

Love, Canadian Style

# CANADIAN

*Fling*

ELLEN BROOKS

# Canadian Fling

Ellen Brooks

Editor: Brynn Paulin

Cover Design: Aila Glass Designs

Copyright © 2023 by Ellen Brooks

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.



# Love, Canadian Style



Read about love, Canadian style, in this multi-author series featuring sweet and steamy reads from some of your favourite authors. This October, why not fall in love with the people from a small town in Canada?

Explore the entire series today!

**<https://mybook.to/lovecanadianstyle>**



## Canadian Fling

**A FORTY-EIGHT HOUR GETAWAY with my sexy brooding boss?**

**Sure, no problem.**

**After all, I'm not his type.**

~ Lauryn ~

My uptight, born-with-a-silver-spoon-in-his-mouth boss is demanding and relentless. He's also devilishly hot and has starred in my daily afternoon daydreams for two years now.

But when I need to land a fake boyfriend fast, I'm stunned silent when *he* volunteers to be my plus one and help out at my family's orchard during our hometown's annual fall festival.

Good thing I've learned a thing or two working for the exacting attorney, including the importance of clarifying important details up front.

~ Miles ~

My sexy-as-hell PA is off-limits, but I've wanted her since day one when she breezed into my office with a lush smile, gorgeous enough to distract a man for years.

She wants to lay out the terms of our weekend getaway before we leave, as if they're black and white and will protect us both. Fortunately, I'm an expert in hiding my feelings because now it's my heart at stake.

The conditions she thinks are crystal clear today are going to be up for negotiation tomorrow because I'm leaving room for creative interpretation.

Grab this steamy small town instalove story, eh? It's full of heat and heart and will have you rooting for these two to go from fantasy to fling to forever.

# Contents

1. Prologue | Miles | Two Years Earlier
2. Lauryn | Tuesday
3. Miles | Tuesday
4. Lauryn | Friday noon
5. Lauryn | Friday night
6. Miles | Saturday morning
7. Lauryn | Saturday night
8. Miles | Saturday night
9. Lauryn | Sunday morning
10. Epilogue Miles | Two Years Later

Also By Ellen Brooks

About the Author



A decorative floral pattern in shades of grey and white, featuring various flowers and leaves, positioned at the top of the page.

# Prologue | Miles | Two Years Earlier

“YES,” I SNAP, NOT glancing up from the legal brief I’ve been working on for three months straight, even though someone has entered my office. Without knocking.

“Miles.”

The low, disembodied tone shoots straight through me. No one in this building calls me that except my father, and even he rarely uses my given name. And never *son* or anything to indicate we’re blood relations.

Whatever lured him down from his top floor corner office, where he and the other partners keep tabs on the rest of us *associates*, I’m not sure. But I won’t have to wait long to find out.

I turn and meet his steel-blue eyes. Mr. Beaufort III, Esq. is wearing a black herringbone suit, black croc-skin leather penny loafers, and a disapproving glare.

He doesn’t take a seat, and I don’t invite him to. My father is here to deliver a message or make a demand, and he’ll do so

then be gone.

“HR tells me you’ve burned through six assistants in the last two months.”

I hold his gaze. He doesn’t need my confirmation, and he won’t tolerate any excuses. He’s going to tell me what he wants, and his word will be law because he rules the firm, just like he rules his household. With an iron fist.

“I’ve already approved double pay for your next one.”

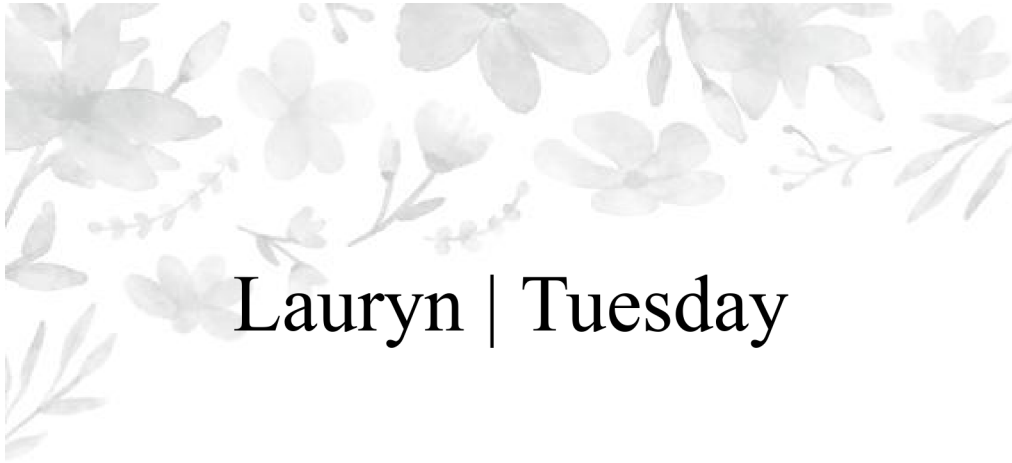
I remain silent and maintain the neutral expression I’ve honed to perfection over the years. My father throws money at problems. It’s his go-to strategy. And why not? The man was born rich, and his wealth has only multiplied over the years. Plus, it usually works.

“HR is down to the one last candidate, who apparently isn’t the best fit for the firm, but I gave them the green light. I don’t want to be bothered with this issue again.”

Translation: Don’t fuck up.

“Saturday is the fundraiser at the museum. It’s black tie.”

He’s gone before I can respond. Not that I planned to. There’s no discussion to be had. I’m stuck with whoever HR waltz’s in here next and will be there on Saturday in my tuxedo, of course. I turn back to my brief with a resigned sigh. If I wasn’t aiming for partner, looking to fill my father’s shoes at the most prestigious firm in the city, I wouldn’t bother.



## Lauryn | Tuesday

**T**HE DAMN COPY MACHINE is broken. Again. Sure, it's brand-spanking new and super energy efficient, but it also has more features than anyone in their right mind would ever want or need.

In the past ten minutes, I've successfully extracted exactly one half of a ripped sheet of the legal brief I'm trying to copy from zone C1. Meanwhile, the display screen flashes with at least four other paper jam locations, one of which I can't pinpoint any better than my last boyfriend could find my clit. And I have a diagram.

At least, I'm free to complain here. The copy room is the one location on our floor where associates would never be caught dead. Especially not my boss, Miles Beaufort, IV, son of the founding partner at the firm. And why would he when I'm as competent in my role as his personal assistant as he is at vanquishing prosecutors?

I let out a string of curse words, so long my friend, Trish, glances over from the binding machine with one perfectly

plucked eyebrow raised. “Everything okay over there?”

“Everything is just peachy,” I confirm through gritted teeth.

“I meant with you, not the machine.” She drops what she’s doing and joins me, kneeling to help hunt for every last jam. The poster child of a true friend.

“I’m fine,” I insist, my fingertips jet black from the dry ink powder. There’s no way that’s staying off my yellow dress.

She slings me a side eye. “You were whispering on your cell phone this morning and then slammed it down on your desk so hard Lenny in the mailroom probably felt the tremors and wondered if it was a magnitude three quake.”

“I did not.” Okay, I did, but I plead innocent.

“Then,” she says, successfully fishing an accordion-folded piece of paper from the duplex unit, “you stared out the window into the dreary gray clouds for at least ten minutes.”

“Did not.”

“And I know you weren’t daydreaming about *him* because when you do, your face is all radiant glow with a hint of smile, and this morning, it was furrowed brow and pensive frown.”

She means Miles, and I can’t deny that one. I sit back on my heels with a sigh. “The Charmont Harvest Festival is on Saturday.”

“Your favorite,” she exclaims, and she’s right. Normally, I look forward to my hometown’s annual event every October. My family’s apple orchard is one of the major draws, and the

single day brings in the bulk of the revenue for the entire year.  
“Are you taking Friday off?”

The knot in my stomach tightens. The one that took shape when my mom called this morning. But I swallow it back down as I’ve been doing all day. “Yes, although I’m not sure I’ll be able to leave on Friday afternoon.”

“Did Miles reject your time off request?”

*What? No.* Despite the heads up HR gave me about my boss before I even met him, Miles has only ever denied one vacation request, and that was a few weeks after I started, when I asked for a day off to tag along with my new boyfriend to a work conference down in New York City. “No, it’s just that I might not be able to leave town until Friday night.”

“Why not?”

Trish is still digging around for the last jam while I fiddle with the crumpled pieces of paper in my lap. “My dad tweaked his back yesterday and can’t lift anything. My mom was calling this morning to ask if there’s any way I can bring my boyfriend to help out for the weekend.”

She twists to face me, her nose wrinkling. “Oh.”

“Right. Oh. Plus, she reminded me—again—how my youngest sister recently got engaged. As if I might have somehow forgotten the big news in the last month, just because I live in the city.”

“So you want to go but don’t want to get caught in a lie.”

Bingo. “You know how sick and tired I was of them comparing my dating life to a revolving door after those first few months down here. I thought one little white lie couldn’t hurt. I mean, we’re close and all, but they live hundreds of kilometers away and never come down to the city.”

“Please tell me you’re not thinking of calling Ryan.”

Crap. He was my first thought. I don’t meet her eyes. “He’s probably free—”

“Lauryn! Your ex is free because he’s a loser. You can’t tell me you’re seriously considering inviting Ryan—a.k.a. doesn’t have a job and still lives with his parents, Ryan—for an entire weekend together? Ugh. Plus, if your family thinks he’s your long-term boyfriend, he’d...” She shivers and shakes her head. “I don’t even want to think about how handsy he’d be.”

“Where else am I going to find a man I know well enough to bring home to my family? A guy who’ll pitch in and help out at the orchard on such short notice, and who I won’t be grossed out—”

“I’ll go with you.”

The low timbre of that familiar voice halts every logical thought in my mind and scatters them like leaves in the wind. My pulse skyrockets as his Italian leather loafers click on the linoleum. The sound echoes so loudly in the oppressive silence I don’t know how I didn’t hear him slip in.

Miles, my demanding yet devilishly hot boss, who’s competent but also unbearably standoffish, has been

eavesdropping long enough to hear at least part of our conversation. And surely, I heard him wrong. I meet Trish's eyes, which are as wide as mine.

“You?” I choke, narrowly swallowing the chortle that wants to accompany the word as I spin toward him. My gaze trails up his impeccably tailored navy wool suit before I bite back a smile and try to let him down gently. “No offense, Miles, but there is no way my family would ever believe I'm dating a man like you. They know me too well.”

A muscle in his jaw works, but it does at least half a dozen times a day, so I've been immune to it since day two.

“Because I'm your boss?”

“No, I'm sure they wouldn't put two and two together on that front. It's more so because you're...” I trail off. How to put it? “You're so reserved. Plus—”

“I can be very convincing.”

Yes, on paper or in court. For a hot second, I wonder why he's volunteering to join me, the assistant he barely tolerates, for an entire weekend. Especially, when that means outdoor, physical labor when he basically hibernates in this glass-and-steel cage twenty-four seven.

Miles is from old money. He grew up in an actual mansion, and he's probably never picked an apple in his life. Sure, he's a hard worker, but that's in a climate-controlled, eight hundred square foot office that's bigger than my crummy studio apartment. He sits at a desk all week, and I'm fairly certain

most weekends, too. He's not used to being out in the sun and fresh air. And he probably doesn't even own a pair of jeans.

I dip my chin. "Look, I can tell you think you could pull off the role of Lauryn's fake boyfriend, but if you think I'm... what are the words you use? Oh yeah, spunky, spirited, loud, feisty—"

"Uninhibited, outspoken..."

He trails off when he realizes my question wasn't actually an invitation to contribute.

"Yes, well, if you think I'm all of those things, you should meet my family. They're ten times worse. And I actually need to convince them the man I bring is my boyfriend. At least, for a few days, and it won't be easy."

"So you don't think I'm up for the challenge?"

"I didn't say that. I just—"

"You don't want me to join you."

"I'd take you in a heartbeat—if I thought we could fake it well enough." Less than a heartbeat, if I'm being honest. I've lusted after this man from my first day on the job, despite his disapproving glare and monosyllabic answers. Or maybe, because of them.

Suddenly, I remember his calendar. "Don't you have an event on Saturday night? Some black tie auction for the ballet?"

The thought of Miles in a tux sends a tingle down my spine.



“Send my regrets.”

*What? Now, he's really talking nonsense.* He crosses his arms and assumes that surly look he does so well. Good thing it's never stopped me from plowing ahead and doesn't now. “Look, I'm not sure how much you overheard while you were eavesdropping, but I need to bring home a man who can help out around the orchard. And although I don't know exactly how much you can bench press, I know it's a lot. So you've got that working in your favor, but—”

“Trish, would you excuse us?” he asks, without glancing her way.

“Of course, Mr. Beaufort,” she says, yanking the last of the jammed pages from the copy machine and shooting me a *what the hell* look behind his back as she grabs her binding project and scurries out.



Miles | Tuesday

*I* *IF I CAN FAKE it well enough?*

Lauryn has no idea how good of an actor I am. Hell, I should have a shelf full of Oscars for my performance every day for the past two years while I've held myself in check. I've pretended to barely tolerate her impertinence, when really, her quick wit, sharp retorts, and insightful observations get me through the day.

With the way she takes nothing at face value and always looks for the loophole, she should be an attorney. My assistant is uninhibited and authentic, while I'm swallowing everything I really want to say to her and curling my hands into fists to keep from reaching out to touch her.

Not that I'd ever really have a chance with a woman as carefree as Lauryn. She's not the type to fall in love with a man like me. A broken workaholic on track to be the youngest partner in the history of his father's firm—no thanks to him.

But in moments like this, when she's being difficult and questioning my every word, I can't help but love it. Lauryn is the only person on earth who pulls no punches and has no trouble sparring right back with me and not capitulating at my first request. She doesn't care who my father is. She doesn't give a shit that I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. And she most definitely doesn't jump at my bidding, even though I'm her boss.

I'd heave a sigh and run a hand through my hair at the direction this conversation has gone, but from the cradle, I was bred never to give the slightest inclination I'm rattled. Instead, I try for reason.

"Look," I say, meeting her gorgeous emerald eyes. "You need a boyfriend for the weekend, and I'm willing to play the part. As you said, I'm more than capable of helping around the orchard, and now that you've warned me about your family, I'll be prepared."

Lauryn snorts and doesn't even try to hide an exaggerated eye roll, a move I'd never tolerate from anyone else, but from her always makes my day. Except today. This copy room has suddenly turned into a courtroom, and I'm in the middle of an argument I'm not winning. Yet.

"Miles," she says, blowing me off as she tosses the crumpled papers in the trash bin and closes up the machine as if she's the judge and closing the case. "I appreciate the offer, really I do, but to be convincing you'd have to do boyfriend type things and—"

"Like opening doors and holding your hand?" *Not a problem, I assure you.*

"Yes," she confirms then spins to face me with a challenge sparkling in her eyes. "And," she whispers, stepping close enough her dress brushes against my slacks and the smell of roses in a summer garden fills the air. "You'd have to kiss me like you mean it. Not some chaste peck on the cheek you'd give your grandma, but a kiss with your whole body."

As if I haven't dreamed of doing just that every single day since the morning she breezed in and saved me. I shouldn't, but I erase the distance between us, save for a razor-thin gap. The heat of her skin seeps through my cotton Oxford shirt, and her breath hitches, but I'm so highly attuned to her I can tell she's surprised, not repulsed.

I brush my fingers against hers ever so slightly at our sides. She freezes but doesn't pull away. Our fingers have grazed before when she's passed me a paper or handed over a folder, but this touch between those same fingers is electric. Adrenaline courses through me, but I don't let it show, not when the prospect of spending the weekend with Lauryn away from the office, out in the fresh country air, is in my sights.

I lower my voice. We're talking about kissing, after all. Kissing like you mean it. My cock twitches at the thought. "And you think I couldn't do that?"

Lauryn's gaze drops to my mouth, and her tongue darts out to wet her full lips. I'm getting my point across and can rest my case. The jury is going to find in my favor.

Voices from down the hallway filter in. She steps back and lifts her chin. "You've told me you never lie."

"I still don't. And I won't need to this weekend. As I said, I can be very convincing."

She swallows hard, and the little V between her brows confirms my suspicion. Lauryn's out of excuses. I've overruled her last objection. Case closed.

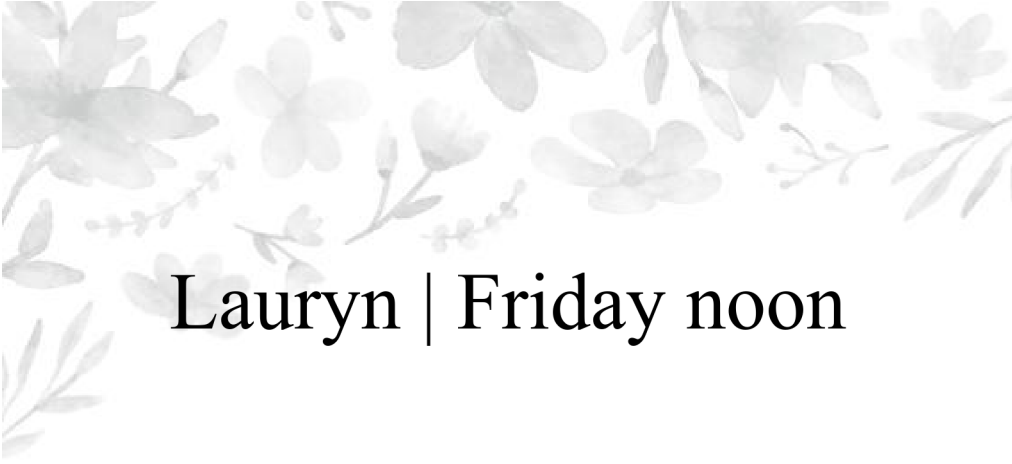
“So you’re up for the challenge, then? You. Me. My crazy family and a harvest festival?”

“I am.”

“Once we cross out of the city, all bets are off. I’m no longer your PA, and you’re not my boss. We’re just Lauryn and Miles. Boyfriend and girlfriend for forty-eight hours.”

Not long enough. But I’ll take it. This weekend is all I’ll ever get. “Deal.”

She shakes her head as if she can’t believe this is really happening. “We leave Friday at noon. I’ll send Greta a packing list,” she says, her gaze sweeping down my body. “Or more likely for you, a shopping list.”



Lauryn | Friday noon

**W**HO IS THIS MAN, and what has he done with my boss? The only recognizable feature of the guy leaning against a black SUV, twirling the key fob around his finger as I wheel my suitcase over, are those familiar, rich-brown eyes. First, instead of a suit and tie, Miles is wearing a long-sleeved, hunter-green, waffle-knit Henley. The sleeves are tugged up to reveal forearms still bronzed from a summer tan. Then, there are his jeans.

Well-worn jeans, and not in the way new designer jeans look distressed. Even in the yellow light of the office parking garage, I can tell the denim is faded. Here and there, small frayed threads peek out at the seams and the bottom cuffs at the back are tattered. The knees and thighs are worn and mold to his body. The fabric looks soft and supple, thanks to years of wear and countless washes.

My fingers itch to reach out and run along the waistband of those jeans, but I don't, at least not yet. We haven't hit the road, and the parking garage is bustling with folks coming back from lunch and eager to wrap up the workweek. These people aren't my family. They're not the ones we need to fool. But mark my words, sometime this weekend, I'm tucking my hands into those back pockets because if Miles were my actual boyfriend, that's exactly what I would do.

"You didn't need to send Greta shopping, I see," I say as he steps forward and reaches for my rolling bag with the hint of



an amused smile curling up one corner of his lips.

He slides my suitcase next to his in the back. “Oh, but I did.”

“For what?” I study him, but even his tan work boots are scuffed with dirt on the treads and a smudge on the toe.

“For this.” He presses a button on the back hatch of the black Range Rover’s door and tilts his head toward the vehicle. It’s gleaming.

My jaw drops. “You bought an SUV for our getaway?”

Miles is filthy rich, sure, but he doesn’t flaunt it. He prefers quality and dresses well, and yeah, his Craftsman-style home is big enough for a houseful of kids, even though he’s a bachelor, but he’s driven the same Jaguar sedan for the past two years. And he already has some sort of super fancy sports car I had to arrange to get serviced a few months ago.

“We’re going to the country, aren’t we? To a farm?”

He’s dead serious. The Miles I know doesn’t mince words and never jokes around. He sees the world in black and white, right or wrong. Although in the copy room the other day, when he was working hard to convince me he could pull off this charade, there was something about the way he stepped up to me that made me wonder if there isn’t another side of him. One I’ve never been privy to at work, though he’s more open with me than anyone else in the firm. Even his father.

“It’s an orchard, not a farm full of horses and cattle. There might be dirt, and it might be a small town hundreds of

kilometers from the city, but it still has paved roads, believe it or not.”

Miles lifts a shoulder as if buying an SUV on a whim isn't a big deal because, for him, it isn't. He circles around to open the passenger side door for me. Like a boyfriend would. I shoot him an approving smile. “Practicing, are we?”

He's so close as I stand in the pocket between his body and the SUV his cologne fills the air rather than exhaust fumes. The same spicy scent he always wears. The one that smells expensive and I've had zero luck finding at the cologne counters in all the local department stores.

With a hand on the door, I glance up before sliding in and meet his coffee-colored eyes hooded in the dim light.

“Practice makes perfect,” he murmurs in a low tone that slithers through me down to the juncture between my thighs. He's not talking about holding the door, and we both know it.

Time to test the waters. “Maybe, we should practice a kiss then, you know, so the first one isn't in front of an audience.”

He releases the door handle and steps closer, widening his stance, so his feet are on either side of mine as he presses his palm flat against the back window. I'm pinned in place, and he isn't even touching me. As if that wasn't hot enough, he murmurs, “A kiss like I mean it? One with my whole body?”

The hum from his chest as he asks is audible, but I barely have time to process the delicious sound because coherent thought escapes me. Although, for the briefest second, I have

the ridiculous sense this isn't practice. Which is impossible, of course, because I'm not Miles's type. Not by a mile. I'm gregarious and fun-loving and uncensored and all the things he's not.

But this weekend, for forty-eight hours, I get to pretend he's mine, and though we haven't even hit the road, I'm a twisting, twirling mess of hormones. He's a whisper from me, and I'm craving his kiss like a flame hungry for oxygen. And just as hot.

"Yes," I reply, desperate for even a chaste kiss, although I know now I'm in for much, much more.

"Are you sure?"

*Why is he dragging this out?* "We have a deal, Miles. You agreed. Forty-eight hours of pretending we're together and you promised to be convincing. Come Monday morning, everything will be back to normal."

"Yes," he says, "you have my word." His resigned tone makes me wonder if he's regretting volunteering for the role of Lauryn's boyfriend, but I don't have time to ask because he wastes no time in pressing me against the cool metal from hip to chest. The air is sucked from my lungs as he sweeps a hand up my jaw to cradle my cheek, and I'm simultaneously melting into him and trembling from his touch.

He laces his fingers into my hair and lowers his lips to mine. His kiss is firm yet gentle and not rushed. He takes his time exploring every inch of my mouth, and the warmth of his touch spreads through me like molten lava.

His fingers dig into my hip, and my breasts press against the hard wall of his chest. I reach up, twisting the knit of his shirt in my grasp as if it's a lifeline. He tilts his head to deepen the kiss, his tongue running along my lower lip, and I open for him because this moment is everything I've fantasized about for years. Only better.

Miles' tongue explores, and I curve a hand around his neck, grateful for the pressure of his body against mine because I'm sure if he let me go, I'd collapse into a boneless heap.

Just when I'm almost lost completely, he pulls away and every fiber of my body protests. My pulse races. My heart pounds so loudly there's no doubt he can feel it knocking against his chest. My eyes flutter open, and my breath is ragged as I look up to find Miles, looking almost as wrecked as I feel.

But the unmistakable desire in his eyes is gone so quickly I'm unsure it was there at all. He pulls himself together and clears his throat. Then, with a self-satisfied smile, he captures my chin between his fingers and lifts my face, so I'm looking right at him. He brushes a thumb along my bottom lip before asking in a husky voice, "Was that convincing enough for you?"

*Like I said, who is this man, and what has he done with my boss?*

## Miles | Friday evening

Lauryn warned me, but the second I pull up the paved driveway at the edge of her family's two-hundred acre apple orchard, I see the place with my own eyes. First, the modest cozy house, exactly as she described it an hour ago, glowing like a welcome beacon in the autumn dusk. Then, a throng of family that spills out the front door at our arrival.

I shift into park, and Lauryn is already reaching for the door latch with an eager, bright smile, but before she cracks open the cocoon of the past few hours, when it was just the two of us and we weren't pretending to be anyone or anything other than ourselves, she spins to face me. "Ready?"

She's not asking because she doesn't think I can pull this off, at least not anymore. She admitted the kiss, back in the city, was convincing. Lauryn seems to ask now because she's worried her family will be too much. Like her, only multiplied. It's definitely not what I'm used to, and her concern is touching in a way I didn't expect, but I'm ready and here to play the role of a boyfriend she's proud to bring home. A man who's good enough for her parents' daughter.

I take a deep breath and nod. "I'm ready."

I might have spoken too soon. Twenty minutes later, once the excitement has lowered to a dull roar and the never-ending introductions have been made, we head inside. But not before I draw a deep breath, filling my lungs with the familiar

fragrance of earthy, sweet apples on the crisp evening breeze. The scent grounds me, surfacing a carefree sensation I haven't felt in years.

Lauryn, or rather, Bug, as her family calls her, slips through the crowd toward me, pulls up my side, and slides her hand into mine. It's soft and fits perfectly, and I have to temper the odd sensation that shoots up my arm.

"Doing okay?" she asks quietly, giving me a sidelong glance.

"I think I've been hugged more in the past ten minutes than in my entire life before today."

"From anyone else, I wouldn't believe that," she says, adding her other hand to surround mine, the warmth seeping through my skin. "But I've met your father."

This is true. I squeeze her fingers.

At the kitchen table, Lauryn's mom sets a generous wedge of homemade apple pie down in front of me. I can see where Lauryn's habit of interrupting comes from. Her parents, grandparents, her three younger sisters and their husbands or fiancés, her one-year-old nephew, and a couple of neighbors who've dropped by to offer help for the festival in the morning all seem to talk at once. Over each other and very loudly.

Plus, they call her Bug. Short for Lauryn-Bug, apparently derived from ladybug. I smile at the nickname that fits her like a glove as I dig in to the flaky crust and thick-sliced apple filling. Lauryn grabs a half-gallon of vanilla ice cream from the freezer and threads through the crowd, back to my side.

She offers me a scoop, which I decline, and is busy topping her slice when one of her sisters, whose name escapes me, says, “So Miles, how did you and Lauryn meet?”

The volume in the overfull kitchen/dining room/family room goes from however many decibels is a lot to zero in a heartbeat. But I’m unfazed. I’ve been running through possible scenarios for this weekend nonstop since Tuesday, and although most of them include Lauryn, I’m also prepared for cross examination. To answer questions a boyfriend might face. Not that I have firsthand experience, but I’m used to forming conjectures based on the facts as presented.

I set down my fork and wipe my mouth with a napkin. “I was fortunate to meet Lauryn at work. We’re both employed by the same firm.”

“Yes,” Lauryn is quick to add, resting a hand on my forearm for all to see. “Miles is an attorney in my office. The best there and in the city. We met in the copy room and just hit it off.”

I smile, nod, and meet the interested looks from those all around us while inside hesitation, like a storm surge, floods my chest. Lauryn never wavers when she’s got something to say, whether if I like it or not, and her compliment is as sincere as any I’ve heard her give, but this time, it’s directed toward me, and it’s a foreign feeling. One I’m unsure I like.

It would never cross my father’s mind to issue praise in any form, and it’s been two decades, at least, since my mother has uttered a flattering remark about anyone or anything. I’ve

simply met the expectations set for me as the first, and only, son in the Beaufort line.

“What kind of law do you practice, son?”

*Son?* The word snaps me back to the suddenly too warm room, and I meet Lauryn’s father’s green eyes across the worn wooden table. There’s an edge to the question, and it puts me on high alert. “Commercial law.”

He takes my curt answer at face value with a nod. “And what made you go into that?”

“Family business.”

“Hmm,” he murmurs, his eyes flitting to Lauryn, who’s giving him the same cocked eyebrow she flashes me occasionally. Not the one that says *you’re crazy*, nor the one that tells me *it’ll be a cold day in hell* before I get what I’m asking for by the deadline I’ve set.

At first, I’m pleased to know I’m not the only one on the receiving end of those looks, but on second thought, I’m entirely displeased to know I’m not the only one she cocks that shapely eyebrow at.

“The family business isn’t for everyone,” she says, stabbing her pie as if it committed a crime.

“No, of course, it’s not, dear,” Lauryn’s mother says, tucking the rest of the pie in an old enamel refrigerator that’s miniscule compared to the double built-in Sub Zero at my place. “It’s just that we’re not getting any younger, and we know how



much the orchard means to you. I mean, you wouldn't send along part of your pay—”

“I know, Mom,” Lauryn interjects, cutting her off. “But it's getting late, so why don't you tell us how things are looking for tomorrow and what Miles and I can do to help.”

I only half listen to the rest of the conversation as everyone reviews the plan for the festival tomorrow. I'm still reeling from the fact it sounds as if Lauryn regularly sends home money to help out her family. The comment reminds me of the day my father warned me not to run off another PA and how he'd approved double pay for the next one.

Lauryn was the next one, and yes, she's still here two years later. I've often wondered why, certain it's not because of my sparkling personality, not because I suddenly became an easy man to support. It's clear now she'd stayed because of the generous salary and puts up with me because of it.

I push away my half-eaten plate of pie and use all of my acting skills to return Lauryn's questioning glance with a reassuring smile.



## Lauryn | Friday night

“I THOUGHT YOU SAID we’d be in separate rooms. Old-fashioned parents and all...” Miles says, trailing off as he surveys the tiny renovated loft. We’re on the second floor of the miniscule guest house out back, and he’s still holding his suitcase. There’s barely room for a double bed, a nightstand, and a small desk with a wooden chair.

Usually, I can read him like a book, but I can’t tell from his current tone whether he thinks this development is a blessing or a curse, and honestly, I’m unsure myself.

“I thought so, too,” I reply, squeezing past him to close the curtains of the window that faces the house. Growing up with three sisters, you never know which prying eyes are watching. “But there are only three bedrooms in the main house. Two sisters in each growing up, and now, they’re full with their families spending the night.”

“You didn’t have your own room?”

I shake my head. “Not until I moved to the city.”

This room is a far cry from what he's used to. It's clean but smaller than my crappy studio apartment blocks from the office. If Miles steps even a meter forward, he'd hit his head on the low, slanted ceiling. The *accommodations* are yet another reminder we're from two different worlds.

He doesn't respond, so I fill the silence. "Considering you're the first guy I've ever brought home, and I'm the oldest daughter, it seems they must've gotten over their reservations. Either that, or they've given up on me and the hope I'm ever coming back."

"What do you mean?"

I sigh and sink onto the bed, flopping onto my back and letting my slip-ons tumble to the floor. Now that we're alone again, it feels, to me at least, like it was during the ride up. When we both seemed to let down our guard. "When I left for the city, I assured them it was only for a year. You know, to explore and experience the world beyond these two hundred acres and our one-street town."

Miles sets down his suitcase. "And that was two years ago."

I roll my head to face him. It was odd to see him sitting in my parents' kitchen and even more unnerving to be relegated to the loft with only a double bed to share. But to be talking to him about this, when he's the reason I've never left the firm, never returned home...it's surreal. But also temporary. I go for the easiest excuse. The one I've used with my family a dozen times.

I lift a shoulder. "I like the city."

He scoffs. Seriously. Not once in all the time I've known Miles has he ever so much as hinted at a scoff, but he does now. At me. And it's charming and wholly consuming and sends an odd shiver right through me. "Could have fooled me."

"What?" I'm too distracted by that sound and my reaction to realize he doesn't buy my explanation.

He takes a seat on the wooden chair by the wardrobe. "Lauryn, your desk is outside my office. Like it or not, I've heard every complaint you've ever lodged with your landlord, the mass transit office, and the city council over the past two years. Not to mention the way you also tell anyone who happens by all about the issues you want addressed."

*Really? He pays that close attention to me?*

My expression must reveal my skepticism because he shoots me a look and elaborates, ticking off on his fingers as he goes. "The lack of recycling and composting in your building, the request to replace the incandescent bulbs with energy-efficient LEDs at the bus stop, the charge you led to get bike racks installed last summer at heavy commuter locations in our district."

"I did get those bike racks," I blurt out, and his eyebrows raise.

"I wouldn't be surprised if every person within a six-block radius knows of your success with the bike racks—and all of the other initiatives. All I'm saying is, it baffles me why you don't consider moving home. You were giddy from the

moment we passed out of the city limits and have been glowing even more than usual since we arrived.”

*Glowing? Did Miles Beaufort really just describe me as glowing? Even more than usual? I could die.* But not the point. He’s leaned back in his chair and crossed his ankle over his knee like he does at the office. The move is a blunt reminder I need to accept I’m not the type of woman Miles Beaufort would ever fall for, let alone marry.

An associate on the fast track to becoming partner needs a serious woman who fits into his serious life and is able to rub elbows with his stuffy, serious, affluent family without completely embarrassing him in a hundred different ways.

Sure, he agreed to this weekend getaway, which is out of character. Even so, it’s a clearly defined period of time with a distinct goal. I should ask him why he volunteered, but I’m afraid of what the answer might be. Instead, I change the subject.

“You didn’t help earlier, you know.”

“How’s that?”

“You told my dad you went into commercial law because it was the family business.”

“It’s the truth.”

“But not *everyone*, even dutiful sons and daughters, follow their parents’ footsteps into the family business.”

“I wasn’t aware that was something a person could do.”

I scramble up and tuck my legs under me. “But Miles, I can tell you don’t love your work, at least not commercial law. Why do you do it?”

His eyebrows come together as he steeple his fingers in front of his face. I know he’s not passionate about the cases he takes or the clients he handles, and I know what he loves to do, but I can’t reveal that secret. It’s one he’s never confessed and goes to great lengths to hide.

“I’m good at it. Excellent even.”

It’s a throwaway answer, an easy response, and an excuse if I’ve ever heard one. And clearly, I’m familiar with excuses. But before I can respond, he continues with the smallest of sighs. One I might not have even noticed, except a shake of his head accompanied it. “I don’t have the luxury of following my dreams, Lauryn. Not when I’m the one and only son in the Beaufort line.”

“You’re not royalty,” I exclaim, ready to pull out my hair. “Come on, all I’m asking is, if you could do anything in the world, what would it be?”

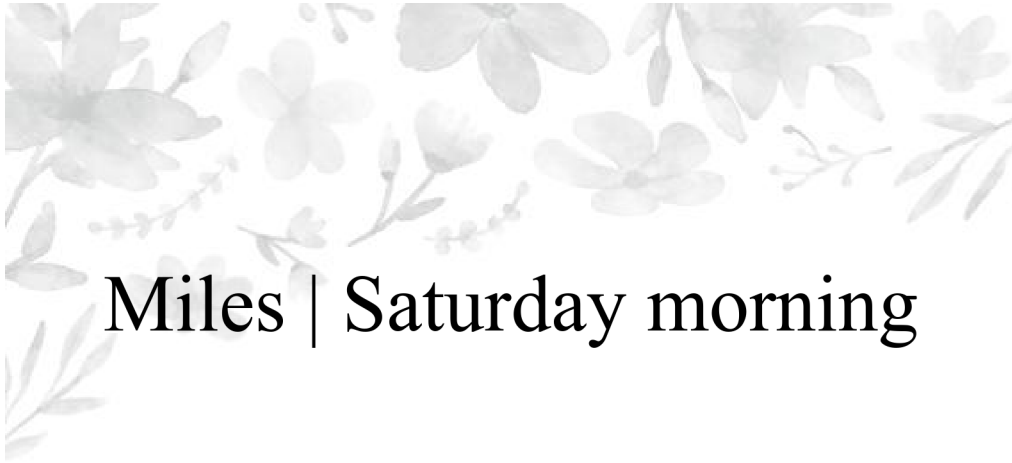
He holds my gaze for a long moment in the soft yellow light from the table. He has an answer, one I can almost feel reverberating through him, but he doesn’t give it to me. At least, not yet. “Do you admit you’d move up here, back to the orchard, in a heartbeat, if the circumstances were right?”

The *circumstances*, a.k.a. this man I fell for years ago and who I’m falling for even harder the further we get from our real lives, will never be mine. Maybe, that’s the lesson I need

to learn: to stop putting my life on pause for a daydream that will never, ever, come true.

“It’s late, Miles,” I say with a sigh. “And we have an early morning tomorrow, along with a full day of work.”

His fingers curl into fists, and a muscle in his jaw clenches, but he rises and nods, then eyes the bed. “I’ll take the floor, of course.”



## Miles | Saturday morning

I COULD USE ANOTHER cup of coffee. The strong, black brew I downed in three gulps in the kitchen this morning before the sun was up wore off hours ago. And we've been going strong ever since.

Not we as in Lauryn and me. I haven't seen my PA/pretend weekend girlfriend, or her worn denim overalls and red-checked shirt, since she pressed her lips to mine before she headed out with her mom and sisters to handle the orchard market. But the way she kissed me, as if it were the most casual, everyday act in the world, along with the flirty smile on her lips, has lingered in my mind for hours. I can't wait to see her again.

No, I meant we as in Lauryn's dad and me.

"Can you drive a tractor, son?" was the first question he'd asked as we headed out to the barn with the other significant others at first light.



That *son* hit me square in the chest again. “No, but I’m willing to learn.”

He lifted his cap off his head and ran a hand through his hair in a way that reminded me of my grandfather, even though he’s much closer to my father’s age. “Don’t have time to teach you now, but maybe, later or tomorrow before you go. Lauryn could teach you, too. She’s been driving since she could reach the pedals.”

Somehow, that doesn’t surprise me.

Without tractor privileges, they put me on heavy manual labor, loading and unloading bins of harvested McIntosh and Redcourt, Gala and Spartan, to refill the stock at the market for folks who don’t want to pick their own. I’m just about done when Lauryn’s dad returns from delivering a load and tosses me a bottle of water.

“Doing okay there, Miles? Need a break?”

“No, sir, never better,” I say, taking a long swig and wiping my brow.

He eyes me as if he doesn’t quite believe me, but it’s true. My grandparents’ estate, where I spent every summer growing up and now spend almost every weekend, is one of my favorite places in the world. It isn’t far from downtown but seems a world away, kind of like this place.

My grandfather made his millions in mining, but he was an outdoorsman in the truest sense of the word. An avid hunter and fisherman, a birdwatcher, a photographer, and an arborist.

He was salt of the earth. A trait my father didn't inherit and still frowns upon. They say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, but in their case, it couldn't be further from the truth. Maybe, that's why my grandmother and I keep my time there as our little secret, even today.

“Good to hear,” Lauryn's dad says with an approving nod before adding, “Say, I was just about to take a drive around the orchard. You know, make sure everything is running smoothly. Care to join me?”

“I'd love to.” Even if the hair on the back of my neck is standing up at the invitation, or rather, the motivation behind it.

The tour, in an old pickup that runs as smooth as my brand new Range Rover, is thorough. This man's pride for the orchard is well-deserved. Along the way, he shares the history of how, years ago, his parents started with just five acres and a dream and how one day, he hopes to pass on the place to his children and keep it in the family.

“Not Lauryn, though,” he says, pressing his lips together as he pulls off the road at a spot with just enough elevation to overlook the thousands of apple trees that blanket the land.

“Why not?”

He shakes his head. “She's not coming back here, no matter how much she loves it.”

“What makes you say that?”

He glances over at me across the rust-colored, vinyl bench seat. “She’s got you down there in the city. Has for years, and if I know one thing about my oldest daughter, it’s that once she sets her mind to something, there’s nothing you can say or do to change it.”

He’s got that right, and because I can’t set him straight on the facts of Lauryn and my relationship, no matter how much I’d like to, I agree with what I can. “Your daughter is one of the most headstrong people I’ve ever met. She’s candid and hellbent when she gets a notion in her head. But that’s a big part of what I respect most about her. Lauryn never hesitates to speak her truth. She is always one-hundred percent herself.”

What I respect but also what I love.

It’s the first time I’ve ever uttered aloud even a fraction of what I feel in my bones about the woman I’ve spent every working day with for the past two years. The first time I’ve ever put into words how I feel about her. It’s a relief to share this secret with another soul, but it’s also torture in the purest sense of the word.

Lauryn needed a boyfriend for the weekend, and I jumped at the chance. She wasn’t looking for forever, at least not with me.

“I wouldn’t be so sure about your daughter never moving home, sir,” I say, turning the empty water bottle around and around in my hand. “She loves it here. You can hear it in her voice. You can see it in her smile and in her eyes. Trust me

when I tell you she loves the orchard much more than she loves me.”

Lauryn’s dad glances over at me before he steps on the brake and shifts into first. “You’re a lawyer, no?”

“I am.”

“You might be a smart fella, but you’re as blind as they come.”

“What?”

He shakes his head as we rumble off down the road. “If you can’t see what’s plain as day right in front of you, maybe you don’t deserve it after all.”



## Lauryn | Saturday night

**T**HE FLICKERING FLAMES FROM the bonfire dance in the dim October evening. The festival was a success, and I'm bone tired after a long day and a warm, filling dinner. The crackling embers are mesmerizing as I think of how much I love times like these here, at the orchard, but I snap out of the trance as my father sinks down next to me on the bench. He hands me a hard cider, his weathered face illuminated by the blaze, and clinks bottles with me before he takes a long swig and nods. "He'll do, Bug."

I don't need to ask, and he doesn't need to explain. The high praise coming from my dad, who's always been the man I've measured every guy against, lands in my stomach with a thud. My fingers tighten around the bottle, and I search out Miles in the crowd. I don't spot him until I look closer. He's joined the circle of men, my brothers-in-law and soon-to-be one, standing around the woodpile with legs propped up on it, as if he's known them for years rather than hours, with a rare, relaxed smile on his face. My heart pounds like a bass drum.

He's done it. Convinced my family we're a happy couple. Mission accomplished. But it's a double-edged sword because even if, for a few days, we can play the parts, Miles is still my boss. And my true feelings for him are still my own little secret. Come Monday morning, things will be back to normal. I've got one more night here, and if there was ever a chance to feel those lips on mine again, to feel his body pressed against mine, this is it.

I turn and kiss my dad's cheek with a soft, "Thank you," then rise, making my way toward Miles. He turns when I approach and tucks me against his side with an arm around my shoulder as if it's the most natural position in the world.

I fit perfectly against him and slip my free hand into his back pocket. His ass under my fingertips, an ass I've admired more times than I can count around the office, is tighter than I ever imagined. But the reminder of the office gives me pause.

I can't help but wonder if this is the beginning of the end of my time at the firm. It doesn't seem as if now that this wall between us has crumbled, even if only for a few days, I can ever go back to being Miles' personal assistant. I've fallen too hard to ever recover. Maybe, it's time I think about moving on with my job. And my life.

"Everything okay," Miles murmurs against my hair, his eyes finding mine and searching, as if he can tell the path my thoughts have taken.

"Yeah," I assure him with a squeeze, pushing away the plan along with the heartache I imagine will come with it. "Just a

long day.”

“Ready to turn in?”

There’s not a hint of innuendo in his voice, and the wrinkles crisscrossing his forehead are genuine concern for my fatigue. But that kiss against the car yesterday, when his lips left me breathless and squirming for more, still lingers in my mind.

I could barely sleep last night, my body so attuned to his every move and turn on the floor only feet away. If there’s ever a chance to feel his touch, it’s now. I risk making a move, laying it all on the line, because the worst he can do is deny me. I make my intentions clear in four little words. “Only if you are.”

His eyes narrow, and I expect more hesitation, more uncertainty, but it’s barely a second before he presses a soft kiss to my lips and murmurs against them, “Oh, I am.”



It’s a good thing my second youngest sister and her husband, who are staying in the guest room below us, are still out at the bonfire because the second the door clicks closed behind Miles and he turns the lock, there’s no holding either of us back.

This getaway, out of our normal patterns and ways of seeing each other, has stripped us of our usual roles and inhibitions in a way I didn’t expect. The charade has worked like a charm, and we’ve got everyone fooled, but until we reach the city limits tomorrow, there seems to be an unspoken agreement

between us that tonight we keep up the façade, pretending we're a real couple, even when we're alone.

We'll give in to the blazing connection between us now, and come Monday morning, it'll be back to work. Back to normal. I expect nothing more. But I'll take what I can get.

Wordlessly, we come together in the middle of the room. Miles' fingers grip my hips as his lips crash down on mine. They're hungry and eager, as if there's a dam that's been breached and now that the water has been released, he can't control the flow.

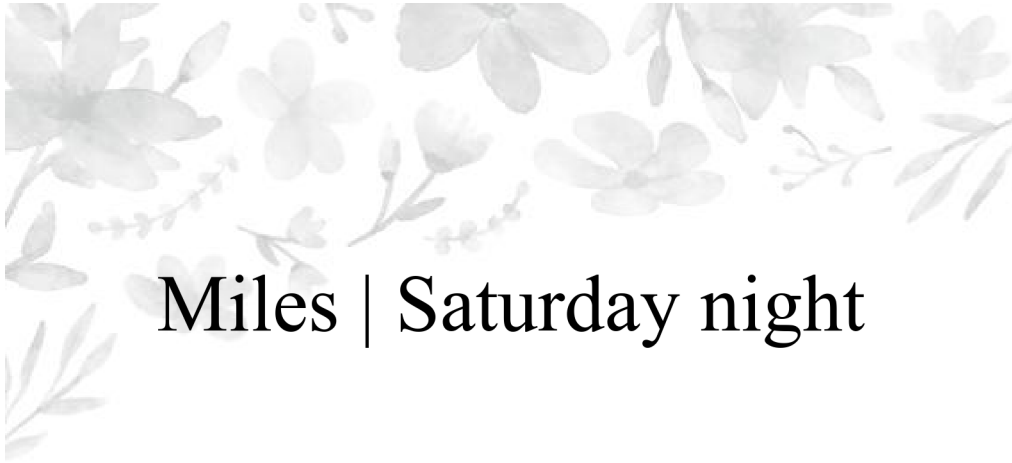
His hands slide up my back, clutching tightly as he pulls me closer. I'm just as desperate to feel him and wind my arms up around his neck as my fingers tangle in his hair. The electricity between us is palpable, and I'm writhing as his hands roam over my body, exploring every inch as if committing each curve to memory.

Sparks shoot through my nerve endings, and I'm on fire, lost to the sensations. Any last reservations I might have had are erased by his touch, by the way he murmurs my name as if I'm the answer to his prayers.

We're all hands and fingers and hot breath on bare skin as we strip each other naked. Once his cock pops free of those jeans, I can't help but stroke him, both hands sliding up and down the generous, satiny, rock-hard length. Miles groans, and his head falls back. The power of my touch is heady, and I lean forward and swipe my tongue over his nipple.



He sucks in a breath with a sharp hiss as he grabs my head with both hands and kisses me as if his life depends on it. That promise of more pleasure is exactly what I need right now.



## Miles | Saturday night

I 'M GOING TO ROT in hell for breaking every moral and ethical code by sleeping with a subordinate, but right now, with Lauryn standing naked in front of me, her grip tight on my cock, I'd have to be a saint to resist.

Which I'm not.

My hands are sore from today's manual labor, but Lauryn's skin soothes them as I trail my fingers down her face to her shoulders then arms and circle around to her breasts, cupping each heavy, perfect one in a palm. My thumbs flick over the dark nipples, which are already as hard as stones, and she gasps, the sound music to my ears.

Her hands fly up to grab my biceps while her eyelids fall half shut. She presses against me, my length firmly wedged between us, against her warm, soft stomach. I pinch each nipple and bend to suck one into my mouth, lavishing it with my tongue as I slide my hands down to her waist.

She steps into my touch and moans loudly, her nails digging into my skin as her breath grows ragged. I'm throbbing to the point of pain and precum oozes from the tip of my cock. I release her, somehow unable to endure the temptation of her body for another minute, even though I've successfully resisted every day for the past two years.

I reach down and stroke a finger between her legs, through her warm, slick folds, and she shudders. I grit my teeth and swipe again from back to front, ending at her clit and circling as her legs quiver.

There'll be time for more later, to taste her and watch from between her legs as she comes undone, but now, I need to fill her, to sink deep inside her. I spin Lauryn toward the desk in the corner and leave her for a moment to grab a condom from my suitcase and roll it on. Then I come up behind her and grasp her hips. She's bent over but grabs either side of the desk and presses her ass up toward me.

I line up and enter her in one smooth, hard thrust. She's so tight and cries my name. Her head drops as her fingers curl around the desk as if she needs to hold on for dear life. And it's a good thing, too, because it's going to be fast and hard.

I pull out almost all the way then sink back in, starting a pounding rhythm that won't last long. I give her everything I've got, but she meets me stroke for stroke, urging me on with her cries of pleasure as I pump into her, again and again. I'm so close when she screams and her walls clench around me, setting off my own orgasm. I come with a final powerful

thrust, calling out her name as pleasure surges through me like a wave.



The sun-kissed color on her cheeks this afternoon was nothing compared to the flush of her skin after she came, but Lauryn beelined to the shower and has been in there for at least twenty minutes. I've pulled on athletic shorts and a T-shirt as I wait my turn then sat in the chair next to the desk rather than on the bed. My blankets and pillow are still on the floor where I straightened them this morning, and as much as I want to hold Lauryn all night long, I have a feeling she doesn't feel the same.

Sure, the sex was hot and fast and she came—hard. And yeah, Lauryn bent over the desk fulfilled my wildest fantasies, but it was more about satisfying the raging desire between us than anything else. I'm hoping for a round two, but I'm not so sure it's in the cards. Despite what her father said today, I can't forget Lauryn has no qualms about having sex with me because she trusts I'd never let whatever happens this weekend impact our working relationship.

We're miles away from our real lives, and the distance is like a buffer, but the fresh country air and working clothes are only a temporary difference. The front that we're a happy couple is only until we leave tomorrow. But I'm about to betray her trust because I'm not thinking about this weekend anymore. And

I'm definitely not thinking only about tonight. I'm dreaming of forever. With Lauryn.

I'll need to tread lightly, though. To see, first, if I even have a sliver of a chance. If she has an opposing view, I can take a crack at breaking it down, counterarguing point for point. But as I formulate where to start, the water turns off, and I realize I'll have to wing it.

She emerges a moment later with full coverage but sexy-as-hell-on-her gray knit pajamas, and I don't have a chance to ask her anything. She beats me to it.

"Can I ask you something, Miles?" she says, her tone serious.

"Of course."

She's brushing her wet hair in long, smooth strokes as she watches me closely. "Why did you volunteer to come with me this weekend? To pretend to be my boyfriend? And I want the truth, Miles, not some long-winded legal jargon no one understands."

"I'll tell you the truth, but only if you promise to tell me something, too."

"What?"

"Why you lied to your family about having a boyfriend to begin with?"

"That's easy," she says with a shrug as she turns her head to brush the other side of her hair and no longer meets my eyes. "I'm the oldest, and my sisters were all finding *the one* and

settling down while I was still in the city and wanted an excuse to stay. A boyfriend seemed like the most logical option.”

There are a hundred flaws in her argument, but that’s not what bothers me about her answer. It’s her tone. She’s not giving me everything. She’s holding back and that, by far, is the worst part. If there’s one thing that’s always been true with Lauryn, it’s that she tells it like it is. She never minces words, but right now, there’s something she’s hiding, and it’s something important. Something I need to unearth to win my case.

But now isn’t the time to press, so I file it away to circle back to. “I see.”

“What about you?” she asks with a deep yawn. “Why did you come with me?”

*Because I love you and I’d give anything to be with you, even though I’m not the type of man you want.* “Why do you think I came?”

Her head shakes as if I’m still a mystery she’s trying to solve. “I have no clue. I thought I knew you. I mean, after this long—”

“We might have worked together side-by-side every day for the past two years, but there are some things you don’t know about me, Lauryn.”

She opens her mouth but closes it again, and her bottom lip tucks between her teeth. After a long moment, she says,

“Same.”

My heart skips a beat as hope floods my veins. The single word is far from a profession of anything, but it’s a start. A sign, just like earlier by the fire when she let me know, in not so many words, there’s more bubbling beneath her surface.

But for all her confidence and forthrightness when it comes to work and speaking her mind, Lauryn might not feel so open with her feelings. She’s a personal assistant, after all, and I’m her boss. She depends on the wages she earns working for the firm. My father’s firm.

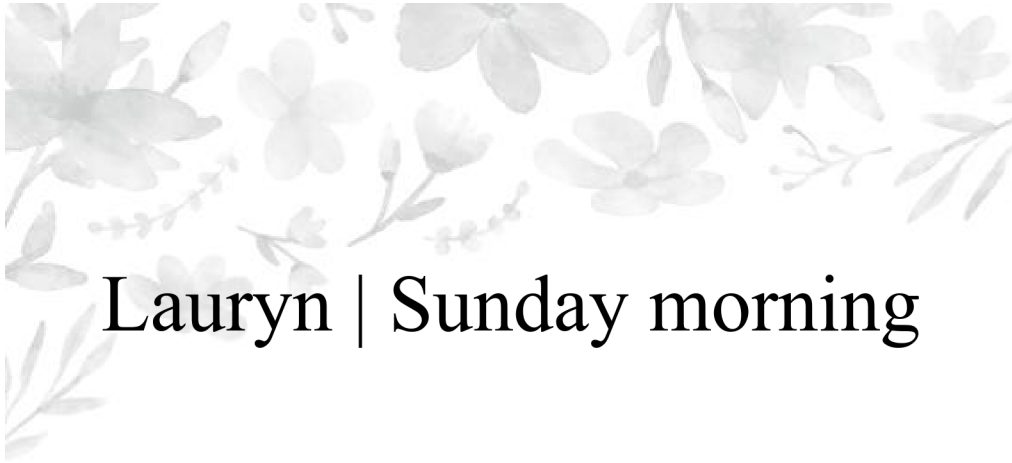
“I learned something about you this weekend, though,” she says, yanking my attention back to the present.

“What’s that?”

“You really are a very convincing actor. I mean, you have my family fooled, and I didn’t think there was a chance in hell you could pull it off. Next time, I need a fake boyfriend I’ll know where to go, especially if it comes with benefits, although I think I might come clean with them soon. You know, say it didn’t work out between us, and that I’m single and love it.”

My jaw clenches. “Think they’ll buy it?”

She shrugs. “I can be pretty convincing, too.”



## Lauryn | Sunday morning

**I**T'S HUGS ALL AROUND for both of us late Sunday morning as we stand in the front yard, saying goodbye as rain threatens from the ominous dark clouds that hide the sun.

“Miles,” my mom says, pulling him in for a warm hug. “Promise me you’ll come back soon and bring my daughter with you.”

“I’ll do my best,” he replies, and his careful, noncommittal response makes my heart sink even further.

I should never have let Miles volunteer. I should have said no straight away and not been tempted by his efforts to convince me spending the weekend together at the orchard was in any way a good idea. Because now, my family loves him, or at least, this version of him that is, in some ways, so different from the one I know and yet somehow exactly the same.

“Dad, let me get that,” I say, grabbing the peck of apples he’s carrying toward the SUV.



“Wouldn’t want you to go home empty-handed,” he says as I circle around the back and slide it in next to our suitcases.

“This’ll last me for weeks, and there’s a chance I might come home before then.”

“That so?”

I glance over at Miles, who’s shaking hands with one of my brothers-in-law. “I think so.”

I was thinking about it last night when I couldn’t sleep. I’m going to have to quit. Not because I slept with my boss, but because now that I’ve had a taste of what it would be like to be with Miles, I don’t think I could bear to work side-by-side with him day after day and go back to how things were. Or even a modified version of that. I want this Miles or none at all.

“I wouldn’t be so sure, Bug.”

I spin to face him, confusion knotting my brow, but don’t have time to ask what he means because Miles makes his way over. “Ready to go?” he asks.

“I am.”

“Take care, son,” my dad says as he and Miles shake hands.

“You, too, and thanks for the advice.” Miles claps him on the shoulder.

*Advice?*

“Anytime.”



“What was that all about?” I ask as I buckle my seatbelt, and Miles starts the engine.

“What?”

“Thanking my dad for some advice.”

Miles raises a hand one last time at the crowd, waving us off as he shifts into drive and pulls out. “I might be smart, but your dad is wise.”

This is true, and it’s something I appreciate more the older I’ve gotten, but still.

“What do you say we go back again sometime soon?”

I swallow hard. “Together?”

“Yes.”

Don’t get me wrong, last night was hot, and Miles fucking me over the desk fulfilled a fantasy I’m sure he didn’t even know I’ve harbored since the day I started as his PA, but it wasn’t making love. Hell, it barely had any emotion other than fulfilling a physical need that had been gnawing at me for years.

But I’m not about to keep up the lie in front of my family, just so we can sleep together miles away from our real lives. Obviously, he doesn’t want to date me for real or risk the chance our pretend relationship would impact anything back in

the city, in our real lives. It's the final straw. Cutting things off now is the best solution. For everyone involved.

I look out the window as rain starts to fall. The rolling green hills fly by, and I try not to think about how I'm giving up, planning to move home after my years in the city produced nothing more than a broken heart. "I don't think that's a good idea. In fact, I'm going to submit my notice on Monday."

The SUV swerves.

"What?" Miles nearly yells, and his outburst is so out of character I spin to face him.

He straightens the wheel.

I murmur, "You heard me. I'll stay on for two weeks, but then I'll be out of your hair."

"Out of my hair?"

"It's for the best."

"For who?" He sounds incredulous, and I'm unsure where this depth of emotion is coming from.

"For both of us, Miles," I insist as he pulls off to the side of the road, and we come to a screeching halt just as a clap of thunder booms.

"Not for me."

"I'll train a replacement, if they can hire someone in time. Or, if not, I'll leave detailed notes to ensure—"

He spins to face me. "I don't give a fuck about the work, Lauryn. You could quit tomorrow, for all I care."

*What?* “Well, I’d like at least one more paycheck to help with the cost of moving—”

His hands grip the wheel. “You’re leaving the city?”

“I think so.”

He runs a hand through his hair, and his expression, usually stone-faced even under pressure, is distressed in a way I’ve never seen it. His voice is strangled as he utters a single word. “Why?”

“It’s for the best,” I say again as a lump forms in my throat. There’s no way I can confess the real reason now.

“You said that, but I disagree. You...” He trails off, and his mind is working as he looks out the windshield, but his eyes don’t focus on the land. Finally, his tone is softer as he turns to face me and reaches a hand over to rest on my thigh as if he wants to have a physical connection between us. “Last night, you asked me why I volunteered to come this weekend, to pretend to be your boyfriend and help out at the orchard.”

“I did.” And come to think of it, I’m unsure I ever got a straightforward answer.

“The truth is,” he says, squeezing my leg, “I didn’t have to pretend. I didn’t have to try to be convincing because, since you swept into my office on that first day, I’ve wanted you. I’ve wanted you by my side as my own, even though I’m not the type of man you’d ever go for.”

“You’ve wanted me?” Even as the words fall from my lips, I don’t believe them. There’s no way what he’s saying is true.

“With every fiber of my being. And not just my body. My heart and soul, too.”

I shake my head as if I’m hallucinating. “But what about your dad? What about the firm? You need a woman who’s rich and sophisticated and can fit into your social circle. Not someone like me. I mean, you said it yourself. I’m uninhibited and outspoken and—”

“Perfect.”

“But—”

“I want you, Lauryn, just the way you are. I don’t want to live in grayscale anymore. I want my life to be in full color with you. I don’t care if you know which fork to use for seafood or can make small talk about the latest opera. In fact, I’m thinking about leaving the firm myself.”

“What would you do?”

He holds my gaze. “Live in the country. Raise a family. Maybe start a private practice to serve folks who really need representation.”

My jaw drops at the first two, but when he mentions serving folks, it hits me like a ton of bricks. I’ve always known what kind of law he’s really loved. “Your pro bono work,” I whisper.

His eyes go wide. “How’d you know about that?”

Good question, considering he’s kept the countless hours he’s donated to nonprofits around the city under wraps for years. And definitely hasn’t let his father find out.

I lift a shoulder. “I pay attention.”

He raises a hand to my cheek and brushes his thumb across my lip. “Not close enough attention to see how I’ve had to hold myself in check every day for the last two years.”

I undo my seatbelt and lean across the center console to kiss him. “That makes two of us.”

“Really?” The disbelief in his voice is endearing and betrays his surprise.

I bite back a smile and nod. “Really.”



## Epilogue Miles | Two Years Later

A TRUCK RUMBLES DOWN Main Street outside my office window as Lauryn knocks on the door before popping in. “Your eleven o’clock with Rob from the Dairy Council just got pushed to noon. He’s on his way, but there was an issue with one of his tanks this morning he had to sort out.”

With a smile, I glance up from the legal brief I’m annotating as she sets a manila folder on my desk and circles around to press a kiss to my hair.

“Not a problem,” I assure her.

“I’m heading to my parents’ house for the dress fitting, remember? But I should be back soon.”

“Still keeping that dress a surprise?” I ask, leaning back in my office chair and tugging my wife down onto my lap.

“Yes,” she giggles as I nibble her ear. “Although, I have a feeling my mom’s going to have to let out the pleats another few centimeters.”

I lay a hand on her belly. “Good. Means you and the baby are healthy.”

A wide smile fills her face before she leans over and kisses me. “I’m just glad he or she hasn’t decided to arrive early. I’d hate to miss my husband getting recognized by the bar for his outstanding pro bono work.”

“And I’m just glad you’ll be there in case my parents are in attendance. You know how much they love black tie events in the city.”

She leans her head on my shoulder and fiddles with a button on my shirt. “If they show up, you’ll be as gracious as you always are with them, even when they don’t treat you with the same respect.”

She’s right. For a good year after I left the firm, my father didn’t speak to me. He couldn’t understand my decision to leave and thought I was sacrificing my career for a woman. He said I was crazy to move to the country, but what he didn’t realize is, I wasn’t giving up anything.

Choosing Lauryn over my future as a partner at the firm meant I was taking control, following my dreams, and finally living life on my own terms. Plus, I was gaining a woman, who loves me for me, and her family, who don’t attach conditions to their feelings.

She turns her head to allow me greater access.

“Sure we can’t skip it?” I murmur, kissing my way across her collarbone.



“Once you see me in my dress, you’ll be glad we’re going.”

“I’ll be glad when we’re back at home alone and I’m peeling it off you.”

She purrs a hum of approval and weaves a hand into my hair. “I’m just glad the ceremony wasn’t scheduled for next weekend. That’s the festival, and then you’d really have an excuse not to go.”

“Speaking of the festival, tell your dad, if you see him when you’re over there, that I’ll stop by tonight on my way home to help move those pallets of cider from the barn to the market.”

“Maybe, I’ll have to come with you. You know how much I love seeing you drive that tractor.”

“I may just have to buy us a tractor of our own,” I say, trailing a hand up her leg from calf to thigh.

She giggles and rises, straightening her dress. “You might have a house in the country, but you don’t need a tractor, Miles Beaufort. With your one-track mind, what you need is a bigger house for all the babies you want to make.”

She’s right.

“Do you blame me?” I ask, adjusting in my seat to ease the pressure in my pants.

“No.” She bends to capture my face for a lingering kiss. “Because I’m on exactly the same page.”



Dear reader,

Thank you so much for reading Canadian Fling! I hope you loved getting to know Lauryn and Miles as much as enjoyed writing them.

Curious to know what happened later that first afternoon when Lauryn and Miles made it back to the city? Spoiler – it's hot! **Grab the free bonus scene now!**

xoxo ~ Ellen

And, if blindsided heroes and women who know what they want sounds like something you'd love, binge the steamy sweet **It Only Takes ONE** small town instalove series today! There is no cheating and no cliffhangers, just a sweet and steamy HEA for every couple.



## Also By Ellen Brooks



Welcome to **Ravish Ridge**, where sexy, small town heroes fall fast and work hard to satisfy the sassy women who capture their heart in an instant.

If you love blindsided men, women who know what they want, and steamy, small town romances, the **It Only Takes ONE** series is perfect for you. There is no cheating and no cliffhangers, just a sweet and steamy HEA for every couple.

One Shot with the Soldier

One Oath by the Officer

One Hassle for the Handyman  
One Challenge for the Cowboy  
One Favor from the Firefighter  
One Question for the Quarterback

### **Holidates Series**

My Sexy Holidate | Snowflakes & Holidates  
My Handsome Holidate | Valentines & Holidates  
Hired by the Single Dad | All the Jingle Ladies



### **Man of the Month Club**

Flirt Like a Fool  
Seduce Like a Siren



## **Welcome to Kissing Springs**

Scorching Santa

Sunshine & Sass

Bourbon & Bets

## **Well-Matched Series**

Learning His Lesson

Finding His Forever

## **The Scots**

Falling for a Star

Tempted by the Scot

Visit [www.ellenbrooks.info](http://www.ellenbrooks.info) for all the links and to sign up for my newsletter so you won't miss a single thing.



## About the Author



Ellen Brooks believes in love at first sight, eating cake for breakfast, and staying up way too late.

She's a classically trained pastry chef who now spends her days whipping up sexy and satisfying modern day love stories.

When she's not dreaming up her next characters, or plotting a happily ever after, you'll find her absorbed in a book, relaxing into shavasana, or downing a caffè americano. Oh, and belting out the lyrics to Hamilton.

Ellen lives in the desert southwest where she still \*occasionally bakes a batch of cookies for her real-life hero and two girls.

\*code for not often enough, if you ask them



Ellen loves to connect with readers everywhere.

