



UNWANTED
ROOMMATE

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

TERRY TOWERS

Description:

A good night's sleep, that's all I asked for before one of the most important days of my life. But as usual, fate came along to put a cog in my plans and that cog is in the form of hockey star Brandon Campbell.

Not only did the supposed five-star hotel put me on a floor that had been reserved by a bunch of rowdy hockey players, but to top it all off I woke up to discover a strange drunk man snoring loudly next to me!

One way or another, my unwanted roommate has got to go.

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By

Terry Towers

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Chapter 1

Taylor

Day one was officially complete, and it was a grand success if I were to say so myself.

The Uber slowed and came to a stop in front of the hotel that I was booked into. Slinging my oversized, maroon leather handbag and computer bag over my shoulder, I thanked the driver and opened the door. It wasn't until I was opening the door and stepping onto the sidewalk that I noticed the obscene amount of people surrounding the front of the building chanting, many wearing face paint and carrying banners with names on them.

I crinkled my nose up as I stared at the crowd. They hadn't been there this morning when I left the hotel for my conference.

Security had blockades keeping the people from completely blocking the front of the hotel. The moment I began to make my way to the front doors I was immediately stopped by a large, muscular man wearing a black t-shirt identifying him as Platinum Security the name written in bold, white letters across the front of it.

“Excuse me, Ma’am. Do you have a room booked here?”

Looking up the length of his body, I craned my neck to peer up into his face pushing my glasses into place with my index finger. “Why else would I be entering the hotel?”

He waved to the hoard of people surrounding the barricades. “For the same reason everyone else is here; It’s the playoffs. Fans want to meet the players.”

Frowning, I had to keep myself from rolling my eyes as I motioned to my attire; a navy blue pants suit, the collar of the shirt buttoned all the way up. “Do I look like I’m a sports fan?” Reaching into my purse, I fumbled around the chaos that was the inside of the overstuffed handbag and produced my room card and held it up to him. “Is this proof enough?”

He looked down at the key and nodded. “Yeah, go ahead, have a good night, Ma’am.”

Brushing past him, I didn’t bother to give the chanting people a second look. What kind of crazy people stands outside of a hotel waiting for sports teams to come back? Didn’t they have better things to do on a Friday night?

If fans and security were outside, then that means the team would be staying in the hotel. God, I really hoped they

were on a floor and section of the hotel that was far from mine. I didn't need that type of distraction during such an important time in my life.

The hotel was a tall, twenty-story building, surely, they'd be far, far away from me. And hopefully, I wouldn't be able to hear the chanting from my room. If it was too bad, then I'd request a room change. I had a big day of presenting my paper tomorrow and needed my sleep. All the experts in my field of neurobiology along with potential investors would be there tomorrow. At thirty-five, I was relatively young for someone in my field and hadn't gained the respect of my colleagues yet, so I couldn't screw this up.

Hurrying through the lobby, which was also jam-packed with people, I headed straight to the elevators and pressed the call button. As I rode the elevator up to my floor, I began to silently recite tomorrow's speech in my mind. I had it all on paper and could easily reference the material if needed, but it just appeared so much more professional when the words came without having to look down at the reference material. There was also a slide presentation that would keep me on track. I wasn't taking any chances on screwing this one up.

Making my way down the hallway, my hopes that I would be far away from whatever sports team was in the building started to diminish. There were a number of men in the hallways, several lounging outside of their open hotel room door with an open bottle of beer in their hands, all in various degrees of drunkenness.

Shit.

Was drinking alcohol in the hallways of a hotel allowed? The hallways weren't a party zone. Seemed a little disrespectful to the rest of the patrons of the hotel if you asked me, but no one did. But they were athletes and no doubt the hotel staff was falling over themselves to accommodate them. Why people worshipped professional sports players was beyond me, although my disdain for athletes stemmed back to being the nerd that those types of people made fun of back in high school.

Swiping my card into the reader, it beeped green and I sighed as I opened the door and quickly scampered inside, closing the door behind me. Placing my computer bag on the desk, I kicked off my shoes which were making my feet ache and fell backward onto the soft bed with a groan.

Home, sweet temporary home, at least for the next couple of weeks.

After my early morning flight this morning, I'd rushed to the hotel to check in and then hurried to the convention center so I wouldn't miss the first speaker of the weekend. I liked to go to all the speaking events, it gave me an opportunity to meet other people in my field. Being an introverted person made these meetings a challenge, but I sucked it up, put my big girl panties on and did what I had to do for my career.

Connections were incredibly important in order to get ahead in my field – especially when you were a woman. Even in this day and age, women were under-represented in the science fields and they had to work all that much harder to be recognized and taken seriously. While it was a long shot, I

tended to dream big and hoped one day my work would win something as prestigious as a noble prize.

Was it out of my reach?

Perhaps. Probably. Most likely.

But it sure as hell wasn't going to stop me from pushing myself to get there.

My family wasn't wealthy, so I was raised to reach for the stars and push myself to my limits. I was to succeed where my parents perceived themselves to have failed. If you worked hard and were smart enough anything you'd dreamed was possible. Your success was only as big as your dreams. And so, my dreams and ambitions became huge. I wanted to succeed both for myself and for my mother and father.

With reluctance, I pushed myself back off the bed and grabbed the first of my two suitcases which were still unpacked and sitting by the door. Pulling it over to the dresser, I opened it and quickly put stacks of clothing away. The convention spanned over two weekends so I'd be here for a while and might as well settle in.

Once everything was put away and the room organized to my liking, I ran a warm bath and sank into the water with a sigh. The water and the lavender-scented Epsom salts that the hotel supplied to add to the water felt amazing, every muscle immediately began to relax. Putting some tranquil music on my phone, I placed the phone on the little bathtub shelf, closed my eyes and sank deeper into the tub allowing the soothing sounds to capture me in their embrace.

I was lulled into a semi-meditative state when a loud crash sounded from the other side of my wall accompanied by whooping and hollering coming from the hallway. My eyes sprang open and I looked towards the door and then down to my phone. It was nearly midnight. What kind of idiots made such a racket at this time of night when people were sleeping?

Ignorant jocks and their groupies – that's who.

I'd always disliked athletic people. Throughout high school and college, they were always given special treatment because they could throw a ball or run fast. What about us who were furthering science and making breakthroughs that could change the world? Where were our fans and groupies? It's not like I cared for those things, but it did rub me the wrong way from time to time. Especially when I was tired and a little cranky.

One thing I did know was that the groupies certainly weren't at the convention.

Chuckling to myself at the thought of people swarming a hotel in order to see their favorite scientist, I closed my eyes again, and proceeded to try to get back to a calm state. Maybe in some alternate reality that was the case, just not in this one.

I reminded myself that we did this for the betterment of humanity. If I could save just one life or improve the quality of life for a group of people with my work, then that was a success for me.

The commotion seemed to die off and I was able to enjoy my bath. By the time I was done, I was feeling calm and relaxed. Mentally, emotionally and physically, I was prepared for another day. Toweling myself off, I didn't bother to get into

my pajamas. The hotel claimed that they had the finest Egyptian cotton bedding so I was anxious to see how they'd feel against my bare skin. Generally, I slept naked, I liked how the cool sheets felt on my skin and hated how clothing felt restricting while sleeping.

Slipping my naked body under the covers, I turned off the last lamp by the bed, closed my eyes and drifted off into a much-needed REM sleep.

~*~ TT ~*~

My eyes shot open in the pitch-dark room and my entire body froze as I felt the bedding moving and being lifted at my back. Was I dreaming? Swallowing hard, I clutched the blanket to my chest as I heard a grunt and felt the sudden movement of the bed behind me as a weight flopped down onto it, giving the blankets another yank and pulling them from my body.

Frozen in shock, I couldn't scream or move.

What in the hell was going on?

I had to be dreaming. Right? But I wasn't, the wretched smell of beer from the person behind me was proof of that. And this intruder was also now in possession of all the blankets. I could feel his body weighing down the other side of the bed making just enough of an impression that my body began to lean into his.

Holy fuck! There was someone in my bed!

And I'm naked without a weapon!

My state of paralyzing terror broke and my flight instinct kicked in. Grabbing the little bit of blanket that I had left, I gave it a powerful yank, as I scrambled from the bed, reaching out and flicking on the light next to the bed so I could get a good look at my would-be assailant.

Instead of the intruder leaping from the bed and coming after me, he grunted, grabbing the remaining blankets and pulling them back to his chin. Without even so much as opening his eyes began to snore.

What in the hell do I do now?

Find a weapon? Was there a weapon I could use?

Call security? I had to call security.

Should I try and wake him first?

Tucking the blanket around me, I stood staring at the stranger without a clue what to do. The light next to the bed, illuminated enough of the room for me to see a couple of massive duffle bags sitting next to the door and a couple of hockey sticks laying across the bags.

Oh for fuck's sakes. He's one of the hockey douches.

At least I could rule out him being crazy. Well, he could still very well be crazy, but I was less likely to be killed by the passed-out meathead in my bed. Mistakes happen, the front desk probably programmed his key card wrong and he just randomly tried my room and assumed it was his. Or something like that. A mix-up certainly happened.

Easily fixed...

But what do I do?

I could get dressed, go find security and have them wake him.

Or I could just... wake him myself. That would be the easiest solution to the problem. I could wake him, explain he was in the wrong room and once he realized that he'd be off to his own room and then I could go back to sleep.

Tiptoeing to the dresser, even though I wasn't sure why I was tiptoeing since I planned on waking him up, I grabbed the only pair of pajamas I'd brought with me and put them on. They were bright yellow and black Spongebob pajamas that made me slightly embarrassed to be seen in them, but this was the current situation. It's not like I was going to put on a full face of make-up for this drunk stranger in my bed. I wasn't out to impress the man, I just wanted him out of my room.

Once dressed, I went to his side of the bed and flicked on the light. A beam of light burst forth illuminating his face and chest. The man was big – huge. I didn't know much about hockey, but he had the physique that I'd expect from a defenseman.

Reaching out, I almost touched his shoulder and then thought twice and snatched my hand back.

What if he didn't wake well? The way his teammates were partying he was probably sleeping off a bender.

Who the fuck cared, he was in my bed and he needed to leave! It's not like I was going to crawl in beside him and deal with it in the morning. He had to go now.

Chapter 2

Brandon

I was sunbathing on the beach in the Bahamas a week after winning the Stanley Cup, with beautiful Bahamian women serving me cold beers as I watched the tide roll in. It was such a beautiful day and just the right ending to a next-to-flawless hockey season.

Suddenly, I became aware of a woman's voice speaking to me, coming from the left. The voice was soft and smooth – like honey. Turning my head, I looked up, then immediately shut my eyes tight against the rays of sun assaulting them. Placing a hand over my eyes, I attempted to look up at her.

“Yeah, baby.” I grinned, still unable to see the person associated with the voice but just knowing to have a voice like that she had to be hot.

She disappeared making me frown, but with a brief shake of my head I went back to ocean watching. A Stanley Cup win, beer and the beach, what more could I ask for?

The voice returned, but this time it was clearer. It wasn't praise for winning the game. It was an annoyed nagging sound.

“Get up. For the last time, I said get up!” The voice yelled, accompanied by a violent swat to my shoulder.

“I ain’t going nowhere lady,” I grumbled to the voice. Turning my head from her I shifted on the chaise and attempted to ignore her.

“One last warning,” the annoying voice said.

“Go away.” God, sexy voice or not, she was annoying. Why couldn’t she just take a fucking hint?

I looked back at the ocean just as a tsunami of a wave came barrelling towards me, about to wipe out the entire beach. How in the fuck...

Water splashed over my head and face. I breathed some of the water in, choking me. Coughing and sputtering, I opened my eyes again, but this time it wasn’t the beach that was before my eyes, but a darkened hotel room with a couple of dim lamps illuminating it.

“Are you awake now?” the now annoying voice demanded to know. “I don’t know who you are, but I’m starting to really get pissed off!”

Sitting up in the bed, I wiped my face with my hand and then looked over at the source of the voice everything feeling foggy in my semi-drunk state. While the woman before me was indeed beautiful, with long bright red curls framing her freckled heart-shaped face, she certainly wasn’t the Bahamian beauty of my dreams.

And what was she wearing? I rubbed my eyes, attempting to clear my vision.

Spongebob pajamas? Jesus!

Who was the woman?

I tried to piece together the events that led me to this moment in time. We had a game, kicked the other team's ass and then we went to celebrate at a local club that closed just for us.

Alcohol. Lots of alcohol. I had three days off before the next game, we'd just won the semi-finals so why the fuck not, right? We were now just four of seven games away from the Cup, and we'd just unseated the top team in our division. Things were looking good indeed.

Did I take this crazy chick back to my room? Did I pass out on her and that's why she was glowering down at me like I'd fucked her best friend and made her watch?

"What the fuck is your problem?" I gave her a quick up-and-down look. Where in the fuck did those pajamas come from? No matter. My dick was getting hard despite the cold water that had been splashed on me. She was in my room. Why the fuck not, she was here for a reason. "Just come back to bed and I'll fuck that poor attitude out of you."

Grabbing her by the waist, I lifted her up and tossed her onto the bed next to me. She gasped as my body came alive despite my still groggy state of mind and I settled my naked body between her legs.

I didn't remember screwing this one. Had I gotten that drunk? How embarrassing. I had a reputation to uphold. The last thing I wanted was to be known as the guy who couldn't get it up in order to please his puck bunnies.

"Sorry baby, I had a hard game. Didn't mean to nod off." I ground my dick against the soft flannel covering her pussy. "But I'm more than ready to make up for it."

“Let me go!” she growled, squirming against me, her tiny fists beating against my chest as I lowered my body to hers, my lips grazing the side of her neck. Her squirming immediately stopped and she went limp under me a soft moan escaping her lips.

“Yeah, baby. Let me know how much you want me.” I ground my hardened cock against her again as I slipped my hand to her neck and then moved up slowly running my thumb along her lower lip. Damn, she had some lush, plump lips. Not plump like the girls who injected a shit ton of stuff in their face to the point it looks ridiculous – no, everything about this woman was natural.

Removing my thumb, I brushed my lips across hers, ever so lightly. “Tell me baby, tell me what you want?” I loved when women talked dirty to me. I just craved them confessing all their dirty little secrets.

“I said I wanted you off of me!”

Frowning, I looked up and into her emerald, green eyes. Was this some sort of twisted role-play? I mean, I was game for most things, but rape play was a little out of my comfort level. There was a flash of anger in her eyes seconds before I felt the full force of her knee coming up and colliding with my junk.

Grunting, my face contorted in pain as I rolled off her and onto the bed beside her. “Are you fucking nuts!” I growled after I caught my breath again.

Her lithe body scrambled from the bed. She scampered around the room a moment before grabbing hold of one of my

hockey sticks, spinning around to face me and waving it in my direction. “How dare you put your hands on me!”

Wiping my hand over my face, I gave my head a shake anger and confusion swirling within me. Was I being punked? Did one of the other guys send her to my room to fuck with me? “You’re in my damned room. Why in the hell are you in my room then? Are you mentally stable?”

Maybe I hadn’t taken her to my room. Maybe she was some crazy fan who somehow found out my room number and snuck in. It might explain those ridiculous pajamas. Actually, nah, it wouldn’t explain those pajamas.

“Me! Me mentally unstable?” Even in the dim lighting, I could see the anger flaring in her eyes as her hands tightened their grip on the handle of the stick. “You’re in my room and I want you out before I’m forced to call security!”

I’d been drunk and still highly buzzed, but one thing I did know was that I was given the key to this room. The key worked. I went inside. These were the facts.

“Look. Lady. I’m not sure what kind of game you’re playing or who put you up to this, but we’ll just forget this happened if you just leave now. Okay? Put the stick down and get out. I can even give you an autograph. I just want you to leave.”

“I am not going anywhere. This is my room.” She motioned to the two suitcases. “Those are my suitcases, this is my room. I was sleeping and your ass barged in here. Time to go hockey boy.”

“Hockey boy!” I couldn’t help but laugh. “Hockey boy is the best insult you have for me?”

Her eyes narrowed as she stared at me in fury. “Listen. All I know is that I have a big day tomorrow and I need my sleep, which means you need to go.”

“I’m not going anywhere. You’re the one who needs to grab your shit and leave. This is my room.”

Walking over to the desk, she snatched something up and then held it before my eyes while keeping the hockey stick still in her other hand. “This key means that it’s my room.”

Pulling myself off the bed, I grabbed the key I was given from the nightstand table and waved it at her. No matter how sexy she looked, this was beginning to get tiring. “And this says that this is my room.”

She was silent for a minute, giving me a long up and down, hesitating a minute at my groin, her face growing red before moving her gaze back to mine. “Where’d you get that?”

Ignoring the fact I was naked with a hard-on in front of a woman who didn’t seem impressed, I responded, “From the front desk, where the fuck else would I get it?”

“Well, I was here first, so you’re going to need to find another room. I’m already unpacked. And if you don’t mind, please put some clothes on.”

Grinning, I grabbed my boxers and pulled them on. “A lot of women would die for a chance to be in a hotel room with me naked.”

“Women with no brain and little self-esteem you mean?”

Grabbing my jeans, I pulled them on as well. “The way I see it, we both go downstairs and get this sorted out. And once you’re told this is my room, this entire floor was pre-reserved for the team, you can apologize and move your prissy ass to another room.”

“Not going to happen.” She bristled up a bit, “And for your information, I’m not prissy. Not swooning over some dude who probably has hepatitis A thru Z does not make me prissy.”

“We’ll see.”

Chapter 3

Taylor

He may have been right about booking the entire floor for the team. The party was still raging around us as we made our way out of the room and down the hallway to the elevators. I was feeling more than a little self-conscious in my pajamas, but most people didn't give me more than a passing glance. It was the guy next to me towering over my 5'6 frame that got most of the looks and all of the greetings.

I didn't miss the dirty looks shot my way from a few stray half-dressed females who seemed to be there for a good time with a player. How desperate did you have to be in your life that your goal was to have some hockey asshole's dick in you? They'd probably brag to friends the next day that they scored with their favorite hockey player when in actuality they were just being used, all part of a running tally of women. They'd be lucky if the guy even knew their first name, never mind knowing their surname.

The ride in the elevator down to the lobby was taken in awkward silence. The sooner this was over the better. Luckily, it was late enough that the lobby was virtually vacant. I hurried ahead of him to the desk.

The young man behind the desk looked up as we approached and gave us a smile that didn't quite carry all the way up to his eyes. "Can I help you ma'am?"

“Yes, I was sleeping soundly in my room and he – ” I jerked my thumb to the man who came to stand beside me. “Got into bed with me.”

“It appears that we may have been booked into the same room.” Hockey douche stated as he came to stand next to me at the desk.

“How is that even possible in this day and age?” I asked, annoyance clear in my tone.

“Could I have your name and room number please?”

“Taylor Haynes, room 2017”

He looked down at his computer and began clicking away on the keyboard. “Room 2017. Brandon Campbell.”

Hearing the soft snicker beside me, I looked up to see him next to me with a big shit-eating grin on his face.

Frowning, I leaned over the counter to see the screen, but without my glasses, it was all a blur. “That’s impossible. That’s my room. Look under Taylor Haynes. T-A-Y-L-O-R Haynes.

His fingers flew over the keys a second time. “Well, shoot.” He looked up at me and then over to the man who I assumed to be Brandon. “It looks like we have a bit of a situation.”

“What’s going on?”

“On very rare occasions when we block off a set of rooms for a group, such as like we did with Mr. Campbell’s hockey team, the system will duplicate a room.”

Looking up at Brandon, he seemed to be as confused as I was. “All right. Then put him into a new room.”

“No.” Brandon put a hand up. “Put her in a new room. That entire floor was blocked off for my team. Miss Prissy Pants needs to go.”

I shot him a dirty look but didn't humor him with a reply.

The man behind the counter grimaced. “Here's the problem. Our hotel is completely booked up. There are no other rooms. When hockey teams, especially for stuff like the playoffs come to town, whatever hotel they're staying in books solid. I'm sorry.”

Well, that won't do.

I huffed, then turned to look up at Brandon. “Guess it looks like you're bunking with a buddy.”

Laughing, Brandon shook his head. “Or you find a room in another hotel. I'm not bunking with anyone.” He turned back to the front desk clerk. “Can you just find her a room in another hotel and have someone help her to the new hotel.”

Planting my hands on my hips, I glared up at him, despising the fact he was so much taller than me. “I'm not leaving. I have to be up early in the morning. You need to move.”

I looked back to the front desk clerk hoping for backup. I didn't get any.

He cleared his throat. “Well, the problem is that there are no rooms anywhere in the city or vicinity. I've gotten calls

all night from people looking for rooms and hotels hoping to find a place. The city is booked solid. As I said, it's play-offs. Hockey is a big deal here."

I shrugged. "Then I guess we're back to him bunking with another player."

"Not a chance lady," Brandon responded. "I'm not changing rooms. Most of the players bring women home. Besides, I have no intention of having to share a bed with another guy. Not going to happen. Don't you have someone who shares your love of Spongebob to room with?"

Panic threatened to settle in as I turned my attention back to the clerk. "Look, I have an important day tomorrow. I need sleep. How about I go back to bed and you find him a spot somewhere while I sleep? You must have a closet or something you can shove him in."

"I'm so sorry ma'am. I can offer you a full refund of course and a credit for an upcoming stay with us for the inconvenience."

The panic became anger. This was bullshit. It may not be the guy's fault who was behind the counter, but it sure was hell wasn't mine either. "I don't want a damned credit, I want to sleep. And that's what I'm going to do. Good night to you both."

Spinning on my heel, I strode across the lobby and to the elevator. They could figure it out. I was done with the nonsense. Getting into the elevator, I made my way back to my room.

Entering my room I left the room door open, grabbed his stuff and pulled it into the hallway. Once it was all outside, I slammed the door behind me, locking it.

There. Done. Where he was going to stay was his problem – not mine.

~*~ TT ~*~

Brandon

I watched her disappear into the elevator and sighed, while running a hand through my hair. I was sobering up much quicker than I'd have liked.

“I'm sorry, Sir, I have nothing to offer you for a room.”

Turning my attention back to the front desk clerk, I grimaced. “There's gotta be something.”

“There's nothing. I'm so sorry, Sir.”

“Fuck!” Balling my hand into a fist, it came crashing down onto the countertop making the other man flinch. “Then you tell me what I should do? What in the fuck should I do for a room?”

“Like I told Miss Haynes, I would be more than happy to refund you and offer you free credits for another night.”

“I don't need fucking free credits, I need a damned place to sleep!”

“Well, technically, you both are booked into that room. If you could just work it out with her for the night I could get

my manager to work out a solution in the morning when he comes in. Surely, he'll be able to figure something out, but at this time of night, it's just not possible."

"Damn." I wanted to stand there and argue but knew that wouldn't do any good. He couldn't just make rooms magically appear when there weren't any. All the pissing and moaning would do would label me a prima donna. I already had the reputation for going through women. Although in my defense, that was a label many of us held, it wasn't one that I held all on my own.

I had no choice, I had to deal with the woman in my room and come to some sort of compromise, at least until morning, then we could get this whole fiasco sorted out.

Making my way back up to my room, I ran through ways I could sell this situation to her. We both had a claim on the room. And as much as I wanted to simply go to sleep, I wasn't so much of a bastard that I'd throw her out on her ass even if she didn't have a claim on the room – although I doubted that she'd be as generous to me.

Approaching the door, I took a deep breath in and slowly released it as I swiped my card key. The indicator light beeped and turned green. Turning the handle, I attempted to open it only to find it only opened a fraction of an inch.

"You've gotta be kidding me," I groaned out loud.

"You okay man?" one of my teammates asked as they walked by. "Your stuff was all in the hallway so I brought it into my room before someone took off with it."

Turning to Lucas, I waved a dismissive hand not interested in explaining my situation. “Yeah, I’m just having a little issue with the room.” The little bitch put my stuff in the hallway! That equipment was expensive. I clenched my fists at my sides as I attempted to keep my cool.

“Go down to the front desk. Get a new card.”

If only it was that easy.

Flashing him a tight smile, I nodded. “Yeah, Maybe I’ll do that. Have a good night. I’ll grab my stuff in the morning.”

Once Lucas rounded the corner and was out of sight, I turned back to the door. Raising my fist, I knocked loudly. “Let me in, Taylor.”

No reply.

I knocked a second time, with a little more force. “I’m tired and not in the mood for games. I’m going to ask you one last time, open the door.”

There was a pause before a voice yelled back. “No. Go away, this is my room!”

Anger, which I normally only felt when on the ice, began to rage within me. “This is childish. Let me in so we can sort this out.”

“No! Find another room. This one is mine.”

“This is your final warning. Open the door or else.”

“Or else what? Go away!”

I gave the door a little nudge and then another harder one. She probably had a chair up against it. “Or else I’m breaking it down.”

Would I really break it down? Seemed a little excessive and there was no doubt in my mind that breaking down a hotel room door would make the news, but the alcohol in me was cheering the thought on telling me it was a splendid idea.

“You wouldn’t dare!” She yelled back.

“Don’t test me.”

“Go away. Find some chick to sleep with, you’re not getting in here. I’m sure there’s some airhead out there willing to shack up with you for the night.”

“I’m counting to three.”

There was silence on the other side.

“One.” Lowering my hand, I took a step back from the door.

“Are you sure you can count that high?” the voice taunted.

Was I really going to break down this door? Was it even possible? This wasn’t some action movie, it was a solid wood door for fucks sakes.

“Two...”

Silence.

It could go wrong in so many ways. If I kicked the door in the wrong way, I could injure myself and be out for the rest of the season. It could cost us the Cup. But that alcohol-driven voice in the back of my head cheered me on. I was a hockey star, one of the best defensemen in the league. Lesser players and men feared me on and off the ice. I wouldn’t get hurt.

The word three came out of my mouth before I even knew I was saying it. I hesitated to stare at the door another moment. Kicking in the door seemed rather extreme.

“Ha! I knew you didn’t have the balls,” the voice on the other side of the door mocked. “Now leave me alone. Find a slut bunny to bunk with.”

To hell with her! My foot came up and with all the force I had in me, I propelled my foot forward to connect with the center door in front of me.

Chapter 4

Taylor

“Three,” his voice boomed out like he was some sort of superhero. Captain Douchebag.

His voice pissed me off. He pissed me off. He had a whole team of guys he could bunk with but instead, he insisted on harassing me. I knew his type, I dealt with them all through high school and in college. They thought they were so much better than everyone else because they were popular and because they could throw a ball or skate fast. Well, to hell with him! He wasn't getting his way this time. He could get bent and find a different room.

When he didn't kick in the door, I couldn't help myself from taunting him. “Ha! I knew you didn't have the balls. Now leave me alone. Find a slut bunny to bunk with.” It was childish, I knew this, but the words came out before I could stop them. Perhaps it was my arrogance that was the final straw.

There was a dead silence on the other side of the door and for a split second I thought perhaps he'd given up. What I didn't expect was the sound of a loud bang or the middle panel of the door to split from the door itself and come flying into the room to land at my feet. I watched in wide-eyed shock as a large hand slithered through the generous hole that his foot had created, removed the now broken chair I had jammed up against it and tossed the chair to the side.

What was left of the door was flung open and an angry-looking defenseman stepped forward his body taking up much of the doorway.

My mouth fell agape for a moment before I finally whispered. “You’re crazy.”

“No, I’m tired and still a little drunk and sick of the childish nonsense.” Entering the room, he closed the door which now had a big hole in the center of it behind him. Grabbing the desk he moved my belonging to the nightstand table then carried the desk to the door and placed it in front of the hole. “Oh and my stuff is okay, by the way, a buddy grabbed it and put it in his room.”

Pushing aside the feelings of intimidation that were swirling within me, I straightened lifting my chin in defiance. “Where do you plan on sleeping? I’m not leaving.”

“Wherever the fuck you feel like.” Crossing the room, he shed his clothing, including his boxer briefs and hopped into bed, pulling a sheet over him. “You’re the one with the issues lady, not me.”

Standing in the center of the room, I ran my tongue along my lower lip, unsure of how to respond. He was done with the conversation, that part was evident. There was no way I could forcefully remove him.

My eyes scanned the room. There was no place to sleep other than the floor or the bed. There was no way I was sleeping on the floor, even in a high-end hotel like this one I doubted the floor was disinfected often. Floors were breeding grounds for bacteria.

Looking back to the bed, he had turned his back to me and had settled in. I'd have guessed he weighed nearly twice what I did, it's not like I could physically remove him. The bed was a king. There was tons of room. It could fit four people. He may take up nearly half, but I wasn't a big person.

I could make a pillow wall...

The moment the thought came to me, I silently laughed it off. We were adults, not children. Considering he reeked of alcohol he probably couldn't get it up if he wanted to. Although I knew that was a lie. He didn't have an issue in that department earlier, just thinking about it caused a stirring between my legs that I found unsettling.

As if sensing my indecision, his voice cut into my thoughts. "Look, I'm not going to touch you. If I wanted to fuck someone, I could have done it a dozen times over at the bar. You're so rigid it wouldn't be any fun anyhow. Just fucking go to sleep. There's lots of room. We'll sort this in the morning."

"How do you know I won't murder you in your sleep?"

A chuckle was my only reply.

Walking over to the bedside table where I'd left my phone, I looked at the time and cringed. I needed sleep otherwise I'd blow the entire presentation.

He was right, there was a fair amount of room on the bed. It's not like I'd be naked. I'd wear my pajamas, despite hating the restriction of pajamas and then go to work. In the morning this would all be taken care of and they'd put me on a

different floor. I didn't want to be on the rowdy hockey floor anyhow.

Just don't sweat it, I told myself as I grabbed the blanket I'd earlier used as a robe and pulled it over myself as I slid into the bed next to him keeping myself as close to the edge as possible and leaving a solid two feet or so between us.

By the time my head hit the pillow, my bed partner was already in a deep sleep his loud snores offering proof of that. Closing my eyes, I attempted to block out the man beside me. But it was next to impossible. Even if he wasn't snoring, his mere presence was keeping me from falling asleep.

Grabbing my extra pillow I pulled it over my face attempting to block out at least some of the noise, hoping that combined with my exhaustion would be enough.

Wishful thinking.

Sometime throughout the next few hours as I laid there staring at the ceiling sleep overtook me. But it was hardly a restful sleep. In fact, my sleep was plagued with dreams of a sexy, arrogant hockey player to the point where I woke up the next morning with my heart racing and my pussy moist.

As I got ready for my morning while he continued to snore away, I took solitude in the fact that he'd either be gone or I'd have a room elsewhere by the time I got back in the evening.

Brandon

“I’m sorry for the inconvenience, Sir, but the destruction of hotel property is unacceptable. We strive for an excellent guest experience, but we’ll have no choice but to charge the team for the replacement of the door to your room.” He hesitated a moment, “And the chair.”

I figured as much. What would it cost? A grand maybe. I huffed as I watched the maintenance men replace the broken door. I was one of the highest-paid players in the league, so the cost of a new door hardly bothered me. “I don’t care about that. Just get it done. What I care about is the fact that I have some random woman booked into my room. She seemed about as thrilled about the idea as I was last night. I assume that you have a room for her today?”

I looked down at the hotel manager who looked a little uneasy over the question. He was an uppity little man, in his mid-fifties I’d guess. He was running a hotel for fucks sake, how hard could it be to find a room for one female?

“Yes, well, the thing is that as you know the play-offs are in town.”

“You don’t say,” I rolled my eyes at him. “But that’s hardly enough reason for the city to be booked up. Don’t you have a suite or some sort of room in a corner somewhere to stash her? An Airbnb? Give her your house for all I care.”

“Well, no, it’s not but there’s also some sort of science convention in town and there’s also a comic book convention. Everything is booked for miles. You’d have to drive a couple of hours and go a couple of cities over to find anything.”

Well, that was certainly a problem.

“So you’re telling me that your hotel fucked up. There’s no room for this woman to stay in and yet you’re bitching to me over a door? I’d think that you should be less concerned about recouping the costs for that door and more about getting your shit together. Do you have any idea how solid of a social media presence I have? How many millions of fans follow everything I post? One bad post about your hotel and you’ll lose business. So I ask again, what are you going to do about it?”

“The hotel would like to extend to you and Miss Haynes a complimentary few days’ stay. Usable anytime. No blackout dates. Suites included.”

She was going to lose her shit. By the time I’d woken up she was already awake and gone for the day. When she got back, I’m sure she’d be less than thrilled to see me and my stuff still in the room, but what choice did we have? We both needed a room and there was no way in hell I was bunking with a teammate.

I wouldn’t get laid unless I went to the chick’s house, but that wasn’t really a concern anyhow.

She’d have to suck it up and make the best of it, as would I.

I was confident in my decision that she’d have to suck it up until I heard the faint click-clack of heels on the tiled floor coming towards me. Lots of women came and went from the rooms, but for some reason the sound made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. It was her – I just knew it. The hung-over me simply wasn’t in the mood for a

confrontation, yet her appearance assured me that there would be one.

Pasting a smile on my face that I normally reserved for women that I attempted to seduce I turned and as suspected it was my roommate – Taylor.

“Good evening, how was your...” I looked her up and down. She was wearing a no-nonsense black pantsuit, her flaming red curly hair tied up in a bun at the top of her head with a leather computer bag in hand and black-rimmed glasses perched on her perfect little nose. “Conference?”

I think she’d mentioned she was presenting something there. I was pretty shitfaced and tired, so who really knew? The previous night was more or less just flashes of memory.

Not even a hint of a smile touched her lips. “Yes, a conference which I was presenting a paper at. I’m assuming that while I was working you sorted this fiasco out?”

“Right. Did it go well?” Why in the fuck was I making chit-chat? Why was she making me feel intimidated? She was a tiny woman, I bench-pressed more than she weighed. It was the red hair, I think. It seemed like all-natural redheads had a fiery part to them.

“I’m exhausted and can barely remember my name let alone the material I had prepared, so take that as you will.” Her green eyes immediately landed on the manager. “You have a new room for me?”

“Well, ma’am...”

I couldn’t help snickering to myself as I watched her already annoyed state turn to outright anger as the manager

explained to her what he'd explained to me. The longer he talked the redder her face became to the point I was sure her head was going to explode.

If nothing else, bunking with her wouldn't be boring. Hell, it might even be fun. Now that I was somewhat rested, I was up for a challenge.

Chapter 5

Taylor

I'd fumbled over my words. I'd failed to answer rudimentary questions about my paper with complete and knowledgeable answers. Instead of sounding like the author of the paper I was presenting, I'd ended up sounding like an undergrad student attempting to grasp the concepts presented.

It had been a flop of a day and coming back to the hotel to discover the reason for the flop was still in my room, and currently sitting on my bed playing some sort of Candy Crush game on his phone wasn't making my mood any better.

I stopped my pacing before the bed to look at him. "Why are you not angrier about this? I have to be annoying to be around." When he didn't answer or so much as lift his gaze for that matter, I took a step towards him. "Brandon? Doesn't it piss you off?"

"Dammit!" He growled looking up.

"Exactly!"

"Your bitching made me lose the level!"

I blinked, giving my head a little shake as I stared at him. "You're angry over the game, but not being stuck with me?"

He tucked his phone into the back pocket of his jeans as he stood. "Yeah, I'm absolutely pissed over having to bunk with you, because you made me lose the level! I almost had it

and you distracted me. Do you have any idea how many times I've attempted that level?"

"I feel like I'm supposed to say I'm sorry, but I'm really not."

"Yeah, well, I feel like you need to make it up to me, we're going out."

"Owe you? Because of your snoring, I couldn't sleep. I screwed up my presentation because of you and the lack of sleep." Although his snoring was only a part of what was causing my lack of sleep. It had been literally years since I'd shared a bed with a man and it felt strange, especially considering how imposing his presence was.

"In that case, let me make it up to you." Pulling off his shirt and undoing his jeans, he picked one of his dufflebags off the floor and placed it on the bed. "I'll take you out to a nice dinner. The team has exclusive access to the spa down the street. We'll get massages and have a nice soak in the hot tub. It'll loosen you up and you'll sleep like a baby tonight."

I stared at him as he pulled out a pair of slacks and button-down shirt from the bag. What was going on here? What did I even wear to this? Was I even going to go? I didn't even know this guy. Instead of getting ready, I stood in the center of the room my mouth agape like an idiot.

He stopped fumbling through the bag to look up at me. "Look, we're going to a nice restaurant so either wear what you have on or a dress. Yes, we may not know each other but what better way than a night out? Like it or not, we're stuck with each other for a while. You can either continue to piss and moan about it or make the most of it. Up to you."

A massage did sound really good. I wasn't a frivolous person and most of my money went towards savings and trying to get my insanely large student loans down. A massage to me seemed like an unnecessary expense, but if he was going to cover it then... What would it hurt? At least if I got to know him a little bit it wouldn't seem as awkward sharing the room with him.

I eyed him a moment. "You paying?"

"Yes, my treat."

With a sigh, I nodded. "Okay, fine. I'll change and take you up on that."

Sorting through my clothes for something to wear, I tried to avoid looking at Brandon. He wasn't shy about stripping down and changing in front of me, dick and balls on full display. I wasn't as brazen grabbing what I decided to wear and shimmying past him and into the bathroom. Although I was hardly a saint, I did sneak a peek at his hard ass under the pair of navy boxer briefs he was wearing and his strong muscular back and shoulders.

He was built like a god of solid muscle. During the little bit of downtime I'd had at the convention I'd Googled him. He had quite the reputation both on and off the ice for being a superstar – among other things. He'd been noted to have had relationships with models, actresses and musicians to name just a few. It seemed odd that he'd want to slum it with a scientist, but maybe it was simply as he said. We had to be trapped together so might as well get to know each other a little bit and break the ice.

Entering the bathroom, I quickly changed and then gave myself a quick inspection in the mirror. I really hoped he didn't have his mind set on a really fancy place because the simple knee-length sundress wouldn't cut it. Cupping the underside of my breasts in my hands, I adjusted my B cups so that they looked as full as possible.

Touching up my make-up I stopped myself. Why was I getting so worked up over going out tonight? It's not like it was a date. All the fussing seemed to be silly.

Scoffing at myself, I straightened. I wasn't out to impress him. Who really cared if my eyeliner was perfect? Zipping up my cosmetic bag I exited the bathroom and immediately stopped in my tracks as I gazed at him.

He looked incredible. His just-past-the-chin brown hair was perfectly styled with the just-got-out-of-bed look that women tended to swoon over. The shirt was tailored to hug his thick frame showing off his exquisite physique. My pussy clenched just looking at him. I had to bite down on my lower lip to keep from allowing the word 'wow' to tumble from my lips.

He grinned, slight dimples appearing on his cheeks. "You look nice."

"Thanks. You too." He looked so much better than nice, but I wasn't about to tell him what I actually thought. "I'm starved, if you're set let's head out." I grabbed the doorhandle and pulled it open.

"Ohh, I like a take-charge kind of woman. Sexy."

I groaned inside, both from his over-the-top compliment and from the fact that he'd complimented me in the first place. I wasn't in the same league – physically – as the girls I'd seen him with in pictures so the compliment, regardless of how over-the-top, felt nice.

~*~ TT ~*~

Brandon

Sitting across from her at a world-renowned Michelin-star Italian restaurant that was just a few minutes walk from the hotel, I gazed across the table at her. She was nervous. It was cute. There were certain circles that I ran in, not because I preferred them, but because my life was dictated by sports agents and managers to a large extent that had me dating a certain type of woman. Groupies would come and go, but for the most part, I didn't get to spend time with real people who didn't give a shit who I was and Taylor had made it perfectly clear she wasn't impressed by my job or who I was. I found it oddly attractive.

With her I wasn't Brandon the hockey star, I was Brandon the douche roommate. Maybe not the greatest way to see me, but it was different, and different didn't always have to be bad.

I'd asked her what she did for a living and she was in the process of explaining her job. I'd gone to college on an athletic scholarship and taken sociology so I wasn't entirely

uneducated, but what she was talking about was well over my head and it was fucking sexy as hell.

Our dessert cannoli was finally served, interrupting her explanation of her research.

She didn't hesitate to dig in, making me grin. She didn't give a shit about counting calories and I was pretty sure she'd never in a million years consider giving up the finer things in life, like eating what you enjoy for the sake of chasing society's perception of what beauty should be. She didn't need to; she was smart and didn't need to rely on looks to get her through life. The fact she was beautiful – in a dorky sort of way with those black-rimmed librarian glasses only added to her appeal.

She stopped eating and looked up at me, a smudge of cream on her lower lip. “What?”

Laughing I reached across the table and wiped the cream from her lip, then grinned watching her eyes widen in surprise as a red hue colored her cheeks as she watched me lick the cream from my index finger. “It's good.”

She cleared her throat, averting her gaze back to the dessert. “It's really delicious. You need to try it.”

“I did.” Reaching for the plate where there were several cannoli stacked, I grabbed one and placed it on the small desert plate before me.

“Try your own, I mean.”

Chuckling, I grabbed a fork and dug into the pastry. “Have you always wanted to be a scientist?”

She shrugged. “Not until middle school. Middle school is where I discovered my love for science. I’ve always had a desire to help people. You know, make a difference. Although it wasn’t until I started as an undergrad that I really began to find my path with neurobiology.”

“That’s wild.”

“It’s challenging but very rewarding. I work in a male-dominated industry which forces me to work harder to make a name for myself. And I’m young so that also doesn’t help, I’m just starting to build a reputation in the community.”

“Yeah, me too.” I grinned hoping she wouldn’t take offense to my joke.

After a minute a smile crept onto her lips as she pushed her glasses up her nose and back into place. “I’m boring you, aren’t I?”

“Not at all.”

“I don’t believe you, so I’ll change the topic. So, tell me about this hockey stuff. You’re playing for the championship?”

Laughing, I nodded. “It’s called a Stanley Cup. We just finished the semi-finals. Not it’s time to finish the year with a bang. The other team was top of that division and we kicked their asses, it was a great moral boost, although I didn’t doubt we’d win. We play two games here and then travel back to my home city for the next couple of games. The first team to win four games of seven wins the cup and the season will be complete until the fall.”

“Sounds like a lot of pressure.”

I shrugged. “It can be for some players. I’ve been on a winning team several times now so it wouldn’t be my first, but most of the guys on the team are young and haven’t won a cup yet so it would be a huge boost for them.”

She smiled, cocking a brow at me. “Several Cups, huh? That sounds like quite an achievement. You’re that good?”

“Nah. I’m that lucky. I’ve been traded a few times over the years, I’ve been playing in the NHL for over ten years now, I actually started late, and it’s getting close to retirement time. I’ve just been fortunate that I’ve been on amazing teams who have made it to the top of the pack while I was with them.”

“I see. And what do you see yourself doing once you retire?” She grinned, a mischievous gleam in her eyes.

“Promote energy bars and athletic wear?”

Laughing, I shook my head. It was nice to see her becoming comfortable enough with me to start teasing me. That was a good question, one that I’d been toying with for the past couple of years. “I’m honestly not sure. I know I’m not ready to kick my feet up and spend the best of my life on a beach or playing rounds of golf with the other washed-up athletes. But as for what I want to do when I’m not playing... I really don’t know. I do have to make that decision sooner rather than later, my contract is up this year.”

“What about a family? You’re single without kids. Are you ever planning on getting married and starting a family?”

I chuckled. “Whoa, you’ve been reading up on me?”

She blushed and looked down at her dessert. “Maybe. I’m a researcher, so of course I’d look up the man I was being forced to sleep with.”

“That’s fair. It appears you have me at a disadvantage.”

She shrugged.

“That’s another hard one. I mean, I come from a large family and I know my mother wants to be a grandmother before she dies – she’s been quite vocal about it. But the first step to that would be find someone that I’d want to spend the rest of my life with, that’s the hard part. What about you? Do you have someone special?”

“The only special thing I have is my love of science.”

Laughing, I took a couple more bites of my dessert, finishing it up. “A noble and respectable love. If you’re done, how about we relocate this deep discussion to the spa?”

She popped the remaining piece into her mouth and nodded. “That sounds like an offer I can’t refuse.”

I couldn’t help thinking this was the kind of girl that my mother would love to see knocked up and carrying my child. She’d been very vocal on numerous occasions that she’d like to see me with a girl who had a big brain, not just big tits, her face filled with Botox and fillers. That was fair, I suppose. Chuckling to myself, I shook the ridiculous thought from my mind.

Chapter 6

Taylor

“I’ll let you two strip and be right back with my colleague to begin your massages,” the masseuse said, giving us a sweet smile and exited before I could protest.

Looking around the room, I felt a sense of panic. I’d gorged myself on pasta at the restaurant and wasn’t a petite girl to begin with – hell, I was a damned whale compared to the pictures of the women I’d seen online that he’d dated.

“What’s the matter?” he asked his fingers beginning to work their way down the front of his shirt.

“There’s no changing room?” Of course there wasn’t, it was a stupid question. I just wasn’t sure how to act right now.

“No, there’s not. I think she assumed we were a couple.”

Nodding, I pulled my lower lip between my teeth, took a deep breath in and then sighed.

“I’ll turn my back.” He grinned, a sexy grin that had my heart doing a little pitter-patter in my chest and then turned his back to me.

“Thanks.” Quickly, I shed my clothing and jumped onto the massage table, working my naked body under the sheet. “Okay, I’m under.”

He turned back to me and shrugged off the shirt. The pants came next. I’d have to be blind to miss the massive

bulge under his boxer briefs. Turning my head and placing my face into the hole, I gave him privacy to finish undressing and take his place on the table.

Was that bulge hard or soft, I couldn't help but wonder. I hadn't taken a good enough look at the hotel. I had felt it though... Quickly, I cleared the thoughts from my mind, scolding myself for even indulging in such thoughts. This was a temporary inconvenience. Nothing more. In a few days he'd leave to head back home and we'd never speak again. Guaranteed.

A knock came at the door. "Are you both ready?" A soft voice asked.

"Come on in," Brandon replied.

The two female masseuses entered and set to work. It. Felt. Amazing! I had no idea I was so tight and wound up until her fingers worked the knots in my shoulders and back. I didn't even feel the least bit ashamed when I moaned a couple of times.

"Do you do this often?" I asked Brandon.

"All the time. My body takes quite a beating and needs some TLC after a game. How do you keep relaxed?"

I laughed. "I don't."

"Then I think you need to add a little time for yourself into your daily routine."

Perhaps he was right. Money and prestige weren't worth a damn if I worked myself into the grave and was unable to thoroughly enjoy it.

I tried to keep my mind shut off and allow the soothing music and floral fragrance in the background to lull me into a sense of serenity, but there were a thousand thoughts racing through my head. By the time the massage was over my body felt loose and refreshed, but my mind was as busy as ever.

The masseuse escorted us from the room, wrapped in thick plush white robes to another private room. Inside, this room was a hot tub that could fit four to six people. The hot tub was already going, bubbles dancing over the top of the water with such force that it was difficult to see to the bottom, especially with the dim lighting in the room.

It had definitely been set up to be a romantic couple's activity. Rose petals littered the floor and side of the tub, and champagne chilled in a bucket off to the side of the tub with chocolate-dipped strawberries. Did she actually think that Brandon and I... The thought was laughable. I saw the pictures of the women he enjoyed the company of – I most definitely didn't fit the bill.

When the masseuse left, Brandon immediately turned his back to me. "Go ahead and get in, I won't look."

"Thanks." I appreciated the gesture. Surely there were tons of women who'd love to be in my position and not be the least bit shy about their bodies – I just wasn't one of them. There was still a part of me, the little girl in middle and high school who was bullied relentlessly that demanded I be shy and awkward. Awkward and shy seemed to be my go-to feelings. Undoing the robe, I slipped it from my shoulders, draped it over the back of the chair next to the tub which held

a number of large bath towels and stepped into the warm water.

With a sigh, I sank into the warm water ensuring my breasts were covered by the bubbles before giving Brandon the go-ahead to turn around. As was in the other room, he wasn't shy about stripping nude in front of me, although I gave him the respect of averting my eyes until he was in the tub and seated across from me.

“You know I don't care if you look,” he said with a chuckle.

“I care if I look. I'm not some sort of sex-crazed pervert.”

Brandon chuckled. “I'm not accusing you of being one. There's nothing wrong with looking at the human body, we all have one.”

Rolling my eyes at him, I laughed. “Yes, we all have one, but we cover them for a reason. It's not my place to just go indulging in someone else's nudity – even if I'm invited to. Although I suspect I've seen a lot fewer naked bodies than you.”

“I haven't- ”

Raising a brow at him, I grinned. “Remember, I Googled you.”

“Don't believe everything you read on the internet. As a researcher, you of all people should know this.”

Even though I sensed he was joking I felt a little ashamed of myself for making the assumption. The media was

alive and well due to sensationalizing people and events.

“You’re right. I apologize, I was partially kidding.”

“I’m not saying that it’s all wrong.” A wide grin broke and spread across his lips.

Laughing, I flicked a handful of water at him. Staring into his deep blue eyes, my mood sobered a moment. “In all seriousness, thank you for this. It’s been such a stressful couple of days that tonight is exactly what I needed to help get rid of some of the negativity and stress.”

“Who said the night was over?”

“I have to be at the convention in the morning.”

“Are you speaking?”

“Not tomorrow, but there’s some speakers and presentations that I really should take in.”

“Sounds boring.”

“It’s- ” The look on his face told me he was on to my bullshit. There wasn’t a single presentation on the next day’s rooster that was all that interesting, but they were work-related so I should be attending – shouldn’t I?

“Is it part of your job requirement? Is there anything in these speeches that will be so ground-breaking, so ingenious, that it’ll change the course of your research forever?”

Laughing, I shook my head. “No, none of that.”

He waved a dismissive hand at me. “Then give yourself a day. Sleep in. Turn your mind off and just have some fun. Enjoy the city outside a convention center and laboratory. Let me show you a good time.” Grabbing the bottle

of champagne from the bucket he popped the cork sending it flying over my shoulder and onto the floor.

“Just so we’re clear. We’re not having sex. Not tonight – not ever.” I hated that I had to say it, maybe I was saying it more to remind myself that would never happen than to him, but a part of me felt it needed to be put out there.

Cocking a brow at me, he grinned, “Did I say anything about the good time involving sex.”

Cringing, I shook my head. Way to make myself look like an idiot. “It’s not that I meant to imply...”

“There is no sex requirement. Sex is off the table. You have my word.” Grabbing one of the two glasses, he poured some bubbly liquid inside and passed it to me. “Now drink up, you’re wound insanely tight.”

Nodding I forced myself to smile, accepting the glass. Maybe the liquor would lessen the humiliation I felt from my prior comment. Taking sex off the table was what I wanted, yet why was I feeling a hint of disappointment?

~*~ TT ~*~

By the time we exited the hot tub and were on our way back to the hotel, my skin was prune-like and my mind was muddied from the alcohol. But I could say one thing for sure, I felt relaxed, and dammit, I was having fun.

“You know you’re not too bad after all Brandon. I mean, for an arrogant hockey player that is.”

Looking down at me, with his arm secured around my waist, he grinned. “Well, that’s quite the compliment. Or at least I’ll take it as a compliment.”

“Come on. Let’s be honest. Most jocks are pretty arrogant. They think they’re God’s gift, like girls should drop to their knees for a chance to suck their dicks.”

The guilty look on his face confirmed what I felt.

“Look, it’s not all jocks. Although I will admit that some,” When I raised a brow at him, he corrected himself, “Okay, the majority, and I’ll admit that maybe I’ve had that tendency as well. It’s not that I feel like they should be grateful. But the thing is that women do it. They flock to us and I think it goes to our heads sometimes. But it’s also a curse in some respects.”

“A curse?” Skepticism dripped from my tone.

“We never know who is with us because of who we are or who is with us because they genuinely like the person we are underneath the fame. We’re always guessing. I suppose many men don’t care, but there’s a point in most of our lives where we do want something real. Brief flings become the norm and a lifestyle that we need to be conscious of to break the cycle.

We burst in through the front doors of the hotel, ignoring the fans outside who were screaming his name. It was all so strange. “It’s so weird they scream your name because you can play a game well. I was thinking the other day that no

one screams the name of the doctors and scientists that change the world as we know it.”

He guided me through the lobby and up the elevator to our room. “Maybe one day they will.”

“At least we have an intact door tonight,” I commented with a giggle. “No door can stand in the way of the great Brandon Campbell.” The effects of the alcohol were really taking effect. If I didn’t have his assistance I never would have made it to the bed, I would have face-planted halfway between the door and bed and probably remained there until I woke up the next morning.

“Yeah, no door is a match for me.”

The world began to become blurry moments before I sprawled fully clothed onto the bed. “I’m just going to give my eyes a rest for a minute or two, then we can talk.” I just needed a rest and then I could continue to peel back the layers of the hockey player who I could feel was staring down at my pathetic drunken body.

However, once my eyes closed I was a goner, effectively ending our date night. Peeling back layers would need to wait for another time. Wait, it wasn’t a date night. But it sure felt like a date night, at least as close to a date as I’d had in a very long time. No matter. It was over now. Maybe Brandon Campbell was simply a dream?

Chapter 7

Brandon

I chuckled as she began to snore loudly, fully clothed and spread-eagled on the bed. She certainly didn't handle her liquor well. I hadn't anticipated that she'd pass out from that little bit of champagne, but I had a suspicion she wasn't a drinker, so I'd cut her some slack. There was a temptation within me to rouse her, but I also suspected she didn't sleep much so decided on letting her be.

But she couldn't sleep in her clothing which was what brought me a dilemma, she'd eventually wake up uncomfortable with her nice dress a mess. I'd seen her naked, despite the bubbles giving her curves decent coverage. As she drank, she'd gotten less and less concerned about her modesty. By the end of our time in the hot tub I'd seen every inch of her and I had to say, I liked what I saw. She had womanly curves. They were more on the side of what society would consider overweight, but that's exactly what I liked.

I came from a family of curvy women and it was what I was drawn to. My mother was a woman who was on the larger side and she was the most stunning woman I'd ever set eyes on. My father would jokingly refer to her as his sexy Amazon. Even with her hair now turned grey and the wrinkles in her face deepening, she was still beautiful. However, my agents and managers always steered me toward what society deemed to be beautiful in women. Maybe that is part of why relationships never worked with them. They weren't my type

physically or on an intellectual level. Just because I played hockey for a living didn't mean I was a stupid person. I liked to be challenged by the person I was with. The women the media saw me with were with me for status and a good time. It was a shallow and unfulfilling way to approach relationships. The older I got the more I was coming to realize that and longed for a change.

This woman, however, was fucking smart and unapologetic about her intelligence or stating what she wanted if she felt it was what she deserved. It was as sexy as hell. I was lucky for the bubbles in the hot tub and her tipsy state or she may have caught sight of the erection I'd sported a number of times while we'd chatted.

Going to her suitcases I unzipped the first one, searched for nightwear for her and came up empty. The drawers came up equally as empty. Her Spongebob pajama set was crumpled up and in a ball in a net laundry bag with her other dirty clothes.

A grin spread across my lips upon realizing that the little smarty pants on the bed who was now snoring softly liked to sleep in the buff. That was as sexy as fuck and very unexpected. What other little secrets did she hold?

But I couldn't just strip her and leave her naked. It didn't seem right and nothing else she owned looked comfortable enough. Going to my duffle bag, I pulled out a 2xl t-shirt with my team's logo embroidered onto the front. This would do.

Crossing back to the room to her, I made a final half-hearted attempt to rouse her but to no success. Well, a man's

gotta do what a man's gotta do. As carefully as possible I peeled the garment from her body, followed by her bra, leaving her in simply a pair of lacy white underwear while ignoring the troublesome erection that was pressing against my pants. She had incredible tits, not too big or small, a perfect handful. How I managed to pull the shirt over the head and onto her body without her waking was a miracle, but I succeeded.

Gathering her up into my arms I walked with her over to her side of the bed and then deposited her under the blankets. She mumbled something incoherent before pulling one of the pillows to her body and clutching it as if her life depended on it.

Stripping out of my clothing, I slid in on the other side of the bed with my phone in hand and pulled up Candy Crush. I wasn't getting any action, although I never expected that anyhow, so might as well try to clear the level that had been mocking me for days now. If this hard-on refused to subside then I might to participating in a different type of solo activity as well. Creepy when next to a virtual stranger? Maybe. But it was her fault my pole was standing strong and hard.

~*~ TT ~*~

Taylor

The day was a bit of a blur. Sometime throughout the night, I'd gotten up to pee. I woke up a second time to the

delicious smell of bacon. There was a little voice in the back of my head telling me that I needed to get up and start my day, I had important things to do, but there was a greater part that demanded I stay nestled under the covers, which is exactly what I did.

What finally did rouse me was the greasy goodness that could be none other than pizza. That was a smell I couldn't ignore, especially when my stomach began to chime in its displeasure with being hungry.

“Why am I not surprised that you're eating pizza for breakfast?”

“You mean late supper?” came the reply.

My eyes sprang open and I sat upright on the bed. “Say what?” Grabbing my phone I looked at it for the first time in nearly twenty-four hours. “No way!” But it was true it was past eight at night. My eyes scanned the window, which showed just a hint of light leftover from the descending sun. “I slept the entire day!”

“You got up a few times, but yeah, for the most part you slept the day away.”

“I had stuff to do! How could you let me sleep?”

“You're a big girl. You wanted to sleep so you slept, besides, you told me yesterday you could skip the day, your body and mind needed the z's.” He gave me a wink, “One night with me baby.”

He had a point, he wasn't my keeper. I was an adult and relying on a stranger to babysit me was unreasonable. Flinging the blankets off myself, I looked down at what I was

wearing. This shirt wasn't mine. It was his. I knew for a fact that I hadn't changed into his shirt. Holy shit! Did we have sex? I immediately dismissed the notion, I was neither sore from what I imagined to be an aerobic event with him nor could I remember any of it. Had we fucked I'm sure I'd have had at least some recollection.

My mouth dropped as I slowly looked over at him, sitting at the two-person table chewing on a gooey slice. He'd undressed me and put me to bed. Slowly, I ran my tongue over my dried and chapped lips as I stared at him. I had to ask but was embarrassed to say the words.

Looking up from the slice, he finished chewing and met my gaze. "What's on your mind?"

Heat seared my cheeks. "Did we..."

Cocking a brow, a wicked grin spread across his lips. "Did we what? We did a lot of things last night."

Oh God... Was I one of those hockey sex girls now? I knew there was a name for it, but couldn't for the life of me think of what the name was now. Either way, I wasn't anxious to be labeled one. "You know... Did we?"

"I haven't learned the skill of reading minds yet, so you'll need to be a little more clear for me to know what you're asking."

I was pretty sure the bugger was messing with me and knew damned well what I meant, but I played his game and answered, "Did we have sex?"

He chuckled, his blue eyes dancing with mischief. "I did and it was beautiful. We didn't however, I had to fly solo

last night after I tucked you in. If you'd been conscious then maybe we would have, hard to say."

Oh god. Was he joking or had he really... With me next to him in the bed. My head turned as I stared down at the indentation where his body had been the previous night on the mattress. I looked for traces of white despite myself. Surely, he was joking, just trying to rile me up. He had a knack for getting under my skin.

"I see..."

"Look, just to clear it all up. You passed out last night. I removed your clothing, with the exception of your panties – which are as sexy as fuck by the way, I'm a sucker for white lace – so virginal. Then I put my shirt on you and tucked you in. I did not touch you inappropriately, although had you woken up and demanded sex I'd have obliged. I'm not one for leaving a lady in need hanging."

If I thought my cheeks couldn't have burned any hotter, I'd have been mistaken as what he said sank in. I never really considered myself someone who men desired, especially a man like him. Men like him always ignored me for the hot, petite or leggy girls. The only attention I ever got was when they needed me to tutor them in order to pass a course. Was he just fucking with me or serious?

It didn't matter either way. Nothing could or would happen. We were in each other's lives for a few days – forced proximity – that is all.

"Would you like some pizza? I bought some for both of us hoping this would wake you. I couldn't tempt you into the world of the living with breakfast or lunch. This was my last

attempt before I started to entertain ideas that you may have turned into a zombie.”

With the anxiety of the situation passing, I began to feel the effects of too much alcohol. I groaned and pressed my palm to my forehead. “Does it count if I feel like a zombie?”

“Nah, you don’t look like one, so it doesn’t count. A little disheveled, but that only makes you look sexy so you’re still good.”

“Thanks. I think,” Pushing myself out of bed, the t-shirt slipped down my thighs landing mid-thigh on me. “I appreciate your kindness.”

“Not kindness, I love the wild just-fucked look you’re sporting right now, even if it’s just a hangover.”

Attempting to run a hand through my hair was useless. The curls needed a ton of conditioner to get back to some semblance of order.

He shrugged and went back to eating as I relieved myself, ran a damp facecloth over my face, and then returned to the main room to take a seat across from him and a slice of pizza. “Don’t you have a game?”

“No, remember, it’s tomorrow.”

I didn’t remember. Taking a bite from the slice of what appeared to be an all-meat pizza, I shrugged. The pizza was good – really good – I’d have to try them again if I ever came back to the city.

“I was going to take you out for a day of sightseeing.” He grimaced. “I don’t think that’s going to happen now though.”

“Sorry.” The way I was feeling the last thing I wanted to do was go touring the city, although that didn’t stop the guilt from smacking me in the face. “For getting drunk. I rarely drink so I guess a little champagne is all I needed to knock me off my feet.”

“Don’t be. I’ve got a game tomorrow and the night after then back home for the next two games. It’s probably best I took it easy today, I need to be in top form for tomorrow, I’ve got a lot of people counting on me.”

“Seems like a lot of pressure.”

He sighed, running a hand through his hair as he sank back into the wooden chair. “It’s not just the team, but their families and hell my entire home city. You know... Sports fans can be fanatical – it’s not just us and them – but when it comes to sports whether you play or are just a supporter it all amounts to being us. We couldn’t play if it wasn’t for fans and the fans give us the encouragement to push further and harder than we would otherwise, that’s why teams always do better in their hometowns. If we win tomorrow then I’m confident we’ll take the entire thing. I’m not trying to be cocky, but just confident that even if the final game is played here, we’ll still win.”

“Well, I really hope you do.” And I meant it. I wasn’t much for sports, but I was becoming quite fond of the man before me. We may just be two ships passing in the night, but I was grateful to have met him. My bad experiences with jocks in high school had left a bad taste in my mouth for people like him, however, he was teaching me that there was more to

jocks and sports figures than ego and I was certainly open to learning.

Chapter 8

Taylor

My second presentation was heads and shoulders above my first one. I even received a standing ovation, so when I walked into my hotel room, I didn't simply walk, I floated. If it couldn't get any better, I'd received interest in potential funding for my research, research the current university I was with wasn't fully on board with. But now that I had interest from a competitor you could bet your bottom dollar my university would sit up and take interest.

“Hey Brandon! Guess what!” I announced to an empty room momentarily forgetting that he wasn't there, but at his game. With any luck his team would take the win.

Disappointed that he wasn't there, but not willing to let that get me down, I flicked on the television and surfed the channels until I came to his game which was being televised live. It was the third period and they were leading 5-3 so it was most likely going to be a win.

Well, good for him, I thought as I grabbed the room service menu and began to scan what the hotel had to offer. If they won I doubted I'd see him until the wee hours of the morning, like last time. But that was okay, he was my friend, nothing more. Although I couldn't shake the feeling of regret within me at his lack of presence tonight. Surprisingly enough, I really did enjoy his company.

I knew I should avoid alcohol, but tonight was a night of celebration and I was going to celebrate whether it was going to be with people or alone. Looking back down at the menu I chose a smoked salmon dish with pasta to start and a bottle of severely overpriced champagne.

Sitting on the bed, I kicked off my shoes, the shoes landing randomly on the floor of the room and then shrugged off my suit jacket as I watched the game. The puck went back and forth, with no one scoring. The game ended with Brandon's team winning minutes before my food arrived.

Well, good for him.

Sitting down at the table, I kept an eye on the television waiting to see if they'd interview Brandon. I was finishing up my meal when they got to him, he was panting hard and sweat was dripping down his face, but he was grinning like a crazy man. A smile spread across my lips as I watched him answer the reporter's questions – each answer well thought out and delivered perfectly. No wonder aside from the comments about him being a player with women, the press coverage I found of him was generally positive.

The feeling of wanting to celebrate was strong and leaving me slightly disappointed that I was alone tonight. The news coverage of the game ended and so I shut off the television. I could get some reading done. A good book, some champagne, along with peace and quiet was all I needed in way of celebration. It always worked before, no reason why it wouldn't work now.

Brandon

“You’re not coming out to celebrate?” Phillipe our team captain asked, surprise and confusion in his expression.

“Yeah, I think I just want to have a quiet night in and reset my mind for the upcoming games.” I gave Phillipe a pat on the back. “We’re just three games away. Eye on the prize my man, eye on the prize.”

“Are you serious? Just a couple of hours, a few drinks...”

I mulled over how to answer that, declining a night out was very unlike me. I really didn’t want to tell him about Taylor, not because I was ashamed, but mostly because I’d be ribbed for being a mark or pussy whipped by a girl I didn’t even know. I could have invited her to go out with us, but from our brief conversations, I knew there was no way she’d be interested in going to bars and clubs with scantily clad women throwing themselves at the players. She’d be miserable.

Besides, just the couple of days spent with Taylor were making me really reconsider how I lived my life. I was just a few years from retirement and getting wasted and jumping from woman to woman just wasn’t as appealing as it used to be.

“If you change your mind you know where we’ll be...”

“I won’t, but I know where you’ll all be if I do.”

Leaving the group, I caught a cab to the hotel, making a quick stop to pick up some chocolates and flowers. She’d mentioned that she had a presentation again today so if it went

well the presents would be congratulations gifts and if it went poorly then hopefully it would help to cheer her up. Win – win.

Entering the hotel room, I found her sitting on the bed, her back against the headboard reading a hardback novel.

Her eyes lifted from the words on the pages as she lowered the book, a smile touching her lips. “I heard congratulations are in order.”

I shrugged attempting to appear nonchalant but in actuality flattered she’d taken an interest in tonight’s game. “You followed the game tonight?”

“I may have put it on while eating supper.” Her gaze landed on the presents and her mood soured. “Got a hot date?”

Looking down at the flowers and chocolates, I gave her a sheepish grin feeling like a schoolboy and not a star athlete, “Only if by hot date you mean hanging out with you watching television.”

Reaching out to the nightstand table she picked up a bottle of champagne. “Well, I do have the champagne, would you like to crack this open and get this celebration started? I got wrapped up in the book and forgot to open it.” Getting up from the bed, she came over to stand before me passing me the bottle while accepting the flowers I passed to her.

“Lilies are my favorite. Thank you.” Lowering her head, she inhaled deeply. “Did I tell you that?”

“Nah. I didn’t have many options this time of night so those ended up being a grocery store special.”

“Well, regardless of where they came from, they’re beautiful.” Lifting her face to look up into my eyes, she smiled shyly, “Would you believe I’ve never had a man give me flowers before? Pretty pathetic huh?”

That was a shame. How could a woman as amazing as Taylor not have someone lavishing her with gifts and flowers on a consistent basis? “Not at all. I’m happy to know that these are extra special then.”

“Why don’t you find us a movie to watch and I’ll pour us something to drink? It doesn’t matter how you celebrate as long as you’re in good company.” I gave her a wink and was rewarded with her cheeks growing red. “At least that’s what I heard.”

Settling herself down on the bed she flicked through the channels until she found a rom-com that I knew I’d hate, but pretended I was all for anyhow. Tonight was a celebration, who really gave a shit what was on television.

“How did the presentation go?” I asked passing her a glass and snuggling up to her on the bed, taking a chance and draping my arm over her shoulders all the while surprised at how natural it was to do.

She looked up at me beaming, her smile spanning from ear to ear. “Amazing! I’m really happy you’re here. I was dying to tell someone about it.” She sank down into my embrace as if it was the most natural thing in the world. “I don’t even know where to start!”

“I want to hear all about it.” I may not understand much of what she would be telling me, but I was willing to at least listen. The feeling of her soft body curling up against

mine gave me the incentive I needed to pursue something I told myself I was going to keep off-limits.

I wanted to know everything, I really did... But in a minute. Okay, maybe two, then I'd listen. Not being able to stop myself, I couldn't resist her lush lips or the sweet smell of her rose-scented shampoo. Lowering my head, I brushed my lips against hers.

She momentarily stiffened in my arms, making me think I'd scared her off, but then moaned softly, responding to my kiss.

My dick jerked alive at the soft sound of her moan, urging me to take the intimacy further. With us both riding a high of our respective wins, it was going to take a miracle to keep from claiming her body tonight.

Chapter 9

Taylor

Brandon pulled back and stared down at me, leaving my entire body trembling from the need that a single kiss had ignited within me. I'd never felt so wanton in my life, and I loved the feeling.

My entire life I'd restrained myself. I thought with my mind, led with my mind and common sense. I shied away from men, especially men like him, the scars I'd been forced to bear when younger were thick and ran deep. But once, just once in my life would it be so bad to simply indulge? To not overthink this situation and just let go? Didn't I deserve it? There sure as hell would be worse people to have one crazy night with and I had a feeling that he could provide me with a night to remember.

Just tonight. One night. I could be bad tonight and then tomorrow I'd go back to being the career-driven driven scientist. One night to celebrate this incredible achievement...

A shiver ran through me at the feral intensity of his gaze as the apex between my legs became instantly wet, beginning to saturate my black lace panties in anticipation of him. This wasn't supposed to happen, I wasn't supposed to give in to his charms, but it felt so damned right at this moment.

I swept my tongue along my lower lip as I placed my glass of champagne next to his on the bedside table and

leaned back against the mattress motioning for him to come closer. He obliged, lowering his head and sweeping his lips along the side of my neck, sending another tremor through me.

Brandon slipped a large hand into my hair, grasping the back of my head. His hand slowly moved down the length of my locks. The pull of my hair felt divine, sending sweet shivers through me, intensifying the throbbing that was beginning between my legs.

Reaching down, I grasped the bottom of his t-shirt and pulled his shirt up revealing his six-pack abdominals and thick chest. Pulling the t-shirt all the way off, I tossed it onto the floor next to the bed. “Your body is... It’s amazing, Brandon. Absolutely perfect.”

Straightening up in a sitting position, I slid my hands up his hard, perfectly defined chest, a chest that was built from years of a strict diet and training. Brandon remained still, his fingers slipping through my hair as I traced the lines of his muscle in his chest with my fingertips and then lower to his abdominals. My eyes shifted to a scar at his side and I gently fingered it, not allowing myself to dwell on the reason behind it. Most likely a hockey accident. I’d make a note to inquire another time. Kissing his stomach, I then glanced up at him, catching my lower lip between my teeth as our gazes locked.

Brandon leaned down and ghosted his lips across mine. “Turn over baby.”

Doing as told, I turned to allow Brandon access to the zipper at the back of my plain, green form-fitting dress. Slowly, Brandon tugged down the zipper on the back of my bodice. The fabric slowly fell away from my naked breasts.

Lifting my arms over my head, he pulled the dress up and over my head. I was momentarily blinded by green cotton as it moved up and over my body and then off, leaving me in only my panties.

Brandon's lips skirted my shoulder and he nipped at my neck, just below my earlobe. I sighed, letting her head fall back against his shoulder.

"Give me a minute. Don't move." He kissed my neck a second time and then moved back from me. I didn't look over my shoulder, knowing he was off the bed by feeling the weight of his body lifting.

"Okay," I sighed. My nipples began to tighten due to the combination of the coolness of the room and my increasing arousal. His footsteps came back towards me and the bed, each step the tension and need within me increased.

The bed groaned as his weight lowered to the bed next to me again. His arms snaked around my chest and he cupped my breasts, his fingers pinching and rolling my nipples. Short jolts of pleasure and pain rushed through me as he teased the sensitive nubs. "I think you're getting ahead of me, baby." His voice flowed through me like liquid fire, fuelling my desire.

"Good thing we have all night." I didn't let my mind ponder on the fact that tomorrow he'd be leaving, and I'd never see him again – except on television or if I indulged in some light Google stalking.

"Umm. We do." He fingered the line of my collarbone as he nuzzled the back of my neck.

I reached up behind me and laced my fingers, behind his neck. My back arched and breasts jutted forward as I leaned back against him, my head resting on his shoulder.

Capturing my chin in his hand he urged my face upwards, lowering his lips to meet mine. My lips parted, inviting him in and I sighed against his mouth as our tongues touched. As their tongues dueled, another jolt of pleasure and anticipation rushed through me and I gyrated against his hard chest and stomach, the wetness between my legs increasing.

His hand on my breast lowered, slowly sliding down my stomach to slip under my panties to cup my wet mound.

“Oh Brandon,” I softly moaned, tearing my lips from his as I bucked against his hand, silently praying his fingers would part my wet folds and thrust deep within me. It had been so very long since I’d had a man explore my body so intensively. How I went for so long without a man’s touch was beyond me.

“What baby? Tell me,” he demanded.

My body trembled against him. “I want you.”

“How?”

I smiled and moaned as he slipped a finger between my folds, found my swollen clit and began to stroke me. I bucked against his hand and moaned a little louder. “I... I don’t care. I’ll take you any way!”

“Nope baby. You’re going to have to tell me.” His eyes gleamed with mischief and desire and my pussy throbbed for him in response. No man had ever looked at me with such intense need and lust and I was basking in the feeling.

I groaned inwardly. Damn him for being so cruel. Sex talk was hardly my strong suit, making me feel slightly insecure and out of my depth with him. “You’re being cruel,” I protested.

“So?” A sexy grin touched his lips and he cocked a brow up at me. “What do you want from me Taylor? I don’t want to pressure you into -”

I licked my lips as my eyes lowered to the front of his jeans. His shaft was thick and standing proud, pressing against the denim. Damn him.

“You’re stunning, Taylor. You don’t have to be shy with me. You know that.”

I froze for a moment, unsure how to proceed. This was foreign to me. Seeing the look of determination in his eyes I knew he wasn’t about to budge on what he wanted - me.

No wonder he’s so feared on the ice, I mused.

“All right.” I leaned back onto the bed, bracing my elbows behind me, thrusting my breasts forward, spread my legs and pulled my knees up so he could get a good view of my soaked panties. “Here. I want you here.”

His grin widened as he did as told.

“On your knees, between my legs.”

Brandon dropped to his knees, so his upper torso was situated between my legs, his mouth little more than a foot from the apex between her legs.

“You still need to remove my panties.”

He gave his head a little shake, clucking his tongue off of the roof of his mouth. "Indeed, I do."

"Then what are you waiting for?"

Grabbing the waistband of my panties he was about to jerk it down when I stopped him.

I swatted his hand away. "No."

"Huh."

"Not like that."

Brandon frowned. "Then how?"

"With your teeth." I was beginning to get into this feeling oddly powerful; the feeling of control was exhilarating, fuelling my desire and making me feel like a goddess to be worshipped.

His frown evaporated and the hint of a grin pulled at the corners of his lips as he leaned over me and his lips brushed across my lower stomach, just above my panties. He caught the white frilly lace between his teeth and jerked it downwards.

I wasn't sure if it was more arousing or amusing as he pulled and tugged - hands free - attempting to remove my undergarments. Once my panties reached my ankles, he straightened and pulled them all the way off, tossing them to the floor.

With me completely exposed to him he kissed his way back up my body then leaned over me, his lips brushing against mine. The smell of his aftershave drifted to my nose, enticing me to move closer. I shivered and let my head fall

back, my curls cascading down my back and puddling on the blanket.

His lips kissed their way along my jaw to my neck. I moaned softly as his lips moved down my neck, sending wave upon wave of anticipation through me. Spreading my legs further apart, I attempted to relieve some of the tension.

He was the devil – he had to be to make me wait so desperately long.

His lips worked their way across my collarbone and down the valley between my breasts. His mouth swept over my left breast and then my right, capturing the tight bud between his teeth. A jolt of pleasure raced through me and I cried out, the throbbing between my pussy increasing.

“Brandon. Please. Oh my God, I need you.”

“Uh-huh,” he murmured as he swirled his tongue around my other nipple, before sucking it into his mouth. The coil of desire tightened within me, his teasing was both wonderful and frustrating.

“I need more. Please.”

“I see.” He released my nipple and began to string of kisses down my torso and to my stomach.

“Oh yes. Yes, lower. Please lower.”

I fisted the blanket under me as I waited, while tempted to beg him to hurry, but suspected that he’d only tease me longer if I did. He seemed to be cruel like that.

“Now tell me,” I could hear the tension in his voice. He wanted to plunge his cock deep within me as much as I wanted

him to, but his willpower was much better than mine it appeared.

“Make me come.” I closed my eyes and let her head fall back again, waiting to feel his lips and tongue on my most intimate of parts.

He leaned over me again, and I tensed up as he began grazing his lips over my shaven mound. “Tell me how you want to come.”

Oh dear God! My eyes flew back open and I lifted my head, my eyes locking with his. “With your tongue. Please, Brandon. Fuck me with your tongue and then give me your cock. I need to feel you come in me. God, please!” I could feel my cheeks burning at my brazen admission. I barely knew the man, yet I was screaming out my innermost desires.

He chuckled softly. “Was that so hard?”

Yes! I screamed inwardly but had no chance to reply verbally as his fingers spread my pussy lips and his tongue swiped the length of me from my anus to my clit. I groaned and squirmed against his mouth and his probing fingers as they plunged deep with me. His tongue began to flick and tease my clit as he slid two fingers in and out of my core, stroking my g-spot with each stroke.

His tongue and fingers were bringing me towards a climax at an alarming pace. My elbows holding my torso up became shaky and so I let myself fall back onto the mattress and my hands gripped his shoulders, urging him on. I was getting closer and closer, so close that my body felt as though it was humming, while my juices were slowly slipping from

my entrance and down my ass. I needed more, harder and faster.

“Use your tongue!”

Another bout of soft chuckling as he did what he was instructed. He removed his finger and thrust his tongue into me. I cried out, my fingers digging into his bare shoulders as I bucked against his mouth. My impending climax seemed to take both forever and second at the same time. A wave of pleasure and relief washed over me as I came into his mouth.

But Brandon was far from finished and was intent on keeping me riding the high of my climax. As the evidence of my orgasm greeted his probing tongue, he continued to tongue fuck my pussy, his fingers pinching and rolling my clit. I bucked and moaned against his mouth, lifting my head to watch him, his face buried between my legs.

It was good. Too good. *Oh-my-God!* Another rush of pleasure raced through me to explode between my legs, making me cry out. My heart was beating so hard it felt like it was going to explode within my chest as I quickly lost all train of thought and gave in to the continuous flow of pleasure.

Just when I thought I couldn't handle one more second of the glorious sensations racing through me, Brandon pulled back, stood up and finished stripping off his clothing with the speed and agility of a true athlete. Grabbing my legs, he pulled me towards the edge of the bed until my bottom was hovering over the edge. Stepping up to me, he ran the head of his cock up and down the length of me, taunting me of things to come.

I wiggled against him, attempting to impale myself on him and extinguish the agony that was raging within me.

“Damn Brandon. Give it to me!” I cried out, arching my back and fisting the blanket under me.

My request was granted as he slowly pushed into me. He took his time sinking into my wet and throbbing core. Propping my torso up with my elbows behind me again, I watched as his cock sank into me. God, it looked so good seeing him disappear within me. I wasn't sure what I found more pleasurable, the feel of him stretching my canal or watching him disappear within.

We moaned in unison as Brandon finished sinking into me, with me taking him to the hilt.

“Oh yes. So good,” he gasped.

We began to move together, with me watching as his dick coated in my juices disappeared and reappeared from within me. With each inward stroke the tip of his cock stroked my inner wall, at just the right spot to make me buck and moan against him. I quickly began to ascend the summit, yet again.

“Come down here.” I needed to feel his warm, hard body against me, to feel our bodies fully unified.

He grinned and lowered his torso to mine, crushing my breasts against his massive expanse of a chest.

“Better?”

“Much,” I confirmed, slipping a hand behind his head and forcing his lips to mine. He felt good - so good - as our bodies gave and took pleasure from each other. Brandon pulled his lips from mine and brushed his lips up and down the

side of my neck. I arched my back and slid my hands to his back, my nails digging into the rigid muscle.

Wrapping my legs around his waist, pulling him tighter into me and working in time with him, our bodies moved together in perfect harmony. His balls slapped against my pussy as he began to work my pussy harder, faster. The sensations rushing through me became more intense, and I found myself moaning and crying out with more zeal as I reached the summit.

“I’m coming Brandon!” I cried out as my body tensed under him and a gush of pleasurable relief washed over me as my pussy exploded around his shaft, begging him to ride the wave with me.

“Oh fuck, Taylor,” he groaned not allowing me a moment to bask in my orgasm as he increased his pace, his dick punishing my throbbing pussy without mercy.

“Yes, yes. Oh fuck me! Yes!” I cried out as I was swept up a second time, my arms and legs tightening around him.

“I’m there. Fuck sweetie, I’m there with you.” With a final forceful thrust that moved our bodies a couple of inches up on the mattress his cock thickened and then exploded. The force of his cum as it burst from him sent me over the edge a final time and my moans mixed with his and we came down from their sexual high together.

We held each other for a moment, both of our bodies trembling with the aftershocks of their respective releases.

Slowly, he pulled back a couple of inches so he could look down and into my eyes. “I really wish I didn’t have to

leave tomorrow.”

And just like that, the moment was shattered. Trying to keep the look of disappointment from my eyes, I gave him a soft smile. “Me too, but we both know this was just a passing thing. We are celebrating and let the mood sweep us up.”

He nodded. “You’re an incredible woman, Taylor.”

“Another day, another time.” Closing my eyes, I cuddled close to him and told myself I wouldn’t be sad.

Chapter 10

Taylor

Waking up, I reached across the bed searching for a warm body to come up empty. Disappointment struck me harder than it should have. I was hoping he'd have at least woken me up to say goodbye.

Slowly opening my eyes, I looked over to his side of the bed – vacant. Sitting up, I wiped the sleep from my eyes as I looked around the room. His duffle bag and his equipment were all gone.

The least he could have done was so goodbye, especially after last night. But really, what was last night? It was nothing to him, I was just another girl in another city. That's really what it boiled down to. He'd never promised anything, in fact, he was clear it was a one-night thing.

But still, the disappointment stung.

Besides, I wasn't a supermodel or actress. I didn't resemble the types of girls he normally had on his arm. I had no business in his world, that was painfully apparent. But still, there had still been that tiny sliver of a hope, as much as I wanted to deny it that perhaps he'd want to at least stay in touch.

It just felt so... Wrong. So final.

The alarm on my phone began buzzing. Groaning, I rolled over grabbed the phone and turned it off. Unlocking it, I

was hoping to see a message of some sort. Nothing. Had I even given him my phone number? I couldn't remember. Probably not.

Sitting up, I took a deep breath in, exhaling slowly. This was a new day. I had a successful go at the convention and the remainder of the convention was going to be equally as successful, I could feel it.

Making my way into the bathroom, I ran a shower and hopped in scrubbing the scent of him from my skin and lathering my hair up with a tangy citrus-smelling shampoo and conditioner. The warmth of the water helped to soothe my aching body from the kinks that I'd acquired from the previous night.

Once done, I stepped out of the shower, water sliding down my body and was about to grab a towel when there was a knock at the door. Grabbing the fluffy white terrycloth bathrobe instead, I pulled it on and secured the belt around my waist.

I answered the door and pulled it open just as the third round of knocks began. "Can I help you?" I asked looking up and into the eyes of one of the hotel workers, a lean, dark-haired man who I'd guess was barely out of high school.

"Hey... Hi." He shifted nervously from foot to foot as he passed a folded-over piece of white paper.

My brow creased as I accepted the paper. "What's this?"

"It was a message left for you at the front desk, Ma'am."

“Oh...”

A note. I wasn't sure if I was angry or pleased that he'd left me a note. At least I assumed, correction hoped, it was Brandon who'd left it.

The bellboy turned to leave, hesitated, and then turned back to me. “This isn't my place to say, but you're not the only one left behind so don't feel too bad about it.”

Tilting my head to the side, I eyed him for a minute. “Excuse me?”

“I've given out a bunch of those notes this morning. Sports teams do this all the time.”

“Do what?” I wasn't sure if I was supposed to be angry or embarrassed – perhaps a little of both.

“They find women. Have a fun night and leave them in the room. Some leave notes. Some don't. Don't take it personally, it's just how many of them are. Take the time you need, but keep in mind that checkout is at 10am. Have a good day.” He turned and began walking down the hallway towards the elevators.

“This is my room!” I called out after him, unsure if he was ignoring me or didn't hear me as he rounded the corner and out of sight leaving me standing in the doorway as water dripped on the floor around me.

He thought I was a hockey whore. Oh my...

This was my room dammit. I wasn't out trying to get fucked. I would have had sex with him whether he was a hockey player or not. Although I wasn't sure if that was a

good defense or not. Stepping back out of the hallway and into the room, I closed the door and opened the note.

Taylor,

I had a wonderful time getting to know you. I wish you all the best.

Brandon.

I wasn't sure what I expected from the note, but that certainly wasn't it. He wished me all the best? How much more generic could that have gotten?

It was actually quite offensive. How many of these notes had the bellboy passed off? Did the guys just send out bulk messages as they left the hotel? It felt so... demeaning.

Crumbling the note up in my fist, I tossed it towards the trash can.

Not surprisingly, the note bounced off the rim and onto the floor.

"Seriously," I mumbled to the empty room as I grabbed it from the floor and slam dunked it into the trash can with more force than was necessary.

Whatever. Screw Brandon and screw his damned note.

~*~ TT ~*~

Brandon

We'd barely left the city on the bus on our way back home and I was already regretting the way I'd left things. She was going to hate getting a note from the hotel staff. It was a dick move on my part. Admittedly, it was something I'd done dozens of times in the past, it had become pretty much second nature to me. Hook up with some chick, take off the next morning without waking her and leave her a note. It was textbook Brandon Campbell.

Maybe textbook Brandon Campbell wasn't the person I wanted to be anymore.

Leaving Taylor made me feel like a piece of shit.

It hadn't in the past with other women, so why it was now was beyond me.

Actually, I'm lying. I knew why. Taylor was different.

She was smart.

She was quality.

She was the type of quality that I didn't come across very often. I probably didn't deserve her anyhow...

So what did I do? I left her with a fucking note, passed on by a bellboy.

Could have been worse I suppose, it could have been accompanied by a fifty on the nightstand table.

Groaning to myself, I closed my eyes and sank deeper into the soft leather bus seat. It's not like I could change it. There was a good chance she'd never want to see me again anyhow. The bus was a normal bus but elevated from the normal, with oversized leather seats, plenty of leg room and a

small kitchen and bathroom at the back. We used it for commutes that were shorter in length as opposed to flying.

“Hey man, where were you last night?” Opening my eyes, I turned my head and watched my teammate, Cameron flop himself into the seat next to me.

“I just went back to the room.”

“Man, the girls at the bar were smooookin.’ Their panties were practically falling off for us.” He nudged me with his elbows in the ribs. “At least the ones that were wearing panties.”

“That’s great. Sorry I missed it.” I really wasn’t.

“You really missed out. You have no idea, man.” His eyes narrowed at me. “Wait, did you already score with someone? That why you didn’t come out?”

Was I that predictable? The whole idea that I was indeed that sleazy left a really bad taste in my mouth.

“No, I... Just wasn’t up for it. I think I may have hurt something on the ice and just wanted a hot bath to soothe the muscles, you know.”

“You know what else soothes muscles?”

I huffed, raising a brow at him. “Pussy?”

“Damned right, brother. You’re coming out with us tomorrow though. We’re not going to take no for an answer.”

He wasn’t going to quit until I agreed. Reluctantly, I nodded. “How could I say no then.” Turning my head, I closed my eyes hoping he’d take the hint and allow me to wallow in my own guilty conscience in peace.

“The one I was with last night, Bro, let me tell ya...”

Oh lord, he wasn't going to take the hint.

“The girl was a freak. Hardcore squirter. I went down on her and when she let loose I thought I was going to drown.” He gave me another elbow nudge. “But I'd die a happy man, you know what I'm saying?”

If I had to continue listening to this, I'd fucking walk back home.

~*~ TT ~*~

The club that we normally went to was busier than normal. It may have been mid-week, but fans all knew where the team went to party and tended to flock to the club when they suspected we'd be there in the hopes of catching sight of us. In the case of the ladies, in the hopes that we'd take one of them home.

“Congrats on the big wins, gentlemen.” The manager of the nightclub stood before us in the roped-off VIP section with a bottle of champagne in his hands. “Allow me to offer you this bottle to start the celebrations off right.”

Without waiting for a response from the group of us, two of the servers who had accompanied him began to distribute clean glasses and fill them. The one with the long,

dark hair bent a little lower than normal as she poured mine, giving me a fantastic view of her cleavage. I'd fucked her before, quite some time ago and she'd been trying to get back into my bed ever since. She was a lovely girl, I'd just had my fill of her.

"It's not over yet," I corrected him. But I knew it was over, I could feel it. We were on a winning streak and the next game was going to be on home turf... Unless something extreme happened we were going to take it all. This was by far the strongest team I'd ever had the honor of playing with.

"Oh come on, Brandon. Don't be a buzz kill," Cameron gave me a nudge in the ribcage with his elbow. "You know we have this. Everyone knows we have this."

"Perhaps, but things happen. I don't like to count a win until the clock is counted down. Don't want to jinx it."

"To winning the rest of the series and taking the Cup home!" One of the other players stated raising his glass high up into the air. The rest of us followed suit. I didn't gradually sip at the wine but downed it in one gulp.

Motioning to the waitress, I ordered several more beers. Might as well get them lined up in advance. I really didn't want to be here and should just leave. But, I also didn't want to go back home and sit there thinking of her...

Pulling my phone from my back pocket, I Googled her name and immediately her profile came up including which university she worked for and her fields of study. Pulling up her credentials I was thoroughly impressed. Admittedly, I didn't know much about what she'd been doing at the

convention or her field of study, but her education profile looked impressive to me.

“Hey fellas!” Cheers from my teammates made me lift my head to see several women with large tits and short skirts making their way up the stairs and into the VIP booth.

I didn't know any of them personally, but I had a good idea of who they were. Most would be Instagram models and “influencers,” who made their money from OnlyFans and sites like it. They had a following on their own without the influence of people like us, but scoring one of us would give them connections so that they could catapult themselves into contracts with modeling agencies who could get them legit couture fashion contracts for runway and magazines.

“Mr. Brandon Campbell, I love watching you play.” A pretty blonde one approached me and didn't hesitate in lowering herself onto my lap, wrapping her arms around my neck and pressing her body tight to mine. “I'm Ashley.”

Man oh man, I was going to need more alcohol.

Chapter 11

~ One month later ~

Taylor

Why did I always make myself ham and cheese sandwiches for lunch? I didn't even really care for them. It was such a boring choice but was an easy one. I really had to expand my horizons in that department. I had to in many departments in my life, it was one thing I learned from my brief stint with Brandon. I was having weekly massages and learning that I needed to take more time to enjoy my life and be proud of my body. I didn't have to be perfect.

But something else had been a consequence of my time with him. I missed him. And it was damned hard to get him out of my mind considering everywhere I turned there was news about him. It was like he was everywhere nowadays. With the Stanley Cup win came massive media attention.

Maybe he always was in the media eye, but I'd never taken notice of him until now. And I certainly didn't miss the pictures – recent pictures of him with women. He'd moved on, it pissed me off that I was still pining after him which he didn't so much as think about me.

Looking up at the analog clock mounted on the wall, I sighed. I had a class today. I was teaching for the first time in my career. This was going to be an interesting turn, but it would be good for me. It was taking me out of my comfort zone. If nothing else, my time with Brandon taught me that I

needed to push myself out of my comfort zone from time to time in order to grow as person.

I was just downing the last bite of my sandwich when a knock came at my door.

“Come in,” I yelled to the person on the other side. “It’ll have to be quick, I have a class starting soo-” My words caught in my throat as I stared at the monster of a man filling my doorway.

“I heard this is where I can find, Professor Haynes?”

Not sure if I was believing my eyes, I removed my glasses, blinked and replaced them on the bridge of my nose. He was still there.

“Umm. I’m Professor Haynes.” Wait, why did I answer him like that? He knew damned well who I was.

“Ahh, good.” He entered the room and closed the door behind him taking a seat across from me at the desk.

Had he always looked that good? I squirmed in my chair memories of our night together flashing in my mind. “Why are you here, Brandon? Congrats on winning by the way.”

“Thank you. You watched?”

Shrugging, I replied with a simple, “Maybe.”

I’d watched the rest of the series. I’d also watched the media and seen him with a slew of women. A couple of days after he’d been in bed with me he had a blonde bimbo on his lap looking extremely cozy in some nightclub. That photo stung the most.

Sure I'd missed him, but I also knew that I wasn't in the right circles to be with someone like him. I'd already accepted that we were like two ships crossing paths in the fog. Nothing more or less.

"Why are you here, Brandon?"

"I want to ask you out on a date."

Pushing my glasses up my nose, I stared at him for a moment. "From what I've noticed, if media is to be believed, that you've been on a number of dates recently. Why would you need to come all the way across the country to get one from me?"

He shrugged. "Nothing serious happened between them. Honestly, it was blown far out of proportion by my agent. I've been on a bit of a celibacy stint."

"Celibacy?" I laughed, a low, hollow sound, "The great womanizer Brandon Campbell. I have a hard time believing that."

"Whether you believe it or not is irrelevant. It's true."

"And why's that?" I wanted him to say it was because of me, but at the same time prayed that he wouldn't. This wouldn't work. Us living in different cities, him on the east coast me on the west, was only the first of many complications between us.

He frowned. "You did catch the part a moment ago where I said I wanted to take you on a date."

"I did." I ran a hand through my hair and groaned. "I just don't think it's a good idea. We had a good time. Why can't we just leave it at that."

I didn't want to get hurt. That's what it really boiled down to. In fact, up until now I'd been romanticizing our encounter, but having him sitting across my desk from me was making me angry.

"You left me a damned note, Brandon. You know what the bellboy said to me... He told me not to feel bad, that girls were left behind all the time. He thought I was a puck bunny! And then reminded me when check-out time was - on my own room!"

I could see the conflict in his eyes. He was going back and forth from feeling bad for how he left things and wanting to laugh, the tiny upward curve of his lips was a telltale sign of that.

"Look, Taylor. I truly am sorry for how all of that went down. It was a douche thing for me to do. The bus was leaving early, you were sound to sleep complete with snoring and I just didn't think there was any benefit to be had in disturbing you. For what it's worth, I have felt guilty for the way that I handled the situation."

I shouldn't have even brought that night up, because by bringing it up the anger within me increased. "You know, and just a couple of days later I'm seeing pictures plastered all over of you and some blonde bimbo!" Boy did I ever sound like a jealous girlfriend, but I didn't care.

This time he did laugh. "Oh wow. That's what this is all about? The wannabe Instagram model? Those girls are around all the time. There was nothing between us. I didn't take her home. I didn't have any interest in her at all, it was

just some pictures that someone took and flooded the internet with.”

Crossing my arms over my chest, I raised my brows at him. “Is that a fact?”

“I haven’t even gotten laid since you.” He made a crossing motion over his chest. “Scouts honor.”

“You were a scout?”

Hitting me with a cocky grin, he shrugged. “Maybe.”

He was such a liar. Groaning, I gave my head a shake, my eyes looking past him and to the clock on the wall. Shit! I was late. Standing abruptly, I began gathering my stuff for class. “Listen, I think you just need to forget about what happened between us. I have. Move on. Get laid. Do whatever you got to do, but this won’t work.”

“Taylor... Come on...”

Stuffing everything I needed for class in my leather crossbody bag, I rounded the desk and opened the door motioning for him to leave. “There’s nothing to discuss. I’ve got a class so if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got to go.”

Getting up from the chair, he stood his body towering over my as we walked past me. “See you soon, Professor.”

I watched him saunter down the hallway thinking to myself that that was far too easy. Once he turned the corner, I closed the door behind us and locked it. This was my first day teaching Biology 1001 and I was more nervous than I expected to be. I’d taught as part of my PhD requirement but hadn’t taught since.

Rushing down the hallways, I cursed under my breath. Being late for my first class was very unprofessional. It was all his fault. It made me feel slightly better to blame him for it.

Entering the room, I announced myself quickly apologizing for my tardiness. Reaching the podium at the front of the room, I began to unload my laptop and booted it up.

“Welcome to Biology 1001 everyone. If you’re not signed up for Bio 1001 then please see yourself out.” Looking up, I watched a couple people get up and make their way up the flight of stairs in the lecture theatre which held around 300 students. Most seats were taken, meaning I was going to have a hell of a time with this class. Luckily, I was only required to teach one.

“Okay people, I’m going to go through the attendance list. I know this is going to be tedious, it’ll only be for the first few classes. Then it’s up to you. Be here or not, I’m not your babysitter so I don’t care either way. I do highly suggest you make sure you keep up to date with tests and I will be having pop quizzes. There are no make-up tests. If you don’t show then it’s a 0. When I call your name shout out.”

Opening the student list, I was only several names down the list when the doors at the back of the room opened and an eruption of murmurs and voices made me pause.

“Excuse me. Sorry. I see a seat, just let me scoot on past you there.”

My heart stopped beating for a brief moment. I knew that voice.

You've got to be fucking kidding me, lifting my eyes from the computer screen I watched in wide-eyed horror as the massive frame of an NHL defenseman shimmied his way down the second row to a vacant seat.

I think that's Brandon Campbell.

Hey isn't that the hockey player?

Damn, he's hot. Wasn't he dating...

The entire class seemed to erupt with students chattering, some being bold enough to stop him and ask him questions. He seemed to relish in the attention, giving high-fives and accepting literal pats on the back.

Clearing my throat loudly I managed to gain most of the student's attention, including Brandon's. "Mr. Campbell, could I please see you up to the front of the class?"

More murmurs.

"Looks like I'm in trouble already, am I right?" he joked loudly, giving the guy who he was sitting next to a little nudge with his elbow before he stood and made his way back down the row and to the podium.

"What do you think you're doing," I hissed, my voice lowered so only he could hear.

Laughing, he thrust his hands into the pockets of his jeans, rocking back on his heels. "Trying to take Bio 1001. I met someone a month or so ago that really got me fired up for biology and I figured, why not take a summer class. Really sink my teeth into the material."

“You don’t go here! What kind of game are you playing?”

“I’m not sure what you’re talking about Professor Haynes. This is Bio 1001, isn’t it?” he cocked a brow up at me.

“Of course it is, but you shouldn’t be here. You need to be a student at this school, registered in this class. You just can’t wander in and disrupt my class like this.”

“Did you check the list?”

“List?”

“Yes, the registration. Had you checked it, you’d find my name listed. Registered and paid for. I’m a current student in good standing at this fine learning establishment.”

My eyes narrowed at him. He didn’t appear to be joking, but there’s no way he was serious. Looking down at the list, my eyes scanned the names coming to the C’s.

“I’ll be damned...”

Chuckling, he shrugged. “Looks like you’re stuck with me – again.”

Chapter 12

Brandon

The look on her face was well worth the effort and the strings I had to pull to get myself enrolled in her already filled-up class. Well, perhaps not me exactly, it was my agent who pulled the strings and called in the favors.

She looked up at me, past my shoulder at the other students who were murmuring to each other then back to me. “Meet me in my office after class,” she hissed through clenched teeth.

She looked pissed. Too bad for her. I went to a lot of effort to have a shot with her and wasn’t about to be deterred by a little bit of attitude, I’d weathered the storm of her anger before, I could do it again. In fact, it was kind of sexy seeing her all riled up.

“After class already professor. I’m honored.”

“I swear if you’re making a mockery of my classroom,” she growled through clenched teeth.

“I promise I’m not doing anything of the sort. I’m just looking for an education.”

She waved me off as if I were a troublesome child. “Just sit down and don’t be more of a disturbance than you’ve already been.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Leaning forward so my lips were just a few inches from her ear, I whispered. “I love this commanding

side of you. It's sexy." Straightening up, I gave her a wink before turning and causally strolling back to my seat.

~*~ TT ~*~

Taylor

Back at my office, sitting in my chair behind my desk, I opened the desk drawer and pulled out a bottle of painkillers. My head was reeling. What kind of crazy man does something like this? He just decided to take my class... What? To torture me?

He'd disrupted the class and it royally pissed me off. This was my first class since receiving my PhD and I didn't need him in it causing chaos.

A knock came at my door, disrupting my angry thoughts.

"Come in," I called out knowing who it was on the other side before it opened and revealed his large frame and smirking lips.

His beautiful kissable lips. Dammit!

Shake it off, I instructed myself.

"That was a great class, teacher. Can't wait until tomorrow's lesson."

"Why are you here, Brandon?"

He scratched at the stubble of his chin and he plunked himself down in the chair across from me. "I thought we'd

been over that already.”

“You’re exhausting.”

“You’re not the first one to tell me that.”

“Cut the crap. What’s the story?”

“Well, I’ve decided to retire and I thought it was time to go back to school. If you had taken a moment to check on your students academic records you’ll see that I already have a degree in Sociology.”

A sarcastic grin spread across my lips. “And you figured why not give biology a shot.”

Shooting me a lopsided grin, he shrugged. “I hear the teacher is hot.”

Laughing, I leaned back in my chair, crossing my arms over my chest. “She’s also incredibly strict and expects her students to take the class very seriously.”

“Even better. I like my teacher’s strict.”

Rolling my eyes at him, I gave my head a little shake, “Come on. Tell me why you’re here. Really, why are you here?”

“I’m not lying about going back to school, but I did have an ulterior motive for being here.”

Of course he did, I knew it.

“Which is…”

“You. But you know that already. I feel like we’re going around in circles at this point.” He made a little twirling

motion with his hand. “I hope you’re not this scattered in class, I hear there’s a student review at the end.”

And just like that, the heat rose to my cheeks in a way that they hadn’t since the last time we’d been together. I was both angry as old hell and flattered. How could I not be flattered? He could get a booty call from anyone. He went to a hell of a lot of effort to be in my class. What made me so special? It just seemed so surreal.

“We live on opposite ends of the country,” I protested feeling myself begin to waiver.

“Not anymore.”

Cocking my head to the side, I eyed him. What was he up to? “What do you mean?”

“Well, I’ve gotta say, I had to track you down and then there were arrangements to be made so it took some time.”

“Track down?”

“Yeah, we left things quite open without contact information so I had my manager do some digging and tracked you down here. Your LinkedIn profile was a big help as well.”

“So you want to move here?”

Laughing he threw his hands up in the air. “Believe it or not, I already did. Put a bid on the house and already signed the papers, movers are on the way, a fifteen-minute drive from campus. I thought it was time for a change.”

My smile faded as my eyes widened in shock. “Are you serious?” This man was crazy or fucking with me. Had to be.

“How else do I show you that I’m serious about you and want to start something serious? I didn’t figure you’d go for me doing this half-assed.”

“I don’t know... Call or text.”

“Nah, this is the best choice. Don’t worry, I didn’t sell my other house back in Boston and I’m not exactly poor, it’s not that big of a deal.”

I was betting the house he bought was twice the size of mine. Go big or go home seemed to be the Brandon Campbell way. “You did that, just to what? Date me?”

“Is that crazy?” he asked, his expression telling me he knew he was talking crazy.

“Little bit, yeah...”

His smile widened. “And here I was thinking it was showing you just how much I was willing to sacrifice to be with you.”

“I don’t know if I should be flattered beyond anything I’ve ever felt before or scared that you might be psycho.”

“There’s only one way to find out.”

“Which is?”

“Go out with me. Tonight.” His expression turned serious as he leaned forward. “Look, I know it sounds insane, but those few days we were roomed together changed my outlook on a number of things. My views and goals were already beginning to change, but meeting you really pushed my agenda forward. You’re the woman I want and need. I refuse to accept anything less.”

I was at a loss, my mind was racing in a million different directions. “I’ve had lots to think about myself.”

“I’m not proposing marriage or asking for you to have my babies. But I’m suggesting we get to know each other better. And you never know. Maybe you might just find that you like me a little.”

I already did like him – a lot.

I already knew what my answer was going to be. Just seeing him in front of me was making my heart leap with joy. But it didn’t hurt to let him sweat just a little. “Maybe I’m not looking for any type of relationship. In fact, I haven’t thought of you at all.”

Clucking his tongue off the roof of his mouth, he laughed. “Liar.”

Tilting my chin up, I kept my gaze locked onto his. “Prove it.”

He was out of the chair and around the desk so quickly, I barely had a chance to register in my head what was going on. In seconds he had me pulled into his arms and lowering his head, his lips ghosting mine, making my body yearn for him as wantonly as the night we’d spent together.

Grabbing my thighs, he hoisted me up out of the chair and onto his hips. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I allowed myself to indulge in him – just a moment. I’d been thinking about him so much for so long.

“Brandon.” Mustering up much inner strength as I had left in me, I pushed at his chest and squirmed out of his grasp,

scampering around the desk and putting as much space between us as possible. “This isn’t a game.”

“Never said it was.” He didn’t pursue me, instead, he brazenly flopped himself down into my chair.

“Well, you can’t be in my class and be with me romantically. It’s one or the other.”

“Why? No one has to know.” He gave me a wink that infuriated me. This wasn’t a game, this was my life – my career. Typical Brandon Campbell taking nothing seriously.

Planting my fists on my hips, I shook my head. “I’d know. And if anyone found out, I’d lose my job. This is my life, Brandon. You just can’t come in and mess with it like this.”

His smile faded. “I apologize, Taylor. It wasn’t my intention to make things complicated.”

Running my tongue along my lower lip, I was at odds with myself. If he was serious about taking the class then I didn’t want to stand in his way. “Are you seriously interested in the class?”

“I am. My plan was to make a grand gesture so you knew I was serious, but I’m not completely frivolous. I do want to learn. And I am in a new stage in my life.”

“Then take the class. We just can’t happen. That’s all.” My heart sunk. I didn’t want to do the right thing, but if he wanted to move on to a new phase in his life then I didn’t want to be the one to stand in his way. “If after the class is done you want to continue things – then... great. We can talk then. It’s

only a couple of months. But until then, we must remain professional.”

Grasping the arms of the chair, he pushed himself out of the chair. “Then I guess that means I’ll be seeing you in class tomorrow, Miss Teacher...” His shoulder brushed mine causing me to inhale sharply. This was painful. I wanted to give in, we could keep it on the down low and hope no one found out. But I knew I couldn’t take that risk, I’d worked too hard to risk losing it now. If he really wanted to be with me then he’d wait a couple more months.

Chapter 13

Brandon

That didn't go as well as I'd hoped. She had a point. I couldn't risk her job no matter how much I wanted to be with her. She'd worked too hard and it was one of the things that I admired about her.

I wasn't the most patient of men, but it had been a couple of months already and the saying did go what's worth having is worth waiting for. She was one of the few things in my life that was worth it.

Making my way in the direction of the cafeteria, I stopped at the entryway and looked in at the crowded dining room. There were people of varying ages, but the vast majority was fifteen years my junior. Was going back to school a stupid choice? It made me feel like an old man starting back to school after all these years.

Well, I can't play hockey forever. Realistically, I had enough money squirreled away that I'd never have to work again. Although, I knew I'd never be the kind of person who would fill their days with playing golf with the rest of the retired athletes, doing the occasional personal appearance or commercial.

Entering the cafeteria, I made my way to the sub shop and grabbed myself a steak and cheese sandwich before weaving my way through the crowd of people intent on finding a quiet corner.

“Brandon! Brandon Campbell,” a male voice called out to me.

Turning towards the sound of the voice, I noticed a long table with a dozen or so men sitting at it. Frat boys. I knew it straight away. The one that had called to me, approached me extending his hand. “Hey, I’m Adam Wallace.”

I gave the younger man a quick once over. He was just a few inches shorter than my 6’4 with a lean physique. Accepting his hand, I smiled. “Hey, you follow hockey I take it.”

“Yeah, you’re a legend man. Congrats on the win.” Giving my hand several vigorous pumps, he released it.

“Thanks. Appreciate it.”

“Listen, I’m the president of the frat here on campus. Would you like to sit with us and have a chat? We throw the best parties and have the best booze. Don’t get me started on the chicks.”

I groaned inwardly. I really didn’t want to get involved with a bunch of frat boys. I’d done the whole frat stuff when I was in college, but the course could get tough and surely a frat “brother” would assist me. I needed to prove to Taylor that I wasn’t just fucking around so she’d take me seriously and not see me as just some dumb hockey player.

After quickly going through the pros and cons of getting involved with the group, I decided there may be more benefit than downside to joining him. “Yeah, sure.”

“Great.” He gave me a pat on the shoulder before guiding me toward the table. “Pledging isn’t until September,

but considering who you are, if you're interested then we can waive all that."

"That's gracious of you. I'm not sure if a frat is for me."

"What do you need? We can get you anything. The world will be your oyster."

I grinned, cocking a brow at him. "It already is, or you wouldn't have approached me."

He laughed. "That's fair. Then let me pitch to you. Come to one of our parties. Get to know everyone."

Reaching the table, one of the frat brothers stood and gave me his spot which had been next to Adam finding a spot towards the other end of the table. Seated, I took a bite from the sandwich which was mediocre at best, and waited for him to pitch me. I'd done the whole frat thing, I just wasn't interested in doing it all a second time, but...

He started rambling. Parties. Chicks. Booze. He wasn't offering me anything I didn't already have. It wasn't until he mentioned that one of the frat members had one of the highest GPA's in the school and was also a bio major that my interest became peaked. Now that could be of interest to me.

"Hold up, so this Gregory Wainwright, he helps with tutoring? I just need to ask?"

Adam shrugged. "Yeah, we stick together. Nothing is impossible when you're part of our organization. So, what do you think? Will you come this weekend? I can text you the details if you'd like to exchange numbers. Introduce you to our resident genius."

Looking up, I noticed Taylor passing by the cafeteria. I needed to impress her and maybe ranking up top grades in her class would gain her attention. It was decided then. I could handle a few douchebags and tacky parties if it meant my end goal was getting her.

“Yeah, thanks. I think I could swing by.”

As if luck was the furthest thing from on my side, I happened to look up towards the entryway to see Taylor walk in. As if sensing my eyes on her, her gaze shifted in my direction and landed on me immediately. I could see her scanning the men at the table I was at. After a moment, a smirk turned up the corners of her lips before turning from me and making her way to the sandwich line-up.

Fuck. Of course, she'd see me with the frat douches. I knew what she was thinking. I was just here for pussy and partying, I was just like the guys she'd hated growing up. In all fairness, I hadn't shown her a hell of a lot more than that. This made proving her wrong even more important – if not for her than for me.

~*~ TT ~*~

Taylor

The final kernels in the bag popped as I opened the door to the microwave and pulled out the popcorn my face being assaulted by steam and the intense smell of butter. Tonight was about me and relaxation. It had been a hell of a week and there was a part of me that felt I was in over my

head with this whole teaching thing. Brandon in my class only made things worse. I wasn't a people person, I was an introvert to the very core of my soul, so teaching the class wasn't just exhausting on an intellectual level, but on an emotional one as well.

Pouring the bag of steaming popcorn into a bowl, I made my way to the sofa where I already had Netflix up, excited to get begin watching a new dating reality show. Why I liked it, I had no idea. Beautiful, superficial people meeting other beautiful superficial people all attempting to increase their social media influence, it was hardly ground-breaking stuff, it was mind-numbing if anything, but sometimes you just needed to allow your mind to take in rubbish in order to decompress.

Pressing play on the remote, I had just gotten myself comfortable on the sofa when the doorbell rang. My entire body froze and I sunk down into the sofa a couple of inches. Lounging around in a pair of flannel Freddy Krueger pajamas, I wasn't exactly dressed for visitors.

The doorbell rang again.

Grabbing my phone, I brought the screen up to eye level and looked at the person on the other side of the door through the camera and then groaned as my heart began to race.

How in the hell did he find me?

But I knew.

This was the great Brandon Campbell. He probably winked at one of the girls at the registration office and their

panties practically melted as they retrieved my information for him. Did that man always get everything he wanted? It was kind of disgusting.

The doorbell rang again waking my fawn-colored French bulldog who leaped from her bed and made a mad dash for the front door barking her face off.

“Thanks, Zoey, I already know he’s there,” I grumbled under my breath as I placed the popcorn on the glass coffee table and made my way to the door. “The way you’re barking the entire neighborhood knows he’s here.”

Grasping the door handle, I took a deep breath in before slowly releasing it as the 4th round of knocks began. Pulling the door open, I forced myself to smile up at him. “Brandon, ummm, what are you doing here?”

“I figured I’d stop by for a little visit. Being neighborly and all.”

“Huh?” My brow creased as I looked down seeing the pie that he had in his hands. How had I missed the pie? Probably because he was fucking hot, with a black t-shirt stretching across his thick chest and lean torso and the amused twinkle in his eyes. My eyes had been too busy drinking in how beautiful he was.

Dammit. I hated that he had such an effect on me.

My eyes narrowed at him. “What do you mean neighborly?”

“Yeah, I told you I bought a place near campus.”

“Yeah.” Looking past him to my driveway I saw my little car, but no other vehicle beside it. “How’d you get here? You really shouldn’t have told the Uber to leave since you aren’t staying.”

“I walked.”

My gaze shifted back to him, looking up into his eyes. The amused gleam in his eyes intensified like he had a little secret that he was dying to let me in on. “Walked from where?” My breath caught in my throat for a moment as my eyes scanned the road again and focused on a house across the street a couple of homes down. Where there was once a for sale sign on the front lawn there was now a big, bold red sold sticker pasted across the listing.

No... Oh no.

We were on a quiet street in a mature neighborhood which was the home of mostly middle-class homes. The house with the sold sign was a bungalow, a perfect starter home. This was not the type of home I’d ever envision him living in.

He was fucking with me. He had to be.

But then he confirmed my worst nightmare. Okay, perhaps not the worst of nightmares, but it was pretty damned high up on the list.

“Yup that’s her there. I wasn’t sure how long I’d be staying and it’s just me, not like I’m planning on hosting any wild parties or anything. It’s a bit of a fixer-upper, but I have time on my hands. At least I hope I will, I hear my bio teacher can be pretty tough.” He gave me a quick look up and down.

“Nice PJs by the way. I thought you were a naked kind of girl though.”

“Hell no!” Grabbing the door, I began closing it on his smug face. There was no way in hell I was going to deal with him tonight. This was just way too much to process.

Chapter 14

Brandon

If she thought she was going to get away as easily as slamming a door in my face then she had another thing coming. Moving quickly, I stuck my foot out blocking the door from closing. It may have been a slightly aggressive move, when she clearly wasn't interested in speaking to me, but I wasn't about to take no for an answer.

“Look, Taylor.” Giving the door a shove with my shoulder I pushed it back in. “I think we should really talk.”

“There's nothing to talk about. You may be my student and I can't do a damned thing about it and we may be neighbors – again it is out of my control, but the one thing I do have control over is letting you in,” she hissed, her eyes flashing with anger.

“Look, if you really want me to leave and drop your class then I will.”

There seemed to be a flash of something in her eyes, disappointment? I wasn't sure.

“That would be great, I'd appreciate it.”

Chuckling, I shrugged. “I'm just fucking with you. I'm not dropping the class and I'm not moving either. You're stuck with me whether you like it or not. Because we both know that's not what you really want.”

I causally leaned my shoulder against the doorframe just in case she got another bright idea to close it on me again. “And I know you’d never fail me or give me an undeserved bad grade as a way to deter me, because you,” I reach out and tapped her on the tip of her nose, “Are a good person who always does the right thing.”

Crossing her arms over her chest, I heard a little growl-like grumble come from her. “I won’t need to, I’m sure you’ll get bored of the class or be too busy partying with your new frat bro friends to spend much time keeping up with classwork. This is some sort of game you’re playing, once the thrill is gone then you’ll be on your way to make some other poor woman’s life miserable.”

“Look, I brought you a pie. The least you could do is be neighborly and invite me in for a slice.” Pushing myself off of the doorframe, I made my way into the house banking on her caving and allowing me a little bit of time. At the hotel it took her some time to cave and realize that she enjoyed my company, she’d cave again. I just needed to be persistent and prove to her that this wasn’t some passing phase.

I could feel her eyes burning into my back as she no doubt tried to decide whether to give in or try to force me out. The little dog who had greeted me at the door trotted along behind me.

“This is breaking and entering you know.”

The layout of her home was similar to mine. The front door led into an open-concept home. First came the living room that led into a dining room and kitchen. In her living

room there were a couple of whiteboards with some sort of equations on it; looked like gibberish to me.

Everything about her home was neat and orderly. I couldn't spot a speck of dust anywhere. The only way I could maintain a home like this was with a cleaning lady, speaking of which, one happened to be starting work for me Monday. The movers had left a fair mess for me to clean up.

I didn't see anything in the house that would give me any hints on who she was beyond what I already knew. It felt very sterile.

"What's the problem?" she asked closing the door and proceeding to follow me into the kitchen.

I looked around, motioning to the stainless steel appliances without a smudge or mark on them. "Your house."

"What about it?" Leaning back against the gray and white marble countertop, she crossed her arms over her chest, her little dog scampering over to sit at her feet.

"There's no..." How did I word my thoughts without offending her?

"No what?" Planting her hands on her hips she shot me an annoyed glare.

"No personality. I'd think I was stepping into the pages of some home décor magazine. Your dog- "

"Zoey," she offered.

"Zoey... Is the only thing I see that gives me any indication that someone lives here. Well, that and the whiteboard with all the hieroglyphics on it."

A smile broke the pissed-off expression she was wearing up until this point. “For your information, if you’re serious about taking biology in a few years you’ll understand what is on that board and I don’t have a lot of time for hobbies. I like a clean, disinfected, organized space. It helps me keep my head clear for my work.”

“I can respect that. I need a clear mind before games, I guess I just go about it a different way.” Turning from her I looked at the row of grey cupboards across the wall. “Which one has plates?”

“You’re not staying. Just one piece of pie and what’s it. Then you’re out of here buddy.”

Grinning, I nodded. “That’s all I ask. Neighbor to neighbor.” Baby steps. I’d take what I could get. Eat some dessert and then come up with an excuse to see her tomorrow...

~*~ TT ~*~

Taylor

I hated that Brandon felt he could just barge into my life like he had. A part of me felt flattered. He could have gone to college anywhere. He could have lived anywhere, but he’d chosen me and was being about as grand as he could get in demonstrating how much he wanted me. At least that’s how it felt, but when I looked at it more realistically, the house he bought he probably paid cash outright so there wouldn’t be interest. Probably got a discount for paying in cash. If he

decided to move on he'd make a profit, being he was who he was, the right buyer would pay over asking just to say they lived in the former home of the great Brandon Campbell. This could just be another game for him. I wasn't the usual bimbo that fell over themselves for him and so he needed to win me over. The two sides of my thinking were at odds with each other wrecking havoc on a good night's sleep.

By the time 7am rolled around I was done attempting to get a good night's sleep. I'd have to make the lost sleep up over the rest of the weekend. Throwing the blankets off of myself, I pulled on a pair of leggings and a tank top, not bothering with a bra. Weekends were the time I allowed the girls to run wild, besides, Zoey was beginning to whine that she needed out to pee.

Making my way to the kitchen, I opened the back door to allow her out, stepping into the sunshine myself. The beauty with it being this early in the morning was that there was still the fresh scent of the dewdrops in the air. Tilting my face upwards I smiled as the sunshine beat down upon me inhaling deeply and allowing the scent of the assorted flowers to overwhelm me and put me into an instant state of bliss.

Brandon had been critical of my lack of hobbies and personality around the house. He hadn't seen the garden I had out back. My hobby was gardening. My backyard was quite large, part of the benefit of buying a house in a mature neighborhood before lot size became an issue and backyards became tiny. I had my own herb and vegetable garden to my immediate right. Fruit trees and bushes in the back and the remainder of the lot were flowers, the more fragrant the flower the better in my mind.

My moment of bliss was interrupted by the loud grinding and banging that came from someone who was doing construction. Frowning, I opened my eyes and looked around, not that I could see anything over the 6-foot-high fence. Besides, the sound was definitely coming from the front of my house.

Why did I have a suspicion of who was behind the noise?

Leaving Zoey to do her business and search for a squirrel to chase even though she was never able to catch one, I made my way through the house and out the front door. Stepping out onto the concrete of the walkway, I looked over at Brandon's new home.

Sure enough, there was a small crew of six men and a couple of work trucks parked in front, one a landscaper and the other some type of construction. Some men were working on the hedges and lawn while the others were lugging lumber and other various building supplies around back.

I didn't see him though.

"Taylor!" Looking to my left, I watched as my neighbor Janine made her way over to me. She looked especially good today. A mother of two teenage boys she was a lover of jogging pants and t-shirts with her hair normally in a messy bun. Today, however, she's put on black leggings and a form-fitting, low-cut blue shirt. She even had make-up and large silver loop earrings dangling from her ears.

"Going somewhere? You look good," I commented as she reached my side.

“Nah.” Waving a dismissive hand at me she nodded towards the house across from hers. “We have a new neighbor.”

“You don’t say.” It took everything in me to not roll my eyes. She’d tell me all about it without me even asking, she loved neighborhood gossip.

“Yeah, and ohmygod, he’s fucking hot. The boys were telling me he’s some sort of athlete or something. Hockey I think they said. All I can say is that man can fire his puck in my net any day of the week.”

“Brandon Campbell.”

“What?”

“That’s his name. His name is Brandon Campbell.”

“How do- ” she cut herself off as her eyes shifted back to his front yard and then to the front door as it opened and he stepped out, shirtless with a pair of grey jogging pants riding low on his hips. “And he’s wearing grey jogging pants.” Balling her hand into a fist she bit down on her fist for dramatic purposes. “What is it about men in grey jogging pants...”

Oh, brother. This time I did roll my eyes. Not like she’d see it, her stare was fixated on him.

He spoke to one of the workers who approached, nodded and then looked up, directly at me. As our gazes locked I couldn’t help but feel a little something, a faint flutter in my stomach. I wasn’t blind, he was indeed hot and the way that he was looking at me reminded me of our night together.

My pussy clenched and my breath momentarily caught in my throat.

Janine gave me a little nudge with her elbow, “Ohmygod, he’s looking at me.” She glanced at me quickly, “Do I look good?”

“You look great,” I assured her, not having the heart to correct her and tell her who he was really staring at.

He spoke to one of the lawn guys before looking back to us, giving us a friendly wave and then began making his way over. Of course, he was coming over here, we were standing here drooling like a couple of lovestruck fools. He ran a hand through his hair as he crossed the road and approached us.

“Good morning, ladies.” He looked to Janine and flashed her a smile before shifting his attention to me. “Did you sleep well, Taylor?”

Planting my hands on my hips, I forced myself to smile. “Like a baby.”

“That’s great.”

“Excuse me, do you two know each other?”

Looking over at Janine, I sighed as I nodded. “Yeah... He’s- ”

“I’m in her bio class,” he offered before I could try and decide how to tackle the question. Extending his hand to her, he gave it a brief shake. “I’m Brandon Campbell.” Glancing over at me he gave me a wink before turning his attention back to her. “And who might you be? My neighbor, I assume?”

She smiled, her face flushing. “I’m Janine Applewood.” She motioned to her house, which was pretty much a replica of ours. “I live right there with my two boys – who love you by the way.”

“No way!” he chuckled, grinning. “I love meeting young hockey fans. If they ever have questions or want to play some road hockey, or chat about what it takes to get involved in the sport then send them on over. I’d be happy to help in any way that I can.”

“I will. Thank you!”

She was practically gushing. I imagine if he asked her to drop to her knees and suck his dick then and there, she wouldn’t hesitate in doing it.

You sucked his dick, a voice in the back of my mind reminded me.

Touché.

The difference was that I didn’t fall all over him like she was doing. I hated when women acted like she was. He was sexy and a hockey player, big deal. There were tons of hot guys that played sports.

“I’m doing a bunch of renovations. I love having a nice garden, but alas the people who lived there before me trashed the backyard. I’ve got people working back there attempting to fix it.”

“You should just ask Taylor to give you a hand. She’s got an amazing garden out back.” She gave me a little nudge in the ribs with her elbow. “She’s the queen of the green thumbs.”

Don't do me any favors, I groaned to myself.

“Well, it's no- ”

“Oh come on. People spend tens of thousands of dollars in order to achieve what you've done. Taylor is amazing. You have to see it to believe it.”

Well, fuck...

“I doubt that Brandon would be interested in seeing my garden. I'm sure he can afford to hire professionals and doesn't need me giving him a hand.”

“No! I'd love to see it,” he assured us. He panned me with a stare that made my insides do little flip-flops. “You'll show me your garden... Won't you?”

Closing my eyes, I slowly counted down from ten. I didn't miss the little garden innuendo. I knew Janine meant well and there was really nothing I could do or say right now that wouldn't raise a brow from her other than nodding and agreeing. “Of course, I'd love to.”

“Great, I've got some things to do. I'll talk to you later Taylor.” She caught my gaze, her eyes shimmering with pride thinking she'd done me a favor.

“Fantastic. Let's check it out.” Stepping forward he slipped an arm over my shoulders and directed me towards the fence gate that led into the backyard. “I assume this is the way?”

Chapter 15

Brandon

I had no idea why she kept trying to fight the attraction between us, teacher or not we would figure something out so she didn't get fired. I really hoped she didn't think I was going to give up, I was many things, but a quitter wasn't one of those things. I saw the look in her eyes when she looked at me. If I was a better man, perhaps I'd accept her reasoning and leave her be, but I'd come accustomed to getting what I wanted and that just happened to be her.

The last thing I wanted to do was jeopardize her job, but I wasn't going to let her use it as an excuse to push me away. I'd behave myself – at school – but all bets were off when we were in the privacy of our own homes.

The fragrance from the garden greeted my nose before we entered through the gates. Opening the gate, she motioned for me to enter before her. Brushing past her, I chuckled to myself upon hearing her sharp intake of breath.

As promised the garden was spectacular. In fact, it was much better than anything I'd ever paid for. "You know, if you ever decide that science isn't for you, you'd make a fantastic landscaper." The focal point of the backyard was the white gazebo with a wicker rocker loveseat and two matching rocker chairs. Her dog which I had found out the previous evening was named Zoey, lay snoozing in the sunshine on her own little white wicker bed.

“Oh, I’m not so sure about that. It’s just a hobby. It keeps my hands busy while my mind is focused on more important work.”

Looking down at her, I smiled. She had a faint red glow to her cheeks, as she stared out onto the backyard with pride in her gaze. I knew there had to be something beyond science that brought her joy.

We walked deeper into the gardens, my eyes drinking in everything she’d achieved. Hell, if there was a zombie apocalypse she’d be all set. There were fruit and vegetables growing in separate sections of the garden waiting to be harvested with many more to get to that point. It was truly amazing.

“What do you do with all the food you’re growing? Surely you can’t eat it all yourself?”

“I don’t.” She sat down on the love seat so I followed her lead sitting down next to her. “I harvest and preserve what I feel I’ll need. The rest goes to my neighbor, who you’ve already met. Her boys eat a ton of food, and then if there is still some leftover it’s donated to the local food bank. They don’t get much in the way of fresh foods so I help when I can.”

The woman kept getting better and better the more I learned about her. I sure as fuck wasn’t good enough for her, although that wasn’t going to stop me from wanting her. If anything, it would push me to want to get even closer to her – to prove to her that I was worthy of her affection.

She frowned. “What? You’re looking at me weird. It’s kinda creepy.”

“I was wondering if there was anything that you’re not fantastic at.”

The rosiness of her cheeks deepened. “Well, I can’t ice skate, so there’s that. I’m hardly a master at everything. Everyone has something they excel at.”

“All right. Let me rephrase, is there anything you’ve set out to do that you haven’t been able to achieve?”

“There’s a list, it’s small, but it’s there.” She cocked her head to the side and looked up at me grinning. “Why did you do all this?”

“What do you mean?” I knew what she meant.

“Just cut the shit. Why did you come here and enroll in school? Hell, you even bought a damned house across from me... I’d like to pin it on you being out of your mind, but I don’t think that’s entirely it. But... Why?”

“No bullshit?” I cocked a brow at her.

“Yeah. No bullshit. It doesn’t make sense to me.”

With a loud sigh, I leaned back in the seat making it rock softly back and forth under us. “I haven’t lied to you. I’m ready for a change. I’m thirty-six. I’m well beyond the age of retirement. Parts of my body ache on the daily that I never knew existed. I guess I was being stubborn and holding onto the career, but it was well overdue. I see young men fifteen years younger come on the scene and they can skate circles around this guy.” I hooked my thumb toward myself. “I’m old and I need to move on. I just don’t know where that is supposed to take me.”

“So it took you to a college town to live in a bungalow?” she teased.

I chuckled. “Yeah, that seems to be the case. I know you’re going to think this is stupid, but I’m fairly superstitious – most athletes are. And I feel like things happen for a reason. After I left the hotel, my mind kept going back to you and our brief time together. What are the chances of us being booked into the same room at a point in my life where I was beginning to question what was next in my life.”

“So, I’m just your mid-life crisis,” I could hear the teasing in her tone, but the comment struck a chord with me.

“That might be part of it. It’s coming a little early for most people, but long past due for someone like me.”

“I don’t want to be the thing that you use to get through this crisis of yours. I’m not a toy or tool to be used, Brandon.”

It hurt that she’d think that way, but I could understand where she was coming from. I was never the best at articulating what I was thinking and feeling and it was evident that I wasn’t doing an adequate job currently.

Cupping her chin in my hand, I tilted her face upwards so that her gaze locked with mine. “That’s not what you are, not in the least. What you are is beautiful, and intelligent, and far beyond my league, but I can’t help but take a shot.” Giving her a lopsided grin, I shrugged. “Can you blame me for shooting for the stars?”

Her expression softened. “Don’t say stuff just to win me over.”

“I wouldn’t, not with you. You’re too smart, you’d see through my bullshit anyhow.”

“People do silly things and ignore glaring red flags when they care about someone.”

“You mean like quit their jobs, enroll in a course they’ll probably fail, and buy a house just to be close to a girl?”

Laughing, she brushed a lock of crimson hair from her eyes and nodded. Damn, I loved how wild and vibrant her hair was. It was apparent that she’d just gotten up since the curls were still unruly. “Yeah, that’s exactly what I’m talking about.”

I could kiss her right now and she’d welcome it. I could see it in her eyes and knew that she’d respond in a way that would have us both naked and in her bedroom. She may be an exceptional woman, but she was still a woman and I knew the look that was in her eyes. I wanted to be with her. I craved the feel of her pussy wrapped around my dick, but I wanted something more now. I wanted her to have no doubts about my intentions. So I knew what I had to do.

~*~ TT ~*~

Taylor

I held my breath waiting for the kiss to come. I could see the longing in his eyes and I wanted it. His words had been so honest, he’d laid himself bare and it had broken through the little resolve that I had left in me. Fighting what was going on

between us was futile. I wanted him as much as he wanted me and I was sick of denying myself the pleasure that I knew he had to offer me.

But it didn't come.

“Brandon?” I asked, my brow creasing.

“I think I should be getting back, the workers are probably wondering where I'd gone off to. They've probably gotten everything fucked up by now.”

“Oh, yes.” The faint sound of hammering and voices in the background gained my attention. “Of course. I didn't... I mean- ”

Placing his hands on his knees, he pushed himself off the swing and to his feet.

Craning my neck, I looked up at him. From this position, his size felt even more imposing. The sun seemed to glisten off his shoulders and back, accenting every contour of muscle.

He extended his hand to me, helping me rise to my feet.

“Thank you for showing me the gardens.”

“My pleasure.”

He cocked his head to the side and grinned. “Was it really?”

I nodded. Straightening my back and squaring my shoulders, I cleared my throat choosing to ignore his comment. “So, I guess this means I'll be seeing you in class Monday?”

You've already read the first couple of chapters I presume." I suspected he didn't.

The smile he gave me told me all I needed to know. "Don't worry, I'll be there willing and ready to absorb all the knowledge you provide to me."

"I bet." I began walking towards the exit, with Brandon at my side. Somewhere along the line Zoey had woken up and was now trailing behind us, her soft snorts alerting us to her presence.

Classy Zoey, real classy.

With a hand on the top of the gate, Brandon turned back to me his eyes giving me a very thorough once over. "Now, if you ever need anything you know where to find me."

"Believe it or not, I've been able to manage on my own well before you decided to move in across the street."

He took a step towards me so our bodies were a mere foot apart. I could practically feel the heat radiating from his body. My breath hitched in my throat as he hooked his index finger under my chin staring down into my eyes.

He leaned in. God, he was going to kiss me and I longed for it. Closing my eyes I waited for it.

Suddenly, his touch was gone and I heard the soft squeak of the hinges as he opened the gate and closed it behind him.

What the fuck? My eyes sprang open and I peered upon the backside of the gate. He was long gone. The bastard! I knew the game he was playing, he intended on getting me

riled up, my body craving his touch and then disappeared making me long for him.

He was such a bastard.

Yet, despite my annoyance, I could feel the side smile on my lips as a warmth filled my heart.

Chapter 16

Taylor

I really shouldn't. Bad things happened when I drank. Last time I drank I ended up in the arms and the bed of my now new neighbor. But I needed to take the edge off. Between his visit last night and then our little heart-to-heart in the gardens this morning my thoughts had been consumed with him and how good it felt to be close to him. I'd even gone as far as to daydream of what life would be like if we got together and got married; kids, house. All that sappy jazz girls dreamed of when they were little.

The thoughts were insane and weren't at all rooted in reality, but I couldn't stop the thoughts. But maybe...

Grabbing the bottle of wine I'd bought for myself as a gift for landing the job at the university but never did drink, I popped the cork and took a drink straight from the bottle. This should take the edge off. I'd have some wine, and a nice warm aromatherapy bath and then all my worries would go away as I indulged in a nice trashy romance book.

Stripping down and leaving a trail of clothing behind me, I took another drink from the bottle as I entered the bathroom. Placing the bottle on the bathroom counter, I turned on the water, adjusting the temperature until satisfactory, and then sprinkled some bath salts and bubble bath under the rapid stream of warm water.

The rose scent of the bubble bath and salts rose up, filling the bathroom with the blissful aroma. Placing the bottle

on the shelf next to the tub, I stepped into the water, the warmth of the water already beginning to soothe me. Sinking down into the water, I sighed. Yes, this was going to do the trick.

Sinking into the water, I took another drink, allowing the water to cover me nearly up to my chin. When I bought the house my first order of business had been to replace the shallow tub with a deep one so I could spend a few hours blissfully floating on the water if I chose to. Occasionally I'd indulge in the sensory deprivation tanks and I'd come out feeling like a new woman. There was no tank here, so this would have to do.

Opening the book to the place I'd left off a few days ago, I began to read. There was one problem, however, the hero kept reminding me of Brandon. The love scenes only made my mind think back to our times together and how good it felt being in his arms and having him deep within me.

After an hour of attempting to rid my mind of him all that I managed to do was become halfway drunk and turn the skin on my fingers and toes into shrunken raisins. Tossing my novel onto the little bathroom table, I rose from the water and wrapped a towel around myself.

So much for that. The fact that he had interrupted what was supposed to be a soothing moment infuriated me. Who in the fuck did he think he was? How did he think this was going to go down? He was disrupting my life. But it was Brandon Campbell, the great hockey star who could get anything he wanted.

My anger increased as I made my way into the bedroom. I needed to have a chat with him. Pulling on a pair of Batman pajama bottoms and a matching Bat signal t-shirt over my bare breast, I stormed out of my bedroom in a fury.

Not bothering to put on a pair of shoes, I left the house, closing the door before Zoey could exit with me, and marched across the yard. The road had been freshly paved so was soft under my bare feet. The cobblestone walking path from the road to his front door however was an entirely different story, making me wince with each step as the sharp points of the rocks jabbed into the bottoms of my feet.

At his front door I didn't hesitate to raise my hand and rap insistently on the front door until it was flung open and before me wearing only a pair of plaid pajama bottoms which hung low on my hips was Brandon.

My breath hitched in my throat as my eyes slowly scanned his body, all the way down to his bare feet and then back up again. Damn, the man's body was like that of a god with scars of various sizes littered about his body. During our night together I hadn't noticed just how many scars he had.

I attempted to force down the desire that I was beginning to feel inside. I wasn't here to get laid. I was here to give him a piece of my mind – wasn't I? That had been the idea, but as I stood before him, in my slightly tipsy state all that my body wanted to do was get a replay of how it felt to be pressed up against him. To feel his hard cock against my pussy.

He said something. His lips were moving, but I couldn't seem to focus on his words. Clearing my throat, I

looked up into his eyes. “Brandon, I’m here...”

“Why?” he grinned, a brow lifting. “Why are you here on my doorstep at midnight in Batman pajamas?”

Fuck it! I was tired of fighting it. One last time. One time and then I’d put this craziness of Brandon Campbell behind me. “I need some stress relief,” I gasped stepping into him.

I don’t know if I kissed him or if he kissed me at that moment. My mind went hazy as I leaned into him craving the taste of his lips on mine. Pressing my body tight to his, I slipped my arms up his chest and laced my fingers behind his neck.

He felt so good. So familiar, the smell of his aftershave pulling me in, despite being apart for the past couple of months. Grabbing my thighs he lifted me up and into his arms, settling me onto his hips as he took me inside, closing the door behind us.

~*~ TT ~*~

Brandon

I was lost the moment that she knocked on my door. As I closed the door with my heel, my tongue dueling with hers, I inhaled the scent of her hair; roses. She smelt so damned good. The smell brought on such sweet memories.

She tightened her legs around my waist, rubbing her pussy against my rapidly growing erection, driving me to near

insanity from the need I was feeling for her. Reaching the living room we fell onto the overstuffed sofa that was delivered this morning, my body covering hers.

Bracing my weight with a hand on either side of her head, my body between her legs, my lips left hers to slowly travel their way down the side of her neck. She moaned softly. While one hand remained on my back, fingers digging into the flesh, her other traveled down my chest and stomach before slipping under my pajama bottoms to grasp my rigid dick.

The moment her soft, dainty hand wrapped around my dick, I nearly came. I'd been craving her touch for so fucking long. I hadn't lied to her, I hadn't had sex with anyone since her and my cock was getting tired of my own rough hands.

"Jesus, Taylor," I groaned as I began to rock my hips, back and forth fucking her satiny soft hand. But her hand wasn't what my dick ultimately wanted, I needed to feel her naked body against mine.

Sitting back on my knees, I took a moment to look down at her. Her green eyes were burning with desire, her chest heaving, her nipples pressing against the thin cotton top. Taking her free hand, attempting to ignore the sensations she was creating within me from her hand stroking my cock, I pulled her up into a seated position.

She didn't need prompting. Releasing my dick, she lifted her arms up, a devilish grin of her lips that made my breath hitch. Grabbing the bottom of her shirt, I pulled it up and over her head tossing the garment to the floor.

Her tits were amazing, with large pink nipples that were already tight nubs for me. Cupping them in my hands,

they fit perfectly, like they were made just for me. Pinching her nipples between my fingertips, I began to roll them between my thumb and index finger, enjoying the way that she closed her eyes, let her head fall back and moaned softly.

“Brandon... I- ” Reaching out to me, she pulled my pajama bottoms down my ass and freeing my dick. When her hand wrapped around my member this time, there was a dollop of cum that had accumulated at the tip.

Opening her eyes, she brought her thumb to her lips and sucked the pre-cum from it, a faint hint of my cum lingering on her lips. “I hate that I want you so much,” she confessed, not looking like she hated it one bit.

I released her tits as she leaned into me, her lips sweeping along the side of my neck and sending a shiver through me, while her hand began stroking my cock, slowly up and down, driving me nuts in the best possible way.

“You sure have a strange way of showing it,” I teased, slipping a hand into her hair and fisting the silky lock. Giving her hair a little tug, I forced her to tilt her face up as I lowered my lips to hers, my kiss hearted, demanding. As our tongues dueled, I hooked my thumbs into the waistband of her bottoms and began to tug them down, not surprised that she was naked under the bottoms.

With her bottoms off, I took a moment to shed mine before grabbing her and turning her from me on my lap. Grasping her hips, I pulled her up so her pussy was over my mouth. My intention was to have her ride my face, but the little vixen had plans of her own, leaning forward, grasping

my cock, and giving it several gentle strokes before she took the head into her mouth.

“Fucck,” the word came out as a hissing sound as her warm, moist mouth took me in and began to work my dick, slowly, painstakingly slow, she worked me. I hated and loved it at the same time.

Two could play at this game.

Spreading her pussy lips, I ran my tongue along the length of her slit, from her clit to her ass, and then back again. She moaned softly the sound sending insane vibrations through me that made me tense for a moment.

Trying to distract myself from the feelings she was invoking within me, I licked the length of her a second time and a third with each time I received a satisfying moan from her. Focusing my tongue on the swollen nub, I used my fingers to work her pussy, thrusting in and out until her pussy was dripping with her desire.

Removing my fingers from her core, I was about to replace it with my tongue when she released my swollen and throbbing dick from her lips and moved lower, her tongue flicking at my balls, once, twice, receiving a groan for her effort. Grasping my shift once more, she sucked one of my balls into her mouth sucking lightly and sending my head into a frenzy no longer able to focus on what I was doing. It was taking all of my energy to not come all over her tits at that moment.

“You need to stop baby. God!”

Ignoring me, she doubled her efforts, her hand stroking me as her lips and tongue teased my tightened balls. I couldn't take it any longer. It needed to end. Grabbing her hips, I pushed her up and forward so that she was leaning over the arm of the sofa, her round ass high in the air. Beautiful.

Sitting up, I grabbed her hips and positioned her a little higher, before spreading her pussy lips and running the head of my dick up and down the length of her juicy slit. Back and forth, my dick beginning to glisten from her juices.

“Such a bad girl. I asked you to stop and you didn't,” I chided giving her a little slap on the ass, leaving a pink print when my hand had landed.

She moaned, arching her back and pushing back against me. “I need it. Please.”

Using some of the juices from her pussy, I began to push into her the need for her was too unbearable to wait any longer. She moaned, bucking back against me again but this time with so much force that I impaled her completely. We moaned in unison.

“You feel so amazing, baby. I've waited for too long to feel you again.”

Looking down, I took a moment to savor the view of us connected. But I couldn't wait any longer. She'd taken me too far, the urge to claim her completely was too great. Gripping her hips in my hands I began to thrust, long and powerful thrust, pushing her hard into the cushion each time.

“I've missed you,” she gasped. Those words excited both my heart and my cock.

She immediately began to rock with me, our bodies synchronized. With each thrust in she met the thrust, her hands holding tight to the sofa as she begged for more. I wanted to hold on, but it was too much. My thrusts became frenzied, over and over until my cock and balls were so tight that they felt like they would explode.

And it did.

With one final, forceful thrust, I unloaded. Spurt after spurt of my cum spilled into her. As I came she moaned loudly, her pussy clenching around, holding me tight and milking my cock as her own juices began to surround my dick and drip onto to my balls.

My entire body trembled as I spilled my last drop into her. Leaning over her, I placed a soft kiss on the back of her neck. "I've missed you too baby. I'll never leave you again."

For a fleeting moment, it occurred to me that I'd forgotten protection. Shit. I never forgot stuff like that. But for the first time in my life, I really didn't care. The realization both warmed my heart and scared the living fuck out of me.

Chapter 17

Taylor

I wouldn't let last night get to me. We'd had sex. Hot, sweaty, mind-blowing sex that lasted most of the night until the sun began to rise. In the morning I'd done the walk of shame back to my place after confirming with him that it was just stress relief and that he shouldn't read anything more into it than that. People did it all the time. Friends with benefits came to mind. Maybe we could be friends with benefits. Deep down, I knew that I'd never be able to do that, as it was last night was causing me anxiety as I attempted to straighten things out in my mind.

Entering the classroom through the door at the bottom of the room, I made my way to the podium. I didn't need to look up and into the stadium seating to know he was there, the goosebumps that were beginning to form on my arms told me.

There was more at stake than my hormones and I had to keep myself in check. I was a scientist for heaven's sakes. A neurobiologist at that. I knew that love didn't exist. It was simple reactions in the brain making me think it was love, when it was just normal human chemical reactions in the brain to stimuli that made you feel good. There had been numerous studies on the subject.

Sorting out my materials, I finally looked up and sure enough, he was sitting a few rows back in the center his eyes

fixated on me. I tried not to stare back at him, but his eyes drew me in making me blush.

I cursed under my breath and then began my lecture. As I got into the material, I found that his influence on me started to diminish. By the end of the lecture, his presence barely bothered me. Last night was great, but that was all – just a night. Just enough to take the edge off.

“Make sure to review the next chapter in preparation for class tomorrow,” I yelled to the class as they began to quickly file out and up the stairs to the back entrances, Brandon being one of the crowd. I silently thanked God that he didn’t try to approach me. I didn’t have enough time to properly process what had happened between us. I needed time to think and analyze.

A couple of the girls remained in their seats, deep in conversation and didn’t seem keen on moving. They were sorority girls, you could tell by their demeanor like they felt they were better than the rest of the girls in the class. “You should just go for it!” The blonde said to the brunette, I hadn’t memorized either of their names yet.

I couldn’t help it, I was nosy, taking my time to put my belongings away so I could hear what they were talking about while pretending I didn’t care.

“I don’t know. He’s out of my league, don’t you think? I’m mean... he’s a celebrity. I’ve only got 500k followers on Instagram so far.”

I turned my head so they wouldn’t see me rolling my eyes. Now I was truly interested knowing already who they were talking about.

Finally, one of the girls looked up at me. “Professor Haynes, could I ask you a question?”

Groaning inwardly, I suspected I may know what they wanted to know. If their question was about Brandon I’d prefer they didn’t. Forcing myself to smile I nodded. “Of course, what do you need help with?”

“Do you know if Brandon is single?”

Frowning, I opened my mouth to answer, shook my head and then snapped it shut again. I hated that I could feel the heat from a blush forming on my cheeks. If they had any idea...

“I know, he’s really hot. He’s a little old, but still, I bet he could rock it in bed,” the other girl commented with a giggle.

Ouch that stung, he was just a few years older than me.

“Ladies, I’m not sure if this is the appropriate place to discuss your classmate’s sexual prowess. At least not in front of your teacher.”

“I’m sorry, Professor Haynes, but do you know if he’s single?”

“I heard he was gay,” the words tumbled from my lips before I could stop them. Sadly, it wasn’t even breaking the top five list of unprofessional things I’d done with Brandon Campbell.

They both looked at me a moment, then at each other. The one that asked the original question shook her head. “No, I don’t think so. I’ve seen him online with women.”

I shrugged, deciding to double down on the lie since I was down that rabbit hole anyhow. “You know how athletes are... They like to give off an image for the public. Their agents handle all of that. You only know what they want you to know.”

“That is true,” her friend confirmed. “His hair is always perfectly imperfect, and he dresses so well. Everything he wears fits him too perfectly. She might be right.”

Why was I feeling satisfaction in deceiving them? I knew why, it was a silly question. I wanted him for myself and didn't want competition from either of the gorgeous college girls sitting in front of me.

~*~ TT ~*~

Brandon

Watching her behind the podium lecturing the class had given me a massive hard-on. She was so confident and knowledgeable – it was fucking sexy. Leaving the lecture theatre, I had to keep my bag in front of my groin like a damned schoolboy so no one would notice the wood I was sporting.

I was only a few steps from the doors to the lecture theatre when I paused and turned. Once the last of the students exited, I was about to re-enter when I heard people talking – Taylor to be specific.

“I think he's gay.” I heard Taylor say.

Gay? Who? Me? I was a little taken aback, I'd shown her quite well numerous times last night that I was anything but gay. I leaned a little closer eavesdropping on the rest of the conversation. By the time they were done talking, I was grinning ear to ear. She was jealous. She didn't like that women were interested and trying to protect her territory. I guess her little speech this morning about it just being a stress reliever was utter bullshit. It's not like I didn't know that already, but it was nice to have it confirmed for me.

Rethinking going back to her, I made my way towards her office and waited by her door for her. She didn't have a class after that one, so she'd be coming straight here. There was a tiny voice in the back of my mind that told me to stay away from her, especially in school, but the erection in my pants was screaming for me to do otherwise.

Besides, she was my teacher, I had a legitimate reason to be near her and standing outside of her office. Okay, perhaps my dick wasn't a legitimate reason, but no one passing by would know that.

"Brandon, what are you doing here?" Taylor asked as she came up behind me.

Turning to face her, I watched her make her way towards me.

"Professor Haynes, I was waiting for you."

"This is my office – you know this – why are you in front of my office? I thought we'd agreed that you're to keep your distance."

"I needed to have a word with you – about class."

“I’m really busy, Brandon.” She walked past me, pulled her card key from her pants pocket, swiped it over the reader and opened the door. I didn’t miss the reddening of her cheeks as she brushed past me and entered with me following behind, closing and locking the door behind us.

“How much time this takes is really up to you.” Grabbing her wrist, I spun her around to face me and pressed her hand to my crotch. “This is what you did to me all throughout class.”

She gasped, her pretty green eyes growing wide as she snatched her hand back. “Brandon, seriously. Unless this is school related we can’t be doing this. Last night was a mistake. I’d gotten tipsy and allowed myself to cave to an urge.”

“It was – an urge. Nothing else.”

She groaned out loud. “What do you want me to say? We were through this already.”

I wasn’t about to be swayed. She was worth the fight and if it meant fighting past her fears and commitment issues then so be it. “I want you to admit what you’re feeling. I want you to give into us. This denying what’s going on between us, regardless of the reason, is futile.”

She didn’t respond but also didn’t back away when I stepped towards her and pulled her into my arms.

“Brandon...” That was the last of her protests as she allowed her body to melt against mine.

Cupping her chin in my hand, I tilted her face up so she was looking into my eyes. “Tell me how you really feel Taylor,

tell me how you really feel and I'll go away. Tell me you love me as much as I'm in love with you.”

I lowered my lips to hers repeating what my heart had been crying out for me to say last night, “I love you, Taylor.”

Silence overtook the room. Our breathing became synched, two bodies becoming one. “I love you too,” she finally whispered the words barely audible, but I damned well heard them as her body melted into mine.

My lips claimed hers completely as she wrapped her arms around my neck and pressed herself tight to me. I needed her in more ways than I'd ever needed anyone else before. Every part of my body and mind longed for her. The feeling was new, and exciting, and a high that I never wanted to give up.

Pushing her back down on the desk, I grasped her wrists in one of my hands and pinned them up and over her head. My gaze locked onto hers as my free hand moved down between our bodies, reached up and under her dress. When I reached the apex between her legs, I was shocked to discover that her pussy was bare, with a wetness forming between her velvety lips.

“Someone has been a naughty, naughty teacher,” I teased, enjoying the redness that began to color her cheeks. “It's making me think that you were hoping I'd come here for you.”

Taylor

The words I love you had come out of my mouth before I even knew what I was saying, but they were true. I'd tried and tried to deny the feelings, we were just getting to know each other – it seemed so quick. But it was true, and I was tired of fighting it. I had to take the risk, because the rewards of giving in to the feelings far outweighed the potential pain if this went bad. Hell, denying myself – denying us – was causing me more anxiety than heartbreak ever could.

So I let those three powerful words slip past my lips.

I struggled against his hands, pinning my wrists over my head as his fingers dipped between my pussy lips causing my entire body to tremble. “Brandon. I-”

There was so something in his eyes now, an intensity in his gaze that swept me up and pull me in. My entire being longed for him.

“You what?” he slipped two fingers into me and began stroking my inner wall, making me cry out for him.

“- Need you in me,” I gasped. While I'd have loved to have spent the afternoon in bed wrapped up in his arms. That wasn't going to happen at the moment, the best I could hope for was a short preview of what would undoubtedly come tonight.

He stroked me another minute, bringing me to the point where I felt like I was going to explode over his hand any second before slipping them from me and undoing his pants. I struggled against his hands again, longing to touch

him, to run my fingers along the hard muscle, but his grip was unyielding.

There was a zip as he undid his pants moments before the head of his dick began to run back and forth between my pussy folds from my ass to my clit and back again. I groaned a second time, struggling against his grip. This time, however, he released me.

A wave of relief washed over me as I gripped his back pulling his body fully down to mine, my lips seeking out his as I bucked again his dick, attempting to impale myself on his shaft. My body craved the relief only he could provide me.

The head of his cock, finally, blissfully pressed against my entrance. “Please,” I begged as his lips left mine and looked down at me.

Looking deep into my eyes, he slowly pressed into me. Wrapping my legs around his waist, I pulled him in deeper moaning softly as his cock filled me completely. For a minute he remained there, embedded inside of me as we lost ourselves in each other’s eyes before he began to move inside of me – slow at first – but his speed quickly increased the pleasure of each thrust making it near impossible to remain silent.

Biting down on my lower lip, I closed my eyes and moved with him our bodies working in unison, giving and taking pleasure from each other. My fingernails dug into his shoulders holding his torso tight to mine as I began to rapidly ascend the summit of my desire.

“I want you to come with me baby,” he whispered in my ear as he quickened his pace.

Faster and harder with each thrust the need within me to climax became almost too much to bear. "I'm so close," I moaned against his neck, the coil in my stomach becoming so tight I bordered the line of pleasure and pain.

"Then come for me, baby," his words were so soft and smooth that it sent me spiraling into oblivion. My entire body tightened, my nails digging into his back as my pussy clenched. Suddenly, I screamed as I came as a rush of my juices met his dick when it plunged deep into me one final time before unloading deep inside of me.

My body trembled and I held tight to his strong body as a second orgasm washed over me. Burying my face in the crook between his shoulder and his neck, I gave myself a moment to come down from the high I was feeling.

"I love you," I uttered the words as tears formed in my eyes. Of all the men in all of the world.

Pulling back from me, he smiled as he looked down into my eyes. "I love you too, baby." Chuckling he added, "Took you long enough to realize it."

Rolling my eyes at him, I slipped my hand behind his head and brought his lips down to mine. "I guess maybe there's a few things you can teach me as well."

Chapter 18

~ Two months later ~

Taylor

Giving into my feelings for him that day in the office was one of the most liberating experiences of my life. I felt good and carefree. I felt like a teenager in love and wanted to dance on the clouds, I was feeling so high. I kept waiting for something to go wrong, but it never did. It just kept getting better and better.

“You really suck at this,” I couldn’t help but tease as I watched Brandon fiddle around his garden. His hedges looked like he’d taken a chainsaw to them and a couple of the fruit trees he’d planted had a definite slant to them. But he tried to share my favorite hobby with me by allowing me to help with his backyard instead of hiring landscapers and I appreciated the faith he had in my abilities. I also admired his perseverance and eagerness to learn. When I’d first met him, I expected him to be a know-it-all meathead. He was proving me wrong each and every day.

I couldn’t be happier.

He took a step back with the garden shears in his hand hanging at his side and grimaced. “Yeah, not the greatest, is it?”

Grinning, I shook my head. “It’s... decent. You need to take your time with gardening. It’s supposed to be soothing

and a way to connect with nature. You're looking at it as a task that needs to get done."

He looked back at his handiwork and nodded. "That's fair. I've never been the type of guy that has been known for delicacy."

"But you're one for precision. I can see it when you played hockey. To be able to intercept a puck and shoot it to the precise location you needed it to go. That's precision. You just need to redirect that energy and focus towards other endeavors."

He grinned the devilish grin that made me tremble inside as his blue eyes traveled up and down the length of my body that was sitting on the ground covered in dirt. "Oh, I like to think I am very precise in many parts of my life." He crooked a brow at me, "You don't agree?"

Shaking my head I chose to ignore his comment, grabbed more black mulch, and arranged it along the perimeter of the flower bed. He knew damned well the effects he had on me.

"Listen, I have something to talk to you about."

I felt a sudden chill run down my spine. Of course, there had to be something, the past couple of months with him had been too good to be true. I spent too much of my life living in rejection from people of the opposite sex, admittedly it left me slightly jaded.

"Taylor?" A shadow blocked the sun.

Looking up, I forced a smile onto my face. "Yes?"

He lowered himself to a crouch beside me. “Are you okay?”

“Of course.”

Liar, the voice in the back of my head shouted.

“Well, classes end for the summer in a week and I was wondering if you’d like to take your free week before exams to come back to Boston with me – to meet my family.”

My jaw went slack as I looked up at him. Meeting his family was a big step – wasn’t it? What if they didn’t like me? What if...

“That doesn’t look positive.” His cheeks took on a very rare blush as his knee began to move up and down, a telltale sign he was nervous. “If you think it’s too soon then I understand.”

“No, it’s...” I was embarrassed to even admit the truth to him. Thirty-three and never met anyone’s parents before, how lame was that? “I’ve never been asked to meet someone’s parents before. I’m just trying to process it.”

“Never?” His eyebrows shot up looking genuinely surprised.

“I’ve never been in a relationship so serious that it was necessary.” I shrugged. “I worked hard all my life and I guess I was too involved in classwork and learning.”

“Why is that?”

Finishing with the mulch I pulled off my gardening gloves and plunked myself down on the ground fully. “My family isn’t what you’d call poor, but we never had any extra

money. Lower middle-class I guess you could classify us as. There were no vacations and no brand-name clothes, but we always had food on the table and the power and heat were always on. I knew early on that it would be hard to go to college for me, especially a higher-tier college without a scholarship, so I pushed myself to get top grades and be the best at everything I did academically.”

“I’m sorry.” Dropping the shears, he took my hands in his.

“Friends and boyfriends were an afterthought, although I was a bit of a dork so it’s not like people were banging down my door wanting to date or befriend me. So I got my scholarship, graduated from an ivy league college, and never really focused on the social aspect. Hell, I still eat my lunch in my office every day like a recluse.” I laughed, but the sound was hollow to my ears. While I was proud of my accomplishments, I was also somewhat embarrassed that I’d been such a loser, especially when the person I was admitting it to was the exact opposite of who I was in every way.

“You are a driven woman. It’s one of the things that I respect most about you. I sit in class in awe of you every single day. I sit there watching you and wonder what in the hell could you possibly see in me that would make you decide to be with me. Yet, here we are. For some reason you see something in me that keeps you in my backyard, planting my flowers and pruning my shrubs.”

Laughing, I pulled my hands from his and threw them up in the air. “Maybe I just saw the state of your backyard and took pity on you.”

His smile seemed to melt away the insecurities I was feeling. “Whatever the reason I’m glad that I finally was able to wear you down.”

“We still have the issue of me being your teacher and there’s a chance I’ll need to teach a class you’re in sometime in the future if you feel biology is what you’re truly in love with.” I raised a skeptical brow at him. “If the faculty or anyone else finds out then my career could be over, at least it would be taken back literally years. I’ve worked too hard for too long for that to happen. I’m still paranoid that someone heard us having sex in my office.”

“Have I not aced all the tests?” he challenged.

“Yes, you have.”

I’d been skeptical at first, but he certainly was nailing the class. I hadn’t favored him in the least, I’d held him to the same standard I held all of my students. Yet time after time he passed the tests with flying colors. I’d seen him around campus a number of times with the frat boys, I suspected he was getting coaching from some of the intellectuals of the group. I didn’t care where he learned the material, I was just proud of him for taking it so seriously and not making my class a mockery. The girls who had their eye on him a couple of months ago still eyeballed him like he was a piece of candy, I’d learned to ignore it for the most part.

“And I’ve been very discreet. No one besides possibly the nosy neighbor- ”

“Her name is Janine,” I stated laughing. For some reason, he didn’t like Janine. He was civil to her, but she was a bit of a neighborhood gossip and I suspected that was one of

the main reasons for his attitude towards her. “You really should try to get to know her. She’s really a nice person and one of my closest friends.”

“Okay, I’ll be honest. I don’t like how she looks at me.”

Crinkling my nose at him, I laughed. “What do you mean by that?”

“She looks at me like I’m a piece of meat. I’ve caught her looking at my dick a few times.”

He wasn’t wrong. Janine did enjoy watching him. Her attention toward him didn’t bother me, he’d proved himself to me more than once. She could look all she wanted, but when it came right down to it, he was all mine. “Well, it is a nice dick and you insist on wearing those grey sweatpants. Don’t you know that grey sweatpants are a woman’s kryptonite? It’s the equivalent of a woman wearing a really low-cut top and no bra. Even when you’re not erect you’re big and it shows.”

Laughing, he shook his head at me. “You’re blaming me and my sweatpants for getting the neighbor all hot and horny and looking at me like I’m a hunk of meat.”

I shrugged. “Sort of. I wouldn’t quite say it that way, but yeah.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this sooner?”

Catching my lower lip between my lips, I looked up at him and wiggled my eyebrows. “Maybe I like seeing you in those sweatpants as well.”

He looked at me, momentarily speechless before lunging at me, grabbing my wrists he pinned them over my

head as he straddled my waist. “And here I thought you preferred when I wear nothing at all?” he said, his lips lowering to mine as a bulge began to rapidly grow and press against my mound causing me to moan softly and yearn for what was about to come.

When his lips ultimately met mine I knew that gardening was done for the day.

Chapter 19

~ One week later ~

Taylor

“My sister is going to be picking us up. My brother will be coming into town tomorrow with his newest fling and we’ll all go out for dinner.” Brandon had been telling me about his family in detail over the course of the four-hour flight. He’d spoken about them off and on over the past couple of months, but still, there was a lot of additional information to digest.

“Just slow down a minute so I can get this straight. Your mom is a retired nurse, and your father is a realtor. Your brother is younger by five years and lives in California and will be arriving tomorrow. He’s bringing a girl, but you have no idea who she is. He’s trying to become an actor – been in a few sitcoms and a small part in a movie. Your sister lives five minutes away from your parent’s place, is thirty, single with no kids, and no intention of ever getting married or having any.” Looking up into his face and seeing the way he was beaming I knew I was correct.

“Excellent.”

There was a look of affection in his eyes that made my heart skip a beat. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I’d find a man who would look at me the way he was. It felt good and more right than anything I’d ever felt before. Each

morning when I woke up I feared I'd been dreaming and this would all go away. But it never did.

“You’ve got an amazing mind, Taylor. Do you remember everything I tell you?”

“That’s quite a compliment, thank you. But no, I don’t remember everything although I do have a knack for remembering many things – the important stuff at least.”

“This way.” He guided me toward the baggage claim around. The airport was jampacked with vacationers who were getting their last trip of the season in. Many people around us stopped and stared, no doubt a number of them recognizing us – correction him - I was a nobody to them. Thankfully, no one said a word and we were able to retrieve our luggage without incident.

“Brandon!” I heard her before I saw her. A moment after I heard her call his name she appeared through the crowd. Several inches taller than me, with long chestnut brown hair and her dark eyes gleaming with excitement as she raced to us and threw herself into his arms. “It feels like forever! I’ve missed you!”

She pulled back and then turned to me, her energy making me feel both excited and intimidated. I didn’t know what I expected from her, but a thirty-year-old with the energy of a cheerleader wasn’t it.

“You must be Taylor!” She made a little ‘squee’ noise that made me a little uneasy as she pulled me into a tight hug. “I’ve been dying to meet you. I’m his sister, Zeta. I’ve never seen Brandon so excited about a girl before. This is history in the making!”

Heat seared my cheeks. I'd seen the women he'd dated in the past. I felt hardly noteworthy in comparison to them. There had been so many rich and famous women in his past...

I had to shake my head and clear my mind of those thoughts. I may not have the stunning looks of a woman that society viewed as desirable nowadays, but I was hardly a woofer and I had a good head on my shoulders. Whatever it was that Brandon saw in me he didn't seem to see in the other women, he'd worked hard to have me in his life. I needed to keep reminding myself of that fact. Admittedly, it did mess with my head from time to time.

"If the media is to be believed he had his fair share of successful women." I was partially joking, but deep down I knew I wanted that reassurance.

She waved her hand at me, immediately giving me the assurance I needed. "Hardly, most couldn't even perform simple math in their heads." She leaned into me, lowering her voice as if we were two conspirators. "Trust me, you could hear the wind whistling through their ears when there was a slight breeze, not that I met many, but if you've met one you've met them all."

It was Brandon's turn to blush. "How about we move on from this conversation, they're ex's for a reason."

"One actually thought the country of Canada was in Europe! She thought all of the land above us was Alaska! Can you imagine?" She threw her head back and began laughing. "She was so fucking stupid."

"I think she was joking..." his protest was weak at best.

“Right.” She mouthed the words *she wasn't* to me.

Grinning, I looked from him to his sister. I really liked her. If the rest of her family was anything like his sister then I was in for an amazing weekend.

~*~ TT ~*~

Brandon

At least I got through the first meeting relatively unscathed. Sitting in the backseat of Zeta's SUV, I listened to the two women chatter on, from the front, as if they were long-time best friends. It was nice to see. Taylor and I had to keep our relationship secret so we were always alone together. It was wonderful to be able to see how she interacted with people aside from the students in the classroom. I was anxious to see how she managed my family. It was a bonus that Zeta wasn't nearly as vicious as I'd expected her to be with questions. It made me wonder if she had something up her sleeve.

Hopefully, the rest of the family would be as welcoming. I couldn't imagine why they wouldn't. Despite being anxious to have Taylor meet my family, the whole thing was outside of my comfort zone, especially with what I had planned for after dinner tomorrow. Just thinking about tomorrow night made my palms sweat and pulse race unlike anything I'd ever experienced before.

I hadn't felt this nervous since – I couldn't remember how long.

“We’re here!” Zeta announced as she pulled onto the driveway of my family home. I was both proud and embarrassed by the massive two-story home in front of us. Taylor knew my family had money, but my house across from hers was small, almost identical to hers. There were no evident class differences back there. Taylor had grown up on the poor side and even as a scientist she didn’t make a huge salary. That also worried me. Would she feel overwhelmed and feel this isn’t the type of world she was interested in living in? Would she consider my family over the top and somewhat pompous? I really hoped not. She sure had when we’d first met. I just hoped those feelings didn’t re-emerge within her.

I wanted to share everything with her, for the rest of our lives. My family was a big part of that and always would be. This weekend had to go well.

“Is it tackless for me to say, wow, this is a beautiful house? How do you guys find each other in that? GPS?” Taylor teased, looking over her shoulder and into the back seat at me.

Chuckling, I rolled my eyes at her. “No, smart ass. We use the intercom.”

Her brow creased, eyeing me, trying to decide if she believed me or not. “You’re shitting me right?”

I wished I was...

She continued, “Is there going to be a butler named Jeeves opening the door for us when we arrive?”

“His name’s Gerald.” I was actually embarrassed right now. She was having way too much fun teasing the piss out of

me over this.

She burst out laughing, turning her attention to my sister. “Is that true?”

Zeta confirmed with a nod of her head. “It’s not as bad as it sounds.”

“I’m not trying to be an ass, I’m just poking fun a bit. If I can be quite frank, I’m a little blown away and feel a little out of my element. This is the type of house you’d see in some sort of movie. It’s a lot to process.”

If this was blowing her away then she was in for a real mind trip when she met the family. Perhaps I should have prepared her better for this.

~*~ TT ~*~

Taylor

I don’t think I’ve ever been this chatty, I suspected that it was a combination of how welcoming his sister seemed to be along with the stress of this situation. I knew he was rich, I’d been nosy and checked his net worth online which was a staggering amount, but it had been hard to fully comprehend. Back home, we lived in a little world of lower-middle-class normalcy. This was just – different.

The house appearing before my eyes was something outside of a movie, I hadn’t been exaggerating when I’d made that proclamation. When he said his dad was a realtor, I never imagined he made this kind of money. Of course, the home

could have easily been a gift from Brandon to his family. I'd seen pictures of his personal penthouse in Boston, but those were mere pictures. Heaven knows what it would look like if he took me for a tour during our stay.

Zeta put the vehicle into park just outside the oversized double doors and hopped out, with myself and Brandon following suit. Everything about this place was perfect, from the perfectly kept green spaces surrounding the home to the spotless, tall white beams running along the sides of the front deck. Did they have people coming out every few days to wash the house down?

Brandon came to stand beside me as his sister made her way to the front of the house. "Sorry, I should have warned you that the place was big. It's a bit much. I honestly never gave it a whole lot of thought."

"I thought you said your dad was a realtor? Did you buy this for them?" I whispered.

"He owns the reality company, I should have mentioned that. I apologize. He's also the realtor of the rich and famous of Boston. He bought this place when I was perhaps ten so it's definitely appreciated in value as the years have gone by."

"You grew up here. Wow a second time." I couldn't even imagine growing up in a place like this. "I bet you had one hell of a good game of hide and go seek."

The front door opened as Zeta yelled at us to move our asses – direct quote.

“The boss has spoken,” he wiggled his eyebrows at me, as he grabbed our two suitcases from the back of the vehicle and pulled them behind him as he motioned for me to follow Zeta.

“This is Gerald,” Zeta announced waving towards a balding man in his mid-fifties who exited the house to assist Brandon with the luggage. I’d half expected him to be wearing the stereotypical butler attire that you’d see in movies; full tux with a bow tie, but instead, he was dressed comfortably in a black golf shirt and khakis.

“If you could take those up to my bedroom I’d appreciate it, Gerald.”

“No problem, man. It’s good to see you back home.” Gerald gave Brandon a pat on the shoulder took the luggage and took it into the house.

Very informal - I liked it. It made me feel more at ease to know that his family didn’t feel the need to force their help to wear specific uniforms.

“Gerald was hired when we moved in here, he was in his early twenties. I grew up seeing him more as a friend than a staff member if that makes sense?” Placing a hand at the small of my back, he led me into the house. His sister was standing in the middle of the massive lobby that featured a staircase and second-floor balcony speaking with two people who were no doubt Brandon’s parents. Looking back up to the balcony, I grinned seeing that Gerald was already at the top of the staircase and moving across the balcony at a swift pace, the suitcases trailing behind him.

While Brandon's father was an older version of Brandon with grey at his temples, the woman was the spitting image of Zeta, but instead of the dark hair, her locks shimmered silver running halfway down her back. Where the grey hair would make many women her age look old, it instead made her look regal. One thing that did surprise me was the fact she wasn't a rake-thin woman, in fact, she had curves under her blue knee-length dress that resembled mine.

As we approached his parents and sister, I began to feel like I was in the presence of a house of giants. His father was as tall as Brandon was and his mother close to six feet tall as well. Once we were within ten feet of the trio, his mother broke rank with the others, heading straight to me, his steps long and graceful, her hips swaying softly with each step. Upon reaching me, she immediately pulled me in for a motherly-like hug immediately making me feel at ease and welcomed.

"I'm so glad to finally meet you. Brandon has said so many wonderful things," she said, pulling back from me, but still keeping me at arm's length looking me up and down. "And you're so pretty. You didn't tell me she was so beautiful, Brandon."

"I didn't think that was important. Her beauty is only a small part of the amazing qualities that I love about her."

My heart did a little flip-flop inside my chest. He admitted to being in love with me in front of his family. I wasn't very knowledgeable about relationships, but that seemed like a pretty big deal. Wasn't it?

“Oh, it’s not, you’re right. Beauty fades but it’s what’s in a person’s heart and mind that really counts. I’m glad you’ve finally realized that. I just like knowing that my grandbabies will be beautiful and with her being as smart as she is... They’ll have a very bright future indeed.”

Grandbabies? What in the fuck was she talking about? What in the hell was Brandon telling her? Did he tell her I was knocked up or something? I was so surprised by her comment, I didn’t even have time to react when she gave me another hug I just stood there, arms to my sides, like a lifeless fish.

“I’m not pregnant,” I managed to stammer when she released me this time.

Laughing, she nodded. “Don’t be alarmed. I know that there’s lots of time for that, but I like to look forward to the future.”

Pushing my glasses back up my nose, I shrugged. “Surely, the other girls he’s brought around would make much prettier than me. I’m just your average dorky girl next door.” I laughed uneasily.

“What other girls?” She laughed as she looked from me to Brandon and then back again. “You’re the only one he’s ever brought over. Even in high school he never brought a girl around to meet us with the exception of his prom date which we insisted on getting pictures of. She wasn’t even a girlfriend. They just both happened to be single and without dates, so he took her.”

“Wait... No other girls? Ever?” They couldn’t have floored me any better if they tried. Looking over my shoulder at him, all he gave me for a response was a shrug and a

sheepish grin. But why? Why wouldn't he bring any of them around? He was seen in public with enough women.

“None. That's why I know you're the one. He'd never have brought you here to endure us if he didn't think you were something very special. Maybe I'll even hear about a wedding in his future – finally.” She said it so flippantly that I had to look toward Brandon to see if she was joking or not. By the redness in his cheeks either he was embarrassed that his mother would assume he was going to propose or he planned on proposing and she'd let the cat out of the bag.

“Come on, let me introduce you to his father and we'll chat as I give you a tour of the house. I know it's a bit big, but I promise we're not as pompous as we may appear at first glance. You'll see as you get to know us.” Slipping an arm around my shoulders, she briefly introduced me to his father and then whisked me away for a tour of their home with Zeta in attendance, the men being left in the foyer.

Chapter 20

Brandon

“If your mother doesn’t scare her off then I would say it’s meant to be.” My father chuckled as we watched the group of chattering women turn a corner and out of sight. “I hope your mother didn’t embarrass you too much, she’s just excited to have you bring someone around to meet her.”

“And she wonders why I never brought a woman here before,” I huffed, running a hand through my hair having conflicting feelings about how my mother handled the greeting. I didn’t want her chasing Taylor off by seeming too overeager.

“She’s excited, Brandon. She worries about you. She worries about you all. None of you are getting any younger and none of you have been married or had children yet.”

“I know. I know. She does know I’m fine. It’s not like I’m a child and not able to support myself. Until now, I haven’t led a lifestyle that supported a serious, long-term relationship.”

Chuckling my father motioned for us to make our way to the pool area. “Come, let’s wait for the women by the pool. It’s a beautiful night and the house feels stuffy when I know the weather is so appealing outside. Winter is just around the corner.”

A few minutes later we entered the back yard and I made a beeline for the hammock while my father made

himself a drink at the pool bar. I'd spent many nights falling asleep back here, swaying back and forth under the stars. It was one of my favorite things to do to unwind when I was still living under their roof.

"Your mother has been waiting for the day that one of you three would finally settle down. You're thirty-six years old Brandon, you can't blame her for beginning to think you'd never settle down. Hell, all of you are in your thirties."

"That's fair." I could see their point. It wasn't until recently that I was beginning to want those things for myself as well.

"And it's not like you've ever brought anyone around before. We've seen you at events with random actresses and models and all of that nonsense, but no one that you'd ever pursue. So she's excited to see that you're finally looking for someone to settle down with."

That hadn't been my intention, not necessarily. Or maybe subconsciously it had. I just didn't know.

"So what about Taylor made you decide it had to be her? You've moved across the country for her, you're back in school, she's got to be pretty special for you to be making so many drastic life changes."

Smiling I began thinking of all the reasons I loved her. It felt like the list was endless. "She's so fucking smart dad. You have no idea. I sit in her class and must look like a lovestruck puppy when she teaches. Her mind is amazing. And she's determined and driven. A little shy at first, but when she opens up she's got a great sense of humor as well, it's a little dry and sarcastic, but it's there. She's the full package. She is

worth the sacrifices. I needed a change in lifestyle anyhow, I can't stay single forever.”

“And what about your money, do you think...” My father cocked a brow up at me. “It's not an easy question to ask, but as someone who is looking out for your best interests, I need to ask.”

I understood where he was getting at with that question. He didn't know her in the way that I did. Most of the women I'd been with had been with me because of the money and what I could do to help their careers along. At this point in my life, I could spot a golddigger a mile away. “No, not in the least. She did her best to avoid me at first.” I chuckled remembering the look of shock on her face when I showed up at the school. “You have no idea how hard I had to work to win her. She wouldn't have made it nearly as hard if she was looking for a payday.”

“I saw the listing of the house you severely overpaid for to live next to her. You certainly were willing to make sacrifices.”

Chuckling, I sighed. “It really isn't that bad. I've lived out of hotel rooms for a good chunk of my last fifteen years. It's a cute home. And I still have my place here in case we want to move. It's just a temporary place to lay my head – that's all. I knew I had to go big and make a grand gesture in order to win her over.”

“And when you marry her, are you bringing her back here?”

“Why do you think- ” I began to protest only to stop myself, the look in his eyes told me he knew if I tried to lie

he'd know it.

“I know you son, the way you looked at her when your mother took off with her to give her a tour gave it away. Let's see the ring. We know you brought her here to propose. It doesn't take a genius to figure it out.”

With a sigh, I reached into my pants pocket and pulled out a small, black velvet box. “I don't have an exact plan on when I'm going to ask, but just keep it around waiting for the perfect moment. I figure I'll know the moment when it comes.”

There was a self-satisfied look in my father's eyes when he grabbed the ring box from me and took a seat a few feet away from me on a white wicker chair. Opening the box he whistled as he looked at the ring, not removing it from the box. “Impressive.”

“Do you think it's too much?” I'd driven myself nearly mad obsessing over the ring. “She's not a flashy sort of woman so I felt an emerald cut on the platinum band would be the best option for her. I swear it took me hours to pick it out.”

“I imagine.” Closing the box he passed the ring back to me. “It's beautiful. Have you met her parents yet? What are they like?”

“Not yet. She's told me a fair amount about them. We're not getting married tomorrow, hell, I don't even know if she'll say yes, but I feel like this is something I have to do. I just don't see there being a reason to wait to ask, it feels right – you know.”

“I know. Bringing her here told me everything I needed to know about how you feel about her, hopefully, she feels the same way.”

She did...

I was pretty sure she did...

My biggest concern was it was too soon for her and scaring her off. She was a much more pragmatic person than I was and a quick proposal might be a little overwhelming for her. I guess we'd see soon enough.

~*~ TT ~*~

Taylor

My mind was whirling. The house was spectacular, and his mom and sister were so welcoming. I'd never felt like I'd belonged like this before. While it felt overwhelming to be here, it also felt good and comforting. His sister Zeta was an incredible person, she was the type of person I always dreamed my sister would have been like if I'd had a sister.

“I suppose we've concluded the several-hour-long tour. I'm sorry I've kept you so long dear.” Brandon's mother looked down at me with a smile so genuine it almost brought tears to my eyes. I couldn't remember ever feeling so accepted in a boyfriend's parents' home before – not that I'd had many boyfriend parents to meet. I'd been a little concerned about how they'd treat me when we rolled up to the house, but I know now I had nothing to worry about.

“Thank you, your home is spectacular and I appreciate your hospitality.”

We stopped at a set of large, glass double doors. Peering through the windows, the day was giving way to night leaving streaks of orange and red in the sky. It took a moment, but my eyes found Brandon, alone on a double-sized hammock entertaining himself on his phone. I giggled to myself imagining he was hard at work trying to get to the next Candy Crush level.

“Anytime. I’ll leave you to it. I see you’ve already spotted Brandon.”

“Thank you for the tour.”

Zeta seemed a little more reluctant to leave my side, but I didn’t miss the no nonsense look her mother gave her, so she trailed behind without protest.

Entering the backyard which was the home of a massive pool and bar, I surveyed the area. Everything was perfectly landscaped right down to the hedges being perfectly pruned and uniformly shaped. It was nice, but I liked to think that it still wasn’t competition for mine. There was something extra special that came with doing your own gardening, especially in the summer when you saw the product of your hard work in full bloom.

“Hey you, I was starting to worry my mother abducted you.” He smiled as he put his phone down and then patted the area on the hammock next to him.

“It’s more likely I’d get lost,” I teased back.

Reaching the hammock, I found myself skeptical about how to proceed.

“What’s the problem?”

“I’ve never been on a hammock before,” I admitted with a grimace.

Lifting a brow, his grin widened. “Never? Not even camping?”

“Nope. My mother used to say that we roughed it enough day to day we didn’t need to rough it as a form of leisure as well.”

“That’s fair. Well, just sit down as close to me as possible and we’ll make it work – promise.”

It took a minute or two of maneuvering, but I managed to get on and snuggled up to him without sending us both tumbling to the ground. I’d call it a win.

“How was your tour?” he asked pushing a stray lock of hair from my face. “Was my mother and sister too much? They have a tendency to come on strong with new people.”

“No, not at all. In fact, they were really nice.” I sighed, snuggling closer, burying my face at the crook of his neck and shoulder and allowing the arousing scent of his aftershave to pull me in and soothe me. But I couldn’t stop the couple of rouge tears that dripped onto him.

“Hey.” Pulling back slightly, he looked down and into my eyes. “What’s wrong? If they did or said something, I’ll murder them all. Promise.”

Laughing softly, I wiped the tears with the back of my hand feeling embarrassed over my show of emotions. “No, no. It’s just... This place is so perfect. Your mom and sister are wonderful. They treated me like I was family. It was nice. These are happy tears, I was so scared that I wouldn’t fit in, yet they were so welcoming. I couldn’t have imagined it going any better.”

“Well, you do stand out. You’re pint-sized compared to the rest of us, although you’re probably smarter than the four of us combined. So what you lack in size you have on us in brain power.”

Laughing fully this time, I swatted his shoulder. “I’m 5’6, average for a female, hardly pint-sized, it’s just you all are a family of giants. And you forget I’m your teacher. I’ve seen your tests and projects. They’re really good Brandon. You’re one of my top students and I’m not being biased, if anything I’ve been harder on marking your stuff over others. I hope you keep with it and complete the program.”

“I will admit I’ve been getting help from a couple of guys in the frat, so I’ll probably end up pledging next week. The price I have to pay for a tutor.” He laughed the humor of the situation sparkling in his eyes. “But my main concern is you and not having to hide us any longer. Tomorrow will be the first day that we’ll be out in public together. As much as I get a small thrill of sneaking around, I want to be able to show you off to the world and know that I can’t do that for a while.” He put his hand up, his fingers splayed.

“I know.” Pressing my palm to his, I laced my fingers with his. “We’ll figure this out. If we’re going to make this

work, then we have to accept the sacrifices that come with it.”

Chapter 21

Taylor

“Connor is meeting us at the restaurant with his newest chick,” Brandon explained as he drove us into the center of Boston where the restaurant was located. “I think the rest of the family is there already.”

“Brandon!” I gave him a gentle swat on the shoulder. “I don’t like being late, you know this.”

“I know, but I wanted you to see the city and the tour took a little longer than I’d expected. I apologize. I haven’t even gotten a chance to show you my home here yet.”

Laughing, I rolled my eyes at him. “I’ve seen the city already. Remember? I went to college here. Four years. I’m sure we’ll find time to see your penthouse palace before going home.”

He took his eyes off the road long enough to grin at me. “Okay, then I wanted you to myself a little bit longer.” Placing his right hand on my bare knee, he slowly began inching it up toward the apex between my legs.

With a gasp, I push his hand away giving him a stern ‘not now’ look that he knew all too well.

Chuckling, he removed his hand and focused his attention back on the road.

Being in Boston again brought back a slew of memories. Boy, if my classmates could see me now, in the

passenger seat of a Ferrari with one of the most desired sports figures in the world sitting next to me. It felt surreal like at any moment I'd blink and wake up and I'd be that nerdy girl back in high school that didn't have a prom date and hadn't had sex until college.

But they do say everything happens for a reason and right now, I don't think life could get any better. But something was nagging at me. Something wasn't quite right with Brandon, like he had something on his mind. I just couldn't figure out what it could be. Maybe just being around his family had him feeling a little out of sorts? My mind wanted to run away with me telling me all sorts of crazy things like he wasn't interested any longer, but I knew that wasn't the truth. Things were perfect between us right now, I couldn't allow my anxiety to get the better of me.

Maybe they are too perfect? A voice in the back of my mind chimed in. I couldn't let that voice win – I wouldn't.

“We are here,” he announced, pulled up to a restaurant I'd never been to before, but the name was familiar. Going to an ivy league school, many of the other students came from money and were able to afford places like this, I was never one of them, but I heard them talk from time to time.

A valet came to his side of the car and accepted the keys as he got out. Another man came to my side and helped me out. Standing, I patted the skirt of my sundress down. It was a fairly basic green dress that matched my eyes. While it was pretty and hugged my curves nicely, if you looked closely you could tell that the fabric was thin and the construction of

the garment was of that you'd find online at a discount clothing store – which is where I bought it.

I watched Brandon circle the car to come to me. He looked so professional and handsome in a suit. In fact, this was the first time aside from pictures that I'd seen him wearing a suit, normally he was a jeans and t-shirt kind of guy.

“Have I told you that you look distinguished tonight,” I whispered as he reached my side and gave me his arm.

“No, you haven't and I'm wearing my best underwear for you,” he replied a little loudly, gaining an eyebrow raise from the doorman.

“Do you need to make a scene wherever you go?” I asked giggling, while avoiding eye contact with the valet who'd heard the exchange.

Entering the restaurant, which served authentic Italian cuisine I scanned the dimly lit room. My gaze landed on a couple of people I'd seen from television but had no idea who they were or why they looked familiar. Brandon seemed to know where we were going so I allowed him to guide me as my eyes drank in the ambiance.

“I just want to warn you, my brother can be a bit of an elitist prick. So...” Brandon whispered as he approached the table.

My heart sank. That didn't sound good to me and immediately sparked my nervousness and insecurity. Thanks for springing this on me now...

“About time you arrived,” the man who I guessed to be his brother said as we approached. His brother seemed to be a

combination of both parents with short-cut chestnut brown hair that resembled his sisters, combined with the brilliantly bright blue eyes of his father. The woman who sat beside him I'd seen before, but judging from her waiflike appearance with gigantic tits I'd suspect she was a model of some sort. I really needed to get a little more in touch with pop culture.

Brandon pulled a chair out for me, seating me next to his sister with him on the opposite side of me. "Yes, well, I took a page from your playbook brother." He turned to me, "This is my brother Connor."

Smiling curtly, I nod toward the man sitting directly across from me.

"So, who do we have here?" His brother asked, grabbing his glass and taking a drink of whatever was inside. There was a slightly glassy look in his eyes, was he high?

"This is Taylor. She's a professor at the university I'm attending."

"Oh, that's right. The teacher." He looked me up and down again. "I heard you had quite the brain on you."

"I get by." He made me uncomfortable, he looked me up and down with a look of distaste on his face. He didn't even know me, but didn't seem to like me. I could feel the judgemental vibes coming off him, similar to the ones that I'd get from the kids when I was in high school. I had to force myself from getting swept up in the tidal wave of insecurity that was threatening to take over.

This wasn't high school. This was real life. We were adults. The past had nothing to do with the present or the

future.

The waiter came and gave us menus and then proceeded to refresh everyone's drinks. The focus seemed to lift off me and a variety of topics seemed to circulate throughout supper. As I suspected Connor's date was indeed a model and social media 'influencer'. I silently scoffed at how proud Connor was of her influencer status and her ability to gain millions of followers by taking her clothes off. If that's what she wanted to do with her life, then so be it, but to put her on such a high pedestal just didn't seem right when there were so many accomplished women in the world who didn't get held to such high regard.

Or maybe it was my own bias. I wasn't immune to being envious from time to time of women who had the kind of beauty the blonde sitting next to him had. Millions of followers didn't happen overnight, regardless of the reasons for having so many there was time and effort put into it and I had to at least give her some credit for that.

Connor excused himself and over ten minutes later returned his eyes even glassier than before and his demeanor changed – he seemed more hostile. He was definitely on something. Glancing over at Brandon, I looked at his profile wondering if he was seeing what I was seeing, but he was in deep conversation with his father and didn't seem to be paying much attention to his brother.

“You know, Taylor,” Connor said, his voice louder than it had been previously. “My brother has never brought a woman home before.”

Forcing a smile to my lips, I nodded. “That’s what I’ve been told.”

“And he’s been with some really hot women. I mean really hot. Like models and actresses, musicians. Girls most men would dream to fuck and yet he chose you. You must be really special.”

What the fuck did that mean?

Who was I kidding? I knew what he meant. The night had been building up to this moment, yet I was still appalled when it did happen.

“Connor!” Zeta’s snapping at him told me all that I needed to know. That was definitely a jab at me and I wasn’t the only one who noticed his aggression towards me.

“What?” he chuckled, “I’m just messing around. Just letting her know what a catch big brother is.”

“She’s an accomplished woman with ten times the intelligence you have so I suggest you take it down a notch,” Brandon growled, hearing just enough to decipher what was going on.

“Boys,” his mother snapped. “You’re making a scene.”

“She doesn’t look like the kind of woman he’s normally with. That’s all. I’m just wondering if it’s a phase. Just because he’s retiring doesn’t mean he needs to downgrade.”

Brandon stood so quickly that his chair went tumbling behind him with a crash as the back hit the floor. The buzzing of voices around us stopped and a stone silence took over. My cheeks began to burn as I felt the eyes of the entire restaurant

on us. If the floor would open up and swallow me whole, I'd welcome it.

“Enough!” his father's voice thundered throughout the room. “She's going to be a part of this family, like it or not. Get used to it or leave.”

Part of this family? What in the hell was going on?

Staring... They were all staring. The eyes of everyone in the restaurant were on us. Were they all wondering why he was with me as well? Were they judging? Of course they were judging.

I looked back over to Brandon whose stare was piercing into Connor's. This was a lot – too much. I wasn't this stressed presenting my research at the conference – not even close. Grabbing his arm, I guided him back to the chair that the waiter who had been closest to us had set back to its rightful position.

“Brandon, please. It's okay. I'm not offended.” I was lying through my teeth, but I'd say anything at this moment to remove the eyes from us.

“It's not okay,” he grumbled not taking his eyes off his brother.

“Please.”

He looked at me, the anger in his eyes beginning to soften. “This isn't how this night was supposed to turn out. I'm sorry, Taylor.”

“Excuse me, you're Brandon Campbell! Right? Man, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I had to come over and say congratulations.”

Our heads turned to see a couple of young men who were perhaps in their mid-twenties, who'd been sitting at a table close to us. I'd been feeling their eyes on us for a chunk of the dinner. It wasn't surprising that they finally approached.

"Can we get some pictures and an autograph?" He pulled his phone out of his jacket pocket as he asked.

Brandon looked at me hesitantly before standing. "As long as it's quick."

"Forgive us for asking but is this your new girlfriend? We thought you were with that actress from the comedy..." He turned to his friend. "What's it called?"

"No. No." He glanced at me quickly. "No, she's not. She's nobody, just a family friend joining us for dinner." He steered the two men away from me.

A nobody? That's what he should have said, right? We were still keeping it secret, but it hurt hearing him say it.

"Part of the family my ass. He just said himself," Connor said it under his breath with a chuckle, but I'd heard it and something snapped within me. Maybe it was the stress of the situation. Perhaps it was the rush of memories from high school that reared their ugly heads. It could have been a dozen different things, but I suddenly felt like the walls were closing in. I could practically hear the taunts of the other girls in the locker room at gym class. Women like Connor's date, who were beautiful and popular. Women like the women Brandon used to date.

This wasn't where I belonged. I'd been here in Boston with him for little more than twenty-four hours and there was

already a scene.

Rising from my chair, I grabbed my purse, slinging it over my shoulder I excused myself. My intention was to go to the bathroom and splash some water on my face. I just needed to get a moment to catch my breath, but then my eyes spotted the back exit. Before I knew what I was doing I pushed open the door and burst out into the back alley taking a deep breath of the cool night air as I emerged.

Without even thinking, I found myself pulling my phone from my purse, and ordering an Uber. By the time I was in the Uber and on my way back to his parent's house, my mind was made up. I was going home. This whole situation was surreal. It wasn't the life I was meant to lead. This past day was showing me that in the real world we were very different.

Too different.

But you love him...

I did. I did with all my heart, more than I ever thought was possible. But was that enough? If I took my heart out of the equation, was it really enough? We didn't have anything in common. We were exact opposites in almost every single way. Logically, we weren't a match. Isn't leading with your heart and being swept up in the lust of a new relationship a big part of why the divorce rate was so high?

By leaving I was just cutting things off before they could advance to that point. I was being logical. That's all. In the long run I was doing us both a favor. The feelings we currently felt would eventually wear off and we'd discover we weren't a match – it was inevitable.

Sitting back in the car seat, I closed my eyes. I'd grab my stuff and just leave. Gerald was at the house, so he'd let me in, and then have the Uber take me to the airport. I'd wait there for the first flight and deal with the fallout of my leaving would cause tomorrow.

Brandon would understand. I was doing this for both of us.

Or you're being irrational and allowing hurt from the past cause you to make rash decisions now.

Damn, I hated that voice. Maybe it was right – maybe it wasn't. it didn't matter, I was leaving either way.

Chapter 22

Brandon

As with what usually happens the two men were only the start of the people who decided to come and offer their congratulations and ask for an autograph and photo. It was always like this. Once the first person asked then it becomes a snowball effect of people coming forward.

Once the final person left, I turned back to the table immediately seeking out Taylor. Surely, she was feeling overwhelmed by this. “Where is she?” I asked, posing the question to no one in particular.

“She went to the bathroom...” Zeta frowned, “It’s been a long time now though.”

Her purse was gone.

Leaving the table with a sense of urgency building within me, I headed straight to the bathrooms a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that something was off. “Taylor,” I called out cracking the door to the women’s room a few inches, keeping my head turned so I wouldn’t inadvertently look inside.

Silence.

“Taylor!” The couple closest to the bathroom turned their heads and looked my way.

“Excuse me, Sir...”

Turning my head I looked at the young, male server. “If you’re looking for the red-head in the green dress, I think she left. I saw her take off out the back door and haven’t seen her since.

“She left,” I said more to myself than to him.

She’s a nobody... My words echoed in my head.

“Fuck!” I yelled not giving a shit who heard me, making the waiter wince and recoil. “Sorry, I’m not angry at you. Just... Never mind.” Brushing past him, I made my way back to the table.

“Is she okay?” My mother asked, all eyes at the table on me awaiting my response.

“She’s gone. She’s left.” Running a hand through my hair, I went through my options and what I should do.

“Where?”

Shrugging, I grabbed my suit jacket and pulled it on, the weight of the ring in my pocket feeling like ten pounds at the moment. “I’m going to find her. Thank you for dinner and I’m sorry for this.” I wasn’t even sure what I was apologizing for, perhaps the spectacle I’d made of our family dinner, although in all fairness Connor had done a knock-up job of causing a scene himself.

I didn’t hear or expect to hear an apology coming from Connor. He wasn’t sorry. I wasn’t sure if my parents noticed the state of mind he was in, but I did and I know Taylor did. He was doing cocaine again. But that was a problem for another day. He was a grown assed man, he needed to stop

sticking his nose where it didn't belong and take care of his own business.

Giving the valet my ticket for them to retrieve the vehicle, I pulled out my phone and sent Taylor a text. She never answered voice messages on a good day so I knew there's no way she'd answer one now that she was upset, but at least she'd see the text.

Brandon: Where are you? If you are headed back to the house please stay there. Don't leave.

Watching the screen I waited to see a response but came up empty. Shit.

The car pulled up and I hopped in, giving the attendant a tip as he passed me the keys. Shifting it into gear, I sped from the restaurant and towards the house moving at speeds that was both reckless and unsafe, but I had a feeling that if she got on a plane and back home then I'd lose her forever.

The problem with Taylor was that she was such an overthinker. By the time she arrived back home she'd have herself convinced that us being together was a bad idea and I wasn't sure if I'd be able to get her back once she made up her mind. The woman was nothing if not stubborn and determined. The moment Connor started to give her shit we should have left. And me telling the fan she was a nobody...

Well... I'd sealed my fate with those words. She liked to pretend that things didn't bother her, but I knew that was a lie. Behind that tough exterior was a scared, fragile woman and in the matter of one night I'd managed to break her.

I groaned.

Even though I'd called her a nobody to protect her and her job there was no way that wouldn't cut her deep.

"Dammit!" I slammed the heel of my hand against the steering wheel. I checked my phone as I pulled into the driveway of the house – nothing. Hopping out of the vehicle, I rushed up the front steps and burst into the house looking for a sign of life. Racing up the stairs to the top floor, I made my way to the bedroom we shared. Her suitcase would be gone, I knew it without looking, but I had to be sure.

Opening the door, I held my breath as I stepped inside of the bedroom and my heart sunk. As suspected her suitcase was missing. "Gerald!" I yelled exiting the room and slamming the door behind me. "Gerald!" I found him at the top of the landing making his way to me.

"She left for the airport, perhaps a half hour ago," he offered without me having to ask.

Dammit! Running a hand through my hair. I quickly weighed my options. "I need you to drive me to the airport. Let's go. We'll take my car."

"Brandon... Umm."

"I don't have time for question period... Let's go." Tossing him the keys to the car I took the stairs down two at a time with him hot on my heels. Surely there was still time, the chances of a flight taking her back this quickly would be impossible to find. I just had to catch her before she boarded.

Taylor

“You’re in luck, we have a cancellation on the flight that is leaving now, but it’s a first-class seat and last minute so unfortunately it’s not the most economical of fares. If you wanted to wait-” The attendant on the other side of the counter grimaced.

“I don’t care.” Grabbing my wallet from my purse I pulled out my VISA and passed it to her. “Whatever it costs. I need out of here.”

“Of course, ma’am.” Smiling, she accepted the credit card. The couple of minutes it took to process the payment felt like an hour to me. Finally, she passed me the ticket, “It’s just-”

“I know the way... Thanks.” I waved my hand at her as I began rushing toward luggage check-in, the suitcase squeaking as it was pulled along the tiled floor at breakneck speeds.

As I checked in my bag and made my way to security, a part of me felt bad that he hadn’t come after me. To his credit, I hadn’t given him much time. Heavens only knew how long the fans would have had him tied up.

She’s nobody... the words echoed through my head striking pain within me once again. I’d devoted my life to science, avoiding relationships so I wouldn’t get hurt, yet despite all of my best efforts I let down my guard and got hurt anyhow.

I should have known.

I’d been foolish.

There was a small hint of a voice that screamed out that I was overreacting. Maybe I'd misunderstood. Maybe he had chosen his words poorly. There could have been countless reasons why he'd said that he had.

Maybe I was being rash, I did have a tendency to make impulsive decisions when I was about to have my period. I was due...

Halting in my tracks, a sense of dread washed over me.

Oh God...

How could I have missed it? My menstrual cycle worked like clockwork. No amount of stress or activity messed with mother nature for me.

"Taylor!" An all too familiar male voice screamed out from behind me.

Dear God, I was hearing his voice now.

I'd been under a lot of stress and I was getting older. Maybe this whole missed period thing was just a coincidence. Women's bodies start to make changes in their thirties. Maybe my cycle was adjusting. I couldn't expect that things would stay the same forever. There would be signs.

"Taylor." Hands grabbing my shoulders spun me around to face the source of the voice.

"Brandon," I whispered. "What are you doing here?"

"Where are you going?"

"Home. Where else?" I huffed, avoiding his gaze. "I don't belong here or with you. Your brother made it clear and you were pretty clear that I was a nobody."

He cursed under his breath. “Taylor, that’s not what I meant. It was a stupid choice of words. All I wanted to do was protect you.”

Was I overreacting? Yes. No. Maybe.

Finally, I looked up into his eyes. “Look, Brandon. I’m just- ” I cut myself off in mid-sentence. There was something in his eyes, it was a mixture of determination and uncertainty.

“I wanted to do this under better circumstances, but this works as well,” he stated.

My eyes widened and the world around us seemed to fade away as I watched him lower himself down to one-knee. This couldn’t be happening. He wasn’t... My stomach began to churn. I attempted to turn away from him, but he held tight to my hand, pulling me back to face him, his strength easily overpowering me.

“Brandon...” My mind and my body were both demanding I get away, but Brandon was insistent. When he pulled a ring out of his pocket with his free hand my heart stopped beating for a moment.

“Taylor, I love you.”

My stomach churned a second time but this time with more ferocity.

“I have to- ” Another failed attempt at escape.

“Please, please let me finish what I have to say and after I’m done if you still- ”

He didn’t get to finish what I was sure would have been a beautiful speech. My stomach churned once more and

gage. I attempted to stop it, every muscle in my entire body freezing, but it was no use. It felt like an explosion erupted inside of my gut as everything I'd eaten at dinner forced its way up and out covering both myself and Brandon, including the beautiful ring he held in his hand.

Coughing and sputtering, tears streaming down my cheeks, I uttered a stream of apologies, my cheeks burning red knowing that dozens of people would all be staring at us if I were to allow myself to look up.

I just wanted to curl up in a hole and die.

Chapter 23

Brandon

Of all the answers in the world I could have gotten to my proposal, being vomited on never for a moment entered my mind as a possibility. It took a second to break the shock I was in before standing back up. Grabbing the handkerchief from my jacket pocket I passed it to her as a janitor with a mop and bucket began to make his way toward us, a none to happy look on his face.

Looking up, I noticed dozens of people staring, the crowd gathering getting larger by the second. Several people had their phones out, no doubt recording this.

Fuck.

I'd really messed up this time.

Shielding her from the camera and onlookers, I tucked her close to me, covering her face with my jacket which was now destroyed from the large amount of vomit I was covered in.

"I'm so sorry," she sobbed. "I just..."

Steering her away from the crowd we made a beeline for the bathrooms. To my relief the family bathroom was open so I ushered her inside and locked the door behind us. Turning back to her, my heart ached as I stared at her. Her beautiful dress was ruined, but it was the humiliation and fear that I could see in her eyes that really pained me.

"I'm the one who is sorry. I shouldn't have chased you, but I couldn't let you go, Taylor." Placing the puke-covered ring on the sink, I pulled several sheets of paper towel from the dispenser, wetted them, and did my best to assist her in cleaning off her dress.

"I can do this. You should worry about your suit. My dress is a cheap thing from online, I doubt your suit is a twenty-dollar special."

Chuckling, I shrugged off my suit jacket, discarded the dirtied paper towel and got some fresh ones. "I'm not concerned about the suit. I have a few of them that I never wear. Besides, I'm sure my tailor would love to see me again – he loves taking my money." I chuckled hoping she'd see that I didn't care about the damned jacket. Luckily the jacket and pants had gotten the lion's share of the vomit leaving my button-down shirt underneath virtually unscathed.

That didn't seem to make her feel any better. Her eyes shifted to the ring. Grabbing the box, I ran it under the water until the diamond sparkled like it had previously. "Look, Taylor. This isn't how I planned it to go down in my head. I envisioned rushing to the terminal, lowering myself to one knee and proposing, one grand gesture to show you how much I need you in my life – for the rest of my life."

"I'm sorry."

My heart stopped beating a moment. Did she mean she was sorry that she'd ruined the proposal or sorry she didn't want to marry me?

As if reading my mind she continued, "I have a lot on my mind and I'm feeling severely sick to my stomach. The puking wasn't because of the proposal, it was just ridiculously bad timing."

Looking around the bathroom, I took in the toilet, baby changing station and overflowing waste paper canister. This was probably the least romantic place I could think of to propose. Looking down at the ring, I looked back up at her to see her gurgling water she'd gotten from the sink and then spit it out in the sink, turning on the water and rising it down.

The whole situation seemed insane. I couldn't propose here.

Dabbing her mouth with paper towel, she turned back to me and her gaze once more landed on the ring. "I'm sorry I ruined that. This was one big shitshow of a night – you know. Maybe I shouldn't have left."

"What happened?"

Grasping the edge of the sink she pulled herself up into it, her feet dangling along the side. Placing her clasped hands on her lap she seemed to look lose herself in thought for a moment. “It was strange. Things were great. I was so happy. Then we went to dinner and your brother started to remind me of the bullies I endured throughout school. A long time ago I know, but those things stick with you in the back of your subconscious no matter how hard you may try to rid yourself of them.”

I cursed my brother under my breath. If we were teenagers again, I’d kick his ass on principle. I wish I could say I understood, but I didn’t. I’d never had to deal with bullies, just the normal hazing from teammates and back in college my frat brothers, but that wasn’t anything like what she’d experienced.

“I’m sorry you had to deal with that.” I clutched the ring box tighter in my hand unsure of how to proceed.

“And then the fans started to swarm and then the reporter and...” A sob caught in her throat.”

Pocketing the ring, I stepped up to her and placed my hands on her upper arms gently rubbing her arms as I lowered my forehead to hers. “You’re the most important person in my life Taylor. I was stupid. When I realized that there were people taking pictures, I wanted to protect your job and ended up putting my foot in my mouth. I never claimed to be the brightest man in the world you know. You were right, I’m a major meathead.” Straightening up, I looked down at her, the ring burning a hole in my pocket.

Looking up, she smiled for the first time since this whole fiasco went down. “So what do we do now?”

My fingers itched to grab the ring and propose again. She hadn’t given me an answer and I still couldn’t say for sure what her answer would be. Before this, I’d been a solid ninety percent sure – now... I just didn’t know.

~*~ TT ~*~

Taylor

The embarrassment I was feeling was more intense than I could ever remember it being. I had a lot of years in school to draw from, but definitely the worst of recent history. And I’d ruined his attempt at a nice rom-com proposal moment. Proposing in an airport as the woman attempts to flee was cliché, yet oh-so-romantic.

And I’d ruined it.

Just looking into his eyes I could see that he was struggling with something. But the way his hand kept touching the ring box which was now in his pants pocket, I figured it was a pretty solid guess to say he was trying to decide if he was going to propose or shelve that idea for now.

My career was now in jeopardy depending on how viral the photos, and no doubt the videos, that were circulating went. And I could potentially be carrying his baby. Closing my eyes, I did my best to calm myself. A missed period and a little bit of vomit meant nothing. It could be from anything.

I was tempted to tell him my suspicions about the baby but how would that affect the proposal? I didn't want him to propose because I was pregnant. I wanted him to propose because he loved me.

No... I wouldn't say anything until I knew for sure. Then, if I was, I'd let him know.

"Taylor, I want to propose to you. And I suppose I kinda already did. But I don't want this to be our memory."

Laughing, I looked up into his eyes. "I don't think it's possible to change it now. This already is. An attempted proposal in an airport followed by vomit. That's our story."

He looked down at me a moment, his expression unreadable. Finally, a large grin spread across his face as he began laughing. "I guess you're right. This is our story." Looking around us, he laughed louder. "This will be a wonderful story to tell our children. Their dad proposed to their mom in the shitter of an airport after she puked all over him."

"In your defense, it's the family shitter so it's elevated from the regular stalls." Hearing him laugh and seeing the stress evaporate from his features and eyes made me feel more at ease.

He rolled his eyes at me. "Yes, that's so much better." Leaving me for a minute he pulled several pieces of paper towel and then laid it on the floor before wagging his index finger under my nose. "Just keep this in mind. When the kids ask us why I did this here, you'll be taking the blame."

Biting at my lower lip, I watched him as he dropped to one knee on the paper towel, pulling the ring box from his pocket. For a moment, I felt a surge of terror. This was really happening. A half an hour ago I was intent on breaking it off and putting Brandon Campbell behind me, but now... Now he was on one knee and there was no other answer for me to utter than yes.

“I had an entire speech planned in my head, but there’s something wet seeping through this paper towel and my pants so I’m going to make this short and sweet. Taylor Haynes, I know we haven’t been dating long, but I’m confident in our love and that we were booked into that hotel room together for a reason. Will you marry me?”

My heart swelled, beating so quickly in my chest that I thought it was going to explode through my ribcage. There was only one answer that I could give him. “Yes. Yes, I will!”

Chapter 24

Taylor

Sitting down in my office chair, I looked down at the big, bright plus sign on the pregnancy test, not in the least bit surprised at the result, but at the same time still shocked now that it was confirmed. It had been a few days since I'd said yes to his proposal and this was the first time I'd been able to escape his side in order to get a test. I didn't want him to know what I was suspecting although him seeing me rush to the bathroom to vomit numerous times a day was causing him to worry. Besides, he was in the process of writing his final exam for my class, I didn't need him distracted with anything other than the test I knew he was going to pass with flying colors.

Looking down at the stunning ring he'd placed on my finger, a wide grin spread across my lips. The diamond was stunning. The ring was stunning. He couldn't have chosen better, although I would have been happy with a simple little ring from the nearby department store.

A knock came at my door giving me a start. Pulling my drawer open, I placed the ring inside and closed it up. "Come in." Looking up at the clock on the opposite wall, I halfway expected the person who walked in to be Brandon, but instead of feeling the joy of seeing my soon-to-be husband, my boss stepped into the office.

His expression was grim as he walked inside and then closed the door behind him. "Do you have a minute?" he asked, not waiting for a reply but strolling across the room and taking a seat across from me.

“I guess. Classes are done, I’m just waiting for the tests to be delivered.”

“Yes. Well, something troubling has come to my attention.”

Uh-oh. My stomach began to churn, but this time it was the dread I was feeling over what he undoubtedly was about to say instead of the baby growing inside of me. I’d seen the videos of us together. The horrifying, humiliating videos of me vomiting over one of the country’s best known hockey players as he attempted to propose. I’d hoped that it didn’t get back to my boss, but by the look on his face that had been wishful thinking.

It’ll be fine baby, I’ll take care of you either way.
Brandon had told me.

I wasn’t so sure. And he didn’t quite get it. It wasn’t about the money, it was about working in the field I loved. It was about being respected in said field.

Just play dumb, I told myself forcing myself to smile at him. “What would that be?”

His brown eyes narrowed at me as he sat back in the chair across from me. “I’ve seen videos of you and one of your students Brandon Campbell. It was the proposal. You do know that fraternizing with students is strictly prohibited and grounds for termination.”

I gulped down the anxiety that was threatening to overwhelm me as I stared wide-eyed at the slender, grey-haired man before me. “I am aware, Dr. Wentworth. It wasn’t something that we meant to happen. He just happened to be

my neighbor and we got to know each other..." My voice trailed off, just the look on his face told me that he didn't care.

"We can't allow for this to happen at our facility. I'm sorry, but today will be your last day here at the university. We have no issues giving you a reference, your work has been exceptional, but we can't have this type of publicity." My boss sighed, running a hand through his unruly hair. "If Mr. Campbell hadn't been in the public eye then perhaps we might have been able to overlook this, but he is and it's forcing our hand. I'm sorry."

Nodding, I lowered my gaze telling myself not to cry. Another wonderful side effect of this pregnancy was that I didn't seem to have any control over my emotions. Any little thing seemed to be setting me off. If I was experiencing this kind of side effects from the pregnancy then I didn't even want to think about what I was going to have to go through in my third trimester.

"We appreciate all you've done here at the university. You're a good scientist. This is truly unfortunate." The chair he'd been sitting in made a cringy scraping noise as he pushed it back and exited the room, softly closing the door behind him.

The moment the door was closed I broke down, tears cascading down my cheeks as I began to sob uncontrollably. I could get through this. I'd gotten through worse than this in my lifetime. After a moment of allowing myself to lose control, I took a deep breath in and slowly released it. A second deep breath in and release. Brandon had told me that if the worst were to happen then he had a plan. I wasn't sure

what that plan was, but I trusted him. My life wasn't only academics, it now included a to-be husband and baby. I had to keep that in mind moving forward. This was just another phase of my life. If being with Brandon had taught me anything it was that I had to be less rigid and work with the hand fate dealt me.

~*~ TT ~*~

Brandon

Leaving the testing area, I felt good. It was an ace in the bag, I could feel it in my bones. I'd barely made it two steps from the doorway of the testing area when I was approached by the dean of the school, looking extremely uncomfortable. He was a small man, about Taylor's height with a head so bald that it shined under the fluorescent lighting.

"Mr. Campbell, it's good to see you again." He extended his hand to me which I accepted. "How was the exam?"

"It was good. Thanks." Giving his hand a brief shake. "What can I do for you?"

"Would you have a moment to join me in my office for a brief chat?"

My eyes narrowed as I stared down at him. I didn't have to ask him what this was about, I was certain I already knew, but I decided to play along. Taylor was in this mess

because of me, I needed to do whatever I had to in order to make this right for her.

“Of course. Lead the way.” He led me down several hallways until we came to the offices of the science department. We eventually ended up in a moderately sized office that resembled a doctor’s office complete with a skeleton in the corner and a DNA strand sculpture that stood a solid five feet tall behind his desk.

“By all means, take a seat.” He motioned to the chair across from him as he took a seat behind the oversized mahogany desk. “The reason I asked you to join me is in regard to Dr. Haynes.”

Crossing one ankle over the opposite knee, I cocked my head to the side and eyed him. “What about her?”

He looked nervous as he grimaced. “Well, it has come to my attention that you and Dr. Haynes have been engaging in a relationship. It is against school policy for a student and teacher to engage in relations when the student is attending the classes at the school.”

“Is that so?”

He gulped. “Yes, it is. I admire your abilities and the school is honored to have you as a student which has put us in a very vicarious position.”

Cocking a brow at him, it hadn’t been my intention to come off as intimidating, I suppose it was just a personality trait at this point in my life. “Is that so?”

“It is. I’ve discussed this at great lengths with my colleagues and we’ve come to the unfortunate decision to have

to let her go. We wanted to let you know personally, hoping that you'll see how we had no choice and not leave our facility over this."

I huffed. "So you are going to fire my fiancé and you want me to continue to attend school here to what end? Up the prestige of this place. With all due respect, you can go fuck yourself."

He recoiled back as if he'd been hit. "Mr. Campbell there really isn't any need for that kind of language."

Rage filled me as my hands gripped the arms of the chair tightly. "You're lucky that the only thing I'm doing is telling you to go fuck yourself. I'm usually a lot more hands on when dealing with pompous assholes like you. But I'm trying to be a better person, for Taylor. Have you told her yet?"

"My colleague is in the process of telling her now."

"Fuck!" I cursed slamming my fist onto the top of his desk making him flinch.

Inhaling deeply, I released my breath as Taylor had taught me to do when I began to lose my cool or feel frustrated. I'd been preparing for this and had already made some phone calls just in case the worst were to happen. I told Taylor that I'd take care of her, and I'd meant it. I just hoped she didn't take it too hard. She'd been sick over the past several days and not quite herself. I hated that this was going to pile onto what she was going through already.

"If that will be all, I'll see myself out." Standing I made my way to the door. I needed to get to her and make sure

she was okay.

“I do hope you decide to continue your education with us.”

With my hand on the door handle, I turned back to him and laughed. “Yeah. You can count on it.” Opening the door, I slammed it behind me with such force that it shook the walls, causing a four by two painting to come loose from the wall and go crashing to the floor, the glass shattering on the hard ceramic tile.

Her office was only a five-minute walk from the dean’s office. I didn’t bother to knock, but let myself in finding her behind her desk with a little white stick in her hands. There were streaks going down her cheeks from her eye makeup. The fucker made her cry. I wanted to kick the shit out of every last one of the people responsible for her pain, but it wouldn’t change what was. All I could do was make it better.

My gaze lowered to her hand and a long white stick between her fingertips. She looked up from the little white plastic stick to meet my gaze giving me a small smile. “You look pissed. I presume you heard the news?”

“I just left the dean’s office.” Rushing across the office floor in just a few long, quick strides, I was to her side and pulling her up out of the chair and into my arms. “I’m so sorry baby. I never meant to- ”

The thing she’d been holding dropped onto her desk as she wrapped her arms around me and pressed her face against my shirt. Looking down at the thing desk, my breath caught in my throat. That was a pregnancy test – a positive pregnancy

test. It took nearly a full minute for the ramifications of what I was looking at to register.

“You’re pregnant?” I asked softly, a little disbelieving.

She sniffed, tears lining her eyes. “Surprise.” She shrugged as she pulled back from my embrace. “I just found out a few minutes before my boss fired me. It’s been a hell of a day.”

“Boy, I’ll say. Definitely wasn’t expecting that. How do you feel? Is that why you’ve been so sick?” There were so many emotions racing through me at the moment I didn’t even know where to start to process them all.

She nodded, giving me a sheepish grin. “I think so, yeah. I didn’t want to tell you until I knew for sure.” Crinkling her nose up at me, she eyed me with skepticism. “How do you feel about it? Are you ready to be a dad?”

“I knew it would happen eventually. I just...” After a moment a wide smile broke out on my face. “I’m going to be a fucking father!” Grabbing her by the waist, I lifted her up into the air as if she weighed nothing more than a feather and pulled her tight to me. “A father. Fuck baby!”

She squealed, giggling like a teenager as she held tight to me. God, how I loved hearing her laugh. Putting her back down onto her feet, I cupped her cheek in my hand love filling my heart as I looked down into her stunning emerald eyes. “You’ve giving me everything, Taylor. I don’t even know how to process how happy I am right now. I love you, baby.”

“I love you too.” Her smile faded slightly reminding me that her day was bittersweet.

“I promise you now. I’m going to make you and our child a life beyond anything you’ve ever dreamed of and that includes a career that leaves you fulfilled. Do you trust me?”

There was a flash of indecision in her eyes before she answered. “I do.”

Lowering my lips to hers, I kissed her with a tenderness I’d never known existed within me. “Then don’t worry about this job or the future. This is just the beginning.”

Epilogue

One Year Later

“Brandon, come on! We’re going to be late!” Buckling the car seat with our three-month-old baby girl Tessa into the back of the SUV, I gave him a look of disapproval as he came sauntering out of the house as if he had all the time in the world.

“We’re going to my parent’s place. It’s not like it’s some huge event, we’ve got a baby now, they’ll understand.” He said nonchalantly.

“Come on. If not for you then for me. You know how I hate being late.”

He stopped next to me, leaned down and gave me a quick peck on the cheek before leaning over my shoulder to look at Tessa. “I swear I’ve never seen so much hair on a baby in my life and look how red it is. She’s a dead ringer for my beautiful wife.”

Blushing, I attempted to keep a stern expression on my face as he gave me another quick kiss, this time on the lips. We’d moved to Boston a few weeks after I’d been dismissed from my job and a couple of weeks after that, gotten married. I would have been fine waiting. I’d been worried about how much work it would be to get a wedding together in such a short period of time, but he insisted. His view was that he wanted to get married before the baby came so we wouldn’t have to stress with wedding plans while caring for a newborn

and when he had his family jump onto the bandwagon I'd been outnumbered and caved. In the end, they'd been right. It had been a beautiful autumn service in the public gardens with our closest friends and family present. It was really amazing what was possible when money was no longer an issue.

Opening the passenger side door of the black SUV for me, he helped me inside before sliding behind the wheel and starting her up.

“So what is the big surprise anyhow?”

“If I told you then it wouldn't be a surprise, now would it?” he teased with a wink that had my heart fluttering in my chest. Over a year and he still had a way of making me feel like a schoolgirl with a crush just by looking at me. “I will tell you this much, you're really going to like it.”

I sighed as I sank back into the soft leather seat. I'd grown to love his family – with the exception of his brother – I hated that douche, but I wouldn't have to deal with him anyhow he'd checked himself into rehab – again - a week ago. Brandon didn't have much faith that it would work, but his family refused to give up on him.

“Tired?” Brandon asked pulling me back to alertness just as I was about to drift off into a deep sleep.

I lazily opened one eye and peered over at him. “You'd be as well if you were woken up in the middle of the night every night.” The man slept like the dead sleeping through Tessa's overnight screams for a feeding leaving me to get up.

“I told you, wake me up.”

Laughing, I opened both eyes and looked over at him. “It’s faster just to feed her, you don’t know how hard it is to wake you at night.”

“I apologize.”

With a shrug, I closed my eyes and sank back into the seat. “It’s not like I have a job to get to.” The comment was meant to be light in tone, but I could hear the bitterness. I missed my job and how it fulfilled me. Don’t get me wrong, I loved being a mother and a wife, and Brandon was the most incredible husband I could ever ask for, but there was still a part of me that needed to work. With each day the itch to go back to work got more intense.

“I think I need to start looking for a job.”

“You think? You’re not happy?”

With a sigh, I looked back over at him. “It’s not that, but you know passionate I am about science. I didn’t get a PhD to have it just hanging on the wall of my office, not putting that knowledge to use.”

He shrugged. “I’m sure you’ll figure something out.”

Annoyance sprang up within me. “You might be enjoying the retired life, but I’m not. I want to work, Brandon.”

Not bothering to respond, he pulled onto the driveway of his parent’s place and parked the car in front of the house. My annoyance with how dismissive he was put on the back burner when I noticed how many cars were parked in front of the house. “What’s going on?”

“You’ll see.” His smirk made me narrow my gaze at him. Getting out of the vehicle, he unhooked Tessa’s car seat from the base and pulled her from the vehicle. “You coming?”

Unbuckling my seatbelt, I opened the door and followed him up the cement stairs of the house. The door opened as we reached the door to display Brandon’s mother and father with wide smiles on each of their faces.

Something was seriously off with them. Looking over at Brandon, he was wearing the same shit-eating grin. “What is going on Brandon?”

“There’s my favorite girl!” His mother grabbed the baby from the carrier and hoisted her into her arms. “Grandma’s baby. Your parents need to bring you over more often, yes they do!” she cooed taking Tessa inside.

Taking my hand, Brandon led me into the house where several dozen people were standing with glasses of champagne in their hands. A couple of servers were circulating the room with drinks and finger foods.

A woman dressed in a grey pants suit approached me as we entered. “You must be Taylor, I’ve been dying to meet you.” She extended her hand to me.

Giving Brandon a confused look, I forced a smile to my lips as I took her hand, “And you are?”

“I’m Andrea Hopkins.” She motioned to the people behind her, “And these are a few of the staff that work with me at Hopkins-Cann research facility. We’ve gone through your credentials and we would like to extend to you an offer to come work with us.”

Hopkin's-Cann... My eyes widened in amazement hardly believing my ears.

She continued, "I've read your work and I am impressed. I think with your ideas you'll be an excellent fit for our research team we're making amazing advancements..."

She continued to rattle on about their research, but I didn't need her to explain what they were doing – I knew. Working with them had always been a dream of mine. They were on the cutting edge of advancements in neurobiology. Looking over at Brandon, all I got for a reply was a wink.

He'd set this up. How in the fuck he'd managed that was beyond me. A part of me was furious, I wanted a job on my own merits not because it was handed to me because of who my husband and in-laws were.

I stepped closer to her, lowering my voice I said, "With all due respect, I can't take a job because it's a favor to my husband and in-laws."

Putting a hand up, she stopped me before I could continue my protest. "I've been interested in your research since I saw you present your paper over a year ago. Your talents weren't appreciated at the university, but with us the sky is the limit. The wage and benefits package will make what you were getting at the school look like chump change. So, what do you say?"

"You liked my paper?"

"Read it and loved it. There's some things we can add to and would like to change, but that's all technicalities. We need you on our team Taylor."

I fought back the urge to jump up and down, screaming like a fool with joy. She'd read my paper. She loved it. I had to take a moment to settle the excitement within before I nodded, grinning from ear to ear. "I'd love to Doctor Hopkins."

She gave me a satisfied nod. "Then when you're ready, I'd like to introduce you to your new co-workers. Welcome to the Hopkins-Cann family."

Coming to my side, Brandon put an arm around my waist and pulled me close placing a light kiss on my temple. "Congratulations baby."

"Thank you," I whispered to him.

"Nothing to thank me for. It's all on you. I just helped expedite the inevitable."

He bent down again. The moment his lips touched mine I was lost, swept away in the essence that was this strong, powerful man. There was a feeling inside of me that told me this was meant to be and that I could indeed have everything I ever dreamed of. This was my movie-worthy rom-com moment and I planned on savoring every second of it.

The End.

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Excerpt from:

Bad Roommate

By

Terry Towers

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Description

Never room with a playboy. Words to live by. Unfortunately, I seemed to have missed that memo. When Carrington Anderson shows up on my doorstep applying to become my roommate, I'm immediately shook. He doesn't remember who I am, but I sure as hell remember him.

He'd broken my heart and been part of the reason my high school years had been complete and utter torture for me. I still dealt with the emotional and mental damage high school had inflicted upon my psyche.

Now ten years later, a hundred and fifty pounds lighter and adorned with more tattoos than a sailor, I wasn't even close to being the same girl I'd been back then. The girl I used to be died a long time ago.

I thought I could resist his charms this time, but I was sorely mistaken. As we got to know each other all over again, I feared he'd destroy my heart a second time around.

Chapter 1

Felicity

Oh my God! I groaned inwardly, sinking back into the overstuffed, navy plush sofa. My pure black cane corso mastiff, Misty, who'd taken up the vast majority of the sofa, lazily opened her chocolate-brown eyes, looking up at me with her head tilting slightly to the left.

“I don't want one either, believe me. But rent in New York is expensive and an apartment that will take a dog your size is even more expensive. So this is kinda your fault - really. We can't afford the bills on our own for much longer. I'm running through my savings quicker than I'd like,” I found myself explaining even though I knew she wouldn't understand a word. “Long story short... We need a new roommate.”

I sighed. Twenty-eight years old and still needing a roommate. It wasn't where I expected my life to be headed when I graduated from high school. I had dreams of marriage and a baby and the white picket fence just outside the city. But as it turns out, we don't always get what we want in life.

My doorbell rang. Looking down at my watch, I frowned. This Carrington dude was fifteen minutes late for his interview – he didn't give me a last name in his email. Though

his email address started with playboy4ever, so I wasn't expecting much – no doubt a douche. Considering only two of the five scheduled for today had shown up, I'd give him half marks for at least making an appearance and not wasting my time. The people I met yesterday were complete disasters.

The buzzer sounded again.

“Yeah, yeah. You're late and now I'm the one expected to rush... Not looking good for you so far buddy,” I muttered more to myself than to the dog who didn't bother to join me in the walk across the room and to the intercom.

“Yes,” I said, pressing the button and waiting for a reply.

There was a pause and then, “This is Carrington. I'm here to do a meet and greet for an apartment.”

Pressing the talk button, I replied, “Come on up. Fifteenth floor, apartment 1521.” My index finger lingered on the talk button before hitting the button to buzz him up, just long enough for me to take notice of the fact that I was long overdue to have my nails done, the white gel polish had grown out a solid quarter of an inch. It's crazy how easily you can lower your standards for your looks when you weren't out hunting for a man. Aside from going to the gym downstairs and my daily run, who'd I have to impress, the clerk at the convenience store down the street?

As I waited at the door for him to arrive, I felt a wave of nerves. This had to work out, I couldn't handle many more of these waste-of-time interviews. On the other side of the door, I faintly heard his footsteps coming down the hallway, however, I waited at the door for him to knock and allowed the

span of a couple beats before twisting the knob and pulling it open to avoid looking too anxious.

At 5'2, I was always shorter than most other adults but as I swung the door open, my line of sight focused on the broad chest of a man that had to be 6'2, maybe even 6'3. My eyes traveled up his broad chest with a black cotton t-shirt stretched across it, to a handsome face with a couple days' worth of scruff.

That's when it struck me.

I knew this man. Just looking at him made me tremble inside as a slew of old memories I'd rather have forgotten about rushed through my mind. It had been a long time since I'd last seen him, not since high school, but there was a point in time – a long time ago - I'd known him quite well.

“Carrington...” I blinked hardly believing my fucking eyes. “Carrington Anderson? Are you fucking kidding me?” Shaking my head, I took a step back from his massive, sexy as sin body. He even smelled amazing, the intoxicating scent of his cologne drifted to me, teasing my nostrils.

His eyes narrowed as he stared down at me, a weak smile on his lips. “Do I know you?”

I wasn't surprised he hadn't recognized me. I hadn't seen him since high school and I'd changed a lot since then, including losing well over a hundred pounds and dyeing my naturally dark hair to platinum blond. The array of colorful rainforest tattoos littering both my arms were also very new additions. Some would argue my insane need to modify myself had a lot to do with my lack of self-esteem through years of mental and emotional torture at the hands of my classmates.

They wouldn't be wrong. I spent a lot of time and money to rid myself of the girl I used to be to become the woman I was today.

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him who I was, Connie Felicity Boyce. Formally, Connie the Cow as my high school peers had called me. Oh, the good old days. Something held me back though. I'd been going by Felicity Boyce for years now.

Clearing my throat, I took a step back and shook my head. For whatever reason, I didn't want him knowing he used to know me. "Sorry, I mixed up who was coming at what time. I..." Hoping he wouldn't give it much thought I waved him inside, closing the door behind him.

Did I really want to live with this asshat? He was part of the reason my high school life had been so horrible. He crushed me and it hadn't even fazed him.

My eyes scanned his broad back and dipped lower. He had one seriously fine ass. Sincerely, you could bounce a damned nickel off it.

Misty stretched, placing her front paws onto the floor and slowly pulled herself from the sofa, casually crossed the living room to greet Carrington, her bobbed tail wagging happily for some pats – traitor.

"Big dog." Reaching down, he gave her a few pats on the head.

"Yes, she's getting old so she's not very energetic anymore – not that she'd ever been all that active to begin with."

His gaze shifted from the dog to me and he smiled. His smile lit up his entire face, an amused twinkle in his dark blue eyes.

I'd always admired how gorgeous his eyes were, an alluring deep sapphire blue. The type of eyes you'd lose yourself into if you didn't watch yourself.

Connie the Cow... Connie the Cow. A voice at the back of my head chimed in – mocking me. He'd been one of those bullies. He'd never tormented me directly, but he never attempted to stop the ridicule. Had he tried to stop it then, they would've listened to him. My senior year of high school would've gone much differently – all he had to do was say stop. But he hadn't. He hadn't because then people might've remembered we'd dated the summer before our freshman year of high school and judged him for it.

Connie the Cow.

So he didn't, he allowed the torment.

As much as I would've liked to simply let it go and move on, my high school years had affected me in ways that lingered a decade later. Those years had broken me mentally and it had taken a long time to rebuild myself.

“I can live with that.” He gave Misty another pat on the head before surveying our surroundings and nodding. “Nice place. The ad said it was a two-bedroom?”

“Umm. Y-yes...” Giving myself a mental kick, I led him past the kitchen, small dining room area and into the living room. Crossing the room, I opened the blinds. “We've got an excellent view of the park.” I shrugged. “It's not Central

Park or anything, but it's nice nonetheless if you like to jog or to relax with a picnic... Or whatever. The greenspace is nice either way." Placing my hands on my hips, I glanced up at him. How long would it take for him to recognize me? Despite all the physical changes in me, there was a very good chance he'd figure it out on his own – eventually. He'd just need to come across a yearbook or old high school photo. Luckily, I hated the way I looked back then so all photos of me were tucked away in albums or boxes in the closet and were never looked at.

"Great." His eyes scanned the horizon. "Loving it already."

"I'll show you the extra room. It's not huge or anything. Just a room." Leading him to the bedroom situated across from mine next to the bathroom, I opened the door and stepped aside allowing him entry.

As he swept past me his elbow lightly grazed my breast, sending a little shiver through me. Inhaling sharply, I took a step backwards distancing myself from him. Fuck, maybe the problem was I hadn't been laid in what felt like forever. Had to be for me to get shivers over Carrington fucking Anderson.

Why the hell I was showing him the apartment instead of kicking his ass out was beyond me. It's just the other candidates had been so questionable in more ways than one. At least he seemed normal.

He's a prick, but at least he's a normal prick.

Carrington nodded as he slowly turned. "This would do. Room for a queen-sized bed and a dresser. What more

could a single guy ask for, right?”

“Suppose so. Do you expect to have plenty of company?”

He grinned his gaze pinning me. “Would that be an issue?”

“I wasn’t planning on getting a male roommate. The only reason I’m considering it is because my last roommate slept with my boyfriend so figured a male roommate would be a better fit.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. For what it’s worth, the guy was a fool to do that to a woman as stunning as you are.”

Heat rose to my cheeks. “Thank you. I appreciate you saying that.”

“Did it all work out? With your boyfriend? Still together?”

Cocking a brow up at him, I laughed. Though the chuckle was more over my stupidity than the hilarity of the situation. It hadn’t been funny at all, just another blow to my fragile ego.

“Yes, it’s going great,” I answered dryly, rolling my eyes.

“I bet. So single and strictly monogamous, that’s your deal?”

“It’s not yours?”

He shrugged. “Yeah, well. I like to keep my doors wide open. Life is too short, ya know?”

Crossing my arms over my chest, I eyed him for a minute. “Well, we’re nearing thirty, there comes a point when finding your happily ever after should be a priority.”

“A couple years to go before thirty, just saying.”

“If that helps you sleep at night. Let’s chat for a few minutes if you don’t mind?” Spinning on my heel, I left the room and settled myself onto the sofa waiting for him to follow behind.

This wasn’t high school. This was adulthood. We were on even ground. In fact, I had the advantage because I had something he wanted and needed – a place to stay. Apartments in this area were hard to come by. The realization still hadn’t eased me as my gaze followed him as he made his way across the room to sit next to me.

“What do you want to know?” He shot that sweet, sexy smile at me again. I remembered that smile, it made me swoon back then and a decade later, it still had an effect on me. “I’m an open book.”

Just kick him out. This is insane. Get rid of the asshole, the voice in the back of my mind chimed in. *It’s not like you’ll be able to live with him!* Having him here brought back bad vibes. Vibes I didn’t need, especially when I’d tried so hard to move on.

But I ignored the voice.

“What do you do for a living? Should I expect a parade of women here? I’m not overly comfortable with a hoard of women coming over each night. I value my privacy. I’d rather not have the hassle of keeping all of the names straight.”

His head jerked back and a roar of laughter erupted from him. “Just because I’m not the kind of guy that relishes the thought of a serious relationship doesn’t mean I’m a player.”

When I cast him a skeptical look. “That’s not what your email handle says.”

Chuckling, I could’ve sworn I noticed a hint of a blush appear on his cheeks then fade just as quickly. “That email was made a long time ago. I just never bothered to get a new one, less embarrassing one.” When I raised a skeptical brow he continued, “I promise, I’ll be discreet.”

“And occupation?”

“I’m an artist, though a struggling one. I just started a gig tattooing at a shop not too far from here. The money isn’t great yet, which is why I’m looking to share a place.” He looked down at my heavily tattooed arms. “Nice ink by the way.”

I looked down at the tattoos that I hardly knew were there anymore, they were a part of me now. I nodded. “Thanks. The artists were amazing to work with.” Clearing my throat, I straightened on the sofa. “This is temporary then?”

“No. If the situation works with us then I’d like this to be a permanent thing. I’m not looking for Miss Right or anything of the sort, so moving out isn’t something I have any intentions of doing anytime soon.”

My eyes scanned him for a moment. He’d always been a good-looking guy, but the additional years had given him a more chiseled, mature look. His jawline was sharp with a

dimpled chin. I could only imagine how many women he had lined up. I'd bet his phone was filled with girls' numbers. Hell, even though I hated him, I still felt an attraction towards him. It didn't help that he'd worn a cologne that drew me to him with its fresh, woody scent.

In fact, flashes of how good it'd felt when he'd kiss and hold me all those years ago came racing to the forefront of my mind. I'd foolishly thought it would be forever. But I suppose many girls feel their first boyfriend and love would be the one. Part of the teenage girl daydream. It was never reality, but at the time it was easy to forget that.

Damn. Sliding back on the sofa a tad, I attempted to distance myself from the temptation.

“Look... Felicity...” He placed a hand on my shoulder, the heat from his hand radiating through me, making me feel all warm and cozy inside. “I suspect you have reservations. I get that, so I'll level with ya. I need a place and it's not easy to find a good roommate. I've had my share of bad ones. I need quiet to work on my art and being new at tattooing, I'd be at the shop more often than not. I won't eat all your food and you'll hardly know I'm here most of the time.”

He looked so earnest, nothing like the egotistical piece of shit I'd once known. People changed; they changed all the time. I changed over the years. Maybe I shouldn't fault him for what happened to me in high school. We were adults now. Fuck, he didn't even recognize the new me now. It had been nearly ten years. Maybe I just needed to let bygones be bygones and move on, that's what mature adults did.

I needed a roommate sooner rather than later and he was the best of the bunch I'd interviewed so far. It'd be stupid to allow petty teenaged issues to get in the way of paying the bills and passing up on a potentially good roommate.

Slowly with a tingle of apprehension in the back of my mind, I stretched my hand out for him. "You've got yourself a new roommate, if you want to move in that is."

A smile crept across his lips as he accepted my hand, his large hand wrapping around my considerably smaller one giving it a firm shake. "Would moving in tomorrow be too soon?"

My heart accelerated at the thought of him living here so soon. It was frightening and exhilarating at the same time. Tomorrow wouldn't give me much time to clear my head of the fact that I'd be living with the first boy that broke my heart. But at the same time, having additional time meant I'd obsess over the situation for longer than necessary. I just needed to treat this like a Band-Aid, one rip and straight off. Forcing a smile to my lips, I replied, "Not at all. Roomie."

Chapter 2

Carrington

One of the biggest pains in the ass of life would hands-down be moving. Damn. But at least I had a place to live now and it was a decent little apartment near the train station. What more could a guy ask for? The chick that lived there was certainly hot. If it wasn't for the fact that I couldn't afford to be kicked out, I would've taken a shot with her at the meet-and-greet. Just the thought of getting between those silky legs of hers had me instantly hard. Fucking embarrassing how much of an effect she'd had on me. I would've thought I'd matured past boyish hormone induced hard-ons by now.

Evidently not.

Shaking off the thought of her, I climbed the old, creaky wooden stairwell to the second floor of the motel in Newark, New Jersey. The doors to the rooms were all outside access and I was partially surprised the stairs and second floor walkway were still together and holding weight. This place was straight out of a movie – horror movie that was. I was sure there were by the hour rooms in the joint where hookers and addicts hung out. I'd seen quite a few shady characters lurking about, I'd just done my best to keep my head down and ignore them. Being that I was a particularly big guy, people tended to ignore me for the most part.

I'd been living in a motel and commuting to work in Manhattan every day for the past couple of weeks. It wasn't

ideal and my meager number of belongings had taken up a good chunk of the space in the tiny room, but it was a place to lay my head. I'd convinced the owner of the motel to take a back tattoo from me in exchange for the room since I was severely short on cash. I hadn't been joking when I'd said I was a starving artist. This wasn't exactly the life I'd expected for myself at this age. My naive adolescence had expected I'd end up being some hotshot football player making millions.

Inserting the key into the door lock, I twisted it and the lock disengaged, allowing me entry. The room had a faint musty smell that quickly greeted me, reminding me of the lack of upkeep the place had received as I entered, flicking the switch to the light just inside the room. The light over the bed turned on with a faint buzzing sound and the fan over the bed began to rotate, making a slightly creaking noise as it rotated.

“One more night.” I murmured to myself. I didn't have a bed or dresser currently. I'd have to make an IKEA stop tomorrow before moving my things. Closing the door behind me, I was impressed by the cleanliness of the room despite the age. The owner's daughter cleaned all forty rooms in the motel and did an amazing job. She was a damned hard worker and I respected her for that.

A small grin spread across my lips as I remembered my night with Sophia. The least I could do was show her a good time after how well she cared for my room. The motel was most definitely full-service. For a split second, I considered giving her a call and asking her to come over for one last bit of fun, but quickly dismissed the idea. I had a long day tomorrow and for some strange reason, the thought of being with Sophia didn't excite me like it had in the past.

Pulling my t-shirt up and over my head, I tossed it onto the cracked brown leather armchair by the door. The dirty clothing pile on the chair had become rather large at this point. The washing machine at the motel was broken and had been that way since I'd moved in. Thankfully I'd be out of here tomorrow, another couple of days and I'd have to turn my boxers inside out to wear them.

Selecting what I'd planned on wearing tomorrow from the remaining clean laundry, I picked up the large white, net laundry bag and stuffed all my dirty laundry inside until it was nearly full.

Grabbing the remote to the television, I flicked it on, not so much to watch what was on, but for background noise. I wasn't one for solitude. I'd always loved having people around, but this motel room just wasn't the place for entertaining guests and I'd couch surfed enough before moving into the motel room that I was pretty sure I'd outlived my welcome with my buddies – at least for now.

It wouldn't take long to get everything I owned packed up and neatly stacked, ready to go when the moving van pulled up in the morning. It worked out cheaper and easier just to hire a van with movers than it was to rent one myself and then deal with the logistics of coming back for my car.

Stripping out of the rest of my clothing, I tossed them into the dirty laundry bag and made my way into the bathroom. The bathroom was basic and there wasn't a bathtub, which was a bummer for me. The feminine side of me relished a good, warm, relaxing bath on occasion. I enjoyed bath salts, bombs and scented candles – the whole works and I really

missed that luxury. I'd give the place credit, it had amazing water pressure and the shower had a large, square head that pelted the skin nicely almost like a massage.

Pulling the shower curtain adorned with an anchor aside, I turned the tap on, adjusting the water temperature until it was perfect before stepping under the stream of water.

A soft groan escaped my lips as I closed my eyes and let my head fall back savoring the feel of the water blasting me. As the water slid down my body, I went through the plans I had for the next day. Rooming with a girl would be different. I'd had roommates before, but never a chick. The idea always seemed – complicated. I loved women, and women tended to have an attraction towards me, so to keep things simple, I'd always made it a rule to steer clear of female roommates.

But... There were times when a person had to adjust the rules and guidelines they set for themselves and take a chance. This would be one of those times.

Squirting some body wash into my hand, I lathered my chest and abdominals, moving southward. Before I knew it, my hand was around my rapidly growing erection. I was only slightly surprised by this occurrence. Felicity had been as sexy as fuck when I'd met her, she came off as cold and in control, but I'd noticed a vulnerability in her gaze.

What was she hiding? What secrets was she guarding and holding tight to her perky, yet ample chest? Would she ever trust me enough to let me into her world?

I moaned as my hand's grip on my dick tightened ever so slightly and I stroked it. Up and down, slow at first envisioning my hand belonged to the woman I'd move in with

tomorrow. Damn, it felt so good. The muscles in my back and neck clenched as I stroked myself harder.

In my mind's eye, I envisioned her before me, on her knees in the shower at my feet with her large blue eyes staring up at me as her small, soft hand worked my dick and balls with expert ease.

“What do you want?” she'd ask, a devilish gleam in her eyes.

“You,” I'd groan, my jaw clenching.

“Doing what?” she'd answer, even though she'd know very fucking well what I wanted. She wouldn't wait for me to respond before adding to my torture. Lowering her head to the tip of my dick, her tongue would lash out, sending a jolt of pleasure through me.

Sliding my hand into her damp hair at the back of her head, I'd urge her closer longing for her mouth to engulf me fully.

She'd resist for a moment or two wanting the tension to build until I begged her for it.

As her free hand grasped my balls, she'd finally put me out of my misery, taking my cock fully into her mouth. She'd moan softly around my dick sending sweet vibrations up my shaft. I'd groan with her as I thrust softly into her mouth.

My heart rate would accelerate until I practically heard the throbbing of my heart in my ears as I thrust against her, working with her hand and mouth. We'd work in harmony as the sensations flowed through me each pump, bringing me closer to that sweet release.

Looking down at her I'd watch my dick appear and disappear from between her lush lips while the water glistened and slid down her body. "Felicity," I'd groan as the tension within me increased to painful heights. "Slow down... Fuck, slow down."

But my request would be greeted with a little throaty chuckle as she doubled her efforts, her hand on my shaft working harder as her other hand started to lightly tug at my balls.

"Oh sweet fuck!" I'd groan out loud as I'd begin to thrust harder into her mouth until she was no longer giving me head, but I was full out fucking her mouth. She wouldn't mind. She'd love it, keeping up with my pace.

"Stop or I'll blow my wad between your lips!" I'd warn, not slowing down my hand fisting tighter into her hair.

She'd moan a little louder this time, granting me permission.

Images from my meeting with her today flashed into my mind; her blue eyes, her tattoos, the cleavage peeking out from under her low-cut shirt and that beautiful, soft round ass. A final image appeared of her once more, on her knees before me in the shower enjoying my dick and that became my undoing.

My hand pumped my cock one final time and I groaned loudly, my head falling back against the cold, wet tile of the shower as a stream of my cum shot out, painting the wall of the shower before me, to be cleaned away by the water cascading down the tile.

Leaning back, I sighed, my heartrate slowly going back down to normal as my dick gave one more shot of cum before slowly depleting in my hand.

“Dammit,” I groaned, releasing my dick.

What in the hell had I gotten myself into?

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Terry Towers

Contact Information and Release List

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