

# SEXY

*Addict*

**BROOKE BLAINE  
ELLA FRANK**

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# SEX *Addict*

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# PART

*One*

**“The strongest drug that exists for a human is another human being.”**

**- Anonymous**

## CHAPTER ONE

“COME HERE.”

EVAN James crooked his finger at the blonde currently shimmying back into her minuscule, tight, black dress. The same one she'd worn last night that had called like a siren's song to his cock in the middle of the dimly lit club.

She looked over at him with heavy-lidded eyes and held the barely there fabric still around her waist. His eyes zoomed in on the impressive breasts overflowing out of her sheer, black bra. Covered, but not enough.

His mouth watered, and he wanted to drag her back to the bed and take hold of her ripe nipple before pulling the fabric down and out of his way to take her fully into his mouth again.

After having had her so many times in the last few hours, she'd no doubt taste of him on every inch of her soft skin. He liked that. Before, she'd tasted faintly of vanilla musk—a fragrance he wasn't overly fond of. He'd made quick, dirty work of her though, marking and leaving his scent on her with his lips, his sex, his come, and he figured one last go-

round before sending her on her way would suppress his craving for at least a couple of days.

He hoped. His appetite was voracious.

“Can’t get enough, can you?” She leaned down over the edge of the bed and placed her hands there, giving him an ample view of what he wanted. Now.

He narrowed his eyes. “Don’t play with me.”

Blondie tsked and put her knees on the mattress, crawling on all fours toward him. “Oh, baby, I told you you’d never want me to leave once you got inside.”

She was right about that much. If he could live in pussy, he would. It was his weakness, his addiction, the one thing he’d give up anything and everything for. And he nearly had.

Luckily, he still had his looks and wasn’t forced to pay her—he doubted the hundred bucks in his wallet would cover the cost of even a blow job nowadays. At least, not from someone of her caliber.

Not that she’d have ever guessed—he played his part well.

He leaned against the headboard, letting her come to him. A white sheet lay haphazardly over his hips, and as she straddled one of his thighs, she bent down and pulled it away with her teeth.

His cock rose as she freed him, her long hair lightly breezing against him, making him hard with scarcely a touch. Oh yeah. He had her.

Threading his fingers through her blond strands, he flexed his hand over the back of her head. Her mouth hovered over his length like a tease, and when his grip tightened, she gave an indecent smile and kissed the tip of his cock.

Pulling away, she looked up at him again, and he grunted, pushing his hips up toward her mouth. He needed those luscious fucking lips sliding all the way down, taking every inch he had.

She got the hint.

Wasting no more time, she grabbed the base of his shaft with one hand and his balls with the other before inhaling him back into her mouth, her tongue flush against the underside, sucking vigorously.

Goddamn but he lived for this. The tight, wet fit of a mouth around his dick followed by the clenching of a sweet, soaked pussy. There wasn't any fucking thing better in this world, and he'd never get enough. He wanted to live there. Die there.

“Thatta girl,” he urged as she took him deeper. “So fucking sexy with that dress down around your hips...” He stopped as white heat flooded through him, and he had to push her shoulders back to keep from coming. He'd save that for her delicious cunt. “But I need you to take it off. Now.”

The tone of his voice had her unsnapping her bra and peeling her dress back off in record time.

“You want me here?” she taunted, straddling his hips without waiting for a reply, her naked lips glistening with need. “You like me on top, riding you...fucking you?”

Wrapping both small hands around him, she squeezed, slowly rotating them up his length. He watched her, his smile half-cocked, his insides on fucking fire as he tried to hold himself off, letting her tease him, stroke him.

She moved her hands to the front of his shaft and leaned back, pushing him against her. Rubbing her slick heat up and down his cock, coating him with her juices, pressing him hard against her clit as she pleased herself with him.

God, she was a fucking sight. She was sending him over the edge. And he couldn't take it anymore.

His back arched, and a roar ripped out of him. He grabbed her hips a little too roughly, lifting her up and pulling her down before filling her completely.

She gasped at the harsh invasion and clamped down around him, causing him to curse and force himself to take his fervor down a notch. The little temptress wasn't making it

easy for him to take it slow. He wanted to fuck her, own her, devour her, if only for the next few minutes.

He was a man crazed.

Leaning up, he grabbed her waist, staying inside her, and moved her onto her back. Her hands gripped his biceps, and he reached up to take hold of her wrists before pinning them above her head on the bed. With a daring look in her dark eyes, she tried to move, but he pushed her down harder and thrust deeper. She closed her eyes and gave a throaty moan.

He pumped himself inside her, and when her head rolled to the side, he bent down and licked a path along her neck. He'd been right—she tasted faintly sweet and salty now, like his sex.

His teeth grazed the soft spot beneath her ear before biting the skin there. She gasped again in surprise and struggled against his hold, but he kept her in place, using her body to ease the ache.

She watched him through half-closed lids, her sex clenching violently, urging him on, her sighs and moans becoming louder, her breathing quicker.

Fuck, she was the tightest thing he'd been inside in months—and he'd been inside more than he could count. She was on the brink, and it wouldn't take much more to push her over the edge.

He leaned up, releasing her wrists, and put each long leg over his shoulders.

Holy shit. That angle squeezed him like a vise and made his breath catch.

Blondie was panting now, and he made small, quick thrusts over and over to the spot he knew would make her fucking explode. With a cry, she came, and the throbbing of her climax around his cock was all he needed to fly the fuck apart.

“Goddamn,” he growled, holding on to her thighs with a punishing grip as the orgasm ripped through him.

The restlessness he'd grown accustomed to holding inside left his body as he emptied himself inside her. The peace wouldn't last long. But he'd revel in it for a few moments, remembering a time when this would've been enough.

Evan opened his eyes to look into the sated, brown ones he'd felt watching him come undone. Something in her gaze unnerved him, but as quickly as he'd thought it, it passed, and a confident expression took over.

"Hell of a send-off," she said with a smirk.

"You were asking for it in this little black thing you call a dress," he said, fingering the material bunched around her waist.

A small smile played on his lips as he eased himself out of her and lowered her legs to the bed. Her hands went to her hips, rubbing the feeling back into them, and any questions that lingered vanished. She made small, pressured circles to the tops of her thighs, and as he sat there watching, still between her legs, she casually brushed her knuckles against her swollen clit.

He knew that, if she continued, he'd have to have her again.

As if she could read his mind, her movements stopped. Then she pushed up to her elbows, swung one leg up over his head to the other side, and gracefully stood. Her fingers deftly twisted her waist-length hair into a knot, revealing faint marks all over the ivory expanse of her back. His markings.

The visual mitigated part of the craving deep inside—the one that insisted he reach out and take. And take. And take. Never satisfied. Thirst never quenched.

She squeezed back into that tiny dress, running her hands across her breasts before tucking them inside, not even bothering with her bra. She held that out to him on the tip of her finger.

"A memento, Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome," she said.

He grabbed it before his brain could tell himself to fuck off. This was a woman who knew the power she could wield over a man. Over him.

Not that he'd ever let her. Or anyone.

He walked her to the door of his condo, and instead of opening it, he couldn't stop himself from pressing her against it, gripping her firm ass in his hands, and tasting her one last time.

That wasn't like him. To linger, to hold on to a fucking keepsake.

He'd burn that bra later—after he'd covered every inch of it with his come.



## CHAPTER TWO

HE LOOKED LIKE hell.

So bad, in fact, that he'd been avoiding mirrors, not wanting to see the progressive downslide his emotional issues were physically taking out on him. But this morning, he'd accidentally caught a glimpse, and it had scared the shit out of him.

He knew he was an attractive guy, and the last time he'd looked while shaving had confirmed he hadn't lost that part of himself yet. Everything else in his life, yes—but not that.

However, now...the haggard expression, the bags under his eyes, the longer-than-usual strands of chestnut hair sticking up wildly, the unkempt stubble around his mouth... Those things hadn't been there days earlier.

Blondie never would've looked at him twice if they had.

That woman...

It'd been two days, four hours, and twenty-six minutes since she'd left.

He remembered that not because she'd been the most delicious pussy he'd devoured in recent memory. No, he remembered because that's how long he'd gone without finding another warm hole for his cock. At least that's what he'd told himself.

“Christ.”

He rubbed the hair covering his jaw and opened the medicine cabinet, leaving it hanging wide so he wouldn't have to look at his sad reflection again. There should've been a spare bottle of lube in there. Last night, he'd finished off the full-size lotion he kept in his bedside drawer, and there was no way his cock could handle another dry rub with it as tender as it was from the hours of abuse he'd inflicted upon it.

But...fuck. It wasn't there. Did I use it? He couldn't remember, and the ache and longing below his waist were starting to rise. If he showered, he'd lose her scent—the one that had sent him on a seemingly never-ending, days-long climax.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, he could hear the voice of reason telling him to stop, that he'd had his fill. His body said otherwise.

The sound of his cell phone ringing brought him out of his thoughts. He hadn't bothered with it in days and was surprised it wasn't dead by now.

Venturing to the hallway, he found it in the last place he'd left it—in the back pocket of the pants he'd been wearing the night Blondie had broken the zipper in her haste to get them off him. Her hands had been too eager, her greedy fucking mouth not waiting to get to the bedroom before consuming him.

Stop. Stop thinking about her unless you have your fucking cock in your hand.

He hit the answer button on his cell without bothering to glance at the screen.

“Am I speaking with Mr. Evan James?” a brisk, female voice asked.

He looked then at the caller ID, not recognizing the number. Not yet destitute, he figured it wasn't a bill collector.

"It is," his voice grated, hoarse and unused. He cleared it and answered again. "This is Evan James."

"Mr. James, I'm calling on behalf of Kelman Corporations. They received your inquiry and portfolio and would like to schedule a meeting with you for tomorrow at nine."

He thought back to the dozens of résumés he'd sent off months ago, back when he had given a damn. The name of that company rang a bell. He thought he remembered that they handled financial planning for several Fortune 500 companies, but he couldn't be sure without looking back at his notes. He'd been so focused on the other issues at hand that acquiring a job had slipped to the bottom of the to-do-list.

Evan kicked the pants into a pile in the corner of the hallway and grimaced. He knew he'd be a fool for even considering not taking them up on a potential offer, but lately, he'd been accused of being much worse.

When he didn't immediately answer, she prompted, "This is the Evan James that submitted—"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted, rubbing his forehead. "Nine tomorrow would be great."

"Good. You'll be meeting with Mr. Kelman and Ms. Spencer. A pass will be left for you at the front desk security check-in, and they will direct you to our office on the twelfth floor. We look forward to seeing you tomorrow morning."

"Thank y—"

She hung up before he could acknowledge that he'd be there.

Ah, shit.

He tossed the phone on the couch and began pacing, his fists in his hair. This was what he wanted. Wasn't it? What he'd been trying to get back on track for the past eight months.

Grateful. That's how he should have been feeling in that moment. Thankful beyond belief that anyone would want him to join them even with knowing the messes he'd made, the lives he'd ruined. He should be on his knees doing Hail Marys or whatever the fuck religious people did.

But his first thought hadn't been one of thankfulness. No, the first thing that'd run through his mind was how many times he'd be able to get himself off before he had to wash her away. Before he'd have to find someone else.

If he was honest with himself, he was fucking exhausted. But he knew that wasn't enough to stop from repeating the cycle.

\* \* \*

HE WAITED UNTIL after dark, until the last possible moment, before he showered. Slowly and with light strokes at first. Then more vigorously, rubbing the skin raw where he scrubbed it. He needed no trace of the last woman to touch his body as he sought to mark himself with the next.

Once he was satisfied, he shut the water off and wrapped a towel around his waist. It didn't take long for the naked feeling of isolation to envelop him like a cold fist around his heart. Then he threw on a pair of dark jeans and a black shirt, ready to get to the action, and made his way out the door just after ten thirty.

The night was warm, a faint taste of the ocean in the air, as he walked the three blocks to catch the L train heading toward the East Village. With an abundance of dive bars, it was his go-to neighborhood when he was looking for a quick fix.

He chose the last subway car—like he always did when he was on the prowl—and as he stood there holding on to the overhead bar, he caught the reflection of the man looking back at him through the grime-covered windows.

His face had a reckless look about it. Reckless—but amped. An anxious energy was building in his veins, gearing up for the hunt, ready to conquer. He closed his eyes, picturing a head dipping between his thighs, and could feel himself growing hard.

It wouldn't be long now. He could wait. Unless...

His eyes flew open and he surveyed the almost-empty car. Maybe he wouldn't have to go that far after all. The lone woman on board seemed to be in her mid-forties and engrossed in a novel, not bothering to look up even though he was sure she could feel his eyes on her. As the train rolled to a stop, she stood up, with not so much as a glance at him as she brushed by and walked out.

He sighed and looked around again, hoping someone new got on. A young, waifish guy in the corner caught his eye; he'd obviously been watching his perusal. They locked eyes for a moment, and Evan briefly considered taking the guy up on the challenge he was issuing. He'd never been with a man, never had to, but he wasn't looking to fuck tonight. The guy had hands and a mouth, and that was more than enough to ease the ache in his balls.

But as quickly as that thought entered his mind, the inner fucking voice of reason shut it down. He wasn't that desperate. Not yet. There was a world of pussy out there, and it wouldn't be hard to find a woman to get on her knees.

When the train reached his stop, he gave a slight shake of his head at the guy before looking away and exiting the car.

\* \* \*

EVEN FOR A weeknight, the bar was packed. It was one of the seedier places on this corner, the clientele of a rougher sort and only there for the two-dollar beers and occasional bar fight.

He didn't bother grabbing a drink; alcohol only fogged his mind, and he liked keeping those memories so he could use

them later. He also wasn't in the mood to waste time. There would be no hotel room, no bringing anyone back to his place. A mouth or a hand would suffice, and at this point, he didn't give a fuck if it happened right here in the middle of the bar.

He made his way to the old jukebox in the back corner of the room, which had always proved to be a good spot for his pickups. Single, lonely women loved to pour their hearts out via song selection, making it the prime spot for exactly what he was looking for.

There was someone there now—she was short, perfect for the position he had in mind, and to say she was curvy was an understatement. Her black hair was angled in a severe cut that stopped above her shoulders, and it showed off the ripped tank top she was wearing with only a bra underneath.

That was a woman who was begging for the slide of his cock down her throat. He almost wondered if he should find someone a bit more challenging, but the insistent throb in his jeans proved that she'd suffice.

Pushing his hands in his pockets, he rearranged his cock before coming to a stop just behind her.

“Interesting choice,” he said, peering over her shoulder and eyeing her selection. A melodramatic tune that could only mean one thing. “Bad breakup?”

She whipped around, a ‘fuck off’ on the tip of her tongue, but she swallowed it back when she got a look at his face. He watched as she straightened, her eyes quickly looking him up and down as she self-consciously tugged on the hem of her shirt.

“Maybe I just like the song.”

“Or maybe some asshole broke your heart.”

A blush crossed her full cheeks when he flashed what he hoped was a charming smile. “Is it that obvious?”

“A song called ‘Love Hurts’? Nah. Not obvious at all.”

When she laughed then, he knew he had her. He wouldn't even have to bother with the formalities of buying her a drink, and for saving himself a Hamilton, he mentally patted himself on the back.

“He must be an idiot, that guy.” He leaned down closer to her ear to lay it on thick. “You're sexy as fuck,” he said, drawing out the last word, letting his nose oh-so-slightly graze her neck before pulling back to catch her reaction.

Her flush had deepened, and with the way her chest was heaving, he'd have bet his condo that she was instantly wet.

Oh yeah. Putty in his hands.

Within ten minutes, she'd followed him outside and into the alley beside the club, tightly clutching the back of his belt loop. Lust must have been clogging her brain, because following a stranger out there was a stupid move on her part—but one he was grateful for at the moment.

He walked her farther down, past a dumpster that would serve nicely for blocking them from curious passersby on the street. Not that he would've given a fuck who saw what was about to go down. Or, rather, who.

Pulling her around in front of him, he grabbed her plump ass in his hands and walked her backwards. She sighed in pleasure until a breeze blew through the alley and the stench of garbage wafted past. Then she gripped his arms and peered at their surroundings, her expression turning to one of disgust. Broken beer bottles, used condoms, and food wrappers lined the alley, but he barely gave them a glance, too intent on satisfying his hunger.

“Are you sure we can't wait for the bathro—” she started to say but stopped as her back hit the brick wall he'd backed her into.

“I can't wait for you that long,” he said, rubbing himself against her, letting her feel how hard he was. Her protests immediately ceased.

“Oh...fuck,” she groaned as he sucked her neck and moved one of his hands to her breast. She had more than a handful to play with, and though he hadn't intended on giving tonight, he couldn't resist pulling her shirt down to take a hard nipple into his mouth.

Her breath hitched, and one of her hands came up to hold him there, urging him to keep sucking away at her, but he wasn't about to let her take control. Grabbing her other hand, he pushed it down to cover his rock-solid length, showing her exactly what he wanted. She rubbed her palm up and down, keeping the pressure steady as he flicked her nipple with his tongue. When she cried out, she squeezed his cock, and he broke contact and pulled away to unfasten his jeans.

“Put your hand down your panties,” he rasped, taking his cock out to stroke himself.

She looked down at his pumping hand and then back at him in confusion.

He brought his face closer to hers. “I want your fingers in your pussy,” he said in a low voice. “Get ‘em nice and fucking wet. And then I want them around my cock.”

Her fingers shook as she reached down to draw up her skirt—whether from nerves or anticipation, he didn't give a damn. As her skirt rose, he noticed that her large thighs were bare, covered only in sparrow tattoos that began at her hip and wound their way around her legs. The material continued to rise until it bunched at her hips and left pink, cotton panties exposed. It didn't faze him that they were probably the least attractive pair he'd ever seen. He only cared about the fact that they were soaked the fuck through. Her hand dipped inside the fabric, her eyes never leaving his face.

Licking his lips in anticipation, he momentarily stopped stroking himself so he could pull the sides of her panties down. He wanted to watch.

She rubbed her palm over her slit. “Like...like this?” she stammered.

He nodded his approval. “Now put one inside.”



Pushing her chubby pointer finger as far as it could go, she obeyed his command.

“And another.”

Next, her middle finger sank deep into her wet hole.

He swallowed thickly. “Another.”

By now, she was breathing heavily, her hips slowly rolling as she inserted a third digit.

“Good girl,” he praised, ardently watching as she began to fuck herself, her thumb rolling in circles against her clit. She was so goddamn turned on that he could hear it.

But he didn’t come here to watch her all night.

“Now put your hand around my cock.” Holding his shaft out to her, he could barely contain how badly he needed a fist other than his own to fuck.

After she pulled her fingers out, she wrapped her hand around the head in a slippery grip before slowly but firmly sliding them down. At this, he gave a violent shudder, his hands reaching out to slap against the brick on either side of her head. With every glide, the smell of her arousal grew stronger, coating every inch of him.

Struggling to draw out his pleasure a little longer, he kept his hands where they were, pushing so hard against the rough wall that he could feel it scrape his palms as he rocked his body up and down, in and out of her clenched fingers.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” he groaned, throwing his head back, reveling in the high and letting it take him over.

“That’s so fuckin’ hot,” he heard her say before she took her hand away.

He looked down to watch as she fell to her knees, so caught up in watching his pleasure from what she was doing to him that she didn’t give any thought to the trash she’d knelt down among. Her mouth opened wide for him, gripping the base of his shaft and taking him between her lips.

She was rough in her eagerness to please, clipping him with the edges of her teeth—a move that could only mean inexperience—and causing his hips to buck. He welcomed the pain though. He knew he deserved it and didn't bother moving his hands from the wall to guide her head.

Faster and with bruising intensity, she sucked, and as his hips wrenched back and forth into her mouth, he pictured a blond head bobbing against his thighs instead of the black one currently between them. The visual caused his orgasm to unexpectedly surge out of him.

To her credit, her greedy mouth drank every bit of what he gave her, licking him clean until there was nothing else to swallow.

\* \* \*

ON THE TRAIN ride home, he sat in the last car again, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands. The high only ever lasted so long before the nausea and self-loathing kicked in. He looked up, forcing himself to watch his reflection in the window across from him as New York's underground passed by behind it. The man he was observing was nothing like the one he'd seen an hour ago. That guy had been confident, motivated. Nothing like the pathetic air of desperation emanating from the person staring back at him.

How long would he do this? This endless fucking cycle he couldn't seem to stop.

He dropped his face in his hands once more, unable to keep looking at that which he hated.

## CHAPTER THREE

HE FUCKING HATED job interviews. They were such a waste of time. No one ever presented their true selves to get a job, and everything said within the allotted time frame was a lie. There was only one thing to accomplish—to be the biggest liar of them all.

As he stood there in his pressed suit and tie, he felt he had that in the bag. He was lying to himself and everyone else if they thought this was who he really was. No, his true self now was the animal that had fucked the brains out of a third-rate, available pussy the night before in an alley of waste and despair.

After stepping off the elevator, he buttoned his suit jacket as he scanned the lobby. Today's version of Evan James would try to be on his best behavior, and if he could keep his zipper shut and his dick in his pants, he just might pull it off. But with one glance at the perky, young receptionist sitting behind the front desk, that notion was quickly shut down.

“Good morning,” she greeted. “Can I help you?”

The bright smile she aimed his way made him think of several ways she could help him, none of which were office

appropriate.

“Oh, I’m sure you could, but I’m here for a meeting. Evan James. I have a nine o’clock with Mr. Kelman and Ms. Spencer.”

The receptionist’s smile stayed in place but relayed little interest in his suggestive remark. “Of course. One moment.”

She stood up from her desk and walked over to a shut door he assumed led to their offices. As she disappeared through the door, his eyes drifted down to her round ass, which was squeezed into a knee-length skirt.

*Stop thinking with your cock.*

He looked around the empty lobby before reaching down to adjust his growing erection. He only had to make it through an hour-long, at best, meeting without fucking things up. Even he could do that. Hopefully Ms. Spencer was an old hag with a chicken neck.

“Mr. James?”

He turned to see that the receptionist had reappeared and was waiting until she had his attention.

“They’ll see you now.” She inclined her head back toward the door, indicating that he should follow her.

This time, he kept his eyes off the woman in front of him and focused on his surroundings as he walked behind her through the wide halls of Kelman Corporations.

She led him down a dark-wooded corridor, the walls lined with gilded frames of company achievements, and past an alcove that featured a sitting area with a small table adorned with an elegant arrangement of fresh calla lilies and a high-back leather chair.

“You can wait right here. Ms. Spencer will be out shortly.”

He nodded his thanks and sat down, keeping his eyes on the ground and not on the figure walking away from him.

*Just one hour. You've fucking got this.*

It'd be nice to actually have a job again and not worry about having to sell his paid-off Range Rover, which was currently valeted downstairs. That, his condo, and a few business suits were all that remained of his former life, and he'd been holding on to them like a lifeline, needing them to keep up with his playboy façade. He'd royally fucked himself out of a career he loved, and not in the good way. This was his last and *only* chance, and he needed to nail it.

In his head, he ran through his career highlights, ticking them off one by one, getting his mind back on the task at hand. He came from a family of financial managers, and he wanted this job. The irony of being broke while helping others with their investments was not lost on him, but he knew that, when he was switched on and focused, he was one of the best in the business.

The door at the end of the hall opened, and as his gaze drifted up, the first thing he noticed walking towards him in wicked-looking high heels was a pair of long, shapely legs. Legs that did not bring to mind the words 'old' and 'hag.'

*Fuck me if this is Ms. Spencer.*

As his eyes continued their upward perusal, they took in the figure-hugging red skirt that hit just above the knee and clung to her shapely thighs and hips before cinching at her waist. The black blouse she was wearing looked silky to the touch and made his fingers tingle with the need to—

“Hello again, Mr. James.”

The velvet voice that came out was not what he'd been expecting, nor was the face that greeted him. She was looking at him with a smirk on her face—one that said she wasn't surprised at all to see him. In fact, Blondie even seemed... proud of herself.

*Well I'll be damned...*

Her long hair was pinned up today, leaving no trace of the sex kitten that had left his condo days ago with smudged makeup, just-fucked hair, and covered in his come.

He thought back to that night, and tried to recall her mentioning anything beyond how much she loved fucking his cock, but nothing came to mind. Especially nothing along the lines of what she did for a living. Hell, he hadn't even known her name, hadn't bothered getting her to repeat it when it had gotten lost in the noise on the dance floor the first time she'd said it.

Evan stood, clutching his portfolio, and cleared his throat. "Ms...Spencer, is it?"

Her lips tipped up at the corners, making him think of the way she'd looked at him right before those pouty lips had wrapped around his dick.

"Yes, that's right. If you'll follow me, Mr. Kelman is waiting in his office."

As she walked down the hall ahead of him, he noted the way her hips swayed from side to side and cursed his bad fucking luck. How the hell was he supposed to sit through an interview, one he was determined to nail, across from a woman he *had* nailed. Repeatedly.

He took a fortifying breath and followed behind Ms. Spencer. After pushing through the door she'd come from, she held it open like an invitation. Then she aimed a smile at him that could only be construed as professional if the glint of fucking knowledge in her eyes wasn't added in.

Evan knew she was playing with him.

Steeling himself, he matched her smile as he walked by her and into the room. He could play that game too.

"You must be Evan," a jovial voice called out.

He watched a stocky man with thinning, grey hair come around the massive mahogany desk to greet him. A limp marred his gait but didn't diminish his enthusiasm as he reached out to shake Evan's hand. His grip was strong, contradictory to his appearance, and it rubbed against the cuts on his palm from last night's exploits. He'd probably need a fucking tetanus shot later.

“Mr. Kelman, it’s nice to finally meet you.” *Time to lay it on thick.* “You’re a legendary name in this business.”

With a wink and a hearty chuckle, Mr. Kelman leaned in. “Oh, no need to blow smoke up my ass, son, but thanks anyway. And call me Cledus.”

“Sir?”

He slapped him on the back. “Nah, I’m just kidding. That was my ex-father-in-law’s name, may the bastard rest in peace. The name’s Bill.” He motioned to the casual sitting area in front of him. “Have a seat, would you?”

Evan glanced across at Blon—Ms. Spencer, who was seated in one of the chairs that circled an elaborate stand featuring a wooden globe on top of it. When he saw her looking fondly at the old guy, he moved to take the empty seat on the far side.

Anyone this fucking happy, especially so early in the morning, made him wary.

“So I see you’ve met Reagan. She’s a real firecracker, so you better watch out.”

Reagan. So that was her name. *Firecracker? Yeah.* So he’d fucking noticed when she had gone off with a bang between his sheets.

“Thank you for the warning, sir.”

“Bah with the ‘sir.’ Call me Bill. Can I get you a drink?” He walked over to the globe and lifted the top half open, revealing a bottle of scotch and assorted glasses.

*Oh, what the hell. My nerves are shot to shit as it is.*

“Sure.”

If this was a test, he’d just fucking failed.

Bill stopped what he was doing, turned to him, and gave a loud laugh. “Ahh, good man. Good. Reagan?”

“I usually wait until I’ve had my second cup of coffee, but thanks,” she replied.

Bill handed Evan a glass and grabbed his own before closing the globe. “Right, right. Let’s get to it, shall we?” He took a seat beside Reagan, and the amiable expression from earlier was replaced with a thoughtful countenance and intelligent eyes.

Reagan was looking over the file she held in her hands, which Evan presumed was his. As she flipped through, a slight furrow of concentration formed between her brows before she gathered the papers inside and put them neatly back together. When she crossed her legs and returned her attention back to him, the room finally took on the quiet, awkward silence that normally preceded an interview before the round of questioning began.

He took a sip of the scotch. *Let’s get this the fuck over with.*

“Mr. James,” she started.

“Evan is fine.”

“Mr. James. You began your career at Smithson Greene, not an easy feat for someone just out of college. Care to tell us how you managed that?”

“I interned there while in school, got my degree, and was offered a permanent position.”

She raised an eyebrow. “That’s quite an accomplishment. Smithson Greene doesn’t usually recruit at the college level. You must’ve been pretty impressive.”

“They would’ve been foolish to pass on me. I was the best.”

Nodding her head, she said, “You were, indeed.”

Something in the way she’d looked at him when she’d said that made him think she hadn’t been talking about his job performance.

She cleared her throat and examined his file again. “At least, according to your early letters of recommendation.”

“Thank you,” he acknowledged.



“I see here that, after five years, you left Smithson Greene and worked for Hedge & Company, another highly coveted establishment. It’s listed as your last place of employment until about eight months ago. Why the long period in between?”

*None of your damn business.*

Evan locked eyes with her and had a feeling that she knew all too well why he’d been terminated. It wasn’t as if it were a secret. He wondered if she was gaining some kind of kick from the position of power she had over him, but as she sat there, she gave no indication of that.

Instead, she played her hand with a beautiful poker face.

He, on the other hand, was beginning to sweat, the shame of his past crawling like vines up his body, choking him in their viselike hold. He could feel the anger at her question festering under the surface.

“Reagan, stop interrogating the poor man,” Bill cut in after an uncomfortable silence. “We all know the whys and hows of Evan’s background, so let’s cut to the chase. Son, you’re a top-notch manager with a keen eye for this business. I could use someone like that on my team, and I know Reagan agrees. Now, I’m gonna be blunt here, ‘cause I figure that’s the only way to be in this situation.” He leaned forward and placed his arms on his knees. “I need to know if you can focus and do the work without bringing your personal life to the office. I guess what I’m asking here is...can you keep that snake locked up in your pants?”

*What the shit?*

The old man rambled on. “You’ll find there aren’t any distractions here for you, anyway. No wife of mine to screw—though if you want the ex who took half my fortune and ran off to the Hamptons, you’re welcome to her. And Amy, our receptionist, well... She’s a female-lovin’ sort, so cross that one off your list. Even your good looks and boyish charm couldn’t persuade her to take a trip to the petting zoo.”

*This has got to be a fucking joke.*

“This one...” Bill motioned to Reagan with his thumb. “She’s not going to screw her career for a quick go-around with you, so forget that.” He looked over at Reagan, and Evan followed suit. “Am I right?”

Her expression remained impassive as she replied, “Of course.”

*Of course*, she’d already screwed him and his possibility of getting hired, so what did she care?

“Right,” Bill said, slapping his hands on his thighs. “If that’s all sorted and agreeable, Reagan here will discuss salary. What do you say to all that?”

*Jesus. Way to wine and dine. Can I have a second to digest?*

Evan sat there, not quite sure of the whirlwind he’d just got caught up in. Bill was all over the place. So...that was it? He’d barely said two words and he was being offered the job? He took a long pull of his scotch before answering. If they were handing out jobs on a silver platter, he supposed he could go along with that.

“I guess I’d say you’ve got a deal.”

“Atta boy. I knew I could count on you.” Bill took Reagan’s offered arm as he pushed up out of his chair and pressed a hand to his thigh, rubbing it. Then he noticed Evan watching his movements. “Oh, just gets a bit stiff after a while.”

His eyes shifted to the woman lending a hand and thought, *Yeah, so’s my dick. Will she help me out with that too?*

Bill walked over to where Evan was seated and stuck his hand out. Evan took it and stood, shaking it in a nonverbal agreement. The man’s sharp eyes pinned him with a don’t-fuck-up look, and he gave a slight nod.

“Don’t let me down.”

Evan spotted Reagan approaching before standing just behind Bill’s shoulder.

“If we’re done here, I need you to come with me,” she told him.

Though the words were delivered with nothing but cool professionalism, his cock didn’t get the memo, because it rose to attention as he pictured her saying those words—but with him balls-deep in her sweet pussy. He was grateful at that moment that Bill couldn’t read his mind.

“Yes. Go with Reagan. She’ll take good care of you, get you all sorted.”

He figured now was not the time to let him know that she’d already taken good care of him. Several times.

As she made her way around them and to the door, Evan turned in her direction, wondering if it was safe for him to be alone with her with the thoughts running through his mind. When she stopped in the doorway and glanced back at him, he kicked his ass in gear to follow. Real fucking fast.

Her office had a corner view of downtown, and unlike the cozy, dark wood covering the expanse of most of the rooms, hers was sleek and modern. The decor was understated and no-nonsense—crisp, white rugs were spread out along the floors and black fixtures adorned the walls.

Her desk was a combination of both hues, and beyond that, in the far corner, something caught his eye. The one flash of color in the room was a red velvet chaise lounge. It would’ve seemed out of place here in such a professional setting, but it was almost as if her underlying sex kitten had crept its way into her work space.

After he walked inside, Reagan shut the door behind him. As she turned around, he stepped in front of her, blocking her path.

“This sure is a creative way to see me again, Reagan. You could’ve just called.”

Her eyes gleamed. “And what makes you so sure I wanted to see you again?”

Evan gave a cocky smirk and leaned in a little. “Well, I’m here, aren’t I? In your office of all places.” He glanced

over to the corner where the chaise was and felt a full smile spread across his mouth before he looked back at her. “Nice setup you have here. Your couch looks comfy.”

Her eyes fluttered down to his mouth, and she moved in closer, tilting her head to the side so he could feel her breath on his lips. Then her gaze traveled back up to his, and she ran her tongue over her bottom lip.

“Oh, it is. Very.” She pulled back then and walked around him towards her desk. “Why don’t you have a seat, *Mr. James*,” she said, and when he made a move towards the chaise, she tsked. “One of the chairs will do just fine for what I have in mind.”

She gestured to the guest chairs in front of her desk, and as he moved to take one, he noted the way her eyes tracked him across the room. She was so calm, so put together—it was unnerving. Her mocha-colored eyes flashed, almost daring him to say something he shouldn’t. But he kept his mouth shut, instead unbuttoning his suit jacket as he sat down and then crossed one leg over the other.

Her eyes flicked to the movement, and just as quickly, she looked away, grabbing at a clipboard before walking around to hand it to him.

“The top amount is your salary offer, and below that, you’ll see the list of benefits. If you accept the terms, sign and date the bottom and we can get started on the rest of the paperwork.”

Glancing at the amount listed, he was taken aback to see a number smaller than he’d grown accustomed to. His eyebrows shot up.

“I know it may seem like we’re lowballing you,” she said as if reading his thoughts.

“You *are* lowballing me.”

“Well, that’s what happens when you bring *your* balls into the mix.”

He jerked his head up at that comment. “Excuse me?”

She leaned back against her desk and crossed her arms. “Your biggest accomplishment of late has nothing to do with your skills in finance and everything to do with your extracurricular activities affecting the companies you work for. Don’t act so shocked. You know it, I know it, and so does Bill. The number you see is just the starting salary during your probationary period, which I’ll be overseeing. After that, we’ll renegotiate your terms. It’s a great offer, so don’t be too proud to take it.”

He tapped his pen against the clipboard and tried to bite his tongue. She was provoking him. Not only with her words, but also with the warmth that had begun to fill her cheeks, causing her skin to flush and his cock and frustration to rise.

“So if I sign here, that would make you my boss for now, correct?” He stopped tapping the pen and pinned her with a heated look. “That won’t be a conflict of interest for you?”

His mind flashed back to that night and the way he’d let her take the reins, something he never did. The control over another was something he craved too much. But with her, he hadn’t even given it a second thought as she’d crawled on top of him, rolling her hips with him deep inside her, her nails digging into his chest. Maybe he’d liked her being in charge...

“It’s just during the trial period—”

“And after that?” he interrupted, curious if she had any thoughts running through her mind regarding their night together.

“After that, it still won’t be an issue. I didn’t know you that night, and I don’t do repeats, so, no, there is no issue.”

Right. Of course. He shook the naked picture of her out of his mind and tried to feel relieved at that admission. He never did repeats either—he didn’t have to in a city as large as Manhattan, with an overabundance of willing participants. That thought had his cock perking back up again. Maybe the sting he felt at her shutdown was simply his pride.

“Okay, then. As long as we both agree.” Then he signed and dated the form and handed it back to her. “When do we start, boss?”

## CHAPTER FOUR

THE MOMENT HE stepped inside, he knew it was a mistake.

The stark, grey walls seemed to close in on him as he followed the officer down the narrow hallway, and he broke out into a sweat despite the bitter temperature. When a wave of revulsion ran through him, he reached out to steady himself, taking a shaky breath. The air was stale, the paint under his fingers peeling, and he briefly thought about turning around and getting the hell out of there. The glaring eyes of the guard who turned around when he stopped, however, changed his mind.

“There a problem?” his voice boomed, echoing off the naked tile.

Evan ran his hand over his face and shook his head, pushing off the wall.

The intimidating figure ahead watched him for another beat before heading back down the hall, Evan steeling himself as he trailed behind. He took another deep breath and shook off the sick feeling in the pit of his stomach.

*Home sweet home.* Well, his father’s anyway.

The Federal Correctional Institute in Otisville was more familiar to him than the house he'd grown up in. He'd been going there since he was a boy.

As the officer handed him the clipboard to sign in, Evan felt the slight moment of pride he'd had at securing the job earlier change to one of disillusion.

Who was he kidding? No matter how much money he made or what kind of car he drove, he would still be his father's son.

"You can wait through there." The guard gestured to the large, rectangular room with several chairs and tables set up. "They'll be out shortly."

Evan walked over to the far back corner, hoping to be as inconspicuous as possible, and took a seat facing the secured door his father would come through. Fuck, he hated this place. Whatever had possessed him to make the hour-and-a-half drive had left as soon as he'd entered the steel front doors.

He watched as more visitors streamed through the entrance he'd come from, the looks on their faces as grim as his own. Now that he was here, he wanted this shit over and done with. Glancing at his watch, he impatiently tapped his foot on the ground, hating that he was fucking anxious.

It wasn't until he heard the loud, "There's my boy!" that he realized his father was being escorted over to him. It always amazed him that, even dressed in an orange jumpsuit, the man managed to look like a million dollars. *A million of someone else's money.*

He hadn't changed much in the months since he'd last seen him. Same head full of silver hair, same confident swagger, as though he were working a boardroom of executives instead of the visiting room at an Otisville prison. It looked like he'd lost a bit of weight off his tall frame, but it didn't diminish his presence; if anything, it made him look more like the cunning figure he was.



Evan stood as he came closer, and when his father opened his arms as if he expected him to step forward for a hug, he remained exactly where he was. His old man, though, had always been one to put on a good front, so instead of letting Evan's stance deter him, he continued on and brought him in close before whispering in his ear, "You came all this way. At least act like you're fucking happy to see me."

Despite uncaring of what others thought, Evan let him put on his show, knowing that it was the quickest way to be released. When he was finally let go, he watched his father as he looked around at the other occupants in the room. Just as Evan had suspected, he was more concerned with their reactions than his.

He sat down and waited for his father to do the same, and when they were finally eye to eye, the charming bastard had the nerve to smile at him.

"About time you came back around. What's it been? Eight months?"

"Nine."

"That's right." His father's shrewd eyes ran over him. "You look like shit, son. About the same as the last time I saw you."

Evan's chair scraped the tile as he stood up, intending to leave.

"Oh come on. No need to be so sensitive. Sit down."

With his hand hesitating on the back of the chair, Evan eyed him.

"Give your old man a break. Humor me for the next few minutes."

"I'm not here to play your games."

"Then why are you here? What brings you to my illustrious dwelling?"

After sitting back in his chair, Evan crossed his arms over his chest.

“Okay, how about I start since you seem...angry about something.”

“About something? Gee...” He paused and looked at their surroundings before pinning him with an irritated look. “I wonder what that could be.”

His father leaned back in his chair and crossed his ankle over his leg. “As you can see, the conditions are still luxurious. I was promoted to electrical duty instead of the kitchen, which accounts for my fine physique,” he said, patting his firm stomach. “Apparently, I’m good with my hands but perhaps not as good as you.” He winked, and Evan’s stomach rolled.

“Cut the shit, would you?”

“Well, speak, Ev, and I’ll stop.”

Evan reluctantly shifted forward in his seat and uncrossed his arms, placing them on the table in front of him. “I actually came up here to tell you I got a job today.”

His father seemed to perk up at that news. “It’s about damn time. So which is it? L&P?”

“No.”

“Reiner-Wallace?”

Evan shook his head. “No.”

His father’s brow furrowed. “But still in finance, right? Baumgard?”

“I decided to go with Kelman Corporations.”

A few beats went by as his father stared at him before the stunned look on his face turned perplexed and he started to laugh.

“Holy shit. For a second there, I thought you were serious,” he said, wiping the tears from his eyes.

“I *am* serious.”

“No,” he said, gaping at Evan. “No, you can’t be serious. *Kelman* Corporations? As in Bill Kelman? Why?”

Feeling defensive, Evan straightened in his chair and glared at his father. “Because that’s who I chose.”

“Oh come on. No one would *choose* to work for Bill ‘Gimp Leg’ Kelman.”

“Well, I did.”

“Hmm.”

Evan felt his skin prickle at the once-over he was given. One thing about the man was that he had an uncanny way of reading a person. It’s what had made him one of the most successful financial managers in the world—and the most notorious.

“I don’t think you chose him at all.”

“Excuse me?”

His father leaned in, uncrossing his legs and steeping his hands on the table. “I think that, after you fucked your way through Manhattan, you had no other option *but* Kelman Corporations.”

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

“Yes, I do,” he said matter-of-factly. “You come in here dressed the part. You have the suit, you’ve styled the hair, and I’m sure the car you have parked outside is nice and shiny. But that’s just a façade, isn’t it, Evan? The bags under your eyes, the look inside them... Boy, you are more strung out than I’ve ever seen. Don’t try to hide it.”

“For your fucking information, his ‘little’ business represents several Fortune 500 companies—”

“His company represents the bottom of the barrel, and you know it,” his father interrupted.

“You know, that’s funny coming from you, seeing as you’re the epitome of the bottom of a fucking barrel.”

A sly smile slowly crossed his father’s face. “And your mother? What did she have to say about this wonderful news?”

Evan shifted uncomfortably in his seat before answering. “She was transferred down to a facility in North Carolina. I haven’t gotten a chance to see her yet.”

“Well, I think you should. I’m sure she’d love to see how her son’s gone soft.”

“I haven’t gone soft.”

“Well, let’s hope for Michele’s sake that’s the truth. What does she think about all this?”

Evan felt his blood pressure begin to rise as he sat there being grilled by his inmate father. Why he always felt inferior to him was beyond his comprehension when it was quite obvious that his father was the one who should feel the shame.

“I’m not with her anymore.”

“Oh, that’s too bad. Did you have a falling out? Into someone else’s bed?”

“You know, after the public humiliation we all suffered at your expense and the twenty-two years you’ve spent in here, you think you’d be a little less judgmental.”

His father’s sharp eyes narrowed on him. “I think you know better than most that people never really change.”

“That’s what Gramps used to say about you.”

“Probably the only thing that crazy bastard was right about.”

Becoming frustrated, Evan bit back the caustic remark he wanted to say and instead asked, “Why do you have to talk about them like that? They stepped in where you and Mom failed. Rather spectacularly, I might add.”

His father snorted. “If, by spectacularly, you mean broke as a joke and raising an addict—”

“Enough!” Evan slammed his hands on the table, causing the conversations around them to cease. “Enough already.”

“Keep your voice down,” his father hissed.

“In the ten minutes I’ve wasted with you, you’ve insulted me, you’ve insulted my job, and you’ve insulted the only people in the world who gave a fuck about me.”

His father looked up at him and gestured to the seat.  
“Son—”

“Stop calling me that.” Evan could feel his hands shaking and balled them into tight fists, refusing to let the man see any sign of weakness. “You gave up that right a long time ago.”

He cocked his head. “Then why are you here?”

*Because I’m a sucker for a good screwing.*

“You know what? I have no fucking idea. I’m done.”

“How long will you stay away this time? Months? Years?”

“How long do you have left in here?”

“Twenty if I’m a good boy.”

“That long.”

“Rockwell!” the guard called from the door. “Time’s up.”

As the sound of his former name echoed throughout the room, Evan watched his father stand but found that he had nothing left to say.

“I’ll see you in a few months, Evan,” he said, smoothing his shirt down as if it were a custom-made Charvet instead of cheap prison uniform. Then he pinned him with a hardened stare. “You never could stay away.”

He said nothing as his father walked farther away from him, but he did make a promise to himself that, this time when he left, he would not come back.

As he walked out of the facility and over to his car, he noticed the way the parking lot lights shone off the polished exterior and thought about what his father had said. Getting inside, he settled into the comfy seats of his black Range

Rover and turned over the ignition before lowering the windows.

He finally felt like he could fucking breathe again.

Christ, that man had a way of infuriating him. It'd been so long since he'd seen him last that he'd forgotten how much he disliked him. Whether that was because he hated the person his father was or the fact that he was just like him, he didn't want to think about. In some ways, he felt like he was constantly seeking the approval of that man, which, considering the circumstances, seemed ridiculous.

He didn't need his approval—he was a grown-ass man for fuck's sake.

What he needed was to remind himself of the world he belonged in. The one he was going to fight his way back into and rise to the top of once more.

He was Evan James, no longer the Evan Rockwell who lived in his father's shadow of disgrace, and this time, he'd do things on his own terms.

## CHAPTER FIVE

TRYING TO DISTANCE himself from the grime of the prison, he'd gone all out tonight, stopping for a haircut and clean shave before putting on his finest suit. The bar he'd chosen was a far cry from the dive he'd picked for his last tryst, but tonight, he wanted something different. He didn't want a dirty fuck in a back alley; he wanted a high-class affair. Someone who would look good, smell good, and taste even better.

*I fucking deserve it.*

The intimately lit interior of Nova welcomed him, the polished wood and massive hanging chandeliers radiating sophistication, and he took a moment as he entered to breathe in the sweet mix of perfume, cigars...and money.

This was more his scene, more the life he'd grown accustomed to before his world had gone to shit. It was a world he intended to reclaim.

He eased through the room with a cocky confidence, letting his eyes make contact with the women he passed. He

loved the spark of interest that lit them up—and the fact that he was the one with the match.

Walking past them all, he made his way to the bar, letting them follow in his wake if they worked up the courage to approach. He knew that, dressed as he was, looking like he did, it wouldn't be an easy task for a woman to make a move, but the one who dared would be someone worth his time. And he would make it more than worth hers.

“A drink for you, sir?” The bartender's voice sounded over the chatter in the room. She was a cute thing, even if completely covered up in her slacks and collared shirt. Her breasts, which were straining against the material and causing stress on the buttons, caught and held his attention.

“If you make it? Absolutely.”

He turned the full force of his smile on her, and she bit her lip in an endearing way that didn't seem to quite fit the establishment. She appeared...shy. Then, as he looked her over a second time, he noted how young she seemed. A smattering of freckles covered her cheeks, and her wide eyes betrayed no glimpse of corruption.

“What would you like?”

*You bent over the bar, legs spread, waiting for me.*

“Maybe you could tell me the special for tonight?” He leaned across the bar and wrapped one of her long, red curls around his finger. “Something that'll set me on fire.”

The girl cleared her throat and glanced around, almost as if checking that she were the one he was talking to, but when her eyes came back to his and he was still focused on her, she got the picture.

Tucking the stray piece of hair behind her ear, she said, “Well, we can do something quick and easy like a shot of whiskey to match your eyes...” She stopped, embarrassed, and nervously chewed on her lip. “Or, uh...maybe something more involved... I could make you a Smoky Sour?”

He moved in closer to her, and she mimicked his movement. “Quick and easy is underrated, wouldn't you say?”



“Oh for God’s sake, don’t scare the poor girl,” a sharp voice came from his right.

He turned to see Blon—Reagan standing there, rolling her eyes at him. She focused her attention on the bartender, who’d jumped away and was now a deep shade of red to match her hair.

“He’ll have a Manhattan on the rocks, but you can make mine straight up.” Turning back to him, she smirked. “On the prowl?”

“You seem to make a habit of asking questions that are none of your business.”

When she took the seat next to him, he noticed that he wasn’t the only one who’d gone all out that night. Her hair was down, cascading in waves over her shoulders and framing the deep V of her dress to showcase her ample cleavage. Her full lips were painted a deep crimson, matching the skintight halter dress that left little to the imagination.

“No need to get defensive. We’re old friends now, right? Oh, you don’t mind if I sit here, do you? Don’t worry. I won’t interfere in your attempt at picking up a girl barely out of high school. If you’re in the mood for a limp body, that one’s a keeper.”

“Just making friendly conversation,” he replied. “A skill you obviously haven’t mastered.”

“If I recall correctly, it wasn’t my conversation skills you wanted me to master.”

“No, your mouth is much more appealing when it’s filled.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment. Took me long, tortured hours to perfect that skill,” she said with a broad smile.

“I doubt it was torture. You seemed to rather enjoy being on your knees.”

The bartender chose that moment to set their drinks on napkins in front of them, her hand a bit unsteady as she put

down the martini glass, which caused a bit of the liquid to spill over the rim and onto Reagan's outstretched hand.

"Oh gosh, I'm so sorry," the girl apologized, grabbing napkins to wipe away the mess. "I'll go make you another." She rushed off before either of them could say anything.

Bringing her hand to her mouth, Reagan licked the liquid from her thumb and raised a perfectly arched brow his way. "Inexperienced *and* messy. You sure you want to go there?"

"Go where? We were just talking. You know, college applications, how many cats she has, whether she likes it better in her pussy or the ass..."

Without batting an eyelash, Reagan brought her glass to her mouth and took a sip. When she lowered it back to the bar, she asked, "And what was her response to these... engaging questions of yours?"

"Vanderbilt, two, and any-fucking-where I'd want to put it."

"Well, inexperienced she must be, because no respectable single female wanting to pick up a man would admit to owning two cats."

He took a long gulp of his drink. "One can never have enough pussy."

"Damn, I walked right into that one."

"You should probably work a little harder on those conversation skills I mentioned earlier."

"Hmm." She turned her head and swept the room with a quick glance before looking back to him. "You're probably right. In fact, I see someone over there I'd like to *converse* with." She stood up and drained the rest of her martini just as the bartender came back with her refill. Grabbing a large bill from her cleavage, she tossed it on the counter while looking at him. "I've got this one." Then she picked up her glass and sauntered her way through the crowd to the opposite side of the bar.

Christ, the woman was something else. She looked like class and sex all neatly wrapped up in one siren-red fuck-me dress. If his dick hadn't already taken a tour of all she had to offer, he sure as hell would have resented the suited-up guy she'd just stopped in front of. But as it was, he had taken that tour and he did *not* do repeats. At least that's what he was trying to tell himself. *Again.*

"I'm so sorry. I hope I didn't, uh...ruin anything."

Red's face was so sincere with worry and the need to please that his cock jerked in response. He picked up the money Reagan had left on the bar and put it in her palm before laying his hand over hers.

"You didn't ruin anything. She's a bit too tart for my taste. You, on the other hand..." He picked up his glass and drained it, noticing her eyes watching his mouth as his tongue licked a drop on his bottom lip. "Fucking delicious."

She gulped, her eyes wide, clearly intimidated but not yet scared off. Then she quickly glanced down, away from the intensity of his gaze, and noticed that his drink was low.

"Is there anything else you'd like?"

"Not right now, but come back and see me when my glass is empty and I'll tell you exactly what I want."

When she raised her eyes to his at the suggestive remark, he didn't hide the bold way he looked her over, making her more than aware of what he was insinuating.

"Okay."

For a reason he couldn't quite pinpoint, the slight tremble in her voice made his cock pound. She would be a very nice reward after a long, hard day. A wholesome young thing always presented a tight hole and an eagerness to learn.

Yes, sinking his dick into that would be a fucking gift to himself, he thought as he watched her walk away to serve another customer. She'd be servicing his cock later if he got his way. And his cock *always* got its way.

As he picked up his glass, he turned to observe the other patrons mingling. He told himself that he was just passing the time, but when his eyes immediately found the blonde who'd left his side only minutes before, he knew what he was really doing.

He was watching *her*, and fuck, that pissed him off.

She was off to the side, laughing at something some fuckwit in an expensive suit was saying. If he was honest, he wasn't a bad-looking guy, but then she touched him, those long, elegant fingers grazing his sleeve, and Evan thought he wouldn't mind uglying up the guy's face with his fist.

Why the fuck he cared, he had no idea, but as she smoothed her hand farther up his arm and gave it a light fucking squeeze, he had to hold himself back from walking over there and ripping it off.

Instead, he turned his face away and forced himself to look at someone—anyone—else. Reagan on the prowl was lethal. She hunted, stalked, and then consumed.

*Much like myself*, he realized. The thought had him conflicted. On one hand, he admired her confidence and bold approach to get what she wanted. But on the other...

Suddenly, he heard her seductive laugh from where he stood, and it made his body stiffen.

*Every* part of his body.

No. He wouldn't think about the *other* hand. He drained the last of his drink and turned back around toward the bar.

\* \* \*

EVAN LOOKED DOWN at the ass bared to him as he gripped the sides of her hips and thrust his cock inside her. The bartender's hair spilled down her back in red waves, and he reached out to fist his hand in them, tugging her head back.

He'd followed her to the private bathroom when she had gone on her break, but she'd been the one to lock the door behind him. Enthusiastic had been an understatement—she'd dropped to her knees on the floor and sucked his cock like she'd had something to prove.

Now, she made soft whimpers every time he drove into her tight channel, and he turned her head to face him so he could cover her mouth with his, absorbing her moans. She tasted like a fucking lollipop, and he wondered if her pussy was just as sweet. He reached down to finger her clit, feeling her body jerk in his arms as he put more pressure on her. When she gasped, he eased up, sliding his fingers down her slit to cover himself in her juices, rubbing and teasing before coming back up to her sensitive spot. He could feel her muscles clench against his cock.

Bringing his fingers up to his lips, he could smell her arousal before the taste enveloped his tongue. He licked his finger from root to tip before pushing the other deep into his mouth. He groaned, and when he opened his eyes again, he caught her watching him in the mirror. Shock crossed her face, and he gave a depraved smile.

“I told you,” he said. “Fucking delicious. Now hold on.”

She readjusted her grip on the edge of the sink while he pounded her candied cunt. Her greedy body sucked his inside, and he'd been right; it was one hell of a fucking fit. Pushing inside of her had been sheer pleasure. Her walls had fisted him tighter than anything he could fucking remember, and every time he tried to pull out, she clung to him like he'd never get free.

That was all right by him. He wanted to stay exactly where he was until he'd gotten what he came for, and that was to reach for that high he could feel just on the other side of blowing his fucking load inside her.

As her moans got louder, a knock sounded on the door, and he clapped one of his palms over her mouth before meeting her eyes in the mirror.

“Shh,” he instructed, his voice a low growl. “Fuck me.”

She nodded and pushed her hips back, urging him on. His fingers reached for her clit again, causing her body to tremble as she neared her release. Then he closed his eyes and let himself enjoy these last few moments of his cock deep inside his prize.

He was back in the game. He'd gotten the job... Reagan was his boss...

*Reagan.* Fuck yes, that right there...

He gripped the redhead's hair hard, twisted it in his fingers, and with the thought of an elegantly dressed, professional-looking Ms. Spencer peering down at him in her office, he came like a fucking geyser.

\* \* \*

HE THREW AWAY the condom and tucked his shirt in as he watched the bartender attempt to pull herself back together. Her pale skin was rosy, an effect of sex that wouldn't be going away anytime soon no matter how impeccable the rest of her looked.

Giving her a light kiss on the cheek, he told her that he'd see her at the bar—a lie, obviously, but a quick way to appease any guilt she'd be feeling about their quickie. Then he opened the door—he was ready to get the hell out of that bathroom.

Standing there, with her arms folded in front of her body and an all-too-knowing look on her face, was Reagan.

“Jesus. You're everywhere,” he said, instantly irritated at seeing her there.

Reagan's eyes looked past his shoulder to the girl still pulling herself together before landing back on his. “Not *everywhere* you've been, thank God.”

The sight of her was causing any fucking pleasure he'd gained from that encounter to turn to anger and, yeah, fucking shame. She was starting to make him crazy.

“Got to say, I'm glad you took me home. A quick fuck has never been high on my to-do list. I prefer a couple of hours at the very least...but you already know that, don't you, Ev?” She looked around him again and asked, “Are you almost done? Some of us actually need to make proper use of the facility.”

He stepped in toward her. “Don't call me that, Blondie. And don't give me this bullshit about being too good for a bathroom fuck. If I'd wanted you there, I would've had you. Besides, you're not staff, so there's no reason for you to be following me.”

“This one didn't have a line.” She made a small show of sniffing the air around him and scrunched up her nose. “Oh, she was very sweet, wasn't she?”

“Like candy.”

Red chose that moment to walk out of the bathroom, and she stopped when she took in the scene in front of her. Her face was one of horror at getting caught.

“It's not what it looks like,” she said, stumbling over her words as she tried to explain herself.

Reagan just shook her head. “Actually, sweetheart, it's exactly what it looks like. Not that I blame you a bit. He can be quite convincing.” She pushed herself off the wall, towards the restroom, but as she passed Red, she stopped and leaned in so Evan had to strain to hear what she was saying to the girl. “It also helps that he's got a large dick.” She winked and walked into the restroom, the door shutting firmly behind her, leaving Red shocked and him...oddly flattered.

As he stood there in the wake of Reagan and the expectation of Red, he was annoyed—annoyed at the woman who had yet again gotten under his skin. It was as if she were gaining some kind of perverse pleasure from it, but he wasn't sure she even knew what she was doing to him.

She was tempting the beast, the one he tried and always failed to hide, and with every word and gesture, she incited the hunger, the ache he felt deep in the pit of his stomach.

She didn't want him; she'd made that much clear.

And for that matter, he didn't want her either. So why couldn't he get her the hell out of his head?



## CHAPTER SIX

THE FOLLOWING MONDAY, there was a knock on Evan's office door as he was setting up his desk, and Bill stuck his head in.

"Getting everything all set up?" he asked before pushing the door open and walking inside.

"Yeah. This computer is an asshole though."

Bill laughed. "I'm sure it is. I hate technology. That's why I call IT." He leaned against one of the visitor chairs. "Listen, we have a meeting today with one of our larger clients, and I'd like you to take over their account."

He narrowed his eyes. "Why do I feel like there's a catch coming?"

"Welllll," Bill said, scratching the back of his head as he drew out the word. "I do believe it's a company you know quite well."

"How well?"

"Ah...I'd say you've had close, *personal* relations with this particular establishment. Perhaps you could take Reagan

with you. Let everyone see you're back in the game."

At the mention of Ms. Spencer, Evan's cock took notice and he reminded himself, *Not an option.*

"I can handle it without Ms. Spencer. I'm sure she has a lot to juggle." *Including fuckwit's dick from the other night.*

"I don't doubt that, but I'd like her to show you the ropes."

"If you think that's best."

Bill nodded. "I do. Meeting's at eleven. Good luck with your, uh...technology situation. If you need any help with that, don't call me."

An hour later, there was a much more perfunctory knock on his door, and before he could say, "Come in," it opened and Reagan walked in.

"You ready?"

"I was told to be. I *can* follow simple orders."

"I remember," she said knowingly. "Although you put up a good fight."

He shrugged into his suit jacket and grabbed his briefcase. "You know, that night, I thought you were a gift sent to ease all my sexual urges. For a few hours, anyway. But now, I realize you're just a spawn of the devil sent to make my life a living hell."

"Aw, you're such a flatterer. I've barely made an effort, but now, I'll make sure to kick it up a notch. Shall we go?" She didn't wait for him to follow before heading down the hall.

Walking behind this woman was becoming something of a habit for him. But he had to admit that, if he was going to follow anyone around, Reagan would be his first choice. The woman had a spectacular ass.

She punched the down button for the elevator, and when it opened, they stepped in, both making sure to stand on

opposite sides of the empty space. As the doors closed, the air inside hummed with tension.

“Don’t get any ideas about this elevator,” she said, glancing at him out of the corner of her eye.

With that comment, he could feel his palms sweat as the urge to touch her became an exercise in restraint.

“Any ideas...such as? Your legs wrapped around my waist?” He took a step toward her. “My body pinning yours to the wall as you grind against my dick?” Another step. “Yeah, I’m not having those ideas.”

Reagan angled her chin to him and lowered her lashes as if contemplating his suggestion. “Ordinarily, I would say no to an elevator quickie, but...” She placed her palm on his lapel, but before she could do anything more, he reached up and covered her hand, trapping it against his chest.

“Say the word and I’ll hit the emergency button.”

Time seemed to stop as they stood there, neither making the first move, and just as he was about to say, “Fuck it,” and lose himself in her, the elevator chimed.

Reagan pulled her hand away, an almost-disappointed look on her face. “Time’s up.”

“Saved by the bell?” he asked as the doors slipped open.

“Saved from what?” She headed into the lobby and turned when he didn’t immediately follow. “You don’t scare me, Evan.”

He thought about that as he stepped off the elevator and walked towards her. When they were eye to eye, he stated, “Maybe I should.”

\* \* \*

“EVAN JAMES?” RON Whitehead, the CEO of Whitehead International, said in disbelief as he met them in the lobby. His

expression showed his contempt for the man in front of him. “I thought you’d been run out of the business.”

Evan lowered his outstretched hand and shoved it in his pocket. Not even two seconds in the door and he was being put on the defensive.

“I’m sure ‘hoped’ is more like it,” he replied caustically.

“That little stunt you pulled cost my VP half his retirement in the divorce.”

“And how *is* Amy doing?”

“You little shit—”

“Evan...guys, guys,” Reagan cut in. “We’re here for business, not to rehash the past. Do you think you both could manage to put those issues aside for at least a half hour?”

“If you think for one minute that anyone in this office, especially me, is going to trust our investments with him, you must be out of your mind. And so must Bill for that matter.”

He’d been wondering the same fucking thing all morning. He didn’t expect to be forgiven for his transgressions, but there was a part of him that was hoping people had started to forget. Which, coming from him, was hypocritical, because if there was one thing he’d learned in childhood, it was that no one ever really forgot when they had been wronged.

“Mr. Whitehead. Ron,” Reagan cajoled and took a step toward him. “Kelman and Whitehead have had such a wonderful relationship over the past several years. We only want to continue that. Evan’s proven to be able to predict where the profit margins will come in almost to the dollar. No one’s track record is better than his.”

The man stayed silent, but the angry flush seemed to be fading from his face and neck.

Reagan placed her hand on Ron’s arm and told him with a confident smile, “Plus, I’ll be working alongside him

the whole time. You're getting a two-for-one deal." She winked.

Ron exhaled and patted her hand but still aimed a glare over at Evan, who held his look without flinching. After a few beats, Ron gave a curt nod and gestured for them to follow to his office.

\* \* \*

"THAT WENT WELL," Reagan said as they walked out of the building. "Well, aside from the 'sleeping with the VP's wife' comment."

"Are you fucking serious?" He stopped on the sidewalk and turned to face her. "Is this the kind of shit I'll have to deal with every time I go to a meeting? I mean, Jesus. Why did you and Bill even bother?"

"We bothered because you're good at what you do."

Letting out a disgusted sigh, he ran a hand over his face and back through his hair. "I knew it wouldn't be easy, but fuck."

"Hey, you have an opportunity here. Don't let anyone scare you away."

"They don't scare me. They piss me off. I didn't make those women spread their legs. They fucking begged for it."

"Yes, I can see why," she said as she pushed the wind-whipped strands of hair out of her face. "You're so... charming."

"Worked for you."

"I won't deny that."

"Then get off my ass."

She leaned to the side, angling her head as if to get a peek at his behind. "But you have such a nice ass..."

“You’re making it really fucking hard to behave,” he said, pointing accusingly at her. “So unless you want me to pull you inside the nearest hotel to work off my frustration, I’d lay the fuck off the flirting.”

“Okay, okay,” she relented. “I was just trying to lighten the mood.”

“By teasing me? Don’t insinuate anything you don’t plan to follow through on.”

She narrowed her eyes. “I think we both know I don’t have a problem with follow through.”

“I’ve noticed, and so has every other man who’s ever laid eyes on you. It’s hard not to be drawn to someone like you. *Femme fatale*. That’s what makes you so dangerous.”

A vixen smile spread across Reagan’s lips. “Oh, you have to stop with the compliments today. First, I’m the devil, and now, a femme fatale? I’m starting to think you like me.”

“I don’t like anyone.” He smirked. “At least not for more than a night.”

She let out a loud laugh. “You’re full of shit, Evan James. But I’ll let you keep that cocky exterior up in case anyone tries to see past it.”

“How thoughtful,” he grumbled, moving by her to continue down the block.

“Listen,” Reagan said, catching up with him. “Of course Ron’s still bitter about what happened. His VP’s like a brother, and after everything went down, he took some time off—a *lot* of time off—and their profits took a nosedive.” She paused, and he waited to see what sage advice she was about to spout out next. “Perhaps this can be your moment to... redeem yourself. I’m sure he’ll be much more forgiving once you make him twice what he lost.”

When she nudged him playfully, he looked over at her with a skeptical expression.

Maybe she was right. This was a chance to redeem himself, in both the business and personal worlds. He had to

start somewhere—why not the easier of the two?

## CHAPTER SEVEN

“I SEE YOU survived your first day.”

Evan looked up from packing his briefcase to see Reagan standing in the doorway of his office. “Barely.”

“You do look a little worse for the wear, but at least you didn’t lose a contract.”

When he quirked his eyebrows, she pointed back at herself.

“Yep. My first day, and only three hours in.”

He stared at her, wondering why she bothered with the small talk. He didn’t want to talk. His eyes zeroed in on her plump, red lips. No, talking was overrated.

She cleared her throat, so his eyes flicked back to hers again.

“Well, have a good night.” She turned and walked back out the door.

He made sure to take a mental picture of the way her black, tailored pantsuit hugged her curves. “Night,” he said



softly, long after she'd disappeared.

As the silence of the office enveloped him, he sat there wondering about the woman who'd just left. Reagan Spencer—she was quite the enigma.

At work, she portrayed the consummate business woman, and outside of it, the confident vixen he'd once bedded. He couldn't help the curiosity that was eating at him to discover which persona was the real woman—or if it was a combination of the two.

Either way, there was something about Ms. Spencer he just couldn't shake.

Maybe he could if he got a glimpse of who she was, where she came from... something, anything to turn his brain off from obsessing about her.

\* \* \*

HE'D GOTTEN HOME quicker than he'd expected, and after removing his suit jacket, he loosened his tie and unbuttoned the top couple of buttons of his white shirt. Feeling slightly less constricted, he moved to the liquor cabinet, where he poured himself a stiff drink.

He went to his bedroom and sat down to his computer, deciding that surely a little digging couldn't hurt. After taking a sip of the alcohol, Evan then placed it on the desk as he typed Reagan's name into the search engine. The first thing that appeared was the website for Kelman Corporations.

*Great. Exactly what I'm not looking for. However...*

When he spotted an image of her under her bio—perfect, blond hair, that plump set of lips curved into a demure smile, and a string of fine pearls draped around her elegant neck, his cock stirred between his legs and he shifted in his seat. He hadn't even set out on his search with that kind of reaction in mind, but one look at her succulent mouth and there was no way he couldn't think of it around his hard dick.

Deciding to try and stay on course, he clicked off the site. Maybe, if he could find some information on her, this fixation of his would get the fuck out of his head.

Scrolling down the page, he spotted an article from the NYU Leonard N. Stern School of Business with her name highlighted. He clicked on it, opening up a page that displayed photos from students who'd traveled abroad, and there, once again, was Reagan. She was standing in front of the Taj Mahal, draped in a stunning, sapphire sari, and she looked young—probably early twenties if he had to guess.

He went back and browsed through the next few links. She didn't seem to have any social media profiles, and there was nothing going back any further than her college years. So he typed in another search, trying to find a clue as to where the woman had come from. His search became more frantic as the hours ticked by, his frustration rising.

Christ, there was nothing. It was as if she'd come into existence at the age of nineteen.

*This is fucking useless*, he thought as he pressed the heel of his palm to his throbbing cock. He let the cursor hover over the one button he'd been trying to avoid, but since he'd gotten nowhere while trying to travel the intellectual route, he figured he might as well get some fucking pleasure from his hard work.

Once he'd clicked on 'images,' he watched as colored photos of Reagan appeared along with several black-and-whites. His eyes roved over them like a starving man, and as he scrolled down, he spotted it—the one image that finally had him reaching for the button on his pants. He double-clicked the photo, and as it filled his screen, his zipper came down too.

Jesus Christ, the woman was fucking stacked.

He'd known that the first time they'd met, especially after he'd peeled her out of that little black dress, but this photograph was something else. It was sophisticated sex. The kind that made his cock pound harder than anything else.

Her hair was swept away from her face, and her head was turned toward the camera. He'd seen plenty of fuck-me eyes in his time, but the way her gaze called to him through the screen struck a nerve.

She was the kind of woman you wanted on your arm at a business function so that, when you looked over at her, you had a goal, and that goal was to get through the night so you could take her home and sink your cock inside her as she lay under you, begging for it.

His hand palmed his cock and gave it a firm squeeze. Then he let his eyes take in the rest of her as he rubbed himself over the material.

Her breasts were swelling up over the confines of the dress and seemed as though they were about to spill out for all to see, which made him wonder if the men that night had stood in front of her in the same state he was now.

*Fuck.* There was no use pretending that this was not going where it was.

He quickly rose up from his chair and pushed his pants and boxer briefs down around his ankles, toeing off his shoes before kicking them aside. As he stood in front of his computer, the light from the screen shone over him, and when he looked down to fist his cock, he could see the tail ends of his white dress shirt brushing his thighs.

He spread the pre-come that was glistening at the tip of his cock down his hard length and stroked it roughly. He wasn't in the mood to drag this out. She'd made him fucking crazy all day, and now, he'd use her the way he'd wanted to since she'd pushed his patience on the street hours earlier. She'd tempted and tormented him on purpose. He knew she had. And there was nothing he wanted more in that moment than to put her in her place by branding her with his come all over that pretty face.

He drew his fist down his straining flesh and tightly cupped his balls, pushing them up against his body. His head fell back for a second, and he closed his eyes, taking pleasure in the feelings that were coursing through him. The rush of

adrenaline flowing through his blood had his eyes opening and focusing back on the woman on the screen—the woman who'd made him do this.

He widened his stance and tugged himself more forcefully this time as he took in the look in her eyes once more. *Fuck me, they said. Use me.*

A growl ripped through his body as he jerked himself harder toward the brink of orgasm.

“Goddammit,” he bit out, straining for release but feeling it begin to retreat.

When he let go of his cock in frustration, he walked to the wide expanse of windows that lined an entire wall of his bedroom and yanked open the curtains. He pressed his hand against the glass and scanned the view of the city as he held his erection in the other. While scanning the buildings nearby, he stroked himself, wanting to feel the eyes of a stranger on him as he fucked his hand.

His gaze skidded to a stop on a well-lit bedroom in the building across from him. Standing inside was a woman drawing a dress down her shoulders as she looked behind her. Evan let his eyes move to the entryway of her room and saw a man making his way toward her while pulling his shirt from his pants and unbuttoning it along the way.

*Oh fuck yes, this will do.*

He stayed focused on the scene unfolding in front of him as he steadily began to pump his shaft. Random strangers fucking for his benefit was something he could definitely get off to.

The woman's dress was now on the floor, kicked aside, and the man's shirt was gone and his pants undone. Then the man pulled the strap of her bra down and bared one breast to both of them, unbeknownst to her. When he leaned down to suck her nipple into his mouth, Evan let out a groan, wishing he were in the room so he could enjoy the smell of sex he knew would surround them. He kept watching them with his dick in his hand, his balls ready to explode.

Gasping, he was so turned on that his breath was fogging up the glass, but he couldn't get to the point of release. Dropping his head on the forearm he had pressed against the window, he cursed, trying desperately to relieve the ache building inside him. Sweat dripped down his face as he looked up at the couple again. Now, she was on her stomach, her ass up, and he was driving every inch of himself into her at a frantic pace. Evan tried to match his own thrusts with theirs, gripping his shaft tighter, watching as they fucked each other until they both collapsed in sated exhaustion. But still, he remained unsatisfied.

Frustrated, he pushed away from the window and turned, gripping his hair in his hands and looking around the room. He'd done this many times before—gotten himself to a state where he was searching for anything he could possibly use to get himself off. And though he knew it was the lowest of the low, his bed called to him.

The large, king-sized mattress took up most of the space, and the computer that sat on the desk against the wall cast a low light over the white sheets. He knew it would be a sure fucking way to relieve the tension that had built inside him, and at this point, sticking his dick between anything that was a tight fit other than his fist seemed like a stellar option.

He walked to the bathroom and took a small jar of Vaseline out of the medicine cabinet before heading to the kitchen for a Ziploc bag. As he headed back into his bedroom, he glanced at the computer screen and his cock jumped at the sight of her.

He knelt beside his bed and opened the jar, coating a thick layer around his semi-hard erection and sighing with relief as the balm eased his raw skin. Then he placed the plastic bag over his length and raised his mattress up slightly. Positioning his cock at the opening between the two mattresses, he slid in an inch and then let go of his hold on the top layer, letting the weight of it press firmly against him as he pushed farther inside.

He gripped the edge of the bed until his knuckles whitened and closed his eyes. The sheer relief from having

such a restrictive clasp around his cock was enough to have him back to being fully erect. When he slowly pulled his hips back, the heavy pressure reminded him of times he'd sought this kind of raw fulfillment before.

As a boy, he'd discovered that, if he knelt in place and held on to the bed, he could fuck himself into a frenzy and still be hidden should someone walk in the door. As an adult, the activity wasn't about hiding; it was much more salacious than that. It was about the clawing need in the pit of his stomach that reached down and grabbed his balls, demanding him to fuck whatever he could find to get off.

If that happened to be his mattress, then that was what he'd fucking use.

Pulling his hips back, he slammed them up against the side of the bed, his cock sliding inside the slick Vaseline grip of the bag as he imagined that it was a hot, wet cunt instead.

*Fuck, that felt good.*

He pushed his hips harder before pulling them away and gradually easing inside, the slow, torturous slide causing him to shiver in anticipation. He stayed there, flush against the bed, as he jerked his hips back and forth in shallow thrusts. The high was rising, and his head fell back, opening himself up to the flood of ecstasy he knew was coming. His eyes glazed over as the pleasure rushed to his head, and he blinked several times, trying to clear it so he could hang on to that high before he passed the fuck out.

That's when he saw her again, beckoning to him from the corner of his eye, and he briefly faltered before picking the pace back up. The image on his computer screen taunted him as he continued pummeling the mattress, his ass cheeks clenching with each piston of his hips.

*Fuck her*, he thought as he pounded between the tight fit, tearing his eyes away. The orgasm he'd been chasing was slowly fading. Shaking his head, he gripped the sheets until his knuckles hurt.

*No, no, no.*

The rush he'd been feeling only seconds before subsided, and as the ache in his cock was replaced with pain, he groaned.

“Fuck you!” he shouted as he slammed his hips back against the bed. The sting made him wince, but still, he tried again, glaring at her as he cursed out, “Fuck you!”

The smile that had once been inviting now seemed to smirk at him as his hard-on waned. He tried desperately to block her from his head, to get back the high, but it was gone. Fucking gone.

“Goddammit!” he roared, clenching the bedsheets in his hands and ripping them off, the move causing his limp cock to pull out roughly from between the mattresses. He stood up and tore the rest of them off the bed before throwing them across the room, knocking over a lamp so that it all crashed to the floor. “Fuck!”

He was panting as he bent over and placed his hands on the bed, drenched in sweat and shaking from frustration. Clenching his jaw, he stood and stumbled before he moved away from the object of his self-destruction. Then he glanced at the image once more as his back hit the wall of his bedroom and he wondered what the fuck she had done to him.

Never had he been unable to find some kind of fucking satisfaction. Never had he consistently been drawn to one person the way he seemed drawn to her. And as he slid down the wall, dejected and exhausted, he tried to pinpoint the exact reason for his growing obsession. His usual tricks weren't working, and he knew that somehow she was the source of his inability to find satisfaction.

She was a gorgeous woman, but he'd had gorgeous women.

Was it that she was a challenge now after her firm denial of him? Was it because he knew she needed to be off-limits so he could keep his fucking job? Or was he simply trying to trade in one addiction for another?

He rubbed the back of his neck in vexation. The lights from the city seemed to shine on him now like a fucking spotlight as he pulled his knees up to his chest. He kept his eyes on the now aching familiar face staring back at him and wrapped his arms around his knees, unable to stop the shame that started to trickle inside the cracks of his well-established armor.

Where he'd originally craved the eyes of an outsider to heighten his release, the eyes of a still image were now more than he could bear.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

IF HE HAD to watch Reagan's goddamn pert ass walk out of his office one more time that day, he was going to lose his shit. He shifted uncomfortably in his leather chair, wincing slightly from the shot of pain that ran up from his groin due to last night's abuse.

He glared at the door again. She'd walk back through it in about five minutes. Just like she'd done all damn day, torturing his raw cock every time he had to look at her—a reminder of how fucking desperate she made him.

Disgust settled in the pit of his stomach every time he caught a glimpse of her, and it was starting to grate on his last nerve. It was bad enough that he'd had to put on the show of a fucking lifetime today, walking around the office as if he were perfectly fine. But to see her looking as polished and professional as always made him want to put his fist through a wall.

Thinking that that wasn't the best idea, he decided it was time for him to make a quick exit. If he could pack his shit up and get to the door before she spotted him, maybe this day could end without—

Reagan pushed open the door without knocking and walked inside, her eyes still looking down at an open folder in her arms. “Hey, I was thinking that we could order some takeout or something since it looks like it’ll be a late night.” When he didn’t immediately respond, she looked up. “What?”

Evan just shook his head and bent down to grab his briefcase, laying it on the desk and piling the work he needed to take home inside it.

She raised her brow. “Going somewhere?”

“I don’t think late-night dinner dates at the office are a good idea, do you?”

“No, not usually on Tuesdays, but how about we make an exception just this once?” She gave him a cheeky grin.

“I don’t think so.”

“Evan,” she said, walking to stand directly in front of his desk.

The top of her thighs pressed into the edge of it, and the first thought that went through his mind was that she was at the perfect angle to bend her over and take her from—

“Evan,” she said again, louder this time, causing him to tear his eyes away from the blue, figure-hugging skirt that encased her shapely legs and back up to her eyes. “Deadline. Work. Dinner. The end. What’s the problem?”

Evan shut the briefcase with a resounding click and picked it up off the desk with a little more force than necessary. Then he walked around to where she stood and dared to step in a little closer than one should with their boss.

“The problem is that it’s after hours and you’re here and so am I with all these flat surfaces. Do you think I’ve forgotten what’s under those prim and proper outfits you wear?”

For the first time since the day she’d interviewed him, he thought he caught a flash of attraction in her eyes as she shifted so they were now eye to eye.

“I’d hardly call an evening pouring over numbers and graphs and eating Kung Pao chicken a date, but—”

“I’d call it a tease,” he said, cutting her off. “It’s like waving a red flag in front of me and daring me not to charge.”

Her eyes widened, but she didn’t move away, still standing so close to him that he could feel her breath quicken. He wondered what she’d do if he touched her now. If he said exactly what he was thinking. *Fuck it.*

“Maybe that’s what you want,” he said, his voice low and seductive like a vampire compelling its prey. She wasn’t moving, so he took that as a sign to continue. “Maybe you like the idea of me hiking that tight-as-fuck skirt up your legs, bending you over my desk, and shoving inside of you”—he paused and leaned a little closer—“just as I’ve been imagining all day.”

The tip of her tongue licked her bottom lip, and there was no way in hell he wasn’t going to let her know he noticed that. He wanted to see just how far he could push her...

“Or perhaps you’d rather a more familiar position: you on your knees with my cock in that flirtatious mouth of yours?”

“Evan—” she tried to interject, but her breath caught as he raised a brow.

“Deny it. Go on. I dare you.”

While she stared at him, her white teeth bit into her cherry lip as she stood there, not saying a word.

“That’s *exactly* why I won’t stay,” he said, letting his gaze drift down her body before he walked out the door, leaving her there speechless and watching after him.

\* \* \*

EVAN RAPPED ON the door to Reagan’s office and waited for her to respond. It’d been a couple of days since their

confrontation, and he'd noticed she'd been giving him a wider berth than usual. That was fine by him since he'd developed an unhealthy obsession with zooming in on the woman every time she was within eyesight, and he was not proud of the fact. So if she wanted to keep her distance, then she was doing him a favor in a way. Although his cock did not agree.

"Come in," she called from behind the closed door.

After pushing it open, he made his way inside with the information she'd requested. "You were right about Stein," he told her. "If they're willing to drop the price point on their major products, then it will likely increase their sales." Stopping behind one of the chairs opposite her desk, he frowned at her. "The hard part will be making them see it that way."

Reagan leaned back in her chair and clasped her hands together. She contemplated his words for a moment and then gave an arrogant smile as she shrugged. "I don't have to make them see it. I'll just tell them the numbers and show the statistics and they'll have no better option *but* to lower their prices. Win-win if you ask me."

He gave a slight nod and turned to leave, but her voice stopped him.

"Wait just a second. Have a seat."

Looking over his shoulder at her, he tried to gauge what the change in her tone signaled.

She cocked her head. "Please?"

Reluctantly, Evan turned, made his way to one of the seats opposite her, and sat. Then rested his elbows on the arms of the chair and steepled his fingers in front of him as he waited for her to talk.

She crossed one leg over the other, but he refused to allow himself to look. He didn't know if she was playing with him or if this was just her, but every little thing she did provoked him. Even the pen she was rolling back and forth between her fingers brought to mind her hands on him.

“Evan,” she said. “I wanted to take a minute and ask how you’re settling in.”

He hadn’t expected that to be the direction she’d take, but as he sat up straight and lowered his hands, he saw her eyes flick down to where they rested on his thighs before coming back to his own.

“So far so good, I think.” He stopped for a moment and then dared to ask, “As my boss, how would you rate my performance thus far? That, after all, is what counts, isn’t it? That you’re satisfied?”

He watched as the pen she’d been twirling between her fingers made its way to her mouth. She bit the end of the pen cap as she appraised him.

“I’d say I have no complaints,” she said, a slow smile crossing her face.

Evan frowned. “That’s not very good feedback, Ms. Spencer.”

She rocked back in her chair, her smile growing wider as she slid the pen across her bottom lip. “Okay,” she said slowly. “I’d say your job performance has been...adequate.”

“Adequate?” he said, baffled. “I think we both know that my skill set is far above the level of ‘adequate.’”

“Hmm,” she mused. “Well, your social skills need a bit of work, but you do seem to be extremely motivated to please, highly productive, and your job focus is unwavering. I guess I’m holding off judgment until I see how you close the deal.”

Evan had a distinct feeling that the conversation had veered off the professional line of questioning directly after he’d been told to sit.

He’d been trying to figure out what was different about her today. Since he’d gotten the job at Kelman Corporations, she’d been nothing but professional, and each day he’d been there, she’d demonstrated a work ethic that anyone would admire. Today was different though. She was more relaxed than he’d seen her before. Her hair was still perfectly styled,

her makeup flawless, but it was her demeanor and...her blouse.

He hadn't looked her over until right then, but as he let his eyes trail down over her collarbone, he saw that the respectable Ms. Spencer had left a few extra buttons open. She probably didn't think he would notice something so inconsequential, but when you had masturbated to the point of hurting oneself while looking at a set of fucking pearls around said neck, you soon sat up and paid attention when it was bared to you.

"My social skills are lacking, you say?"

She leaned forward in her chair and dropped the pen on the desk, resting her elbows on it and causing her shirt to spread open a little more.

"Well, it's understandable that you're a little reluctant to open up."

His eyebrow quirked as he looked down to get a peek of her bra before coming back to her face and stating, "Whereas you seem more than happy to..."

"To..?"

He shook his head. "Nothing." Glancing around, he noticed the diplomas hanging on her wall. "NYU, huh?"

She followed his gaze and nodded. "Yeah. For my master's."

"And before that?"

"Before what?"

"Before NYU. What's your story?"

She shrugged and sat back in her chair. "Are we playing Twenty Questions now?"

"Are you gonna answer every question with another question?"

"It's just not important."

Evan studied her carefully. “Well, it seems only fair. You know everything about me.”

“Yes, but we hired you. It’s my job to know what I’m getting myself—our company into.”

“So, your favorite restaurant growing up was called..?”

She laughed and shook her head. “McDonald’s.”

“And the names of your parents are..?”

Reagan rolled her eyes and pointed to the door. “Get back to work.”

\* \* \*

“WE MAKE A good team,” Reagan said the following week as they walked out of the conference room and through the lobby. They’d just finished presenting their collaborative merger project, and it had gone surprisingly well. “Frankly, I’m a little shocked.”

“Oh yeah? Doubting my ability to perform, were you?”

As she pushed the doors open to the street, she shot him a look that said, *Really?* and he laughed.

“All right, all right. We make a very good business team. I agree.”

“There. Was that so hard?”

As he strolled beside her down the sidewalk, he shook his head. “Be proud of me. I’m keeping my lips zipped.”

She snorted. “Yeah, that’s about the only thing you keep zip—” She stopped herself before she could finish the sentence.

“Hey, I’m trying here.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry.”

*You wouldn’t be sorry if you knew every way I’ve thought about fucking you.*

He felt a grin quirk his mouth as they continued back to the office in comfortable silence until the growling of her stomach had him stopping in his tracks. “Lunch?”

She pressed a hand to her belly and glanced over at him. “It’s daylight, so eating together is allowed now, huh?”

When he nodded, she pointed at a Thai restaurant across the street.

“Does that work for you?”

“I’m always down for hot and spicy.”

She rolled her eyes. “I’m sure you are.”

\* \* \*

HE FELT REAGAN’S gaze on him as he scarfed down his second helping of Pad Thai. Lowering his fork, he raised his eyes to meet hers.

“I thought you said you liked hot and spicy?” she commented, spearing another forkful of red curry chicken. “*That* is neither.”

“I like to switch it up. I’d get bored ordering the same dish every time.”

“Hmm. That’s interesting. Says a lot about you.”

“What can I say? I like a change now and then. Speaking of...” He wiped his mouth and put the napkin back in his lap. When he spoke again, his voice took on a more sober tone. “Thank you. You know, with the job, this account—everything, really. Many wouldn’t have given me a chance, and I would’ve deserved it. So...I appreciate it.”

She regarded him thoughtfully, her head tilted to the side. “Everyone makes mistakes, Evan. It’s how you deal with the aftermath that counts.”

*Pretty sure she wouldn’t agree with any of my methods.*



Rubbing his jaw, he said, “I don’t think I’ve been doing a very good job of dealing with anything lately.” He looked up at her with haunted eyes, his voice dropping down to barely a whisper. “I just don’t know how...” he trailed off, losing his nerve.

“You don’t know how to what?” she prompted.

He focused on her and decided that maybe it was time to open up to someone. “To stop. I just don’t know how to stop.”

“I’m curious,” she said before taking a sip of her water. “You have a healthy...appetite, that much is clear, but so do a lot of people.”

“Yourself included.”

Her lips lifted in a half smile, and she nodded. “Myself included. So what’s the tipping point?”

“The tipping point?”

“Yeah. What makes it get out of control?”

“I don’t think you wanna know.”

She gave him a look that made it pretty clear what she thought of that, but in case he’d missed it, she told him. “I’m a big girl, Evan. I can handle it.”

He knew what she was asking for, but he wasn’t sure she could handle that. How could anyone understand what he did when he thought no one was watching?

She waited, an expectant look on her face, and he felt his defenses slowly crumbling. Shifting in his seat so he was leaning in close across the table, he lowered his voice and locked eyes with her, not giving her any chance to escape the intensity he knew was in his own.

“Have you ever wanted something so much you’d do anything to get it?”

“Of course.”

“What if that meant giving up every good thing in your life for it? For a high that lasts only minutes before you’re

chasing it again. When you're down to the last few dollars in your bank account and you'd rather call a sex hotline instead of eat because your hand just isn't getting you off, and the thought of going another minute without coming is what you think would kill you. When your first thought after finally landing a new job isn't that you can pay your bills, but that you can finally afford the high-class hooker with the tightest cunt in Manhattan to fuck you instead? That's the line. That's the difference."

Reagan's eyes had widened throughout his speech, and as she sat there staring at him with her mouth slightly parted, he wondered what the fuck she was thinking.

"Hey," he told her and reclined back with a shrug, trying to appear indifferent. "You asked."

Several seconds passed before she nodded and managed to pull herself together enough to ask, "Have you ever tried to stop?"

He put his napkin on the table, and returned her stare, refusing to feel any more humiliation than he already did. "And how would you suggest I do that?"

"Have you ever talked to someone?"

"Of course."

"And obviously abstinence doesn't work."

"Obviously."

Her lips curved into a cheeky smile as she suggested, "This may sound crazy, but what about monogamy?"

At that suggestion, he blew out a breath. "The last woman I dated said she wished I'd fall in the Kaptai Lake and have my dick eaten off by a swarm of hungry piranhas. So, no, it didn't end well."

"Where the hell is Kaptai Lake?"

"Exactly. I had to look it up. Remind me never to go to Bangladesh."

"Well, shit."

He let out a humorless laugh and watched her tap her manicured nail against her lip.

“Well, look. You have the job. Just don’t fuck it up, okay? Pun intended.”

“I’m trying not to. But keep in mind, I’ve been promising my family the same thing for years now, and if I can’t seem to get it right for them...” He trailed off when he saw an expression flash across her eyes. Interest? No...but something.

“You’ve hardly mentioned them since starting. Are they from around here?”

“No,” he replied but gave nothing more. His family was not a topic he wished to discuss.

He watched her out of the corner of his eye. If she was flustered by what he’d said, she wasn’t showing it. She seemed to take the hint and went back to eating without saying another word.

But when he picked up his fork and reached over to spear a piece of her red curry chicken, she looked at him in surprise.

“What?” he asked, an innocent expression on his face. “I wanted to taste hot and spicy after all.”

\* \* \*

EVAN TURNED HIS SUV onto the dark, familiar street lit only by a flickering lamppost and rolled down the window. The night was sticky with humidity, and the sidewalks seemed to be deserted in favor of air conditioning. That or business was good.

He spotted a couple of shadowy figures in heels standing on the corner and dimmed his lights as he eased his Range Rover in their direction. One of the women was tall with skin the color of rich coffee, and the other a scrawny redhead. Both were similarly dressed in tiny miniskirts and the

highest heels he'd ever seen, leaving no dispute over exactly what it was they were doing on the street after dark.

He hadn't intended for things to get this bad. But it'd been two fucking weeks since he'd come, and if he didn't get a release soon, there was no telling what the fuck he would do.

As he slowed to a stop in front of the women, they turned and sauntered toward him. That close, he wasn't altogether sure that the redhead wasn't a guy and, upon further inspection, he still wasn't positive, so he looked behind them to see if his regular was nearby.

"You lookin' for something, sweet thing?" the taller woman asked as she pulled her tube top even farther down to showcase her breasts. They weren't anything spectacular, but he supposed she would work in a pinch if it came down to that.

"Is Layla around?"

The woman's penciled-in eyebrow arched, and then she crossed her arms, seemingly put out that he'd asked about someone other than her.

"Layla's already busy for the night. You're too late for that piece of ass, sugar."

Evan tightened his hands around the steering wheel as he thought over his options. Then he glanced back at the woman whose hip was resting against the side of his car door.

*Fuck it.*

"You. What's your name?"

As she bent down so she was face to face with him, the side of her painted lips curved and she told him, "Violet."

His eyes flicked over to where the redhead was walking away after realizing she, or he, was obviously not who he was interested in.

The fact of the matter was that he wasn't interested in either of them. The woman he was fixated on was off-limits. Better to slake his lust here than risk losing his job for

cornering his boss and pounding into her for some kind of fucking release.

“Okay, Violet. Get in.”

He pushed the seat back as she opened the door and slid in, angling her long legs towards his. Immediately, she was on him, running her long nails over his chest as he raised the window and drove away from the corner.

“What’ll it be, sugar? You an ass man? Or maybe you’d like a good titty fuck?” She removed her hand and grabbed her small handfuls, massaging them as she licked her lips.

Glancing briefly at her movement, he snorted. *Wouldn’t be enough to titty fuck.*

She stopped rubbing herself and jerked away from him. “Whatchu snortin’ about, classy dick? You picked *me* up, remember?”

He turned the car into an unilluminated alley and shut off the ignition. There was no way in hell he was bringing a hooker back to his place, and he sure as fuck wasn’t spending money on a hotel room for a five-minute job.

He unzipped his pants and pushed them down, pulling his cock free. He’d gone commando for easy access, and even without being hard, her eyes flared with interest.

“I think just a hand job will work for tonight, Violet,” he said as he pushed his seat back.

Closing his eyes, he tried to imagine he was anywhere other than in his SUV with a fucking hooker. When her fingers wrapped around the root of his cock, he hissed from the sheer relief of having someone other than himself touching his flesh.

In that moment, he didn’t care who she was or how she looked. Nothing mattered but the fact that she was tightening her hold on his dick.

While he pushed his hips up off the seat, he heard her moan at his movements, but he wasn’t interested in her pleasure. He was interested in his own. And as her fingers

started to stroke up his length, his erection started to take notice.

The dry rub wasn't going to work for long, so he cracked open his eyes and asked, "Lube?"

She gave him a cunning grin and flexed her fingers, making his jaw clench. "That costs extra."

"I've got the fucking money."

She pursed her lips at him and glanced down at his dick before returning her focus to him. "Sure you don't want my mouth instead?"

Reaching down, he clamped his hand around hers. "Lube. That's it."

"Okay," she relented and brought her free hand to the side of her skirt. Then she slipped her fingers underneath and took out a small packet.

*Apparently, she's a fucking Girl Scout. Always prepared.*

After she oiled him up, she went to work, firmly squeezing him from root to tip, twisting both hands around his cock and rubbing it to attention. He pumped his hips up at a steady pace through her clenched hands and tried not to think about any fucking thing but how good it felt. The beginning tremors of a rush ran through him, but just as quickly, they were gone.

"No, fuck," he spat, grabbing at his hair in frustration as he felt his erection begin to diminish.

She felt it too and moved her hands faster, trying another position as she urged him on in seductive purrs. This couldn't be fucking happening. Not again. What the hell was going on?

So he'd looked up images of Reagan, and now, all of a sudden, he couldn't get himself off? What was that? Some kind of fucked-up guilt trip? He knew he couldn't have her, and ever since secretly jacking off to her, he couldn't fucking come to save himself.

*Fuck this shit.*

He sat up and pushed the hooker's hands off his useless body.

“Stop. Just fucking stop.”

“Is there a problem, sugar?”

He shot her a look that was full of anger and frustration and grasped for his wallet, which was in the pocket of his pants that were currently around his ankles. Pulling a couple of bills from it, he threw them across the console at her, and told her coolly, “Just get out.”

Her eyebrows shot up to her hairline. “Excuse me?”

He pressed a button to unlock the doors, reached over her, and opened hers. “Get out.”

“You is a twisted motherfucker, lettin' girls out in the middle of an alley when the least you could do is drive me back the two blocks to—”

“GET. OUT.” His voice vibrated through the air and had her jumping out of the car.

She wiped her hands on the sides of her scant dress, yelling obscenities at him as he leaned over and pulled the passenger's door shut. “Don't bother comin' back here—you or your limp-ass dick!” he could hear her shout as he peeled out of the alley.

Nausea twisted through his gut and the sting of unshed tears burned his eyes. He hated who he was like this. Hated it yet couldn't escape. He couldn't decide which pain was worse: the physical agony, the fucked way he'd used and disposed of another human being, or the guilt and humiliation of having to acknowledge who he really was.

## CHAPTER NINE

EVAN DIDN'T FIDGET. Didn't move. He merely sat in the boardroom chair, watching and listening to Bill as he wrapped up the highlights of the week and what they needed to accomplish come Monday.

Or at least that's what he assumed was going on from observing the man's lips move. He couldn't actually hear anything other than the blood pounding in his head, each beat a taunting reminder that he was no longer in control of his unruly body—it was controlling him.

It was taking every ounce of willpower to keep still. If he moved, he'd crack, and those fissures would spread until he crumbled completely and irrevocably apart. So he sat there, his eyes glued to the front, his hands in his lap, and hoped the expression on his face was a pleasant one.

*She* was seated across from him, a fact he'd become aware of the second he'd walked into the room. He'd decided that the best way to deal with that was by not dealing at all—so he ignored her.



“That’s all from me for now,” Bill said as he closed the leather folder he had on the desk in front of him. “I’m sure you’re all anxious to get out of here and enjoy your weekend. So remember what I said—this week’s numbers were good but not good enough to spend your life savings. So wind down, relax, and come back ready to make even more money.”

There were low murmurs around the room as people pushed back from the tables and stood, filing one by one out of the room, *her* included. Evan waited until they’d all exited and then rose to his feet, ready to leave without having to engage anyone in conversation. He was almost to the door when he heard his name from the front of the room.

“Hey, Evan? Will you wait a minute?”

*Fuck.*

He plastered on his poker face as his guard went back up. Then he turned around to face Bill. There was an expression Evan didn’t like in his eyes. It looked like something similar to fucking concern. He hoped there wasn’t about to be a ‘come to Jesus’ meeting right there in the boardroom, or he’d be tempted to throw himself out the fucking window.

The man reached down to grab a manila envelope and held it out to him. Evan looked at it in confusion for a moment before taking it.

Bill laughed. “It’s just the numbers Reagan gave me to look over for the Whitehead account, not a pink slip.” When Evan jerked his head up, Bill continued. “You looked at it like it’d bite your hand off. No need. You seem to be getting back into things nicely, son. Accounts look good, and Reagan showers you with praise.” He leaned closer and said in a conspiratorial whisper, “But don’t tell her I told you, of course.”

He took the envelope from Bill and gave a quick nod of his head. At this point, it was the only reaction he trusted while the man was watching him so intently.

“She left before I could return them and she needs them for her final report. Can you take them over to her before you leave today?”

*No. No, I fucking can't*, was what he wanted to say. But instead, he managed a polite, “No problem,” and moved to step away.

“Oh, and Evan?”

He froze and gripped the report tighter, waiting for the axe to fall.

“Are you doing okay? You look a little...off today.”

He rubbed a hand over his chin and tried for a smile, but he knew it wasn't fooling Bill for a second if the perceptive eyes watching him were any indication.

“Yeah. I'm just not sleeping that well. I guess it's finally catching up to me.”

Bill tapped his fingers on the table in front of him and nodded in agreement. “Yeah, that'll do it. Try and catch up this weekend, yes? We can't have one of our top managers looking like he needs a week's vacation. We need you alert, son. You know, to instill confidence.”

Evan forced a small smile. “Of course,” he said and walked swiftly back to his office.

Once there, he shut the door and leaned against it, quickly loosening the tie that was suffocating him. He took a gasp of air, but it wasn't enough. After shrugging out of his suit jacket, he threw it over a chair along with the envelope and leaned back against the door, letting the coolness of the wood seep through his damp shirt. He hadn't even realized he'd been sweating, the effort of trying to be normal and present at the office obviously taking a physical toll on his body.

Raking his fingers through his hair, he struggled again for a deep breath to calm his hammering heart. He didn't know how to ease his suffering, and that's what was sending him over the edge. He'd tried all of his usual go-tos and still nothing.

The addiction that had once ruined everything in his life was dragging him back under again. If he didn't get a handle on it soon, he was going to fucking drown. He looked down at his shaking hands and was reminded of the very catalyst of his downward spiral—Reagan.

It was because of her that he'd started out on this never-ending quest to get his rocks off, and he knew deep in the pit of his stomach it was because of her that he fucking couldn't. Exasperated, he moved over to where his briefcase was sitting on the desk. He needed to get this the fuck over with and go home.

A knock sounded on his door while he was gathering up his stuff, but he ignored it, not wanting to deal with anyone at the moment. He needed to wait until everyone else was fucking gone before leaving. No need for others to witness him in the rock-bottom state he was wallowing in.

The knock sounded again, but this time, a head peeked around the door. A blond head. A very attractive but unwanted blond head.

As Reagan took in his state of undress, her expression turned troubled. She stepped into the office and shut the door behind her. No words were exchanged as she looked at him, her eyes conveying understanding. Understanding and... fucking compassion. The look made him sick, and he turned away in disgust at himself.

“Please leave.” His voice was quiet as he closed his eyes, his knuckles in fists on the wooden desk.

He wasn't a praying man, but he would have said one now if she would just go away. The rope that held his body together was threadbare, and if it snapped, he wasn't sure what he was capable of. And he just couldn't let her see that. Not her.

“Ev—”

“I said,” he cut her off without looking back, “please leave. There's an envelope on the chair for you. Just take it and go.”

The silence that engulfed the room was thick as they both stood frozen where they were. He was waiting to hear her footsteps taking her out the door and away from him. Away from the hell that was brimming just under the surface. But he couldn't hear anything. Not one fucking thing.

He shut his eyes and squeezed them tight as he balled his fists until they hurt.

“Evan...” Her voice was soft, coaxing this time, as if she were treading carefully around a wild animal in the room, and really, with the way he was feeling, she was fucking smart to be wary. “Evan, look at me. Please?”

*And isn't that just the fucking problem? I don't want to stop looking at her.*

He shook his head, and as he did, footsteps came closer.

“Stop,” he called out, and her steps halted.

“I'm not leaving,” she said, her voice defiant.

He imagined that, if he turned around right then, he'd see her arms crossed and her head haughtily tilted up. That visual, the one of her confident and bossy as hell, almost had him swiveling in her direction. She wouldn't remain so arrogant for long if she got her way; he'd have her pinned to the wall with his hand up her skirt in five seconds flat.

“Then you're inviting trouble. I told you to get out.”

“And I told you I'm not going anywhere.” Her voice had climbed in volume as she stubbornly refused to leave. “Now turn around and tell me what the hell is wrong with you. You've been a mess all day.”

He laughed then, the hysteria inside bubbling up and forcing its way out in a humorless sound. God, she was testing his patience, and fuck, it was just about out.

Slowly, he pivoted on his heels, and when he was finally facing her, he brought his eyes up to lock with determined, brown ones.

“Okay, Reagan.” His voice was low, and as he drew out her name, he saw the way she shifted where she stood. Not so confident now that she was face to face with a man who was clearly holding on by a thread. “Now what?”

Her eyes were watching him carefully, gauging his every move, and when she took in a breath of air and pushed her hair back behind her ear, he noticed the way her breasts tested the shirt’s constraints.

She took a step toward him, and Evan couldn’t help but think she was either brave or incredibly foolish as she asked, “Now tell me what’s going on. Your bloodshot eyes aren’t fooling anyone. Did something happen?”

He gripped the sides of the desk by his thighs and focused on her beautiful face before him, feeling his lip curl in a derisive smile. “You. *You* fucking happened.”

She flinched at the menacing tone of his words. “Me?” When Evan didn’t respond, she got defensive. “And what exactly do you mean by that?”

His eyes wandered down her body inch by inch, taking in all of her. He didn’t think he’d ever seen a sexier woman in his life. It was then that he realized his dormant cock had taken interest.

*Of course it fucking has.*

Reagan looked immaculate. Her blond hair, styled in soft waves, rested softly against the silk of her shirt. It was a cream color with black buttons that ran down the center between two of the most spectacular breasts he could recall having ever seen.

The curves of her body were highlighted in a tasteful way beneath her black pencil skirt. But the way the shirt was tucked in, showcasing her tiny waist and the flare of her hips, made him want to grab ahold of her and hike it up so he could see what kind of lace was beneath it.

And she *was* the kind to wear lace. He knew because he remembered in stark detail watching her peel her magnificent body out of it once before, and fucking hell, that

was what was going to get him the release he'd been chasing now.

“Hey.” She snapped her fingers to get his attention again. “What the hell is the matter with you? I’m not gonna ask again.”

“Oh...I see. We’re playing by Reagan’s rules, are we?” He pushed himself off the desk and began to slowly circle her. “And when you get your answer, what will you do? I doubt it’s something you want to hear...” he trailed off, stopping behind her.

The back of her was just as appealing as the front, and he had to force himself not to push her forward and on top of his desk. As his eyes ran over her ample bottom, he palmed his growing erection and took a step closer. She shivered when his breath grazed her neck but didn’t move away.

That surprised him. “Not running tonight?” he wondered aloud. “Does this mean I can touch you?” He ran his fingers down the length of her spine, and this time, she jerked away and turned to face him.

Her eyes flashed as she hissed, “No, you can’t fucking touch me.”

“I see,” he acknowledged as she shifted farther away from him, undoubtedly trying to create more distance between the two of them. “Then you should have left when I told you to instead of poking at me for fucking answers.”

She looked him over as if trying to decide the best course of action. Then she crossed her arms over her chest and stated plainly, “I’m still waiting for an answer, Evan. Stop trying to intimidate me and answer the question.”

He took a step toward her and let his gaze drop to the breasts heaving behind the satin of her shirt. They were straining the buttons he wanted to pop open with his fingers—or teeth—and when he was finally close enough that he could see the lace of her bra between the buttons, he moved his eyes back up to hers and pinned her where she stood.

“You’re the fucking problem, because for the last two weeks, I’ve had a fucking erection I can’t seem to get rid of. Day after day, I’ve watched you walk around, making my cock fucking ache to sink inside you again, and you know what? I’ve been on my best behavior. I’ve looked, yeah. I won’t lie. But did I touch? No...I went home and tried to forget. Tried to somehow relieve this craving you’ve built deep inside me, but I think I’ve finally worked it out...” His eyes trailed down her neck, watching her pulse beat rapidly as she lowered her arms to the desk to steady herself. “It’s you. I want you.”

Reagan looked taken aback by his admission. “But... that’s not true. I know what you are, Evan. I know it’s not about me.”

He raised his brows. “It’s not? What’s it about then? Please enlighten me.”

“It’s why you don’t do repeats. You’re an addict. I was just a quick fix for you.” She stopped and thought that over. “Well, maybe not so *quick*.”

“Definitely *not* a quick fix.”

“We both agreed it was a one-time thing. What’s changed?”

Evan blew out a heavy breath as he paced the room and gripped the back of his neck. “I don’t know. I don’t fucking know.”

She eyed him cautiously. “But you somehow think I’m the answer? You didn’t seem to have any problems at Nova the other night.”

“Jesus Christ. Because I thought about *you!*” he exploded, stopping in his tracks. “You came into my life, and you’ve fucked it to shit. I can’t get a good goddamn release without you. Do you see what it’s doing to me? You keep asking what’s wrong. Now do you see it?”

He knew he was losing it, knew he was going too far, but he couldn’t stop now. The throb of his cock was insistent, and he caught her eyes on his erection before she quickly tore

them away. Reaching down, he rubbed his open hand over his pants and felt himself growing harder.

It was then that the main office lights shut off for the weekend, the room going dark except for the dim lamp on his desk and the sliver of city lights peeking through the blinds. The room was charged with sexual tension, and from the way she clung to his desk, he had a feeling that it wasn't emanating only from him.

“Reagan...” His voice was like gravel as he tried to slow himself down. “Tell me you want this. Tell me you'll let me have you.”

She took a shuddering breath as he unbuttoned his pants, his hand disappearing inside to continue stroking. “I can't.” Her voice was barely a whisper, but her eyes were no longer fighting the urge to watch his movements.

“Yes, you can,” he coaxed, taking a step toward her. With every rub of his cock, he was growing harder for her, more desperate. “Just this once.” He moved again so that only mere inches separated them. “Let me fuck you, Reagan. Right here on my desk. Let me...”

Reagan looked him dead in the eye. “And if I do... what happens then? What about next week when some hot waitress can't get you off? Will you come running to me?”

He dropped his head forward, stared down at the hand he was using to massage himself, and shook his head. “I don't know. I don't *know*...” He gritted his teeth, then dragged his blurry gaze back to hers, and pleaded, “Please, Reagan. You don't understand how much I need this.”

She raised her hand and placed it on his chest, and if he hadn't actually witnessed the action, he wouldn't have believed she was finally touching him. Then understanding dawned across her face and she seemed to be thinking over her words carefully before she spoke.

“Here's what's going to happen, and since I'm the boss for now, you're going to listen to me.” As she gently pushed him away from her, Evan's heart thumped hard inside his



chest. Then she said softly, “You’re going to stay here where I can see you. You think it’s me, the thought of me, that gets you off? Then you shouldn’t need to touch me to achieve that... should you?”

He stepped away as she moved to the side and walked around to where his office chair was pushed in under the desk. After rolling it out, she sat, crossing her legs and placing an elbow on the arm as she ran her eyes down over him.

When they landed on the hand pressing over his parted pants, she licked her full lips and told him, “Now what is it you want, Evan?”

As he looked at her sitting in his chair and issuing orders like a fucking queen, he wondered if she thought he would change his mind and leave. If that were the case, she was about to be in for one hell of a fucking surprise.

“I want you to unbutton your shirt.”

She didn’t hesitate, her fingers nimbly unfastening the buttons down to her waist.

“Untuck it. And then leave it on my desk.”

Reagan kept her eyes on him as she obeyed his wishes and pulled the material from her skirt, unfastening the remaining buttons before sliding it off her shoulders and baring the cream lace bra underneath.

*Christ almighty.*

The sight of her sitting there with her breasts spilling over the edges had him groaning, but before he could reach back inside to ease himself, she called his name.

“Wait,” she said, standing up and walking back around. “I can’t see from over there after all.”

She sat in one of the visitor chairs in front of his desk, and when he turned to face her, she grabbed his hand. Her tongue ran over the length of his palm before she took two of his fingers into her mouth and sucked.

His entire fucking body trembled at the warm, wet heat of her, and when she was finished, she grabbed the edges of

his pants and pulled them, along with his boxer briefs, all the way down. He kicked them off and took hold of his cock, pumping it through the slick glide of his fist.

Reagan's hand reached up to slip the strap of her bra down, and he nodded and grunted out, "Off."

She complied, unsnapping the back and letting the bra fall to the floor. Her nipples were hard, and fuck if that didn't make him thrust into his hand more forcefully.

Her eyes were watching him closely, not showing any discomfort over the fact that she was sitting topless in his office as he masturbated. That was when, bold as ever, she tilted her head and licked her lower lip. Evan knew right then that he wouldn't do anything to fuck this up.

"What next, Evan?"

The way her lips parted around his name had him reaching for her until she shook her head.

"No, no. No touching me. What next?"

"Fuck," he growled out as he clenched his jaw and brought his hand back to pump his cock harder. He let his eyes fall down to her breasts and the smooth skin of her stomach and managed, "Unzip your skirt."

"No," she told him and gave a sinful grin. "I'm not taking my skirt off. Next?"

His nostrils flared in frustration as he looked down at her sexy face and said, "Pull it up."

"My skirt?"

"Yes, your fucking skirt," he groaned.

She reached down to either side of her thighs but kept her eyes on his as she started to draw it up her legs.

"More," he said when she stopped just below her hips.

Reagan raised it higher until her matching cream panties came into view. He wanted to pass the fuck out when he realized she had soaked through them.

“Goddammit, Reagan,” he ground out, and she raised her brow.

“See something you like?” she asked and threw one of her legs over the arm of the chair.

*Fuck yes, I do.*

“You know I fucking like it,” he confirmed as she arched her hips in his direction, and he fisted his length harder. “I fucking crave it. Jesus, Reagan. You’re soaked. Tell me you aren’t dying for me to fuck you right now. Right here on the floor.”

She clutched the sides of the chair she was sitting in, and he watched her thigh muscles tense as her back curved like she was trying to push against something, seeking the pressure he knew his cock could give her.

He stepped closer to her, like a man dying of thirst who’d finally spotted an oasis in the desert, and when he was close enough that the scent of her arousal hit his nose, he bared his teeth and demanded of her, “Why are you denying yourself?”

When she looked up at him, the hunger in her eyes was evident, but so was the control he knew he was lacking. Instead of answering, she fingered her nipples, successfully drawing his attention back to the task at hand. She cupped herself, pushing her rounded flesh up and squeezing in time to every stroke he made.

*Fuck. Almost... I just need...something more.*

He was panting, so close to the rush he knew was coming. “I want—” he started.

“Tell me.”

Evan leaned over her and grabbed the back of her chair, only inches between them. With his mouth hovering by her ear, he told her, “I want to come all over your perfect fucking tits.”

She gave him a smile so fucking naughty that it had his insides twisting as she whispered, “Do it.”

*God, I want to kiss that fucking smile off her mouth, he thought, but that was not part of the deal.*

Instead, he held on to the back of the chair and moved between her splayed thighs. She still had one hanging over the arm of the chair, so she was nice and wide for him, and as he started to pump his cock, he looked down to see her watching with rapt attention and a slightly parted mouth.

Fuck, he was so ready. The smell of her, the debauched look of her, and the fact she was letting him even do this were all coming together to build inside him a climax he couldn't wait to paint her skin with.

Then her eyes flicked up to his from beneath her long lashes, and when she repeated, "Do it," he lost his fucking mind.

His gaze never wavered from hers as the pent-up hours of agony unleashed in spectacular fashion across her chest. He'd never felt a release on this level before. It felt as though he were unloading a heavy burden from his shoulders, and as his climax waned, the tightness in his chest eased.

She never took her eyes off him, and he wondered what she saw. A desperate man, most likely. One so deeply entrenched in the depth of his addiction that the only relief he'd been able to find lay with the woman beneath him, covered in his come—she'd become his dirtiest fantasy.

He jerked back from her, his hands shaking as the enormity of what had just happened sunk in. He'd just come all over his boss's tits.

*Fucking hell. What have I done?*

She slid her leg down from the arm of the chair, and Evan watched in stunned silence as she turned, grabbed a couple of tissues from the box on his desk, and cleaned herself up.

*I need to say something...but shit. What do you say after that?*

She didn't even give him a passing glance as she stood and walked around to where she'd dropped her bra, tossing the

tissues in the trash. As she replaced her clothing in silence, he kicked his ass into gear and did likewise.

Before he could offer up one word of apology, she came around the desk, looked him over, and smoothed her hands down her skirt.

“So, I’ll see you Monday?”

# PART

*Two*

**“...I lost my illusions in a black rain of  
bitterness - now what do you see in my  
eyes? How can you still love me? How  
can I be tender? ...”**

**— John Geddes**

## CHAPTER TEN

REAGAN'S EYES FLICKED open two minutes before her alarm went off. She didn't feel the seize of panic in her stomach upon waking anymore, though the dreams that had been haunting her for weeks were becoming more vivid.

As remnants of the memory dissipated, the man lying next to her came into focus. The tousled chestnut locks she'd been remembering faded into a dirty blond, and a night's worth of stubble covered his angular jaw.

Reaching for her cell phone still on the nightstand, she glanced at the time and quickly disabled the alarm before it could wake him up. The last thing she needed was an audience to her walk of shame, and she was already mentally kicking herself for staying the night.

Gingerly lifting the sheet, she slipped out of the bed and tiptoed around the room collecting her things. Then she dressed quietly, grateful that she'd gone out the night before in a pair of jeans instead of something more conspicuous. Tight dresses at seven a.m. were a little *too* call girl for her taste.



Her heels were nowhere to be found, so she dropped to her knees and crawled along the hardwood floors to search underneath the bed, freezing every time it creaked and checking to make sure Tom...err...Ted? Travis? Well, to make sure whatever his name was stayed dead to the world.

The damn things must've been kicked off in haste, because she had to flatten herself and wriggle her way beneath the bed to reach them. As she tried to slide back out, her head knocked against the frame in a loud thump, and she stopped breathing while the man above groaned and tossed about before becoming silent again.

A string of curses ran through her mind as she pushed herself out and got on all fours before peeking up over the edge of the bed to make sure she was in the clear for a getaway. Once she was satisfied, she got to her feet and didn't look back. As she shut his apartment door behind her, she breathed a sigh of relief and stepped into her heels. She wouldn't be making an overnight mistake like that again.

Pulling out her cell phone, she opened her calendar and groaned when she realized Bill had set up an eight o'clock meeting that morning. She wouldn't even have time now to run home.

"Great," she muttered, tucking her phone into her jeans pocket. If she hurried, she could freshen up at the office, and, luckily, she always kept a couple of business suits there just in case. Though by "just in case," that usually meant in case she spilled coffee down her shirt, not in case of a one-night stand.

Once outside, she hailed a cab and hopped inside before pulling out her small makeup bag and wiping away the flakes of mascara under her eyes. No amount of powder would conceal the fact that her late nights were starting to catch up with her. Those had to stop. She didn't let herself think about what had prompted her actions, but deep down she knew that night in Evan's office three weeks ago had left an indelible mark. One she wasn't ready to admit to herself and one she sure as hell wouldn't ever let him see.

After that evening, he'd seemed...different. Less anxious, like the coil of tension that was wrapped so tightly inside him had unraveled. If Evan was regaining some semblance of control in his life, it seemed as though hers was beginning to spin out of control.

Reagan stared out the window as the cab maneuvered through the traffic. She knew she would have to eventually deal with what she had allowed to happen that night, but in the back of her mind she was aware that wasn't the only thing she had to face when it came to Evan James. When Bill had finally told her he was ready to bring Evan in, after months of keeping tabs on the man, she'd thought she was ready to handle it. *How wrong was I?*

The cab pulled to an abrupt stop at the curb of the building that housed Kelman Corporations, and she fished through her purse for some cash. Pulling out a couple of bills, she handed them over and climbed out before shutting the door behind her. She glanced down at her phone again and noticed she had a few minutes to spare. Brushing her hair away from her face and tucking it behind her ear, she held her head high and walked toward the front entrance.

*There, see, no one will be the wiser.*

Believing she was home free, she didn't notice until she was reaching for the handle that a person had stepped in beside her.

"Let me get that," a deep, familiar voice said as he reached out to open the door before she could. Inwardly, she groaned as Evan gave her a once-over, and a knowing grin crossed his handsome face. Before he could say anything, she held up her hand.

"Don't say a word," she grumbled.

Striding past him, she made her way over to the elevator and punched the up button until the doors opened. Stepping inside, she moved to the back corner and leaned against the wall, watching as Evan balanced the tray of coffees in his left hand and stepped inside to press their floor with his

other. When the doors slid shut he faced her and gave a mock frown.

“So, you don’t want your caffeine jolt?” He took a step closer and leaned against the wall beside her. She could smell the strong scent of coffee wafting from the cups, and she almost...*almost* told him no. Then she turned and caught his you-know-you-want-it look.

“Fine, give it to me.”

He held the tray out to her, and when she saw the cup with “BOSS” written on the side, she had to fight back her own smile. She reached for it, and just before she could take it, he moved the tray away and told her in a most serious tone, “You could be nicer. I waited in a pretty long line for this beverage.”

Reagan narrowed her eyes at him and then glanced to the cups. “You’re being rather impertinent to your boss, don’t you think?”

The half-quirk that curled Evan’s lip was becoming familiar, and it was a trait she was discovering she enjoyed seeing. He tilted the tray around and looked down at the cup and then back at her.

“Oh, no. That one’s mine. Seemed like I had a better chance with the barista if I looked important.”

Raising a brow, she reached out to grab the other cup in the tray. As she brought it to her lips, her eyes caught the black marker that had “Bob” scrawled across the side, and she gave him a pointed look. Evan shrugged.

“What? It’s not very smart to make myself look important and then order a coffee for a woman. So, today, you’re Bob, and I’m the boss.”

“Could’ve at least given me a good one, like Jackson,” she said, pouting before taking a small sip. When the creamy espresso hit her tongue, she looked up in surprise. “How did you know I like—”

“A grande soy wet cappuccino? I pay attention.” He nodded at the drink in her hand. “You know, most women like

a little flavor in theirs. Mocha or some vanilla shit, but you... you like it straight and to the point, don't you?"

"I like my kicks fast and hard, and that includes my caffeine."

Evan whistled as the doors opened, and he followed her out to the lobby, where they greeted Amy at the front desk before heading to Reagan's office. Halfway inside she heard her door shut and knew Evan was there, per their agreement, to give her the rundown on his latest therapy session. The only problem was that this morning she needed to...well, change her clothes.

Putting her coffee on the corner of her desk, she turned back to face him where he stood.

"Okay, look. Clearly I need to change and get ready for this meeting with Bill in"—she took a quick look at the clock on her wall—"fifteen minutes. So why don't you take this chair and turn it around?"

Evan stopped in the center of her office. "You're serious?"

"Yes. Just turn that chair there...oh for the love of—" She stepped forward and circled the chair around toward him and pointed. "Sit."

The look on Evan's face was something caught between shock and amusement. "Yes, ma'am."

He walked to the chair and placed the briefcase down on the floor. "Are you sure I can't just stand here and watch?"

"While we talk about your sexual addiction therapy?" Her voice rose a couple of octaves. "I don't think so. Now sit."

Obliging, he sat down, shaking his head, and she yanked open her desk drawer and pulled out one of her "emergency" skirts and a camisole. As she unbuttoned her jeans, she paused and called out, "I don't hear anything, Evan."

"Sorry, I was visualizing. I didn't hear a zipper yet," he said, and started to swivel in her direction until her shrieks

halted him. Laughing, he turned back around. “So this week in the adventures of Evan James and Dr. Glover, we discussed masturbatory practices.”

Reagan stumbled into her desk as she laughed with her pants down around her ankles. She held on to the edge while she pulled off one pant leg at a time. “His or yours? Comparing notes now?”

“For a guy that’s probably heard it all, I think I shocked him.”

“How could you tell?”

“His eyebrow twitched. That’s the biggest reaction I’ve seen from him in the past three weeks. I almost fell off the couch.”

She snorted as she stepped into her skirt, tugging it up and over her hips before pulling her wrinkled blouse over her head. “So what did the wise doctor say? Is this the part where you swear yourself to celibacy?”

Reagan studied the back of Evan’s head and found herself holding her breath as she waited for his answer. Why this particular answer was so important to her she didn’t want to analyze. But it was.

“Well, he told me I shouldn’t set goals for myself that I know I’ll break, because that just leads to a cycle of feeling like a failure. And let’s face it...I’m pretty sure celibacy just might kill me. You remember how I got last time and then came in here with—”

“Yes, yes,” she cut in, not wanting him to remind her of that night. “I remember. So what did he advise instead?”

“Can I turn around yet?” Evan asked as his head turned in her direction. Luckily for her, she had her clothes all in order.

“So glad you waited for my reply.”

Her dry response amused him as his hazel eyes ran over her. “I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t hoping to catch you midway.”

“Focus, Evan,” she instructed, and stepped into her heels. “What did he tell you?”

Evan stood and spun the chair around before sitting back down in it facing her.

“He said that I’m allowed to practice sex in a healthy, normal environment.”

She frowned at him as she walked around to the front of her desk and leaned back against it, crossing her arms over her chest.

“I thought we were discussing masturbating?”

“You said that with such a serious face.”

That comment had her lips twitching. “Well, it’s a serious topic, and you still haven’t answered me.”

He unbuttoned his suit jacket, almost as if the conversation was starting to make him uncomfortable, and then replied, “His answer was much the same. He just advised me to cut back and keep it tame. And no crazy shit.”

“No crazy shit,” she repeated with a smile. “And do you think that seems...doable?”

His gaze drifted down over her, and she realized the thin fabric of the camisole was probably not covering enough.

“Not particularly at the moment,” he said when his eyes met hers again.

Her heart stuttered in her chest at his words, but she managed an eye roll as she went over to the coat rack and grabbed a suit jacket off the hanger, slipping it on before turning around. She was finding it imperative to keep a strong facade when it came to Evan James, because the man was charming enough to make you forget you didn’t want to get involved.

“Your therapist seems to be handling you well, from what I can see.”

Evan stood from the chair and turned to where she was standing. “Let’s be clear—he’s not handling me. Even I’m not

that desperate.”

“Evan, would you stop with the jokes?”

“Okay,” he relented with a sigh as he bent down to retrieve his briefcase. “He’s been good so far. He doesn’t expect miracles, and he seems to know what he’s doing.”

Reagan pursed her lips as she thought that over, and then gave a quick nod. “I agree. You seem...much more relaxed since seeing him.”

As Evan walked toward her, she lifted her head and held his stare.

“I think we both know that’s only a small part of why I have some self-restraint lately,” he said, that devilish gleam sparking in his eyes.

One thing she knew deep down in her soul was that if she didn’t keep a tight hold of her control around this man, she would likely get sucked inside the dark vortex he seemed to spiral down into. While it would be pleasurable in the moment, Reagan knew it would not end well. And she’d become rather fond of their growing friendship.

Ignoring his insinuations, she gave him a pat on the arm. “That’s nice. Great chat. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got a meeting to get to.”

*Did I just fucking pat him like my grandpa? Jesus.*

Evan chuckled, bringing her out of her thoughts. “Thanks for listening there, Reagan.”

She walked around him to get her coffee and a notepad, and waved a hand up beside her as if she were too busy. “I listened, but now it’s time to go. So shoo—you have work to do, right?”

As he reached for the door handle, he made sure to point out, “Well, you are the boss.”

“Not that it says so on my cup,” she threw back at him.

“Okay then...*Bob*. One more thing,” he said, giving her one last perusal. “I didn’t hear you put on anything

underneath that skirt.” When she blinked at him in surprise, he continued, “I told you. I pay attention.”



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

“SO...BOB,” BILL said as he glanced down at the cup in Reagan’s hand before easing into one of the leather chairs in his office. “Do I need to update your personnel file? I want you to know that we fully support any kind of...*change* you may be going through.”

Reagan took a seat opposite her boss and crossed her legs before smoothing a hand over her skirt. “Believe it or not, *this* is courtesy of Evan.”

“And Evan is under the misguided belief that your name is Bob?”

“No, he was trying to pick up the local barista and figured his buddy Bob wouldn’t be a cock block.”

“So I take it therapy is going well?”

Nodding, she said, “Seems to be helping. He’s pretty open about what goes on in those sessions, and he has no problem telling me every lurid detail.”

“Should I be worried about that?”

*Hell yes.* “Not at all. He’s an interesting guy, and I can tell he’s trying.” *Trying to constantly get in my pants.*

Bill drummed his fingers over the arm of the chair. “That’s all we can ask for, then, isn’t it? But you let me know if he tries any funny business with you, okay?”

Reagan's brow winged up, and she laughed. "Funny business? What are we in, the 1950s? Trust me, I can handle Evan."

"Maybe that's what I'm worried about..."

"Bill, you have too much to worry about already. This is not something to concern yourself with."

Leaning forward, he placed his elbows on his knees and rubbed his forehead.

"When we agreed to this, it was with the clear understanding that you would stay out of trouble. I promised your—"

"I know," she interrupted. "I plan to stay away from trouble. I don't want my father to kill you. I kind of like you."

"That's comforting, but I'm being serious. Something seems a bit off with you lately, and I just want to make sure this situation with Evan isn't affecting you. Personally or professionally. We've always been open and honest with each other, so if there's anything you need to talk about, you know I'm here, right?"

Lifting her drink to her lips, she took a small sip and then another as she pushed back the guilt that was trying to force itself out in confession. She *had* always told Bill everything. Hell, he was practically her second father, but she couldn't bring herself to admit that things with Evan had gone far differently than they'd planned.

"I'm fine, really. Stop worrying. You know if I had an issue, I would tell you, but things are going well, and Evan's doing good work. You're happy with his job performance so far, right?"

Bill sat back and clasped his hands together. "Well, yes. I have no complaints with the work he's doing, and I know a lot of that has to do with your supervision."

"No, that has to do with him. You were right about bringing him on—he's got great instincts." Reagan paused for a moment and ran a painted nail around the lip of her coffee cup. "Maybe you need to have a little more faith in him."

“Professionally, that’s not a problem. In regards to his personal life, the jury’s still out. But I have high hopes for Evan, as I do for you. Be careful, Rae.”

“Always,” she said, standing up from her chair and leaning over to kiss the top of his head.

As she walked toward the door, she only hoped she could live up to his high expectations.

\* \* \*

REAGAN SWUNG OPEN the door of Cafe 24 and rushed inside, scanning the tables until she spotted the familiar head of auburn curls. She quickly made her way over to her friend and bent down to give her a hug before taking a seat in the booth across from her. “Sorry I’m late, I got caught up in a meeting.”

“I’ve got a martini, my phone, and it’s a fabulous sixty-five degrees outside, so you being late is really not something that’s bothering me. Although I am getting hungry, and we all know how I get when I haven’t eaten.”

Reagan looked around for a waiter and waved him over. “Please get this woman a menu before she hurts someone in here.”

After grabbing a couple of spare menus off the table behind them, he handed them both one before scurrying off.

Crystal laughed. “Jesus, he didn’t have to run. I’m not feeling too stabby yet.”

“I don’t know,” Reagan drawled as she gave her a quick once-over. “Your face certainly says otherwise.”

“And your face is screaming of another late-night conquest. Spill it.”

Sighing, she grabbed Crystal’s martini and took a sip before saying, “It’s that obvious, huh?”

“Mhmm.” Her friend wrinkled her nose in distaste. “If I recall correctly, you’re wearing your emergency clothes that you keep in your bottom drawer at work, and you’ve got a guilty ‘walk of shame’ look about you.”

When Reagan set Crystal’s drink back down in front of her, the woman shook her head and pushed it back. “Oh no, you keep that one. No telling where that filthy mouth has been.”

“I don’t know why I’m friends with you,” Reagan said as she scratched her brow with her middle finger. “How the hell did you even know these were my emergency clothes?”

“That huge crease running down your shirt is definitely not a dead giveaway.”

Reagan looked down to the center of her blouse and then aimed narrowed eyes back on Crystal. “Well, we all can’t be as immaculate as you.”

“Bullshit. Usually you’re put together right down to the color of your nail polish matching your lipstick...but not today. Today you look like you fucked and fled.”

“Actually, it was more like crawling and creeping out the door.”

Her friend leaned in across the table, eyes wide. “Why? Was he *that* bad?”

“I can’t even remember, does that tell you anything? Plus, I stayed the night. And I haven’t done that since—” She caught herself before she spilled Evan’s name, but not before her friend caught on.

With a wide smile, Crystal sat back and crossed her arms over her chest. “Oh, I know who you mean. Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome. Did you ever find out his name?”

*Yeah, and he works under me...well, not under me, though I know how amazing that...no, no, no.*

“No.”

Crystal’s eyes narrowed, but before she could say anything, the waiter came by, and they paused their

conversation to place their orders for salads and another round of martinis.

After he was out of earshot, Reagan tried to change the subject. “So how did it go with the buyer from Saks? Is she interested in—”

“Nope. No. Let’s rewind a bit, because for some reason, I think you’re holding out on me.” Curious eyes studied Reagan from beneath the longest lashes she’d ever seen, and then understanding dawned. “You found out his name, didn’t you? Wait, is he the creep ’n crawl from this morning?”

Shaking her head, Reagan said, “Absolutely not. You know I tell you all of my dirty secrets. If I’d seen him again, you’d know.” Her conscience nagged at her that she’d lied twice this morning about her involvement with Evan to two of the closest people in her life, but she swiftly brushed the thought aside.

“Besides,” she said as she removed the cocktail stick of olives from her glass and slid one off with her teeth, “it’s probably a good thing I haven’t seen him again. The guy was gorgeous, but a total bad boy, two things I know you can’t resist, and I’d hate to have to kick your scrawny ass. Again.”

“Oh, God.” Crystal rolled her eyes. “First, you didn’t kick my ass, nor could you ever, and second, we agreed after that first night that there would be no fighting over a guy.”

“I don’t even remember what that guy looked like anymore.”

“Oh, I do. He was wearing an expensive suit and had tattoos peeking out around his wrists. I’m sure there was probably a wedding band in his pocket, so in hindsight, we definitely dodged a bullet.”

“I thought you were such a tramp, homing in on my conquest.”

“Your *potential* conquest,” Crystal corrected. “We all know had I wanted to, I would’ve won that battle.”

Reagan shook her head. “Instead, you got the most fabulous friend you could ask for. Aren’t you a lucky hooker?”

“That’s true. I did get a fabulous friend, but I also got one who is *keeping secrets*.”

The denial was right on the tip of Reagan’s tongue when the waiter stopped by their table and lowered a gigantic salad in front of each of them.

“Holy shit, I thought a salad was going to be a healthy option,” Crystal said as she peered across the table at the mountain of chicken, lettuce, and parmesan in front of Reagan. “There’s no way I’m going to be able to get through all of this.”

“I’m sure you’ve swallowed more than that in one sitting before.”

Crystal picked up her fork and pointed it in Reagan’s direction. “I’ll have you know...” She paused and looked down at her plate, and then back over to Reagan before shrugging. “Who am I trying to kid? You’re right.”

Reagan grinned, and as she placed her napkin across her lap, the phone she’d left on the table started to buzz. When Evan’s name and number flashed up on her screen, she made a quick grab for it. Accepting the call, she brought it to her ear and held up a finger to her friend, mouthing “work.”

“Hey, Bob.”

Evan’s greeting had her groaning in frustration. “Really? I think that name needs to be retired already.”

“Of course, Bob. So, I was out and about and wasn’t sure if you were in a meeting or not, and wanted to know if you required sustenance.”

“Sustenance?”

“As in food. You know, us humans eat it to survive.”

“Why are you sucking up to me? You’re not getting a raise anytime soon.”

Evan coughed slightly and lowered his voice. “I told you, Reagan, my therapist has me doing new and helpful things for the women around me. You know, instead of just sexualizing them. Using words like ‘sucking’ in sentences pertaining to yourself is not very...*beneficial* to my success.”

“Is that also why you’re persisting with that ridiculous name you’ve given me?”

“No,” he said, and she could practically hear the grin through the phone. “I do that because it irritates you, which in turn makes your cheeks flush. Are they flushing right now?”

Reagan could feel her entire neck heat all the way up to the cheeks in discussion, and she looked up to see that Crystal’s brows had risen, and she was watching her intently.

“No,” she said.

The chuckle that came through the line had her frowning, as did the reply. “Liar.”

“Is there anything *else*, Mr. James?”

“What are you doing right now? I’m not interrupting, am I?” he asked, his tone clearly indicating that he didn’t care one way or another.

“If this is not a work-related call, then we can have this discussion when I return to the office.”

“Oh, I see,” he drawled. “Are you on a date?”

“That’s none of your business.”

“Shopping for panties? Because we both know you didn’t leave wearing any—”

“If that’s *all*, I’m hanging up now.”

Then she ended the call and tucked the phone inside her purse before reaching for her martini and draining it dry.

A smirk took over Crystal’s face as she asked, “Someone have you flustered and thirsty?”

“Just a work call. We’ve got a new guy on board, and he’s a bit...needy.”

“Ah, yes,” her friend said knowingly as she stabbed another piece of chicken with her fork. “Or maybe someone’s got *you* feeling a bit...needy?”

Reagan wanted to deny those words, but instead of lying for the third time today, she replied with, “Just shut up and eat your damn salad.”



## CHAPTER TWELVE

*“QUIT IT!” SHE screeched as ice-cold water hit the middle of her back. Spinning around on her toes, she saw two wide smiles splitting across her brother’s and his friend’s faces as they aimed the hose in her direction.*

*Her father had reminded them earlier in the day that if they wanted their allowances, then they better get to washing his car by the end of the day. Usually, it was a chore that went by without incident, but with her brother’s friend involved, it had turned into pick-on-Jennifer hour.*

*She dodged another spray in her direction and ran over to the side of the car for cover. Grabbing a sponge from the bucket of soapy water next to her, she peered over the hood and aimed it right at Troy’s head. It hit him square in the nose, which made him yell while Rocky stood there and laughed at his friend.*

*“Nice throw, Jen,” Rocky called out to her.*

*Jennifer ducked back down when he grinned in her direction, embarrassment causing her skin to heat even as she shivered from the cold. She’d had a crush on the older boy*

*since the first time he'd come home with her brother after school a couple of years ago...not that he knew it.*

*"You better be getting ready to run, J."*

*Her brother's warning had her looking across the yard to the large tree with the rope ladder. Realistically, if she made it in time, he would still be able to latch on to her ankle, and, with Rocky's help, pin her to the ground. So, that wasn't an option. Her eyes then moved to the back door that was slightly ajar, and she wondered if she would make it in time to lock it.*

*"You know we're gonna get you, so you may as well come out."*

*Opting for the door, she turned and made a run for it. She was halfway across the lawn when she felt someone grab her waist and tackle her onto the grass. Squealing, she tumbled down with an "oomph." She wriggled underneath the frame that landed on top of her and rolled over. Rocky was laughing as she shoved against his shoulder.*

*"Get off of me, you buffoon."*

*As he held her down, she spotted Troy coming over with the hose in his hand.*

*"Don't you dare," she said, squirming to get away. "I'll tell Mom."*

*"It's just a little water," Troy said as a mischievous grin crossed his face.*

*Turning her attention back to the boy above her, she pleaded with him, her eyes wide and, she hoped, innocent looking.*

*His laughter stopped when he saw the expression on her face, and he sighed, letting her go with one hand to brush the long brown locks off his forehead. She took advantage of his position by pushing against him with all her might and knocking him backward before kneeling on his chest and shouting, "Hah!" in his face. At his look of surprise, she quickly leapt off him and ran for her life, laughing the whole way.*

*She bolted through the door, turned, and shut it behind her, clicking the lock into place. The glass window afforded her the chance to witness her brother's shocked expression of disbelief, while the boy behind him ran a hand through his hair and watched with a look of admiration.*

*She wasn't sure how she knew, but in that moment she was positive that he was impressed.*

“I’M GONNA GET you!”

The young voice shouting pulled Reagan out of her daydream, and she scanned the park next to her for the source. A group of boys and girls were chasing each other and playing tag, while their parents stood nearby chatting and popping hot nuts from the street vendor nearby. The little girl with brown pigtails reminded her of herself when she was younger, and when she hit one of the boys before running away, Reagan smiled to herself and pulled her camera up to take a picture.

After a long week, she found her happy place on the park benches of Manhattan, observing the people around her, taking candid snapshots, and dreaming up stories about those she watched. With her camera strap around her neck, she stood and wandered down the path that wove around the outskirts of the park. The sun was warm as it shone down, and she couldn't help but tip her face up to it, enjoying the rays against her skin.

She lived for days like this. The quiet times where she could get out of the office and immerse herself in the city she loved.

As she made her way along the path and back out onto the street, a classic brownstone across the road caught her attention. The iron fence that bordered the basement entryway was covered in ivy that wound up the staircase and covered the left-hand side of the building. The double doors were gorgeous, with brass handles and glass panes that allowed a passerby to catch a glimpse inside to the way the elite might live in the city that never slept.

Feeling the need to capture such beauty on film, Reagan brought the camera up and placed her eye to the viewfinder, adjusting the lens to get the image exactly where she wanted it. She took several shots, the shutter clicking with each snap of her finger, and as she zeroed in on those impressive doors, one of them opened, and a man stepped out onto the porch.

Intrigued by the appearance of the owner, she found herself zooming in on him, waiting for him to look up in her direction. He was well dressed, and she had to admit that the back view was impressive.

As he pulled the door shut, he turned around, and Reagan realized the attractive face now prominently featured through her lens was that of...Evan James.

She cursed and drew the camera away before he could glance in her direction and catch her snapping shots like a stalker. What the hell were the odds that they were both in the same place in Manhattan on a lazy weekend morning? Wait... that wasn't *his* apartment that he was walking out of.

*Oh hell.*

She looked around for something to hide behind, but there was only a wide-open walkway, unless she wanted to jump in the Hudson River. Which she did not. At all.

She walked to the railing, pulling her camera back out to take a picture of...of...

“Reagan?” Evan called out.

...absolutely nothing at all.

“Reagan,” he said again, and this time she turned around to see Evan strolling her way, his eyes roaming over her in such a way that she felt naked instead of completely covered in yoga pants and a long-sleeved shirt.

Inwardly, she groaned, hating that he looked so damn good in his walk-of-shame dark jeans and tailored button-up while she'd been slumming it on park benches.

Not that she'd ever let him see that bit of insecurity come out.

"Evan?" she asked, confusion masking her face as she slipped into a more unruffled version of herself, one that wasn't bothered by her unkempt appearance. Then she noticed the way his eyes were still drinking her in...

"Stalking is still illegal in all fifty states, you know," she told him when he reached her.

"I'm glad that you're aware of what crime *you're* committing."

Reagan placed a hand to her chest. "Me?"

"Well, you're the one standing across from my therapist's office. Were you taking surveillance photos for Bill?" Evan teased.

Reagan felt her mouth fall open at the accusation, but she was secretly pleased he wasn't leaving the scene of a late-night conquest. As quickly as she could, she pulled herself together and shrugged.

"It wouldn't be the worst idea. How do we know you aren't making Dr. *Lover* up?"

Evan glanced back over his shoulder to the brownstone and then returned his focus to her. "Wanna come meet him?"

"No," she replied, appalled. "I'm not here checking up on you; don't be ridiculous. This is just some strange coincidence."

"Or a happy one?"

Reagan pursed her lips as if thinking about it. "Perhaps, Mr. James. Perhaps."

He glanced at the camera hanging around her neck and then brought his eyes back to hers. "You like photography?"

"No, I just carry this around so men will look at my breasts."

He gave her a disarming grin. "Good news—it worked."

“Eyes up here, sir. You *just* left your therapist’s office.”

“And ran into you. Either someone up there is fucking with me or this is a sign.”

With a laugh, Reagan found herself kicking a pebble around underfoot, trying to remind herself she was a grown-ass woman and not the eight-year-old girl she’d been remembering earlier.

“Where you headed?” he asked, and Reagan raised her eyes back to his amber-colored ones.

“Nowhere in particular. I was just out taking a few photos.”

“So you *do* do this for fun?”

Reagan gave a slow nod. “I do. There’s something cathartic about it.”

Evan said nothing for a moment as he stood there, and Reagan had the distinct feeling he was trying to see more than what she was willing to show.

“You’re a hard one to figure out, Reagan Spencer.”

“Am I?”

He slipped his hands into his pockets and nodded. “Yes. I would never have guessed you like photography. You don’t have any images in your office.”

Reagan looked out across the river and replied softly, “Some things are private.”

“And your photos are one of those things?”

She glanced over to where he’d moved beside her and said, “Yes, they are.”

His eyes narrowed slightly, and after several intense seconds, he flashed a smile and bumped his shoulder to hers.

“Well, since we’re close, personal friends, maybe you’ll let me see a few?”

When she didn’t respond, except for a look that screamed *hell no*, he laughed and said, “Okay, okay.”

“Nothing against you—it’s just I’ve never let anyone see my shots.” Her gaze traveled over the water, mindlessly watching the rowers pass by. “They just tell stories.”

“What kind of stories?”

“The ones I make up.” When Evan stayed silent, she turned to face the park, looking around before pointing out an older man sitting on the curb feeding the pigeons scattered about him. “Like him. I imagine he was once very good-looking and incredibly wealthy, but married a woman his family didn’t approve of and lost his inheritance. He’s lived his life as a poor but happy man until his wife passed away recently, and instead of spending his days alone in his small apartment in Queens, he would rather keep company with other living creatures, no matter how small.”

Nothing was said as they watched the man in silence together. Finally, Evan quietly asked, “Walk with me?”

She gave him a small smile and nodded. “Sure.”

Pushing off the rail, she fell in step with him as they walked along the river’s edge.

“I’d be scared of what you’d see if you looked at me through your lens,” he admitted.

“You shouldn’t.”

Evan scoffed and ran his fingers through his hair. “I can’t imagine there’s much good there...”

“You’d be surprised at what I see.”

That comment had him coming to a standstill. “Would I?”

“Yes.”

“Okay,” he said, and started walking again. “Tell me what you see.”

Reagan slid her thumbs down the straps of her camera and cocked her head, looking him over.

“I see a successful man. One who dresses well, even on a Saturday morning. So that would indicate to me that he takes

pride in his appearance. Maybe cares about what *others* think also. The fact that you were leaving a therapist's office makes me think you're a man with some issues, but also a man who is willing to work through them. Again, that comes back to pride. You seem to be able to swallow yours when need be."

Evan's brow furrowed, but he said nothing as she continued.

"You also have a certain...air about you. It's in the way you move. You're confident, but at the same time, when you flash that smile, the arrogance disappears, and you look like the boy you used to be."

The smile under discussion appeared, and Evan asked, "How do you know what kind of boy I used to be?"

"Hey? This is my story," Reagan reminded him before he continued asking questions she wasn't willing to answer.

"Oh, my apologies, I somehow thought it involved me."

"It does, but you're on the outside listening, so shh. You asked, remember?"

With a serious face, he nodded. "You would be right."

"Okay. Now I lost my train of thought."

Evan chuckled. "Well, it's probably for the best that you didn't mention any of my unappealing attributes."

"Speaking of..." she said, and turned to walk backward, facing him. "How *did* the session go today?"

"Really great. There was an orgy, a sampling of sex toys, and a dessert buffet afterward. Very satisfying."

"Evan..."

He blew out a breath and rubbed the back of his neck. "It was fine. It's always fine. Today, Dr. *Glover* brought up behavior triggers, and it helped to figure out where this whole mess started."

Curious, she asked, "And where was that?"



“It wasn’t any one event. It was the high off the power I got from my job, it was being in an unhealthy relationship... my grandparents passing...the worry about following in my parents’ footsteps. The further things spiraled out of my control, the more I craved that control in other parts of my life. Well, a very specific part of my life.” He glanced over at her before continuing. “Obviously that’s the condensed version, but...I think it helps. Knowing those things and hopefully being able to stop them in the future.”

“But the urge isn’t gone?”

The look in his eyes was haunted as he replied, “No. No, it isn’t gone.”

“So...what does he suggest this week?”

“Ah,” Evan said, pulling out a colored flyer from his back pocket. “‘Love at First Sit,’ a speed dating and social mixer for those looking to meet that special someone and find true love.”

“And what the hell is that supposed to help you with? I thought you weren’t supposed to be taking random women home from a bar?”

“That’s not technically true—I don’t have to be completely celibate. But for this bit of homework, I’m supposed to talk to the women without hitting on them. I don’t even know if that’s possible.”

“So you mean you have to pretend to care?”

“In a manner of speaking...”

“Wait, you weren’t just—”

“No, no,” he interrupted. “I actually *want* to know about you.”

“How comforting,” she grumbled as she took the flyer from him. Then she scanned the date and time and looked up at him. “This is tonight.”

“Yeah.” He nodded. “I can’t think of a better possible way to spend my Saturday, can you?”

She was about to hand the flyer back and tell him no and good luck with that when he took her arm and stopped her.

“What are you doing tonight?”

“Ohhhh no. No. Don’t even think about it.”

Evan’s mouth quirked in a way that made it difficult to look away.

“Too late. Come with me.”

“Are you out of your mind? You don’t take a date *to* speed dating.”

He patted her arm, much like she had earlier in the week, and she was annoyed that it irked her. She didn’t want him treating her like—

“My wingman, not my date.”

Trying not to be offended by the thought, Reagan mulled the idea over in her head.

“First off, I would be your wingwoman. Second, *if* I was going to do this I’d want it to be interesting, you know, for me too.” She pushed the flyer back against his chest and said, “Let’s make a bet.”

“A bet?”

“Yeah. I bet that if I get all dolled up and hit this ‘Love at First Sit’ deal, I will walk away with more phone numbers than you.”

Evan took the flyer from under her hand and looked at it once more. She could see him thinking it over before he raised his eyes to hers and asked, “What are the stakes?”

“Hmm. How about *when* I win, you have to bring me coffee every day next week with *my* name on it.”

He rubbed his right eyebrow with his index finger and then pointed at her. “You got it. And when *I* win, I want a date—a real date, with you.”

“What? No. That wasn’t—”

“A date, Reagan. If you’re confident in your”—his gaze traveled to her mouth—“*abilities*, then this should be an easy win for you.”

She shook her head. “That’s a dirty play, Evan.”

“I’m a dirty boy. Do we have a deal?”

Against every sensibility that was screaming out in warning, she stuck out her hand to shake his. “Deal.”

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

REAGAN RAN OUT to the curb as the bright yellow taxicab pulled up alongside her building. An hour or so earlier, the sky had opened up and decided to dump enough water that there was practically a stream running down the sidewalk. Cursing, she retracted her pink and black umbrella, yanked open the door, and dove inside headfirst, trying to save the hairstyle she'd spent the last half-hour perfecting.

“Damn it.”

She shook the umbrella, the water droplets that had been clinging to it falling to the plastic seat she was sticking to.

“Perfect. This is just perfect.” Sighing, she looked at the eyes in the rearview mirror and said, “Thirty-eighth and fifth, thanks.”

The driver gave a slight nod, and as he pulled out into the traffic, Reagan unzipped her bag and rummaged around inside looking for her compact, but then remembered she'd left it on the bathroom counter. Settling back, she groaned.

How on earth was she supposed to win this stupid bet if she turned up looking like a drowned New York sewer rat?

The answer was simple—she wouldn't, and that meant Evan would win.

*Win a date with me.*

This was so not a good idea. She'd known it the second he'd opened his mouth and suggested it. But instead of saying no, like she should have, she'd done what she always seemed to do when it came to Evan James...she'd caved. And maybe just a small part of her wanted him to win.

*Now that is a stupid fucking idea.*

But there was no denying that even though she'd always had the upper hand when it came to men, Evan was getting under her skin in a big way. It was hard enough trying not to admit that to herself, but it was becoming increasingly more difficult not to show *him*.

It hadn't even occurred to her until just now that they were going to a bar. To meet other people. People besides each other.

Which was no big deal. Really. It wasn't like they didn't *meet* others all the time. This would be easy, right?

Right.

As they neared the bar, she tousled her hair around her shoulders and then reached down to readjust her breasts so they were lifted in spectacular fashion. Number-grabbing fashion.

*Take that, Evan James. Your ass is going down. Even if that's possibly on me—nope, shut up. Not thinking it. He'll just be bringing me coffee every day for a week, not orgasms. NOT orgasms.*

The cab squealed to a stop in front of the bar, and Reagan handed him a twenty before pushing the door wide and opening her umbrella. She stepped up onto the pavement and scanned the crowd milling about under the awning. It didn't take longer than a few seconds for her eyes to zoom in on tight-fitted pants hugging a perfect ass, a trim waist outlined by a tailored black button-down, and those broad

shoulders encased in a jacket. Had it only been weeks since she'd dug her nails into those? Then he turned to face her.

*Oh, who am I trying to kid? If he's giving out orgasms...*

"Blondie," he called out, and lifted his hand in a wave.

She dashed over, out of the rain, and lowered the umbrella as she came to a stop in front of him. His eyes automatically zoomed in on her plumped-up breasts, and the first thought that ran through her mind was, *Score one for me*. Slightly juvenile, perhaps, but a much more appropriate thought than the ones she'd been having prior to getting out of the cab.

"I wasn't sure you'd brave the weather tonight. Thought I might end up going stag."

Shaking the umbrella, Reagan brought her eyes up to his and let her mouth curl into a wicked smile.

"Please, I'm at my best when wet."

Evan's eyes heated as he seemed to bite his tongue. "Already pulling out the big guns, I see."

"Oh no, honey, I haven't even started. I'm saving my true arsenal for the men who count."

Evan cocked his head to the side, but didn't appear offended as a small smile tugged his lips. "I see how it is."

"Do you?"

"Yes. You're gonna go all sex kitten, and I'm going to be stuck asking about feelings and shit."

As they moved toward the door, and Evan reached for the handle and pulled it open, Reagan stopped and looked up at him.

"You do *have* feelings, don't you, Evan?"

He leaned down until his mouth was by her ear and whispered, "I'm having a very strong feeling right now."

Reagan's stomach flipped, and she ignored the urge to flirt back with the man grinning at her, instead scoffing before patting his arm. "Well, you should make sure to tell that to the first young lady you sit down with."

"If she's a lady, I'm thinking she won't appreciate that particular feeling."

"Then what does that make me?"

Brushing past him, she felt his hand against her hip through the tight material of her dress. She didn't have to have eyes in the back of her head to know he was staring at her ass.

"That makes you fucking dangerous."

Stopping in front of a table full of labels and black markers, she gave him a sultry look and picked up a sticker. She scrawled his name and peeled the back off, slapping it on his chest. Then she repeated the move, locked eyes with him, and stuck it to her breast before smoothing her hand over it... slowly.

"Game on, Mr. James."

She turned away from his perusal then, looking around the room and noticing men on one side and the women on the other.

"Looks like we part ways here. Don't forget to ask about how many kids they'd like someday and what their dream wedding looks like. Women love that kind of thing."

"Can't wait. And what's your plan, Miss Spencer?"

Reagan turned and gave him a mischievous grin over her shoulder. "Feel free to watch."

With that, she joined the other women on the right side of the room, and, out of the corner of her eye, saw Evan walk to the crowd of men on the left. She realized then that she hadn't even noticed what any of the guys looked like, so she made eye contact with each one as she looked them over. Evan seemed to be making friends already, chatting up his competition at the bar. Arrogant bastard.

Looking around her, she noticed a mix of women, early twenties to what she'd guess was late fifties, and all of them immaculate despite the rain.

“Welcome to Love at First Sit,” a loud male voice boomed through a microphone, causing the room to go quiet and bringing their attention to a flamboyantly dressed man at the head of the long center aisle of pushed-together tables. “Where you could be taking your first seat toward your future.”

Reagan tried not to roll her eyes as she glanced over at Evan to find him taking a shot. She probably should've followed his lead on that one.

“So as you can see,” the man continued, “we've got the love seats all laid out for you here. Ladies will be seated on the right, and the gentlemen will rotate the chairs on the left every time this bell sounds.” He paused as the woman behind him rang it and then said, “You've got three minutes to make your match. We've left pens and paper on the tables, should you want to exchange contact information, or you can choose to get together after the speed dating concludes, and mingle at the bar. Are you ready to find love, New York City?”

A few embarrassed cheers rang out, and he tried again.

“I *said*, are you ready to find true love, New York City?”

This time, Reagan looked right at Evan with a confident smirk and winked before chorusing out a “hell yeah” with the crowd. He returned the look, and then she took a seat at one of the open chairs and waited for her first victim.

The man who walked over was attractive enough. He was dressed in dark jeans and a lightweight, blue V-neck pullover. He smiled down at her and pulled the chair out, stumbling slightly as he sat.

Chuckling, he straightened in the seat and said, “Way to make a good first impression, huh?”

Reagan grinned at him, realizing nerves when she saw them, but figured she might as well put him at ease...after all,



your first was always the most difficult. Why not make this memorable for him?

Leaning forward, she rested an elbow on the table, knowing full well it pushed her breasts together and gave her amazing cleavage, but to his credit, Mr. Stumble's eyes remained on her face.

"So..." she drawled, wondering if maybe she, *yeah*, stroked a finger along her exposed collarbone his interest would be piqued. "I'm Reagan."

She figured she'd clue the guy in since, apparently, he was hellbent on keeping his eyes above her neck. Well, damn, now she had to talk.

"And you are..." She dropped her eyes to his nametag. "Scott."

"That's right."

His short answer made Reagan start to worry a little. What if this was harder than she originally thought?

She glanced over to where Evan was seated, three tables away, and the brunette he was opposite was all smiles and giggling. She'd even leaned in and touched his hand.

There was a slight cough in front of her, and she realized she'd completely ignored the question that had been directed at her.

"I'm sorry. What did you say?"

Mr. Stumble looked down in the direction she'd been staring then back to her. "I just asked what you do for a living."

*Really? That's what he's going with?*

Not understanding why this man wasn't even *remotely* interested in her girls, she frowned and sat back. "I'm a lingerie model." There, that should get his attention.

She waited for him to give her a thorough once-over, to see if she could in fact be able to model the skimpy items she

claimed to, and what was he doing—he was looking at the damn tablecloth!

*Seriously...*

After a few more moments of awkward silence, she heard, “Okay, everyone, wrap it up. Thirty seconds until we switcheroo.”

Reagan couldn’t believe that her first shot out of the gate was a lame horse, but then she reminded herself this was about winning a bet, not getting a date.

*So...what the hell.*

“I’d love to meet up with you again,” she lied. “Would you like to exchange numbers?”

He looked down in the direction of Evan, probably wanting his own shot at the brunette, and then turned back to her.

“No. That’s okay.”

With that parting remark, Reagan’s mouth fell open, and the bell chimed. The men stood, about to move on, and she noticed the brunette out of the corner of her eye pass Evan what had to be...her damn number.

*Well, hell. Evan, I. Me? A big fat 0.*

Straightening her shoulders and plastering a smile on her face, she greeted the next guy who sat down before her. Charles from Charleston was forty-two and never married, but was really looking for a down-to-earth girl to bring home to his parents. He also loved redheads and fly-fishing, and despised Manhattan.

*This is the longest three minutes of my life.*

Reagan nodded absentmindedly as she listened to him drone on and on, unable to get a word in edgewise. When he paused to take a swallow of his drink, she opened her mouth to say something, but just then the bell sounded, and he stood up quickly.

“Nice to meet you,” he threw out, and turned his attention to the next woman in line.

*Okay, what the hell is going on...*

She reached for the spoon by her hand, unwrapped it from the napkin, and brought it up to check out her reflection. Nothing out of place. Even her waves had somehow survived the humidity. The dress she’d chosen for tonight had worked so well in the past when on the prowl that she now only brought it out for special occasions.

Well, not that this was a special occasion or anything. She just needed numbers. And she needed them fucking now.

Evan took a seat at the table next to her, his three-minute date a couple of decades older than him, not that he seemed to mind. He oozed money, sex, and sophistication—three things no woman in this city could resist, and the smile he gave that woman probably had her ready to fling her panties at him in surrender.

*Jesus Christ.*

“So you must be Reagan.” The man across from her had already sat down and was watching her intently. Reaching his hand across the table, he said, “I’m Mike.”

“I am. Nice to meet you, Mike,” she said, returning his shake and sighing with relief that not every guy here was oblivious to her this evening.

“That’s some dress,” he said, not letting go of her hand yet.

Reagan leaned forward to put one of her elbows on the table, causing her breasts to inch further out of their confines. “I’m glad you like it.”

“Oh, I like it,” he said, and then glanced to his left.

She followed his gaze and noticed Evan’s eyes on their entwined hands. Immediately, Mike pulled away. Looking at Evan, she saw he’d gone back to winning over his date, while the guy in front of her had flushed and was looking everywhere but at her.

*What the fuck, Evan?*

“So, Mike.” She placed her chin on top of her clasped hands and looked at him under her lashes. “You’re obviously an attractive man, and I’m sure you have no problem with the ladies, so I’m curious...what brought you here tonight?”

“I could ask you the same question.”

Before she could answer, the bell chimed, and Evan was sliding a paper into his pocket and ushering Mike out of his seat.

“Okay, move along, time’s up,” he said, a bit forcefully, causing Mike to hold up his hands in a defensive gesture before moving to the next table. Evan sat down across from her, unbuttoned his suit jacket, and stretched out with a smirk on his face. “How’s it goin’, Blondie?”

Reagan narrowed her eyes and leaned across the table. “You’re a cheating asshole, you know that?”

“Dates not going so well?”

“What did you do?”

“Well, I’ve got three numbers and counting, so I’d say I’m doing pretty well. Yours tucked into your cleavage?”

“These guys are avoiding me like the plague, and there’s only one reason I can think of that that would happen.”

“Bad perfume?”

“Evan...”

“Not into blondes? Or maybe you’re too”—he looked at her chest—“out there?”

“Since when are those things a problem when you’re looking for a quick fuck?”

“Oh no, no,” Evan said, shaking his head. “No quick fucks here. We’re here to take the first step toward our future. Maybe you should readjust your attitude.”

“Oh yeah?” she said, her blood starting to boil. “Maybe you should—”

The bell rang and Evan stood up, winking at her. “Good luck, Reagan. You should probably start thinking about where you’d like to go next week.”

The next few dates passed by in much the same way as the first. A little small talk and a whole lot of running. Oh, and not one fucking phone number. She didn’t *feel* off her game, but clearly something was wrong tonight.

As the final bell chimed and everyone headed toward the bar, she stayed in her seat and sucked down the rest of her cocktail. She was no longer in the mood to socialize, too busy sulking over what she knew was a loss. If glares could kill, every one of those idiot guys would have a bullet in the back of their heads.

The scent of Evan’s cologne filled her nose before she saw him. He moved the chair next to her and sat down, putting his arm over the back of her seat.

“All right, Spencer. Show me your hand.”

Reagan let go of her glass and held her middle finger up in front of his face. “There you go.”

Evan laughed. “That’s not very sportsmanlike.”

“In case *you* haven’t noticed, along with everyone else in this stupid bar, I’m not a man.”

“Oh, we all noticed. Trust me.”

“Then what the fuck.”

Mike, the last guy—strike that, the *only* guy—who’d shown a spark of interest chose that moment to walk by, and when he caught sight of her, he stopped in his tracks.

“You know,” he said, looking back and forth between her and Evan, “I never would’ve pictured you two as brother and sister. Nice to meet you guys.”

Reagan felt heat flood her cheeks as she slowly turned her head to pin Evan with a look that screamed, *Are you fucking kidding me?*

“Oh, look at the time,” Evan said, looking down at his watch and pushing away from the table.

She followed, hot on his heels, as he walked toward the exit and didn't stop even when the rain pelted her in the face. “Don't think you won this round, jackass.”

Evan whirled around to face her. “I won fair and square. We never said we couldn't play dirty. I just threatened them within an inch of their life if they touched my sister.”

“That's cheating.”

“Well I was never gonna win with you dressed like that.” His eyes roamed her hungrily, and she realized every inch of her was wet and probably see-through. Struggling with the umbrella, she tried to push it open, but the damn thing was stuck somewhere, so she threw it in frustration.

“Do you feel better now?”

“No,” she exclaimed, feeling the water sluice down her neck and into her cleavage.

He took a step closer to her, so close she could see the droplets of water gathering on his lashes. “I've told you before, I get what I want. But just so the night's not a total waste...”

He pulled out a slip of paper from his pocket and held it in his fist before telling her, “Here's the number of a guy who wants to know what that dream wedding of yours looks like and how many brats you wanna have. Four? Ten? A soccer team?”

She snatched the soggy paper from his grasp and tucked it into her purse.

“You still cheated,” she said, pouting. “I had that in the bag.”

“You did,” Evan said. “That's why I'll still bring you coffee with *your* name on it every day next week.

“No more Bob, huh? Aren't you sweet.”

“Don’t let the nice-guy exterior fool you. My motives are never that pure—especially when I’m faced with a hot, wet woman I want to sink my cock into.”

Evan looked over her shoulder and raised his arm to hail the empty cab coming down the street. When it pulled over, he opened the door and told her, “Get in. Go home. Peel yourself out of that dress—alone.”

She didn’t put up a complaint as she slid inside the backseat, but when he shut the door and the driver pulled away from the curb, she turned to watch Evan standing there. As he ran his hand through his hair, watching after her, he’d never looked more like the boy she remembered.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

REAGAN PULLED HER rental car into the driveway of the one-story brick house off the quiet suburban neighborhood she grew up on, and turned off the engine. She didn't make it to Sunday brunches as often as she used to, but with the way memories from her past were resurfacing, she felt the urge to see her family.

Ziggy came barreling out of the house before Reagan had a chance to get completely out of the car, and she stumbled back against the side of it as his massive paws jumped out at her chest.

“Oof, hey there, Zig,” she said, putting one arm around him and petting him on the head with the other. He gave familiar, slobbery kisses in return, and she laughed as she tried to push him off her.

“Okay, okay, it's good to see you too. Let's go see what Troy is doing.”

The German Shepherd jumped back down and followed her up the sidewalk, past the well-kept flowerbeds lovingly tended by her mother, and to the front door. Pushing



it open without bothering to knock, she walked inside and called out, “Mom? Dad?”

“Hey, hey, little sis,” her brother said as he rounded the corner from the kitchen and tackled her into a big bear hug. It was his thing, those bear hugs, and though she could never breathe when enveloped in one, she loved them just the same.

“Troy,” she choked out, and when he released her, she laughed. “Are you getting stronger? I think you crushed a rib or two that time.”

“I did not. But it wouldn’t be hard. You’re too damn skinny, Reagan.”

“I am not. I’m in shape. There’s a difference.”

He gave her a *yeah right* look, but before he could say anything further, she added, “Do you know how hard I work out to look this way?”

“And how many burgers you must miss...”

“Oh, shut up. I eat burgers and fries and sometimes even the dessert.”

Troy took her hand and tugged her down the hall. “Come on—Mom and Dad have been waiting on you all morning. It’s been too long between visits.”

“I know, I know. It’s just been so hectic at work with training—” Reagan caught herself before she said his name, but her brother didn’t miss a thing. He stopped walking and glanced over at her.

“With training Evan? Yeah...you and I are gonna have a chat about that.”

*Which is one of the many reasons I avoided coming here the last few weeks.*

“That’s really not necessary.”

“Yeah it is. Now come on—Wendy and the kids are out back.”

She followed her brother through the hallway and smiled as she passed their high school senior photographs

hanging side by side. That seemed like such a long time ago. Another *life* ago, and really, she supposed it was, because the person in those photos was practically a stranger.

She continued down to the doorway of the kitchen, and when she walked through she spotted her mom standing over by the stove and her father—

“Ahh, Jenny,” he said, walking over to her with his arms stretched wide.

Reagan gave him a warm smile as he took her in his arms and kissed the side of her head.

“Hey, Dad.”

She wasn't sure why, but she felt the need to wrap her arms around him for a moment and not let go. He let her stand there for as long as she needed, and when she finally released him and stepped back, he looked her over and said, “You keep getting blonder, Jen. I miss the warm brown...much more you.”

“Dad,” she complained halfheartedly. They'd been having this conversation ever since she'd first colored her hair and changed her name back in college in an attempt to put their past behind her.

“What? Is it a crime I want to see my baby girl resemble her beautiful mother?”

“I still resemble her,” she joked. “I can't change genetics, just my hair color.”

“Speaking of hair, remind me to make an appointment at the salon for this week,” her mom said as she wiped her hands on a dishrag and gave Reagan a kiss on the cheek. “I'm sorry to tell you that grey is genetic as well, but that's why the good Lord invented hair dye—so no one ever has to see it.”

“Very true. Can I help you with anything?”

“You can go set the table, and let Troy know brunch is ready.”

Reagan took out a stack of plates and then pulled open the cutlery drawer, counting out enough utensils for the seven

of them before heading to the dining room to place the items around the table.

She couldn't remember a time when they hadn't gathered here on Sundays, the only day her father was able to be there given his unrelenting work schedule. Now it was hers that interfered, but her guilt was lessened by the fact that her brother and his family lived so close by. As soon as the thought crossed her mind, Troy opened the back door and walked inside.

"Need some help?"

She shook her head as she finished setting the table. "Just go let everyone know it's ready."

"Rae," he said, and then turned back to shut the door before starting again. "You know they're gonna want to know what's going on."

"I know."

"Are you okay?"

*Of course. I just have a date with Evan to get through.* No big deal. "I'm fine."

"Then why have you been avoiding everyone since you and Bill took him on?"

"I'm not avoiding. It's been a busy time, and we've got a lot on our plate with some new contracts that have come in. You know I'd be here if I could."

Troy's eyes remained suspicious, but when the back door opened again and his kids came tumbling inside, he let it go. "Yeah. Okay."

"All right, everyone," Reagan said, pulling her eyes from his. "Grab a seat. Nana has the food ready to go, and you don't want to miss out."

As the kids scrambled around the table, her mother pushed through the door with her shoulder, carrying a bowl of fruit, and her father came behind with a plate full of waffles.

“Troy, go and get the eggs and bacon, would you?” her father asked as he moved over to the table and placed the serving dish down.

“Sammy, stop pulling your sister’s hair.”

Reagan smiled at Wendy as she too came walking in.

“Hey, Reagan, you look fantastic!”

“Finally, someone with an ounce of style. I’ll take *your* opinion, not the you’re-too-skinny-and-your-hair-is-too-blond opinion.”

As she said it, she turned to poke her tongue out at her brother, who was now walking to the table with two plates. One full of fluffy eggs, the other with crisp, crackling bacon.

She took her seat and immediately reached for the plate of bacon.

“See, nothing wrong with my appetite.” She placed three pieces on her plate and then passed it to Wendy, who gave a quick laugh.

“Oh, don’t listen to the men, what do they know? Hell, after two kids I would kill to have your figure, and Troy would love it if that happened.”

Her brother popped a grape in his mouth and shook his head. “That’s not true. I love you just the way you are.”

“Oh, God,” Reagan said as she rolled her eyes.

“Hey, it’s the truth. Now pass me the bacon, would you?”

She frowned in her brother’s direction and handed over the plate of greasy goodness.

“So, Jenny,” her father said as he settled into his seat at the head of the table.

*Here it comes...*

“How has work been?”

*Way to beat around the bush, Dad.*

She picked up the plate of eggs and shoveled a healthy dose onto her plate. If she couldn't avoid this issue, she may as well eat her way through it.

"It's been...interesting."

Her mother picked up a napkin and ever so politely draped it across her lap.

"Interesting, dear? What do you mean?"

"You know, it's just an unusual circumstance, that's all."

"Is he...working out well there? Doesn't seem to have the, uh, Rockwell genes in regard to finances, does he?"

"No," she said through a mouthful of eggs, and then swallowed. "He's actually great at what he does and seems to be a nice fit for the company. Bill was smart to bring him on."

"That's good, that's good. And his..." her father said, and then stopped as if trying to figure out how to word what he wanted to say. "Personal issues. They aren't affecting you, right?"

Reagan shook her head but kept her focus on cutting through the mountain of waffles on her plate. "He's kept it professional."

"You don't think he has any idea who you are?" her mother asked.

*Not in the way you mean.*

"No. Wendy, can you pass me the syrup, please?"

"I think it's nice that Bill took Rocky on. Lord knows that poor guy has been through enough. About time he had a decent role model instead of the dreadful felons he ended up with for parents."

Reagan kept her eyes down as the family started to chat about Evan's parents, not really feeling comfortable discussing him when she knew she would have to see him first thing tomorrow morning.

When Bill had first approached her about bringing Evan on, she'd been apprehensive about the situation. She'd then scoped him out, wondering if the boy from her past would recognize her, but when not one flash of recognition had sparked for him, she'd told Bill to go ahead with what he'd had planned. She could feign indifference in the face of total ignorance.

She was brought out of her thoughts by the swift kick she got under the table from her brother. She glared in Troy's direction.

"Do you have something you want to say?"

"Do you?" he whispered back.

"No."

"You're lying, Reagan. Your neck is all red."

"Shut. Up," she said before her father asked, "What are you two mumbling about over there?"

"Nothing."

"Waffles."

"It's so nice to have the family all together again," her mother said as she smiled down the table at the two of them.

"So, Mom, how's the new semester going?" Reagan asked, anxious to change the subject to anything other than Roc—Evan.

"I think this bunch of first graders might be my wildest ever. I've got Don Riley's youngest in there, and I tell you, I don't know how his wife does it..."

Her mom continued, and Reagan found herself nodding along as the rest of her family chimed in about their jobs and the kids' fall activities. Her mind wandered back to Evan, and she wondered what it'd be like to have him sit there with them for Sunday brunch.

Would it be warm and familiar, or was he so far removed from the boy they'd all known him as that it'd be like a stranger in their midst? She thought she saw glimpses every

now and again when he let his guard down, but after what he'd gone through, she couldn't blame him for his seemingly unscrupulous exterior.

Evan had been through way more than any one person deserved, so it wasn't such a surprise he hadn't walked away unscathed. What was surprising was how that made her feel about him—almost impressed by the tenacity with which he was living his life.

Sure, everyone, including her parents, knew that he'd hit rock bottom, but that hadn't stopped him from clawing his way back. He was broken, but he wasn't unfixable, and that gave her hope. Hope for the boy she remembered from so long ago.

As the chatter continued around the table and she thought back over the last few weeks and then last night... Reagan knew that she was going to have to get a hold on her emotions if she was supposed to have a date with him next—

“Hey, Rae?”

Her brother's voice interrupted her thought, and when she turned to face him this time, she noticed his eyes held a hint of worry in them as he reached over to touch the arm she had on the table.

“Be careful, would you?”

She knew exactly who and *what* he was warning her against without any further detail, and as she placed a hand over his, she gave him a tight smile and a swift nod, assuring him that she would be. She just had to convince herself first.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

REAGAN HADN'T EVEN made it to her desk the next day when Evan came bursting in, a huge grin on his face and a coffee cup in his hand.

“A grande soy wet cappuccino for the lady. Oh,” he said, and brought out the hand hiding behind his back to reveal a small paper bag. “And pain au chocolate. Your favorite coffee with my favorite pastry. A delicious combination, if I say so myself.”

“So not an attempt to make me fat?” she asked, taking the bag from him, but before she could wrap her hand around the cup, he pulled it back.

“Forgot something,” he said, pulling the cardboard sleeve out of his pocket. He held the drink out again, and this time, she saw a smattering of writing on the side that was quickly covered up as he slid the sleeve over it. Glancing up, she saw him wink and then he was backing away, a smile still on his face.

*What is he up to?*

“Have a great day, Ms. Spencer.”



As soon as he was out the door, she didn't waste time in pulling the sleeve back down to see what hidden message he had for her.

If it hadn't been quite so shocking, Reagan was sure she would be laughing at his audacity, but the fact of the matter was that Evan's message had the complete opposite effect. She knew those few lines were in reference to their "date," and didn't *that* just add some dynamite to a situation that was already bound to be explosive.

Again, she read over the words:

**BLONDIE, THINK YOU COULD FIND A DRESS  
SIMILAR TO THE LAST ONE I PEELED YOU OUT OF  
FOR FRIDAY NIGHT?  
IF SO, WOULD REWARD YOU.**

*Reward me, will he? Hmm...*

Folding the sleeve flat, she tapped it against her thigh before making her way around to her chair. Rolling it out, she switched on her laptop and took a seat. The smile that was creeping across her lips couldn't be helped as she once again found herself reading the message.

She sat there trying to decide how to respond, or if she even *should* respond, to Evan's blatant seduction tactics. As she slipped the sleeve over the cup once again and leaned back in her chair, she tapped her foot on the floor and thought, what the hell...

She logged into her system and pulled up her email. Scrolling through the directory of names until she found his, she opened up a message box and started to type.

*Dear Mr. James,*

*I appreciate the caffeine boost this morning, but please note that bribery has no business in the workplace. Any and all*

*rewards will come from hard work and dedication. I would be more than happy to discuss should you have further concerns.*

*Ms. Reagan Spencer*

*Senior Finance Manager*

*Kelman Corporations*

She lifted her coffee to her lips and took a sip of the creamy cappuccino as she reread her words and then hit send before she could change her mind.

Not even a minute later, a response popped up in the corner of her computer. As soon as she saw the sender's address, the long-dormant butterflies in her stomach began to flutter, and she clicked it open.

*Dear Ms. Spencer,*

*Please accept my apologies. I am under no delusions that I should be rewarded for anything other than persistence and exceeding expectations. In the future, I will endeavor to be clearer about my intentions.*

*Evan James*

Clearer than telling her he'd like to peel her out of a dress? She was almost scared to think of what the rest of the week would bring...

**Tuesday**

**BLONDIE, (PER YOUR REQUEST TO BE CLEARER)  
I REQUIRE A STRAPLESS DRESS THAT I CAN PULL  
DOWN OVER YOUR BEAUTIFUL BREASTS BEFORE  
LEAVING IT IN A PILE AT YOUR FEET.  
PLEASE.**

*Dear Mr. James,*

*While you have definitely shown strides in stepping up your game in the workplace, and your attention to detail is one of your strong points, I fear your focus might be too narrow.*

*Please expand on your proposal.*

*Ms. Reagan Spencer*

*Senior Finance Manager*

*Kelman Corporations*

## **Wednesday**

“...so I think what he’s really saying here is he’d like to merge with Bridlewood instead of—”

A knock on the door cut Bill off, and he called out for them to enter.

“Excuse me, sir, I thought we could use a midweek pick-me-up,” Evan said, walking in with a tray of coffee cups.

Bill smiled and gestured him inside. “I don’t think any of us would turn that down. Thanks, son.”

“I heard you’re a fan of caramel,” Evan said, and handed Bill the first cup. “If not, you’ll have to blame Ms. Spencer here.”

Reagan felt her face turn to fire as she realized she'd be forced to see whatever obscenities Evan had decided to write on the cup that morning in front of Bill. She barely looked up as Evan held the coffee out to her.

"Be careful, this one's extra hot." His suggestive comment and a quick glance at the cup had her almost dropping it.

**BLONDIE, HERE IS MY ADDENDUM  
TO AFOREMENTIONED PROPOSAL:  
NO PANTIES.**

Her eyes flew up to his then, and a smirk crossed his lips. "They also gave me these," he said, pulling a couple of cardboard sleeves out of his pocket. Then he handed one to Bill, and as he offered the other to Reagan, he said, "So you don't get burned."

Bill took his and, without fuss, slipped it over the cup while Evan eyed her with an expression that could only be considered...ravenous.

"Don't you have a meeting to go to this morning, Mr. James? Or *emails* to answer?" Reagan managed, barely, as his eyes practically stripped her where she stood.

"Now that you mention it, I should go and check my inbox. Lately I've been getting spammers sending me inappropriate—"

"Evan." Reagan was positive she was about to be outed, fired, or would just combust on the fucking spot with the way he was still looking at her. "I'm on it. Now, if you'll excuse us, we need to wrap this up."

"Reagan," Bill said, chuckling, looking between the two of them.

"Sorry, Bill, but I have another meeting I need to get to in fifteen minutes."

"Okay, okay." He gave Evan a nod. "Thanks again for the coffee. Apparently Reagan needed it a little more than we

knew this morning.”

Evan finally took his eyes from her and backed away to the door with a good-ol’-boy smile for Bill. “Sometimes we have no idea what we need until someone gives it to us.”

As he opened the door and stepped outside, leaving her standing tongue-tied next to Bill, her boss and longtime family friend turned to her and cocked his head to the side.

“Want to explain what that was all about?”

“Oh, nothing,” she said, but Bill wasn’t buying it.

“Nothing? It sure seemed like something. Why is Evan bringing us coffee?”

Reagan racked her brain, trying to think of the most plausible answer to give that wouldn’t sound as if...well, as if she wanted to take Evan home and screw his brains out. The man was driving her nuts, and he hadn’t even touched her.

“He’s no doubt buttering us up for a raise. He knows we lowballed him when we signed him on, and I’m sure he feels like he’s more than proved himself by now.”

“And do you?” Bill asked. “Feel as though he’s proved himself?”

*He seems hellbent on showing he’s changed to get in my bed.*

“Reagan?”

She focused back on Bill’s question, and her fabricated story, and gave an absent nod. “I think he’s getting there. Maybe a couple more weeks and we can reevaluate.”

Bill brought the file up that was in his hand and handed it over to her. “Okay. You’re the boss when it comes to his probationary period. Just let me know.”

*Jesus Christ, now I really feel like a shit for lying.*

“Will do, Bill. Now I’ve got this conference call with Bridlewood. Was there anything else?”

Bill eyed her in a way that made her feel uneasy, almost like when she'd told a fib as a child. She felt guilty, as if he knew she was lying, but he wasn't going to call her out. More likely he would wait until she fell face first into it and then say, *I told you so.*

But, like any person who was guilty and knew it, she held her cards close and shook her head.

“Nope, that’s all.”

She turned to make her way out the door, and just before she closed it, she heard him call out, “Have a good day, Reagan.”

*Yeah, happy Hump Day to me.*

## Thursday

**BLONDIE, LOOK IN YOUR BOTTOM DRAWER**

*My bottom drawer...?*

Reagan pushed her office chair back with her toes and reached with tentative hands toward the drawer he indicated. She paused for a moment, wondering if she should keep playing this game with him, although it had probably not been smart to engage him in the first place. Her head knew that. The rest of her was eager for him, his attention, his words, and she couldn't seem to stop herself...

Without a second more of hesitation, she pulled the drawer open to see another note taped to a small gift bag.

**YOU LEFT THIS AS A KEEPSAKE,  
BUT IT DOESN'T SMELL  
LIKE YOU ANYMORE. I EXPECT THIS BACK.**

Reagan knew, even as she pulled the item out of the bag, what she would find. The sheer black bra from their first encounter, the one she'd held out to him like a gift after a night filled with more orgasms than she could count.

She was in so much fucking trouble, and she knew it. This bet Evan had struck with her, this date she was supposed to go on, had WARNING written all over it.

At first she'd thought, sure, she could handle a night out. Maybe a dinner and then he'd drop her home. But as the week progressed, and the notes on each coffee he'd given her became that much more suggestive, Reagan knew she was in deep shit.

She tucked the bra into the gift bag it came from then placed it back in the drawer and pushed it shut. Maybe if she wasn't staring at it, she wouldn't recall how good it had felt to have his hands cupping her bare breasts as she sank down over his hard cock.

*Yeah, because I'm sure not thinking that now...*

Clicking open her email, she pulled up his name and wrote:

*Dear Mr. James,*

*Thank you for returning the item you borrowed to its rightful owner. But perhaps in the future, you should remember it is always better to give without the expectation of receiving something in return.*

*Ms. Reagan Spencer*

*Senior Finance Manager  
Kelman Corporations*

*Dear Ms. Spencer,*

*Please understand I was not returning a 'borrowed' item. I was merely sharing with you a gift that was originally given to me as a token of gratitude for a job well done. I would never presume to give with expectation of receiving, although recognition is always appreciated. You should know this better than others since you have been watching my...progress.*

*Evan James*

*Dear Mr. James,*

*Your comments have been duly noted. Regarding your progress, I can say I've seen remarkable strides but will continue to closely monitor your performance.*

*Ms. Reagan Spencer  
Senior Finance Manager  
Kelman Corporations*

## **Friday**

Fuck-me Friday.

Reagan had a feeling that would be the theme of the day, and night, if Evan James had anything to do with it. And how could he not? He'd been the constant in her thoughts ever since the first time she'd met him at the bar in Chelsea all those weeks ago. What began as curiosity of the man her



childhood crush had become had blossomed into something more than she'd ever expected. Within the stirrings of lust she felt every time even his name was mentioned, there was the twinge of something more...something dangerous, and the more she felt herself falling, the more she couldn't stop herself.

Standing in front of the elevator banks, Reagan tapped her foot as she waited impatiently for one to reach the ground floor. She was in amongst a crowd of both businessmen and women, anxious to get their day underway so they could knock off and enjoy the city over the weekend. The lights overhead indicated the elevator was on its way down, and just as it chimed and the doors slid open, she felt someone step in close behind her.

“Good morning, Ms. Spencer.”

She didn't have to turn to see who was standing there. Her body already knew. Without a word, she walked inside with the rest of the group and took a spot in the back corner, sensing Evan hot on her heels. When she finally glanced up at him, she steeled herself against what she would find. She'd been right to do that, because the look he was aiming her way just about disintegrated the tiny thong she'd slipped on earlier that morning.

“Good morning.”

His eyes tracked a heated path down her body, and when they finally came back to land on her face, she pretty much lost the will to open her mouth and interrupt that hot-as-hell expression.

“You're looking lovely this morning, as usual,” he told her, and then raised the coffee cup he had in his hand toward her. “I believe I owe you one more of these, and then we're squared away...on my end, at least.”

The man standing in front of them, wearing a starched business suit and clutching his briefcase, peered over his shoulder toward them, and before Reagan could explain, Evan jumped in.

“I lost the office bet last week.”

The man gave them a smile of camaraderie, and when Evan looked back at her, Reagan didn't feel in the least bit friendly—she felt indecent as hell. What kind of person was she that she was standing there, lying to this man, and yet at the same time wanting to hit the emergency button and demand he put an end to this frustration he'd built inside her all week?

As it was, she was almost terrified to read what was on the final cup.

She took the coffee with a tentative hand and held his gaze. His eyes seemed to sparkle at her, and she couldn't help but respond by rolling hers, even if the half-smile on her face never went away.

Casually, she pulled the sleeve down to see what message she needed to refute today, but there was nothing written. Brows knitted together, she turned it around and found the rest blank as well. Beside her, she felt Evan's shoulders begin to shake and, not wanting to give him the satisfaction of showing she cared about his silly messages, took a long sip before sputtering as the hot, black coffee that was obviously *not* hers made its way down her throat.

“Did you get mine by mistake?” Evan teased. “I'm sorry—it looks like this one is yours.”

Reagan glared up at his smirking face before grabbing the coffee out of his hand and shoving the nasty concoction she'd been forced to drink in his.

His lips found their way to her ear and, ever so quietly, he said, “I just wanted to taste your wet”—he glanced down to her mouth before looking her dead in the eyes—“cappuccino.”

A shiver raced through her, and as the elevator doors opened on their floor, she pushed her way past the remaining people inside, trying to put some space between her and the arrogant ass somewhere behind her. She waited until she was safely inside her office, away from Evan's penetrating gaze, to pull down the sleeve.

**BUT TONIGHT...  
I'D RATHER TASTE YOUR WET PUSSY.  
SEE YOU AT 7, BLONDIE.**

Movement out of the corner of her eye had her looking up, and she saw Evan peering around her office door watching her. He'd probably been watching the whole time. *Dammit.*

“Make sure to include your address in your snappy comeback email,” he said, and disappeared before she could even begin to formulate a response.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

REAGAN TWISTED A lock of her long blond hair deftly around the curling iron and held it there for a few moments before letting it fall in a bouncy ringlet down her chest. She never wore her hair like this, preferring a sleek updo or light waves down her back, but she was feeling a bit nostalgic after the constant barrage of dreams she'd had this week.

It didn't surprise her that Evan hadn't had an inkling of who she was. He was, after all, *her* childhood crush, and being the little sister of his best friend had made her invisible most of the time. Not to mention, she barely resembled the girl she used to be. That little girl had chocolate curls and an easygoing smile, still innocent to the way the world worked. Until...

Reagan put down the curling iron and ran her fingers through the ringlets to soften them a bit, thinking back to when her whole world had come crashing down the week before her eighth birthday.

*"Troy!"*

*Jennifer heard her father call throughout the house as she stood in front of the bathroom mirror getting ready for school. She was waiting for her mother to come and help her with her curls that she'd started wearing after seeing her favorite TV star with a head full of ringlets.*

*"Troy!"*

*As her dad called out again, she made her way to the door and looked down the stairs to where he stood looking up at her.*

*"Oh, Jenny. Is your brother up there?"*

*With a quick shake of her head, she frowned at her father as he mumbled under his breath and told her, "You won't be going to school today. Your mother and I need to talk to you, but first—Troy! Where is that boy?"*

*He turned and stormed away, presumably to track down her missing brother, leaving her standing there wondering what was going on.*

*Quietly, she made her way up the hall, careful not to make any noise as she approached her parents' bedroom door. It was open just a crack, and as she got closer, she could hear soft sniffles—the sound of someone crying.*

*With a shaky hand, Jennifer reached for the door and pushed it open a little, spotting her mother sitting on the edge of her bed. Her head was bent, her hands were covering her face, and she seemed to be lost in her despair.*

*"Mom..." Jennifer's voice shook as she tried to project it across the small space.*

*Her mother looked up, and as her bloodshot eyes found hers, she raised a hand toward her.*

*"Jenny."*

*Jennifer took a timid step forward. "What's going on? Daddy is upset too."*

*Her mother wiped a tear from her cheek before patting the bedspread beside her. "Come here, baby girl. It's okay."*

*She moved around to the side of the bed and sat down beside her mother, her legs swinging off the floor as she fiddled with her hands in her lap.*

*“We got some bad news today, and we need to talk to you and Troy about it before you...well, before other people do. That’s all.”*

*Confused, she asked, “What do you mean?”*

*Her mom took her hands in hers and pulled her close to her side before stroking a hand down her hair.*

*“It’s about Rocky’s family, Jenny.”*

*She tried to piece together what her mother could possibly mean, but came up with nothing.*

*“We won’t be seeing him anymore.”*

“OW, SHIT,” REAGAN cursed as her hand accidentally brushed the hot iron. After turning on the cold water, she stuck her hand underneath, wincing slightly at the initial sting of pain. Glancing at her cell, she noticed it was getting close to the time she’d planned to meet Evan, so with one final pass under the water, she shut the faucet off and grabbed the Neosporin from the medicine cabinet to her left. Then she applied a thick smear and gave herself one last look in the mirror.

Even though she hadn’t promised to obey Evan’s “cup commands,” she’d never had any intention of not following through. On any count.

The fuck-me heels were high, the panties were nonexistent, and the strapless skintight black dress she wore was short enough to be indecently sexy, but long enough for her not to pass as a street hooker.

The only thing she couldn’t manage to put on was the bra he’d returned, but only because it was impossible to wear underneath that particular dress. It was spritzed with her favorite perfume and tucked into her handbag in case he accused her of renegeing on their bet.

*All right, Evan James. Bring it on.*

\* \* \*

THE TOWN CAR waiting outside her apartment had been a surprise. Though she'd refused to give him her address and had stipulated she'd meet him at the venue, he'd managed to find it anyway and had transportation waiting to escort her there—alone.

She smiled as she gazed out at the river below, watching the lights of the Brooklyn Bridge dance across the top of the water as they drove across it, leaving the city behind them. The flutter in her stomach made her feel like she was eight again, giddy and excited about seeing Evan's handsome face. For all his faults, and she was well aware of them, he really was charming when he wanted to be.

The unruly brown hair he'd never been able to tame back then was a bit more manageable now, and his face had taken on a rugged, manly look, erasing his boyish features, but his eyes—his eyes were the constant. They were the color of aged whiskey, but back then she had always compared them to the honey that Miss Rodgers down the street had bottled up and sent by the case to their house every year. But no, Evan was certainly not sweet like honey; he was more the hot sting left behind by the bee.

As the car pulled up in front of a cobbled path, Reagan peered out to see twinkling lights scattered throughout the branches hanging in an arch over the walkway. The plants and flowers lining the pavers were also lit up by garden floodlights, adding to the romantic ambience of the place as she pushed open the car door and stepped out onto the curb.

Looking at her surroundings, Reagan had to consciously keep her mouth from falling open.

The place was stunning. Breathtaking, actually, and there was no way in hell that this could be mistaken as anything other than a play to impress.

*And score one for Evan. I'm impressed.*

Clutching her handbag by her side, she all of a sudden felt like a nervous wreck. No doubt thanks to the Town Car, the restaurant and—

“Reagan?”

—the man.

Turning her head, she spied him standing off to the side of the entrance, dressed immaculately in a black suit, black tie, and tailored white shirt. In the left pocket of his jacket was a neatly folded handkerchief. He’d never looked sexier.

Swallowing her nerves, she willed herself to pull it together and also reminded herself not to think about how hot he looked, *because hello—no panties.*

She made her way over to where he was standing and didn’t miss for one second the way his eyes ate her up with every step she took. Apparently she had pleased him, because when she stopped in front of him and raised her eyes, he swiped his tongue along his lower lip and said, “So...I see you do know how to follow orders. Although I have to say, you far exceeded my expectations.”

With a seductive wink, she leaned in and placed a hand on the lapel of his jacket and said, “Thank you. And just so we’re clear, I followed every *single* order, right down to the bare essentials.”

Evan’s eyes roamed down her body, as if he would be able to see through her dress, and then quickly found hers again. “You mean...”

“Oh yes, I mean *bare.*”

“Fuck me,” he said under his breath.

As his gaze made its way back up to hers, the look in his eyes almost stole the air from her lungs. She couldn’t move for a long moment and then, finally, she looked away self-consciously and decided to break the tension in the air.

“But you haven’t even bought me dinner yet,” she teased.



His expression stayed serious as he reached for her waist and held her still, close enough that she could feel his breath on her lips. “You’re beautiful,” he whispered.

Though she couldn’t find the words to respond, a smile swept across her face, and his hand on her waist moved down to grab her hand.

“Shall we?” he asked, and she linked her fingers through his and squeezed in acknowledgment.

He led her inside the intimate space, and the first thing she noticed was the wall-to-floor glass on the left side of the room, showcasing the spectacular Manhattan skyline.

Their table was situated directly in front of the glass, adorned with a fresh bouquet of roses, candles, and intricately carved wine goblets, while the soft sounds of the grand piano played from the corner of the room. Taking the seat Evan pulled out for her, she almost pinched herself that she was here, now, with him.

Not quite sure where to begin, she glanced down at the white tablecloth, looking for the napkin and cutlery—but the table was empty save for the napkin.

Glancing across at where Evan sat, she saw a crafty smile pull across his lips.

“Looking for something?” he asked as she turned to look at the people seated next to them. It wasn’t until right at that moment she noticed they were eating with...their fingers.

Spinning back to face him, she narrowed her eyes and asked, “Where’s the silverware?”

Evan chuckled, and she had a feeling her consternation was amusing him greatly.

“Oh, did I forget to tell you? This is a fine-dining finger-food restaurant. So that means I get to sit here and watch you suck and lick those long, elegant fingers of yours, and it has nothing to do with sex...it’s purely for nutritional purposes.”

Reagan licked her lips then and had to admit she loved this sneaky, cheeky side of Evan. It appealed to her in every way imaginable.

“Really? You *really* picked a place where I would sit across from you and basically stimulate you all evening for the price of a meal? It better be a damn good one, Evan,” she said, and hoped in the back of her mind that he was becoming as aroused by the looks and conversation as she was.

“I have a feeling it’s going to be worth the discomfort of an hour or two, to say the least.”

Feeling slightly less out of place, and a lot more smug at his admission, Reagan picked up a menu and sat back in her chair. Reading over the choices, she felt a sassy smirk hit her lips as she raised her eyes and pinned him with a molten stare.

“This king shrimp looks good, and the sauce sounds delicious.” When Evan’s eyes met hers, she couldn’t help but add, “I mean, who doesn’t like a good cream sauce?”

Evan grinned, a mischievous gleam in his eyes, and he nodded. “I’ve always been a fan of a delicate cream sauce... the kind that melts in your mouth. We should get two.”

“Greedy,” she remarked, and they both looked up as the waiter came by to tell them the specials. It all sounded amazing to her, so she went ahead and placed her order, and then sat back to watch Evan do the same.

“Is red wine okay with you?” he asked, turning his attention back to her.

“Perfect.”

Once he’d made his selections, he took the napkin from the table and set it across his lap, and she made sure he noticed her following that move.

“See something you like?” he asked, his lips tipped up in amusement.

Something about the night was making her feel bolder than usual. Not that she was ever a shrinking violet, but having no attachments meant she was always in control, and here, it

was quite clear that was not the case. She couldn't put her finger on what the change was, but even without that sense of power, she suddenly felt fearless, as though there were no consequences to her actions and no fear of falling.

Well, the last part wasn't true—she was definitely falling.

Drinking him in, she said, "I'm finding it hard to see something I *don't* like."

Something in her tone must have relayed her seriousness, because the grin that had started to form on his lips drew into a tight line instead.

"Well, don't look too close."

Reagan made sure she had his full attention as she let her eyes wander over all she could see.

"I've been looking at you for the past several weeks, and I have to say, Mr. James, I most certainly like what I'm seeing."

He seemed slightly thrown by her comment, and she wondered what he was thinking as he sat there, all the ease having left him.

"Oh come on, you have to know you're improving," she added, realizing that somehow her comment had changed the mood at the table from flirty to solemn. He looked as if he were about two steps from getting up and leaving. "Let's change the subject, then," she said, hoping to get some kind of response other than the stoic expression he was currently wearing.

"So, for our first date, you took me to a restaurant in... Brooklyn. Don't get me wrong, it's gorgeous and all, but come on, you can spill..." She leaned across the table and made sure she had his full attention as she whispered, "It's because you're good with your fingers, right?"

Just as she'd hoped, Evan couldn't help the laugh that escaped him at her teasing tone.

"You're a minx, Ms. Spencer. A naughty little minx."

She slicked her tongue along her glossy lower lip and sat back slowly, happy to see he had come back out to play.

“As if you’re one to talk.”

The waiter arrived at their table right before Evan could respond, and he placed their meals down and poured them each a glass of red. As he walked away, Reagan reached for her wine glass and absentmindedly ran her index finger around the top of the rim before raising her eyes to the man seated across from her.

He was watching her with a look on his face she couldn’t quite decipher. It wasn’t the serious expression from moments ago, and it certainly wasn’t the playful Evan she’d become accustomed to. No, this was a look of recognition, almost as if—

“Huh. I swear you just made me have some sort of déjà vu. You with your curls and that thing you just did with the glass.” He gestured at it with a nod, and Reagan immediately pulled her hand away.

*Fuck.* She didn’t even realize she’d been doing it.

“Nervous habit?”

Putting her hands under the table to keep them the hell out of trouble, she shook her head and felt her damn curls brushing her cheeks. What had she been thinking wearing her hair this way?

“No,” she said quickly. “I’ve got nothing to be nervous about...do I?”

Evan shrugged and thankfully let it go. “Not that I’m aware of. You’re one of the most put-together females I’ve ever met. And one of the sexiest.”

Reagan picked up one of her shrimp and then aimed what she hoped was an indecent smile in Evan’s direction as she dipped it in the sauce and brought it up to her mouth.

He watched her with intense focus as she parted her lips and slipped the succulent piece of shrimp between her

teeth, sliding the shellfish out of her mouth and sucking the creamy sauce from its flesh.

“How many of those shrimp do you have?” Evan asked as he glanced down at her plate.

She gave a soft chuckle and counted. “Looks like eight...unless you feel like sharing yours with me.”

He picked up one of his own shrimp and dipped it in the sauce before telling her, “You suck yours, and I’ll suck mine.”

“Hmm, I think you actually mean vice versa. Maybe you could suck mine, and I could—”

Evan coughed mid-chew and then swallowed before replying, “Jesus, Reagan, you can’t say that shit to me here.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m *trying* to wine and dine you, but if you keep up with those comments, you won’t get your dessert.”

“Oh, I plan on getting dessert.”

“Reagan...” Evan growled, clenching his napkin in one hand.

Reagan’s eyes widened innocently as she picked up her glass of wine and looked out across the East River. “Gorgeous view, wouldn’t you say?”

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Evan shaking his head before following her gaze.

It really was beautiful. The city lights stood out in contrast against the mix of an ink-stained sky, and she found herself saying, “Thank you.”

She could see puzzlement cross Evan’s features in his reflection, and he responded, “Thank you?”

“You picked a gorgeous spot to wine and dine me. So thank you. But if you don’t mind”—she glanced at him with her brow raised—“I’d like to pick where we have dessert.”

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AFTER THEY'D ENJOYED their delicious meal, Reagan had indeed taken Evan to her favorite dessert spot—her third-floor walk-up apartment in Hell's Kitchen.

He'd been torturous to watch over the past two hours, making sure she'd caught every lick of his fingers and the way he sucked in his bottom lip to catch the last drop of sauce from his prawns. Clearly, the venue had been chosen with great purpose—not that she was complaining.

She'd been serious when she'd told Evan she didn't do repeats. But the man she'd gone home with all those weeks ago was not the same one who followed her inside her loft now.

Since that night, her head had been warring with her heart over how to handle the polar emotions she felt every time he was near. Hell, she even felt them every time he wasn't.

Before their little bet, she'd been standing firm on the side of “nothing more than professional association with Evan with a smidgen of friendship thrown in.” They'd work together, she'd give him an ear when he needed it...

That, however, had proved impossible to maintain after this week. Her carefully guarded exterior crumbled with every smirk of his lips and every inappropriate message on her coffee cup. As much as her head knew what would happen now could only lead to disaster, she was selfish enough to ignore the warning.

She wanted him. She'd always wanted him. How could she possibly walk away from the chance to be with him, no matter what the fallout entailed?

The answer to that came easier than her next breath—she couldn't.

“Have to say”—Evan broke the silence as Reagan dropped her keys and bag on the foyer table—“I wasn't expecting an invite back to your place when you mentioned dessert.”

“No?” she asked as she looked at him over her shoulder.

He'd turned to shut her front door behind him, and when he glanced back to where she was standing, she felt her thighs clench at the heat aimed her way.

“No. But that's not to say I'm disappointed.”

Her heels clicked against the hardwood floors as she made her way into the open living space. Evan wasn't far behind; she could tell because lately she seemed to pick up on every little thing he did, and right now, she knew he'd stopped near the entrance to stare at her black-and-white photographs—the ones she'd taken when she first moved to the city several years ago.

“I really love these,” he said, his voice more serious than she'd heard before. “Did you take them?”

“Yes,” she replied, offering no more as she pushed a curl behind her ear.

“You're really private about your artwork, aren't you, Reagan?” Evan asked as he slid one of his hands into his pockets and started to walk toward her.

Trying to play it cool, she gave a quick shrug but also said, “I told you last weekend. It’s just a hobby I like to do in my spare time.”

“Yes, one where you make up stories, I believe you mentioned.”

“That’s right.”

She saw him glance beyond her shoulder to the bookshelves behind her, and when his mouth curved into a wicked smile, she wondered what exactly he was thinking. He stepped around her, and she spun on her toes to see him heading for the spot she kept her cameras, tripods, bags, and film.

“Sure...feel free to look around, Evan.”

Without even sparing her a look, he said, “Hey, you’re the one that invited me in.”

Frowning, she waited to see what he was doing. When he reached for the Polaroid camera on the second shelf and turned back to face her, Reagan suddenly had a flash of him, sans clothing, lounging on her bed, and *her* snapping all kinds of “scenery” shots.

“Now, this...*this* is interesting,” he remarked.

Deciding now wasn’t the time to be coy, Reagan raised a brow before responding. “It’s a Polaroid. I’m sure you’ve seen one of those before. It gives you an instant photo.”

Evan licked his bottom lip as he let his eyes rove down over her, and then said, “I *do* like instant gratification...”

“Do you? That’s shocking, Mr. James.”

Holding the viewfinder up to his eye, he quickly snapped a photo of her and reached around to grab the printed film. He waved the photograph back and forth to speed up the developing process, but Reagan tsked and walked over to grab the photo from him.

“You don’t have to work so hard to get the picture to come through,” she said, looking up at him under her long



lashes. “It’ll develop naturally.” Not taking her eyes from his, she set the photo on the bar top. “Now we wait.”

The smolder in Evan’s gaze made her knees weak as he replied, “I’ve never been a patient man when it comes to getting what I want.” His hand came up to cup the side of her neck before he slowly trailed his fingers down, brushing past her collarbone, then farther to trace over the swells of her breast.

A shiver ran through her at the heat of his touch, and her breath hitched as she took a step back. He countered and she took another. And then another. With every move she made, he stalked her, like a wild animal boxing in their prey and waiting for the right moment to attack. When her back met the cold, exposed brick, she didn’t even try to move. Instead, she watched him as he prowled closer, a feral look in his features, as dangerous as it was desirous.

One of his hands hit the wall by the side of her head; the other stayed down by his side still holding the camera. The weight of him loomed heavily over her even without touching. His powerful frame and the heady, masculine scent of him enveloped her, blazing a trail of fire down between her thighs.

With his eyes pinning her in place, he brought the camera between them, aimed the lens under her skirt, and snapped a shot.

“Wonder what story this will tell me?” He raised the Polaroid to her as the picture slid out, and said, “Do you want to do the honors or shall I?”

Not quite believing what he’d just done, Reagan’s mouth parted, but nothing came out.

“Oh, okay, you convinced me. I’ll look.”

He pushed back from the wall and pulled the small square photograph free, and this time instead of waving it, he brought it close to his mouth, held her eyes, and blew.

“If you’re really nice...no, *bad* to me,” he said, his voice dripping with devilry, “I’ll give the real thing the same treatment.”

Deciding she was done with being a wallflower, she took a step forward and grabbed the camera from him.

“I think you may have forgotten, but in this house, I’m the photographer. So maybe if you’re nice to *me*, I’ll blow on *you* later.”

Evan looked down at the photo in his hand and then raised his eyes to hers. “Got to say, this picture is telling me something very specific, Ms. Spencer.”

He made a show of studying it in great detail before aiming his eyes down to the hem of her dress.

“Think I could get a closer look?”

Reagan brought the camera up between them and told him, “Perhaps. But first, take off your jacket.”

Evan tilted his head slightly, and his brows rose as she continued to watch him with unflinching focus.

“Just my jacket?”

“That’s what I said.”

He nodded, and as he started to undo the buttons, she snapped off a shot. Then he halted his movements, his eyes narrowing on her when she pulled the photo out and aimed again.

“Why’d you stop?”

“What are you doing?” he asked.

She licked her lips as she looked him over, and then informed him, “I’m going to tell a very naughty story. Now, keep going, Evan.”

He parted the fitted material and shrugged out of it as she took several more snapshots, each depicting every small movement, and as they developed one by one, she let them fall, scattering to the floor.

When he was standing before her in his shirt, pants, and tie, she took his measure, trying to decide what she wanted gone next, but Evan had his own ideas.

He unbuckled his belt, and watched her steadily as he pulled it free and let it hang down by his thigh. She zoomed in on his fingers wrapped around the leather and felt her pussy throb in response to the mere thought of him using that as a restraint in bed.

*Snap.*

“Want to come closer, Reagan?”

Lowering the camera, she knew the look she gave him was full of the desire she could feel coursing through her.

“I plan to come when I’m *very* close to you, but for now, how about you take off that tie?”

“And then?” he asked as his hands moved to the knot at the base of his throat.

*Snap.*

“And then I want you over there.”

She pointed toward her bed, and with a savage gleam in his eye, he started walking backward in that direction. Loosening his tie, he slipped it off over his head—

*Snap.*

—and Reagan walked one step closer to the real thing.

The back of his knees hit the edge of her bed, and when she directed him to sit on top of the mattress, he obeyed.

*Snap.*

“Don’t lose that tie,” she warned, moving closer and tossing the undeveloped picture on the bed next to him.

Evan moved the tie to the pillow and then reached down to untuck his shirt.

“Stop.” His hands froze, and her face peered around the viewfinder. “Did I tell you to do that?”

A smile of understanding crossed his face, and he shook his head.

“Unbutton it first. From the top.”

With one hand, he began to undo the white button-up, making sure his movements were slow and teasing.

*Snap.*

“I like that,” she whispered, keeping one hand up to snap shots and letting the other fall down to finger the edge of her skirt.

When he caught her movement, his hand shifted down the front of his shirt faster, agitated and trying to rip off the buttons.

*Snap.*

Reagan placed one knee on the bed on the outside of his, letting her fingers rise a bit higher underneath her skirt.

“What about you?” she asked. “Do you like what *you* see?”

“Fuck, you know I do,” he groaned, his hand moving from his shirt to reach for her thigh, but she pulled her fingers from under her skirt and blocked his attempt.

*Snap.*

Leaning in to his neck, she said, “No touching.”

After pulling out the picture and tossing it beside them, she rose up over him so he had an ample view of her breasts, and placed her other knee on the outside of his in a straddle position. His breath ghosted over her exposed cleavage as he watched her, waiting for permission.

*Snap.*

“Since I can’t touch you, it’s only fair that I be the one taking the shots,” Evan said, his warm breath leaving a trail of goosebumps across her flesh.

With a seductive laugh, she slicked her tongue across her top lip and then conceded, handing over the camera.

“Deal.”

As he straightened, she reached for his arm to steady herself and then drew her painted nail down the edge of his

shirt before slipping it under and pushing it from his shoulder.

“Hmm, I want to look at you,” she purred, letting the material slide down his arm.

With his other hand, he angled the camera up at her and took a shot before telling her, “I hope you do more than look.”

Her nipples hardened under the intense eyes focused on her and the thought of what she was about to do next. Kneeling up, so her breasts were in line with Evan’s lips, she grinned down at him as she reached for the stretchy material and slowly drew it off, exposing herself to him.

“Goddamn it, Reagan,” he said.

*Snap.*

“Oh...I’m sorry, I know I didn’t follow this particular request. My bra is in my handbag for you.”

“Fuck the request,” he told her, licking his lips like a starving man.

“Well, if it’s all the same, I’d rather you fuck *me*... when I’m ready.”

She saw his hand move along the bedspread, and as he lifted it, she let her eyes fall down in an accusatory manner.

“Uh uh. No touching.”

His mouth drew into a thin line, and when his jaw bunched, she knew he was having trouble with the request.

With dexterous fingers, she reached down to the hem of her skirt and inched it up her thighs. A low rumble escaped Evan as his eyes dropped down to what she was doing and then—

*Snap.*

The camera produced another erotic image to add to the pile growing around them. As he tossed it to the side, uncaring of where it landed, she watched his teeth sink into his bottom lip, and it made her push that little bit harder.

She wanted to blow his mind, and she knew exactly how to do it.

Reaching out a finger, Reagan tilted his chin up so he was looking directly at her, and then she trailed it up to his mouth and told him, “Suck.”

Evan parted his lips and sucked her finger deep into the warm recess of his mouth, swirling his tongue around, getting it nice and wet. She couldn't help the soft moan that slipped from her own lips as her knees tightened around his outer thighs and she felt the slick heat between her legs increase.

As she pulled her finger free, she drew it down between her breasts and then lowered her hand and asked, “Do you think I'm ready, Evan?”

His eyes were glued to her hand where it hovered between her thighs, and when she repeated his name and he looked back up, he said, “Fuck yes.”

*Snap.*

Inching her skirt up so he could watch, she traced her finger slowly down her pelvic bone before sliding it over her swollen clit, letting a gasp escape her lips at the sensation that shot through her when she touched herself there. She spread her pussy lips apart, letting him see how wet she was before—

*Snap.*

—rubbing her way down and sliding her finger inside.

The sound emanating from Evan was one of a man in physical pain, and it spurred her on to go even further. She rolled her hips up and, when she sank down, pushed her finger as far as it would go. Her free hand ran up her side, grasping her full breast and massaging as a growl ripped through Evan.

“Jesus fucking Christ, Reagan, let me—”

She shut him up then by pulling her finger from deep inside her and pushing it into his mouth.

“In the spirit of this evening's meal of exquisite finger foods, I thought you might like your dessert the same way,” she said.

He groaned around her finger, and then she slid it free. Bending her head, she placed her lips against his, whispering across his mouth, "I'm ready."

In as long as it took for Evan to place the camera on the bed, she raised her head and felt both of his hands clutch her hips. His fingers dug into her supple bare flesh as he pushed up using his strong thighs and spun them around, depositing her on her back amongst the sea of erotic images. As she lay there looking up at him, she watched with greedy eyes as he unbuttoned his pants and unzipped.

She wriggled her dress down her body, and his eyes lit on her as she raised her hips and shimmied it off. When it reached her feet, and his pants and boxers were gone, she lifted her slender leg in the air and let the material hang from her ankle.

"I believe you requested this."

Evan shrugged out of his open shirt and then reached for her offering, bringing it up to his face and taking a deep inhale.

"You switched up your scent," he told her, and then tossed the dress on the bed, bringing a condom packet to his mouth to rip open.

"No," she said, and shook her head against the mattress underneath as she watched him protect the both of them. He then took her ankle in his hand, removed the first heel, and dropped it to the floor.

"Oh, yes. There is no way you smelt this delicious that first night. You reminded me of a fucking sugar cookie."

Reagan's mouth parted as he drew a finger up the arch of her foot.

"No," she sighed as he placed that foot on the bed and reached for the other. "I had run into Macy's on my way home and a woman at the cosmetic counter attacked me with her spray. I couldn't get that smell out for days."

Evan removed the second heel, dropped it on the floor, and then released her leg.

“Reagan?” Her eyes locked with his, and her heart almost stopped when he told her, “Stop talking.”

Shutting her mouth, she clamped her teeth into her bottom lip and lowered her eyes to the hard-on Evan was stroking.

“Open your legs,” he instructed as he stood at the end of the bed.

The time for play was clearly over.

Without so much as a hint of hesitation, Reagan bent her legs until her feet were flat, and parted her thighs.

“I want you to use your finger on yourself just like you did a minute ago, but this time...this time I’m going to watch. And then, Reagan...then I’m going to devour you *and* your sweet fucking pussy.”

*Yessss...*

As she began to move her hand down her body, he called out for her to stop. She was confused until she saw him pick up the camera lying next to her on the bed.

“I can’t resist you wide fucking open for me.”

*Snap.*

With a sultry smile, she let her hand continue its trail over the flat plane of her stomach, her fingers slowly creeping toward her bare mound. As much as she was ready to have him inside her, she couldn’t resist torturing him first so she could see the frustration of how much he wanted her. That thought alone had gotten her off so many times in the past few weeks that she’d lost count.

Knowing how much she turned him on had turned *her* on, and she didn’t think she could get enough of him.

“You want me touching here?” she asked, rubbing her middle finger down the center of her pussy. When he nodded, she ran circles around her clit, her back arching off the bed. “What about here? I’m so wet, Evan. Don’t you want to feel?”



Just as she started to slide her finger inside, she felt strong hands grab her ankles and yank her down to the edge of the bed.

Evan was between her thighs before she had a chance to lift her head, her legs hanging over his shoulders once he'd dropped to his knees. The grip he had on her hips was unyielding, and he pulled her in so close she could feel his breath.

"I'd rather fucking taste" was all she heard before his mouth was on her.

Her hips bucked in surprise, but she couldn't get away from him if she wanted to. And fuck, she didn't want to.

His tongue ran up and down her slit, licking and sucking every drop of arousal before thrusting inside. She couldn't stop the cry that escaped her, and reached down to thread her fingers through his hair. The intensity was almost too much, but the more she tried to push him away, the tighter he held on to her, his tongue never letting up.

Giving herself over to the pleasure, she raised her hands over her head and stretched her body out for him to do as he pleased. When his warm palms moved over her sides, she arched her back, pushing into them. A moan escaped her throat at the sheer satisfaction of being devoured in such a way. His tongue was avaricious as it slicked over her to her swollen clit, and he flicked and sucked on it, causing her entire body to tremble.

A low, throaty rumble came from Evan as he continued to sample her as if she was the most delicious thing he'd put in his mouth that evening, and when his hands cupped her breasts and he pinched her nipples, Reagan just about lost her fucking mind.

"Evan," she moaned, and barely recognized the pleading sound coming from her mouth. She never begged, but fuck, she was ready to sell her soul to get him up her body and his cock deep inside her.

His mouth left her sensitive flesh, and as she raised her head to look down at his shiny, wet lips, she knew not only was her body his in that moment, but so was her heart. She'd wanted this man as a boy—a crush she could never forget—and as a man, she was desperate for him.

Bringing her hands down to where his were still shaping and molding her breasts, she squeezed them against her chest and told him boldly, “I need you inside me.”

Evan's intense gaze trailed over her, and as he lowered her legs to the floor and started to crawl up the bed over her, Reagan scooted up until her head hit the pillow.

In that moment, the spark in Evan's eyes darkened, becoming one full of focus and determination. That was when she was reminded that underneath the sophisticated front he presented to the world resided a man who was always a slave to his carnal side.

When he was hovering over her with their faces only inches apart, she watched him lick her juices from his lower lip and give a deviant smile.

“So you want me...” He paused, and when she felt the tip of his cock brush against her soaked core, her eyes fluttered closed and she reached up to grip his arms. “Here?”

She bit the inside of her cheek, trying to hold back a cry of frustration, and when he moved over her, sliding his length against her clit and mound, she couldn't help but bow off the bed and push her body against him.

“I didn't hear you, Reagan.”

She opened her eyes, and before she could tell him *yes* or *now*, he lowered his face to the crook of her neck and bit her earlobe.

“I'm going to fuck you so hard, Ms. Spencer, that come Monday, you'll have no problem remembering that I gave it to you *without* any expectation of receiving in return.”

As his explicit words filtered through her mind, she was reminded of her “professional” email responses last week. She turned her head on the pillow, about to reply when she

was flipped over onto her stomach, her hands sliding against the prints strewn underneath her.

*Oh shit...*

He grabbed her waist and pulled her up onto her hands and knees. “You might wanna hold on to your headboard.”

Reagan reached for the top of the filigree headboard, wrapping her hands tightly around it before pushing her ass out toward Evan. “Do your worst.”

There was a sting of pain on her right ass cheek as Evan bit down before his tongue swept a soothing pass across it. His hand moved between her legs, and he wet his fingers with her slick heat before slipping one inside. Reagan clenched around his finger and pushed back against him. “More.”

“So fucking greedy,” he murmured against her other cheek before biting that one at the same time he slid a second finger inside her.

As she rode his fingers, he licked a trail up her body—her ass, her hips, her lower back, following her spine all the way up to her neck, where he gently nipped the skin with his teeth. “How can someone so naughty taste so fucking sweet?”

Reagan moaned, and her hand left the headboard to grab his free one, wanting to feel his strong touch on her breast while his fingers moved inside her. Her head fell back on his shoulder, and his hand moved from between her thighs before replacing it with the tip of his cock, teasing her swollen lips.

“Yes,” she said, breathless, and impatiently pushed back against him. “I thought you were gonna *give* it to me. Fuck me, Ev—”

Before she could finish her sentence, he shoved hard inside her, causing her to cry out and brace herself with both hands back on the headboard. One of his arms wrapped around her waist, holding her flush against him, while the other pinched her hardened nipples with every thrust he made.

Reagan bit down on her lip, trying to hold back the scream she felt building inside her, and every time his cock

slid out of her body she felt her pussy tighten around him in an effort to make him stay.

Evan placed his mouth to her ear, and as his tongue flicked her earlobe, she took a hand from the frame and reached down to stroke her clit. She was so close she could feel her knees trembling with every powerful drive of his body into hers, and when he whispered in her ear, “Your cunt is practically strangling my dick, Reagan,” she felt a wicked smile tug at the corner of her mouth.

She dipped her fingers lower, and this time when he pulled out of her, her fingertips brushed the underside of him, making him groan in her ear.

“Fuck,” he said, and rammed back into her before rasping, “Use your nails.”

Knowing him as well as she did, Reagan wasn’t shocked in the least that he wanted the sting of pain with his sex—hell, right then so did she—so this time when he pulled out of her she used her nails on him as requested.

“Yes,” he groaned, and then fucked into her once more. “*Again.*”

She repeated the move, and continued until he picked up the pace and she could no longer support herself with one arm.

Grasping the headboard, she felt his hands move to her waist and his lips leave her ear as he started to plow into her. One of his hands smoothed up her back to her shoulder, where he gripped and held her in place right before her pussy tightened around him and her orgasm hit, causing her to scream his name so loudly it was likely her neighbors heard.

But he wasn’t done, and when she was left panting, he pulled out of her and turned her around.

“On your back.”

Without hesitation, she lay down, the images beneath her now sticking to her damp skin, and he moved a little ways down the bed, rolling the condom off. Once she was in place,

he shifted between her thighs and reached down to dip his fingers in her juices.

Reagan felt her mouth part on a sigh at the touch to her sensitive flesh, and watched as he wrapped his drenched fingers around his cock and started to stroke himself. He looked at her face intently as he pumped his cock through his tight fist.

She opened herself wide and continued to watch, enraptured by the rawness of the moment. He was a man desperate for release, and she wanted to be the one to give it to him.

The muscles in his arms bunched, and the corded veins on his neck stood out as he gritted his teeth and, with a shout, came spectacularly all over her stomach and breasts.

As he looked down at her, he ran his fingers over the sticky fluid on her body and then gave her an arrogant-as-hell smile.

Right then she knew that, regardless of what her mind was telling her, she'd continue to push those warnings aside to indulge in Evan James—her own guilty pleasure.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SHE'D WOKEN UP draped across Evan's chest with his arms wrapped around her. It should've terrified her. She never brought a man back to her place, much less had a sleepover.

But there he'd been—his warm skin under her cheek and the steady rise and fall of his chest lulling her back to sleep. Her first thought upon waking had been the realization that she hadn't had a dream. Or a nightmare.

*Probably because he is both of those things all tangled up in my sheets.*

Reagan had lingered there awhile, letting herself imagine that this was a common occurrence. That he was hers, that she always woke up curled against him. His face looked so peaceful as he slept, and she lay there letting her fantasies take over.

But as the rising sun began to filter through the curtains, reality set in. She couldn't let herself get too attached, but she feared she already was.

He'd slept awhile longer, and she'd quietly gotten up to take a shower, fully expecting him to be gone when she got out. To her surprise, not only was he still there, but he was half

naked in his pants from the night before, and standing in her kitchen casually sipping coffee.

With only a towel wrapped around her, she walked out, and just like last night, his eyes raked over her. She eyed the mug in his hand and the one he'd set out on the counter for her.

“You made me coffee?”

“Well, I couldn't drop the ball even on a weekend, now could I?” He grinned at her before lifting the mug back to his lips. She let her eyes trail over his bare chest and ripped abs, and when she got to the unbuttoned pants, she quickly brought them back up to his.

*Jesus, he's even sexier with morning stubble.*

She made her way over to the counter, still holding her towel in place, and poured some of the fresh brew into her cup. Turning back around to face him, she said, “You never fail to impress, Mr. James.”

“You don't need to hold that,” he said, eyeing the firm grasp she had on the top of her towel. “I wouldn't complain if it happened to fall down.” He set his mug down and walked over to her before placing his hands on the counter on either side of her.

And suddenly, she was nervous. He was too close, too nice, too...*fuck*, too mouthwatering. She hadn't been expecting this version of Evan after their night together, and some part of her knew that if she let her guard down now, she'd never recover from the inevitable letdown.

She cleared her throat and said, “Well, I've got somewhere to be, so it's probably best if I keep this on.”

“Ah.” He nodded but then leaned into her neck and whispered, “I'll let you make it up to me another time. I want you wet and just like this. Because you're sexy as fuck in that towel.”

He pushed away from her then and winked before going to get dressed, and she quickly threw on a pair of jeans

and a tank top before taking a seat on the barstool to watch him.

As he shrugged into his white button-up, she realized how his body had changed over the last couple of months. He'd been muscular before, but his shoulders were broader now than she remembered, and his abs more defined. Damn, but she wanted to say fuck it and push him down on the bed to have her way with him again. If she did that, though, she wouldn't stop.

After he picked up his jacket, he sauntered over to the door, and she followed to see him out.

"You know, there is just one thing that's been on my mind this morning," he said, turning around to face her.

"Besides me in my towel?"

"Mhmm," he murmured, and took a step closer so she had to look up at him. "In our haste to...eat dessert, I didn't get something I really wanted. I didn't get my goodnight kiss, Reagan. And I'd really." He leaned toward her. "Really." Closer. "*Really* like one before I go."

Before she could think twice, she had him pushed up against the door with her mouth on his.

His lips parted immediately, and she slid her tongue inside. She wasn't about to tease him this morning, because God knew if she did that she would only drive herself more fucking crazy.

*No, best to go for the kill.*

Her nails clutched at his shirt as the coffee flavor hit her taste buds. He groaned and brought his hands up to her cheeks, holding her head in place as he tangled his tongue with hers and destroyed any brain cells she had left after last night.

Evan James sure knew how to pack a punch when it came to a kiss.

He wasn't timid or shy, he was a man who was confident in what he was doing—and there was nothing sexier



than someone who knew he could have you orgasming from a look or kiss if he wanted you that way.

Knowing she needed to pull back, to somehow regain the upper hand, Reagan pushed away from him, but not before letting out a soft sigh when his teeth grazed over her bottom lip.

“There,” he said as he drew a thumb down her cheek to her chin and then gave a light squeeze. “Now I can go about my weekend knowing my date was thoroughly pleased with her evening.”

Reagan stared up at him and couldn’t find one thing to say as she tried to fight off the arousal he’d once again ignited. But as he stepped around her and opened the door, she couldn’t help herself from turning to see him go. As he made his way to the staircase, he looked back at her and gave a wink, adding, “Very fucking pleased,” and she knew he was right—and so did her traitorous body.

\* \* \*

AS FAR AS Saturdays went, this one was fairly typical. She met up with Crystal at her apartment for brunch to catch up on anything that may or may not have happened Friday night.

In her case, what had most *definitely* happened Friday night.

She’d practically sped over to Crystal’s place, needing to tell someone all the dirty details. But first, Reagan knew she had some explaining to do. Armed with mimosas and a quiche from her favorite corner bakery, she’d turned up at Crystal’s condo with a guilty conscience and a need to unload it. But she also knew in the back of her mind that this was only the condensed version of the truth.

She wanted reassurance in what she was doing. She needed to know if she was crazy for letting Evan near her again when she didn’t do repeats, and, as usual, her friend had

told her straight up—yes, she fucking was, but if he was hot... throw the fucking rule book out the window.

*Yeah, really helpful, Crystal...*

The mimosas had helped, though, and she was feeling pretty damn good as she sat in the back of the taxicab later that evening, watching the people on the streets as they passed by. Maybe Crystal was right—what did it matter about rules and repeats if you were really into someone? If you couldn't stop thinking about them, then why should you care if you'd been there and done that before?

With a smile, she leaned back in the seat and thought it was actually a pretty damn good reason *to* repeat. And Evan did seem interested in pursuing whatever this was between them.

*Hmm...maybe...*

“Excuse me,” she said to the cab driver, and when he glanced over his shoulder, she thought for a second, *Am I really going to do this?* Before she could change her mind, she rattled off Evan's address.

As he changed direction, she sat there trying to calm herself down, but just like those times when she'd known Rocky would be coming to their house to visit, her heart was hammering in her chest.

*Christ, I feel like the same kid with a crush all over again.*

She smiled, thinking back to those days, and wondered if Evan would remember the young girl who'd watched after him with a dopey smile. When he'd mentioned last night that she reminded him of someone, she'd had the insane notion he'd figured it out, but he'd soon pushed it aside and hadn't brought it up since. So perhaps it was wishful thinking on her part that he'd somehow pieced it all together and realized they were supposed to meet again.

*God, what kind of sap am I.* She laughed at herself as the cab turned on to Evan's street.

As the car slowed to a stop by the curb, she saw Evan striding out of his building and getting into his SUV.

For a moment, she hesitated. Half of her figured he had plans and she should probably go home, but the other half guessed that he was probably heading out to a bar to unwind, like he had been lately, and maybe he'd like a little surprise to take home later.

“Could you follow that Range Rover, please?” she asked the driver. Realizing how stalkery that must sound, she said, “If you don't ask questions, I'll tip you extra.”

The man made a zipped-lips gesture and waited for Evan to pull onto the street before following a few cars behind. He kept pace with him, even through the busy Saturday night crowd, and continued to follow as the brightly lit high rises faded behind them and the streets became darker and less populated.

“Hey, uh, lady,” the cabbie said, glancing at her in his rearview mirror. “You want me to keep going?”

Her brow furrowed. “Why wouldn't I?”

“Eh. Not such a great neighborhood for a looker like you.”

Glancing out the window again, she noticed the buildings were a bit more run-down, and the streetlights seemed to flicker like a bad reception.

“I'm sure it's just a shortcut,” she murmured half to herself, wondering where the hell Evan was headed.

The man shrugged and kept driving, leading them down even further into an area that, in the pit of her stomach, Reagan knew couldn't mean anything good. She felt a gnawing unease, and she shifted restlessly in her seat, hoping like hell that any minute now, Evan would turn on to a main street, or head back to his apartment.

“Lady, I don't think you want to go down this road.”

“It's just a road.”

“Welllll,” he said, rubbing the back of his neck. “None of my business, but you’re followin’ this guy, and I don’t think you’re gonna like what you see.”

“I’m not paying you for advice, so please just drive the fucking cab,” she snapped, her anxiety taking over.

*Fuck*, this was a bad idea. She knew it, but she couldn’t stop now. She had to know.

Her gut churned as she watched Evan’s SUV slow to a crawl up ahead and pull alongside a curb where a group of women were gathered. Every one of them that she could see wore skintight dresses that couldn’t even really be called that—scraps were more like it. Even in the dim light, she could see the pounds of makeup on their faces and their motivated expressions at seeing a high roller pull up to their curb.

A woman stepped forward from the back then, almost as if she was called, and Reagan’s blood went cold. Long, dark curls spiraled down her back, and unlike the others, this one didn’t look the part of a skanky prostitute. Her heels were every bit as high as the others, but her dress was less revealing, almost as if she were going to a bar instead of working a street corner. Evan’s window went down, and the woman bent over, letting her elbows rest against the side of the car.

Reagan’s heart sank as she watched him finger one of her curls as they talked, and the nausea she’d felt pooling in her stomach made its way up her throat. She tried to fight it back, not wanting to open the door and be sick, exposing herself to Evan and his fucking whore.

Taking a deep breath through her nose, she bit out, “Go,” and the driver had enough sense not to comment or ask questions as he u-turned in the middle of the street and sped away.

*What an idiot I am*, she thought as she squeezed her eyes shut and tried to rid herself of the images burned inside her eyelids. *What a goddamn fool*.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

IT WAS OFFICIAL. Reagan had shut down.

As soon as she'd arrived home Saturday night, she'd turned her phone off, crumpled into a ball on her couch, and stayed there until Monday morning. There was no way she was ready to face leaving her apartment yet, so after calling Bill and giving a few pitiful coughs, she hid under blanket and tried to sleep away her reality.

When the sun rose on Tuesday morning, Reagan finally crawled her way to the shower, hoping she could wash away her thoughts of Evan as easily as she could the dried trails of mascara down her cheeks. The hot water was invigorating, and afterward, she even managed to eat a few bites of toast, though she chose not to make any coffee, since it reminded her of Evan standing there in her kitchen casually, as if he belonged there.

Maybe she'd switch to tea.

Her bed was still as they'd left it after their wild night, Polaroids strewn across the rumpled sheets, and the scent of him on every fucking inch. She grabbed at the pictures, fully

intending on throwing them in the trash bin and lighting every one on fire, but one photo stopped her.

Evan was sitting on her bed, looking up at her as she straddled herself over him, and the look on his face was so hungry, so...reverent. Holding it up closer, she wondered how she'd missed that hint of vulnerability from him underneath the sex-god exterior. He was looking up at her with an expression more than lust, and that made her heart ache.

*Why did he have to fuck it all up?*

Not quite able to let go of the photo, she walked over to her nightstand and stuck the film in between the pages of a hardcover novel and then turned back to face her bed. She ripped the sheets from the corners, gathered them into a ball, keeping the Polaroids inside, and then went to grab a trash bag.

After stuffing the material inside the plastic, she tied a double knot around the end, as if that would help keep the memories from escaping the confines. But it was no use; that explosive night was etched inside her mind for all time—unfortunately, so was the image of what came after.

*Goddamn him.*

She kicked the bag into the corner of her room and stared at her now empty mattress.

She never should have invited him here. Not to her home, not to her bed, and not inside her fucking heart.

The worst part of it all, though, was the fact that she had no one to blame but herself. Evan had never lied to her when it came to telling her who he was. He'd told her several times over that he was no good. He was in therapy for his problems, for fuck's sake.

*But no...like a stupid moron with a savior complex, I'd thought my magical pussy might change that.*

How on earth was she ever going to face him again? Not only that, but face him and act as if she hadn't followed him like a crazy woman and seen him conversing and God knows what else with a hooker.

As that word rolled through her mind, the nausea started again.

She needed to pull her shit together. She was Reagan Spencer, she had a kickass career, and she ate men for breakfast. She wasn't some lovesick, wilting flower who stayed at home eating ice cream over a guy...

Well, at least the last half was true.

She walked over to her dresser and looked in the mirror at her sad reflection, determined to turn it around. She would not let Evan James control her emotions any longer.

Deciding a day at the spa might just help in revamping her overall attitude, she set out with one thing in mind. It was time to stop hiding from her past, from who she really was, and the first thing that had to go was the woman who'd taken Evan into her home and bed this past Friday night.

It was time for a brand-new start.

\* \* \*

“WOW, MS. SPENCER, you look great,” Amy said as Reagan sauntered into the lobby of Kelman Corporations on Wednesday morning. With a facial and a new 'do to match, she felt confident and reenergized. At least on the outside. She was still waiting for the inside to catch up a bit, but she planned to fake it till she made it.

“Thank you, Amy. Is Bill in yet?”

“Yes, ma'am, he arrived about twenty minutes ago.”

Reagan gave an acknowledging smile and pushed through the main entrance, not bothering to drop her things off before knocking on Bill's office door.

“Come in,” he called out.

When she walked inside, Bill looked up and gave an appreciative whistle. “Now there's the Reagan I haven't seen for years.”

“Well, I thought it was time for a change. Do you approve?”

“I do. The blond was nice, but you know I’m a sucker for a brunette.” He winked and set his pen down. “You feeling better?”

Taking a seat in one of the chairs in front of his desk, she set down her briefcase and said, “I am. Just a bit of a head cold. Made things foggy for a few days.”

“I see.”

She crossed her legs and folded her hands in her lap, carefully choosing her next words. “I just wanted to check in with you regarding Evan’s probation. You said to let you know when he’s ready to fly solo. I think now is the perfect time.”

Bill raised his eyebrows. “No doubts about his ability to provide superior performance without your supervision?”

*Oh, I have no fucking doubts about his unsupervised performances without me.*

“None whatsoever.”

“Hmm.” Bill leaned back and rocked in his chair, and Reagan struggled to keep her face nonchalant under his scrutiny.

“I’ve spoken with several of the high-profile clients he’s been working with during his time here, and even those he left on disagreeable terms have all agreed that he’s proven himself more than capable of handling their accounts.”

“So it’s time to kick him out of the nest and see how he flies.”

*Oh, I’d love to kick him, all right.*

“I think that’s best for everyone.”

Narrowing his eyes, Bill asked, “And that’s what’s best for you too?”

“I don’t think Evan needs me watching his every move any more, and honestly, I’ve got a full plate as it is. He’ll be just fine.”



A few silent moments passed, and then Bill inclined his head. “I’ll have the paperwork drawn up today and let him know.”

She stood, picked up her briefcase, and headed to the door. As she opened it, she turned back and saw Bill giving her a fond smile.

“I really do like the hair. And your dad is gonna love it.”

With a soft laugh, knowing he was right, she waved and walked out the door, calling, “Thanks, Bill.”

\* \* \*

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, Reagan was seated at her desk and sorting through her inbox. Her first task had been deleting the email reminders from Mr. James last week. No need to keep them around as evidence of her lack of judgment.

She then moved on to the overwhelming amount of junk she had to sift through. That was the one downside to taking days off—the monumental task of catching up. After deleting what wasn’t needed, she was just about to click open a request for a meeting from their clients over at Whitehead International when there was a brisk knock on her office door.

She called out for the person to come in, and reached for her phone to dial the company’s number.

As Evan entered, he stopped in his tracks when he caught sight of her, and then looked around the room before letting his eyes fall back on her.

“Oh...I’m sorry, I was looking for Ms. Reagan Spencer. Have you seen her?”

The humor in his voice surrounded her, and when Reagan locked eyes with him where he stood, she steeled herself against what was to come. Without cracking a smile, she looked back to the phone and told him, “She’s busy. Do you need something, Evan?”

She knew she sounded waspish, and hated that she couldn't play it cool, but the minute she'd seen him her intentions of being the put-together woman who didn't give a damn flew out the window.

"I can come back," he said, and she heard him walking farther into the office.

"I'm going to be tied up all day today. Is there something specific you wanted?"

"Speaking of ties—"

"We're not speaking about ties."

When he stopped in front of her desk, she willed herself to put on her best impartial face and glanced up at him.

"*Okay*...well, to answer your initial question, I don't need anything in particular, no. But I've been trying to reach you for the past three days, and all I got was your voicemail. If you hadn't come in today I was going to send out a search party."

She pushed a piece of hair behind her ear and explained as quickly and impersonally as possible, "I've been sick. I slept the last few days. That's all."

"Sick, huh? Well, for someone who's been sick as a dog, you look fucking stunning."

She tried not to let his compliment go any deeper than the surface, but could feel it seeping through the cracks of her resolve. She needed to get away from him—now.

"Thanks. Just thought I'd switch things up a bit. If that's all..."

She could see in his eyes that the wheels in his mind were turning, trying to work out why she was doing everything she could to get rid of him, but instead of asking, he gave a slight smile and started to back away.

"Okay, I can take a hint. But for the record, your hair looks great that dark. Really suits you."

As he left the office and shut the door with a soft click, she had to wonder if he realized he'd seen her hair that way many times before.

\* \* \*

MID-AFTERNOON, REAGAN made her way down the hall toward Katrina's office with the files she'd requested on the client she'd met with yesterday. She was almost there when Evan stepped out of his office, closed the door behind him, and aimed a smile her way.

"Just the lady I was coming to see. I'm heading out to get some lunch and wondered if you'd like to join me. I promise we can eat with utensils this time."

With the reminder of their date front and center, Reagan found it close to impossible to remain neutral as she shook her head. "No, I'm good. Just going to eat in today."

Evan's smile vanished at her refusal, and as he took a step closer toward her, she chanted over and over in her mind, *Do not back up, do not back up. Stand your ground.*

"Then how about I pick you up some chicken noodle soup? You still seem a little..." He paused, and a frown formed between his brows. "Under the weather."

"I'm fine," she snapped, and when his eyes widened, she walked around him and muttered, "I'm just busy."

She didn't even bother to look behind her, instead choosing to march off and, without knocking, walk into Katrina's office—for the moment, her sanctuary.

*Fuck*, but why was he trying to be nice to her today? She didn't need nice. She needed douchebag Evan to come out to play so she wouldn't feel the trickle of guilt that kept trying to invade her thoughts. And why the fuck would *she* feel guilty, anyway? *He* was the filthy asshole here. She hadn't done anything wrong except fall into cliché territory by falling for the unredeemable, stereotypical bad boy.

If ever there was proof that her “no repeats” rule was one to live by, Evan’s actions that weekend were it. Tonight, she’d go out and find someone to take her mind off the last man she’d let inside her—and to reclaim her single and fucking fabulous status.

\* \* \*

NIGHT FELL AND Reagan was still at the office.

Even though she’d fully intended on going out that night, it was their busy season, and missing two days of work had put her further behind than she had anticipated.

It wasn’t helping that she couldn’t focus.

Instead, she was turned away from her desk, facing the large glass window that overlooked the city. In the distance, she could make out the Brooklyn Bridge, with the lights shining off it that only days ago seemed to dance across the sky, but now glared at her in mocking winks.

She sat there, drumming her nails against the arm of her chair and lost in thought for what could’ve been minutes or hours. It wasn’t until a knock on her door jolted her out of her thoughts that she looked at the time. It was well after everyone should’ve left the building, and she had been under the impression she was there alone.

The knock sounded again, and then the door opened and Evan peered around the corner, surprised when he saw her sitting there.

“I thought you’d snuck out hours ago,” he said as he walked inside, his jacket slung over the crook of his arm and briefcase in hand.

She cocked her head to the side, studying his face. Why did he have to have such a handsome face? He was by leaps and bounds the most gorgeous man she’d ever seen... and he was damaged beyond repair.

What would've happened if his parents hadn't gone away? If he'd had a normal childhood, if he'd had good influences in his life, if he'd been surrounded by people who loved and cared for him and had his best intentions at heart? Would he be the same man standing before her, or would he be a stronger one?

All irrelevant questions to be thinking at that moment, but she wondered them just the same.

Sighing, she shook her head. "*I have no reason to sneak anywhere.*"

"Well, you've been avoiding my good looks and witty repartee all day, so I assumed maybe you weren't feeling well and had to rush home."

"Do I look that fucking bad?" she snapped. As Evan's eyebrows shot up, she continued, "You keep saying I'm not feeling well. Stop saying that."

His hands went up in a defensive gesture. "Well, you mentioned you were sick, and you wouldn't answer your phone \_\_\_"

"I wasn't fucking sick!" she shouted, rising to her feet so fast her chair tipped behind her. "Unless you consider being nauseated for days over what I saw this weekend sick, and then yes, I was sick. Happy?"

The look on Evan's face was one of bewilderment, and he opened and shut his mouth several times before saying, "I'm a little confused, so forgive me while I try to keep up with you." He dropped his jacket and briefcase in one of the chairs in front of her desk and ran his hand through his hair. "We went out Friday, and I had the best fucking dessert of my life. Since I haven't seen or heard from you until you decided to resurface today, I have no fucking idea what you're talking about. Care to clue me in, Reagan?"

She could feel her blood begin to boil as her heart pounded in her chest. She wanted to leap across the desk and slap his lying face, and at the same time, she hated herself for that impulse.

“Tell me, Evan, since we didn’t get a chance to go over your therapy session this morning, did you and Dr. Glover have an extended visit this weekend? I’m sure after *both* of your late-night escapades you had several things you needed to get off your chest.”

As the words flew out of her mouth she saw his eyes narrow on her, as if he were trying to decide exactly what she was referring to.

*Yeah, God forbid you accidentally admit you fucked a whore to the woman you wined and dined the night before.*

He placed his hands on the back of the chair in front of him and leaned in before saying, in a tone that indicated quite clearly that he was becoming extremely aggravated, “I’m going to ask you again, since you seem to be skirting around whatever it is you *really* want to say. What the fuck are you talking about, Reagan?”

Any self-control she’d been hanging on to finally snapped in that moment as she decided to just lay it all out for him. What did she care if she came off unhinged to him? He was the one who—

“I saw you!” she spat out before she lost her nerve.

Evan cocked his head to the side and, in an infuriatingly calm voice, asked, “You saw me where?”

*He’s going to make me say it? Well, fuck him if he thinks I won’t.*

“Does a five-sevenish brunette in a red dress on the corner of Smith Street ring a bell, Evan?”

His hands flexed on the chair he was gripping before he quietly stated, “You followed me.”

“Does it matter? I saw you, not twelve hours after leaving my bed, trying to solicit a fucking hooker.”

“So let me get this straight: you’ve been stewing over this ‘secret’ of mine for the past three days, and today you’ve barely said two words to me because of it?” He straightened

and released the chair to rub a hand over his face. “Wow. That’s some fucking nerve.”

“I have nerve? Are you serious?” She couldn’t believe he wasn’t even trying to deny it.

“Not only have you not bothered to ask me if it’s true and just assumed the worst, but maybe we should also acknowledge that I’m not the only one in here keeping fucking secrets.”

Every argument she had in her head vanished in that instant. *What the hell is he talking about?*

“The brown hair is a nice touch, though not as curly as I remember. I have to say, I had my suspicions, *Jen*, but when you came in this morning everything just fell into place.”

Reagan opened her mouth, about to hotly deny what he was saying, but when he started to walk around the chair toward her, she decided moving the hell away was a better idea.

“Yeah...I had my doubts. I kept thinking, why would little Jenny Spencer go to such lengths to conceal the truth from an old friend?”

As Reagan’s mind swirled around the new information being thrown her way, she didn’t realize she’d reached the wall until her ass ran into it—and still, Evan kept coming for her.

“But then I started to remember...we were young back then, and there are a lot of details and facts that were over my head, but one thing I will never forget is that the year my parents ruined my life, they also destroyed my best friend’s family. The ones who’d taken me in and cared for me more than my own. How is Troy, by the way?”

*Oh God. Oh shit, shit...shit.*

“What?” he prompted. “Nothing to say now? Tell me, Reagan.” He stopped in front of her, and when she wouldn’t meet his eyes, he tilted her chin up roughly. “Were you ever going to tell me? Or was this some kind of sick retaliation a long time in the making?”

“No,” she said, shaking her head.

“No, what? No, you were never planning on telling me, or no, you would never even consider the possibility of ruining my life for what my parents did to yours?”

“How could you even think that? We loved you—”

“Then why the ruse?”

“It’s complicated,” she started, and looked away.

“No, it’s not,” he said, pulling her chin back to face him. “At least look at me when you lie to me.”

She could feel the prick of tears behind her eyes, but she fought them back. “It’s not my story to tell.”

“And Bill? Where does he fit in with all this? That’s the one piece I can’t figure out.”

Her mouth clamped shut as his eyes bored into hers and he waited for a reply. He wouldn’t get one.

“Ah. More secrets.” He let go of her chin and backed away. The vulnerable expression from the photo she’d kept crossed his face then. His voice was quiet when he asked, “Was any of this real?”

Trying to speak past the lump in her throat, she managed to respond, “I thought it was.”

“And because of something you think you saw, you’ve changed your mind?”

“I know what I saw.”

His jaw ticked and then he gave a curt nod. Turning around, he picked up his jacket and briefcase and walked to the door, stopping when he reached it. “You know, Reagan,” he said, looking over his shoulder. “Even after I realized who you were, and even with all the possibilities of why you’ve lied to me...I still gave you the benefit of the doubt. I wish you could’ve had the same respect for me.”

And then he was gone.



Reagan's hand flew up to her mouth as she tried to muffle her cries, and she felt her knees begin to give out. Sinking to the floor, she gave in to the overwhelming ache and let her head drop to her hands. As she took a shuddering breath, she heard footsteps stop a few feet away from her.

“Reagan?”

As the sound of Bill's voice, not Evan's, hit her ears, her heart stopped and she looked up to face the man she'd never wanted to let down. The man looking at her now with sad, disappointed eyes.

“Oh, Reagan. What have you done?”

# PART *Three*

**“The world breaks everyone, and  
afterward, many are strong at the broken  
places.”**

**-Ernest Hemingway**

## CHAPTER TWENTY

“SO LET ME get this straight.” Dr. Glover lifted the end of his pen to his lips as his eyes narrowed on Evan over the top of his glasses. “The woman we’ve been discussing over the past few weeks finally shows you that she wants more, and you left her in an emotional heap in her office. Did I get that right?”

Evan stretched his long legs out in front of him. *She thinks I fucked a prostitute the day after I left her apartment, so, yeah, that’s about right.* Sighing, he leaned back into the worn leather couch. “You left out the part about her being a liar. And not someone I met in the last few weeks. She had an agenda.”

“So did you.”

“And what the hell was that?”

“You wanted to fuck her.”

“Jesus, you get right to the point, don’t you?”

“Well, that’s what you do. Isn’t it?”

*I thought it was until I became obsessed with a leggy fucking blonde.* Evan glared at the man whose eyes he swore fucking twinkled. “Even if it is, what therapist talks like you

do? I'm positive they don't teach you that in Patient-Client Relations 101."

"I've always been a firm believer in no bullshit. I told you that the day you walked in and tried to lie to *me*. We aren't going to make any progress if you don't trust me and I don't trust you."

"Yeah, yeah, I know. You're just—"

"Yes, Evan?"

Evan waved him off. "Nothing. I guess I'm still trying to process the fact that Reagan is that little girl from so long ago. A whole fucking life ago. It's... I don't know," he said, running his fingers through his hair in frustration. "It's disconcerting. She knew me before."

"And that bothers you."

"Fuck yes, it bothers me. I was ten years old the last time I saw her. Innocent. And now I'm...this."

"You're awfully hard on yourself. I wonder if you're upset over what you're saying or over Reagan thinking bad of you."

And there it was. The truth he didn't want to admit. Reagan accusing him of being with anyone hours after he'd been with her had infuriated him. Which was ridiculous, because he knew what he was. The demons he'd been trying to fight. *Why would she assume anything but the worst?* But with that anger came embarrassment and shame. He hated that she'd seen him on that corner. Hated that she'd seen him with Layla. But how the fuck could he ever convince her otherwise? And why would he even want to?

"She's a liar," he said.

"And you're a sex addict. Fantastic pairing."

"You're not helping. What am I paying you for?"

"To listen. To talk you through your feelings and help you understand them."

“It could never work with Reagan,” Evan said. His eyes were on the ceiling, trailing the long, jagged crack that ran from one end to the other. As many times as he’d been there, in the impeccable home and office of Dr. Glover, he’d never noticed another flaw. That crack drove him crazy, to the point that he wanted to grab a caulk gun and a ladder and fix the damn thing.

“You know why I leave that there, don’t you?” Dr. Glover asked. When Evan’s eyes met his, he continued, “It’s metaphorical. You see a nice house, a nice facade. Everything seems perfect and in place. But if you look closer, you’ll find that everything has a flaw, Evan. Every person, every relationship, every job. So perhaps it’s not the flaws we should be focusing on, but the beauty of it all. In Reagan’s case, and I can only assume, of course, but I don’t think she was looking at your flaws when she accepted a dinner invitation from you. I believe she was remembering the boy she knew all those years ago. Which brings me to my next question. You said it could never work with Reagan. What can’t work with her? Work? Sex? A friendship? Or a relationship? Because until you know that, all you are going to see when you look at a crack in the ceiling is a crack in the ceiling.”

Evan stared at his therapist, speechless. He couldn’t remember the doctor ever having said so much in one sitting, let alone in the two or so minutes it had taken him to lay that all out on the table.

“Are you ready to admit that Reagan lying to you is not the biggest issue here?”

Evan clasped his hands in his lap for something else to do besides pull his hair out in sheer frustration over those words. “You know it’s not.”

When Dr. Glover merely nodded, Evan blew out a breath. “I wish I’d never gone to cut ties with Layla that night.”

“Then why did you?”

“Fuck.” He looked around the room. “Why don’t you have any alcohol for these deep discussions?”

“Evan.”

“Fine. There was something about her—”

“Layla?”

“Yes. Something familiar.”

“What did she look like?”

“She was, I don’t know, medium height... probably around five seven-ish, but she wore these skyscraper heels and tiny little—”

“Evan. Focus, please. What about her looks? Her hair? Eye color, that kind of thing.”

Evan drew his legs in and planted his feet flat as he leaned forward, resting his forearms on his knees.

“She had dark eyes, and—”

“Like Reagan, correct?”

“Lots of people have dark eyes.”

“But so does Reagan.”

“Right.”

Dr. Glover nodded and then gestured with his finger for Evan to continue.

“Where was I?”

“Layla had dark eyes and...?”

“She had curls. They were long and trailed down over her shoulders—”

“What color?”

“Huh?”

“What color were the curls?”

Evan frowned at him, and then a light bulb went off, and he started to shake his head adamantly. “No.”

“No what?”

“I know what you’re fucking thinking.”

Dr. Glover flicked back through the notebook in his hands and ran his pen down the page. Then he hummed and looked at him. “Your ex-girlfriend, Michele. She had dark, wavy hair and...dark eyes. Just like—”

“Don’t. Even. Say. It. Reagan had blond hair when I met her, so that has nothing to do with it.”

The doctor’s eyes shifted to the clock that hung on the wall behind him, and then he gave a nonchalant shrug. “Okay, well, I suppose it’s a good thing you don’t want to discuss it, because your hour is up.”

Evan’s mouth fell open, his jaw moving as he tried to get the words out. “Wait...what? You’re just going to send me away after you drop that bomb in my lap?”

Dr. Glover stood from the chair and placed his notepad on the large desk in the corner of the room. “Well, you’re the one who said there was nothing to it. So, we’ll make sure to move on next time we see one another.”

“But—”

“Have a nice day, Evan.”

Evan pushed off his knees and stood. “You have a real sadistic streak.”

“All good therapists do.”

*Maybe that’s why I like you. You never hold back from giving me a good whipping when needed. Ass.*

Shaking his head, Evan said his goodbyes and walked out the front door. A cold wind slapped him in the face as he stepped outside, and he closed his eyes, taking a deep lungful of the bitter fall air. When he opened them again, his gaze fell across the street, at the spot Reagan had been standing one of the last times he’d been there. She’d been trying to hide, casually taking pictures of the East River. His heart had leapt when he’d seen her, dressed casually in yoga pants and with a camera slung around her neck. That day had been light and easy and had led to an even more eventful evening at the speed-dating event he’d tricked her into attending.



That seemed like a lifetime ago.

*There is nothing light and easy about where we are now*, he thought as he made his way down the stairs and onto the path that led to the train.

*And just where the fuck do we go from here?* He didn't have one good goddamn idea.

\* \* \*

REAGAN SAT SLUMPED over the bar top in her apartment, legs swinging off the stool, and slid the empty shot glass back and forth between her hands. A bottle of vodka sat half empty in front of her, and she debated whether it was wise to pour another shot.

*Ah, fuck it.*

She reached for the bottle and tipped another ounce into the glass. After shooting it, she cringed and grabbed a handful of peanut M&M's to cut the taste of hairspray to a minimum. Seriously. That shit tasted like Aqua Net.

It wasn't her thing to sit alone in her apartment and drink her feelings, but there was no way she was leaving her sanctuary. Knowing her luck, she'd run into Evan, since even in a city as large as the Big Apple, she still somehow managed to cross paths with him wherever she went. *And I'd just end up dumping my drink on him anyway, which would be a waste of perfectly good alcohol*, she thought as she popped another M&M.

The jingle of a key unlocking the front door had her sitting upright and alert, and then ever so slowly she leaned to the left to finger the top of the baseball bat she had standing against the wall behind the bar. She gripped the counter with her right hand so she wouldn't fall flat on her ass, and as the knob of her front door turned, she sucked in an anxious breath. She kept her eyes trained on the door as it was pushed open, and before she could think better of it, she got her fingers around the metal handle of the bat, hauled it up, and shouted at

the top of her lungs, “I have a gun, and I’m not afraid to use it, motherfucker!”

So what if it was a bat and not a gun? They didn’t know that. Well, not yet, anyway.

She slipped off the stool and raised the bat high by her ear and, for a split second, thought, *Smart move, Reagan—what if they have a gun?* And as that realization hit, she threw the bat to the ground and dropped to her stomach behind the bar.

“I don’t have any money—”

“Well, that’s a fucking lie right there. You have an apartment in New York City.”

Recognizing her brother’s voice instantly, she pushed up to her knees and then bounced up onto her feet. “Troy? What are you doing here?”

Her brother pulled the key from the lock, strolled inside, and shut the door behind him. “Apparently risking my life if you have a gun on you, Pistol Annie.”

Placing her hands on her hips, she blew a piece of hair that had fallen over her face out of the way. “I don’t *really* have a gun. I have a bat. I was trying to be scary.”

“To who? Your friendly neighborhood burglar that has a key to your apartment?”

“You do know I gave you that key for emergencies only, right?” She flopped back on the stool and gestured around the apartment. “Do you see an emergency anywhere?”

Troy looked at her and then at the spread of glasses, drinks, and food that lined the bar top. “Any reason you’re three sheets to the wind at”—he glanced at his watch—“three o’clock in the afternoon?”

“Five o’clock somewhere.” Reagan poured another shot and held it out to him.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me if you think I’m shooting vodka. Who does that, J?”

“Well, it was all that was in my freezer. It’s not like I do this on the regular.”

“What, you were all out of mouthwash? I’m sure that would’ve been a better alternative if you wanted to get wasted.”

“Who says I didn’t start there?” When he raised an eyebrow at her, she sighed. “Did Bill send you?”

Troy tossed his keys on the foyer table and took a seat next to her at the bar. “Can’t I just pay my little sis a visit when the mood strikes?”

“No.”

“Maybe I came because I missed Manhattan.”

“You hate the city.”

“Okay, maybe I had a little bird mention I should take a drive and come see you.”

“Little bird? Or maybe a big Bill bird?”

“Maybe that, yeah.” He ruffled her hair, and she smacked his hand away. “I like the brown, J. It’s more you.”

Groaning, she put her head in her hands. “It just made things worse.”

“Made what worse?”

“My whole life,” she wailed.

“Uh...aren’t you being a tad dramatic? If you hate it, change it back.”

She slapped her hands on the counter. “It’s not about the hair. It’s about—”

“So help me, if you say Evan—”

“Fucking Evan,” she said, reaching for her glass again, but Troy grabbed it before she could.

“What did I tell you?”

“Oh, don’t fucking say it. Don’t rub it in. If that’s why you came, do me a favor and march your wise old ass back to

suburbia.”

Troy twirled the shot glass between his fingers and took a moment to look around her small apartment. Reagan followed his gaze, and when hers landed on the overstuffed trash bag in the corner by her bed, she winced.

“Did you miss garbage day?”

*Of course he didn't miss that bad reminder.* “No. It's on Friday, for your information.”

“Hmm...”

“What's that supposed to mean?”

“What?” he asked, turning back to face her.

“The *hmm*?”

He shrugged and then flicked a finger over one of her brown curls. “The drinking, the hair, the waterworks I feel coming any second now, and the garbage bag neatly tied in the corner of your room. Yep, this has all the true signs of a classic boy meltdown, Jennifer-style.”

“Excuse me, I don't have boy meltdowns. I am an adult. I have mandowns. Manmelts. Shit. You know what I mean.”

“And on that note, I'm raiding your fridge for some real food.” Troy pushed off the stool and came back a few seconds later with slices of turkey, cheese, and bread.

“You still like it without mayo?” he asked, and she nodded before folding her arms on the bar and resting her chin on top of them. She watched him as he made them both sandwiches, extra turkey, and then warmed them in the microwave for ten seconds.

“You remember how I like them,” she said after taking a big bite.

“We only ate them like this every day after school. What do you think older brothers are for?”

Reagan wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. “I'm sure rescuing sisters from alcohol poisoning isn't in the

manual.”

“Nah, you’re not stupid. But I expect a full explanation when you finish that sandwich.”

She nodded and took another bite, both of them chewing in silence as the minutes passed. Finally, she pushed the plate away and laced her fingers together.

“I fucked up, Troy.” She sighed and then started to twist the ring on her middle finger. “I thought I could handle this—”

“Handle what? Evan?”

She tilted her head to face him and nodded. “Evan, working with him, Bill...everything. But all I ended up doing was hurting them. Both of them.”

Troy reached over and placed his palm on her back, rubbing it in a soothing way as he said softly, “I’m sure that’s not true.”

“Oh, it’s true, all right. I lied to Evan from the second I saw him again. I lied to you, when I said I could handle all of this. And the thing I hate the most, the thing I can’t stand, is that I lied to my fucking self. I never do that. I’m always...I don’t know, smarter than that.”

Troy opened his mouth to speak, but she didn’t give him a chance.

“You don’t have to say I told you so. I already know. And that’s why I’m so goddamned pissed off. I’m not one of those women who falls head over heels for some guy and does all this stupid shit. But here I am, drinking nasty-ass vodka, and for the first time since he walked back into my life, I don’t have any idea what to do next.”

“Well,” her brother said gently, almost as if talking to a wild animal, “maybe you need to ask yourself what you *want* to happen next.”

“I don’t know what I want to happen. That’s the whole problem.”

“You know what? I’d like to catch up with my old buddy.”

Reagan’s eyes widened as she shook her head. “No. Absolutely not.”

Troy stood and took her empty plate, placing it in the sink before turning back to face her. “What’s his address, J?”

“I’m not giving it to you.”

Troy crossed his arms over his chest and raised an eyebrow. “If you don’t, Bill will.”

Reagan pursed her lips and glared at him. “Low blow, brother.”

“I do what I must.”

She sighed, but walked over to a drawer in the kitchen and pulled out a notepad and pen. After scribbling down Evan’s address, she tore off the piece of paper and shoved it into his outstretched palm. As he closed his fingers around the written address, Reagan left hers there and looked up into her brother’s eyes.

“You’re not going to hurt him, are you?”

He scrunched his face in thought before giving her a wink. “Not too much, I promise.”

“Troy...”

“You worry too much,” he said, and shoved the paper in his pocket. Snatching the bottle of vodka off the bar, he shook his head and emptied the contents down the sink.

“Speaking of worrying too much,” Reagan said, “so do you.”

Troy picked up the keys he’d dumped on the foyer table and said over his shoulder, “See, that’s because we’re so much alike. So just think to yourself, if this situation was reversed, what would you do?”

As he opened the door and stepped outside, Reagan shouted at the top of her lungs, “That’s exactly what’s worrying me.”

But it was too late. The door had slammed shut, and Troy was gone, leaving her to cross her fucking fingers and hope Evan made it out of *that* encounter alive.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

*“OH GOD, RIGHT there.”*

A loud thump sounded from the other side of the wall where Evan sat reclined on his couch. And then another. Glancing at the clock, he noted that his neighbors had been at it for over twenty minutes now. He'd never heard them before, but for the past few days, it was as if they'd picked up where his sex life had stopped.

*“Harder, fuck!”*

“Jesus,” he muttered, turning up the volume on the television and then tossing the remote beside him. It should've alarmed him that his dick wasn't even hard because, normally, he'd get off on hearing a couple fucking. But his mind was elsewhere.

Reagan fucking Spencer. Or Jennifer. Whoever she was. He kept trying to consolidate her into one identity, but it was like shoving a square peg into a round hole; it didn't fit. The bold sex goddess couldn't be the same sweet girl he used to tease and chase around her backyard. The same one he'd assured there were no monsters under her bed after a particularly scary movie night.



Why had she come back into his life now? He'd mentioned to Dr. Glover that she had an agenda, but did he really believe that? Part of him did. The other—

A knock on his door had him jerking his head in that direction. No one had been buzzed up, so it had to be a neighbor.

*Thump thump.* And clearly it wasn't the neighbor next door currently on the receiving end of a different sort of pounding. The knock sounded again, and Evan stood up and kicked a pair of shoes out of his path as he headed for the front door. "Yeah, yeah, I'm coming."

After unlatching the chain, he swung open the door. His eyes went wide, and an "Oh fuck" left his lips before he grabbed hold of the frame and tried to push the door shut again.

A steel-toed boot wedged itself in the jamb, and as a firm hand on the outside pushed the door open, Evan found himself face to face with Troy Spencer.

"Is that any way to greet an old friend?"

Evan dropped his hand and stepped aside as Jennifer, *no, fuck*, Reagan's brother walked inside.

"Friends, are we?" Evan asked, keeping a wary eye on the man he hadn't seen in two decades. "Does that mean I'm *not* about to get a punch in the face?"

Troy stopped at the end of the small hall and looked back in his direction. "I don't know, do you deserve one?"

Evan shut the door and made his way toward yet another ghost from his past. He would recognize Troy anywhere, with his dark, closely cropped hair that was almost the exact same cut it'd been during grade school. The only difference about him now was the size of the guy. He'd always been tall, but shit, Evan didn't remember him being built like a brick house. Where it'd taken him several weeks to piece together who Reagan was, one glimpse at Troy and memories came tumbling back.

“I don’t know. Have you spoken to your sister lately?”  
Evan asked.

“Actually, I just came from J’s place.”

*J.* As the familiar nickname echoed through his head, it was just another reminder that Reagan wasn’t who she’d said she was. Deciding to hedge his bets, in case this was a random visit, Evan slid his hands into his jeans pockets.

“And how is Reagan?” He walked past Troy and into his kitchen, hoping to appear nonchalant, when he felt anything but. “Do you want a drink?”

“No, I—” Troy stopped talking as a loud thump hit the wall, and a “*Yes. Yes. Oh fuck yes*” filtered through his apartment. “Is that what I think it is?”

Evan opened his fridge and looked over his shoulder at his old friend. “If you think it’s a woman getting her brains fucked out, then yes, it’s exactly what you think it is. Beer?”

Troy’s face was comical as his eyes widened and his mouth fell open. “Uh, no thanks. How do you guys live in the city? I swear, this place would drive me fucking crazy. How about we go grab a beer? There’s got to be a happy hour somewhere around here, right?”

Evan shut the fridge door and made his way back to where Troy was still standing.

“You sure you aren’t going to drive me somewhere and kick my ass?”

“You keep asking me questions like that, Rocky, and I’m going to think you’ve done something to deserve it. Now, do you want to go grab a beer or not?”

*Now that’s not a name I’ve heard for a while. Surely if he’s reverting to nostalgia, he’s not planning to knife me in an alley.* Evan snagged his keys off the kitchen counter and shrugged. “Why the hell not?”

\* \* \*

A WHISKEY SHOT and two beers later, and Evan's shoulders had finally relaxed. They'd circled around the hard topics, catching up instead on the latest Mets lineup (verdict: another losing year), arguing over which Pink Floyd album was better, and Troy's family. He'd married their classmate, Wendy, and popped out two kids already. For some reason, it blew Evan's mind that they were old enough to actually have families of their own. A stir of longing in his gut had him taking another swig of his beer. Troy seemed like he was in a good place. Steady job, the wife, two kids, and the damn white picket fence.

*And where am I? Sitting in a bar, single, and wondering if my last date's brother is about to knock me out at any minute. On the plus side, at least I have a steady job and don't want to take the waitress out the back and fuck her through the wall.*

"You might have guessed by now I want to talk to you about J."

*Yeah, no shit.* "You mean you didn't drive all the way into the city to shoot the shit with me and catch up on old times? That hurts, Troy. It really hurts."

"Yeah, it hurts so much you haven't bothered looking me up in over twenty years."

As Troy's words sank in, their past, and the wrongs his family had done to his friends, came barreling back into Evan's mind. When he'd been carted off to live with his grandparents, he'd been upset that he'd had to leave his friends behind. But later, as an adult, when the truth of what had gone down became public knowledge, he felt a deep sense of guilt over his parents' betrayal of those he'd come to think of as a second family. *How could I call him, knowing what I'd done? No, not what I'd done. What my fucking parents had done.*

"People drift apart," he ended lamely.

Troy's brow winged up and he lifted his beer bottle to take a swig. "That's your story?"

“Yep, and I’m sticking to it.”

“Fair enough, then,” Troy said, and took a peanut out of the bowl sitting between them. He popped it in his mouth and then turned his head toward Evan. “Let’s talk about J.”

*And here we go...*

“She was in pretty rough shape when I saw her earlier.”

Evan cursed. “I never wanted to make her cry.”

“Oh.” Troy chuckled slightly. “You didn’t. By rough, I meant she was sitting at home shooting vodka.”

Evan shuddered at the thought of that.

“Care to tell me what happened between the two of you?”

“Not really,” Evan said, and then glanced at Troy out of the corner of his eye. “But I have a feeling you won’t take no for an answer.”

“You’d be right about that.”

Evan picked at the label of his beer and then pushed back in his seat. “Let’s just say...I didn’t realize Reagan was little Jenny Spencer until very recently.”

“And that would make a difference, why...?”

“It’s just a little suspicious. Hell, I thought the gorgeous woman I took back to my apartment that first night was just someone random, and come to find out, it’s Jen. The girl from the family my parents fucked over.”

“Wait a second—are you telling me you took my baby sister home the first night you met her?”

“What? Oh...no, I mean...well, technically, but that doesn’t have anything to do with the fact that she sought me out on purpose. She knew who I was, arranged the job at Kelman, and has been playing me this whole fucking time.”

Troy shook his head and laughed. Took a swig of his beer and then laughed some more. “You’re kidding, right? You think she’s got some malicious intent here? This is the girl that

followed you around like a puppy when we were younger. She worshipped the ground you walked on. Still does, probably, but don't tell her I said that."

"Uh...are you trying to tell me that Reagan's been doing all this to what? Get back into my life? That seems a little extreme."

"Speaking of extremists, I don't want you to think this little chat we're having is me giving you my blessing or anything."

Evan frowned and opened his mouth to ask what the fuck Troy thought he needed his blessing for in the first place, but then his old buddy continued.

"I know you have a shit ton of baggage you need to clean up, dump out, or do whatever it is you're doing to fix it. But J...she's a good girl, Evan. She's grown into an amazing woman, one any lucky bastard would be proud to call theirs." He paused and sized him up where he sat, and for the first time since they'd arrived, Evan felt self-conscious. "For some reason, she's set her sights back on you. The question is, are you going to man up, or be a chump and walk away?"

Though the chump option sounded like the easiest way to go, the thought of anyone else touching Reagan made Evan want to strangle the anonymous fucker with his bare hands.

"From the look on your face, I'm assuming walking away is unlikely, so I will only say this once, Rocky. Don't fuck this up. You hurt my little sister, and there are not enough whiskey shots and beer chasers in this world to make us good. You got me?"

Evan tipped back the rest of his beer and raised his bottle. "Yeah, I got you."

\* \* \*

REAGAN ANSWERED HER phone the second her brother's number lit up the screen.

“You didn’t kill him, did you?” she asked, only half joking.

Troy’s laugh filtered through the line. “Nah, but he’s in pretty bad shape in the alley behind Cedric’s Bar.”

“What?”

“Relax. He’s home and all tucked in.”

She sank onto her couch and curled her legs underneath her. “Sure he is. Where are you?”

“On my way home. Just wanted to let you know.”

“Wait, wait, wait. Where did you go? What happened?”

“We just grabbed some beers and shot the shit. You know. Guy stuff.”

“Bullshit. What did you talk about?”

“The Mets.”

“And?”

“Wendy and the kids.”

“And?”

“Pink Floyd.”

“Jesus Christ, Troy,” she said, ready to chuck her phone out the window. “What else?”

“Well, he did mention your first date, if you want to call it that.”

“Our first date? At the restaurant in Brooklyn?”

“Oh no, J. At his apartment.”

“His apar—” *Oh God.* Heat crept into her cheeks, and she mentally cursed that jackass. Pulling the phone away from her ear, she bit down hard on her lip and counted to ten. What the hell was Evan playing at talking about their sex life?

“J? Jen, you still there?” The sound of her brother’s voice had her putting the phone back to her ear.

“I’m here. And he must’ve been thinking of one of the many other women he’s brought back to his apartment.”

“Cut the shit, little sis. I really don’t wanna hear about all that.”

“That makes two of us.”

“You know,” Troy said, “it was good to catch up with him. I always wondered what happened after he moved away.”

“Troy…” she said with a growl.

“Yes?”

She threw her hand up. “Did he talk about *me*? Fuck, give me something here.”

“It’s not all about you, Jen,” her brother playfully admonished. “But yeah, he might’ve mentioned something. I can’t say what, though, since I’m sworn by guy code not to say anything.”

“What? What about sibling code? Blood thicker than bros or hos or whatever the saying is.”

“Sorry, my lips are sealed.”

“I’m telling Mom.”

“Too old for spankings now. Guess you’ll live.”

“I’m not sure *you* will when I get done with you,” Reagan said, kicking her legs out in front of her and pouting.

“I get the impression that Evan’s not going anywhere anytime soon.”

“Why?” she asked, clinging to the comment like it was a lifeline. “What makes you say that?”

There was a long pause, and as she scooted forward on the couch, she brought one of her hands to her mouth to bite on her thumbnail.

“Let’s just say when I mentioned walking away, he looked as if he wanted to deck me for even putting it out there as an option. I don’t know everything that went on between the two of you, but I think he’s starting to realize just how

much he cares. Hang in there, J. The old Rocky, he's in there somewhere."

She opened her mouth to respond, but before she could get the words past the lump in her throat, Troy had already ended the call.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

MONDAY MORNING CAME around, after what had been the longest weekend Reagan could remember. Even though Crystal had forced her out of the apartment for what she called “shopping therapy,” all she could think about was what awaited her when she went back to work. Between that, and checking her phone every five minutes for a missed call or message, she’d practically driven her best friend crazy.

As she stepped into the elevator at the building that housed Kelman Corporations, the uneasy flutters in her stomach warred with the small flicker of hope in her chest. Evan would be there today. Would he talk to her? Look at her? Give her death glares and tell her what an awful human being she was? Or would he act like nothing happened at all?

*Jesus, pull it together, Reagan. Stop overthinking.*

Stepping onto the twelfth floor, she was greeted by a smiling face.

“Good morning, Ms. Spencer. Still loving the hair,” Amy said as she handed her a stack of messages. “Mr. Kelman asked to see you when you arrived.”

“Thanks, Amy.” Reagan flipped through the messages as she walked to Bill’s office.

She hadn’t spoken to him since he’d found her in a crumpled heap in her office days ago. Nothing needed to be said as she’d gathered her things, and he’d told her to take the rest of the week off.

She stopped outside of his office, and hesitated for just a moment. Brushing her left palm down the side of her skirt, she straightened her back, mentally preparing herself to walk into his office with her head held high. No way was he going to see the disaster he’d sent home last week. She’d done everything she could to get rid of her and bring back the strong, professional woman he’d hired all those years ago.

She knocked on the door and waited for him to respond. He called for her to come in, and she took a deep breath before turning the handle and stepping inside.

“Reagan. You’re looking lovely this morning. Come in, come in. Sit down,” Bill said from where he was seated behind his desk.

“How was your weekend?” he asked when she took the chair opposite him, and the hesitant look on his face made her smile.

“It was fine, Bill,” she said, and then leaned forward to whisper, “I’m fine too.”

He rocked back in his chair and interlaced his fingers. Twiddling his thumbs, he ran his eyes over her as if trying to decide if she were telling the truth or not. Having come to some inner conclusion, he nodded at her. “Good, good. So the little impromptu visitor...*helped*, would you say?”

Reagan sat back and crossed one leg over the other. “I’m not sure a visit from Troy does anything other than raise my blood pressure, but in this case...” She paused and thought back to the way they’d ended their call the other night. “In this case I think he might’ve actually helped. So thank you for calling him.”

“Right, right. As long as everything is better, and we can all get back to work.”

The mention of *we* made her heart start to thump. She knew exactly whom he meant by *we*, and wondered if Evan had arrived already. *Best to just ask and get it out of the way.*

“Is he already here?”

Bill didn’t have to ask whom, and just gave another quick nod. “We have a prospective client coming in at ten this morning, and I’d like for the two of you to sit down with them. If you’re up for it, that is.”

“Always. I’m assuming Evan has the file?”

“He does.”

She forced a smile as she stood and smoothed her skirt. “Well, I guess I should go track him down so we can set up the pitch.”

Bill rocked back in his chair. “You should.”

Though his expression was impassive, she knew him well enough to know there was something he wasn’t saying. *What is he up to...* “Is there anything else?”

When he shook his head, Reagan scooped up her briefcase and said her goodbyes before shutting the door behind her. She stopped at her office to drop off her belongings, and then pulled a compact out of her purse to make sure her hair and makeup were in place. Then she tucked her shirt tighter into her skirt, rearranged her pearl necklace, and forced a few deep breaths to calm her jackrabbiting heart. *Stop stalling...*

A quick look at the clock had her legs moving. They only had a couple of hours before the prospective clients came in, so it was already crunch time to get familiar with their company.

Evan’s office door was open, and she hesitated just outside it before heading inside. He was seated in one of the guest chairs in front of his desk, which he’d turned to face the

other, and his head was down over the notepad he was scribbling on.

A long lock of dark hair fell over his forehead, and had Reagan been any closer, she would've pushed it back off his face. He had on her favorite navy suit today, not that he would've known. It was the one tailored to his body so perfectly, and with the matching vest and the crimson tie, it made him look like a million dollars.

*No. Think professional. He doesn't look attractive at all in that ugly-ass suit. Really.*

Rapping her knuckles on his door, she lingered on the edge of his office until he looked her way. When she entered, he stood up and motioned to the chair in front of him.

\* \* \*

EVAN WATCHED WITH wary eyes as Reagan made her way into his office. He'd gotten there early, wanting to prepare himself for when she arrived. He needed time to get himself in the right headspace. Time to deal with the reality of coming face to face with the woman he now knew to be the young girl from his past.

It wasn't the easiest adjustment to make, thinking of the sexy-as-fuck woman who'd straddled his lap and taken Polaroid shots of their night in her bed as the same girl who used to chase him around her backyard.

He knew if he'd run into her right off the elevator, he would've been tripping all the fuck over himself to keep things polite, and that wasn't what he wanted coming back to work today. He needed things to get back on track. This was his shot at reinventing his career, of actually creating something good in his life. *Plus*, he thought, as she made it to the chair and took a seat, *I'm a professional, damn it.*

"Good morning," she said, and looked up at him expectantly.

*Sit down, you fucking moron. She's waiting for you to sit down.*

Evan took a seat and made sure to keep his eyes on her face as she crossed her shapely legs, one over the other. The same legs that had wrapped around his hips when he'd been fucking her hard into her mattress.

*Now speak.*

“Good morning,” he said.

He didn't want to be the first to break eye contact, so he was happy as hell when she lowered her eyes to the notebook she had in her hand. She fiddled with her pen for a moment, tapping it against the paper, and it gave him a feeling of satisfaction to know that she was obviously feeling just as uncomfortable as he was. Not that she'd ever admit it. Nor would he.

“Bill said you'd already stopped by and picked up the file for this morning's meeting.”

Evan kept his eyes on her, letting them fall to the elegant string of pearls draped around her neck, and when he realized they were the exact same ones that'd been in the photo of her that he'd once used as...*inspiration*, his leg started a nervous bounce.

*Yeah, that's just what you need, dickwad. To remind yourself of a frustrating night with your mattress and a Ziploc bag.*

He put his fist on top of his thigh, as if he could hold it the fuck still, and then held out the manila folder in her direction.

“Yes. I've just been running over it. Taking down some notes on what they may want to do to maximize their profits.”

Reagan reached for the folder, and when he didn't immediately let it go, she glanced at him and raised a brow. “Do you want to, I don't know, let it go, maybe?”

Her choice of words seemed to hold a double meaning, and he couldn't help the curl of his lip when he replied, “I

don't know. Do you?"

Her brown eyes narrowed on his, and he could've sworn a flame flashed through them as she said, "I'm not the one holding on to things," and yanked her hand back, taking the file with her.

Evan sat back, slightly more comfortable now that she was on edge, and gave her a minute to flick through the file.

It was obvious from her words just now that she was not over the events of last week, and this polite attempt to walk into his office like nothing happened was total bullshit. Thank God for that, though, because his act was just as fucking pathetic.

Who did he think he was fooling trying to act like an hour of preparation time before seeing her would make a damn bit of difference? He'd thought about nothing else but her since the moment he'd walked out of the office last week, and there was no way this was going to stay polite or professional—even if it was done in a passive-aggressive, fuck-you kind of manner.

He crossed his leg over his knee and clasped his hands together, and when she kept her eyes glued to the papers in front of her, he said, "No. Your specialty is jumping to the wrong conclusions, so I think you should definitely study up there and make sure you know all the facts before you make an assessment of the situation."

Reagan's head snapped up, and it seemed as if she was about to comment and then thought better of it. Shutting her mouth, she looked back at the file in her hands.

"I think a higher price point would be best, making them more exclusive—"

As Evan shook his head, her eyes flicked up to his.

"What?"

"I think that's the wrong direction," he said.

"You want to go lower?"

*Don't answer that.*

He cleared his throat and tried to think of something non-sexual to say, but when nothing sprang to mind, he went with one word. “Yes.”

“Hmm.” She flipped through the notes, and said, “Well, we’ve got some time to hash it out, so tell me what you’re thinking.”

*There’s not enough time to hash out what I’m really thinking,* he thought as he took advantage of her focus being elsewhere and let his eyes roam over the swell of her breasts underneath her white blouse. It was tucked into a tight pencil skirt that showcased the flare of her hips, and he had to dig his nails into his palm to snap his mind out of mentally undressing her.

“All right,” he said, keeping his eyes on his notepad. “Let’s do it.”

\* \* \*

TWO HOURS LATER, they’d come to an agreement on the pitch. When the knock on his door alerted them that the CEO from Allendale had arrived, Reagan stood and readjusted her pearls. Evan followed her to the boardroom, and as they walked in, they greeted the gentlemen before them.

“Mr. Blake, so nice to meet you,” she said, shaking the hand of the CEO.

“We’ve heard you two are among the best in your field, so thank you for meeting with us.” The man smiled, his grin crinkling the deep lines around his eyes. “And this is Charles Brigham, my VP.”

“Thanks, gentlemen,” Evan said after greeting the men. “If you’ll have a seat, we’ll show you how we’re going to turn your business around.”

Mr. Blake’s brow shot up, and he nodded in approval. “I like that mindset. I assume you’ll be running lead for us?”

Reagan looked at Evan, expecting to hear him explain they would *both* be running the numbers, when lo and behold, the man had the audacity to pat Mr. Blake on the back and say, “Of course. I have some ideas I think you’re really going to like.”

*Oh, is that right, Mr. James? You have some ideas? You’re going to run the numbers...we’ll see about that.*

“Excuse me, Evan?” Reagan asked, her voice saccharine sweet as she grabbed his arm.

“Yes, Reagan?”

“You don’t mind if I start us off, do you?” she asked as she released him and took a seat, making sure to flash the long line of her legs in his direction.

A shadow of lust crossed Evan’s face. “Ladies first.”

*Typical man, letting his “head” think for him. I’ll take advantage of that.*

“Thank you,” Reagan said before turning to the men in front of them. “So, gentlemen. We understand you’re looking to revamp your Aqua Cool bottled water line and are looking for the best way to get more bang for your buck, if I may. Mr. James and I both agree that the best way to do that would be to *raise* the price by seventy-five cents, making it competitive with the other premier brands.”

She could feel Evan gaping at her out of the corner of her eye, but she continued. “To do that, you’ll want to rebrand, work with your advertising agency, possibly get a celebrity endorsement. In the long run, establishing yourself as one of the elite water companies in the world will get you a higher price point and more money in your pocket.”

Beside her, Evan coughed.

“Did you have something to add?” Reagan asked.

“I...uh. Well, that’s one way we could go,” Evan said slowly, as if carefully choosing his words. “Or, to give you another option, you could *lower* the price by twenty percent and make it competitive against the mass-market brands.



You're a brand people already know and love. If someone were to stop by a gas station and grab a water, they're gonna go for a brand they know at a price they can afford. High volume times increased sales equals a huge profit."

The two men across from them looked between Reagan and Evan with quizzical expressions.

"I see your point, Evan," Reagan said, keeping her face impassive. "Some people *are* happier with a low-end product. But that's the struggle; is it a low-end product with low-end quality? People know that a higher-priced brand will give them superior taste and satisfaction."

"Water is water—" he began.

"No. It's more than water." She could feel the line crossing from professional into personal, but God, she couldn't stop herself. Evan James was making her fucking crazy. After spending the past two hours in close quarters with him and keeping things strictly work-related, the feelings simmering beneath the surface were now a low boil on the fast track to spilling over.

"Reagan—"

"Yes, Evan?"

His eyes narrowed on her, and she could tell he was trying to work out what the fuck was the matter with her. Honestly, for one split second she wished the other men in the conference room weren't there so she could really let him have it. Instead, ever the cool professional, she took a calming breath and plastered a cordial smile on her face.

Over the next twenty minutes, she and Evan volleyed their points like two tennis pros at Wimbledon, each vying to score the most points with their client and come out on top. Facts and figures were laid out, and though Evan gave her a good run for her money, she had no doubt that hers was the better proposal.

"Gentlemen." She looked across the table at the CEO and VP. "It seems we've given you two great options this morning. Perhaps it would be best if you talk it over with your

advertising department and company accountants and work out which strategy is in your best interest.”

Evan shot to his feet as if she'd lit a fire under his ass, and then leaned in so close to her that the sleeve of his suit jacket brushed against her bare arm. He turned his head, and as his breath ghosted over her ear, she couldn't help the shiver that raced down her spine.

“What do you think you're doing?” he whispered, low enough that only she could make out his words.

Determined not to be intimidated by him, she pivoted, causing him to back up or have their lips brush one another. “I'm giving them what they came for. A choice, so they can make an informed decision.”

“Okay, Ms. Spencer,” the CEO said. “Charles and I agree you've given us two solid ideas here. We'll take this back and work the numbers and projections and give you a call within the week so we can move forward with whichever route we choose to take.”

Reagan noticed Evan's jaw tick as he clenched it shut, and she could tell it was killing him to bite his tongue. No doubt he was beyond pissed that she hadn't followed through on the original plan, and instead, the meeting had turned into some kind of fucked-up contest she was dead set on winning.

“That sounds fantastic, Mr. Blake,” she said.

“I have to say, the two of you seem very passionate about your jobs.”

Finally, Evan spoke up as he shook their hands. “You're spot-on about that. Let's do what Reagan here suggested, and take a few days. We'll get our detailed analyses over to you by the end of the day, each backing up our proposals, and from there you can make a more informed decision.”

Reagan had to stop herself from kicking him in the shins. *Do what I suggested? How fucking kind of him.*

She gathered up her paperwork as Evan did the same, and then they both silently made their way around the

conference table to show Mr. Blake and Mr. Brigham out. As they vacated the room, she stood there beside Evan and counted back from thirty, wondering if he planned to say anything about what had just happened. When it appeared he seemed indifferent, she reached for the door handle.

She got it open a few inches when he moved behind her and slapped his palm on the back of it, shoving the door shut with enough force that the sound would've echoed up the hall. She whirled around ready to ask him what the hell he thought he was doing, but she miscalculated how close he was standing, because when he took a step forward, her ass and back were flat against the door before she knew what was going on.

His eyes were wild as he lowered his arm and leaned forward. Then she heard the loud metallic click of the lock as it was engaged.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE EXPRESSION ON Reagan's face would've amused him if he hadn't been so irritated. She looked ready to hiss at him, like a wet cat, and as he ran his eyes down to her heaving breasts, it got him thinking of another wet pussy.

"Get out of my way, Evan."

He knew the uppity tone in her voice was meant to dissuade him, but it had the opposite effect. It made his cock hard as a fucking rock.

"Not until you tell me what the hell that was all about."

In true Reagan fashion, she didn't back down. She tilted her chin up and pinned him with annoyed eyes. "What was what about? We each presented our side of the argument. Nothing more, nothing less."

He raised the hand he had by his side and placed it on the opposite side of her head, caging her in where she stood. "You're full of shit. What got your panties in a twist back there?"

Her eyes flashed at him, and his gaze dropped to her mouth. She'd worn a clear gloss on her lips today, and the way

the glistened made him want to lean in and take a bite.

“I don’t have my ‘panties’ in a twist, thank you very much. What a totally sexist thing to say. Which, by the way, seems to be your mindset today. What’s next? You gonna throw me over your shoulder and take me back to the cave where I belong?”

“Now that sounds like a good goddamn idea. Maybe that’s what you need.”

Even as pissed off as he was that she’d had complete disregard for the plans they’d made in his office, he couldn’t stop the craving that took over when he was in close proximity to Reagan. *And fuck her for that.*

She narrowed her eyes at him and struggled to get free. When he didn’t budge, she leaned back against the door.

“So what happens now?” she asked, and then lowered her voice to a whisper. “Are you gonna fuck me against this door?” Her hand trailed over her hips and hovered between her legs, pressing against the tight skirt she was wearing. “Let’s not play games, Evan. Just move away. And then I’ll let you apologize.”

“Apologize?” He threw his head back in a humorless laugh and then looked her dead in the eye. “Okay,” he said, leaning closer, his voice dripping with disdain. “I apologize. I’m so sorry I took you home that first night. That I fucked you until you could barely walk out my door. That I’ve ruined you for every other cock out there. I’m so fucking sorry, Reagan. But most of all I’m sorry you’re such a fucking liar.”

“Fuck you,” she said, pushing hard against his chest, but he wasn’t about to let her go. His blood was boiling in the way that only she seemed to provoke.

He grabbed the hands shoving against him and pinned them over her head against the door. Then he took a step toward her and said in a low, raspy voice, “That’s the second time in as little as minutes that you’ve invited me to fuck you. Maybe I should just take you up on the offer. Or are you lying about that too?”

He pressed his body flush against hers, and as her breasts connected with his chest, and his cock brushed against her tight skirt, a low moan left from between her parted lips.

“Ahh, so this...” he said, lowering his head and grinding his hips against hers. “*This* we at least know is true.” He placed his lips by her ear, and when he heard her suck in an unsteady breath, he whispered, “But here’s the thing, Reagan—as much as I liked your suggestion about fucking you against the door, I had a vision when you were pulling your snobby princess routine. And it had more to do with bending you over the table.”

He took a step back and pulled her arms from the door, and just as he was about to tug her forward, she boldly stepped up to him.

“Like one of your whores?” she asked, backing him up until his ass hit the table. “Maybe I should hike up my skirt and stand on a street corner to get your attention? Would that keep you coming back for more?”

He growled, and she gave him an evil smile. “Let’s get one thing straight. Your cock and I...we’re never gonna be intimately acquainted again.” Looking down at the erection in his pants, she said, “Down, boy.”

Evan shook his head and pushed off the table, their fronts pressing against each other, since she wasn’t about to back down. “You are such...a fucking...liar.”

“And you are *such* a fucking manwhore.”

Before he could stop himself, he reached around and grabbed her ass, squeezing her forward so she could feel his erection.

“Did it ever occur to you that maybe *you* have that effect on me?”

“Who’s the liar now?” Her words fought against him, but her body wasn’t following. “Don’t pretend like I’m something special.” Leaning in, she captured his lower lip with her teeth and bit down hard before whispering against his

mouth, “Let’s just be honest about what I am to you. Your favorite...filthy...*fuck*.”

\* \* \*

REAGAN COULDN’T BELIEVE the shit flying out of her mouth. When Evan maneuvered them so he could back her up to the conference table, she knew exactly where this was going. She wasn’t naive enough to believe this was hearts and flowers, and was honest enough to call a spade a spade. This was a total hate fuck, and the sooner he got his pants down and his cock inside her, the quicker she could get off and go about her day as planned.

Her ass hit the table first, and he lifted her slightly so she was perched on the edge.

“Don’t think this changes anything between us,” she told him as he touched her knees with his fingers.

“Oh, I’m under no delusions as to what this is,” he said as his fingers slipped under the hem of her skirt. “After all, you’re the one who reminded me of who you are...right, Reagan?”

She glared at him with enough force that he should’ve fallen dead to the floor, but when he started to inch the material up her thighs, she slowly parted her legs.

His eyes dropped to her movements, and when she stopped, he raised them to hers and demanded, “Wider.”

She licked her lower lip and placed her hands on the table behind her, leaning back slightly and spreading her legs apart. His palms smoothed over the top of her thighs, pushing the skirt up as he went, and when his fingers grazed the lace of her panties, she fought to keep her eyes open and on his.

“Are you gonna take all day?”

The look that crossed his features then was both exciting and alarming as he warned, “You might want to keep

your voice down, Ms. Spencer. We don't want everyone in the office to know just how *hard* you plan to work for the next—”

“Five minutes?” she interrupted with her most innocent smile.

She felt the tips of his fingers brush across the damp material of her panties, and as he slipped them into the leg and pulled them aside, he promised, “Oh it's going to take much longer than five minutes. You can stop pretending you aren't dying for it, Reagan. My fingers are practically dripping, and I haven't even gotten them inside of your sweet cunt yet.”

*Fuck me*, she thought, her inner muscles tightening. Evan was definitely her equal when it came to the bedroom. When his dirty mouth came out to play, and the words fell off his tongue as they were now, she wanted nothing more than to get him inside her so her greedy body had something to cling to. Rather than the empty throb she currently felt.

“You're doing a lot of talking when you could be putting your mouth to better use,” she told him.

“And you're doing a lot of complaining for someone who is about two flicks away from an orgasm.”

“Shut...*up*,” she said, and covered his mouth with her hand. He bit down on her thumb and kept his eyes on hers as his fingers grazed against her wet slit.

*Dammit. Why does he have to be so fucking good at this?* And why did her body turn traitor every time she was near him? She hated him.

One of his fingers pushed inside her.

*Oh fuck.*

Yes...she hated him. Loathed him as another finger filled her.

When her hands went up to her breasts, she heard him groan.

“Unbutton it,” he said, and her fingers obeyed as his scissored inside her.



She parted the material to reveal a silk chemise underneath, her hard nipples straining against the soft material. His free hand came up to cup one of her breasts, and she arched into his grasp.

*God*, it didn't take long for him to focus in on her sweet spot, and as he pressed against it, her legs quivered and her breath hitched in her throat. Her hand covered his on her breast and she squeezed, anticipating the explosive release that was about to shoot through her.

“Fuck,” she panted, her hips jerking up. “Fuck me—”

“And there's the third invite,” he rasped, as he removed his fingers, grabbed her wrist, and pulled her off the desk.

\* \* \*

ONCE HE HAD Reagan on her feet, her lust-filled eyes locked with his, and he couldn't help the grin that tipped his lips. With her skirt hiked up around her waist and her shirt parted, she looked like a woman who'd either been thoroughly fucked or was about to be.

He spun her around, and before she could offer a sound of protest, he placed a hand on her shoulder blade and gently urged her forward. When she bent at the waist and placed her forearms on the table, the sight of her bare ass cheeks separated by a strip of black lace just about had him coming in his pants. He reached for his belt buckle, and as he fumbled with it, he cursed and instructed her, “Stay just like that.”

He took a step back and shrugged out of his jacket, tossing it on the table beside her. Glancing over her shoulder at him, her eyes tracked over his body boldly, and when they reached the fingers at his belt, he kicked it into high gear. He unbuckled it and unzipped, but before he pushed them down over his hips, he took his wallet out of his back pocket.

Her eyes found his as he opened it to remove a condom. After tossing the wallet onto his jacket beside her, he brought the packet to his lips and tore it open.

“Now we both know how *vocal* you like to be, Ms. Spencer. Do you think you’re going to be able to keep your mouth shut? Or do you need some assistance in the matter?”

Reagan’s eyes zeroed in on his crimson tie, and without her saying a word, he reached for the knot and loosened it, drawing it from around his neck. As the thin strip of material slipped free, he let the end of it flirt over her ass and groaned when she pushed back, wanting more. He ran a finger down between her ass cheeks. When he dipped it down between the soaked material covering her swollen lips, he pushed it up inside her.

She moaned, and Evan leaned down until his chest was against her back, and pulled his finger out to rub the material of her panties over her clit. He kissed the shell of her ear, and as she bucked back against him, he teased her again.

“I think a gag order is necessary here, don’t you?” She squirmed against him as he brought the tie into eye line with her. When she turned her head to look up at him, he raised his brow. “Don’t be so shocked. You’re the one who always screams my name.”

He then moved to place the fabric between her teeth, and as she bit down, he gave her a wicked smirk. “I have to say, I like you with a mouthful, Reagan.”

He secured the ends of the tie around the back of her head and then rolled his hips against her ass as he moved back up behind her. He smoothed a hand over the round globe of her cheek, the sight in front of him one he could never have dreamed.

She was stunning as she waited for him, and even after everything she’d done, he still wanted her more than his next breath. He quickly shoved down his pants and boxers and rolled the condom up his thick cock. He stroked it several times and growled when Reagan rocked her hips as though she couldn’t wait for him to get inside her. And as much as he would’ve loved to torture her a bit longer, he couldn’t hold himself back.

He pulled her g-string down just below her ass, too impatient to take it completely off. Spreading her cheeks, he rubbed the length of his cock along her wet core, lubing him up before teasing her opening with his tip. As he teased her, she slapped her hand on the table, and the message was crystal fucking clear.

With no more warning, he slid inside her, her tight pussy like a fist, and it had him dragging in a ragged breath.

“Fuck,” he said, closing his eyes and relishing the feel of her. Hot. Wet. Fucking perfection. He could’ve come right then, but he held himself still, his hand on her lower back as he took a deep breath.

Reagan, on the other hand, had a different idea. Pushing up on her hands, she moved her hips back against him, and it had him opening his eyes and grabbing her waist. As she looked over her shoulder, one of her hands went down between her thighs. Her fingers brushed against the underside of his balls, and his hips bucked. Drawing himself out of her and away from her dangerous fucking fingers, he pushed her back down again, and this time, she winked at him before laying her head on her arms. He thrust back inside her and wrapped his arm around her hip to play with her clit while the other hand kept a tight grip on her waist. She met every punch of his hips with one of her own, and he could hear the soft, muffled sound of her cries from behind his tie.

The pace intensified as he pinched the swollen flesh he was rubbing with his finger, and as he tunneled into her, he knew that nothing would ever compare to the way he felt when he was with Reagan. She was a fiery-hot temptress, and her appetite more than matched his own.

He gripped her hips with both hands now, using her in a way that was both brutal and beautiful, and as his climax threatened at the base of his spine, he felt her inner muscles clench around his cock like a vise. He gritted his teeth to hold back the curse he wanted to shout.

Her hands moved to the table at the sides of her head, her fingers whitening as she pushed them into the unforgiving

surface. Her body was moving back and forth across the tabletop with each forceful thrust, her slick juices causing a sweet slide in and out of her. Then she tore the tie out of her mouth.

She glanced back at him over her shoulder, reached down between her thighs, and said, “Don’t even think about stopping me this time.”

He dug his fingers into her creamy flesh and picked up the pace. If she wanted to finger-fuck herself, he had no problem with that. In fact, the moment her fingers touched his cock as he slid inside her, he clenched his eyes closed and growled. “Hurry the fuck up, Reagan.”

He heard her moan and then shove back on him hard as a soft cry escaped her lips and her entire body clenched around his, tensing from the pleasure that was overtaking her body.

The feeling of her tight core squeezing his dick had his own climax exploding as he bit his lip so hard he drew blood.

He’d questioned what Reagan had said earlier, not liking the meaning behind her words, but when he stared down at the woman that he’d so thoroughly possessed, he realized how right she was. Reagan Spencer was definitely his favorite filthy fuck—she just also happened to be a hell of a lot more.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

AS REAGAN STEPPED out of her g-string and stuffed it in her briefcase, Evan gaped at her.

“What the hell are you doing?” he asked.

“You can’t expect me to walk around in those all day.” Loosening his tie from around her neck, she lifted it over her head and threw it at him.

Evan held it up and shook his head. “Then you can’t expect me to wear this all day.”

“Put it on. You came in wearing a tie, so it’d be too obvious if you left the room without one.”

“I think it’d be more noticeable to wear it. Jesus, did you leave teeth marks?”

“If anyone asks, just tell them I tried to strangle you.” She gave him a pat on the chest and headed for the door, but Evan grabbed her wrist.

“This doesn’t change anything,” he said.

“Course not. You’re still a cheating asshole.”

“And you’re still a fucking liar.”

Reagan narrowed her eyes and jerked away from his grip. “Glad we got that straight.”

When she pulled the door shut behind her, reality slapped her in the face. *Oh fucking hell, not again.* At least the hallway was empty, and no one was around to witness her walk of shame out of the conference room. *Better not to chance it, though,* she thought as she dashed to her office, praying the whole way that no one would see her. If she ran into anyone now, there’d be no denying what just happened between her and Evan. Her clothes were back to immaculate smoothness, but it would be her face that gave it away.

*God, what was I thinking? I wasn’t thinking. But it doesn’t mean anything. I hate him. Besides, a good hate fuck never hurt anyone.*

As she entered her office and shut the door, her cell phone pinged.

**Lunch?** Crystal’s message said.

Yes. Girl talk. That was what she needed. And fresh air. Fresh air was good.

**Diablos at noon?** she typed back.

**See you then.**

\* \* \*

EVAN STOOD WHERE Reagan had left him minutes ago—staring at the shut conference room door. In his right hand he held the crumpled tie she had thrown at him as she’d exited the room.

*Goddamn it. Why am I such an idiot?*

He zipped his pants and tossed his tie down next to his jacket on the table. Picking up the coat, he shrugged into it, and then pulled the white collar of his shirt up. *And why the fuck did I do it here?* Now he wouldn’t be able to attend a

meeting without thinking of Reagan bent over the desk and his cock plowing inside her. *Yeah, smart move, fucker.*

He knotted his tie and slid it into place at the base of his throat, and as he smoothed the ends of it down his chest, he remembered her dainty hand patting him there condescendingly before she'd walked out the door.

*Jesus, man. She doesn't even like you. And you don't like her. Get a fucking grip.*

He turned the collar down on his shirt, reached for his briefcase, and slammed it shut with a little more force than needed. This was not how today was supposed to have gone. He'd told himself when he arrived this morning that he would be a professional and respect the fact that Troy had stopped by his house, by staying the fuck away from his sister.

Somehow, though, getting inside Reagan after she'd started mouthing off at him had trumped his moral high ground, and staying away from her had been the furthest thing from his mind.

He glanced at the clock on the opposite wall and saw that he was due in Bill's office in thirty minutes for a lunch meeting he'd scheduled last week. There was no way out of it, but sitting in an office under the watchful eyes of Bill, who was practically a fucking father figure to Reagan, was not his idea of a fun afternoon.

*Maybe I can convince him to go out for lunch.*

He picked up his briefcase, took a fortifying breath, and told himself to forget this morning had happened. But when he turned to leave, he stepped on something hard and looked down to the carpeted floor to see Reagan's string of pearls under his foot.

He crouched down to pick them up, and as he ran them through his fingers, he noticed the tiny gold clasp had broken. Rolling the polished pearls over his palm, he straightened and then slipped the necklace into his pocket. He'd give it back to Reagan as soon as he could look at her again without attacking her.

\* \* \*

REAGAN ARRIVED AT the restaurant just as Crystal stepped up to the hostess station. When her friend turned to look at her, her eyes widened.

“You had sex.”

Reagan stopped in her tracks as the crowd of customers waiting to be seated went silent. “Uh,” she said, trying to keep the flush she felt spreading through her body off her face. She tried for a smile and felt herself failing. Horribly. “No.”

Crystal crossed her arms over her chest. “You did. Today. I can tell.”

“Crystal—” Reagan lowered her voice to a hushed whisper so her friend would do the same, but that wasn’t working for the loudmouth she was now regretting meeting for lunch.

“Please tell me it was not hot fuck-you sex in the workplace with a certain dangerous ex.”

“Oh my God. Can we please get a table before you bring up my sex life? And he’s not my ex.” Reagan looked at the gawking faces around them and said, “Carry on, nothing to see here.”

The hostess seemed to snap out of her eavesdropping, because she grabbed two menus and quickly showed them to their table.

“You are a bad, bad girl, Reagan Spencer,” Crystal commented after they’d given their drink orders. “First day back and fucking in his office.”

Reagan sighed and put her head in her hands. “The conference room, actually.”

“What? Holy fucking shit.”

When she glanced up, Crystal’s jaw was still on the table.



“I know. I’m a horrible person, and I make stupid decisions.”

“This is true,” Crystal joked. “But...we don’t like this guy. He cheated.”

“Well, I didn’t see that happen, but yeah, I’d guess he did. He says otherwise.”

“Of course he did. They all do. I mean, they have cocks for brains, what do we expect?”

And wasn’t that an understatement in Evan’s case. “Yeah,” Reagan said. “I just...I don’t know.”

Crystal raised an eyebrow as she sipped her drink. “You’re having doubts. He’s planting seeds of doubt, and I do mean that quite literally.” When she winked, Reagan groaned.

“No fucking seed planting happening, so wrap that shit up. And I mean *that* quite literally.”

A burst of laughter came out of her friend then, and the tension in Reagan’s shoulders eased. The best thing about Crystal was that she always lightened the mood, always made a joke or embarrassed the hell out of her to make her problems seem not quite as life or death as her brain was telling her they were.

“Now I’m hungry,” Crystal said, scanning the menu before eyeing Reagan over the top of it. “Some of us didn’t have our protein this morning.”

\* \* \*

EVAN STOPPED OUTSIDE Bill’s office and did one final check of himself. Jacket was buttoned, tie was straight, and his zipper... *Yeah, fuck, make sure it’s zipped.* Once he was satisfied, he knocked on the door and waited for Bill’s voice.

“Come in, come in,” he heard.

Stepping into his boss’s office, he spotted Bill standing over by the globe that housed his secret, *or not-so-secret now,*

stash of liquor. Evan shut the door behind him and slid his hands into his pockets as he walked inside, stopping by one of the chairs.

“Ah, there you are,” Bill said, turning from the stand with two glasses in his hands. “Can I interest you in a quick noon pick-me-up?”

One of Evan’s eyebrows rose, and he wondered if he looked like he needed a drink. *Hell*, he sure as fuck felt like it. “No, I think I’m going to pass. You okay?”

Bill placed one of the glasses back on the stand and added a splash of whiskey to the ice in his. Evan watched as Bill made his way over to him, compensating for the limp by relying more heavily on his other leg.

“Yes. Everything’s just fine and dandy with me. What about you?” Bill kept his eyes on Evan as he took a sip of his drink.

“I’m fine,” Evan said. But he wasn’t sure how the hell he actually got the words out.

Bill’s eyes narrowed slightly, and then he looked Evan over.

*God, fuck this shit*, he thought, and prayed that he hadn’t missed anything when putting himself back together. *Never again*, he vowed. *If I get the fuck out of here with no damage, never fucking again.*

Evan stood there under silent observation, and was close to cursing out loud when Bill finally brought his eyes back to his.

“You sure? I know this last week was...difficult. And then you had to go in hard with Reagan today to try and win this client...”

Bill continued to talk, but all Evan heard was *go in hard with Reagan*. Oh, he’d gone in hard, all right.

“Evan?”

“Huh?” he said, shaking himself out of the mental picture in his head.

“I just asked if you want to get out of the office for a bit. Maybe we could have this meeting down at Diablos.”

Evan almost sighed in relief. It was as if Bill was reading his mind. Well, the part where he'd wanted to leave the office, at least. He was damn lucky he couldn't read the fucking rest.

“Yeah, that sounds really good, actually. I was going to suggest stepping out myself.”

Bill finished the drink with a quick swig and then placed the glass down on the corner of his desk.

“Fantastic. I'll let Amy know. Sometimes you just have a hankering for some queso dip.”

\* \* \*

FOR SOMEONE WHO'D claimed to be hungry, Crystal hadn't eaten much. But that was probably because Reagan had ended up spilling her guts about how she'd known Evan way back when, and how nothing about their reunion had been coincidental.

“If your jaw is insisting on staying on the damn table while we're here, at least let me put a napkin down first,” Reagan said.

Crystal shook her head, as if trying to clear it. “Hold on, let me make sure I have this straight. So you knew Evan when you were a kid, but then his parents Ponzi-schemed *your* parents as well as hundreds of others, and when their asses ended up in jail, Evan disappeared? Did I get that right?”

“That would be about the gist of it.”

“Fuck. Wait—you said Troy came down to see you both? What the hell happened? How is Evan not in the hospital?”

“Troy's always been a lover, not a fighter. He was best friends with Evan, so I think he was curious to see him again.”

“I’m officially speechless.”

“*That* would be a first,” Reagan said with a laugh.

“Okay, so...what the hell happens now?”

“And *that* is the million-dollar question. I have no fucking clue.”

Crystal chewed on the end of her straw, looking deep in thought. “Maybe you could play with him a little.”

“I think we did enough of that today.”

“No, I don’t mean in bed. Or in conference rooms,” Crystal said. “Taunt him. Show him the kickass, confident female he can’t seem to stay away from.”

“Yeah, okay, but what about the feelings part?”

“His or yours?”

Reagan pursed her lips and cocked her head to the side. “Really?”

“Yes, really. What do you want out of this? You’ve never been a relationship kind of girl since I’ve known you, but I get the feeling this guy’s different no matter what kind of crazy shit he’s done. Or possibly *not* done, as it were. So I guess the question is, are you willing to wash your hands of him for good, or do you want to have this guy on his knees begging you to be with him?”

“He is good on his knees...” Reagan said. *Am I fucking crazy for wanting to give him another shot? Probably. Definitely.*

“Don’t make it easy on him, though. Didn’t you say you did some kind of hidden messages or something?”

“Mhmm. On coffee cups. Wait,” she said, an idea forming in her head. *Yes, that’s perfect.*

Crystal gave an approving nod. “I think you’re getting it. Go have fun with him. And if a chance for more comes up...”

With a grin, Reagan handed her credit card to the waiter and sat back against the booth, feeling twinges of excitement and apprehension. Maybe things had gotten too serious. Maybe she'd gotten too attached. That part wasn't going away, but it was time to remember the part of her and Evan's relationship that she loved. The fun, flirty, carefree side that reminded her of the way they'd been once, long ago.

And then she felt it. His stare.

Whipping around in the booth, she scanned the room until his familiar hazel eyes met hers. He was standing at the hostess station with Bill, one of his eyebrows raised in surprise.

*Oh my God.*

"What's wrong?" Crystal asked when she jerked back into the booth.

Dreading the inevitable run-in with Evan and Crystal, she groaned, wanting to bang her head against the table. What were the odds they'd all be having lunch in the same place? When it came to Evan, there had to be some kind of tracking device, because he was everywhere.

"Fuck," she said. "Please promise not to make a scene."

"Why would I make a scene?"

"Just promise."

"What the hell am I promising for?" Crystal leaned out of the booth and looked in the direction of the front door. "Oh, there's Bill. Why would I make a scene about—" She stopped as her jaw took another dive for the table. "Oh holy Jesus, who's that with him?"

When Reagan didn't say anything, choosing instead to hide her face in her hands, Crystal hit the table with her palm and shrieked.

"That is not who I think it is. Please, please tell me that's not Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome."

"It might be," Reagan said meekly.

“Wow.” Crystal’s eyes were wide and still staring in Evan’s direction. “Now it all makes fucking sense.”

\* \* \*

THE ENTIRE TRIP over in the cab, Evan had tried to get Reagan off his mind. Bill had been a good distraction, talking to him about everything from the cool down in the weather that made his bad leg act up, to, surprisingly, his mother.

He always forgot Bill had worked with his parents back in the day, although that wasn’t much of a shock. Anything to do with his parents he tended to block out of his mind for self-preservation purposes. But when Bill had asked him how his mom was doing, in an off-the-cuff sort of way, Evan felt almost ashamed that he hadn’t been able to answer.

*God*, there was no reason he should have to feel anything toward the two who had ruined his childhood, but the fond smile that had crossed Bill’s mouth made Evan wonder for a moment if maybe the woman that his boss remembered was still somewhere inside the one sitting in prison.

*Maybe I should go and see her*, he thought as he followed Bill through the doors of Diablos and stopped by the hostess station.

He scanned the restaurant trying to spot the missing hostess, and as his eyes tracked over the bustling tables, he caught sight of a familiar now-brunette, whose scorching brown eyes he’d been trying to forget since he’d last seen them spitting fire and sass at him.

*Are you kidding me*, he thought as Reagan fucking Spencer stared back at him. Apparently the universe had a goddamn sense of humor when it came to his life, because no matter how hard he tried to steer it in one direction, it always ended up on the detour back to Let’s-fuck-with-Evan-ville.

“Good afternoon, gentlemen,” a perky redhead greeted them.

Evan tore his eyes away from Reagan just as she seemed to get her own jolt of what-the-fuck medicine, and then he turned to Bill, who, of course, was none the wiser.

“Well, hello, young lady,” Bill greeted, jovial as always.

“Is it just the two of you today?”

“Yes, yes, just us two.”

“Okay then, if you’ll just follow me, I’ll take you to your seats.”

Evan watched her snatch up a couple of menus and hoped like hell she wasn’t about to walk them toward—*yeah, of course she was*—Reagan.

“Bill,” he whispered under his breath, and when his boss looked over his shoulder at him as if to say, *What?* Evan found himself stuck for words. What was he going to say? *Reagan’s here and I don’t want to sit next to her*, like some kind of stupid adolescent kid.

“Don’t worry,” he mumbled, and kicked his own ass for being a fucking idiot.

No, it was time to man up. He could do this. If Reagan Spencer could sit in a busy downtown restaurant with no fucking panties on, then he could damn well walk by her like he didn’t remember her stuffing them into her briefcase.

As he neared the booth he’d seen her slide back into, he noticed the second occupant at Reagan’s table staring up at him with wide eyes and a shock of auburn curls. She had a light sprinkling of freckles on her pert nose, and as he got closer he saw her eyes dare to trail down from his face to his chest—and then they went lower.

Bill was just about at the booth when Reagan slid out of her seat and looked Evan dead-on. He had to give her credit—she sure as hell didn’t back down from a challenge. And that feisty side of her appealed to him more than he’d ever imagined.

“Bill,” she said, as she ran her hands down her thighs, and Evan almost groaned at the reminder of how they’d looked when he’d had her bent over the table earlier. *Creamy, bare and*— “Evan. How unexpected to see you both here.”

Bill came to a stop, and a wide smile lit up his face. “Reagan. Well, well, this is a coincidence. Of all the places in a city as large as this, we chose the same one.”

She smiled at the both of them, but when her eyes lingered on him, Evan swore a mischievous spark entered them. “Yes it is, isn’t it. But this seems to happen a lot with me and Evan.”

Bill chuckled. “Does it?”

“Yes,” Reagan replied. “We may come at different times but usually end up at the same place.”

Evan felt his cock react to Reagan’s words as if she’d run her tongue over it. *What kind of game is she playing?*

“Well, I have to admit today’s decision was purely mine. I had a craving for some queso.”

Reagan laughed, but Evan heard the strain behind it. She might have been trying to project Miss Cool and Calm, but it was clear to him she was anything but. And *that* sparked the devil inside him to come out and play.

He glanced down at Reagan’s friend, who was biting her bottom lip as if trying to keep her mouth shut, and Evan wondered just how much she knew about him. Because it was obvious she knew something.

“Would you like to join us for lunch, Reagan?” he asked, returning his eyes to her.

Her friend lost it then, and the laugh that she’d been attempting to hide turned into a cough instead. *Oh yeah, she knows fucking everything.*

“I would love to stay,” Crystal began, but a quick glare from Reagan shut her up real fast.

Reagan turned around and smiled at Bill. “We actually just finished, and I’ve got to get back to work, so you two



enjoy.”

“That’s a shame,” Evan said, winking at Crystal. The woman’s brow rose and she shook her head before sliding out of the booth.

“It is a damn shame,” she told him when she stood up. Then she held out her hand. “Crystal Smith.”

“Evan James.” She had a firm grip, and it was instantly obvious that Reagan surrounded herself with women as headstrong as she was. No doubt they’d had quite the conversation now, if the mirth in her eyes was any indication.

When he let go, Reagan wrapped her arm through Crystal’s. “See you at the office,” she said, and pulled her friend away before the woman could say anything else.

*Anything incriminating, I’d wager.*

As Bill slid into an empty booth, Evan took a seat on the other side. Just as they picked up their menus, a loud “Sweet motherfucker!” could be heard from the front entrance. Evan leaned out to see what the commotion was about, only to notice Reagan pushing her friend out the door.

With a chuckle, Bill shook his head and eyed the menu. “You sure do know how to make a first impression, son.”

Evan scanned the menu and felt his lips twitch. *Yeah*, and maybe, if he were being honest, some part of him was hoping to make a lasting one with Ms. Spencer.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### Tuesday

REAGAN SMILED TO herself the following morning as she waited in the elevator, balancing a tray of coffee cups in her hand. She'd decided to take Crystal's advice and lighten things up a bit. So she'd kind of fallen for a guy she used to know. Big deal. And so what if he'd given her the most earth-shattering orgasms ever. So did her vibrator. Sometimes.

Deciding to call a truce, she'd stopped at Starbucks and made sure she had her permanent marker handy. Which was the reason for her smile.

When the elevator doors opened, she waved at Amy and headed straight for Evan's office. The light was already on, and she peered around the corner. Leaning against the wall, she watched him silently. He was sitting at his desk with the work phone to his ear and jotting something down in a notebook. His jacket was already off, the sleeves of his white button-up rolled halfway up his tanned, muscular arms.

*Just another guy, Reagan thought. Just another supremely gorgeous human. Nothing special there.*

Evan hung up the phone and tossed his pen on the desk. “Can I help you, Reagan?” he asked, swiveling in his chair to face her, his eyes meeting hers.

“How did you know I was here?” she asked as she pushed away from the wall and entered his office. Her hips might’ve been swaying more than usual, but that wasn’t on purpose. *Riiiiight.*

“I can always feel your eyes on me.”

Reagan lifted an eyebrow and tried not to read too much into that.

“That and I could smell you.” He leaned back in his chair and placed his hands behind his head before winking at her.

She stopped in her tracks. “By smell me, I hope you mean this delicious coffee I brought you.”

“Oh, is that for me?” Evan reached across the desk for his cup, but Reagan held the tray out up high.

“On second thought, Amy looked a little thirsty this morning.”

As she turned on her heel to leave, Evan said, “I meant that as a compliment, you know. You always smell so fucking delicious.”

When she swiveled back to face him, he leaned forward and said in a conspiratorial whisper, “You really should stop wearing that. It could attract unwanted attention.”

“So sweet of you to be concerned about my well-being.”

“I wasn’t. I was concerned for mine.”

*Charming motherfucker. Get out. Get out now.*

Reagan placed the steaming cup of coffee on his desk. “Have a good day, Mr. James.” As she walked out of the office, she couldn’t stop her damn hips from swaying again. She’d blame it on the tight fit of the pencil skirt she wore, but really, it was because his eyes were on her.

She could feel them.

\* \* \*

EVAN COULDN'T TEAR his eyes away from Reagan's pert ass as it swished its way out of his office. *Hot damn, she has one spectacular rear end.* And he should know; he'd seen it bent over and naked on more than one occasion. But this morning he couldn't help but think the swaying of Reagan's hips, and the coffee she'd deposited on his desk, held a lot more meaning than a flirtatious morning hello.

It felt as if she was calling a truce. Waving a white flag and saying everything was okay between them after the conference room incident, not to mention the shitstorm that had led up to that. She seemed willing to let go of what had transpired between them, and if she could be mature enough not to hold a grudge, then so could he.

Lifting the coffee cup to his lips, he sat back in his chair and took a careful sip. The bitter taste of the darkest possible roast hit his tongue. Perfection. When he placed the coffee cup back down on the desk, the sleeve slipped to the bottom of the cup. And there, in permanent marker, bold as you please, were the words:

**ENJOY YOUR MORNING CAFFEINE HIT.  
A BLACK COFFEE FOR A BLACK, BLACK HEART.**

**REAGAN**



Evan's mouth fell open at the smartass message, and as the words and the contents of the cup registered, he found his lips tipping up in a grin. *That sneaky little wench. So she wants to play that game, does she.* Well, that was fine by him. After all, he'd been the one to invent it.

*Bring it on, Ms. Spencer. Bring. It. On.*

## Wednesday

EVAN DASHED THROUGH the front doors of the building that housed Kelman Corporations the next morning, with a tray of coffee in his hands. A security guard gave him a warm smile as she held one side open for him, and he greeted her with a good morning and a quick wink as he stepped through. He'd made sure to arrive early, just as he had been for the last couple of days. He wanted to get upstairs and into Reagan's office before the little minx arrived.

When the elevator hit their floor, he bypassed the empty reception desk, Amy not having arrived yet. He held the tray in one hand and fished around in his pocket for the key Bill had given him to the office. Once he'd let himself in, he made his way down the hall and went directly into Ms. Spencer's immaculate place of work. He glanced at the bright red couch that lined the wall and remembered the first day she'd interviewed him.

That felt like years ago, not months. She'd been so cool that day, going over the facts and figures of his job as if she barely knew him. Keeping him at arm's length. But little did he know just how *well* she'd known him after all. *What a twist of fate.*

Pulling himself out of his daydream, he crossed her office and placed a coffee on her desk and then dug into his pocket and pulled out two packets of sugar. He placed them down next to the cup and smiled to himself as he backed out.

*Oh yes, Reagan, two can play this game.*

\* \* \*

“ALLENDALE HAD GREAT things to say about you and Evan,” Bill said from where he sat across from Reagan in her

office.

She raised her brow. “Is that right?”

“Why do you look surprised?”

“No reason.” *Other than the eventual hate-fucking that took place five minutes after they’d left.*

“They said they’d have a decision made within the next few days and will let you know.”

“Good, good.” Reagan nodded. “We’ll be ready for them.”

“That’s what I like to hear,” Bill said. Then he shifted forward in his seat, and Reagan inwardly groaned. He always assumed that position when he was about to say something serious. Something about Evan, no doubt.

“So, I noticed things aren’t quite as...*heavy* around the office this week,” he began.

*Bingo.*

“We’re all professionals here,” she said. “No reason to drag our personal lives into the workplace, right?”

Bill cocked his head to the side and gave her a look that said he didn’t buy that for a second. Smart guy.

She held up her hands. “All right, fine. No more bullshit. Things got messy, and that was entirely my fault. I never expected to get involved with Evan, so for that, I apologize. You don’t have to worry about any repeats, I promise.”

“Reagan,” Bill said, and then shook his head. He was silent for a long moment before he spoke again. “You’re like a daughter to me, you know that—”

“I do, and that’s why I’m sorry—”

“I wasn’t finished,” he told her, and she clamped her mouth shut. “I only want the best for you. I don’t like to see you upset or in pain. Now, I don’t know the specifics of what happened between you and Evan, and I don’t need to. I know

his past. I know there's more to the story, and I know the man has been through more than most people should."

Reagan narrowed her eyes. "What are you trying to say, Bill?"

He rubbed the bridge of his nose and sighed. "You've always been a spark of a thing. And I think...maybe...that's helped him..." His voice trailed off, and he didn't need to say any more.

In his own way, Bill was giving her permission to try again with Evan—if she wanted it.

Swallowing the lump in her throat, she nodded. "Thank you," she said, her voice barely a whisper.

Bill raised a fist to his mouth and coughed a little, shifting in his seat. Then he eyed the unopened sugar packets on her desk. "Since when do you put sugar in your coffee?" he asked, clearly deciding now was the time to change the subject.

*Since Evan put a coffee cup on my desk this morning stating:*

**HEY "BOSS" - HERE'S A COUPLE OF  
EXTRA SUGARS.  
IT'S CLEAR YOU NEED SWEETENING UP.**

*Asshole.*

But as she thought about his message, she couldn't help the giddy feeling that accompanied it. He was playing with her, and if there was one thing Evan James was good at, it was playing you until he won. And she had to admit, she didn't mind giving the victor the spoils when it came to him.

**Thursday**

*DEAR MS. SPENCER,*

*I was disappointed to come into a caffeine-free zone this morning. But in case you feel inclined to rectify the situation, I'll have my "usual" order. Make it a large.*

*Evan James*

*Dear Mr. James,*

*My, my, aren't you presumptuous this morning? Your usual? As in the tar you enjoy in place of an actual coffee? Perhaps I can swing by and drop off the sugar you left for me. They weren't needed, you see, since I'm sweet enough already. Or maybe you've forgotten and need to have another taste...*

*Ms. Reagan Spencer*

*P.S. As for the size of your...coffee—I never had any doubt ;)*

*Dear Ms. Spencer,*

*Are you fucking serious?????*

*Evan James*

*Dear Mr. James,*

*About which part?*

*Ms. Reagan Spencer*

Not five seconds after she'd hit send, her phone rang, and she leaned back in her chair and crossed one leg over the other. She had a feeling whatever was about to come might make her...squirm.

She picked up the receiver, and as soon as it was by her ear, her lips quirked into a wicked smirk. "Reagan here."

"I would appreciate very much if you would stop sending such inappropriate emails."



Evan's voice sounded strained through the phone, and she moved her hand up to stroke her fingers over her pearls only to notice... *Fuck, where are they?* She jerked up in her chair. "Shit."

"Exactly," Evan said through the phone.

"No, no..." she said, slightly frantic as she looked around the floor, having completely forgotten about flirting with Evan.

"Reagan? What's the matter?" he asked, sensing her panic now that the line had gone silent.

"My pearls. I've lost my damn pearls," she told him, her breath coming a little harder as she bent at the waist to look under her desk. When Evan's low laugh came through the phone, she almost gave in to the urge to slam the receiver back on its holder. She didn't need him laughing at her. This was serious shit. Her *mother* had given her that necklace.

"Reagan?"

"Hmm..." she said absently.

"Your pearls. They're sitting on my nightstand at home."

*Wait...what?* She sat up in her chair and blew her hair off her forehead. "What do you mean they're at your home?"

He chuckled through the line and then told her in a voice that practically reignited the heat between her thighs, "They fell off your neck when I fucked you over the conference table."

Her mouth fell open and her pussy throbbed. *Well, damn. I asked.*

"Oh, and Reagan..."

She swallowed and closed her eyes at the silky caress of his voice. "Yeah."

"If you want them, you can come fucking get them."

As the phone went dead, she stared at it and had two thoughts. One, Evan James was trouble with a capital fucking

T. And two, there was nothing on the planet that was going to stop her from going and getting her pearls back.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

REAGAN HAD FOLLOWED him home. Evan smiled to himself that she'd come to his turf just for a necklace. Oh, who was he kidding. He'd taken the damn thing on purpose, hoping it would urge her closer, and it looked like the plan had worked. Well, maybe not as well as he would've liked. Her stubborn ass was still in the lobby refusing to come up to his apartment. He didn't plan on hand-delivering, though, so she'd eventually be making that elevator ride. And while he waited he'd make himself comfortable.

After ridding himself of his jacket and tie, he grabbed a beer from the fridge. A buzz sounded, and he sauntered over to the intercom, taking a swig of his drink before answering. "Yes?"

"Don't yes me. Get your ass down here." Reagan's annoyed voice had him chuckling.

"See, that's not how it works. You followed me all this way. It'd be a shame not to get what you came for."

"Evan—"

"Come up, Reagan."

“Stop being such a pain in the ass, and get down here.”

“And what’s the magic word?”

“Now.”

He tsked. “Wrong answer. I’ll see you Monday.”

“Fine,” she said, irritation lacing her voice. “I’m coming up.”

“See you then.” He let go of the intercom button and took another swig of his beer. As he opened the door, a loud THUMP sounded from the neighboring wall. *You’ve gotta be kidding me.* The fucking sex rabbits next door had incredible timing.

Leaning against the doorjamb, he waited for Reagan to finally make her encore appearance at his place. When she stepped off the elevator, a scowl across her beautiful face, his cock twitched.

Fuck, but he wanted her in his bed again. Or in this hallway. Didn’t much matter the place.

“All right, where are they,” Reagan said, holding out her hand as she stopped in front of him.

“Nightstand. You remember the way.”

“I’m not going inside.”

“That’s too bad.” Evan pushed off the frame and went to shut the door when Reagan’s hand shot out.

With a glare, she marched past him into his bedroom.

“You know, this is an ill-fated attempt at getting me back in your bed. It won’t work this ti—”

Another loud THUMP from next door cut off her words, followed by moans of pleasure. She swiveled around and raised an eyebrow. “Mood music?”

Evan wandered into the room behind her and stopped at the foot of his bed. “How can it be mood music when you just told me I had no chance of—”

“*Oh, fuck me,*” came through the wall.

“—doing *that* to you.”

He saw Reagan’s eyes wander down his frame, and when she sank her teeth into that pillowy bottom lip of hers, *God fucking damn*, she wasn’t going to make this easy. She turned away from him and walked down the side of the bed to snatch the pearls off the nightstand. As she came back toward him with her prize in her hand, he stepped to the side, placed his beer on the tallboy, and blocked her path.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“I got what I came for. Now let me pass, Evan.”

He lowered his eyes to the dainty fingers holding the necklace and then shook his head. “No. I don’t think so.” He held his hand out to her. “Here, let me help you put them back on. I’d hate for you to lose them again.”

She eyed him warily, probably assuming the worst. Smart of her, really, but then again, nobody could call Reagan a fool. Lifting her hand, she placed the necklace into his outstretched one, and his mouth turned up on the sides.

“Turn around. It will be easier that way.”

She didn’t move at first, but he saw her swallow and lick her lips, as if thinking about her next move. “No funny business. Okay?”

Evan inclined his head slightly, but didn’t agree. Instead he repeated, “Turn around.”

\* \* \*

REAGAN CLENCHED HER fingers into fists by her sides, trying to stop her shaking hands. She knew this was a bad idea. A monumentally bad one, but instead of pushing past the sexy man in front of her and running for the door, her masochist ass turned around, as per instruction.

She sucked in a quick breath when she felt Evan step behind her. The heat radiating off him made her fear for her

clothes, thinking that if they touched they would disintegrate to ash. Then he spoke.

“You know, the very first time I ever saw these pearls, I had a wicked fantasy about seeing you in them and nothing else.”

His arms came around in front of her, and she remained frozen as the tiny, cool spheres touched the skin of her collarbone. She kept her eyes trained on the wall behind his headboard and tried to block out the moans from the woman on the opposite side, but if she were going to be honest, they were making her as hot as the man who was behind her, taunting her.

His mouth came down by her ear, his warm breath floating over her skin as he continued to whisper words that set her blood to a feverish boil.

“The clasp was broken when I found this. I guess it couldn’t hold up against the rigors of your workday, but not to worry. I got it fixed for you. It’s sturdier, so if you ever have to work so *hard* again, it shouldn’t fall off.”

Her breaths were coming harder, his erection pressed against her ass, and when his teeth grazed her lobe, she just about fell to her knees. His fingers trailed over the clasp at the nape of her neck and then ran down the line of her back to her waist.

*Abort. Abort*, she told herself as his strong arm banded around her. *Get out now while you still can*. But her legs weren’t moving, her voice wasn’t working, and when the heel of his hand applied a delicious pressure to the top of her mound, she gave in and leaned back into him.

The way his fingers were slowly dipping down between her thighs, combined with the erotic groans coming from next door, had her pussy throbbing and her hand grabbing the back of his head.

She pushed her hips back against him, rocking on his fingers as his other hand cupped her breast. With a moan, her

head fell back on his shoulder, letting his hands take over her body.

*This shouldn't feel so fucking good. If it's wrong, then why...*

Evan nuzzled into her neck, his lips brushing the sensitive skin. "Reagan," he whispered.

"Hmm?"

The hands cupping her breast and between her thighs squeezed gently before letting go. "I've gotta run."

Reagan's eyes shot open. "What?" When he didn't respond, she turned to see if he was serious.

He was.

"You motherfucker," she said, shoving him in the chest.

He laughed and grabbed her wrists. "Come with me."

"I believe that's where we were headed until you started talking."

As she struggled from his hold, he pulled her against him and wrapped his arms around her. "I'm serious. Come with me."

It was too easy to get lost in his eyes, too easy to fall into his well-muscled arms. There was a serious set to his mouth, and she couldn't stop her curiosity.

"And just where are you going?" she asked.

"For a drive."

"You just stopped my orgasm to go for a drive."

"It's a long drive."

"To where? Queens?"

"North Carolina."

Reagan laughed, thinking he was out of his mind, but when his face remained solemn, she stopped. "You're serious."

“Yep.”

“What the hell is in North Carolina?”

“Prison.”

“Ah, of course. Will you be visiting or checking in?” she joked.

“My mom was transferred down there. Thought I’d be a good son and make sure she’s not stealing from the other inmates.”

Though he said it in a lighthearted way, she could see the pain in his eyes. How did he end up with two of the most conniving, selfish people on the planet as parents? When she thought about the many Sundays spent around the dining room table with her own family, she felt a twinge of guilt. She only had to travel upstate to see her parents—he had to visit federal penitentiaries to see his.

Evan’s arms tightened around her. “Come with me.”

She leaned back, studying his expression. “I...don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Why not?”

*Because I don’t think I could not fall for you.* “We’ll kill each other.”

“Possibly.”

“I don’t even like you right now.”

Evan winked. “Well, we both know you’re a liar.”

“Jesus, if I can manage to stop talking about your *Pretty Woman* reenactment on a street corner, you can kindly shut that hole in your face about my indiscretions.”

“See? This is progress.”

Reagan shook her head. “I’m absolutely, positively not going with you.” When Evan raised an eyebrow at her, she said, “I mean it. I’m not.”

Forty minutes later, she stood on the curb outside her apartment, watching as Evan threw her overnight bag into the



trunk of his car.

*Well, shit.*

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

EVAN HAD BEEN shocked as hell when he'd asked Reagan to spend the weekend with him. The thought had never even crossed his mind, but as the words had tumbled from his lips, they felt right. He glanced at her now, legs crossed and casual in the passenger seat of his Range Rover. She looked perfect there, as if the car had been designed with her in mind. A yawn escaped her mouth then, and she stretched her arms over her head, letting them dangle behind the seat.

He looked away before he stared too long at the tight fit of her jeans, or the way her thin sweater had ridden up to show a hint of her ivory stomach. He also wasn't thinking about the way her yawn wasn't from being kept up all night underneath him. No, they'd been on their best behavior for once. *Such a shame.*

After he'd stopped by Reagan's apartment long enough for her to grab a quick overnight bag, they'd started the long drive to North Carolina, stopping outside of D.C. for dinner before spending the night in a double-bed suite at the Charlton Hotel. It should've been torture, being so close and not able to touch. But she'd fallen asleep easily, and he'd watched her for hours, replaying their casual conversations from the car ride,

and the arguments over which station they listened to (he'd let her win).

It was so easy with her. And even though the urge to be inside her never wavered, he found that this was enough. Just being next to her satisfied the craving and set his body at ease.

So it'd actually turned out to be a good thing he'd asked Reagan to come along with him on this trip. He hadn't seen his mom in a while, and uneasy anticipation had settled into his gut.

"Looks like it's the next exit," Reagan said, checking the directions on her phone. Leaning back into the headrest, she turned her head to look at him. "You okay?"

*How the hell does she always see right through me?* "A little antsy. Walking into a prison will do that."

"Seeing your mom there will do that too. Do you want me to come with you?"

"You would do that?"

She looked away from him to stare out the window, almost as if not facing him made it easier to admit, "I would for you."

Her words and the tone of her voice moved an emotion inside him that he hadn't been sure he was still capable of. *Hope*. And as he let his eyes trail over her long brunette waves, he hoped he could be a man worthy of her.

He gripped the steering wheel and pressed his foot to the accelerator as the light turned green. "I'm not going to put you through that. Hell, I don't even want to put myself through that."

He caught her glancing his way from the corner of his eye, and she reached out to put her hand over his on the wheel.

"Okay. As long as you know the offer is there if you want to take me up on it."

Evan turned his hand over and, for the first time in all his adult years, entwined his fingers with another. He looked at her long, slender hand in his and wondered how, in that

moment, she was the strong one. She was the anchor holding him steady as he headed into uncharted waters.

“Thank you,” he whispered across the console, and never in his life had he ever meant two words more.

\* \* \*

THIRTY MINUTES LATER, Reagan shut the door behind Evan as he left to go and visit his mother. She walked over to the mini fridge and opened it up, wondering if there was anything inside she'd be willing to drop six dollars on just to take her mind off what Evan was about to do.

It was too early for alcohol, and honestly, she wasn't sure a bottle that size would do any good anyway. *Hmm*, the Snickers looked good, and so did the M&M's, for that matter. *Oh hell, why not both?*

She grabbed them out of the fridge, refusing to look at the “actual” price, and moved over to the bed. Kicking her shoes off, she climbed to the center and flicked on the TV. Nothing like a midday Saturday movie to take her mind off things.

As a massive eighties perm and pastel pink jacket with shoulder pads filled the screen, she rethought her original idea and wondered if perhaps a nap wouldn't be the better option. Scooting down until her head was against the pillow, she unwrapped the chocolate bar and took a bite out of it.

*Oh Jesus, that's good.* Almost good enough that she'd forgotten the orgasm Evan was still withholding from her. *Well, almost.*

Her eyes started to get heavy as she relaxed into the duvet, and as she stared at the ceiling fan above her, she thought about the woman Evan was on his way to see. She tried to convince him to rest first, but he'd said he was too wired to sleep. That was understandable. She was nervous for him, and it wasn't even her mother. But as she popped the last piece of chocolate into her mouth, she closed her eyes and

thought back to the first time she'd ever seen Mrs. Rockwell. It was a moment that had changed her life.

*"Jenny!"*

*Jennifer stopped the jump rope from swinging overhead as her mother shouted her name again. She ran to the back door and flung open the screen. Stepping inside, she saw her mother halfway down the stairs clutching several curlers in her hand.*

*"Oh good, there you are. Can you go and let Rocky's mother in? I just saw her pull up out the front, and I'm a mess."*

*Jennifer grinned at her mom and nodded. "You aren't a mess. You look pretty."*

*"Jen, half my hair is done, and I'm in my nightgown. But thank you for saying that. You're a sweet, sweet girl."*

*As her mom turned and dashed back up the stairs, Jennifer skipped up the hall to the front door. Her brother and Rocky had gotten up early to ride down to the creek and catch fish. She'd begged them to let her go with them, but after the threat of frog throwing and mud fights, she'd wisely, in her opinion, opted to stay home.*

*When she got to the front door, she peered through the narrow panel of glass in the wood and saw a shiny red convertible parked in their driveway. It reminded her of the car she used to drive her Barbie around in. The one she'd told her mom she wanted when she grew up.*

*She pressed her face up to the glass, and the first thing she saw was a black, wide-brimmed hat and matching sunglasses so round they pretty much covered half the woman's face. The car door pushed open then, and a long leg and a really, really high black heel appeared, only to vanish as it sank into the gravel of their drive. Then the woman got out of the car.*

*Jennifer's eyes widened as the tall, willowy woman straightened and shut the door behind her. Her blond hair was*

*pulled into a fancy 'do at the nape of her neck, so the hat could sit perfectly on top of her head. She had a white handbag looped over her right forearm and was wearing a black and white geometric pencil dress. On her hands she wore elegant white gloves, and there was a gold bracelet around one of her wrists that was catching the sun.*

*The lady was unlike anyone Jennifer had ever seen before. And in that moment, she wanted to grow up to be just like her.*

*Jennifer took a step back and pulled the front door open, wanting to get a better look at the woman walking toward their front door. She'd known Rocky's family was different to theirs, but he'd always said how much he liked coming over. She had no idea why, if this was his mom, because as far as she could tell, she was beautiful like a movie star.*

*"Well, hello, young lady," Mrs. Rockwell said, as she finally came to a standstill in front of her.*

*Jennifer tried to open her mouth and say hello back, always taught to respect your elders and mind your manners, but as she looked up at the woman all she could do was stare. The lady reached up and removed her sunglasses, and when her warm brown eyes seemed to smile down at her, Jennifer found herself beaming back.*

*"What's your name?"*

*Jennifer giggled. "Jenny."*

*"Jenny, is it?" she asked, and then gave her a quick look up and down. "Well, I think I'll call you Jennifer. You look like a young lady to me. And all smart young ladies should have strong names."*

*Absolutely enchanted by Rocky's mom, Jennifer didn't think before she blurted out, "What's your name?"*

*"Audrey. Audrey Rockwell." She straightened and gave a wink as she started to pull off her gloves. "Remember that name. It's going to be famous one day."*

*Jennifer looked up at Mrs. Rockwell, the sun beaming down on her, and thought she looked as though she were under a spotlight. As far as she was concerned, this woman was already a superstar.*

\* \* \*

THE WOMAN STANDING in front of Evan in the meeting area of the Oxford Federal Correctional Facility looked a helluva lot like the woman who raised him, but there was no light behind this woman's dark eyes, no warmth to her complexion. Pale and tired, her golden hair faded to an ash blond, Audrey Rockwell stood before him in a slightly ruffled orange jumpsuit, her arms hesitantly outstretched as though she wasn't sure what kind of greeting she should offer.

"Hi, Mom," Evan said, and stepped forward to wrap his arms around her. As she returned his hug, the tension eased out of her body, and she gave him a light squeeze.

"You look good," he told her when he pulled back.

"And you sound like your father. A master bullshitter."

He winced at that as he waited for his mom to sit before pulling out the plastic folding chair on his side of the table. The last thing he wanted was comparisons to the man he'd cut ties with.

"Well, I'm not lying when I say you've got the better setup from what I can see," Evan said, looking around at the freshly painted cerulean walls and fake potted plants in the corners. "Though it looks more like a retirement home than a prison."

"It'll be that too," his mom said as she threaded her long fingers on the table. She cocked her head to the side, wisps of her fine hair falling from her shoulder to brush against her neck. "What are you doing all this way, Evan?"

"I just thought I'd take a drive down here to check on you."

She nodded slowly, as though wondering whether or not to believe him. Assessing him through critical eyes, she said, “You look much better than the last time I saw you. Happy, even.”

“Happy...”

“Well? Are you?”

It’d been so long since happiness had been an option, he’d forgotten what it felt like. Was he?

“I’m trying,” he said.

“No doubt working with Bill helps.”

His brow furrowed, and he leaned forward with his arms on the table. “How did you know I was working for Bill?”

“I’m your mother. I know everything.”

“So who’s the master bullshitter now?”

She laughed, a long belly laugh. “What do you think landed me in here? Being honest?”

“How’d you know about Bill?”

“He told me.”

Evan stared at his mother, his brow raised. “He told you. What, during your weekly phone call?”

As he began to chuckle, she said, “Yes, actually.”

His laughter stopped. “What do you mean *yes*?”

“I thought you would’ve pieced it together by now, what with working for his company. Plucking you up out of the blue, giving you a second chance, not questioning your rather suspect lineage.”

Heat filled his face as his brain struggled to piece together what she was telling him. “Are you...are you telling me *you* had something to do with all this?”

“Of course not.”



“But?” he asked, sensing there was more she wasn’t saying.

With a sigh, she tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, and said, “You must know it’s a small world you’re in.”

“Referring to my job, I suppose, and not the millions of people I’m surrounded by living in Manhattan. Is this your way of telling me you two are...what, friends?” He laughed again, finding that explanation hilarious. “I’ve already heard from your partner in crime what he thinks about Bill Kelman, so yeah. Okay, Mom.”

“I’m glad you find this amusing,” she said. “But I’ve always had a...*differing* opinion than your father when it comes to him.”

“What do you mean, *a differing opinion*?”

“Bill and I were...close.”

Evan’s eyes widened. *What the hell is she talking about?*

“The fuck do you mean *close*?”

His mom shrugged, as if she wasn’t opening a huge-ass can of worms. “If things hadn’t gone down the way they did, our lives would’ve been much different.”

“Jesus Christ, meaning what? And spare me the riddles. I didn’t drive nine hours to talk circles with you.”

But all talk of circles went out the damn window when she told him, “I think maybe you should discuss this with Bill.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE EXPRESSION ON Evan's face when he walked into the hotel room later that afternoon was not one Reagan was expecting. Where she thought he'd be a bit down and out, instead he was a mixture of riled up and perplexed.

He leaned against the door, shaking his head and rolling up the sleeves of his grey collared shirt.

Reagan sat up from the bed, where she'd been napping, and rubbed her eyes. "Did something happen?"

Evan strolled into the room, running his hands through his hair. He looked agitated, and wasn't replying. She crossed her legs under her and watched as he moved to the end of the bed to turn and sit down—his back to her, a wall firmly in place.

*Well, that's just terrific.*

"Evan?" she tried again. And still he didn't turn. She scooted down to the end of the bed and sat beside him, their shoulders and hips lined up with one another, and this time, when she said his name, she placed a hand on his thigh. "Evan? What happened?"

He took in a breath so deep she saw his shoulders rise and then fall again. He must've been tired, having driven the entire way. And where she'd been able to lie down and get some rest, he'd chosen to go straight over to see his mother.

She was about to open her mouth and try again, when Evan finally turned to her and spoke. "Just the usual bullshit when it comes to my parents."

"Talk to me."

"Did you know?"

"Know what?"

"That Bill and my mom are close."

"They're...what? Define close."

Evan shook his head. "You know, somewhere in the back of my mind, I always wondered how my grandparents paid for it all. The private schools, the car I got when I passed my driver's test. They weren't rich people, and any money in the family disappeared when my parents got busted. Makes sense now."

"I'm not following. What does that have to do with Bill?"

Evan's eyes pierced through hers. "That's what I plan to ask him." He didn't touch her, other than where she had her hand on his leg, but when she moved in closer he shook his head. "It's probably best if you don't—"

"Don't what?" she interrupted, knowing he was about to block her out. "Show that I care? Is that what you were about to say?"

His eyes narrowed, and then he turned away from her. "Something like that. Reagan, this...whatever this is between us, it can't be what you want it to be. I'm not the same boy I was back then. I'm so fucked up. I mean, you're sitting in a fucking hotel room waiting for me while I visit my mother in prison."

He got to his feet and walked away from her to the small window. "What they did back then, to your family—"

hell, to all the fucking people who trusted them—it took its toll. It took its toll on me. I changed because of them, and I can never go back.”

Reagan stood also, ready to somehow try and comfort him, tell him he was wrong... *But is he? Am I crazy for thinking that we could have anything more than a few quick fucks? Is our past too complicated to ever un-complicate that?*

“I don’t want the boy from back then,” she said, and slowly moved toward him. His back was still facing her, and she wondered if she was brave enough to really lay her feelings out for him to see. But if she didn’t at least try, then how would she ever know? When she was directly behind him, with only inches to spare, she placed her palm on his back and whispered, “I want the man who’s here now.”

“Reagan—”

“Tell me you haven’t thought about me.”

A long silence went by before he said, “I haven’t lied to you, and I won’t. Not now. Not ever.”

Reagan received that message loud and clear. He was telling her he hadn’t touched anyone since the night he’d been with her.

She rested her head between his shoulder blades and summoned up every ounce of courage she had to speak the words she’d kept locked away behind a wall of self-preservation and pride.

“Please,” she said, closing her eyes. “Please don’t push me away.”

His shuddering breath beneath her cheek was the only response he gave, and when she wrapped her arms around his waist, his hand grabbed both of hers like he was going to do exactly what she asked him not to—push her away.

But then he sighed and turned around to face her. His fingers trailed the side of her face, and she leaned into them. “What is it you see...” he said, echoing the words he’d spoken before when she’d been looking at him through a camera lens.

She reached up and intertwined her fingers with his before softly kissing the tips of them. He looked at her with hunger in his eyes, but there was something else there too. Something that should've scared her, but instead had her wanting more.

With his hands cradling her face, he ever so slowly brought his lips down to meet hers. It was soft, sensual, and when their mouths met, Reagan swore her knees almost gave out. She'd never seen this side of Evan before. Usually when they came together it was fast, passionate, and full of fire. But as his tongue slid between her lips and rubbed against hers, she moaned at the seductive caress.

She brought their entwined hands down to her side, and when she released his fingers, he wrapped an arm around her waist, bringing her body in close to his.

“God, Reagan,” he whispered, when he raised his head to look down at her. “I need...”

When he trailed off, she shook her head and urged him to continue. “What do you need?”

He licked his lower lip, and she could tell he was trying to decide how much to say. Then he lowered his head, pressed a kiss to her ear, and said, “To be the man you see when you look at me like you are now.”

She turned her head, and when their eyes connected she asked, “And who's that?”

“The man who deserves your heart.”

\* \* \*

EVAN CAPTURED REAGAN'S lips before she could respond, and when her hands moved up to encircle his neck, the swell of her breasts pressed against his chest. He ran his hands down her sides to her ass, and when he squeezed and hoisted her off the ground, she wrapped her legs around his waist.

Her fingers speared through the hair at the back of his neck, and as she deepened the kiss, he couldn't help the groan that escaped his throat.

*Fuck, she's sweet.* Her taste, her smell, and, most of all, her heart.

He turned around and lowered her to the bed, and as her brown curls fanned out around her, he thought she'd never looked more beautiful than she did in that moment. She smiled up at him and slowly spread her legs. Then she crooked her finger at him, and the invitation was more than he could resist.

He stepped between her thighs and placed a knee on the mattress. Then he moved down over her to put his palms by either side of her head.

"Kiss me," she said, and his mouth curved into a smile to match hers.

"What's the magic word?"

Her eyes held a mischievous twinkle as they moved to his lips before coming back up to meet his. "Now?"

He grinned and gave her lips a quick kiss and said against them, "See, sometimes your sassy answers are just perfect."

"Oh yeah?"

He trailed his tongue along her lower lip, sampling her, and then replied, "Oh yeah."

Evan dipped his tongue in between her lips, unable to stop himself from tasting her. One thing they'd always seemed to skip when rushing to the finish line was this part. The meeting of mouths, the mingling of breath, and as she sighed and the sound drifted between them, he thought, the mutual pleasure of savoring another.

Reagan's hands came up to touch his sides, and when they smoothed over his ass, he ground his hips down, rubbing his erection against the denim she was wearing. Her fingers dug in as she pulled him down, and when she arched up into him, he lifted his lips from hers.

Her eyes were dilated as she opened them to focus on him, and her lips were ruby red from his kisses. When she bit into her lush lower lip and trailed her fingers around to the button of his jeans, he raised his hips in an effort to assist her. She made quick work of the button and his zipper before pushing his jeans and boxer briefs down past his hips. He pulled his wallet out of the back pocket and grabbed a condom, then tossed the foil packet on the bed and removed the clothing Reagan had been trying to rid him of. Kneeling between her spread thighs, he began to unbutton his shirt as her hands went to the front of her jeans. He watched her flick open the button and slowly unzip, and then she brushed her fingers over the pink panties she was wearing underneath. When Reagan's hand disappeared inside her jeans, a low growl escaped his throat, and she smiled before pulling her hand back out. Then she sat up and removed her sweater, leaving her ample cleavage showcased in a pink bra that had his mouth watering. She moved his hands away from his shirt and took over undressing him, moving up to her knees so they were nose to nose.

As she leaned in closer and bit his lobe, he groaned. "Reagan..."

His hands slid down her waist, pushing her jeans and panties down as they continued their trail of her body. After she'd pushed off his shirt and tossed it on the floor, he did the same with the clothes needlessly covering the lower half of her beautiful figure. She caught his lips again as she knelt in front of him, his hands sliding under the straps of her bra before unfastening and removing it completely. When she was bare beneath his hands, he pulled her tighter against him, his tongue exploring every inch of her mouth, and fuck, she tasted like heaven. Like something he'd heard existed but something he never thought he'd be able to attain.

She pulled back slightly, her lips brushing his, and then she whispered, "I want to be enough for you."

*You are*, he thought, and as the two words ran through his mind, he took her lips again, this time in a kiss full of the pent-up emotions swirling inside him. They fell on the bed,

her on her back, him stretched out over her. After grabbing the foil packet next to them and tearing it open with his teeth, he settled between her open thighs and rocked against her.

One of her hands snaked down between them, but he was quicker, taking hold of them both and placing them up by her head so he could move his entire body along hers. She writhed underneath him, arching her back and undulating her hips in an effort to get closer.

The sexy sounds tumbling off her tempting tongue had his cock hard and his arms shaking. Never in his life had he desired a connection more than this. Not only did he want their bodies to become one, he also craved the emotion that was swirling in the depths of her eyes. He needed to know that the heart she'd just opened to him would be big enough to accept and understand who he truly was—on the inside and out. But the question that kept tripping through his mind was—could anyone learn to love someone like him?

Reagan wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him out of his thoughts, almost as if she sensed he was getting caught up inside them, and when the tip of his cock brushed over her slick entrance, the heat of her had him groaning her name.

He wasn't sure how long he would last once he buried himself inside her, but the time for waiting was over. He needed to be one with this woman, and he needed it now.

\* \* \*

REAGAN STARED UP at the sexy man hovering over her, and tried to recall a more perfect moment in her life. For as long as she could remember, this boy—no, this man—had been a figure in her mind. Whether he be a friend of her brother's, a ghost of her past, or the lover currently teasing between her thighs. No matter what else had happened throughout her life, Evan had always been on her mind, in some way or another.



With her hands trapped by her head, and the wide tip of his erection grazing her clit, Reagan's breath was coming in soft pants. Then Evan lowered his head and flicked his tongue over the tip of her nipple, and her eyes fluttered closed.

*Oh God. That feels so fucking good.*

He then scraped his teeth over the tip before sucking it between his lips. Her hips snapped up in response, and her arms strained against his grip. "Evan..." she cried out, hoping to get him to move into action.

"You are so fucking beautiful. Every inch of you is—"

"Yours," she moaned. "Take me."

He let go of one of her wrists and swept a strand of hair from her face.

"I want to be able to see your face when I'm inside you."

His hand went back to holding her down, and then she felt the head of his cock slowly push inside her. Inch by delicious inch, he slid deeper until he was filling her completely. He stopped then, and the look he aimed down at her was almost heartbreaking. It was full of shock and awe, as if he'd never before felt all that he was feeling, and when Reagan lifted her head from the mattress to softly kiss his lips, she said, "I've never wanted you more than I do right now."

Her words seemed to spark him into action, and he withdrew from her, only to thrust back inside again.

The movement was slow at first, but as she bowed up off the bed to meet each of his downward slides, Evan picked up the pace. His chest grazed her sensitive nipples as he rolled his hips over hers, tunneling into her tight, throbbing pussy. His pelvic bone rubbed over her mound, and she couldn't help but press harder against it, trying to reach that elusive release.

"Let go of my hands," she begged, and, surprisingly, he freed them. She brought them down to cup his ass, and then she really started to use his body for her own pleasure. As his cock slid in and out of her, she ground her clit against him,

knowing with a couple more thrusts in just the right spot and

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“Oh, fuck—right there. Yes, *yes*...don't stop.”

Evan's fingers gripped her hair as his hips pistoned, his cock shoving deeper and harder with her cries. Their climaxes were so close, chasing one another as a bead of sweat gathered at his temple, and when their eyes locked together and she exploded around his thick shaft, Evan threw his head back, the veins in his neck straining against the skin as he shouted her name in total satisfaction.

As they came down from the high, he fell to his elbows on top of her, the rocking of their hips slowing to a stop. Evan rested his forehead against hers, and when he opened his mouth again to speak, her heart stuttered and stopped.

“More than enough,” he said on a breath of air. “It's so much fucking more.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

EVAN SWIPED HIS MetroCard and pushed through the turnstile, navigating through the throng of passengers hurrying through the underground maze. His body was exhausted from the weekend, but his mind was running a mile a minute. And at the forefront of his thoughts was Reagan.

He felt the loss of her acutely, though he'd dropped her off at her apartment only a half-hour ago with promises to return after he took care of a little personal matter.

Though it wasn't spoken aloud, the wall between them had crumbled, the bond between them solidifying into something...more. He felt it, felt it in his gut, knew it in his heart. He was fucking done for.

Rubbing his forehead, he yawned and stepped forward as the C train slowed to a stop, and then took a spot inside standing against the opposite doors.

Reagan fucking Spencer. The bombshell who'd taken over his brain these past few months, the one he'd done everything, and he did mean *everything*, to get a fucking release from. The fiery, independent woman who didn't do relationships or second dates or weekends away with a

member of the opposite sex. And she was crazy about him. Wanted to hold his hand while he drove the nine hours back to Manhattan. Wanted him in her bed tonight. Was willing to try with him even knowing every fucking one of his faults.

He wasn't about to complain, but he did wonder if maybe she'd lost her damn mind.

The thought had him grinning, and as he looked up, he caught his reflection in the window. It was such a marked difference from the last time he remembered seeing what he'd become through the grimy glass of a subway car. Was he really the man staring back at him? The one who smiled, the one with a great job, money in the bank, and an incredible woman who wanted to be by his side? Fuck, but he wanted to be. He hoped he was. The broken man looking for a quick alley fuck was someone he didn't recognize in that reflection, but it scared him that he was still inside somewhere, lurking deep down, ready to strike and take over at a moment's notice.

*Fuck off. One day at a time. I'm taking it one fucking day at a time.*

But there was something else on his mind. Or *someone* else, rather. There were questions he couldn't get out of his head, and only one person could answer them.

When he reached his stop, he exited the train and took the stairs leading above ground two at a time. He'd never been to this destination specifically, but he was familiar enough with the area. This part of Brooklyn felt like suburbia compared to the rush of his neighborhood. It was quiet here, and the occupants of the brownstones were occupied by the age group that loved to tend to the small gardens they kept in the boxed backyards, and the fruits of their green thumbs lined the stoops.

He pulled out the paper Reagan had written the address on, and double-checked the house number before walking up the stairs to number fourteen thirty-seven. Taking a deep breath, he knocked twice, and then waited, an unexpected rush of nerves shooting through his stomach.

And as the door opened, he came face to face with the man who knew far more about him than he'd ever expected.

Bill gave him a warm smile when he opened his front door. "I thought I might be hearing from you."

"I have questions."

"Then you might wanna come inside," Bill said, holding the door open wide. "I've got answers."

\* \* \*

REAGAN STOOD AT the bottom of the wide stairs that led up to the most beautifully restored brownstone on the street, and looked back at the Hudson River. She'd been here before. Well, not here exactly, but she'd stood on the opposite side of the street and watched Evan vacate this building once before.

It was gorgeous and slightly intimidating in the way it towered up toward the sky. Tangled vines of ivy trailed up the staircase railing, and as she clutched the strap of her handbag and took a fortifying breath, Reagan reminded herself that she was there for a good reason. She wasn't being nosy, nor was she being invasive, in her opinion. She was there to make sure that the man who she'd fallen in love with was not going to break her heart.

*But how realistic is that? Can I really expect Evan's therapist to talk to me? And if so, will he tell me what I want to hear?* These were the thoughts that'd been running through her head on the way back from North Carolina.

Her weekend away with Evan had been enlightening. *Enlightening and life changing.* She'd gone from a woman who was hellbent on taking things slow and getting their relationship back to a "friendlier" place, to one who had fallen head over heels.

Evan James was in her soul. She'd tried in vain to push him aside, to forget about him and how he made her feel. But after eighteen hours trapped in a car with the man, and the

hours they'd spent rolling around in the hotel bed together, it was no use. He was forever ingrained there. Every part of him tugged at her heart: the man anguished over his lost childhood, the dark, desperate side of him he tried to squash down, and the charming professional he was—it all called to something in her. Something forbidden that made her feel just as needy as he was whenever they touched.

She loved this man. As broken, damaged, and fucked up as he may be. She loved him. Which is why she was here.

Making her way up the stairs, she swallowed back the lump of fear she could feel in her throat and rang the doorbell. She turned away from the large double door, and stared back across at the spot on the street where Evan had tricked her into going speed-dating with him. That was the night she'd seen beneath the darkness for the first time. He'd been fun, carefree, and even managed to get the upper hand on her, which rarely happened. His boyish charm had resurfaced that night, and she'd been powerless against it.

The sound of a door handle being turned had her spinning back to see a man in his early fifties standing in the open doorway. He was wearing casual, light-colored slacks and a thin black knit sweater, and his dark hair was peppered with flecks of grey. He smiled at her in greeting, and the warmth of it made Reagan automatically return the gesture.

“Can I help you?” he asked.

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Reagan regretted showing up there.

“Um...you know what, I think I have the wrong house,” she rushed out, and headed back down the steps.

“Wait...miss, just one second.”

She slowly turned back to face the man at the top of the stairs, feeling like an idiot.

“Do I know you?” he asked.

“No. No, you don't know me.”

“May I ask your name?”

Reagan hesitated, wondering how much he knew. Had Evan mentioned her? She was almost positive he had. *Yeah, this was a stupid, stupid decision.*

The man's forehead creased, and he asked, "Are you all right?"

*Oh fuck it.*

"Yes, I'm sorry." She took a tentative step back onto the stoop. "I'm Reagan Spencer, and I'm not really sure what I'm doing here."

If the man was aware of who she was, his face didn't betray that knowledge. "Sure you do. Why don't you come inside? I've made a hot pot of tea."

"You mean you don't serve alcohol?"

"You know," he said, "I was just asked that same question recently." As Reagan reached the top of the staircase, he held out his hand. "Michael Glover."

She gave him a firm handshake. "It's nice to meet you."

"And it's very nice to meet you, Reagan. Come on in." He held the door open for her to pass through and then led her to a tidy kitchen, more long than it was wide, and motioned for her to sit down at a circular glass table.

"Cream and sugar okay?" he said when he brought out an ornate teapot and matching cups.

"Yes, thank you. Cute set you have there."

"They're my wife's," he said, pouring some of the steaming liquid into Reagan's cup. "I stole her away from England, but she wouldn't leave without her fine china. No doubt she'll have another set when she gets back from seeing her family this week." He set down the pot and took the seat across from Reagan. "So, Ms. Spencer. What brings you by?"

Reagan stirred the sugar in her mug until it dissolved, and then looked up. "You know who I am."

Not a question. A statement.

Again, Dr. Glover's face gave nothing away. "Why would you assume that?"

"You're not going to make this easy, are you?"

He took a long sip of his tea, and when he put it down, he looked at her expectantly.

"Of course not," she said. "Well, your client, Evan James, is a...close, personal friend of mine."

He didn't blink.

"And I was wondering. Hoping, really, that you could..." *Could what, exactly? What the hell do I expect him to tell me?* She rubbed her forehead and blew out a breath. "I need you to tell me I'm not making a massive fuck-up of my life by falling for your client."

\* \* \*

EVAN WANDERED INSIDE past Bill and made his way down the narrow hall. Bill shut the door behind him and followed as Evan took in the cozy surroundings of a well-lived-in home. As he stopped in the living room and spotted the bar off to the side, he immediately felt comfortable.

This was Bill. From the well-worn recliner, to the fireplace with photos of friends and... *Wait a minute.* Evan walked over to the mantel and picked up a framed image. The woman staring back at him was like a ghost from his past. She certainly wasn't the same woman he'd seen just this weekend, but as he turned to face his boss, Bill gave him a smile that was filled with as much joy as sadness.

"Your mother was an extremely beautiful lady."

Evan lowered his eyes back to the image to see a young Bill, dressed smartly in a suit and tie with his mother on tiptoe kissing his cheek. Her hair was free and flowing behind her, as though the wind had caught it in its fingers, and behind them was the spectacular view from the top of the Empire



State Building. The photo could've been taken professionally, it was so well captured, but Evan somehow knew—

“Did my father take this?”

Bill ambled around the recliner and took a seat before replying, “Yes, he did. We were close back then. Your parents and me.”

Evan's eyebrow winged up as he cocked his head to the side. “How close? I mean, we are talking the seventies here—there wasn't any—”

“No, no.” Bill chuckled. “Not like that. At least not with your father.”

The silence that stretched between them was tense, and Evan ran his finger down the side of the frame as he thought about his next question. Did he really want to get into this? What if he learned something he didn't want to? Would that make him spiral back to old habits?

He was almost scared to continue. He didn't want anything to fuck up this new version of himself. The version Reagan deserved.

“Why don't you sit down?” Bill suggested.

“No, I think I'd rather stand.”

“For a quick getaway? It's not like I could chase you down,” he said, and then indicated his leg.

Instead of laughing at the genial man seated, Evan turned away. He wasn't sure how he felt about what Bill had just revealed, even though he'd suspected it ever since his mother had brought it up back at the prison.

“So you and my mom—” He stopped and looked over his shoulder at Bill. “You were what? Fucking behind my father's back?”

Bill's mouth opened, but before he could continue, Evan blurted, “He is *still* my father, right?” He was almost hopeful for a second that Bill would say no. *Yeah, 'cause that would make your life easier, moron.*

“Yes, yes. He’s definitely your father, Evan. Your mother and I didn’t start seeing each other until the last couple of years before—”

“Before they both got carted off to prison?” Evan supplied, when Bill seemed hesitant to say the actual words.

“Yes. Before then. You see, we were very close, Evan, all three of us. We were talking about going into partnership with one another, but your father had some ideas that I wasn’t onboard with.”

“Like pillaging from your unsuspecting clients.”

“Well, we didn’t know about those dealings until much later on.”

“We? Are you saying my mother wasn’t involved?”

Bill leveled his gaze on Evan. “She wasn’t involved.”

“The justice system would beg to disagree.”

“Wouldn’t be the first time it was wrong. Not that she was innocent by the end of it all. When she—we found out about the schemes your father had been conducting behind our backs, she tried to leave him. She knew he was a ticking time bomb, and she didn’t want that to be your lives.”

“But?”

“But your father can be quite...conniving. When he found out she was planning to divorce him, he blackmailed her into staying.”

“And how did he do that?”

Bill shook his head. “That’s neither here nor there, and it’s not my place to say.”

“So it wasn’t because my father found out about you two?”

“Not entirely. Though he wasn’t exactly pleased when he found out.”

Evan rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hand. Bill, the friendly, wouldn’t-hurt-a-fly Bill, wasn’t as innocent as he

would've guessed. His mind was spinning with the revelations, but before he could try to fill in the gaps in the story, Bill continued.

"I guess there are a few more questions you'd like answered. Yes, I still talk to your mom. I was fond of her then; I'm fond of her now. She's curious about her son, always has been, which I'm sure you can understand. You don't check in with her much."

"So you're spying on me?"

"Looking out for you would be more like it."

Evan scoffed. "Let me guess, you were the one behind my first car? The scholarships I received for college? You're the one who's saving me from rock bottom by giving me a job. Thanks. Really. I appreciate you throwing money my way like a fairy fucking godfather, but did it ever occur to you that maybe a little moral support would be more useful?"

"What was I supposed to do? Some strange man comes to you when you're ten, wanting to be a father figure to you? I helped you in the only way I knew how. You were in good hands with your grandparents. Your scholarships were all you. Hell, this job is all you. You want to blame any personal problems on anyone else, and I'll slap that notion right down. Be responsible for your own choices, Evan, and don't blame the way you were raised on the effects of bad decisions."

"Sounds like I'm not the only one who's made some really bad decisions."

Bill pursed his lips and nodded. "And I pay for that every day. Maybe it's time we both start making some good decisions."

"Such as?"

"Reagan. She'd be one of the best decisions you ever made, son."

*Fuck, he's right about that one. Looks like he's not done looking out for me yet.*

\* \* \*

REAGAN CHEWED THE inside of her cheek as she stared across the table at the stoic therapist. He hadn't said a word in the past five minutes, and she knew that because she'd been watching the clock just over his shoulder.

*Cagey bastard.*

She raised her teacup to her lips and took a sip, trying to remember the manners her mother had instilled within her and the fact that she was a lady. Otherwise, she'd have dumped it on the table, stood up, and demanded he tell her what the fuck he knew. But...she was a lady. And she was going to have to weave her way through this conversation as though walking through a maze.

Placing the cup back on the saucer, she settled into the chair, hoping for nonchalance as she racked her mind on how to bring up a topic she *knew* he wasn't allowed to discuss.

“So,” she started, and that damn eyebrow of his arched up, halting her before she began. “You’re kind of intimidating. Anyone ever told you that?”

“Intimidating?” Dr. Glover said. “I have been called many things in this house, some that aren’t polite to repeat in front of a lady, but intimidating isn’t one.” He leaned to the side, placed his teacup down, and then rubbed his thumb and forefinger over his chin. “Why do you feel intimidated? You aren’t a client of mine. You can say whatever you please.”

Reagan resisted the urge to roll her eyes. He was such a...doctor. And it was clear he was used to talking his clients in a circle until they confessed, admitted, or whatever they did when they came to see him.

“Look, I know you can’t tell me anything, but I don’t want to be...oh, I don’t know, leaping the hell off this bridge with someone who might not jump with me.” She stopped, thought about that, and then shook her head. “Okay, no, that sounds wrong. I don’t want Evan...I mean your *client* to jump off buildings with me. But metaphorically speaking—”

“I like metaphors,” the doctor interrupted.

“Do you? Oh good. Well, umm...let’s just pretend something for a minute, is that okay? Surely you role-play in here all the time.”

When Dr. Glover’s lips twitched, Reagan wanted to kick her own ass. Why did everything sound ridiculous coming out of her mouth right now? *Because you’re nervous. A nervous fool in love.*

“Say you were a vet, and I brought my dog to see you. But I’ve never had a dog before, and I want to know what brand of dog food to feed him. I ask you what you feed your dog instead of asking you what you recommend, because I know you can’t flat-out tell me and show bias. So then you would say...” She knew the expression on her face must have been stuck somewhere between hopeful and ridiculous, but she figured what the hell at this stage.

The doctor sat back in his chair and nodded as he seemed to ponder her question. “I see. Well, I would feed my dog Science Diet dog food.”

“No, no.” Reagan sighed, waving her hand in the air. “I don’t actually mean—”

“Ms. Spencer?”

Reagan shut her mouth. He was probably about to tell her to quit rambling about dog food, and get the hell out of his house.

“If *I* had a daughter, and not a dog, and a certain young man came into her life that she wanted approval to pursue, I would tell her to follow her heart but use her head.”

Reagan sat forward on the seat and felt as though the heart that was really under discussion, her own, was about to thump right out of her chest.

“So you think there’s hope here—I mean, hope for your daughter?”

Dr. Glover gave her a smile and stood. When she did the same, he held out his hand to her and she took it. His warm fingers

wrapped around hers, a comfort in his grip, and when he said,  
“There’s always hope,” Reagan believed him.

## CHAPTER THIRTY

### *6 weeks later...*

“SEE YOU NEXT week, Evan.”

Evan tossed his empty Styrofoam cup into the trash can situated in the corner of the Baldwin Arts Center’s meeting room and looked over his shoulder. Carl Thomas, the leader of the Sex Addiction Recovery meetings held every Saturday morning, gave him an encouraging smile.

“Thank you for sharing your story this morning,” the man continued. “It’s a brave thing to do, and it will help the others with their struggle.”

“That’s what these are for, right? I’ll even bring the cookies next week.” Evan’s lips tipped up in a half-smile, and he nodded a goodbye before making his way out of the room.

It hadn’t taken any prodding from anyone for him to commit to attending the weekly meetings with his fellow sex-obsessed peers. Though in the past few weeks the destructive urge he’d had over the past year or so hadn’t been present, he wasn’t deluding himself that he was cured or ever would be.

But he was trying. There was too much at stake for him to fuck things up—literally.

And as he pushed through the glass exit door, the most important reason came into view.

Dressed casually in black spandex workout pants and a hoodie with her long brunette hair pulled up in a ponytail, Reagan was a fucking vision. She always was. Always took his breath away whenever she came into view.

She was snapping away with her camera, pulling it back every so often to adjust a setting. Evan looked across the street at the objects of her focus. An older gentleman was handing money to a hot dog vendor, ignoring what seemed like protests from the woman beside him.

“And what’s their story?” Evan asked as he strolled her way, hands in his pockets.

Reagan looked up at him and grinned before turning her attention back across the street. “He’s a kindly multimillionaire, who doesn’t dress like one, and he goes around paying for a random New Yorkers’ food at the vendors he passes while he’s out.”

“Sounds like he’s racking up some good karma.”

“Mhmm, it does.” Reagan put down the camera, letting it hang from the strap around her neck as Evan wrapped his arms around her waist and leaned in for a kiss.

“I missed you,” he said against her lips.

She laughed and pushed him away. “A whole hour. Must’ve been torture.”

“It was. I’m starving.”

Reagan narrowed her eyes at his double meaning. “Don’t you dare. You just got out of a meeting, and we’ve already made plans.” She reached down for the picnic basket and tote bag at her feet, but Evan was quicker.

“That’s what I meant. I’m starving for food. Get your thoughts out of the gutter, Ms. Spencer, there are children



around.” He took her hand in his and gave her a wink. “Are we thinking Bryant Park today?”

Reagan flashed her warm smile at him. “You lead, and I’ll follow.”

“Those are dangerous words, don’t you think?”

She gave a soft laugh as they started to walk. “Maybe at one time. But I’m feeling pretty confident these days.”

Evan squeezed her fingers and grinned. “I don’t think you’ve ever lacked confidence, Reagan.” He leaned down and put his lips by her ear. “From the very first night we went home together, you’ve matched me move for move.”

She turned her head, and when their lips brushed she flicked her tongue along his lower one. “I thought you were hungry for food?”

Evan nipped at her lip and then pulled his head away so they could keep walking to the park, but not before he told her, “I’ve always thought it was a shame to eat dessert last. Maybe we could—”

“No, no, no, Mr. James. We are eating this picnic I slaved over.”

“Umm...I’m pretty sure you picked it all up on your way here.”

Reagan stopped and placed her hands on her hips. “Are you insinuating I can’t cook?”

“Not at all. I am stating matter-of-factly that you don’t.”

She pouted at him, and he couldn’t help but lean down and take those sweet lips with his own, and when he pulled up he heard himself say, “But I love you anyway.”

\* \* \*

REAGAN FROZE WHERE she was on the bustling street. People were rushing past her, and cars were zipping in and out of the crazy New York traffic, and all she could do was stare wide-eyed at the man looking down at her. She licked her lips, and then moved her mouth, trying to get some words to come out, but when a broad smile crossed Evan's gorgeous face, she knew she hadn't misheard. The charming bastard had actually admitted he loved her.

She tilted her head to the side. "Did you really just tell me you loved me for the first time on the back end of an insult?"

Evan's eyebrow winged up as if it hadn't even occurred to him that that was what he'd done, and then he chuckled. "Maybe. Are you going to try and deny you loved hearing it?"

"You sure are confident today, aren't you, Mr. James?"

They started walking again, and he swung their hands as he looked at her, and Reagan's lips itched to break into the biggest grin of her life. But by God, she wouldn't give him the satisfaction just yet.

"I don't hear you denying it."

"And you won't," she told him. "But you don't have to be so smug about it."

He hummed and brought their hands to his mouth and pressed a kiss there. "Little Jenny Spencer loves me."

"Shut up, Evan."

"I think she's always loved me."

"Jesus, really?"

"Yep, really."

She tugged on his hand, leading him along the path into Bryant Park, and said, "Well, there's no accounting for taste."

Searching out a spot for them to sit, they made their way over to an open space on the inside of the green. She

spread out the small blanket she'd brought with her, and as she knelt down on it, Reagan watched him do the same opposite her. He hadn't spoken since they'd gotten there, and as he rummaged through the basket, pulling out the sandwiches she'd picked up from the corner bakery, she knew he was waiting—waiting for her to say it.

“Evan?” she said, as she reached into the canvas tote bag she had and felt around for the bottles of water in there. He looked up at her, his hazel eyes full of expectation.

“Yes, Reagan?”

She curled her fingers around the top of the bottle, pulled it out, and tossed it to him. He caught it and glanced down at the label. *Aqua Cool*. The product they'd agreed to disagree on rather spectacularly all those weeks ago.

“Now *that* is a fancy-looking bottle of water,” he said, turning it in his hands.

“Screams ‘buy me,’ don't you think?”

“Eh, I wouldn't go that far. I would've been just as happy with a chea—ow.”

Reagan swatted him again. “Don't you dare say you'd be happy with a cheaper brand, or I'll dump my expensive water all over that gorgeous head of hair.”

Evan looked down at the bottle again. “On second thought, it is excellent packaging.” He opened it and took a swig. “And an undeniable, thirst-quenching taste that anyone would be crazy not to pay an extra dollar for.”

She gave him a smug smile. “Thank you. I'm glad you see that I was right. Go ahead and say it. Yes, Reagan, you're a genius. I should just bow down now and—”

Evan tackling her to the ground had the breath rushing out of her lungs. He pinned her in, his hands on either side of her head.

“What was that about going down?” he asked, a flicker of lust in his hazel eyes.

“I said you should just bow down and accept defeat.”

“I could admit that...maybe if you admitted something in return.”

Reagan’s heart skipped in her chest, but there was no way she was giving in so easily. “Okay. I admit it. You don’t really snore in your sleep like I said you do.”

“Reagan—”

“And I might’ve lied when I told you I love eggs Benedict. I don’t. I hate it.”

Evan’s eyes went wide. “I thought we’d cured you of that.”

She squirmed underneath him. “I didn’t want to hurt your feelings. It looks so pretty, but there’s just all this sauce, and I can’t...” She twisted up her face.

“I’m not sure I can continue this relationship anymore. That’s a deal breaker.”

Reagan pouted and rose up to her elbows. “But I do love your beef Wellington...and your filet mignon with mushroom-wine sauce...and the way your bacon is always so”—she kissed his lips—“perfectly”—another kiss—“cooked.”

“So you’re saying you love my meat.”

She grinned under his mouth. “I fucking love your meat.”

He took her lips again in a scorching kiss, and she slid her tongue inside. She wouldn’t admit it, but Evan tasted better than any meal he could whip up.

“Get a room!” A shout from across the green had her breaking away from him before she wanted to.

“Now that I’ve worked up an appetite, we should probably eat,” she said, pushing against his chest until they were both sitting up. She took out two plates and unwrapped the sandwiches while Evan reached inside the basket and pulled out—

“White macadamia cookies. You’re a goddess.”

“You can say that again.”

“You’re a goddess.”

Reagan laughed and handed him his plate.

They both sat comfortably, munching on their food, as they eyed one another thinking about later. She loved moments like this with him. They’d become a “thing” for them. He’d do his weekly afternoon meeting, and she’d take the opportunity to snap some photos around the area before they’d meet up and have lunch. Which had her glancing down at the camera resting by her side.

She put her plate down and picked the camera up, pressing her eye to the viewfinder and aiming it toward the relaxed man lounging back on the blanket. He was so very different to the man she’d met back when he’d first applied for the job. He’d changed, yet at the same time—

“What are you looking at?” he said, interrupting her train of thought.

She peeked out from behind her lens and smiled.  
“You.”

He unscrewed the cap of the water and took a drink, and Reagan watched his Adam’s apple bob as he swallowed.  
*Damn, he is one hell of a sexy guy.*

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah,” she said, zooming in on his face. He was squinting against the afternoon sun, and the highlights in his hair shone. He was extremely attractive, there was no denying it, and when he flashed that smile at her, she was totally sunk.

“And what do you see when you look at me, Ms. Spencer?”

She took a few snapshots, the clicking and whirring of her camera the only thing she could hear over the beating of her heart, and for that moment it felt as though everyone else in the park had disappeared.

“I see a man who just ate all my cookies.” She paused as he popped the final piece of one into his mouth.

“And?”

“*And*”—she grinned as she lowered her camera—“he’s lucky I love him.”

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

EVAN BLEW OUT a silent breath as he walked alongside the snow-shoveled path that led to the Spencers' modest home outside the city. Fuck, he was nervous. He'd been putting off this moment for as long as he could, but seeing as it was Christmas, the time had come to finally get the fuck over his trepidation.

He felt Reagan's gaze on him, and then she said, "You're cute when you're nervous." Her words came out as small puffs in the frigid air. "But they won't bite."

"Promise?"

"Promise. They'd never bite someone who brought them so many gifts." She nodded at the two enormous bags in his hands and shook her head. "A little over the top, but it's kind of adorable."

Evan stopped where he was and looked down at the dozens of presents. He *had* gone a bit overboard, but wasn't that what you did to overcompensate? Here, have a shit ton of gifts and please try to forget that my family took all your money once upon a time. No big deal.

Reagan turned around and came back to stand in front of him. “They’re dying to see you. Just be the charming bastard I know you are, and make sure to get second helpings of Mom’s soufflé. You’ll make her year.”

She gave him a quick kiss and then pushed open the front door. “Merry Christmas,” Reagan called out, and in an instant, the whole family rushed into the entryway, armed with hugs and hellos.

Evan lingered in the doorway watching the happy scene before him. It was so strange to be there, and even more strange was the way they all looked the same as he remembered them, apart from a few more laugh lines on their faces and the grey sprinkled through her father’s hair.

“Evan, good to see you.” Troy gave him a hug and slapped him on the back. “Glad you made it. Are these for me?” He took the bags out of Evan’s hands and winked before carrying them off and placing them next to the other gifts lining the huge Fraser fir tree.

“Mom, Dad, you remember Evan,” Reagan said, wrapping her arm around his waist and pulling him inside.

*Here we go...*

Mrs. Spencer was the first to step forward. She opened her arms up in an automatic welcome gesture, and the words that came out of her mouth had Reagan giggling behind him.

“Rocky. It’s so good to see you.”

He felt Reagan’s hand on his back as she shoved him in her mother’s direction, and when he aimed a glare her way the giggle turned into a full-on laugh. He stepped up to her mother then, and when she hugged him he heard her say, “My, you’ve gotten so tall,” and then she peeked around his shoulder and said to Reagan, “And so handsome.”

“All right, Mom, hands off,” Reagan said, and moved forward to rescue him. “Don’t think you can steal him away from me. After all, it took me this long to get him.”

Mr. Spencer wrapped an arm around his wife then gave a broad smile and held his hand out to Evan. “It’s so good to



have you back in our home. You were always one of the family, and now it feels complete.”

Evan shook his hand and gave a quick nod. “That’s very kind of you to say, Mr. Spencer—”

“There’s nothing kind about it, son. It’s a fact. And if I didn’t approve, do you think I’d be so nice to the man Reagan brought home to meet us? Count yourself lucky we already know you and don’t have to give you the third degree.”

As a booming laugh left Reagan’s dad, he gave his wife a squeeze and headed down the hall. Evan glanced at Reagan and she just shrugged and said, “See, what’d I tell you? Nothing to worry about...*Rocky*.”

“Okay, you need to forget that nickname.”

Reagan took his hand in hers and steered him through the house and back to the kitchen where everyone was bustling about.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said. “I kind of like it. Reminds me of a boy I used to know. He was very sweet to me.”

Evan tugged on her hand and pulled her into the empty living room to give her a quick kiss. “He is *still* sweet to you.”

“Sometimes...” she said, and twined her arms around his neck. She brushed another kiss along his lips, and he groaned when she sighed into his mouth. “Sometimes he’s *not* so sweet too.”

“Are you trying to say I’m on the naughty list this year? Because I *have* been behaving,” he reminded her.

“You’ve been behaving with others...but not so much with me.” She gave him a flirty wink, and he coughed a little, putting his hands on her waist to push her back from him.

“Are you crazy? Your family is just through that door.”

When she stepped back in close to him and pushed her hips against his, he knew the playful tease was dying to come out and play. “I know. That’s what makes this so fun.”

“Reagan...” he said, knowing full well he found it close to impossible to resist her when she acted this way.

“What?” she asked innocently, batting her eyelashes for good measure. When the flush of arousal stained her cheeks, he almost caved until she relented with a sigh. “Oh, okay. Your virtue is safe.” She let him go, and he was tempted to pull her back. *Don't do it. You have a dinner to get through.* When she glanced over her shoulder and ran her eyes down his frame, she said, “For now.”

He hoped like hell he had the fortitude to hold back.

\* \* \*

TWO HOURS AND a large glass of spiked wassail later, and Evan had relaxed enough that he was actually enjoying himself. Being with Reagan's family was comfortable and easy, and he wasn't sure why he'd been dreading it so much in the first place. They'd welcomed him with open arms, telling jokes while passing rolls at the dinner table, making fun of the red and green striped candy-cane socks Reagan had kindly suggested he wear, and laughing when he ripped into the gag gifts they'd given him.

Bill had arrived not too long after they did, and Evan was only slightly surprised to learn the man came there every holiday. It seemed he really was part of Reagan's family. As he looked at the smiling faces gathered around the tree, the blinking colored bulbs cast a soft glow over them. Reagan was seated across from him on the floor. Her legs were crossed, and she had a Santa hat on her head with a present between her hands. Around her neck she wore that elegant strand of pearls, and she was laughing at something her mother had just said. She'd never looked more beautiful. When she caught him staring at her, the mischievous twinkle in her eyes made him want to go over to her.

Before he got the chance, Bill clapped him on the back. “Glad you're here, son. Even if you did let your woman dress

you.”

“Only my socks, old man. Speaking of old, how’s your leg doing with the cold air out there?”

“Oh, it’s fine,” he said, rubbing his knee. “Been that way for years. Used to it by now.”

“I never asked, but what happened?”

Bill chuckled. “Remember when I said your father wasn’t too happy when he found out about your mom and me?”

“Yeah…”

Bill massaged his knee again. “Let’s just say he’s got a really good batting arm.”

Evan’s eyes widened and he shook his head. “Jesus. And on that note, I’m going to get myself another drink. Does anyone want anything?”

Everyone shook their heads except for the little minx on the ground, who looked up at him when he stood.

“I’ll come with you. I’m not quite sure what I feel like.”

He was pretty sure by the way her lips curved into a seductive-as-fuck smile that she knew exactly what she wanted to swallow, but he extended his hand to her and felt the thrill of anticipation rush through him when she slipped her palm into his. She got to her feet then laced her fingers through his as they exited the living room and made their way down the hall.

When they were out of earshot of her family, he squeezed her hand. “I’m glad I’m here.”

A brilliant smile lit up Reagan’s face, and she kissed his shoulder. “We’re glad you’re here too.”

When they entered the dimly lit kitchen, they headed straight for the bar set up in the corner.

“Hmm. Looks like we’ve got two options,” Evan said, fingering the top of an empty glass and nodding at the wassail

in the Crock-Pot. “You could do hot and spicy, if that’s what you’re in the mood for...”

“Spicy is always good,” she said. “And I do feel a bit hot.”

Evan cocked an eyebrow. “I think I’m in the mood for something a bit more...creamy.”

“Is that right?”

“It is.” As Evan stepped forward, Reagan moved back, her ass hitting the dining room table. “And while eggnog doesn’t sound terrible, I doubt it’s going to quench my thirst.”

“Did you have something more...specific in mind?”

Evan thought back to where this all began. That moment Reagan had stepped back into his life, gone home with him, and shed her skin, inviting him to be a part of her life once more. He’d been a disaster back then. A desperate shell of the man he was now striving to be. Someone who’d hit rock bottom and had been searching for a lifeline to pull him out.

He looked at the woman pushed back against her parents’ dining room table and felt everything fall into place. Reagan was it for him. She was his lifeline, she was his hope, and, as she crooked a finger up at him, inviting him down to play, she was also his every fantasy wrapped into one delicious package.

He leaned down over her and placed his hands by her head, and when their mouths touched and a wicked-as-sin smirk hit her lips, he knew she was waiting for him. For the darker, more depraved side of his soul to rise to the challenge. He loved that about her. She loved every single part of him, and he knew he’d found his perfect match.

*Smart.*

*Sexy.*

*And dirty as all hell.*

She was his equal in every way imaginable. And he knew exactly what she wanted.

He took her hand in his and brought it to his lips, where he kissed her fingertips before gently nipping at them. He then started to lower them down between their bodies and matched her smile with a deviant one of his own. Her eyes dilated, and her mouth parted on a sigh.

*Oh yeah, your filthy fuck is here to stay.*

“I think I’ve changed my mind about drinks,” he told her as he pushed her hand lower, her fingers disappearing beneath the waist of her pants. “I’m in the mood for a little finger food...”

## EPILOGUE

### *7 weeks later...*

“SO LET ME GET this straight.” Dr. Glover lifted the end of his pen to his lips as his eyes narrowed over the top of his glasses. “You tracked this man down, went home with him the first night you met him, got him a job working with you, and lied about your identity to get him to fall in love with you. Is that right?”

Reagan’s eyes went wide and she looked over at Evan. “Uh...when you put it like that—”

“Yes or no?”

“Yes?”

“And Evan,” Dr. Glover continued, “you admit to bouts of uncontrollable sexual urges, and destructive thoughts and behavior. Is that right?”

“Is he always like this?” Reagan whispered, and Evan squeezed where his hand was resting on her thigh.

“Yes,” he said to Dr. Glover before turning to Reagan.  
“And yes.”

“So we have a liar and a sex addict. How’s that working out for you two?” Evan’s therapist asked.

“Well, I keep him satisfied on the sex front because, clearly, I’m not eligible for admission at the local convent.”

“*Amen*,” Evan said. But Reagan continued as though he hadn’t said a word. “And since I was busted the first time I withheld the truth, it’s pretty obvious I don’t have a good poker face. So you could say it’s working out well. Right?” She turned to Evan, who nodded.

“You don’t seem to regret giving an illusion,” Dr. Glover said.

“Look at him. I doubt I’m the first to tell a few white lies to get close to him.”

“*Real* close,” Evan piped up.

She sat up straight and then twisted toward Evan. “Mhmm. But I *will* be the last,” she teased, and gave a flirty wink. When a delicious smile morphed his lips, Reagan shifted on the seat.

“So, Reagan, you’re proud you lied?” Dr. Glover asked.

Reagan heard Evan cough behind her. “He’s enjoying this a little too much, don’t you think? He’s definitely the troublemaker of the two of us. Shouldn’t you ask him a few questions?”

“Oh, I will, but first, you have to answer mine.”

Reagan shrugged. “I wouldn’t call it lying. I’d call it... hiding the truth. But if you’re determined to use the label, then hell yes I fucking lied, and I’d do it again.”

Evan’s laugh was loud as it echoed around the walls of the office. “So unapologetic,” he said. “Just admit it. You lied to get in my pants.”

Reagan's mouth fell open, and she pointed an accusatory finger at him. "I didn't *need* to lie to get in your pants, thank you very much. Remember, we're here talking to *your* therapist, Evan James."

"Who knows aaaall about your dirty ways."

Reagan let out a sigh and looked over at the doctor to see his lips twitching in amusement. "I'm glad you find this so amusing."

"I have to admit—I do. It's nice to see how far he's come," Dr. Glover said. "Now if you don't mind, I've got a few more questions for the two of you."

"I mind," Reagan replied. "This is more stressful than a job interview."

"Unless you're trying not to imagine your interviewer naked and straddling you like she was the night before. Then it's *harder*, and yes, the pun is intended," Evan said.

Dr. Glover stared at Evan. "Well, I, for one, am grateful you are not picturing that for me. Now, Evan, what would Reagan say is the one thing you do that drives her crazy?"

Evan cocked his head to the side. "I'm pretty fucking perfect, but if I had to pick something...it would probably be leaving my wet towels on the bathroom floor."

"Wrong," Reagan said. "It would be always choosing a horror flick knowing I can't stand them."

Evan burst into laughter. "There's a good reason for that."

"I'd love to hear it," Dr. Glover said.

"She's too scared to watch the movie, so she focuses her attention...elsewhere."

"Jesus," Reagan said, rolling her eyes.

"What? It's true."

"Okay, come on you two." Dr. Glover chuckled, peering at her over his glasses again. "Reagan, what traits



would you say Evan admires the most about you?”

“That would be my fierce independence and my dazzling mind,” she said.

“And also her ass,” Evan chimed in.

Dr. Glover looked annoyed. “That’s not a trait, Evan.”

“Well it’s an *asset*. But really, I do appreciate how intelligent she is. Reagan is one of the smartest people I know. She conducts business better than any man I’ve ever seen, and sometimes I can’t believe she is the same little Jenny Spencer I grew up with.”

“Aw, that’s so sweet,” she said, and leaned over to give him a kiss. And then another. And another.

“All right, knock it off. We’ve only got a few more minutes on the clock, and then I’ll let you lovebirds ride off into the sunset. Reagan, same question to you.”

She pulled away from Evan and smiled. “His ability to overcome adversities in his life. It hasn’t been an easy path, but he takes it one day at a time, and I respect him for that. I love him because of that. He’s stronger than anyone I know.”

“Aren’t you a sappy little thing. You forgot to mention filthier than anyone you know.” Evan wrapped his arm around her waist and planted a kiss on her neck.

“I think that goes without saying,” Reagan replied.

Dr. Glover set down his notepad and steepled his fingers. “I never would’ve guessed things would work out this way, so thank you. Thank you for surprising me.”

“You had a lot to do with helping me work through my issues, so I appreciate it. Even though you’re a blunt bastard,” Evan said.

“It’s nice to see that I’m doing something right.” Dr. Glover got to his feet and motioned for them to do the same. “All right, time’s up. I’ve got to take my wife out for dinner. What do you two have planned for Valentine’s this evening? Or should I even ask?”

Evan ushered Reagan toward the door, with a hand lightly pressing against her back. As she stepped through and out onto the front stoop of the brownstone, he looked back over his shoulder and winked at the good doctor. A mischievous smile pulled into place as he replied, “You *definitely* shouldn’t ask.”

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We hope you enjoyed SEX ADDICT. We cannot wait to bring you many more collaborations over the years to come!

~Ella & Brooke

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

If you'd like to get to know Ella and Brooke better, you can find them getting up to all kinds of shenanigans at:

[The Naughty Umbrella](#)

## About Brooke

You could say Brooke Blaine was a book-a-holic from the time she knew how to read; she used to tell her mother that curling up with one at 4 a.m. before elementary school was her 'quiet time.' Not much has changed except for the espresso I.V. pump she now carries around and the size of her onesie pajamas.

Brooke enjoys writing sassy contemporary romance, whether in the form of comedy, suspense, or erotica. The latter has scarred her conservative Southern family for life, bless their hearts.

If you'd like to get in touch with her, she's easy to find - just keep an ear out for the Rick Astley ringtone that's dominated her cell phone for years.

## Brooke's Links

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[www.BrookeBlaine.com](http://www.BrookeBlaine.com)

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## **About Ella**

Ella Frank is the author of the #1 Bestselling Temptation series, including Try, Take, and Trust and is the co-author of the fan-favorite contemporary romance, Sex Addict. Her Exquisite series has been praised as “scorching hot!” and “enticingly sexy!”

A life-long fan of the romance genre, Ella writes contemporary and erotic fiction and lives with her husband in Portland, OR. You can reach her on the web at [www.ellafrank.com](http://www.ellafrank.com) and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/ella.frank.author](https://www.facebook.com/ella.frank.author)

Some of her favorite authors include Tiffany Reisz, Kresley Cole, Riley Hart, J.R. Ward, Erika Wilde, Gena Showalter, and Carly Philips.

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