaving well, and I feel hopeful. Everything here is designed to relax and comfort, from the bland cream walls to the mellow traces of scents that I can't quite identify.

I suck in a deep breath, exhaling slowly and physically feel myself unwinding.

When the knock sounds and the door swings slowly inward, my heartbeat takes off at a gallop, my entire body tensing up. So much for aroma therapy.

Tricia's hair pulled back into a low ponytail draws my attention to her long, slim throat and the delicate gold chain



that surrounds it. A tiny charm sways from it and I can't quite make out what it is.

"Hello, Dr. Smyth," she says, giving a fast smile.

"Matt, please," I request. There's something about Tricia addressing me by my title that puts a wall up between us I don't care for.

Her thick lashes conceal her eyes for a moment, her smile freezing. Her pink tongue darts out, sweeping across her lips so quickly that I almost miss it. "Matt," she says, a hint of color rising in her cheeks.

Familiar with what's expected of me, I quickly strip off the robe and lay down on the table. Her oil slicked hands touch me moments later, easing some of my tension.

"Good week?"

I give the question a brief bit of thought. Nothing special about this week unless you count my obsession with my appointment with her. "Yes."

"I can tell you're much more relaxed today than you were last session."

"Good."

Silence stretches between us, her palms and thumbs running over my back.

"You?" I ask suddenly.

"Excuse me?" Her hands falter for a moment before resuming their circular motions.

"How was your week?" Socially awkward, thy name is Matthew Smyth. I feel like I'm tripping over my tongue just to make standard small talk. It's ridiculous.

"It was a good week. I love this time of year."

"Me too. The changing leaves make every day seem new and different."

"It does!" Pleasure hums through her voice, soothing my nerves, and it's far easier to continue the conversation.

“I look forward to my morning commute for that reason. A tree that was faint yellow one day can be almost gold by the end of the week. This weekend I’m planning to drive up through Pennsylvania just for the foliage. The rolling hills in Lancaster are spectacular this time of year.”

“That sounds so nice. What do you plan to do while you’re up there?”

Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Which sounds incredibly boring and sad and now I’m regretting starting this conversation.

Part of me wants to impress Tricia and lie about grand plans. Another part longs to invite her to come with me. No trip with her could be humdrum.

I do neither and admit the truth. “Stay at a quaint little hole in the wall motel, eat too much shoofly pie, and get excited over the various colored foliage and all the Amish buggies I come across.”

“Oh wow. I would love to go.”

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# CHAPTER THREE

TRICIA

The moment the words leave my mouth, I want to cram them back in and slink under the table in embarrassment. Matt's entire body goes rigid under my hands, and I can't even look to see what his facial expression is.

"But I just returned from vacation a week ago, so no more trips for me for a while. Maybe next fall I'll make that drive. It sounds great. Really great." I'm babbling and I can't make myself stop. The words shoot out like water out of a hose. "And shoofly pie? Never had it. While I was in Colorado with my friends on that trip I just returned from? We had some tasty local foods. I even tried rocky mountain oysters..."

I slap my oiled hand over my mouth, the jasmine massage oil coating my lips and nearly gagging me with its overwhelming smell. At this rate, I'm going to need to quit my job and find a hole to bury myself in.

Matt's husky chuckle fills the room, his large body shaking on the table. "Did you really?" he wheezes, turning his head to look up at me, his brown eyes alight with humor.

The humiliation that swamped me a moment ago has nothing on the tsunami of need that swallows me whole. Dr. Matt Smyth is so handsome he drains me of all rational sense. Staring at his attractive, smiling face, something tickles at the back of my head, a bit of *déjà vu* that I just can't grasp.

Inching my hand down, I give a wry grin. "I did... and they weren't that bad."

That sets off another guffaw, his smile growing even wider. "I don't think I'm adventurous enough to try bull balls." Matt's face creases in a wince. "In fact, I know I couldn't stomach it. Solidarity for a fellow male and all."

He looks so serious for a moment, then another dazzling smile graces his face as he flips casually onto his side. The sheet slips enough to show me the wonderfully defined happy

trail of dark hair tracking down his stomach to sink beneath the concealing sheet.

Unable to resist, my eyes dip lower for a quick peek at his crotch. The solid bulge there has my breath fluttering out.

Hoping guilt isn't clearly stamped on my face, I drag my gaze away, meeting his brown eyes and smile. "Completely understandable. I have no problems with chicken breasts, though."

It takes half a second before we're both wheezing with laughter.

"That was terrible," Matt gasps.

Holding my sides, I can only nod, trying to calm down. If anyone's walking outside the door, they're probably wondering just what in the world we're doing in here. I haven't laughed this hard in a while. Probably since my vacation with my friends.

That thought sobers me up some. I don't have a great core group of friends here. We're all scattered across the country and that gets lonely at times. Sure, I have some work friends, but they are more like acquaintances. Most of my friends were the girlfriends of my ex's friends, so I lost them in the breakup too.

Matt sits up on the table, his smile gone. "Are you okay? You got quiet fast. Was it something I said?"

My gaze flies to him. *Is he serious?* He looks so concerned. What a sweet guy.

I shake my head. "No, nothing you said." I glance at the timer on the stand with the oils. "I'm sorry we're wasting your time. I'll add more on at the end."

He waves a hand. "You didn't waste my time. I feel good. Relaxed. Thank you." He carefully flops back over on his stomach and neither of us tries to continue the conversation.

When he leaves, an odd pang hits me and I want to follow him out the door and...

And do what? Tell him I find him attractive and watch the poor man get flustered while he tries to let me down gently? Or have him stride out the door and never see him again?

Neither of those are great options, so I busy myself cleaning up and getting ready for the next client.

\*\*\*

Next Tuesday, when I see Matt's name on my schedule, I don't even try to control the sudden burst of heat and happiness that floods me. I'm attracted to him. There's no law against that.

And if I get butterflies in my stomach when he smiles? Oh well, I'll enjoy his company while he's my client.

Except it's not just giddiness that overtakes me when I walk into the room and find him waiting there for me with a wide smile and a covered dish in his big hands. Pure want wraps around me and I want to do one of those slow-motion romantic runs to him. The kind with the sappy music playing in the background.

He'll toss the dish aside, sweep me up in his arms, and kiss me senseless. Then we'll test out the strength of the massage table. My fantasy is so realistic that a tingle zaps through my nipples, radiating down to my clit and leaving me physically aching.

"Afternoon, Matt." I force myself to slowly approach, my clinging damp underwear a very stark reminder of how deep into this crush I am.

"Tricia." His brown eyes twinkle with warmth as he holds the dish out to me. "I picked up an extra shoofly pie for you." Faint red creeps up his cheeks above his beard.

"You did?"

My stomach cramps up in a knot. He's handsome, sweet, and thoughtful. And has a sense of humor. Could he be any more perfect?

"Thank you." I can't help noticing my hands tremble when I reach for the pie.

“You’re very welcome. I hope you enjoy it.”

“I’m sure I will.”

We stand there staring at each other, and I don’t know what to say or do. Matt seems to have the same problem.

Finally, I come to my senses and turn my back on him, placing the pie on the long counter along the wall. When I turn around, Matt’s moved closer. For a big man, he’s light on his feet.

My mouth goes dry as I look up at him.

“Tricia, I’m sorry if this is out of line. Could I take you to dinner sometime?”

“A date?” My voice squeaks slightly.

A shy smile tugs at his firm lips. “Yes, a date.”

I want to say yes. This is a dream come true. I’d be crazy not to say yes.

But I can’t.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

MATT

My heart is thudding like mad in my chest as I wait for her answer. Tricia's blue eyes are so wide and clear, surrounded by dark eyelashes. This close to her, I can see the tiny moles on her right cheek and the faint pink that's spreading on her face. More than anything, I want to taste her lips.

"I'm sorry, but I can't."

Everything skids to a stop. Utter disappointment slapping me in the face.

"It would be against professional ethics for me to date a client," she says softly.

I nod. "I understand. I'm going to miss your massages. They really have been wonderful for my stress."

Comprehension blooms on her face, and I grin. "But I truly want to get to know you, Tricia."

Her blush deepens. "I'd like that too, Matt."

I reach out a hand to touch hers, heat zinging up my arm at the contact. Her touch on my skin during the massages has always affected me. This is more. Deeper, more personal. We're touching by choice for the first time, and I can't wait for more.

Giving her hand a squeeze, I release her and walk over to my clothes, retrieving my phone out of my pants pocket. I offer it to her. "Can I have your number?"

"I don't have my phone with me. We can't have it in the room with clients for privacy reasons."

"Guess you'll just have to answer all the unknown numbers that call you," I say, feeling like my heart is stuck in my throat and anticipation thumps through me. It's been years since I've gotten a woman's number. It's a high that I've long forgotten about. Though I don't quite remember it being this intense.

Almost shyly, she takes it from me, quickly typing in her information. I marvel at her slim fingers flying over the keys. Her hands might be small, yet I know the power behind them. Desire tugs at my groin.

Our fingers brush when she hands the phone back, her gaze flying to mine. The attraction I feel isn't one-sided.

Emboldened, I move closer, the warmth of our bodies colliding to create a heat all its own. "May I kiss you?"

Tricia's hands go to the front of the silly white robe. Her thumbs hook in the edges, barely grazing the skin of my chest. The effect is electrifying. My gut tightens painfully, my dick hardening and lengthening down my thigh.

Wordlessly, Tricia nods, angling her chin up, giving me better access to those tempting pink lips.

Lowering my mouth to hers, I nearly groan when our lips meet. Everything about her is sweet. Gliding my tongue along the seam of her lips, she opens with a sigh, her fingers clenching into fists on the robe, unconsciously pulling me closer and tighter.

There's nowhere else I want to be.

I lose myself to the kiss and her. My hands come up to cup her face, forgetting about the cell phone still in my hand until it, not me, connects with her cheek.

With a wince, she jerks away, her wide gaze slightly unfocused.

"I'm so sorry!"

Tricia rubs a hand along her cheek, shaking her head with a chuckle. "It's okay. We both got carried away there. It was a timely reminder to stop."

Her grin is engaging and some of my guilt lessens. I reach out and run my fingers over her cheek. "You're not hurt?"

"No, I'm fine. I should go so you can get dressed." Her gaze dips down, new color filling her face.



The thought of her knowing about my erection when she was massaging me was mortifying. Now I feel no shame. I'm attracted to her. No need to make a secret of it or be embarrassed about my body's natural response to her. "I look forward to seeing you again."

She's reaching for the door but pauses, her head swinging around, showing off her bright eyes and beautifully well-kissed lips. "Me too."

Then she's gone.

I glance down at my phone, contemplating calling her now. She might get a laugh out of that.

Or it might annoy her.

Somehow, I don't think so.

I'm practically walking on air when I leave the massage clinic and return to my practice fifteen minutes away.

The large, single story redbrick building occupies a desirable corner lot, and it's gratifying to see almost all the parking spaces filled. I'm not seeing patients today, just getting caught up on forms and drawing up new treatment plans. I enter through the back door and head to my office, exchanging a few smiles and nods of greeting with the technicians I pass on my way.

Thirty minutes in, Jared pops into my office, a ready grin on his sunburned face. He's newly returned from a golf trip down to Florida and that's all he's talked about for days. I click save on a current set of notes and prepare myself for another drawn-out golfing story.

Dropping into the leather chair opposite my desk, he laces his fingers over the paunch straining his white doctor's jacket and raises bushy blond brows.

Remaining quiet, I arch my eyebrows back at him.

"Well?" he props.

"Well, what?"

He spreads his arms wide. “How are the massages going?”

Giving my shoulders a roll, I don’t feel any of the tension that normally plagues me. Surprising since my massage got skipped today. “Going great.”

“Have you settled on a tech or just going to who’s available?”

We might not be best friends, but we’ve been partners now for three years and have known each other professionally for over ten. Still, I hesitate to mention Tricia. Part of me is afraid to jinx things.

“Whoever’s available.” It’s not a lie. The next therapist will be whoever Tricia recommends. Unless she’d be willing to give me massages on the side. Though I would feel guilty having her work on her time off and offering to pay her might upset boundaries.

I almost laugh. We haven’t had a single date yet and I’m already complicating things.

“That’s a suspiciously satisfied smile on your face,” Jared comments, leaning forward. “I’d say you were getting happy endings, but I know the place I recommended doesn’t do that.”

Narrowing my eyes at him, I can’t even form a reply for several long seconds. Finally, huffing out a breath, I shake my head. “I won’t even ask how you know that. I’m in a good mood. Why is that suspicious?”

Jared’s loud laugh is like a shotgun blast shattering the silence of the office. “A good mood isn’t. That smile is. Something’s going on.” He appraises me for a moment, his smile widening. “Did you meet someone?” He waggles his brows, his faded blue eyes merrily intent while he spits out rapid-fire questions. “Who is she? How long have you been seeing her?”

I’m shocked at how fast Jared figured it out. *Am I really that transparent?*

*Apparently.*

I open my mouth and close it. After a few seconds, I finally mutter, “I don’t...”

He doesn’t even let me get any denials out. Jared jumps to his feet, holding his palms out and grinning. “But if you’re not ready to tell me, that’s fine. Good luck, buddy.” With a wink, he walks out.

Sitting in my chair, I go over the brief conversation and can only shake my head. I had no idea that my business partner was so invested in my love life.

My thoughts immediately turn to Tricia, my gaze darting to my phone on the edge of the desk. Before I can talk myself out of it, the phone is in my hand and I type out a quick text, not even reading over it before I hit send.

**MATT: Hi Tricia, this is Matt. When can I take you out to dinner? Tonight?**

I wince reading over it. Do I sound desperate or eager?

Despite my dry spell, I’m not desperate. I could have joined a dating site or hit the bars at any point since my divorce. Dating simply took a backseat to everything else going on in my life. Seeing Tricia was like a bolt of lightning hitting me. It wasn’t other women I was missing out on. It was Tricia who is missing from my life.

**TRICIA: Hi Matt! If you don’t mind a late dinner, I can probably meet you somewhere around seven.**

Mind? I’m thrilled I don’t have to wait days to see her again.

**MATT: Seven sounds good. Any preferences?**

**TRICIA: Not really. I’m happy with anything I don’t have to make myself.**

**MATT: Italian? D’Angelo’s?**

**TRICIA: It’s a date!**

Yes, yes, it is.

If Jared thought my grin earlier was suspiciously happy, he would label me downright loony if he could see me now.

My mind is filled with visions of a romantic candlelit dinner with Tricia. Wine, flowers, deep and meaningful conversation, staring endlessly into her bright blue eyes and basking in her warm smiles.

Call me a hopeless romantic, but I cannot wait to wine and dine her and show her exactly how captivated by her I am.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

TRICIA

*No! No! No!*

Panicking, I shove the sodden, heavy mass of my hair out of my face, knowing I probably look like a drowned rat and praying I don't, while racing from the far corner of the parking lot to the entrance of D'Angelo's. I'm over thirty minutes late for my date with Matt and my heart pounds with the fear that I completely blew this.

Wrenching the heavy door open, I barrel in, colliding with a solid mass.

Gasping, I fight to stay on my feet, large hands locking onto my arms, helping to keep me upright.

"I'm so sorry," I stutter, shaking the hair out of my face again and sending droplets of water flying while I chance a glance up at the poor person I almost ran over.

Matt's brown eyes meet mine. Except they lack the warmth I associate with him.

I rest my hands on his chest, staring up into his solemn face. "Matt, I'm so sorry."

His lips pinch tight, his chest rising slightly, his hands covering mine for a moment before he pulls my fingers away, holding them gently in his. "It's fine, Tricia. I understand," he mumbles.

His words ease some of my tension and I blow out a deep breath before I realize he was on his way out when I ran into him. "Were you leaving? Could we go get a table and still have dinner?"

"I gave our table up. There are people waiting."

"Oh." Guilt swamps me. "Want to hit another place? My treat," I offer, hoping to salvage the evening.

Another couple enters the restaurant and Matt steers me out the door before dropping my hands. Thankfully, the rain

has stopped, though puddles dot the parking lot, glistening in the faint light from the overhead lights.

“No, you don’t have to do that.” His eyes bore into mine for a moment. “I’m sorry if I pressured you into this. You don’t have to have a pity meal with me.”

My lips part and I can only stare numbly at him. “Pity?” I stammer out when I can finally speak, my head swimming, trying to wrap around how in the world he thinks I would feel sorry for him. “Why would I pity you?”

He runs a brisk hand through that mop of long hair on his head, the parking lot lights catching glints of silver in the dark mass. “I’m older and you’re a beautiful young woman. I’m sure it happens all the time, clients developing crushes on you and asking you out. You probably felt sorry for me, so agreed just to get me out the door. I deeply regret any discomfort I caused you.”

Listening to him, I want to laugh and shake him all at once. I’m seriously confused how such an attractive man could, for one minute, believe any woman would go out with him out of a sense of obligation or pity. Number one, he’s a major catch. I can almost see my mother jumping in glee if I brought Dr. Smyth home. And two, most women aren’t that nice. There’s no such thing as a pity date.

“Matt! What I feel for you is most definitely not pity.” I step closer to him, loving how he’s just the perfect amount taller than me. He’s tall enough to make me feel all delicate and petite, but not basketball player tall that forces me to crane my head to look into his face.

“I’m attracted to you,” I say, loving how his eyes widen with a look of awe. Pressing even closer to him, I reach up and skim my fingers along his jaw, his beard soft against my skin. “I like you. I’m glad you kissed me and asked me out today because I was far too chicken to do it.”

His head tilts down, the warmth returning to his beautiful eyes.

“What I’m saying is what I feel for you is the furthest thing from pity.”

He doesn’t ask me this time. This time his mouth captures mine with only the flickering heat in his gaze as my warning. His tongue sweeps between my eagerly parted lips. Swiftly, I meet it, my tongue gliding and twining around his. Desire rides me hard as we gasp and lick into each other’s mouths. The taste of him is intoxicating, a blend of minty mouthwash and something clean, fresh, and wholly his.

My skin is flushed and the light jacket I’m wearing, though wet, feels far too hot. I want to peel my clothes off and snuggle against Matt’s big body. The thought of his chest hair against my breasts causes a surge of want to grip me. My nipples bead tightly while my core pulses in greedy anticipation of the thick erection he was spotting earlier at the clinic.

When Matt’s mouth leaves mine, a small whine works its way out of my throat, and I chase after his soft lips, needing another kiss.

His husky chuckle doesn’t help my libido any. It sends a shiver of pure want racing through me.

Opening my eyes, I find his soft gaze on me and a tender smile on his face. I can’t help grinning back. His hands go to my face, his thumbs running gently under my eyes.

I can see the smudges of black on his fingers even in the yellowy parking lot lights and inwardly I curse for not checking my appearance in the car’s mirror before rushing into the restaurant.

“You’re all wet,” he comments.

My thighs rub together, my clit tingling pleasantly. *Yes, yes, I am wet.* That’s not what he’s referring to, though.

Shrugging, I flip my wet hair over my shoulders. “Long story, but I got caught in the rain.”

He gives the door to D’Angelo’s an assessing look, then runs his searching gaze over my soaked form. “How about you

go home and change and then we could try another place to eat?”

I live twenty minutes from here and there are zero restaurants near me. Plus, my stomach is making its unhappiness over the lack of dinner known with little grumbles and growls that are sure to pick up in volume if I don't eat soon. “No, let's just go eat. I've already wasted enough of our date.”

Matt's big hand grabs mine and squeezes. “I'll treasure any amount of time I get with you.”

It should be cheesy, but I'm a sucker for anything sappy and romantic, so I fall a little more for Matt.

His eyes dart away, and he clears his throat as if embarrassed by what he said. “There's a Chinese buffet a few blocks over.”

“Yum. That works.”

He peers up at the darkening sky. “I'd suggest we walk, but it's getting late, you're already wet enough, and it's probably best if we drive. Are you okay going in one vehicle? I'm right over there.”

I turn and look in the direction he's pointing and see a big white Tesla SUV that I have zero doubts is his. “Nah, I don't want to get your seat wet. Why don't you just ride over with me?”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Walking over to my tiny secondhand Honda Civic, I suddenly regret offering. *Will Matt even fit in my car?*

Even worse, when I unlock the doors and open mine, a whiff of stale fast-food fries hits me in the face. Matt's too polite to say anything, though I notice his nose twitching as he eases his long body into the passenger seat.

He fits, barely.

It's a shame we can't walk there, because the drive literally takes us three minutes.



My stomach has revved up its complaining, so I'm thankful for no wait and happily pile my plate full at the buffet.

If Matt thinks anything about my overflowing plate when we return to our table, he doesn't say a word about it. I notice his selections are far smaller in portion and don't touch. I refrain from poking fun at him about that, and I call it a win on both of our parts.

I dig in, trying not to shovel the food into my mouth. Glancing up, I find Matt's gaze on me, a small smile inching up the corners of his lips.

My cheeks warm up and while dabbing at my mouth with a paper napkin, I can't resist muttering, "What?"

"I know never to get between you and your food. You might chew my fingers off."

He's not wrong.

Tossing him a grin, I pick up another forkful. "It's a good thing to know about me. You've been forewarned."

Matt throws his head back while he laughs, drawing a few curious eyes. The place is mostly empty, with only a handful of other customers, and they quickly turn their attention back to their food.

It's a small restaurant and one I've never tried before. There are maybe ten tables in the entire place and the walls are done up in hideous red wallpaper with large bamboo and faded paper fans placed sporadically around. Despite the lackluster interior, the food is amazing, and I can see coming back here. "Do you come here often?"

After a long gulp of his iced water, Matt nods, his smile warming up further. Other than the slight misunderstanding over my interest in him, I don't think I've yet to see the man without a smile on his face.

It's nice.

He just comes across as so approachable and sweet.

“I’m here far too often. My practice is only a few miles away and sometimes when I’m working late, I run over and get some carryout instead of cooking. I should warn you, I’m not much of a cook.”

“We’re in trouble, because neither am I,” I confide.

“Good thing there are a lot of restaurants around for us to try.”

The man is speaking my language. I love to eat and try new foods and different things. Sadly, my budget doesn’t always allow for that. It’s too soon to blurt out my financial situation, nor do I expect him to cover all our meals, but if we’re really going to date, maybe I should start working it into our conversation.

Before I can, Matt steers the conversation in a slightly different direction. “How long have you been a massage therapist for?”

“Around four years now.”

“Did you start your courses directly out of high school?”

I grin. “Is this your roundabout way of asking how old I am?”

“Partially,” he admits.

“I’m twenty-five. I got my associates degree and then decided I wanted to give massage therapy a try. Which meant more classes and certifications. And here I am.”

His grin widens, his hand snaking across the table to capture mine. “Yes, here you are.”

It’s becoming apparent that Matt is naturally a cheesy romantic.

Warm, bubbly feelings overtake me, and I grip his hand back. I like this.

And I definitely like him.

## CHAPTER SIX

TRICIA

I could pretend that I don't already know his age, but I don't see the need to bother.

Licking my lips, I do have to ask, "Is our age difference going to be an issue?"

"That depends on you," Matt says carefully. "You might not want to be dating such an older man. There's going to be a marked discrepancy between your friends' boyfriends and me. I'm not a young man anymore. I don't party all week and live on beer and pizza. I keep my vitamins and medications in a pill organizer, and I get creaky far faster than I did even five years ago."

Matt's eyes never leave mine, and I appreciate how transparent he's being. I've never dated a man over thirty before. But honestly, after those kisses, there's no way I'm not going to see where a relationship with him goes.

"I also use a pill organizer, so definitely not a deal breaker," I tease, loving the laugh lines fanning out from his twinkling brown eyes. "As to the partying, there's a time and a place for that, and I don't expect you to be a party animal. I'm not. I love a good time as much as the next girl, and I've been known to go over my limit when it comes to tequila shooters, but that's not an every weekend thing for me. It never was."

"Tequila shooters, huh?"

"My weakness. Remember the trip I mentioned?" At his nod, I continue, "That was a girls' getaway and yeah, I went overboard." Laughing, I shake my head. "You wouldn't believe some things we got into..." I trail off as the thought that was itching at the back of my brain returns.

*Clarissa's love spell!*

Blinking rapidly, I take stock of the man in front of me.

*Kind, funny, and romantic? Check!*

*Tall and handsome? Umm... hello, he's gorgeous!*

*Great in bed? I certainly hope to find that out.*

I try to think of the other items on my list, but the details are fuzzy.

“Tricia? Are you okay?” Matt asks, his brows scrunching down as he watches me.

“Fine, just fine. Had a moment remembering some of the trouble we got into.” I give him a bright smile. “But that reminds me. Thank you so much for the shoofly pie. It was so sweet of you.”

“Did you enjoy it?”

Not even bothering to hide my grimace, I shake my head. “Nope. It was dreadful.”

Throwing his head back, Matt laughs and I can’t help joining him.

When our laughter tapers off, we’re left smiling at each other across the table and it hits me once again how natural being with him feels.

*Could the love spell really have worked?*

The urge to call a few of my friends is strong, but I shake it off. It was just a bit of fun, nothing really serious. Right?

\*\*\*

Matt

Gazing at Tricia’s sweet smile and shining happy eyes, a sense of rightness fills me, and I realize that Jared’s correct. Something is going on with me. I’m completely and utterly infatuated.

With a woman not quite half my age.

Maybe that’s stretching things a bit. Still, sixteen years isn’t something to brush aside. I was getting my driver’s license when she was a newborn. A rather daunting realization that makes me question if it’s wise to continue this date.

A bitter flare of distress squeezes my insides at the thought of thanking her for a wonderful evening and never

seeing her again.

Maybe after a few dates Tricia will decide that the differences in our ages and lifestyles are simply too insurmountable for a relationship to flourish, and she'll end things.

Or we'll find out we're a compatible couple and things will proceed naturally, and we'll forge a life together. Which is a much more pleasing thought.

No matter what, there's no way I'm not going to take the chance. I might get hurt, but it's a risk I'm willing to take.

After my divorce, I hadn't given much thought to remarrying. Now, I see I would be a fool to rule out a second opportunity at a family.

"Tricia, when can I see you again?"

Her grin grows. "I insult your gift and you still want to see me? How did I get so lucky?"

Fighting back a chuckle, I say, "I was thinking the same thing. How did I get fortunate enough to meet you?"

"Who knew someone would be grateful for sore muscles?" she teases.

"Ahhh... so I should be thanking the long hours and stress for leading me to you."

Her eyes squeeze shut and her face bunches up as she laughs. "You're dreadful. I love it." Opening her eyes, her gaze sweeps over me, lingering on my lips and sending a bolt of heat straight down to my cock. "When would you like to see me?"

"I want to see you tomorrow, but my schedule is packed, and I've already committed to doing a prerecording for an upcoming webinar," I admit, not even attempting to keep the disappointment out of my voice. "What about Thursday?"

"Friday," she counters.

"Want to try D'Angelo's again?" I waggle my brows and wink. "This time I'll pick you up."

Red blooms on her face. “I am so sorry about that. I couldn’t even call you because I don’t have my phone.”

“You don’t have to keep apologizing. I’m not upset. Everything worked out.” A happy sigh eases out of me before the second half of her apology sinks in and my grin freezes. “Wait. What happened to your phone?”

Tricia’s gaze darts from me to the server that silently appeared next to the table. We wait while he places the bill face down and drops two fortune cookies on the table before leaving as quietly as he came.

I hand her one of the cookies, leaving the other one on the table.

She busies herself with trying to tear the cookie’s plastic wrap off. Keeping her head down, she mumbles, “I kinda dropped it into my neighbor’s pool.”

“In a pool? Isn’t it rather chilly for swimming?”

Her blonde head jerks up, and the plastic tears, the cookie shooting upwards before bouncing across the table to land on my mostly empty plate.

I pick it up and give it a shake, globs of sweet and sour sauce splattering back onto my plate. “Guess this one is mine now.”

Smothering a laugh with her hand, she grabs at the still wrapped cookie and offers it to me. “No, don’t eat that!”

“Why? It’s fine.” To prove my point, I bite into the now-sticky cookie, forgetting about the fortune until a piece of paper slides against my tongue. With a grimace, I reach in and pluck it out.

Tricia’s entire body shakes, her face going almost as red as the sweet and sour sauce while she tries to hold in her laughter.

Summoning up a bit of dignity, I fish the other half of the fortune out of the uneaten half of my cookie and put the two pieces together.

“Happiness comes to those that seek it.” I mull that over and smile. “The cookie is wise tonight.”

With an amused quirk of her lips, Tricia breaks open the second cookie. “Seek what you want, and you will never be unhappy,” she reads, her voice barely louder than a whisper by the time she gets to the last word.

The scrap of paper slips out of her fingers, her gaze avoiding mine. The fortune cookies are only a bit of harmless fun, but they seem to have rattled Tricia.

Normally I would say something about how similar ours are or at least ask her what she wanted. Instead, I remain quiet and let her work through whatever is bothering her.

Grabbing at her drink, she takes a long sip. When she sets her glass down, her grin is back in place. “Anyway, I wasn’t planning to go swimming, and neither was Ruthie, my neighbor. We had to fish her dog out along with the squirrel he chased in there.”

“Oh my,” I mutter, trying not to linger too long on the mental image of Tricia soaking wet, her clothes clinging to every sweet curve.

“Yes, oh my indeed. We were using the pool net to scoop the squirrel out when Maxwell, her chihuahua, decided we were trapping it for him and he lunged, grabbing the net and pulling Ruthie in. I tried to stop her and that didn’t go so well.”

A rueful smile tugs at her lips. “It was only when I changed that I realized my phone was at the bottom of the pool. So, there I was with no phone and no clue what your number was to call you and let you know I was going to be late.”

She could have called the restaurant, but I guess with everything going on that didn’t even cross her mind. I don’t hold that against her and am truly just thankful that she showed and is sitting here with me now.

Even so my lips twitch with my efforts not to laugh when I ask, “Did you get your phone out?”

“I did, but I don’t have much hope for it. I have it in a bag of dried rice at home.”

Pulling out my wallet, I place my credit card on top of the bill and fish out one of my business cards. Flipping the card over, I scrawl my personal number on it and hand it over. “In case you can’t salvage yours.”

“Thank you,” she says, tucking the card into her purse. Glancing at me, a hint of pink dusts her cheeks in a blush that sends a pulse of longing through me. “Thank you for everything, Matt. Being understanding and just being so nice.”

“I try. I can’t imagine anyone not being nice around you.”

The pink morphs into red and it’s all I can do not to lean across the table and kiss her.

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# CHAPTER SEVEN

TRICIA

“You’d be surprised,” I say, sitting up straighter in the seat, my gaze locking onto his soft brown ones. “Or maybe you wouldn’t be. I can’t imagine everyone is pleasant to be around while you’re messing with their teeth and inflecting pain.”

“A necessary evil of my job. Like they say, ‘no pain, no gain’,” he grins, showing off his perfect white teeth. I don’t want to think about how much work went into achieving them. Or the pain.

“My family asks how I can deal with looking at half-naked people all day. It’s not that bad. You want to help the person and end their discomfort. Plus, most people are very conscious of their nakedness and shower and prep ahead of time. But your line of work? You have to look into mouths all day...” I trail off, slapping my palm protectively over my mouth as a horrifying thought occurs.

“You’re not staring at my teeth thinking painful thoughts, are you?” I ask, my words coming out muffled sounding from behind my hand.

Matt’s wide eyes gleam with humor as he rocks back in his seat, deep, husky laughter pouring out of him. He swipes at his moist eyes and shakes his head. “Not at all,” he gasps, struggling to control his mirth. Grabbing at his water, he takes a long gulp and pulls himself together. “But if you’re having orthodontic issues, I hope you give my office a call.”

“You’re probably out of my price range,” I say, careful to keep my teeth covered.

“We have payment plans. Either way, from what I saw of your teeth already, you don’t have horrible issues.” His head cocks to the side, his expression transforming to a calm and professional one. “Open up.”

I blink at the command and let out a nervous laugh. Matt’s expression doesn’t change. He’s the very picture of

patience.

*He's serious!*

Hesitating for another moment, I mutter, "I can't believe I'm doing this," before leaning forward and opening my mouth wide, praying I don't have tons of food stuck in my teeth.

Matt peers intently for a moment, his hand going to my cheek and gently positioning my head differently. "Posterior crossbite. An easy fix."

His fingers drift over my skin, causing a shiver to race through me as he withdraws his hand. "Or not. No pressure and no cause for concern or embarrassment."

He studies me for a moment, then turns his attention to the charge slip the server slid next to him. With a flourish, he signs his name and folds and tucks his copy into his wallet along with his credit card. His gaze rises slowly to me, a serious look on his face. "I'm not in the habit of ridiculing people over their teeth, nor do I want to cause undue pain. That's not why I got into this business. Same as you, I want to help people feel better. Mentally and physically."

Rising to his feet, he holds out his hand, which I accept with a smile.

Walking with him out to my car, our fingers entwined, warmth thrums through me. Once more, my thoughts circle back to the love spell my friends and I cast. On the surface, Matt is everything I could dream of and more. And though I've barely scratched the surface of his personality, from what I've seen so far, he's warm, caring, and has a great sense of humor.

Could meeting the perfect man really be so simple and easy?

Doubtful.

Yet when we arrive back to the parking lot of D'Angelo's and Matt turns to me, I can't help believing that with the right man, maybe falling in love really is effortless.

“Can I kiss you?” he whispers, his head already angling closer.

His deep voice sends butterflies to my stomach and a pinch of nervousness. “You gave me a dental exam. I don’t think you need to ask anymore.”

With a husky chuckle still vibrating his lips, Matt claims his kiss. His mouth moves over mine with an intensity that has tingles racing from my lips to my toes. I sink into the bliss kissing him brings and when his arms curl around me urging me closer to his big, broad chest, a sigh of contentment wells up from deep within.

When our lips part, heavy condensation fogs the windows and I feel like a naughty teenager making out with a forbidden boyfriend.

Our age difference might be more extreme than I would have ever considered before, but there’s nothing illicit or wrong about a relationship with Matt.

It all feels so right that it’s almost painful when he exits my car and I watch him walk over to the gleaming white Tesla. I can’t help smiling a bit over how I just knew it was his. It kinda reminds me of a big tooth, though I’ll never tell him that.

Okay, no, I will probably tell him that at some point.

Maybe even the next time I see him, which will hopefully be soon.

It suddenly hits me that we never finalized our plans for Friday. Not missing a beat, I lurch from the car and race over to his SUV. He’s out of his door in a flash, his hands reaching for me. “Are you okay?” he says, his eyes dark with concern as they move over me.

“Friday, right?” I ask, finding it hard to catch my breath with our bodies so close together. “Our next date,” I add.

A half-grin tugs up the right corner of his mouth. “Guess I can’t call you until you get a new phone. Call me and we’ll decide what we want to do on Friday.” After half a beat, he asks, “Are you working tomorrow?”

My brows scrunch down. He said he was busy tomorrow. “Yes,” I say slowly.

“It’s going to sound crazy, but would you be open for an early breakfast together?”

“Breakfast?”

His half-grin stretches into a full-on smile that makes those previous butterflies in my stomach take flight. “I’m going to miss you too much to wait until Friday.”

I’m starting to suspect Dr. Matt Smyth must have a book of smooth lines to get women to fall for him.

I’m not immune.

I positively melt like a marshmallow into a puddle of happy goo. “Breakfast sounds wonderful,” I breathe, a big sappy grin on my face.

“Anything you don’t like? I’ll pick you up at your work around seven?”

Well, I don’t really like getting up that early in the morning, but I’ll keep that bit of information to myself. “I hate tofu and cauliflower anything.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” He leans in and gives me a far too brief kiss. “Until tomorrow, Tricia,” he says, releasing me and taking a step back.

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# CHAPTER EIGHT

MATT

Our first date had a rocky start, though the rest of the evening went well. I'm determined that our breakfast together will go perfectly. Which means I'm up at five to ensure everything is ready when I go to the clinic to meet Tricia. Sadly, I can't control the weather and squint up at the gray clouds moving at a fast pace across the weak, struggling sunlight that's trying in vain to chase away the darkness.

At the sight of Tricia's tan sedan, my heartbeat picks up, the weather forgotten. I'm out of the SUV before she's even pulled into the parking spot next to me.

In jeans and a plain pink t-shirt, her long blonde hair pulled away from her face in a messy braid, she looks fresh and achingly beautiful. Wanting things to be perfect for her makes sense, as at this moment I would happily give her the world if she but asked.

My ex accused me of not being romantic and it was only later that I realized we were both distant and almost clinical in our interactions, but I was merely following her lead. Somehow, our professional personas carried over into our personal relationship, which wasn't how a marriage was supposed to be.

I'm no longer with my ex. Now I'm free to be as spontaneous and romantic as I want. The key is that I want to be that way with Tricia.

Grasping her face between my hands, I almost shudder at the softness of her skin against my palms. That softness is nothing compared to her lips, which I lay claim to, moving my mouth with a building hunger.

Her arms twist around my waist, her breasts pressing into my chest, and the sweet smell of her wraps around me. With a groan, I slip my tongue between her parted lips, tasting the crisp mint of her toothpaste and a faint hint of something that is uniquely her. Pure need rocks through me, my cock

hardening and throbbing within the tight confines of my dark dress slacks.

When her lips leave mine, it takes me a dazed moment to come back to myself and open my eyes to her smiling face. “Hi.”

“Yes, hello there,” I say, wanting nothing more than to kiss her again. A wiggle of reality intrudes, reminding me I have a full day with responsibilities that I can’t skirt, no matter how much I’m tempted to. “Ready for breakfast?”

“Absolutely,” she says, unwinding her arms from around me.

“There’s a small park less than five minutes from here. I thought we could have our meal there. I promise to have you back here in time for work.”

Her nose scrunches up as she laughs. “I would hope so. I don’t have work until eleven today.”

My mind blanks for a moment. “Why did you agree to meet me so early?”

Tricia’s smile flashes bright and sunny on this overcast day. “Because I couldn’t wait to see you again either.”

The honest sincerity of her words humbles me and it’s all I can do not to sweep her into my arms and say to hell with being a responsible adult.

Before I can do anything brash, Tricia’s hand on my chest lifts. “Let’s get going. I’m starving.”

True to my word, the park is but a few minutes away and soon I have the red checked flannel blanket spread out on a bit of dry grass overlooking a scenic pond.

Orange juice, biscuits stuffed with eggs, peppers, and cheese, and a container of fruit complete our breakfast. I sit watching Tricia dig in and just enjoy being here in this moment with her. Peace and happiness make me feel lighter than I have in a long time, and I savor it as much as I do the flakey, buttery biscuits.

“This is so good!” she enthuses. “I thought you said you couldn’t cook.”

“Oh, I can throw a few things together to survive. This I can’t take credit for other than placing the order and picking it up.”

“I’d ask where, but if I ate like this daily, I’d fall asleep in the middle of a massage. This is nice, thank you.”

“Thank you,” I say softly.

We eat and look out over the pond, a few geese making their presence known with occasional honks and wing flaps. I can’t quite keep my gaze from going back to Tricia, she draws me like a beacon with her bright blonde hair and smile.

Her head turns, and she catches me, a bit of pink flooding her face. “How are you single, Matt?”

The direct question, softly asked, is still jarring, though not entirely surprising. We don’t know that much about it each other yet and I want to change that.

“A divorce and my life changing direction finds me single and thrilled to be sitting here with you.”

Tricia’s eyes dip down to the blanket before darting up to meet mine head-on. “How long ago was the divorce?”

“It was finalized three years ago. And as to why we got divorced-”

“You don’t have to,” she breaks in, clamping her lips shut when I take her hand in mine, my thumb rubbing along the smooth skin and marveling over the strength contained in her small hand.

“No, I want to tell you. I never want to be anything but honest with you, Tricia.”

Her blue eyes flare wide, her hand squeezing mine.

“We were in our late twenties when we got married. Both of us orthodontists with similar business goals, namely building our practice. Then our life goals changed. I wasn’t what she wanted, and I wanted things she didn’t. We spent

years building a business and getting financially stable and I thought it was time to move on to the next step, children, family vacations, basically settling down and enjoying all the hard work we had put in. She disagreed, and we parted in a mostly amicable divorce.”

I can't help filling the silence that greets that with a laugh. “Sorry. You didn't ask for all that.”

She shakes her head. “No, Matt. That was exactly what I wanted to know. Family is important to me too. I have four older siblings.” Her smile grows wistful. “Tons of nieces and nephews, so no pressure on me to get married and have children. But I want that.”

I see myself reflected in her dark pupils, a hopeful expression on my face as our upper bodies sway closer.

“It's important for you to know that I'm dating looking for forever-”

“Not just for right now,” I finish for her. “Looks like what we're after aligns.”

“It seems that way.”

Uncaring of the remains of our meal scattered between us, I edge closer, my hand tightening on hers. She meets me halfway, our lips colliding with a heat I feel scorching through me. Eagerly, I advance, urging her lips apart. Her tongue slides against mine before it twists to slip between my lips. Tricia guides the kiss, each moist caress of her tongue causing the twisting heat in my groin to pulse in aching need.

My free hand goes to the soft cotton of her shirt, hesitantly palming the weight of her breast. Her tiny moan slips between our lips, Tricia pressing her breast harder into my hand. That's all the encouragement I need. My fingers zero in on the raised bud of her hard nipple, my thumb circling and teasing.

She is so sweet, the taste of strawberries strong on her tongue, leaving me feeling half-drunk in want of her. My cock, an insistent bar in my pants, feels ready to burst, pre-cum coating the swollen head.



She tumbles onto the blanket, and I follow her down, rolling half on top of her, feeling the give of her soft body cushioning mine as I wedge a leg between hers.

Our kisses become frantic, my pulse a thundering beat accompanying the harsh pants that escape our lips when we part for a sip of air. Tricia grinds against my leg, her hips seeking more.

I lose my head and any trace of restraint I once had.

With a harsh exhalation, I roll completely on top of her, my cock thrusting against her jean-covered pussy. Tricia meets me thrust for thrust, her legs pressing against me, holding me captive.

Abandoning her nipple for a moment, I snake a hand down her belly to the edge of her t-shirt, my fingers glorying at the feel of her soft, warm skin as they skim the hem. Tunneling my hand upwards, I shove the silky material of her bra down to cup her naked breast. Her nipple stabs at my palm, hard and needy.

It's been so long since I've been overcome with passion, with raw aching want. Everything else fades away, Tricia filling all my senses.

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## CHAPTER NINE

TRICIA

Matt's kisses are addicting. Things with him are happening so fast, my feelings spiraling out of control. I'm normally so cautious, especially with men. He makes me abandon all my inhibitions.

Abandon?

I happily toss them into the fires of our passion, which burn so hotly I feel like I'm going to combust when he rolls completely on top of me, the rigid length of his erection grinding into my pussy.

Dimly, I'm aware that we're out in the middle of the open, basically dry humping like horny teenagers and anyone could come along and see us.

Or worse, report us.

I need to slow things down or at least move them along somewhere a lot more private.

His hand claims my breast and my eyes roll upward. Just a few more moments...

I'm trailing my hands down the hard, muscular length of his back that I know so well when a loud beeping assaults my ears, stopping me cold. Matt continues to kiss me, his hand kneading my breast, making me want to purr in satisfaction. If only that annoying beeping would go away.

Pulling away from Matt's mouth, I shudder all over when his lips go to my neck. "Matt," I say, pushing him back when all I want to do is pull him closer.

His tongue teases at my collarbone. "Matt," I try again, shifting my body under him and earning me a husky moan from him that makes my pussy clench in want.

The beeping continues and finally it seems to break through to him. Matt's head lifts from my neck, his dark eyes heavy-lidded, the pupils blown wide with desire. He stares at

me for a moment before a grimace contorts his face and he rolls off me.

Sitting up, his hand goes to his pocket, and he pulls out his phone. His grimace changes to a rueful grin. "I set an alarm so I wouldn't be late for work," he says, silencing the alarm. "I knew I would get distracted being with you."

A deep chuckle leaves him, his eyes flashing with warmth when his gaze connects with mine. "I didn't expect this kind of distraction."

My tongue darts out and glides over my lips and I can taste him still. "I don't mind that type of distraction," I say, even while my cheeks burn with a flush at my boldness.

But is it bold?

No. I'm simply being honest. I wouldn't mind getting lost in Matt's kisses every day.

He leans over, his fingers brushing some of the errant hairs that have come loose from my braid away from my face, before he kisses me again. Slowly, tenderly, and so sweetly that I cling to his lips when the kiss ends.

We stare at each other and then his hand falls away, and it's time for reality to take hold again.

Matt stands up and brushes the crumbs from his pants and from his hands before offering me a hand to help me up. The picnic breakfast is stowed away quickly, and we begin the walk back to his SUV hand in hand, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

A few geese are walking across the path, blocking our way, and we stop to let them cross. My eyes go to the straggler several paces behind. He's favoring one leg awkwardly as he struggles to keep up with the others.

The reason becomes obvious when I see the green and white fishing lure hooked into the webbing of his foot by a nasty looking four-prong hook. "Oh no," I moan, my heart going out to the poor thing.

“Let’s see if we can trap him in the blanket,” Matt says, yanking the red checked flannel blanket from our picnic out of the basket.

Before I can fully process what’s going on, Matt lunges forward, tossing the blanket over the goose, who honks manically like a driver stuck in rush hour. I race to Matt’s side to help him contain the goose, whose wings are beating madly as he tries to escape.

I thought my nieces and nephews were squirmers as toddlers. They have nothing on this goose who is bucking and kicking wildly, trying to get away. “It’s okay,” I whisper, though I doubt he can hear me over his own panicky honks and hisses or even understand me.

“We’re going to help,” Matt says soothingly, pulling a multi-tool out of his pocket. Grasping the goose’s injured foot, he uses the pliers to get the lure out of the thick orange webbing between its toes. “You can let him go,” he says to me with a nod.

The moment I unwrap the blanket, the goose waddles away with a jerking gait. Already he can move faster than he could with the hook in his foot.

Standing with the blanket in my hands, I watch him join his friends. “Do you think he’ll be okay?”

Matt folds up his multi-tool. “Has to be better than with a lure in his foot.” He holds it up and I wince at how wicked the hooks are and how much that must have hurt the poor goose. “At least now he has a fighting chance to heal and migrate.”

I offer him the blanket and after a few brisk shakes he rolls it up and stuffs it into the basket that he set down just off the walkway. Rubbing my hands down my pants, I can’t help crinkling my nose up at the smell. A glance down confirms there’s goose poop on my jeans. Yuck!

Thank goodness I can go home and change... that thought sends my eyes to Matt.

“Oh, no.”

His dark eyes flash my way, concern drawing his mouth tight. “What’s wrong?” he asks, coming to a halt.

“Goose poop,” I say, pointing at the green smears on his pants. “You’re heading right to work, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I am.” He gives a short laugh, and we start walking again. “Oh well, shit happens, right? I couldn’t leave that poor goose suffering like that.”

The attraction I feel for Matt skyrockets at that. There is nothing more attractive than a man who’s compassionate toward animals. Okay, the fact that Matt is physically gorgeous, has a sense of humor, is sweet and an amazing kisser that might also have something to do with what I’m feeling. This man is everything I’ve ever wanted.

I stumble over my feet. Matt’s hand is immediately on my arm to steady me.

Blearily I blink up at him, realization hitting me like a jolt of lightning.

*He’s everything I asked for.*

I’m in a daze as Matt drives us back to my work. It doesn’t even register when he pulls into the parking lot and stops next to my car.

“Tricia.”

At my name, my head lifts and I meet his searching gaze. His brown eyes are so full of warmth that I want to fling myself into his arms and stay there forever.

I’m doing just that when his hand captures mine.

“I know I’m rushing things and if you ever feel overwhelmed, just tell me to back off...” he trails off, his eyes closing for a moment. When they reopen, he smiles. “I’d love to have you come over for dinner tonight. It would be late and it’s probably asking too much. We just had breakfast, but I need to see you again-”

“Yes,” I cut in.

“Yes?”

Undoing the seat belt, I angle my body closer. “It is overwhelming, but in a good way.”

Matt’s mouth covers mine in an instant. His tongue sweeping against my lips in a way I’m growing to crave.

When the kiss ends, we’re both smiling, and it hits me I could fall in love with this man so easily.

I’m halfway there already.

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# CHAPTER TEN

MATT

I have no idea how I made it through a full workday and can only hope I said nothing too off-key when recording my presentation for the webinar. My thoughts were fully on Tricia. As they have been since the moment she walked into the room for my massage. I'm too old for puppy love and it's not mere infatuation.

Freezing in the act of stepping into the shower, it hits me how much I want her. Obviously sexually, zero doubt about that, yet this is more. I'm looking forward to showing her my home, of seeing her here and this space being filled with her scent and presence. I want her, all of her.

I shower and toss on slacks and a plain blue shirt, hoping to project a casual appearance. Assessing myself in the mirror, the same face stares back at me that has most of my adult life. There's more silver in my hair and beard than there was a few years ago and it's hard not to wince at the lines bracketing my mouth and creasing the skin around my eyes.

All the signs are there that I'm not a young man any longer. Yet I'm just as eager as any twenty-year would be waiting for Tricia to arrive.

I'm not young, but I still have a lot of life left in me. Life that I want to spend with her.

When the doorbell rings, the sight of Tricia standing there steals more than my breath.

Words feel inadequate.

Still, I try.

"You're beautiful," I breathe, stepping forward to take the bulky white and red bag from her.

Her blue eyes sparkle, her pink lips parting in a pleased smile I cannot resist. Cupping her cheek, I press my mouth to hers, almost dropping the bag when her arms wind around my neck, her fingers brushing through the hair on the nape of

neck. She pulls back first, yet I linger, breathing in the sweet scent of her and enjoying the closeness.

“Hi again,” she says, a flush of pink on her cheeks.

“Yes, hello again,” I say, brushing my fingers along her blush before dropping my hand. “Thank you for coming.” Looking down at the bag, I grin. “D’Angelo’s. You didn’t need to.”

Tricia shrugs. “We missed out on our meal there. I felt like I owed you.”

Taking her hand in mine, I lead her into the house. “We’ll have plenty of opportunities to eat there,” I say, giving her small hand a gentle squeeze. “And other places.”

I place the bag on the gray granite counter and get two plates out of the white cabinet.

“I thought you didn’t cook?” she says, her brows raised as she looks around.

Glancing around the large kitchen, while washing my hands in the deep farmhouse-style sink, I can see why she might be confused. It’s fully updated, has an impressive gas range, and tons of gleaming appliances grace the counters. “I don’t. Most of these barely get used anymore.”

“Oh.” Tricia’s teeth work at her lower lip, her eyes darting around before coming to rest on me as I plate up the baked manicotti she brought. “Is this the house you shared with your wife?”

“No,” I say gently, holding out the takeout bag of garlic bread. “I bought this after the divorce. Far too big for a single man, I know, but it was my parents’, and I loved it. My ex laughed when she found out I bought it.”

“Are you two still close?” she asks hesitantly, while following my lead and carrying her plate into the dining room where I already have a pitcher of water and glasses waiting.

Placing my plate down, I hold Tricia’s chair out for her before sitting down in the seat across the table from her. “Hardly. We’re both orthodontists, though, so we see each



other at conferences and such. She lives across town in a townhouse she bought when we separated.”

I’m thankful for the small table, as the distance between us isn’t great, and I can reach for Tricia’s hand. I find I love touching her and holding her in any way I can. “I’m completely over my ex. It’s been four years since we separated; you don’t have to worry that I’m still carrying a torch or will go back to her.”

Instead of looking relieved, Tricia frowns. “I need to be honest with you,” she says, picking at her piece of garlic bread. “My last relationship wasn’t that long ago. We broke up in August.”

A bit of worry trickles along my spine.

“But there is zero chance I’d ever take him back.” She pauses, staring past me for a moment before releasing a huff of laughter. “Long story there, but trust me, we were completely wrong for each other, and I have no desire to revisit that relationship. So don’t think you’re a rebound for me or anything,” she says.

“Good. I’ll admit, I’m a rather possessive man and I don’t share well.”

“Neither do I.” Tricia beams and picks up her fork. “I hope you’re hungry, because I’m starved.”

During the meal, we talk about our work and Tricia tells me more about her siblings and I can’t help feeling a slight pang. I have a younger sister, but she’s out in California, so we don’t see each other that often and my parents moved to North Carolina several years ago. It sounds like Tricia and her siblings are all close, which is wonderful and the type of family connection I’ve always craved.

After piling the dishes into the sink, we finish the evening with some apple cider on the patio with a cheery fire in the stone fire pit.

“What’s that over there?” Tricia asks, her eyes narrowed in a squint while she points.

Taking in the large wooden screened-in enclosure, heat burns its way up my neck. “Oh, um... a catio.”

Tricia licks her lips and leans forward. “I’m sorry, I’m not sure I heard you right. Did you say catio?”

Clearing my throat, I set my mug of cider down and extend a hand. “Would you like to see it?”

Her laugh sends warmth of another kind shooting through me. Getting up, she takes my hand, and we walk over to the catio.

“Is it like a chicken coop?” she asks, releasing my hand to walk around the multi-level wooden structure.

I rub at the back of my neck. “It’s a fancy outdoor cat house.”

She turns to me, a large smile filling her face. “You have cats?”

“I do. Three of them.”

“Here? I didn’t see them during dinner,” she says, planting her hands on her hips like I’ve hidden them from her.

“They were probably up in their room.”

She comes even closer, her eyes full of laughter. “They have a summer house,” she says, gesturing to the catio, “and their own bedroom. Someone is a good cat daddy.”

Before I can say anything else, Tricia’s hand is on my arm and she’s urging me toward the house. “Come on, I want to meet them.”

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

TRICIA

My heart is pounding in my chest, and I hope my palms aren't sweaty as I pet Poe, Matt's all black cat. Sprawled on the bed are King, a huge tabby, and Kelly, short for Kellerman, a sleek Siamese cat. Matt is leaning against the doorframe, just taking us in with a faint smile on his face.

Emotions swirl within me. Just when I thought Matt couldn't possibly be any more perfect, I find out that nope, he's indeed everything that I could want in a partner. And is, in fact, everything that I asked for. Not only is he kind toward animals, I thought my heart was going to melt at the way he helped that goose this morning, but he's an animal lover and spoils his three cats.

I'd love to have a pet, but my apartment has a strict no pets policy. Now that doesn't matter because by dating Matt, I get to love on his three cats.

"Are we dating?" I ask suddenly, giving Poe a final stroke and getting to my feet.

Matt moves away from the door, his deep brown eyes fixed on me. "That was my intention, yes," he says, coming to a stop a few inches from me. Close enough to feel the heat of his large body, but not quite touching.

A single step has me pressed against him. "Good," I say, before leaning up and capturing his lips in a slow kiss.

Matt's hands are on my hips in an instant, drawing me firmly to him. The hard length of his erection tells me I'm not misreading what's between us. Then again, our wild make-out session this morning told me he wanted me. If it wouldn't have been for his phone, I would have had sex with him right there in the open. I should feel guilty being so reckless. That's not me.

But it didn't feel reckless. It felt right.

When we parted so he could go to work and me back home, I missed him. It's pure craziness. I've never fallen so hard or so fast for someone.

I can practically hear my two sisters, Mandy and Carol, telling me I need to slow my roll because I just got out of a relationship, and I shouldn't be jumping straight into something serious with someone new. Besides the fact that I don't know Matt that well.

My heart and body say something else entirely.

Matt is the real deal. He's what I've been yearning for. He's the man that Hallmark movies are made about, and I didn't even need to move to a small town to find him.

Despite a few concerns about the love spell, we're together now and I fully plan to see where this goes between us.

Deepening the kiss, my tongue glides over his deliciously soft lips. With a moan, he opens for me, his tongue stroking against mine as the taste of him has my head spinning.

I can't get enough. Impatiently, my hands work the buttons of his shirt. His fingers follow the lines of my hips before dipping lower to cup and squeeze my ass, grinding me into the hard length of his dick. I shove his shirt back, his naked chest exposed for my exploration.

Breaking the kiss, my eyes move over his upper body. My hands trembling slightly as I do what I've dreamed of doing since the moment I saw him wearing the white client's robe for the first time. His chest hair is surprisingly soft and springy under my fingers.

Matt stands there, his chest rising and falling, letting me look and learn his body. His fast inhalations are the only sounds in the room.

My thumbs brush over his tightly budded nipples, their dusky brown peaks peeking out of the whorls of his dark hair. They draw me like a magnet. My lips wrap around one, tasting his skin for the first time.

His harsh gasp of pleasure drowns my moan out. Slinking a hand lower, I press my palm over the stiff, heavy form of his cock.

The bed is directly behind him. Releasing his nipple with a final flick of my tongue over the hardened tip, I smile and cup his crotch, feeling the thrust of him against my hand.

I step closer and when his arms move to go around me, I shrug them off and advance further. Matt's brown eyes are alive with desire and my mouth goes dry at the heat within them.

Warm excitement seeps from me. I'm wet and it's all from touching him. The thought of riding him, like I've fantasized while massaging him at work, sends a wave of need through me and my pussy throbs.

Slowly, I back Matt up against the bed. Releasing his dick, I place my palms on the warm, solid strength of his chest and push.

Instead of sitting down on the bed, his hands come up and cover mine. "No."

I freeze at that word. Everything in me shrinking back in mortification. How did I totally misread this situation?

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MATT

At the touch of Tricia's hand on my cock, I nearly lose it. The way she looks at me steals my breath.

This beautiful woman wants me.

And I want her.

More than anything else in this world.

My cock pulses in time with my frantic heartbeat, making thought difficult. When the back of my legs hit the bedframe, something breaks through the static of lust fuzzing my head.

"No," I grit out.

Tricia's body goes rigid, a flash of hurt tightening up her features.

*Does she think I don't want her?*

*Never that!*

Her hand leaves my dick, her entire body withdrawing from me. Seizing her arms, I apply just enough pressure to keep her with me.

"I want you so badly," I rasp, angling my face closer to hers, feeling her sweet breath against my lips. "Just not on this bed."

Stealing a quick kiss leaves me hungry for so much more and it takes effort to get out the rest of the words. "I want you in my bed, Tricia, not the cats' bed that's full of their hair."

"Lead the way," she says with a smile full of promise. Her fingers trail down my stomach, leaving the muscles quivering in anticipation.

She expects me to let her walk to my room after just agreeing to be mine? Not happening.

I palm her soft, utterly delectable ass and haul her closer, my lips absorbing her squeal of surprise when I lift her into my arms. Her legs wrap around my waist, spreading her wide and pressing her against my straining erection.

Walking her into my bedroom, the friction on my dick is intense and I'm staggering when we finally make it to my bed.

Gently, I lay her back on the dark sage comforter. Her legs release my waist, and she smiles up at me.

The sight of her laying there, long blonde hair spread out over my pillow, her lips parted as she waits, is one that will forever be burned into my brain.

"You are so..." I swallow hard. "You're everything," I finish, uncaring of how that still somehow isn't enough to convey my thoughts.

"Matt."

Tricia reaches for me, and I fall into her welcoming embrace, my lips frantically connecting with hers.

Eagerly and clumsily, we kick off our shoes and struggle out of our clothes, warm skin on warm skin feeling so utterly right. Her pink nipples brushing against my chest has my breath leaving me in gasps. My unrestrained cock rubs against the smooth skin of her pussy and my balls pull up tight to my body as my breath escapes in a hiss from between my clenched teeth.

It's been years since I've had sex and I'd like to blame that for why I feel like I'm seconds away from coming, but it's not that.

It's her.

"You are so unbelievably sexy," I whisper, staring down into her passion-blown, wide blue eyes.

"Beautiful," I say, pressing a kiss to her lips.

Working my way lower, I swipe my tongue across a tempting nipple, glorying in the way she thrusts upwards, seeking more of my mouth on her. I suck the hard straining bud between my lips, swirling my tongue around it and feeling it constrict further in the sucking heat of my mouth.

"Matt," Tricia pants, her fingers raking through my hair, holding me captive to her breasts, while her hips thrust and grind into my stomach, the perfume of her arousal saturating my senses.

I switch back and forth between her breasts, planting kisses in the shallow valley between them as I go.

Her breasts aren't large, the slight pale mounds quivering with her fast breaths, as I raise my head and gaze down at them with wonder. My hands cover them completely and fierce possessiveness throbs through me. They're perfect because they're hers and at this moment, they are mine.

"Tricia, what you do to me," I growl against her soft belly, my tongue licking a hasty path to the tiny strip of dark blonde hair between her legs.

Wedging my shoulders between her spread legs, the sight of her wet pink pussy has my cock feeling like a lead bar between my legs. I open her inner lips with my fingers and dip my tongue into her.

The taste of her on my lips has me diving into her sweet heat. Her silken walls ripple around my lapping tongue, her blunt fingernails digging into my shoulders as her legs box my ears, keeping me right where she wants me.

I lick up from her entrance, smearing her honey up and around her clit, circling the sensitive little bead before sucking it into my mouth.

Tricia goes wild, her heels digging into my shoulder while her thighs clench around my head.

“Matt, Matt...”

Her cries spur me on. I ease a finger into her, then slip a second inside. The smell and taste of her consumes me.

Pre-cum leaks from my cock as my hips thrust against the sheets. My face is buried between Tricia’s thighs and I’m nearly mindless with desire as I eat her with a savage hunger that burns through me.

Her sharp, broken cries ring loudly in my ears while her body clings and pulsates around my fingers. I ride the wave of her climax with her, gentling the strokes of my tongue along her hard little clit, and breathing deeply of her intoxicating scent.

Withdrawing my fingers, I move over her again, the erect points of her nipples rubbing against my chest while I claim her mouth in a slow kiss.

Tricia’s legs squeeze me, the wet lips of her pussy gliding along my cock. With a jerk of my hips, my sensitive tip presses against her hot opening, liquid heat bathing me.

The urge to drive into her tests me, but I don’t want to mindlessly fuck her. I want our first time together to be perfect.



Inch by inch, I press into the welcoming warmth of her body until her silken walls fully grip me.

Groaning, I circle my hips, my eyes almost rolling back at how good it feels.

My strokes are short and slow. Our mouths and tongues mimic the intimate dance of our rocking bodies as we kiss. Pleasure radiates outward from my cock, leaving my entire body humming.

“Tricia,” I moan against her lips. “You feel so good, sweetheart. So incredibly good.” I thrust in time with my words, feeling her pussy squeezing tight around my bare cock.

I freeze, then wrench my mouth from hers.

“I forgot the condom!”

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

TRICIA

Matt's thick cock plows into me, his ridged cockhead dragging across a sweet spot inside with every thrust. The angle is perfect, and it's all I can do not to whimper.

I dig my nails into his tight ass, which flexes rhythmically with the power of his thrusts. His masculine scent wraps around us and he smells so freaking good.

Nuzzling my face into the crease of his neck and shoulder, I inhale and drag my tongue across his slightly damp, salty skin before kissing my way up his jaw to capture his lips.

"Tricia," he moans into my mouth. "You feel so good, sweetheart. So incredibly good."

The way his voice caresses the word sweetheart sends swirls of heat straight through me. It sounds so right coming from him.

My pulse pounds wildly and I'm so close to coming. My clit throbs in time with my pussy and-

"I forgot the condom!" Matt gasps, pulling out of me.

"No!" I wail, digging my nails harder into his ass. "Don't stop," I beg. "Please don't stop!"

His confused brown eyes stare down at me.

Unclenching my fingers from his hard buns, I shove at his shoulders, urging him to lie down. Quickly I clamber over him, straddling his hips and his still extremely hard dick.

I seize his slippery length and hold it firm while I hover my pussy over him and notch the tip at my entrance. "It's fine," I assure him. "I'm on birth control."

"Are you sure?" he asks, his anxious eyes scanning my face.

"Positive," I say, sliding down on his girth with a sigh.

His big hands go to my hips as I begin to ride him, but I drag one away and press his fingers to my clit.

Slamming down on him, I don't bother with slow. I need it fast and hard, trying to chase down my orgasm again.

Matt's fingers circle the small nub of my clit and within moments the familiar anticipation is back. My clit and vagina pulsing together as I shudder and grind myself down on his fingers and dick, coming with a short, sharp shout.

His hips make small thrusts and I ride the waves of his movements, feeling sated and happy, my head lolling against my shoulder.

"Can I come in you?"

"Hmmm?" I raise my head, my eyelids fluttering before I'm able to fully open my eyes. Matt's gaze is pinned on me, the tendons in his neck standing out in stark relief as his fingers dig into my hips.

"Can I come in you?" Matt grits through his teeth, his heart thundering under my palms.

"Yes," I whisper.

With a groan, he throws his head back, his hips pistoning wildly. If not for his hands on my hips, I would be bucked off.

"Oh!" I gasp, riding the waves of his release as his dick spasms within my body's tight embrace.

Matt's large frame goes limp, a smile curling up the corners of his lips.

Leaning forward, I tease his lips with mine, feeling a trickle of our mingled juices slipping from my pussy. His mouth opens to me, my tongue gliding within to do a leisurely exploration. I'm not trying to excite, merely enjoying the blissful afterglow of great sex.

Our kisses change from slow and tender to fast and greedy. Matt's hands cup my hips and guide them in a rocking motion. His cock swells within me, the walls of my pussy clinging to him as tightly as I do his shoulders.

His hips jerk beneath me, thrusting me upwards. His hands smoothly guide me back down as his cock meets my downward movement, filling me completely, again and again.

Time seems to halt. My entire being centered on the surging pressure of Matt's cock as he bounces me down on it. My juices run out of me, a growing pool of wetness collecting under me and plastering Matt's brown pubic hairs to his balls. The wet sounds of his dick hammering my soaked pussy and my shallow and fast breaths are dim noises in my ears as I try not to collapse on him, my arms shaking while I hold on.

The tangy smell of sex clogs my nose and my head swims. Matt shifts under me, the hard little nub of my clit dragging along his cock as his thrusts speed up even more.

With an exhausted moan, I shatter. Pleasure hums through my body, radiating from my pulsating clit and pussy. The rhythmical clenching of my walls around Matt's thick cock leaves me shuddering, my tissues far too sensitive to his every movement.

But he doesn't relent, urging me to continue to ride him, even as I wail with the aftershocks of my climax. With a strained grunt, Matt comes, shooting his seed up into my tight, grasping, oversensitive little pussy.

When his hands relax their hold on me, I collapse onto his sweaty chest, sucking in big greedy lungfuls of air. His arms wrap around me, his lips pressing kisses along my damp hair. I don't have the energy to move or protest that I'm too yucky for him to be kissing all over.

After several minutes, he shifts me to the side and slips away. Blearily, I crack open an eye, watching the flex of his muscular ass while he pads on silent feet to a closed door. My eyelids drop closed and from far away I hear the sounds of a toilet flushing and then running water.

The bed dips under Matt's weight and I pay it no mind. When his slightly damp and cool hand runs along my arm, I swat at it and grumble, burrowing my face deeper into the welcoming comfort of the pillow.

“Tricia, sweetheart, you need to get up. Come on.” Hands grasp my shoulders and give a quick shake, wrenching another grunt from me.

“Tired,” I moan, patting around for the covers to pull over me.

A whack on my butt has my eyes flying open and I shove up on my arms, glaring at him from between the tangled strands of hair covering most of my face. “Did you seriously just spank me?” I demand, though the smack was more shocking than painful.

“I got you up,” he says, gently brushing the hair out of my face.

“Fine.” I sit up and scoot to the edge of the bed, my legs unsteady when I stand. An embarrassing amount of come slips from between my thighs as I awkwardly shuffle to the bathroom, trying not to leak on the floor.

I slam the door behind me and immediately go to work cleaning up the mess and emptying my poor, screaming bladder.

When I finally emerge from the bathroom, Matt’s sitting up in bed reading his phone with one of his cats in bed next to him. He looks up and his smile has my insides fluttering and a curl of warmth blooming in my chest.

Once again, I’m hit with awe that somehow, he came into my life. If I wouldn’t have done that shift, I might never have met him. And I wouldn’t have needed that shift if I hadn’t spent far too much on my trip to see my friends at Clarissa’s new place. That thought sends a flicker of unease through me. The love spell that we cast looms large in my head once again.

Matt pulls back the covers and pats the mattress next to him in invitation. I feel kinda weird slipping into bed naked. Quickly, I find my underwear and shirt, pulling them both on before I crawl into bed beside him.

He puts his phone down on his nightstand and turns to me. “Spend the night?” he asks, his brown eyes warm as they

regard me.

Licking my lips, I nod, thankful that I switched to an IUD a few months ago, so now I don't have to panic about not taking my birth control pills nightly like I did in the past.

“Need to be up by a certain time?”

“No,” I say, feeling my eyelids growing heavy as the warmth his big body radiates lulls me into sleep.

“I need to be up early for work, but you sleep as long as you need,” he murmurs, his lips skimming my forehead in the sweetest of kisses. A smile turns up my lips as sleep claims me.

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Rolling and stretching, warm contentment hums through me. I snuggle back into the soft pillow, breathing in the fresh, slightly manly scent of it, secure in the knowledge that my alarm hasn't gone off and I don't need to be at work until this afternoon.

My eyes gradually open and I blink up at the unfamiliar ceiling and squint from all the light streaming in from the huge bay window to my left. Glancing that way, I see a sweet little reading nook that is so cozy and inviting with a mint-colored cushion and several overlarge and fluffy accent pillows. I can envision myself spending hours curled up there with book and a cat or two.

Stretching my legs again, my toes curl into the sheet and I roll over toward Matt's side of the bed. Reaching out a hand, his pillow is cool to the touch and a pang of longing constricts my chest. I miss him.

Last night was unexpectedly wonderful. Somehow, I knew sex with him would be good. I just wasn't expecting it to be that good our first time together. It was as if he knew what I needed and pushed me to accept every single bit of pleasure his body could give.

My eyes roll back in delight and I chuckle. His dick, being thick, certainly helped ensure that.

Well, can't laze around in Matt's bed forever. I really should get going.

Vaguely, I recall him mentioning work. Despite having no clue on the time, I deduce that he's already there or on his way. I'm not Sherlock Holmes, but the silence of the house is a major clue that I'm correct.

Sitting up and looking around, I spot my purse and clothes in a neat pile on an armchair near the door. My body feels fluid and relaxed when I stand. Nothing like great sex to insure a good night's rest.

"Awww..." There, on top of my clothes, is a note and that warm, giddy feeling overtakes me again.

I read over it quickly and yup, he's so sweet.

Tricia,

I hope you slept well. This morning you looked like an angel, and it was hard to leave you. Help yourself to anything in the kitchen. I hope to talk to you soon, sweetheart.

Matt

After making use of his bathroom and tossing on my clothes, I practically float down the stairs. For a moment, I consider rummaging around his kitchen for breakfast. He did offer after all, but all that late night fun has me in the mood for mega calories and a fast-food sausage and egg biscuit is calling my name.

Taking care to lock the door behind me, I head out, stopping for my breakfast and going about my day, eager for Matt's call.

I'm due in to work at one and to my surprise Matt calls me when I'm on my way there.

"Hello?"

"Tricia."

His warm voice has my toes curling in delight and I need a moment to center myself before I can reply. "Matt, hi."

“How are you doing?”

It’s a normal conversation, yet feels so odd after last night.

“I’m doing fine. On my way to work. Umm... thanks for the note, it was sweet.”

“Sorry I had to leave before you woke up-”

“Not a problem!” I cut in giving a shaky laugh. “Thanks for not kicking me out.”

“Never. I’d keep you in my bed forever if I could.”

*He wouldn’t have to tie me down to keep me in his bed, I’d go very willingly!*

I’m so distracted I almost miss my turn and cut in front of a red car without using my turn signal.

A blaring honk from the upset driver blasts my eardrums. Scrunching my shoulders, I give a tiny wave of apology and receive another honk and a one finger salute.

“Everything okay?” Matt asks.

“Yup, sorry. Bad drivers,” I say, leaving out the part where I’m the bad driver.

“Another reason for my call was I wanted to see if you were available for dinner tonight? No pressure for a repeat of last night.”

My body relaxes and I chuckle at his candor. “Sorry, I can’t tonight.”

“I understand. I’m rushing things, aren’t I? Too much too soon.”

“No! It’s not that. I’d love to see you.” With Matt being so open and direct I find it much easier to be candid as well. “It’s just that my last appointment is at six thirty and by the time I finish up with the client and clean up for the night it will be well after eight by the time I leave. Rather late for dinner.”

The phone falls silent and I unclench my fingers which have a stranglehold on the steering wheel. I mean I’m thrilled



this wasn't a wham/bam thing for him and I hate to have to turn down his dinner invite. Maybe I should just have two dinners? I do want to see him again...

"I could swing by, and we could maybe just sit and talk for a bit?" His tone is hesitant, and I swear I fall a little more for him. He's as interested to see me as I am to see him.

"That sounds lovely," I say.

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# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TRICIA

“Oh, Doctor Dreamboat is here,” Sasha sings out.

Weeks ago, when Matt first met me after work in the parking lot, it was the start of our late-night talks. Sometimes he brings warm drinks and deserts for us to sip and snack on while we sit in his vehicle and chat. Other times, we drive around and usually end up at someone’s house for more than just talking. It doesn’t really matter what we do, I’m just thrilled to spend the time with him.

Since this has become a regular occurrence on the evenings I work late and all my coworkers are aware of it, I don’t even blush over the nickname they gave Matt. He’s a doctor, and he’s dreamy, so why not? And his big white Tesla is pretty distinct in the parking lot, so they always know when he pulls in behind the building to wait for me.

“He’s like a dream come true for sure. A handsome doctor, lucky you,” Allison says, giving my arm a nudge as we walk through the hallway together toward the back room, which is our multi-purpose area. “I need a love spell to conjure up one of them for myself,” she jokes, grabbing her purse and jacket from her locker.

Love Spell.

The words thud in my brain.

“Have fun, see you tomorrow,” Allison calls out on her way through the backdoor, completely unaware of how her simple comment has tossed a dark shroud over my formerly cheery evening.

Matt and I have been seeing each other for almost a month now. One incredibly perfect month.

Because the man is perfect- for me.

He’s everything I ever wanted. And so darn sweet sometimes at night when we’re curled together in bed, and I

feel the rise and fall of his warm back against my hand, it's all I can do not to pinch myself, because this can't be real.

Now Allison's unintentional reminder has me panicking. Nothing perfect can last. Is there a time limit on the love spell? What happens when it wears off or expires?

The thought of losing Matt steals my breath

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MATT

My eyes dart to Tricia's silent form cuddled up in the passenger seat. She's strangely quiet tonight on the drive to my house.

Thanksgiving is less than a week away and we're both going to be spending it apart from each other with our respective families. I wanted her to come to North Carolina to meet my parents. My sister is even going to make a rare appearance, so it seems perfect timing.

Before I could bring it up, she told me her eldest sister Carol rented a cabin in West Virginia and demanded that the family meal be moved there. Apparently, it's not unusual for that sister to be bossy and suddenly decide to throw a wrench into everyone's plans.

I was stunned at the audacity.

My sister and I would never dream of bossing our parents around like that. Nor would they have gone along with it without a discussion taking place.

Tricia just shrugged her shoulders and said it wasn't a huge deal.

Perhaps not to her, but with those changes, I didn't feel comfortable asking her to blow off her family's Thanksgiving to spend time with mine.

For that reason, I planned our own mini feast for this weekend. I even have a turkey breast in the fridge. I'm confident that between the two of us we can manage not to overcook it.

Reaching out a hand, I cover her cool, limp fingers with my own. Her head turns my way, but it's too dark in the vehicle to make out her features. "Everything okay?" I ask.

Her hand tenses. "Yeah, everything is fine. Lost in thought, I guess."

"Penny for your thoughts?" I tease, trying to keep the mood light.

Tricia lets out a short, sad sounding laugh. "They're not even worth the one cent. Sorry to be so moody."

"Hey, it's okay. We're all allowed our moods. I just wanted to make sure nothing was bothering you."

She slips her hand out from beneath mine and pats my arm. "I'm fine."

Except she's not fine.

Clearly, something is on her mind. I want to press her on the issue, but I won't. Hopefully, when she's ready, she'll confide in me.

"How was your day?" she asks, in a clear attempt to change the subject.

"Busy. Before the holidays, there's always an influx of patients with popped wires or brackets. And then even more are calling up after the holidays. You wouldn't believe the amount of people disregarding the warning not to eat candy apples with braces."

Her huff of laughter is music to my ears and the rest of the drive is filled with idle chat.

When we get to the house, the cats run to greet her and trail after her into the living room. While Tricia is on the floor getting overwhelmed with feline affection, I grab the snack tray I picked up on the way home earlier and two bottles of water.

Entering the room, I stop and take in the sight of Tricia on the couch with Poe next to her. My ex laughed when I bought this house. The house I grew up in and the one I want to raise my family in.

Once more, the thought that Tricia belongs here rushes through me. Everything about us feels right. And I can't help feeling a burst of thankfulness that I booked that appointment. The attraction I felt for her when she came into the room stunned me. Now having gotten to know her, that initial rush pales to compare to the steady swell of feelings that have overtaken my entire being.

My life before was empty and monotonous. Tricia has brought a contentment unlike anything I've ever known. It's hard not to blurt out the sentiments that pound in my chest, wanting to break free.

At my approach, Tricia glances up, the smile on her face inviting me closer. I place the waters and tray on the coffee table and reach for her hand. Willingly she takes it, her fingers closing securely over mine.

With a slight tug, she comes to her feet, and I stroke the fingers of my free hand over her soft cheek, my breath locking in my throat when she leans into my touch.

This is it.

I can't contain my feelings any longer.

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# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TRICIA

His warm brown eyes stare into mine. “Tricia, I love you.”

My heartbeat speeds up. These are the words that I’ve been waiting to hear. The ones that beat a fast tempo in my chest every time I see or think about Matt.

But they are hollow, meaningless words.

Words that a spell has manipulated him to feel and speak.

He’s waiting for me to say something. Each second that passes, I see the hurt creeping into his features.

“I know it’s early and far too soon,” he says, pulling back slightly, disappointment tightening his jaw.

I’ve hurt him.

The absolute last thing I’ve ever want to do.

But to continue this relationship is wrong.

“I need to go,” I say, whirling out of his slackening embrace. “You need to drive me back to my car.”

“Tricia! I’m sorry,” he says, hurrying after me. “Please, forget I ever said that.”

Tears burn and blur my vision and I can’t stop my lips from trembling. “I don’t want to forget,” I whisper more to myself than him.

He darts in front of me. His big body blocking the door. “I don’t understand. Did I do something wrong? If you don’t feel that way about me, I get it, but can’t we talk about this?” His chest rises and falls rapidly as he releases a ragged breath. “Things have been going so well between us... I...”

Unable to bear hearing the pain in his voice, nor seeing the misery pulling his handsome features down, I cut him off. “Matt, it’s not you. It’s me. You’re too good for me. You’re perfect.”

“So perfect that when I tell you I love you, I chase you away?” he asks, his dark, heavy brows dipping low over his eyes.

“You don’t understand,” I say.

He nods. “You’re right, I don’t. So, explain it to me.”

Running a hand through my hair, I can’t meet his gaze. “It’s all because of a love spell.”

“A love spell?”

Lifting my chin, I stare into the face of the man I love. “Yes, my friends and I cast love spells, and mine worked.”

His big body noticeably relaxes. “You think a love spell brought us together?”

“Yes. You are everything I asked for.” Tracing his dear familiar features, I try to ignore the way my heart is crumbling at the thought that this is over between us.

“Yet you’re running out on me. Doesn’t sound like a good love spell to me.”

“I’m not running out.” I blink back more tears. “I’m doing the right thing. It would be wrong of me to use you like this. We’re both going to get hurt when the love spell ends.”

To my shock, Matt throws his head back and laughs. I’m so stunned that when his hands cup my face, I don’t move. When his warm lips press against mine, I can’t hold in the tiny moan that escapes, nor the way I kiss him back.

Spell or not, I love him.

Tenderly, his lips move over mine, his tongue teasing and stroking. The kiss ends and his hands remain holding my face.

Opening my eyes, I see Matt smiling down at me. “That doesn’t sound like a spell. It sounds like life, Tricia. People get hurt in relationships and people find happiness in them. I’m happy with you. I’m not perfect and it wasn’t a spell that made me fall for you. It’s all you. I fell in love with you.”

“I’m not that special,” I argue, though a spark of hope burns in my chest.

“You are very special,” Matt says quietly, his lips capturing mine again in a slow kiss. “You are the woman I love,” he says when our lips part. “The one I want to wake up with every day and putter around the kitchen burning food with. The woman I hope will be my wife, and the one I want to build a family with.”

“But the spell...”

“What spell? If something magical was the push that got us together, then I’ll thank whatever forces had me walking into that massage clinic that day. What happened after that was purely us. Tricia, I love you and I hope that someday you feel the same.”

Hot tears fall from my eyes and I sniff them back the best I can while grabbing the front of his shirt and hauling his mouth down to mine. “I love you, Matt,” I say against his lips.

His arms wrap around my waist, crushing me against his big body. “Again,” he requests. “Say it again, please.”

“I love you.”

A shudder moves through him a moment before his mouth is on mine.

My pulse thunders in my ears as his lips ravish mine, his tongue delving deep within my mouth to tangle and tease. His hands grip my ass and haul me up. I have no choice but to wrap my legs around his hips, my pussy directly over the hot junction of his pants where the hard heat of his dick bucks against me.

“Bedroom,” I gasp, pulling away from his mouth.

His lips trail across my face to my ear, his teeth latching onto the fleshy lobe a moment before his tongue swipes along it. “Couch,” he counters, his hot breath a caress against my tingling skin.

Without releasing me, Matt walks over to the couch and lowers us, being careful to keep most of his weight on his arms.



“You’re not going to crush me,” I say, slipping my hand in-between our bodies and stroking along the prominent ridge of his cock straining the front of his pants.

His husky laugh flutters the fine hairs around my forehead. “I’d rather not take that chance. The couch is rather narrow.”

Working his zipper, my fingers dip inside the opening and tug his cock through the slit of his boxers. Rubbing along his slippery tip, I tease, “We could have gone upstairs.”

A low groan is his only answer, his hips pumping his hard length into my hand.

I drag my dress up and impatiently try to nudge my underwear down with one hand while the other grips Matt’s dick.

“We didn’t think this one through,” I mutter, forced to release him so I can yank my panties down. “Little help?”

Matt slips off the couch and grabs my panties, smoothly gliding them down my legs. He tosses them to the floor and slowly strokes his cock while staring down at me. “You are so perfect. I never want to hear you say otherwise again.”

Breathless, I gaze up at Matt, my heart in my throat at his husky words and the intensity of his gaze. This man loves me.

It hits me with all the force of a sledgehammer.

And he’s right, whatever magic brought us together was only the beginning. The rest is the magic of us, together for the rest of our lives.

“I love you,” I say, reaching out for his hand.

Linking fingers, Matt brings our joined hands to his lips, kissing my knuckles before releasing my hand. “I love you,” he says, climbing back on the couch, his big body lowering to mine, the jut of his cock hard against the mound of my pussy.

“It’s not just a spell making you love me? It goes both ways, right?” he teases.

“It’s definitely not just a spell,” I say, grasping his face and pulling him down for another kiss.

His mouth sucks at my bottom lip, applying a tiny bit of pressure as I thrust my hips upwards, desperate for the hard, driving heat of his dick. With a whimper, I wrap my legs around his waist, the heels of my feet digging into his tight ass.

“Matt, I want you,” I murmur against the soft hairs of his beard, flicking my tongue up to tease along the clean edge of his mustache.

“Don’t ever stop.” His husky plea is warm against my cheek. He pulls back enough to grip his cock and guide it to my opening.

With a shared moan, his cock sinks into me, his lean hips nestling into the welcoming cradle of mine.

Our movements are slow, his strokes long and deep as we kiss, taking pleasure in our newly declared love.

This isn’t the first time we’ve had sex, but it’s the first time we’ve made love and those shared feelings somehow make everything more sensitive and intense. The awe that this is the man I plan to spend forever with sends me higher and higher as his hips pick up speed, his dick pounding into me with ever-increasing force.

Matt’s panting breath warms my neck, his lips pressing fast, insistent kisses against my skin. He burrows his right arm under my shoulders, lifting me to the hard strength of his big, burly body. His chest hair grazing my breasts. My nipples bead up harder at the steady rub, sending little jolts down to my clit.

His scent fills my nose, and I moan at his delicious smell. Arching my hips, I grind my clit against his coarse pubes. With a short cry, I strain against him as my pussy clamps down on his thick length. Waves of pleasure pound through me, my clit and pussy throbbing like a heartbeat.

“Oh Tricia, you feel so good, sweetheart,” Matt groans, his hips driving my body into the couch’s soft cushions. With a

low, husky moan, he thrusts deep, his climax shooting forth in short hot blasts covering my quivering inner walls.

With a sigh, he sags against me, cocooning my body with his. For several long moments, we lie basking in the afterglow. Only when I feel his cock softening and some of our mingled juices beginning to slide out do I squirm to get free.

I tap at his broad shoulder. “Matt, I’m leaking all over your couch.”

Lifting his head, he grins down at me, his shock of thick brown hair falling over his brow. “Oh well.” He presses a kiss to my breast even as I twist and shove at him harder to get free. “I love your breasts and your big hard nipples,” he says, his gaze pinned to them.

With a sigh, I stop struggling and accept the fact that there’s going to be a huge puddle under me when I get up. “Is that the only thing you love about me?”

He drags his eyes from my chest, leaning forward to plant a soft kiss on my swollen lips. “One of the many things and you know it.” He moves back, his smile dimming. “I’m going to miss you over Thanksgiving.”

“I’m going to miss you too,” I admit.

Glancing away, I mull over the long week without him. The slide of Matt’s wet cock on my thigh jerks me back to the moment, and I renew my efforts to wiggle away. “Okay, up! I need a shower,” I say, giving his hips a nudge with my knee.

With a pout, he pulls away and stands up, offering me his hand.

I carefully scoot to the edge of the couch and accept his help. Once up, I waddle-walk with my thighs tightly squished together to keep the mess mostly contained to my person and not drip all over his floor.

Matt’s laughter follows in my wake, and I toss a scowl over my shoulder.

Thank heavens his downstairs bathroom is a full one with a huge walk-in shower with rain showerheads. I’m glorying in

the hot water when Matt slips in behind me, his erection nudging at my lower back.

“I thought older men were supposed to slow down,” I say, turning in his arms to grin up at him.

“That’s only if they don’t have a younger woman to keep up with.” He reaches for the soap and a loofa. “Does my age bother you?” he asks in a subdued voice.

I look at Matt, taking in the lines on his face and the silver in his dark hair, and feel nothing but love for him. “Not really, and if it does, it’s a little late for that, don’t you think?” I snatch the loofa from him and rub it along his straining length. “You’re not getting rid of me that easily.”

“Never. I will never not want you.”

Dragging the soapy loofa up his furry chest, I stand on my tiptoes, leaning into his big body for support. “Good. Now show me again how you’re going to keep up with me.”

With a delighted grin, he does.

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# EPILOGUE

SIX MONTHS LATER

MATT

Stretching my arms overhead, I make a big production out of wincing and rubbing at my shoulder.

“Hey, are you okay?” Tricia asks, looking up from her phone.

“Just tight.”

She sighs and tosses her phone down on the couch. “How many times have I said I would be happy to give you a massage?” she asks, standing up and coming over to me.

“I know. I just feel guilty sometimes asking when you do that at work all day.”

Her hands wind around my waist, her body snuggling against mine. “Silly man. I told you not to feel guilty about that. I don’t want you hurting.”

I rub my cheek along the top of her silky hair, inhaling the fragrance of her and feeling the familiar burst of love that always accompanies the sensation of having her close.

It’s true, she has offered multiple times to rub my shoulders and back and occasionally I take her up on those offers. Her strong, soothing hands feel amazing. The problem is that massages usually lead to sex, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing, but sometimes undoes all the help the massage did for my muscles. Even the time I booked an appointment with her at the clinic, hoping the clinical setting would temper our desires, we ended up getting far too reckless.

We’re fortunate her boss, Amber, has a great sense of humor and said she ignored the thumping coming from the room. It also helps that I’m her daughter’s orthodontist.

Though now whenever they come in, I feel like a guilty teenager whose neighbor caught them sneaking out of the house because Amber will toss me a knowing grin. My composure cracks and I message Tricia to tease her about

corrupting me with her wicked ways. She always laughs and tells me I'm being silly. Then when I come home, she has her wicked way with me once more, leaving us both smiling.

The months we've been together have been among the happiest of my life. We didn't end up spending Thanksgiving together, but every holiday since we have.

She thought I would be overwhelmed by her siblings, and she was mortified over her sisters grilling me while her two brothers glared, and the nieces and nephews swarmed. Honestly, I loved it. You could feel the love the family had for each other, even with the bickering and not-so-subtle digs.

Tricia meeting my family was extremely anticlimactic by comparison. We spent the weekend with them, having quiet meals at their house and playing endless hands of rummy, which to my dad's enjoyment he soundly trounced all of us at. When we left, hugs were given, and my parents said they looked forward to our next visit. No sly looks, or off-colored jokes like with her family. Tricia gushed over my parents the entire drive back home.

We haven't officially moved in together, but at this point I don't know why she's paying rent on an apartment that has a few pieces of furniture and little else in it, since most of her belongings have slowly migrated to my house.

Part of me worries I might be rushing things and she's not ready. And if that's the case, this might negatively affect our relationship.

My instincts are telling me to go for it. They haven't led me astray yet with her and I only hope that continues to hold true.

Tricia steps back and motions to the couch. "Lie down and let's get some of that tension out of you," she says with a grin.

"I got a new massage oil," I say, practically vibrating with the nervous energy strumming through me.

Her blonde brows go up, a grin curving her tempting pink lips. "Oh, you did?" She walks her fingers up my chest, her

smile growing. “Got big plans for tonight?”

Swallowing hard, I manage a wobbly smile. “Maybe. Why don’t you go get it? It’s on my dresser.”

With a laugh, Tricia walks out of the living room and, after a brief count of three, I follow.

An ornate green, turquoise, and orange perfume bottle rests on the dresser and I enter the room right when Tricia reaches for it.

“Pretty fancy massage oil,” she says, picking it up and squinting at the tiny note attached. “What is this? Endless love...” she trails off and swings around, almost bumping into me as I drop to a bended knee.

With a gasp, she clutches the bottle to her chest, her blue eyes wide.

“Tricia, we don’t need a love spell. All we ever needed was each other. I see you in my life always. A year from now, five, ten... until the end of my days. I want to wake up to your beautiful face and have you right beside me sharing every moment of our lives together.”

With trembling fingers, I withdraw the small black velvet box from my pocket and open it to reveal the two-carat diamond and platinum ring that I commissioned the week after we pledged our love to each other.

Jared thought I was crazy, but I saw the envy in his eyes when I dragged him with me to help look at diamonds.

And now my happiness hinges entirely on Tricia’s answer.

“Will you marry me?”

Her eyes fly from the ring to my face, a huge smile spreading her lips wide. “Yes!”

I’m reaching for her hand when she throws herself at me, the impact rocking us backward. Only my bulk saves us from crashing to the ground. “Yes, a million times yes,” Tricia cries, looping her arms around my neck in a tight hug.

With a joyous shout, I wrap my arms around her waist, the ring box still gripped in my hand, and rise to my feet, taking her with me.

In a delirious moment of pure happiness, I swing her around before slowly lowering her feet back to the floor and claiming her sweet lips in a kiss.

Much later we'll call our families with the news, but for now I want to hold my bride-to-be and dream of our future together.

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10 YEARS LATER

TRICIA

"It's my fault," Matt says.

I shift my eyes from the ghostly white blobs on the transparent black x-ray. "What are you talking about? Your teeth are perfect."

"Because of extensive orthodontics." His fingers glide over the panoramic scan of our oldest son Alex's teeth. "Palate expander only," he says, nodding his head. The brown eyes I adore roll, and his lips quirk up in a lopsided grin. "If we're lucky."

"And if we're not?" I ask around the growing pit in my stomach.

"Headgear or possibly jaw surgery later in life," my husband says matter-of-factly, like we're not discussing cracking my baby's bones.

I groan and push away from the desk.

"Should have wished for a man with perfect dental records," he teases.

"I still would have wanted you," I say, reaching up and patting his chest. "I love you, even if you passed on your narrow palate to our child."

"How did I ever get so lucky?" Matt asks, his warm brown eyes positively glowing with love as he wraps his arms



around me.

“Luck had nothing to do with it. Remember? Magic did.”

“Maybe we should try for a little more magic.”

My eyebrows arch. “Such as?”

“I’ve been thinking about another child.”

My breath freezes in my chest and for a moment, I’m too stunned to react. For over a year now, I’ve been wanting us to try for another baby and Matt has held firm that three boys were more than enough of a handful for us.

“Do you mean it?”

“I’ve been giving it a lot of thought and you’re right; our family doesn’t feel complete yet. That third-row seating looks rather empty with just Noah back there.”

Tears spring to my eyes and I sniff loudly. “You’re not going to change your mind?” I ask around the lump in my throat.

Matt plants a loud smacking kiss on the tip of my nose. “When have I ever changed my mind over something this important? My beautiful wife wants to have another one of my narrow palate babies. Who am I to say no to that?”

I reach around and swat his still firm behind. “That’s right. Who are you to say no to that generous gift?”

He wraps his arms around me, and I melt into his embrace, his warmth and the familiar smell of him instantly erasing any lingering tension from my day. “I’m the man that you wished for...” he pauses, his eyes locking with mine. “But what you don’t realize is that I wished for you too.”

Matt doesn’t wait for my answer. His lips claim mine in a kiss that steals my breath and warms my heart, just like it did the very first time we kissed.

All those years ago, when I cast that love spell, I thought the man I wished for was a mere fantasy. It turns out that Matt is so much more than I ever dreamed of in a partner. He’s right

though, we're not perfect, we're just perfect together, and I cannot wait to finish growing our family with the man I adore.

THE END

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