

DOCTOR,  
*Please*

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
CELESTE GRANGER



DOCTORS  
of Eastport General

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Dr. Please

In

Doctors of Eastport

by

USA Today Bestselling Author

Celeste Granger

Note from the Publisher: This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead or references to locations, persons, events, or locations are purely coincidental. The characters, circumstances, and events are imaginative and not intended to reflect actual events.

Dr., Please

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# Acknowledgment

I always appreciate the opportunity to approach the blank page with a new idea; a story of love and intrigue and more love. I also appreciate all of you that have supported me in the past. I sincerely thank you for that. It means so much to me. I also have to thank my team who has supported me – the editors, graphic designers, and A readers. Thank you for helping to see me through.

# Dedication

This book is dedicated to those who understand that love is a sacrifice and worth losing sleep over.

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## Chapter One

Dr. Felix Rush II stood in Eastport General Hospital's Sub King waiting for his order. He was famished after a ten-hour rotation in the hospital's emergency room. It had been nonstop since he started, and this was his first opportunity for a break. It wasn't much of a break, though, a half hour to grab a bite before returning for the remainder of his shift. Yet, even though his back was starting to ache from being on his feet for so long, Felix was still in great spirits. Eastport General was his new home after his recent appointment as Director of Emergency Services. Taking on ER rotations was the hospital's way of helping him to acclimate to what his staff experienced on their emergency room rotations.

Felix was fine with it, though. Landing such a prestigious position at one of the most prominent hospital's in the country was worth the physical and mental sacrifices. The line at Sub King moved slower than Felix would have liked, but he took the opportunity to make a very important phone call. Felix reached into his scrubs and pulled out his cell phone. He dialed the number and waited for the phone to ring.

"Hey, big brother," Alexandria Rush smiled on the other end of the line.

"Hey, little sister," Felix smiled. "Did I catch you at a bad time?"

"I always have time for you," Alexandria smiled some more. "What's going on?"

"Aw, isn't that sweet," Felix laughed. Alexandria joined him. They had a great relationship, but he knew she was trying to be funny with that statement.

"Of course it is," she commented.

"Listen, I left the phone number for the realtor you recommended at home. I'm at the hospital, but I wanted to confirm our appointment."

"Getting sick of shacking up with our folks?" Alexandria asked.

"A little," Felix admitted. "It's not that I don't love them. I do, but I'm a grown-ass man who needs his own space."

"I hear you," Alexandria agreed. "Let me pull the number up."

Felix stepped forward as the server called his number. "Thanks," he uttered as he turned and walked over to a booth, taking a seat.

"Can you write this down, or do you need me to text it to you?" Alexandria asked.

"Text it," Felix replied.

"Will do," Alexandria agreed.

"Thanks, sis."

Felix unwrapped and took a bite of his sandwich after hanging up the phone. It felt good to sit, and he relaxed his back against the booth seat just as his phone beeped. He wiped his hands and swiped his phone. Alex had sent the number and the realtor's name. Felix smiled. He was glad she did, just in case he didn't remember. He checked his watch. It was almost the end of the business day, so if he wanted to reach out, now was the time. He called the number.

"Peyton Hall Realty, how may we be of service?"

"Yes, may I speak with Ms. Hall, please?"

"Hold for one moment," the receptionist asked.

Felix listened to the music piped over the line.

"This is Ms. Hall. How can I help you?"

"Ms. Hall, this is Felix Rush."

"Oh, Mr. Rush. It's nice to hear from you. What can I do for you?"

"I wanted to confirm our appointment for tomorrow," Felix replied.

"Oh, yes," Peyton answered. "I have a few houses scheduled for us to look at. I was thinking we could start at noon?"

"That's perfect," Felix answered. "I'll be at your office at twelve o'clock sharp."

“See you then,” Peyton replied.

Again, Felix disconnected the line. As he finished his sandwich, Felix considered the prospect of leaving his parents’ home. Sure, he meant what he said to Alexandria, that he was ready to have his own place again. He thought about his parents. There were definite benefits to living with them, having the ability to save money but, more importantly, being there for them. They were getting up in age, moving a little slower. He knew his being there was a help to them. But as he threw his trash away and headed back toward the ER, Felix also considered how he could still be there for his parents without living under the same roof.

As Felix neared the emergency room, he saw a plethora of activity that could only mean one thing – there was a new emergency. Felix readied himself to receive the incoming patient. As the gurney pushed through the triage doors, Dr. Rush listened to the emergency tech give a rundown of the client’s vitals.

“BP 200 over 160, heart rate elevated. Internal injuries suspected due to car crash.”

“Let’s get him inside,” Dr. Rush advised.



## Chapter Two

Felix worked into the wee hours of the morning with one emergency after another. Still, he was on time for his appointment with Ms. Hall. Felix entered the realtor's office and walked up to the receptionist.

“I have an appointment with Ms. Hall.”

“You can have a seat,” she replied. “Ms. Hall will be right with you.”

Felix found a seat in the lobby as the receptionist advised Ms. Hall that he was there. He took note of the demure décor and the lush plants that accentuated the office space. Felix hoped he didn't have to wait long. Sitting would encourage resting and remind him of the sleep he missed. Felix was glad he was at the end of his rotation, though. He would have plenty of time to rest after his appointment.

Then, his wayward attention found focus. The woman walking in his direction was incredibly beautiful to the point that gazing at her was enough to pull Felix from his thoughts. He didn't intend to stare, but she was breathtaking with her flawless mahogany skin and voluptuous hourglass figure. When Felix was assured she was headed in his direction, he lifted his tall frame from his seat.

“Mr. Rush?”

“Yes,” Felix replied.

“I’m Peyton Hall.” She extended her hand to which he firmly but gently shook. “It’s nice to meet you.”

Their eyes met, and she smiled an incredibly beautiful smile.

“It’s nice to meet you as well,” Felix replied, the bass of his voice waxing and waning, inching up her spine. Peyton’s eyes widened as she felt the strong warmth of his hand. Her smile slowly faded as their eyes reconnected again. That feeling Peyton had, moving up her spine, was accentuated when their eyes met for a second time. Both Felix and Peyton became increasingly aware that their hands were still connected. Neither of them seemed in a hurry to separate. Yet, Peyton eased her hand from his reminding herself that in this situation, she needed to be professional.

“If you’re ready?” She suggested.

“After you,” Felix replied.

Peyton stepped forward in front of Felix and headed out of the office. She was mindful of how her hips swayed. Felix also noticed how smoothly she moved even though he, too, was trying to remain professional. Peyton was making that incredibly difficult as his eyes took in her incredible frame again.

“Shall we ride together or separately?” She pivoted on her heels and asked.

“I don’t know,” Felix replied, the two coming face to face again. “What do you think?”

She looked up into his deep-set eyes and saw an unexpected sparkle. It caused goosebumps to emerge on her skin. Peyton felt them rise as she was transfixed by his gaze. She blinked, trying to disengage from the intense psychological entanglement, but that feat proved harder than Peyton had anticipated. It was just too easy to fall into his gaze and drift on his thoughts. But Peyton knew she had to disengage or remaining professional would become too difficult.

“Well,” she began, blinking and turning her head to resist the urge to stare into his magnetic eyes again. “If we ride together, I can answer any questions you may have. We can discuss the pros and cons of the properties we see,” Peyton suggested.

“That sounds like a great idea,” Felix agreed. “My car is right over there.”

“Are you sure you don’t want me to drive?” Peyton asked. “I know where the houses are.”

“I’m sure,” Felix replied. “We can just plug in the addresses in my navigation system.”

“Alright then, Dr. Rush,” Peyton said with a smile.

Felix smiled in return and then gently placed his hand on the center of her



back as they both moved toward his vehicle. Peyton felt it, his touch more pervasive than anything she'd ever felt before. It caused her chest to hitch with the pulsation of her increased heartbeat. It took a lot for her not to respond noticeably, but she kept it together. They made it to the passenger side of the car. Like the perfect gentleman, Felix opened his truck's door and assisted Peyton in getting into the seat.

“Thank you,” she uttered as he closed the door after making sure she was comfortably seated. Felix walked around the back of the vehicle and emerged on the driver's side. He opened the truck's door and slid into the driver's seat. After closing the door, he started the ignition.

“Shall I help you with your seatbelt?” He asked.

Although Peyton was tempted by another chance at close proximity, she thought better of it.

“I have it. Thanks.”

Peyton hated declining his generous and gentlemanly offer, but she knew she had to in order to keep it together. They hadn't even seen the first house yet. Peyton had to remember her first priority despite her obviously physically charged response to him. But he saw that glint in her eyes, and even though she declined his offer, Felix knew it wouldn't be his last one. And there was a strong possibility that the next time, Peyton would accept.

He in no way felt dejected.

“No worries,” Felix smiled. “Once you get settled, if you’ll give me the address to our first destination, I’ll plug it in, and we’ll be on our way.”

Peyton buckled her seat belt after feeling the impact of his incredible smile on her heart. She reached into her briefcase and pulled out the list of addresses.

“4213 Falcon Way,” she told him.

Felix’s eyes lingered on her beautiful face, longer than he intended. Their eyes met, and Peyton felt her face warm in response. They had to disconnect, and Felix did, refocusing his attention on the navigation system where he plugged in the address. His eyes drifted to her once again, and this time, he waited until her eyes lifted to him. An easy smile spread across his full lips as she felt her stomach turn over and a flush spread to her cheeks. Yet, she maintained eye contact with him for as long as she could endure it.

*This is going to be a long afternoon,* Peyton thought to herself as she pulled her eyes away from him, which again took considerable effort. But Felix’s gaze still lingered, and she felt the heat in her cheeks increase even more. Felix watched as she squirmed uncomfortably in her seat, and he knew he was the cause. That made his smile broaden even more. He decided to let Peyton off the hook that time. Instead, Felix placed the truck in reverse and

placed his hand on the back of her seat, backing the truck out of the parking space. The navigation system started to speak, giving directions. The two rode in virtual silence outside of the system's voice until the truck reached the interstate.

“So let me tell you a little bit about the house we're going to see,” Peyton began.

Felix inclined his ear to her and listened in.

“The all-brick two-story residence is approximately four thousand square feet. It's got two bedrooms outside of the master. The house has formal living, formal dining, and a family room on the main floor. The primary bedroom is on the main floor as well. The house sits on three-quarters of an acre and has a two-story back deck.”

“Sounds nice,” Felix replied.

“It's near the top of your price range, but since the residence has been on the market for six months, there is probably some wiggle room.”

“No prior offers?” Felix asked.

“There were some, well under the asking price, and I'm sure that's why the sellers rejected them,” Peyton offered.

“Well, I'm looking forward to seeing it,” Felix advised.

Peyton found it difficult to relax in the seat. She knew it was his nearness, being enclosed in an inescapable place that she ashamedly didn't want to escape from.

*Get it together, girl,* Peyton internally chastised herself. *Get it together.*

Peyton kept her attention on the passenger side window, allowing the speeding landscape to pass before her while trying to focus her attention there. But that proved difficult as well. It was like she was drawn to Felix, like a moth to a blazing flame, no matter how hard she tried to avoid it. Peyton was grateful when Felix pulled up in front of the house they were going to see. At least they would not be held captive in such close quarters, and she could regain her professional edge.

Felix parked the truck, turned it off, and then climbed out. He rounded the back of the vehicle again, appearing on Peyton's side of the car. She unbuckled her seatbelt and reached for her briefcase just as Felix opened her car door. He extended his hand, and Peyton folded hers into his as he helped her step down. Felix didn't release Peyton's hand until he was sure she securely stood on her own two feet. Once Peyton advanced, brushing slightly against him, Felix closed the truck's door. He clicked the locks as he pivoted on his heels and joined Peyton on the sidewalk.

"The house has great curb appeal," Felix noticed as he took the property

in.

“It also sits on a cul de sac which helps to decrease traffic flow,” Peyton observed.

Felix liked the way the house sat back from the street, but he was even more interested in seeing what the house looked like on the inside.

“If you’ll follow me, we can go inside,” Peyton suggested.

Felix fell in line behind her as they walked up the path to the front entrance. Peyton put in the code to the realtor’s lock and opened the front door. Felix extended his hand, and Peyton crossed the threshold. Felix followed her inside and closed the door behind them. Peyton gave Felix the opportunity to observe the house from the front entrance.

“The stairs are off the kitchen. Take a look around,” she suggested. “I’ll meet you in a little bit to answer any questions you may have.”

Felix nodded his understanding and started to explore. He looked past the house’s decorations and personal touches and observed the structure and layout of the house. He appreciated the high ceilings and hardwood floors. Felix made his way to the primary bedroom and was pleased to see the double doors that led into the space. He found the bedroom roomy and full of light. Felix could imagine himself relaxing in the space after a long day at the hospital. He meandered through the bedroom and observed the walk-in closet

and the adjoined bathroom. Felix found the bathroom to be nicely appointed and the size of the shower to be impressive.

He made his way upstairs, especially curious as to what was there outside of the two bedrooms Peyton had mentioned. When Felix reached the top of the stairs, the explanation was made manifest. It was a multipurpose room with shelves of books, recliners, and a pool table in the center.

“What do you think?”

Hearing Peyton’s voice caused Felix to turn around. She had followed him up the stairs and observed as he took in the rec space.

“It’s very nice, the whole house,” Felix replied. “But I especially like this space.”

“It’s a great space and very versatile,” Peyton agreed. “Have you looked at the bedrooms up here yet?”

“No, I haven’t,” he replied.

“Well, take a look,” she smiled. Peyton watched as Felix sauntered off. She took in his tall, muscular frame and the smoothness and assurance in his stride. He was something, Peyton observed, as she found it equally as difficult to pull her eyes away from his form even though he wasn’t looking at her. Felix inspected both bedrooms and the adjoining bath. They were equally nice and spacious. He could envision his parents and his sister

occupying those spaces on a visit or maybe permanently. When Felix reentered the rec room, Peyton was there waiting for him.

“Very impressive,” he commented as he strolled in front of her.

“Any questions so far?” Peyton asked.

“None that I can think of, but before we go, I would like to take a look at the backyard.”

“Definitely was my next suggestion,” Peyton replied.

Felix followed her down the stairs and out of the back door. Once again, Felix found himself appreciating the way she moved. When he stepped out onto the back deck, Felix also appreciated the view. It was spectacular, with mature trees at the back of the property and a massive lawn.

“A beautiful view. Wouldn’t you agree?” Peyton asked as a gentle breeze blew.

Felix slowly turned away from the backyard, focusing his full attention on Peyton. He waited until he gained her eyes and had her full attention.

“I do agree.”





## Chapter Three

Peyton didn't respond orally. She couldn't. The words wouldn't come to her lips, even though she thought of how to reply. Peyton was taken aback by his forthrightness, not appalled but bemused by how plainly he spoke. And he didn't seem to backpedal from what he said. Felix stood firm, appraising her with his eyes, causing her to flush, adding immense color to her cheeks. Felix seemed to relish in the way she responded and smiled when Peyton finally turned her head away from him.

It took Peyton a moment to pull herself back together. Felix abided the silence as he knew he was the direct cause of it. So, he waited patiently until Peyton spoke again. She was slow to turn back in his direction. When she did, Peyton purposely avoided making eye contact with him.

“So, what are your thoughts?” She asked. “Should we discuss them as we head out?”

“Yes, we can head out,” he replied.

Once again, Felix fell in step slightly behind Peyton. He took a final look at the rooms as he passed but was easily distracted by the smooth sway of her hips. By the time Felix helped Peyton back into the truck, he had realized how difficult it would be to maintain any semblance of professionalism with

her. There was just something about her that more than piqued his interest. She waited until he was seated and had started the vehicle to reraise her question.

“Are you ready to tell me what you thought about the house?”

“There’s a lot about the house I like,” Felix began. “Even though I really like the rec room, I would have preferred that the primary bedroom is on the same floor as that space.”

“Definitely understandable,” Peyton agreed. “Well, the next house we’ll see has approximately one thousand more square feet of living space.”

“I’m ready to see it,” Felix commented.

“The address is 888 Callista Ridge.”

Felix plugged in the address. “It’s not too far away.”

“Roughly fifteen minutes drive time,” Peyton offered.

“Well, let’s get moving,” Felix suggested.

“Let’s,” Peyton agreed.

The duo engaged in casual conversation while Felix drove. It was an easy conversation that caused Peyton to relax more than she had been before. Intuitively she recognized the inherent danger in letting down her guard. Ordinarily, she wouldn’t dare, but there was something about Felix that put

her at ease. Even after Felix pulled up to the next house they were slated to see, the duo was still talking, engaging, and connecting. Felix was surprised at how easy Peyton was to talk to. He, too, had been guarded but found himself relaxing and enjoying the time they were spending together even though it wasn't intended to be quite so enjoyable.

They paused their conversation to see the next house. As Felix assisted Peyton in getting out of the truck, there was no hesitation, no resistance on her part to take his hand fully. This time when she eased past him, Peyton didn't bristle when their bodies came into close contact. Still, she felt the impact, his masculine essence encroaching upon her feminine. When they were both on the sidewalk, Peyton explained what they were going to see.

“This is a single-story, brick home sitting on an acre of land. There are four bedrooms and a little bit of a surprise in the backyard.”

Again, Felix followed Peyton up to the front door. He took in the neatly manicured shrubs as Peyton worked the realtor's lock and opened the door. Felix allowed her to cross the threshold first and followed Peyton in closing the door behind them.

“Feel free to take a look around,” she began. “I'll find you.”

Felix thought about what she said and decided something different.

“Why don't you look around with me?” Felix suggested, much to

Peyton's surprise.

"Sure," she smiled.

Peyton started describing the architectural details from the door. "The arched entryway is quite appealing and the perfect lead into the long hallway done in large black tile. As we move forward, there's the living room across from the formal dining room," she explained. "The owners are willing to part with any of the items, including the light fixtures you might be interested in," Peyton continued. "My understanding is that there are downsizing."

Felix explored the living room, appreciative of the hardwood floor and the use of rugs that added visual interest to the space. The large picture window was a nice touch and offered a great focal point for the room. When he crossed the hall and stepped into the dining room, Felix really liked the space. He could see hosting formal family dinners or even intimate dinners in the space. Again, the large picture window offered great focus to the room.

"As we move down the hallway, there's the guest bathroom. It's one of four bathrooms," Peyton said. "And just past the bathroom, as we continue forward, there's the family room."

Felix was surprised by how the space opened up. The room was massive, with opportunities for conversation in multiple spaces. But the wall of two-story windows is what drew his immediate attention.

“Wow,” he sighed as he moved closer to the windows as the drapes were pulled back for optimal light. Peyton sauntered up and stood next to him.

“Quite spectacular. Don’t you think?” She asked.

“Definitely,” Felix agreed as his eyes scanned the impressive backyard.

“From what I understand, the windows open and create an indoor-outdoor space.”

Peyton found the latch on one of the windows and unlatched it. She then pushed the folding glass until it was compressed on the other side. Immediately, the outdoors was indoors, with the warm breeze moving through the family room. Felix didn’t hesitate to step out onto the back deck. It was quite impressive, with a sitting area in front of the fireplace, a professional grilling area, a fire pit, and a swimming pool.

“This is really nice,” he observed as he walked around.

“It is,” Peyton observed as she walked over to join Felix at the pool’s edge. They stood there quietly, looking at the water and enjoying the breeze. It was a pleasant moment.

“This really sells the house for me,” Felix offered.

“The asking price is right at the top of what you’ve been preapproved for.”

“How long has the house been on the market?”

“Roughly two months,” Peyton answered.

“I’m surprised,” Felix replied. “I would have thought as soon as this one came up, someone would have grabbed it.”

“The backyard has sold you on the house?” Peyton asked.

“Pretty much,” Felix replied. “Unless the rest of the house is drastically different, drastically unappealing, I’m prepared to make an offer.”

“Already?”

“Yep. The backyard did it for me. Also, because it’s one story, and I’m thinking forward about my parents not having to navigate stairs, that’s certainly a plus.”

“Let’s go inside and see the rest,” Peyton suggested. “And if you still want to make an offer, we’ll write up the paperwork.”

They re-entered the house. Felix took the opportunity to close the sliding glass in the family room and lock it.

“To your left is the kitchen, and off the kitchen is the three-car garage,” Peyton explained as they walked in that direction.

The kitchen was nicely appointed with stainless steel appliances and good lighting over a large island. There was also space for a dinette table. The

Wolf range was another impressive feature. Felix noticed the security system by the kitchen door that led into the garage. When he opened the door, he noted the ample space. Even though he didn't have multiple vehicles, he thought about how he could use the extra space for storage.

The duo crossed the kitchen and headed down another long hallway.

“Down this hall are all the bedrooms, the laundry room, and the primary bedroom at the end,” Peyton explained.

“It makes sense to have the laundry close to the bedrooms,” Felix noted as he opened the doors and checked out the bedrooms.

“You'll also note the jack and jill bathroom between these two bedrooms.”

Felix had already started visualizing how he would use the space, turning the extra bedroom into an office or maybe even a man cave. As he reentered the hall, he fell behind Peyton as she moved toward the primary bedroom. Felix didn't resist the urge to watch her sashay in front of him. When Peyton opened the door and crossed the threshold, Felix entered after her.

“This is massive,” he observed as he took in the vaulted ceiling, bank of windows, and the sitting area that was a part of the primary space. Peyton hung back as he explored the massive closet and the impressive bathroom.

“The shower is a winner,” he noted, appreciating the multiple shower

heads and the overhead rainfall shower head. “I’m definitely ready to put an offer in.”

“Great,” Peyton smiled. “I think it’s an incredible property. Shall we return to the kitchen and get the paperwork together?”

“Sounds good to me.”

They crossed the house and moved into the kitchen, where they completed the paperwork.

“As soon as I return to my office, I’ll send over your offer.”

“Hopefully, they’ll accept,” Felix said as they moved toward the front door.

“You’re making a full-price offer. I don’t see why they wouldn’t,” Peyton affirmed.

As they made their way back to Peyton’s office, the conversation was as easy as it had been before. Peyton even found herself laughing at Felix’s corny jokes. They talked about family and interests and really enjoyed each other’s company. As they got closer to the office, the duo quieted, both secretly begrudging their time coming to an end. Felix hadn’t expected to enjoy himself so much, with looking at the houses being an added bonus instead of the focus. Peyton was easy to talk to, and they had a lot in common. She felt much the same way, surprisingly, as Peyton prided herself



on being the consummate professional. Still, she didn't feel bad about letting her hair down with Felix.



## Chapter Four

Felix pulled into the parking lot and found a parking space near the door. He still remained a gentleman as he helped Peyton down from her seat. The moment felt slightly awkward as neither of them was ready for it to end.

“So, I’ll call you when I hear something,” Peyton began. “Hopefully, we’ll hear back quickly.”

“If we don’t hear back quickly, what do we do?” Felix asked, trying to stay focused on the business at hand.

“Well, if we don’t hear anything within the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours, then I’ll put a call into the seller’s realtor and see what the status is,” Peyton explained. “Worst case scenario, they’ll come with a counteroffer, but truthfully, I don’t expect that since your offer is at full asking price. Are you nervous?” She quizzed.

“I am, honestly,” he replied.

“That’s understandable,” Peyton agreed.

“I’ll have to keep myself busy, so I don’t count the hours,” Felix admitted.

“That shouldn’t be hard for you, should it?” Peyton asked. Then she

thought about how her question might have sounded. “You know, considering you’re an emergency room doctor.”

“Who has the next few days off,” Felix added.

“Oh,” Peyton sighed. “Well, hopefully, you’ll find yourself less nervous and keep yourself busy.”

“You can help me with that, keeping myself busy part,” he suggested.

Peyton felt heat rising in her flesh again. “And how do you suggest I do that?” She coyly asked. Professionalism be damned, she thought to herself. Peyton had abided by the script for quite a while. Peyton had been so focused on building her career that she’d given herself very little time for anything or anyone else outside of her family. Maybe it was time to change that. It was risky to abandon the script, but with Felix considering how their conversation had gone, Peyton was willing to take the risk.

“Call me when you get a chance, and we’ll talk,” Felix replied, the bass of his voice tickling her ears.

“I can do that,” Peyton agreed.

“Excellent,” Felix smiled. He extended his hand in her direction. Peyton accepted and shook his hand. But there was something about the physical connection that caused her heart to turn over in her chest. Peyton could feel intense energy coming from Felix that caused her to swoon.

“Thanks so much for the showings,” ensuring his eyes connected with hers.

“You are most welcome,” Peyton replied.

Even after their salutations were over, their hands still remained connected. They were both cognizant of it, but neither seemed in a hurry to pull their hand away. Peyton finally moved, initiating the separation.

Peyton smiled before making her way back into the office. Felix appreciated her walking away from him once again before getting back in his truck. That smile remained on her lips even after she reentered her office.

“I can’t believe I did that,” she mused as she sat down behind her desk. Peyton rarely opened herself up so quickly like she had with Felix. And she never was anything close to forward. She shook her head with the smile still remaining on her lips. “Business first, and then I can freak out about it.” As Peyton processed Felix’s paperwork, she hoped for the best. She always did when it came to her clients, but this one felt special. Peyton really hoped Felix won the bid.

As she left the office for the evening, Peyton put a call into her best friend, Samantha Brown, from her car. They had been friends since high school. Even when they attended university in different states, they remained close, and when they both returned to their home state, their friendship

physically picked up where it left off.

“Hey, girl.”

“Hey, friend,” Samantha answered back. “Are you off work?”

“Just now leaving the office,” Peyton replied. “Are you at home?” She asked.

“Girl, yes, and glad to be here.”

“And are you sitting down?” Peyton questioned.

“Should I be nervous?” Sam challenged, not sure where Peyton was going with her question.

“Not particularly,” Peyton replied, “but are you sitting?”

Peyton could hear Sam moving around.

“Okay. Now I’m sitting. What’s going on?”

Samantha still wasn’t sure where Peyton was going with her insistence, but she certainly wanted to find out.

“I met someone today.”

“Who? When? Where?” Sam fired off in quick succession. She sat on the edge of her seat, awaiting Peyton’s reply, relieved that it wasn’t anything bad.

“I met someone,” Peyton quietly admitted.

“What? Who? When?” Samantha repeated, even more interested in what her friend had to say.

“One question at a time,” Peyton laughingly rebuffed.

“Girl, I want all the details,” Sam quipped.

“Well,” Peyton began. “He’s a client. He’s a doctor, and he is fine,” Peyton replied, emphasizing the last part.”

“You messing with a whole client? Isn’t that a conflict of interest?” Sam asked, not in a judgmental way. She was genuinely curious but also happy for her friend. It had been a long time since Peyton had expressed interest in anyone.

“Hey, I thought talking to my best friend was a judgment-free zone?” Peyton asked.

“It is friend,” Sam laughed. “I’m cool with it if you are. More importantly, he’s fine. That’s what I heard you say. Have you all gone out?”

“Not yet,” Peyton replied. “Truthfully, I don’t even know if we will.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know,” Peyton whined as she continued to navigate home. “You know,” she continued. “It’s been a long time since I’ve been involved with someone, and like you said, it’s a conflict of interest.”

“But that’s even more reason to let him pursue you,” Samantha argued. “Not the conflict part, but the part about how long it's been for you,” she continued. “I never understood why you wouldn’t respond to the men that were obviously responding to your presence, but you know that. You know my feelings about the ‘all work, no play,’ Peyton.”

“Yes, I do. You’ve made them very clear.”

“So don’t go down the same old road again,” Samantha reasoned. “Sure, you’ve excelled in your career, received awards, and made lots of money, but you’re alone, sis. Wouldn’t you like to share your highs, your lows, and in-betweens with someone special?”

“Yes, of course,” Peyton quickly quipped. But,” she began.

“But what?” Sam challenged. “There’s no time like the present. Peyton, sis, you’re in a good place. Give it a try, and if it doesn’t work out, I’ll be there to help you reem him out, eat ice cream, fuss and cuss and cry if you feel like it.”

Peyton listened to what her friend said. There was a part of her that agreed with Samantha. Still, there was a significant part of her that was too afraid to step out of what had become her comfort zone and give the man a chance.

“I’m just not sure I’m ready,” Peyton admitted.

“Ready to take a chance?” Sam quizzed.

“Yes, ready to take a chance,” Peyton acknowledged. “Maybe it’s not the right time?”

“No time like the present,” Sam countered. “I know it’s corny, but it’s true. Call me after the deed is done.”

Before Peyton could launch a further objection, Sam disconnected the line.

*How rude*, she thought to herself as she heard the line buzz. Peyton disconnected the phone and rode in silence, fully allowing her thoughts to roam free. She didn’t like the way they roamed, but Peyton kept them unfiltered, allowing the words to flow from her heart as well as her brain. She drove in silence for a while and allowed her thoughts to flow freely, but at the end of it, Peyton was just as confused as she’d admitted to Sam she was.

*What the hell*, she thought to herself after deliberating a few more minutes, enough time to pull up into her driveway. She parked her car and turned off the ignition. After finding Felix’s number and taking a few deep breaths, she dialed it. Immediately upon the phone ringing, Peyton considered disconnecting the line. What was she thinking? But then she heard his voice. Instantly, Peyton felt her heart beat hard.

“Hello?” His smooth, baritone voice wafted over the line.



“Hi,” she managed.

When Felix recognized who was on the other end, a slight smile creased his lips.

“Hello, Peyton. It’s good to hear from you. I hope you have good news about the house?”

“Not yet,” Peyton replied, her heart still pounding hard in her chest. “But I expect an answer soon.”

“Oh, so you’re calling me about the other thing,” he smiled again even though she couldn’t see it.

Peyton found herself blushing, too, because he said it. Felix called it for what it was, and hearing it made it all very real. She tried to take a deep breath, but it hitched in her throat. Peyton hoped Felix hadn’t heard that.

“Yes, the other thing,” Peyton finally replied. Her voice was shaky as she spoke, which reflected how she truly felt.

“What changed your mind?” Felix asked, genuinely curious.

“I don’t know,” Peyton laughingly admitted. “I thought about it. I thought about you,” she surprisingly admitted, “and decided that maybe you were worth the risk.”

“I am,” Felix confidently admitted.

He waited for her reply. It wasn't audible as she flushed once again, but he felt it. Felix felt the growing connection that Peyton wasn't ready to admit to. She didn't realize how difficult the conversation was going to be, how many feels she would have because of it. There was a part of Peyton that wanted to retreat from the overwhelming sensations she experienced, but there was a greater part of her that wanted to explore the possibilities.

“Well, I guess I'll just have to see about that,” she coyly replied.

“So, I was thinking a casual stroll on the beach tomorrow. What are your thoughts?”

His question made things very real. But Peyton was willing to take the leap.

“I think a stroll on the beach sounds nice.”



## Chapter Five

Even in reflection, Peyton couldn't believe she had agreed to go out with him. More than that, she couldn't believe she had initiated the call that led to it. They talked for a little while longer. The sun lowered in the sky, casting diminishing rays and splattering muted colors across the skyline, marking the beginning of the evening, and they were still on the phone. They talked about so much, so effortlessly, that the call continued well after the sunset. By the time they hung up for the night, the moon had replaced the sun as the center of attention.

"It's too late now," Peyton quietly admitted as she examined the potential outfit she might wear in the floor-length mirror in her walk-in closet. She examined the outfit closely, trying to determine if it was the best option for a first date. Peyton wasn't sure. It was only the fourth outfit she'd considered, but it was getting close to the time for her to leave if she intended to arrive on time.

Peyton thought about calling Samantha so she could convince Peyton that she was doing the right thing, but Peyton knew if she called, it wouldn't be a short conversation, so she decided against it. Her eyes drifted to the clock in her bedroom, and she realized that more time had passed than she thought.

Peyton had to get a move on.

She rushed through it, grabbing the first outfit she'd picked out and putting it on. Peyton moved quickly from the closet after grabbing a sensible pair of shoes and moved to her dresser, where she fished a pair of earrings out of the jewelry box. With shoes in hand, Peyton padded to the front door, put on her shoes, and grabbed her crossbody bag and keys.

By the time Peyton backed out of the driveway and put the car in drive, a wave of nerves rushed over her. She came to a stop sign but didn't immediately pull off after the cursory stop. She sat there for a minute, contemplating whether she should return home, call Felix and cancel. Maybe it wasn't a good idea, the whole thing. She sat in that moment of indecisiveness, toying with the idea of canceling and going. A blaring horn from behind Peyton pulled her out of her thoughts. As she slowly pulled off, Peyton did make a call.

"I'm on my way on the date, but I am having second thoughts."

"There's no time for that," Samantha countered. "You're dressed. It sounds like you are in the car," she continued. "Follow your first mind. Keep going."

"Oh, Sam, I don't know if I can," Peyton rebuffed. "It all seems too quick, too easy."

“That is probably a good thing that it has been quick and easy, that you didn’t have to jump through any unnecessary hoops. Easy is a good thing,” Samantha replied, trying to be convincing.

“I should just turn around and go home,” Peyton said, sounding deflated. “That would probably be for best.”

“On no, ma’am,” Samantha objected. “No risk, no reward.”

“Now, what kind of reward are you talking about?” Peyton teased.

“You already know,” Samantha giggled.

That moment of laughter with Sam helped to relieve some of the tension Peyton felt.

“Listen, you are already on your way,” Sam sighed. “Go ahead and go for it. I’ll be by the phone just in case you need more convincing after you and Dr. Felix meet up.”

“And you really think it’s a good idea?”

“Of course I do. Go forth and conquer, and call me later.”

Peyton disconnected the line and kept driving toward her destination. She didn’t retreat. She didn’t turn around and return home. She kept going until she arrived at Eastport Park. Peyton parked her car and turned off the ignition. She glanced at her phone to see if maybe she’d missed a phone call,

that maybe he had second thoughts and canceled so she could still get out of it. She had missed a call, but it wasn't from Felix.

Fortunately, the caller had left a message that Peyton took a moment to listen to. After listening to the message, Peyton smiled. Then, the phone rang. She immediately recognized the number.

“Hello, Dr. Rush,” she greeted.

“Hello to you,” he replied. “I’m walking over to your car now. I didn’t want to surprise you in a bad way.”

Peyton turned around quickly when she heard a slight rap against her window. Once she saw him smiling with the phone still pressed against his ear, the lurch in her heart quieted.

“Surprise,” Felix breathed.

She unlocked the door. Even though Felix had caught her completely off guard, Peyton was pleasantly surprised. Felix disconnected the line and opened her car door.

“You definitely surprised me,” she guffawed.

“Not in a bad way, I hope.”

“No, definitely not.”

Peyton let Felix assist her in getting out of the vehicle. He closed the door

behind her.

“How long have you been standing here?” Peyton asked.

“Not long,” Felix answered. “Just long enough to see you were on the phone.”

“Speaking of the phone, I just got a call about the house.”

Felix wasn't sure how to respond, and Peyton gave nothing away with her face or her voice.

“What did they say?” He reluctantly asked. Felix still tried to read Peyton's face, but she made it incredibly difficult.

“Well,” she began stoically. She could see the little bit of light evaporating from Felix's eyes. She didn't want to see that. “You got the house.” And then she smiled. Peyton watched as the light returned to Felix's eyes, and when he smiled, she smiled even more.

“Congratulations.”

“Wow,” Felix uttered. “And thanks,” he smiled.

“I'll go over the details with the clients tomorrow and let you know what they say.”

“That sounds like a plan.” Felix shook his head while the smile remained on his lips. “I can't believe I got the house.” His eyes met hers and held hers



there.

“Thank you.”

She felt his mesmerizing gaze but didn't shy away from it.

“You're very welcome.”

“I want to hug you,” he began, “but.”

“But what?” Peyton quizzed.

“I don't want you to think me forward, too forward.”

“Hug me, Felix. It's okay.”

Still, even after she gave him permission, Felix visually checked in with her, searching her eyes for confirmation. When he felt like he had received it, he stepped forward, closing the space between them. Felix opened his arms and leaned in. Peyton lifted onto her tiptoes and wrapped her arms around his neck. Felix wrapped his arms around Peyton's waist and drew her into him. Felix intended it to be a cordial hug; a thank you hug for her help with securing the house. Yet, once Peyton was in his arms, the thank you part was lost. It was a hug, a wonderful connecting hug that neither of them immediately separated from. Felix loved the way Peyton felt in his arms. She fit so perfectly. She enjoyed the way his chiseled chest felt against hers. And his masculine scent was intoxicating. Peyton knew she should lower her arms, lower herself and separate from him, but she felt so good in his arms it

was hard to pull away.

But Felix felt it necessary to separate to retain any semblance of appropriateness. Even after parting, there was still intensity between them, still intense eye gazes, and still close proximity.

“Shall we go for that walk?”

“Sure,” Peyton answered. Felix bent down and picked up a picnic basket, and then she folded her hand into Felix’s extended one. They stepped from the sidewalk onto the sandy beach. Feeling the ground move under her feet was a different sensation for Peyton, and she stepped gingerly, grateful that she had Felix’s hand to hold on to. Soon though, she was no longer focused on her footing and actually started to enjoy their stroll. There was a gentle wind that kept the day from being too hot and plenty of clouds that kept the sun from glaring. It was nice to be outdoors, Peyton contemplated, as she spent so much of her time in and out of the car, in and out of buildings, and in and out of residences. They walked hand in hand toward the water. The closer they got, the cooler the air blew.

It was nice, and Peyton silently chastised herself for all the rigmarole she put herself through in deciding to come. Peyton inhaled and exhaled slowly, purposefully. She decided to simply enjoy herself.

“This looks like a good spot,” Felix said. “Do you agree?”

“A good spot for whatever is in that picnic basket?” Peyton questioned.

“Yes,” Felix replied. “Even though you have no idea what it holds.”

They paused their steps. Felix released Peyton’s hand and handed her the basket after removing the blanket that was attached to it. After the blanket was spread, Felix retrieved the basket and set it on the blanket. He extended his hand, and Peyton accepted it. Felix helped her get seated and then sat down next to her. They both enjoyed the cool breeze coming off the water and the serene scenery.

“I’m really glad you agreed to spend some time with me today,” Felix began.

“Why?” Peyton had Felix’s full attention behind that comment.

“Well, I would think a handsome man with a prestigious occupation would have a slew of women,” she commented.

“I could say the same for you,” Felix replied. “A gorgeous, successful realtor such as yourself would have a slew of suitors.”

“A few,” Peyton teased.

“See what I’m saying?” Felix chuckled. “That’s why I appreciate you carving out some time for me.”

“I should have said a few who have expressed interest, but the feeling

was not mutual,” Peyton clarified.

“And I can say the same,” Felix replied. “We have that in common.”



## Chapter Six

“So, what’s in the basket?” Peyton asked, deflecting the conversation. But her deflection didn’t go unnoticed.

“Okay, for a slight reprieve from speaking so frankly,” Felix smiled. “But only a slight reprieve.”

“Okay,” Peyton smiled. “I’ll take it.”

He reached for the basket and opened it. He pulled out a bottle of wine, two glasses, some fresh fruit, various kinds of cheese, and sliced baguette bread.

“Would you like something to drink?”

“Sure, that would be nice,” Peyton replied.

Felix handed Peyton a glass, opened the wine, and poured a glass for her and for himself.

“Shall we make a toast?” Felix inquired.

“What would you like to toast to?” Peyton asked.

“How about toasting to whatever comes next for us,” he suggested.

“I’ll drink to that,” Peyton agreed, lifting her glass.

Felix lifted his glass and clinked his with hers. Peyton lifted the glass to

her lips and inhaled the bouquet as she took a sip. She felt the warm libation go down her throat and settle in her belly. It tasted good. The duo enjoyed the refreshments and the wine as they continued to talk about everything and nothing. And they laughed. And it felt good to both of them.

The sun started to lower in the sky. Still, the clouds lingered, causing the sunset to be a mix of changing colors with billowy interplay.

“Shall we return to our prior conversation?” He asked.

“Do we have to?” Peyton pouted.

“I think it’s necessary, for clarification’s sake. We can walk and talk,” he suggested. Felix removed his shoes and set them to the side. Then, he stood up. Felix reached for Peyton’s hand. When she folded hers into his, he lifted her to standing. Before they started their stroll, Peyton kicked off her shoes as well. They fell into an easy pace, with Felix abbreviating his longer stride to match hers. Peyton liked how the warm sand felt under her feet.

“So, am I to understand that you’re currently not seeing anyone in particular?”

“Does that surprise you?” Peyton asked.

“Yes, it does,” Felix quickly replied.

“So, am I to understand that you’re currently not involved with anyone in particular?” She asked.

“No, I’m not.”

“And I am also surprised,” she rebuffed.

“I take it you have a reason for your position, right?” Felix asked.

“I do.”

“And I have a reason for mine, despite the fact that you find it difficult to believe.”

“Touché,” Peyton concurred.

They both fell quiet, but not uncomfortably so. Then, Felix stopped and turned Peyton to face him. She felt his eyes penetrating hers. Peyton was tempted to disconnect in that moment because of the warm tingly sensation she felt course down her back, a sensation she knew emanated from him. But she held his gaze.

“The real question is whether you are open to the possibility.”

“What possibility is that?”

His eyes softened, but his gaze remained just as intense. He reached for Peyton’s other hand, and she obliged.

“The possibility of me and you.”

It wasn’t just what he said that made her soul shutter. It was the way the words sounded spilling from his lips. Felix’s words soothed an ache in her

soul Peyton didn't realize she had. Being in such close proximity to him gave her another sense that she didn't recall experiencing. It took Peyton a minute to figure out what that sensation was, but then she realized she felt safe with Felix, not just physically but soulfully as well. Her lashes kissed the height of her cheeks just as she looked up into his dreamy eyes again.

"I want to kiss you," Felix admitted. He knew he was treading on dangerous ground, but it had to be said because that's what his heart truly felt. And it was unexpected for him. He didn't go into this date with that level of expectation, but something about Peyton caused him to open up in ways he never expected. He was nervous about her response. But he would accept it whether it was in his favor or not.

"Then, kiss me," Peyton replied, quite unexpectedly for both of them. Her heart pounded hard in her chest at the mere premise of Felix kissing her, but Peyton had decided to live in the moment, and she refused to abandon that idea now.

Felix didn't need to be told twice. He kissed her with his eyes first, drinking her in totally. Then, he kissed her. It was surprisingly gentle, thoughtful, and slow in the beginning, but there was an unexpected hunger inside of him to have more of Peyton, to taste more of her. The kiss intensified. His lips were more persuasive than she cared to admit as he reclaimed her lips, crushing them to him. Felix's mouth covered hers with an



unrivaled hunger leaving her mouth burning with fire and her soul yearning for more. And he ended the kiss as sweetly as it started, slowly and thoughtfully.

The duo continued to enjoy each other's company during phases of talking and silence. But they stayed connected even in the quiet moments. They returned to where they started, back at Peyton's car.

"I had a really nice time," she admitted.

"I did as well and would like to have that nice time again."

"I think we can arrange that," Peyton smiled.

"Excellent," Felix replied. "I hate that we came in separate cars, though."

"I'll be fine and careful," Peyton promised.

"Still, I would much rather see you home to make sure you arrive safely."

"What if I promise to call as soon as I get there?"

"I guess that will have to do this time," Felix agreed. "Or I could just follow you home."

"We don't live in the same direction," Peyton reasoned. "I'll be okay."

"You promise?" Felix asked. Peyton didn't miss the seriousness in his tone.

"I promise."

Felix had to relinquish.

“Call me,” he said as he stepped closer to her.

“I will. I promise.”

He kissed her again, this time without asking permission, and Peyton was okay with it because she wanted him to kiss her again. She felt his lips touch her like the sweetest whisper. He stepped back from her just far enough to open her car door. Peyton slid inside, and Felix closed the door behind her. She pulled out her key and started the ignition. Her eyes drifted back to where he still stood. Even through the glass, his eyes blazed into hers without repentance. Peyton offered a slight wave and then backed her car out of the parking space. Felix watched until he could no longer see Peyton’s taillights.

Peyton drifted on air the whole way home. She was surprised that everything had turned out so well. Maybe she hadn’t made a mistake after all. Maybe it was okay to have taken the risk. Either way, Peyton felt good about the time she spent with Felix. And as soon as she pulled into her garage, she did what she promised. She called him.



## Chapter Seven

Again, they talked long into the evening. Even though they had spent hours together, they still managed to have a lot to talk about, which was a refreshing change of pace for both of them. Far too many times with other romantic interests, conversation was limited or completely self-focused, which lost its appeal after a very short while. But conversation was easy, refreshing, and interesting. With a promise to speak the next day, the call was supposed to end, but neither of them rushed to hang up the phone, and even more, conversation ensued. Their call ended in the wee hours of the morning, and still, there was hesitancy for it to end.

When the sun came through the slit in the curtains in Peyton's bedroom, she wasn't ready to get up, so she covered her head with her duvet.

"Just a few more minutes," she reasoned as she tried to settle back into the slumber she so desired. Just as Peyton nestled back in and started to fall back asleep, the blare of her alarm clock sounded.

"Ugh!" She huffed as she blindly reached for it, hoping that in silencing the sound quickly, she could readily return to slumber. But she reached in vain, and the alarm continued to sound. She was forced to open

her eyes, even though squinting to cut the sound off. The behavior was so unlike her. Normally, she sprung from bed, ready to take on the day. It wasn't uncommon for Peyton to wake even before her alarm sounded. But the late-night she spent with Felix altered her typical behavior, and all she wanted to do was go back to sleep.

But she knew she couldn't keep lying there.

“Ugh, again,” she sighed as she peeled the covers from around her and swung her legs, planting her feet on the floor. Peyton was still slow to rise from the bed. Eventually, she did and drug herself across the room to her adjoined bathroom. After brushing her teeth, she turned on the shower and allowed the water to get warm, steaming the mirrors. Peyton disrobed and stepped into the shower. The warmth of the water coaxed her awake.

By the time her shower was over, Peyton was finally completely awake and ready for the day. But the day didn't start the same way for Felix. He was used to working long hours and operating with very little sleep. He rested for a few hours after their conversation, but he was too energized to remain in bed long. Felix was up, showered, and dressed before the sun fully rose in the sky. He needed time to think with energy to burn, so he decided to go for a run. It's what Felix needed. Even though he kept a pretty hectic schedule, he still found time to exercise as it provided him the energy to handle his crazy schedule.

There were a few things he couldn't get off his mind, the acquisition of the new house, which he was totally excited about, and Peyton. As he fell into a comfortable pace, Felix's mind went to the house. Although he had only physically been inside one time, he remembered much about the house, especially the backyard. Felix could already envision himself entertaining in the space but also enjoying the pool by himself. He loved the water, and having ready access to his own private pool was like a dream come true. But the more he ran and thought about the possibilities his new home offered, his thoughts went to Peyton. Sure, she helped him secure the house, but that's not where his thoughts of her and the space ended.

Felix could envision spending lots of time with Peyton in his new house. Truthfully, Felix could imagine spending lots of time with Peyton no matter where the location was. The time he could envision spending was what he focused on. And it was a new something to consider. Having recently returned to Eastport and taking on a new position, Felix had a lot on his plate. But he'd grown accustomed to it. He liked being busy, keeping himself occupied with advancement, and taking on new adventures. Now might not be the ideal time to take on a relationship. But Felix already knew Peyton would be hard to shake. She managed to prick a dead place in his heart, one he'd sealed off and kept dormant even though

there were lots of women who expressed interest in him. He was not interested in them, though, or they never held his interest.

But Peyton was different. Felix realized that he wanted to make room for her in his life. As he neared the end of his run, he came to the conclusion that he couldn't rush what he wanted. He would have to be patient and allow what was to be to flow naturally.

*But I will push it if it takes too long.*

By the time Peyton arrived at her office, she was ready to take on the day. The first order of business was confirming the house sale for Felix and scheduling the signing of the paperwork for the transfer of ownership. Just as Peyton picked up her desk phone to call the realtor, her cell phone rang.

“Hello?”

“Did you forget all your girlfriend manners?”

“Hello, Samantha, and I'm sorry.” Immediately, their prior conversation and her prior agreement came back to Peyton's memory.

“Don't apologize so quickly because I'm not finished fussing,” Sam quipped. “Anything could have happened to you, and I would have been none the wiser because you didn't call me like you were supposed to.”

“And I'm sorry, Samantha. Forgive me,” Peyton reasoned.

“How am I supposed to forgive you when I’m still mad at you,” Sam fussed.

“You need to forgive me,” Peyton repeated. “Stop being mad at me. I’m really sorry I didn’t call.”

“Mmhmm,” Samantha hummed. “I don’t forgive you. I’m glad that you’re still alive. How did the date go?”

“Surprisingly, it went very well,” Peyton affirmed.

“I knew it,” Sam sighed. “I knew it. So that’s why you didn’t call me because the date went so well.” Sam leaned in and whispered even though she was alone. “You didn’t give up the drawers, did you?”

“No, Sam, I didn’t, and I wouldn’t on a first date. You know me better than that.”

“Well, hell. I thought I knew you better. I was sure you would call me, but alas, you didn’t.”

“Come on, Sam. Please forgive me. I promise it will never happen again.”

“So despite the fact that I was worried and stayed up past my bedtime, tempted several times to call you but not wanting to ruin what I hoped was a good time, I forgive you this time. But if you ever do me like that again, I will not hesitate to whoop your ass. Do you understand?”



She fully expected a lecture, so Peyton wasn't surprised by what Sam said.

"I understand. Thank you."

"Now, I'm going to hang up the phone now and try to catch up on the sleep I missed worrying about you."

"Talk to you later, girl."

After hanging up the phone with Samantha, Peyton placed the call to the realtor.

"Mr. Ingram, did I catch you at a bad time?"

"No, you didn't," he replied.

"I would like to discuss the closing with you if you've got a minute."

"Of course," Russel agreed.

"We have already come to terms with the price. When is the final inspection scheduled?" She asked.

"The inspection is scheduled for tomorrow."

"Good. If they don't find anything that would delay closing, may I suggest we complete it within the next couple of weeks?"

"I'll check in with my clients, but barring anything with the inspection, I am sure they would be amenable."

“You’ll call me back and confirm?”

“Of course, hopefully as early as this afternoon.”

“Excellent,” Peyton replied. “I look forward to hearing from you.”

Peyton was pleased the conversation went so well. She would be really pleased when the final inspection was over, and the house got the all-clear. She would wait to call Felix and advise him after she heard back from the seller’s realtor. In the meantime, Peyton had plenty of other work to do. And she set out to do the work that had piled up on her desk. But after a few minutes, Peyton found her thoughts focused elsewhere. Peyton also found herself smiling for no apparent reason. But the reason was apparent. Felix was the reason. Her smiles emanated from thoughts and memories of their night together, including the phone calls that preceded and followed their date.

“Focus, Peyton. Focus,” she verbally chastised herself. Yet, she still found herself smiling after the chastisement. She powered through, putting all thoughts of Felix out of her head as best she could. And then her phone rang. Peyton cleared her throat to recenter herself and focus on business.

“This is Peyton. How may I help you?”

“Hello, Peyton,” his smooth baritone voice came cruising over the line. She felt a familiar hitch in her chest and an escalation of her heartbeat. But

this time, it didn't scare Peyton. She recognized it for what it was. "Hopefully, I didn't catch you at a bad time."

"No. Your timing is perfect," Peyton replied. As a matter of fact, I just got off the phone with the seller's realtor. The last inspection is in the next couple of days, and if all goes well, as we expect, I propose that we close within the next two weeks. What do you think about that?"

"That sounds like a plan," Felix agreed. "The earlier I can confirm the date for closing, the better. That way, I can make sure that I am free on that day."

"As soon as I hear from their realtor, I will call you and confirm. It might also help if you can check the schedule for two weeks out and give me some time frames that won't work so I'll know if they propose them, I can ask for another option," Peyton suggested.

"That's a good idea. I'll definitely get that information to you. Maybe I can give it to you in person," Felix not so subtly suggested.

"Oh really?" Peyton quizzed, the beginning of a smile penetrating her full lips.

"It was an idea I've been thinking about since last I saw you," Felix crooned.

"Which was just a few hours ago," Peyton quipped.

“More than a few,” Felix corrected.

“Okay, less than twenty-four,” Peyton giggled.

“It feels like more than that,” Felix replied. But I digress. Let me rephrase. Peyton, I would love for you to go out with me again, sooner rather than later.”

“How much longer are you off work?” Peyton asked.

“A few more days.”

“So, you would prefer this date transpire before then?” She asked.

“Of course, I would,” he replied. “If you are amenable to that idea.”

“I am.”



## Chapter Eight

“I would think with the few days off you have, you’d at least spend a little time with your momma.”

“Mom, don’t start,” Felix chuckled. “I’m here every night.”

“You may be physically here, present in this house, but that doesn’t mean you’ve carved out any time for your father or me, but me mostly,” Allison fussed. “And now that you got your new house and are going to be moving out, knowing I’m going to see you less and less makes me sad.”

Felix had shared the news about the house with his mom and dad as soon as he heard. He knew his mother was happy for him, proud of him, but that didn’t stop what was coming.

Felix sat down on the couch next to his mother. “I don’t want you to be sad, and even though I’ll be moving out, that doesn’t mean we won’t see each other. Besides, the house is big enough for you and dad to move in.”

“Why would we do that when we’ve got our own space here that’s paid for?” She fussed.

“I’m not suggesting it's anything you have to do immediately. I’m just saying that there is plenty of room if the situation arises, and you all need to. That’s all.”

“Well, thanks for making sure that you have space for us, but I would think you would focus on filling that space with your own family, your wife, and your kids.”

“Now we’re getting to what all the fuss is about,” Felix surmised. It was a conversation they had had before but hadn’t had for a while.

“What fuss?” Allison quizzed. “I know you haven’t been back home long, but you’re not getting any younger, and you stay so busy. You want a family, don’t you?”

“Yes, mom, but I still have plenty of time to make that happen.”

“Not if you’re not focused on it, putting your wishes and intentions into the atmosphere.”

“So what are you saying, mom? Have I missed my window of opportunity?”

“I’m saying its closing, and if you don’t put forth some real effort, you’ll be a confirmed bachelor, depriving me of another daughter and grandbabies. Leaving me again is bad enough, but depriving me like that? It would be so tragic.”

“Well, what if I told you that I think I may have found the one,” Felix suggested.

Allison’s eyes widened, and she inclined herself to him.

“You already told us you found the house and got it,” his father interjected. Felix sat down in the reclining chair across from his dad and his mother with a newspaper in hand. Felix Sr. wasn’t a fan of television. He preferred to get his information in writing. He always had a book or a newspaper in his hand.

“He’s talking about a woman, honey,” Allison corrected. “Now, hush so he can finish telling me.”

Felix Sr. relented as he often did. It was part of the key to them being married for more than forty years. He sat down and opened his newspaper, but he kept his ears open to see what his son had to say.

“Don’t hold back now, Felix. Tell me all about her,” Allison encouraged. She refocused all of her attention on her son, interested to see what he had to say as well.

“She’s a lovely woman, highly successful, intelligent, and beautiful.”

“And single?” Allison asked.

“Yes, she’s single, mom,” Felix chuckled.

“And are you serious about her? Is she serious about you?” Allison gently pressed. Felix Sr. paused, looking at his paper to hear his son’s response to the question.

“It’s still early,” Felix replied. “We’re just getting to know each other.”



He knew his mother wouldn't like his response, but he couldn't lie to her.

“Well, I suggest you like her quickly so you can get to loving on each other so I can get my grandkids.”

“She might not be the one, Allison,” Felix Sr. inserted. “He's got to take his time and really get to know her before any kind of settling down.”

“I don't think my son would have mentioned this young lady unless she was worth mentioning,” Allison countered. “If she's worth mentioning, she is worth actively pursuing.”

“I think she's worth pursuing,” Felix said.

“See?” Allison said to her husband, who promptly buried his head back into the newspaper.

“You're about to find real love,” Allison replied. “Just like you're about to break my heart by leaving me again.”

“Mom,” Felix replied. Seeing the sadness in his mother's eyes pulled at his heartstrings. He was excited about buying the house, but he was sad that his mother was sad. Felix reached for her hand, and she accommodated him by folding hers into his.

“I promise you won't miss me much.”

“I miss you already.”

Just as Peyton prepared to leave the office, her desk phone rang again. She'd spent most of the day on the phone, and she wasn't looking forward to talking to anyone else. All she wanted was some peace and quiet. But Peyton knew she couldn't leave the call unanswered.

"This is Peyton Hall. How may I be of service?"

"Peyton, it's Russel."

"Hi, Russel. Hope you're calling with good news?"

"Yes," he replied. "My clients are prepared to do the closing one week from today."

"That's good," Peyton replied.

"They also added a contingency. They are willing to commit ten thousand dollars to whatever, if anything, the inspector finds. They are ready to move on from this property, and they don't want anything to hold up the process."

"Well, I will certainly share that with my client," Peyton replied. "Can you send over the contract that outlines the contingency?"

"Certainly. You'll have it tomorrow."

After hanging up the phone, Peyton decided that she would share the news with Felix after she received the contract. They would most likely

have to meet in order for him to sign the contingency agreement – two birds, one stone. But tonight, she had an appointment, one she couldn't miss. Peyton made her way to her vehicle, and within thirty minutes, she was pulling up into the driveway of her appointment. A slight smile crossed her lips as she climbed out of the car and made her way to the front door. She rang the doorbell and waited for the occupants to answer.

“You are right on time,” her mother said after opening the door. Vivian stepped forward and hugged her daughter around the neck. Peyton embraced her mother as well.

“Hi, mom,” Peyton said. “You said I'm right on time?”

“Yes, ma'am,” Vivian replied, closing the door behind her daughter. “Your father is already setting the table.”

“Well, let me go and wash my hands so I can help.”

Vivian and Peyton split from each other in the hallway, with Peyton going to the lavatory to wash her hands. When she reemerged, Peyton made her way to the kitchen.

“Smells delicious in here,” she commented as she made her way over to her father.

“Hi, dad,” she smiled, hugging her dad around the neck.

“And how is my daughter?” Joseph asked.

“She’s fine,” Peyton smiled. “How are you?”

“Doing good. Got in nine holes today. You should join your father out there on the golf course. It’s been a while since we hit a few rounds.”

“I know, but I’ve been so busy lately.”

“You still need to make time for what’s important, and spending an afternoon on the golf course with your only father sounds pretty important.”

“I know, dad,” Peyton sighed. “I’ll figure out how to make it happen.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” Joe said, leaning in and kissing Peyton on the forehead.

“Well, if you’ll grab the salad, Peyton, we can eat,” Vivian suggested.

The three made their way to the dining room. Peyton sat the salad down, and they all took their seats.

“Turn your phone on silent,” Vivian instructed.

Vivian didn’t have to say any names for Peyton to know who the comment was directed at. She reached into her pocket and put her phone on silent.

“Now, Joseph can pray so we can eat.” Vivian reached both her hands out. Peyton took one, and Joe took the other. They all bowed their heads.

“Father God, we come before you as humbly as we know how, thanking you for all your blessings. We thank you for the food and the hands that have lovingly prepared it. Let it be nourishment for our bodies. In your name, we pray, amen.”

“Amen,” Vivian and Peyton chorused.

The trio took a moment to fix their plates. It was a weekly tradition, Peyton joining her parents for dinner. There were times that Peyton begrudged weekly attendance, but all the time, she loved spending quality time with her parents. Her mother had always been a housewife, with her dad as the primary breadwinner as an independent computer engineer. He retired two years ago and spent much of his free time on the golf course.

“So, how are things going with you, Peyton? Any new developments since last we spoke?” Vivian asked.

“I sold another house, but nothing out of the ordinary.”

“Nothing out of the ordinary?” Vivian asked. “That sounds kind of extraordinary to me, especially considering the market.”

“Well, when you put it like that,” Peyton shrugged.

“I know you have been wildly successful, but don’t take for granted success in a down market. I’m sure that’s not everyone’s story.”

“True,” Peyton agreed. “I’m appreciative of what I’ve been able to

accomplish.”

“That’s because you work very hard at ensuring your success,” Joseph chimed in.

“Anything else going on with you?” Vivian questioned.

“No,” Peyton replied, lowering her eyes and focusing on her plate.

“I know there’s something,” Vivian challenged. “Call it a mother’s intuition.”

Peyton refused to look up. Instead, moving the food around on her plate. Her mother wasted no time in getting to what she wanted to know, and Peyton knew her mother wouldn’t let it go until she was satisfied. But that didn’t mean Peyton had to give in immediately.

“It’s nothing, mom,” Peyton uttered. “The food is really good.” Peyton shoved another forkful of food in her mouth, all without looking up.

“Sidestep,” Vivian commented. “And yes, the food is really good. What’s his name?”

Peyton’s eyes widened again, even though they were focused on her plate. She lifted her head and noted that both her parents were staring at her. She knew there was no getting out of it.

“Felix,” she mumbled with food still in her mouth. She looked at her

parents again. They looked at her as though they expected her to say more. She finished chewing.

“Dr. Felix Rush,” she added, immediately dropping her eyes again.

“Oh, a doctor?” Vivian smiled, taking a drink from her glass.

“What kind of medicine does he practice?” her father asked.

“He’s the head of Emergency Room Services,” Peyton answered.

“Sounds impressive,” Joseph commented.

“The head of a division, and he’s single?” Vivian inquired.

“I thought the same thing,” Peyton admitted.

“How did you two meet?” She continued.

“I sold him a house, the one this week.”

“Interesting. But I’m sure it’s moved past just the house sale, the way you flushed when I asked you his name.”

Her mother was always intuitive, and nothing about that had changed.

“We’ve gone out,” Peyton confided.

“I’m pleased,” Vivian replied.

“Pleased. Why?” Peyton asked.

“Because, dear. You’ve spent the last few years solely focused on

building your career, which is smart. But as a mother, I always hoped you'd find someone, someone to make you happy that you could share your life with. It's one thing to be successful. But it's a whole other thing to have someone to share that success with."





## Chapter Nine

Peyton was just as particular and just as confused while she was getting dressed for their second date. Felix suggested that she dress for an active evening. Peyton pressed him for details, but he got tight-lipped and wouldn't tell her. That left Peyton fumbling in her closet. She'd been fumbling for the past half hour and was no closer to figuring out what to put on. And this time, he was picking her up, so she had to come up with something and come up with it quickly, or she wouldn't be ready when he arrived.

“And I know he's going to be on time, too,” she mumbled under her breath. Peyton knew she had to pick up the pace, or she wouldn't be ready in time. Peyton eyed her closet again, her eyes roaming the racks of clothes she had.

*Think casual, girl*, she thought to herself. Peyton eliminated the racks of business suits and dresses and concentrated more on her casual looks. Finally, she settled on a pair of jeans that hugged her in all the right places but were comfortable enough that she could move around in. With the bottom settled, she just had to find a top that would work. She wanted something comfy and casual but also cute. She spun on her heels and

opened one of her dresser drawers. After lifting a few shirts, she pulled out the one she wanted to wear.

With her outfit selected, Peyton got dressed and added accessories before stepping back into the closet to grab the pair of metallic flats she wanted to wear. Placing them by the door, Peyton stepped into the bathroom and put the finishing touches on her hair, swooping her bangs low over one eye while the rest was pulled up into a messy bun. She smoothed a shiny gloss onto her lips and remembered to turn off the light before stepping out of the bathroom.

The doorbell rang just as she reentered her bedroom. Peyton grabbed her shoes and made her way to the front door. She moved quickly, but the closer she got, Peyton slowed down. She didn't want to answer the door in a huff. She wanted to appear cool, calm, and collected. Peyton slipped on her shoes and took one final look in the mirror before answering the door.

“Good evening,” Peyton greeted after opening the door.

Felix's eyes dragged from hers down her full figure and back up to her eyes again before he greeted her.

“Good evening.”

His smooth and sultry tone tickled Peyton's ears and caused a warming sensation to course through her body.

“Are you ready?” He asked.

Her eyes trailed over him, too. He looked nice in dark jeans and a dark t-shirt that accented his muscled chest and tapered at his narrow waist. When her eyes returned to meet his, Peyton saw a spark there.

“Yes, I’m ready.”

Peyton grabbed her bag and her keys and crossed the threshold, closing the door behind her. Felix waited until she locked the door before guiding her from the rear, with a gentle hand to the center of her back, to his truck. That warming sensation she felt in her gut remained as she felt his hand to her back. Felix opened the passenger side door and helped Peyton inside. Only after she was comfortably seated did he close the door behind her. He rounded the back of the truck and entered on the driver’s side, closing the door once he was settled in his seat.

“Can I assist you with your seatbelt, or you’ve got it this time?” Felix asked.

Peyton flushed. “You can help me,” she mused.

He moved in, close. Felix was gentle as he reached for the seatbelt and even gentler when he clicked it on her waist. But he remained close to Peyton, so close that she easily inhaled his masculine scent, so close that she felt cosmic energy radiating from his body. She could feel her heart

pound in her chest in response. Fortunately, Felix eased back into his seat before Peyton got even more verklempt.

Felix turned over the ignition and started the car.

“So, where are we going?” Peyton asked.

“Some place fun,” Felix smiled.

“Great,” Peyton smiled.

Felix turned smooth r and b on the radio and backed out. They enjoyed the music as he drove. Every now and then, Peyton would catch Felix looking at her.

“Keep your eyes on the road, doctor,” she smilingly chastised.

“Yes, ma’am,” he answered. Felix complied, but still, there were stolen glances. He couldn’t keep his eyes off her.

After a while, the road that had only been lit by headlights was suddenly lit with lights spilling over, brightening up the otherwise dark sky. Peyton smiled when she saw Pier 45, an outdoor game park. There were also carnival-style eateries sprawled all over the pier. Felix found a place to park that was only a short walk from the festivities. As Felix helped her out of the truck, Peyton was glad she wore flat shoes. He reached for her hand, and they walked hand in hand down the pier. There were lots of people milling about and lots of interesting things to look at.

Wonderful smells wafted as they passed a few of the eateries.

“Would you like to eat first or get down to the competition?”

“Oh, are we competing against each other?” Peyton questioned.

“A little healthy competition never hurt anyone, right?”

“Oh, okay,” Peyton replied. “Let’s eat first, and then it’s on.”

He smiled and winked as they headed towards one of the eateries that had a variety of choices.

“Do you know what you want to order?” Felix asked.

“There are so many things to choose from. I have no idea,” Peyton replied. “What are you going to have?”

“I’ll have the foot-long coney dog with curly fries,” Felix ordered. “I’ll have the strawberry lemonade to drink.”

“And what will you have, ma’am?”

“Hmm,” Peyton hummed, looking over the sprawling menu. “Let me have the regular-sized hot dog, curly fries, and regular lemonade.”

Felix paid, and their order was placed on a tray. They found a small table where they sat down.

“Hopefully, this isn’t too casual for you,” Felix observed.

“Not at all,” Peyton replied. “It’s fun and not fussy. This is right up my

alley.” She took a sip of the refreshing lemonade.

They both started to enjoy their food.

“I like a woman who isn’t embarrassed to eat in front of me.”

Peyton smiled as she took a bite of her hot dog and stole one of his fries.

“Hey, watch yourself,” he smilingly fussed.

“I just wanted to taste it to make sure it was okay,” Peyton teased.

They finished their meal with light bantering and good conversation continuing. After they left the table, the couple made their way toward the gaming area.

“What about a little basketball?” Felix asked.

“I think I still know how,” Peyton replied.

“Do you need me to demonstrate for you or show you how to do it?”

“Nah, I think I got it,” Peyton smiled.

They stood next to each other and waited for the game to start. When the buzzer sounded, the competition was on. Although there were other contestants, they each were only focused on the other. Peyton had game and made several shots in a row. Felix considered letting her win before they started, but once he saw how competitive she was, he stepped his

game up. They were having a blast, and when the bell sounded, they each looked at the other's score.

Peyton smiled. She won.

“Good game,” Felix smiled.

“Thank you. Not half bad yourself,” Peyton replied, positioning her hand for a high five, which Felix obliged.

They played a few more games, with Peyton winning some and Felix winning the others. They laughed and had a great time. When they approached a strong man machine, Felix decided to go for it.

“Alright then, Dr. Rush. Show me what you got.”

Felix smiled as he picked up the sledgehammer. It looked heavy to Peyton, but Felix looked confident.

“Make the bell ring and win a prize,” the attendant instructed.

“How many swings does he get?” Peyton asked as Felix picked up the hammer.

“One.”

Peyton knew it was just a game, but she felt nervous for him. Felix lifted the hammer, and Peyton saw the muscles in his arms flex as he let it swing. When she heard the bell ring, Peyton smiled and clapped. Felix



smiled as well, showing off his masculine prowess.

“Congratulations! You’re a winner! Pick your prize,” the attendant instructed.

Felix picked a large red heart and handed it to Peyton.

“Aw, you’re giving me a heart?” She smiled.

“I’d also be willing to give you my heart if you give me the chance,” he smiled a much more sultry, sexy smile in return. Felix held her eyes, conveying that he meant what he said without another spoken word. Peyton felt it even more than she was willing to acknowledge in the moment. In that instant, when his dark eyes held hers captive, Peyton felt a sensation deep in her gut she’d never felt before. It wasn’t one of the most romantic times, other than what Felix said, but Peyton felt a resonating in her spirit that flowed from her heart that spoke volumes about what she felt for Felix, which startled her.

Felix sensed a softening, a letting down of her guard, compiled with the overwhelming feelings he already felt. He took a decisive step forward, closing the gap that had existed between himself and Peyton. He held her eyes the entire time, hating to even blink because it would cause a break in their connection. Peyton wanted to blink, but she too felt like she would miss part of the moment they were clearly in. Felix lifted the plush heart

from her hand while simultaneously enveloping her waist with his other hand. She felt him pulling her close, their connectivity intensifying as their bodies connected. Felix's steady gaze bore into Peyton in silent expectation. Her thoughts spun as their lips touched. Felix's mouth did not become softer as he kissed her. His lips were demanding, and she succumbed under the delectable pressure. Everything around them, everyone around them, faded into nothingness as they were alone together at that moment.

That wasn't the last moment the couple had. After arriving back at Peyton's place, Felix escorted Peyton to her front door. Although they conversed freely on the car ride home, all conversation ended on the walk up. Felix was nervous, more nervous than he'd been before because his intentions were more clear in his own head. Peyton, too, was nervous, but she'd been nervous before. After having kissed Felix before and feeling all the thrills and chills, she was nervous with anticipation this time. By the time they arrived at Peyton's front door, they were both obviously nervous, eying each other without maintaining eye contact as it seemed just too intense.

But their eyes did meet, and they did lock. There was a collective escalation of heartbeats.

"I had a nice time tonight," Peyton said. She felt like the words were

going to get caught in her throat, but they managed to come out.

“Me, too,” Felix uttered as he gathered Peyton into his arms. He couldn’t help himself. He wanted to hold her, kiss her again, and he did. They connected again in such a physical and emotional way. It was enough to take Peyton’s breath away and take it away again. And when they separated, they were quiet again, reflecting in the glow of the connection they had just made.



## Chapter Ten

### Two weeks Later

The papers had been signed.

Felix was completely preoccupied with transforming his new home into his dream home. He worked tirelessly late into the evening, rising early the next morning, fine-tuning everything he touched. That was on the days the emergency room didn't require his presence. Yet, even after a long shift, there was nothing like returning to his new home. He loved it, and his place was coming together nicely.

“You still need so much furniture,” his sister fussed. They happened to have the same day off, and Alexandria volunteered to help Felix out.

“That’s part of why you’re here, sis, to help a brother out.”

“And is that the only reason you invited me over?” Alexandria questioned, with a hand on her hip.

“Of course not,” Felix quipped.

“Of course, it is,” Alex laughed. “I don’t have a problem with it,

though. You know how I love to decorate.”

“So, where do we start?” Felix asked, grateful for her decorative touch.

“Grab a notebook and something to write with. We will go room to room, and you will write down the furniture pieces that we need,” Alexandria instructed. “How much money do you have?”

“What?” Felix asked as he went to find a notebook.

“Beautification is not cheap,” Alex replied. “And beautification by me is definitely going to cost you.”

“I have a few dollars put away,” Felix replied, returning with pad and pencil in hand.

“Well, you’re going to need them.”

“So, where should we start?” Felix asked.

“Upstairs,” Alex replied.

The duo mounted the stairs with Felix following behind his sister. He already knew she would help get everything together. He was confident of that and understood he needed the help.

“So when are you going to have mom and dad over?” Alex asked as they started at the furthest bedroom.

“When I have a place for them to sit down,” Felix huffed.

“Good point,” Alex smiled.

After entering the bedroom, she rattled off rather quickly the furniture items he would need.

“Too bad you don’t have any of your old furniture that you can transition into the new space. At least that would save you a few dollars,” she commented as they made their way to the next room.

“I still have my childhood bedroom set,” Felix chuckled.

“And you know mom is not going to let you take that out of their house,” Alex quickly corrected.

“What if I brought the bedroom set and them?” Felix asked.

“What do you mean?” Alex asked, pausing her steps and turning to face her brother.

“I’m just thinking out loud, planning for the future,” Felix replied. “Our parents aren’t getting any younger.”

“I know,” Alex said with a sigh. “But you also know how stubborn they both are. I can’t imagine that either one of them will willingly give up their independence without a significant fight.”

“What if we fight them together?” Felix asked.

“It might take more than just us fighting them,” Alex replied. “But I’m

down for the battle.”

“If we start dropping seeds, then maybe they will take root,” Felix answered. “I know it’s going to be a battle, but it’s a battle worth fighting.”

Alex pivoted on her heels and moved to the next room.

“What about your future, though?”

“What do you mean?” Felix asked as he entered the next bedroom behind her.

“You do plan on having a family, right?” Alex questioned as she took inventory of the space. She caught her brother’s face out of the corner of her eye.

“Wait a minute,” Alex smiled, her arched brow pitching on her forehead. “You got a prospect?”

She watched as her brother tried to avert her gaze, but she wouldn’t let him off the hook that easily.

“Brother?” Alex drilled.

Felix finally relinquished because he knew Alex wouldn’t let up.

“There is someone.”

“Ooh, tell me all about her,” she replied, totally interested. “But you do know she has to be vetted by me before any long-term decisions are



made.”

“I know,” Felix smiled. It was an unwritten understanding. They were very close. Anyone invited into that space had to be a match and respect that bond.

“So, tell me,” Alex insisted.

“Her name is Peyton,” Felix offered.

“The realtor?”

“Yes,” Felix sighed, shaking his head.

“Okay,” Alexandria smiled. “Okay. So, you weren’t just buying a house, were you, big brother?”

“That was my intention,” Felix defended.

“But?” Alex quizzed, wearing a smirk of her own.

“I couldn’t resist.”

“I bet you couldn’t,” Alex smiled.

The duo continued their walk through with Felix dutifully writing down everything Alexandria said. By the time they were at the last room, he had a long list of things he had needed to buy.

“I may have to go get a second job looking at this list,” Felix observed.

“You won’t have to worry about that,” Alex suggested, reaching for her

purse. “I buy fabulous, but I also buy smart.”

“Well, you’re gonna have to buy really smart, sis, because we have a lot of buying to do.”

“No problem, brother. I’ve got you.”

Peyton was still floating on a cloud, a cloud that grew and intensified the more time she spent with Felix. Over the past few weeks, they’d been out several times, and when they weren’t able to go out, they spent time talking and getting to know each other better. Even though they were both able to be professionally distant during the signing, the minute it was over and the coast was clear, Felix thanked her in a personal way. Thinking about that kiss still sent shivers down Peyton’s spine.

Peyton needed to talk to her friend. She certainly couldn’t talk to her parents about it.

“Hey, girl,” Samantha replied after answering Peyton’s call.

“Hey,” she replied. “Did I catch you at a bad time?”

“Of course not,” Sam replied. “I’ve finished my Saturday cleaning and am now lounging on the couch in clean pajamas binge, watching black and white movies. What’s up?”

“I think I’m in love,” Peyton giddily admitted.

“Wait just a minute,” Samantha replied, sitting up on the couch and turning the television down, so she didn’t miss anything Peyton said. “Now, you guys just started dating maybe a month ago, and you’re already making that kind of proclamation? What kind of magical wizardly shit did he work on you?” Samantha asked.

Before Peyton could answer, Sam interjected with another question.

“Did you guys hoot?” She asked quickly, cautiously but also excitedly.

“No! We haven’t hooted,” Peyton replied, appalled by her friend’s question. “I may be having all the feels, but it’s not because of that.”

“I’m just checking, girl. Get close to a fine man after a long drought, and the panties might just fall on their own.”

“Samantha!”

“I’m just saying,” Sam rebuffed with a smile on her lips. “I would understand if you did. That man is gorgeous and a doctor, too? Yeah, I would have dropped them.”

“Honestly, I’ve had to keep my thighs pressed tight, chile,” Peyton admitted. “It’s been hard.” And then Peyton thought about what Samantha said. “Uh, friend, how do you know how he looks?”

“Oh,” Sam uttered. “I might have looked him up.”

“Seriously?” Peyton quizzed.

“Well, I had to know who we were talking about.”

They both laughed. Peyton expected nothing less from her.

Sam smiled. “But what’s up with the L word? Are you sure you’re ready to use such powerful language?”

“I feel like I am, but now that you’ve said that and put a time stamp on it, maybe I’m not,” Peyton admitted.

“Wait, don’t backpedal already,” Sam protested. “Let’s talk it through and see.”

Peyton was amenable to the idea.

“I enjoy being with him, and when we’re apart, I miss him terribly even if I just saw him. And we have such great conversations even when we have to be away from each other. It’s like, intellectually, I don’t have to worry about sounding too smart or talking about something they might not be interested in. I can actually learn from him, which is such a huge turn-on. You know how sexy intelligence is,” Peyton sighed.

“And when that intelligence is wrapped in a package of sexy milk chocolate, it’s even sexier.”

“Exactly,” Peyton agreed. “And even when we’re quiet, and all

conversation has ceased, I still feel him. Sam. I still feel this powerful connection to him. Is there something wrong with me? Am I losing it, or have I been deprived for so long that I'm making things out to be better than they really are?"

"No, no, and definitely no," Sam replied. "Even if it has been a while since you've had some much-needed male attention, your brain still works. Especially when you all are apart," Samantha reasoned. "It kind of sounds like you might be in love," Samantha speculated.

"But isn't it too soon?" Peyton questioned. "I mean, seriously, despite how I feel or how I think I feel, it's not rational that I would be so convinced that I am truly in love after such a short period of time."

"Truthfully, it is kind of quick, but that doesn't mean the love you feel is not real. You sounded so convinced when we first started talking."

"I know I did," Peyton replied. "But I think the prospect of being in love and actually taking it through has me second-guessing. I mean, we haven't had a fight yet. This feeling hasn't been tested. It can't be love." Peyton felt a surge of disappointment sweep over her. She tried to fight against that feeling and go back to the jovial place she'd been in, but the more they talked, the more she felt like her emotions had played tricks on her.

“What if it is the kind of love that doesn’t require testing? It just is,” Sam reasoned.

“Then I would be suspect of that kind of love, waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

“Peyton, fighting and making up is fun, but it doesn’t prove true love. Sometimes time is the proof. What if you two were destined to be together, and the universe has nodded its approval making the fighting to prove it unnecessary?”

Peyton thought about what Sam suggested. So much of what she felt for Felix felt predetermined like they didn’t start from zero but that they actually had a jumpstart on connecting. It felt so real to Peyton. Why couldn’t she just accept it?

“So now I’m supposed to just go with what I feel, like it’s, right? Isn’t that immature and dumb?”

“There’s nothing dumb about what you feel,” Sam answered. “You just have to get your head and your heart on the same page. And when that happens, trust that it’s right.”



## Chapter Eleven

Peyton went with her first mind to feel what she felt despite the fleeting thoughts of doubt she had that what she felt was real. Felix hadn't said that he loved her, so Peyton had no plans of revealing how she felt to him, but she still felt it. And her feelings for Felix continued to intensify the more time she spent with him. When she had regular dinners with her parents, Peyton guarded her feelings even when her mother pressed, asking questions about her feelings that would be so easy to answer if she would just open up. But she didn't. It wasn't time yet.

And Peyton remained quiet about what she felt until she couldn't keep quiet anymore. Felix had been very preoccupied with work. Emergency after emergency after yet another emergency kept him working long hours and sleeping very little. Sure, he would call when he got a break before he passed out. And although their phone calls were always welcome, they became briefer and briefer as the demands of his job demanded more and more. Peyton wasn't just biding her time waiting on the phone to ring. Although she, too, missed their time together, she was also extremely busy with an unexpected surge in the housing market that required more and more of her time and attention with the influx of new clients she juggled. Many nights, Peyton went to bed exhausted after working a sixteen-hour



day. But when that phone rang, and she recognized the number, sleep was put on the back burner as she made time for Felix.

“I finally have a few days off, and I want to spend them with you.”

“But I still have to work,” Peyton replied.

He was quiet on the other end, and Peyton noted his disappointment. “I can spend time with you after,” she suggested.

“A little time or a lot of time?” Felix asked.

“It will be the weekend, and I don’t have any signings or houses to show Saturday, so a lot of time,” Peyton replied.

“I look forward to it,” Felix crooned. “I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you, too,” Peyton answered, her heart swelling in her chest. “I’ll see you later.”

“Bring your bathing suit,” Felix added.

“Okay,” she agreed.

The rest of the day, Peyton thought about how her evening would be spent. She did miss Felix. She missed how safe and carefree she felt when she was with him, and she longed for that feeling again. But that feeling would have to wait. Peyton had an afternoon full of clients that demanded her full attention. And they got it long after five o’clock. Peyton did

manage to call Felix and tell him she was running late, but for Felix, being late was better than not coming at all, so he remained patient. Peyton was always worth the wait.

When Peyton finally arrived at the house, Felix didn't wait to let her know how much he missed her. As soon as he opened the door, Felix crossed the threshold and met Peyton on the porch. She was surprised, but that didn't last long as she was quickly swept up into his arms and lavished with a heated kiss that Peyton knew he meant because she felt it in her soul.

“Hi,” Felix said as their lips separated, and he pulled her close.

“Hi,” Peyton replied as she inhaled his masculine scent.

Felix held her for a moment, and when they separated, he led her into the house, closing the door behind them. The house looked so different than the last time Peyton saw it. She finally had the chance to experience Felix's style, and she liked it.

“The house is coming together beautifully,” she commented as he led her further in.

“Thanks, but it is in large part due to my sister, who had no problem spending my money to furnish the place,” he replied.

Peyton continued to admire the accouterments as they made their way

further inside. When Felix paused his steps and pivoted in front of her, bringing them face to face, Peyton's steps paused as well.

“Why don't you change into your bathing suit, and I'll meet you at the pool?”

“Okay,” she replied.

Before Felix walked away, he leaned in and gave Peyton a sweet kiss to her forehead. She felt a tremor course through her as she made her way into the bathroom to change. When she emerged, Peyton sat her bags down and made her way through the family room. When Peyton stepped outside, she felt the difference in temperature, but it wasn't enough to make her flinch. When she saw Felix, she forgot about the difference in temperature. He was emerging out of the pool with splashes of water dotting his handsome face and even more splashes trailing down his chiseled chest. Peyton had never seen so much of his flesh before, and her eyes widened and then narrowed in response as she inadvertently focused in on his masculine frame.

Peyton had felt those muscles before every time she hugged him, but there was nothing like seeing them revealed in all their masculine glory. She'd no longer have to speculate about what she felt. Seeing Felix emerge from the water confirmed everything she had wondered about. She felt her

heart lunge in her chest when he moved in her direction, leveling Peyton with an intensely heated gaze. When he stopped in front of her, Peyton felt like her heart had dropped into her belly. The beat was so intense there.

“You look amazing,” Felix uttered, his eyes trailing over her body slowly and intentionally before returning to find her eyes.

The sheer sheath that Peyton wore over her bathing suit didn't hide Peyton's nubile curves. When Felix reached out and removed her sheath, his eyes trailed her body again as it was now uncloaked. The intensity with which he looked at Peyton, appreciating her every curve, was not lost on Peyton when his eyes found hers again. His gaze wasn't filled with lust but appreciation and admiration.

Felix took Peyton by the hand and led her toward the pool's stairs. She was hesitant to step in, expecting the water to be cold, but when she did, Peyton found the water surprisingly warm. Felix guided her down into the water until it reached her waist, but he didn't let her hand go. Instead, he held onto it and then guided her further into the pool until the water was chest high. Felix kept his eyes connected with Peyton's, gauging her response to going deeper. He pulled her in close until their bodies were fully connected.

“I missed you,” he whispered into her ear. The warmth of his breath

against her flesh sent a shiver down her spine, noticeable enough that Felix felt her shivering.

“Are you okay?” He asked, his brows slightly furrowing.

“Yes, I’m fine,” Peyton replied, not wanting to admit to the reason he felt her shake in his arms. “And I missed you, too,” she quietly admitted.

They slowly spun in the water, Felix guiding their movement and Peyton allowing herself to be guided. She loved the water and how she felt weightless in it. Having Felix’s strength to anchor Peyton made her enjoy being in the water with him even more relaxing.

Felix guided them to the side of the pool, where he had two glasses of champagne waiting for them.

“You were prepared, huh?” Peyton asked and then took her first sip. “What if I wasn’t able to come?”

“Then, I would have drunk both glasses, did some laps, and gone to bed sad, lonely, and possibly depressed,” Felix replied.

“Well then, I’m glad I showed up,” Peyton smiled. “I wouldn’t want you to go to bed depressed.”

“I’m glad you came as well,” Felix smiled.

Peyton did her best to keep her eyes from drifting down to his sculpted

chest, but it was difficult to do. She busied herself and her thoughts by taking another drink from her glass.

“I don’t want us to be casual anymore,” Felix said it so matter-of-factly it caught Peyton off guard.

“What?” She asked, hearing the words he said but wanting to ensure she heard them clearly.

He moved closer to her and sat his glass down poolside. Felix placed one hand on each side of her, virtually trapping Peyton between them. He was so close Peyton was forced to look up.

“I said I don’t want to be casual anymore.”

“What does that mean?” Peyton asked. She needed to fully understand what he was suggesting before she responded.

“It means that I want to take our relationship to the next level,” Felix replied. “I want to be exclusive. I want us to be exclusive.”

“Why?” Peyton asked, even though her heart had already softened for him. “Why do you want that?”

“Are you seriously asking me that question?” Felix wondered.

Peyton nodded her head, turning between his arms and placing her glass poolside.

“We have something good here, better than good, and I think what we have can grow if we give ourselves the chance.”

His words waxed and waned over and through Peyton. And then, just as she was about to speak, Felix leaned in and captured her lips in his, kissing her with passion and intensity, causing a heady situation Peyton couldn't shake.

If there was anything else Peyton intended to say, it was swallowed up not just by Felix capturing her mouth into his own, but by the elevation of emotion Peyton felt choking out the remainder of her words.

“And I feel everything you feel, Peyton. Just saying your name thrills me in a way I've never felt or thought I could feel. And it was instant, from the moment I saw you. I knew that you were special, very, very special. I knew I wanted you to be mine.”

Felix's deep baritone voice was smooth and gently caressed her mind, body, and soul. Peyton's eyes remained locked with his as he leaned further and kissed her. Peyton opened her mouth to receive his penetrating tongue that probed her orally, titillating and teasing her into a passionate frenzy. The warm feeling from her lips traveled down Felix's body, and as she kissed him back, the slow burn she felt increased as she released the last vestiges of resistance still clinging to her heart. Felix cradled the back of her head as she

turned her face up, and their tongues danced deliberately. He was enchanting and commanding, and Peyton melted like soft butter in his powerful arms.

The soft kisses intensified as his love for her roused the deepest parts of him. Peyton was no longer in control, feeling Felix's manhood rise, pressed against her. Felix layered his kisses on Peyton's neck. She felt the push of his lips and the titillating tease of his tongue as he left scorching kisses the length of her neck, stopping at the place where he could feel her heartbeat at the base of her throat, onto her shoulders. Felix moved closer to her, and she pulled him in as close as he could be. Peyton didn't want any space existing between them.

Felix left heated kisses on Peyton's shoulder that sent shivers to Peyton's core. She pushed back against him as her nipples pulsed. Peyton moaned again, enticing Felix. With ease, he slipped his swim trunks down and released the pressure that held his hardness at bay. He then untied the side ties that held up Peyton's bikini bottom. Now, it was flesh against flesh, her womanhood pulsing and throbbing against the press of his manhood. With one hand, he lifted her cheek and found the warmth that was her sweet spot. She was ready to receive him as his kisses had already created a pool of nectar there. Peyton's wetness coated him thickly as he eased deep inside her, feeling her walls envelop him. Felix gasped and then moaned as he filled her up slowly with his thickness.



It was the moan that oozed from Felix's lips pressed close to her ear that sent a wave of desire coursing through her. Peyton guided Felix's hand to her breast, and he cupped the fullness, finding her swollen nipple and twirling it between his thumb and forefinger. The pressure, the pain felt sweet to Peyton as she ground down on his swollen manhood. Felix bit down on Peyton's neck, shooting even more pleasurable pain to her core, and she whimpered under his touch. They fell into a deep syncopated rhythm; his push against her push, his thickness hitting the top of her womb. Her moans became pants that ricocheted within Felix. He wanted to please her. Felix held her firmly as he pushed inside her, the muscles of his thighs tightening with every stroke. She was open to him fully, and Felix lavished in the hot nectar that spilled from her. The warm water offered buoyancy in a way that intensified their fuck.

Releasing her swollen breasts, Felix cupped Peyton's ass, spreading her cheeks wider for maximum exposure. He leaned in, hitting the puss at a new angle that thrilled Peyton's sweet spot. The groan that rose in Felix came from the deepest recesses of his loins as hot gism threatened to spill from him. But he didn't want the intensity to end. He bit down again on her shoulder as he held himself, not ready to release inside her. He felt Peyton's body quivering under his touch. Peyton gasped for air, feeling herself full of the man she knew she loved. His stroke quickened but remained steady. Felix

swung Peyton around in the water with his back to the side of the pool. He bent down in his knees and thrust up inside her, the curve of his magic stick held tightly by her womanhood. Peyton held his thickness in place, never wanting to let go.

“Bae,” he whimpered as Peyton lifted from his chest. He held her back as she positioned herself to ride out the rest of what Felix had to offer, lifting her feet and planting them on the side of the pool. Her ample ass moved up and down as her pussy worked his pole to the hilt. She swirled her hips and bent Felix to her will. Peyton’s breasts bounced as she fell into her own rhythm, pleasing herself with what Felix offered her. The heat between her own thighs rose to new heights. He couldn’t hold back anymore, lifting himself up to her down stroke. Felix couldn’t take anymore as his gism rose in his thickness, almost to a place where he could no longer control it. Felix held Peyton’s waist tight as he pounded her flesh, and she squealed with delight as her pour met his pour, leaving nothing.

Peyton’s body glistened with drops of water, but she held Felix firmly inside her until he softened. It was only then that Peyton leaned forward, pressing her body against him, and Felix’s arms found her again. He wrapped his arms around her and held Peyton close.



## Chapter Twelve

After they made passionate love to each other and bonded in an inexplicable way, the two lounged in the pool for a while longer. When they got out, the two enjoyed a warm outdoor shower, where he washed her body, and she washed his. It was enticing, but they collectively resisted the urge to indulge again, although they did dabble around the periphery. Peyton awoke early the next morning after a few hours of sleep. She felt Felix's presence close to her, encapsulating her with his strong arms wrapped around her. A slight smile spread across Peyton's lips as she listened to Felix breathing. There was a slight rumble in his chest, like he intended to snore, but it didn't come out that way.

The sun had just started to peak through the drapes as Peyton comfortably lay next to him. She didn't want to disturb him. Clearly, Felix needed his rest, and she wanted to respect that. But Peyton couldn't fall back to sleep. She was tired, too, after a very busy week but still, sleep eluded her. She lay next to Felix as quietly as she could so she wouldn't disturb him. And then her eyes drifted to the nightstand and her cell phone. If she could just reach it without waking Felix, she could reach out to a few clients and handle a little business.

But the more Peyton considered moving, the more she thought she'd disturb him. He was sleeping so well. She didn't want to do that. So, she lay next to Felix in the folds of his arms, looking up at the ceiling. Peyton waited as long as she could. She started getting antsy just lying there. And then Felix moved, rolling over on his side, releasing the hold he had on her. Peyton looked over to make sure he was still asleep. Once she was assured he was, she leaned over and reached for her cell phone. Peyton eased up in the bed and put the code in on her phone, bringing it to life.

She dialed the number so she could listen to her voicemail. She had six missed calls. Peyton settled in to listen to the messages. She wished she had a notepad to jot down any pertinent details. Peyton considered putting the phone on speaker so she could open the notes on her phone and take them down. But the noises might wake up Felix, so she opted not to. After a few minutes, he stirred, and Peyton paid attention.

“Morning,” he uttered before rolling over in her direction.

“Good morning,” she quietly replied. “I didn't wake you up, did I?”

“No, no,” Felix replied, wrapping his arms around her and pulling Peyton close. “I just missed your warm, voluptuous body next to mine.”

He reached for her again.

“One sec,” she pleaded. “I just need to send a quick message, and then

I'll be all yours.”

“I'm not willing to wait, though,” Felix rebuffed.

Felix removed the phone from Peyton's hands. She barely hit send before Felix casually tossed her phone aside and then lifted her up his body to meet his lips. A gentle kiss to the forehead led Felix's lips leaving soft kisses down Peyton's nose and to her pouty lips that awaited him. With his tongue, he opened her mouth, and she received him. Peyton closed her eyes and allowed her tongue to dance in Felix's mouth. She loved him, and she wanted him to know. Feeling his manhood pulsating underneath her, Peyton disengaged from Felix's pleasurable mouth, opened her eyes, and winked at her man. The smile that spread across his full lips showing a hint of his perfect teeth atop a nicely trimmed goatee put a smile on her face as well. Sitting up on Felix's strong chest, Peyton removed the scant t-shirt she wore. Felix leaned up and took off his tee as well. Peyton's hands instantly fell to his chiseled pecs, tracing the lines of his tattoo, one that was hidden from medical view.

Peyton's perky breasts were on full display, and Felix took them both in, one in each hand. He caressed Peyton's breasts until her nipples hardened and her areolas swole under his touch. Leaning more forward, Felix took one into his mouth, pulling and tugging her nipple and settling it in the back of his throat. The warmth she felt from his mouth created a

charge in Peyton's loins. When he released the hold his mouth had on her, Felix pushed both of Peyton's breasts together and then licked and sucked both nipples, giving them equal attention. She moaned under his tenacious tongue. Her desire for him increased.

Felix's lips moved lower, tracing a center line down Peyton's belly. Taking both her hands, Peyton eased Felix back onto the bed and then lifted herself sufficiently to turn around. The boxers Felix wore were no match for his stiff erection. Easing them down, Felix assisted by lifting his hips, freeing his manhood. That pleased Peyton. Her mouth descended on his manhood, first suckling on the tip and then inching her mouth further down his thick shaft. As she leaned forward, Felix shifted her back to gain access to her sweet spot.

Her mouth on him drove moans from his lips that quickly found nourishment between her ripe folds. She licked and sucked. He licked and sucked, both dizzying each other expertly. As Felix lifted his hips to meet Peyton's talented lips, he gripped each side of her plump ass, exposing all of her puss. Felix deposited his thick tongue into her inner sanctum, and she rocked, matching his lift. When Peyton totally released Felix's thickness from her mouth and then blew warm air down his shaft, he growled deep in his belly and plunged his tongue further into her sweetness, tasting the first of her hot nectar.

She moved with reckless abandon, totally freeing herself from the grip of playing nice when she wanted to be so bad. As Peyton pushed back on his tongue more frantically, Felix knew she was ready for him. Grabbing her by the waist, Felix eased his mouth from her, and Peyton raised up from his shaft. With one smooth motion, Felix eased higher on the bed and positioned Peyton to take his fullness within her folds. Her hot womb eased down his pole.

“Mmhmm, doctor, you feel so damn good.”

Felix filled her walls to capacity, and the two fell into a slow, familiar rhythm. Peyton balanced herself, pulling her knees up and planting her feet on the bed. She lifted from Felix, and he lifted his hips to find her. Their syncopated beat increased, and Felix sat up fully, wrapping his strong arms around Peyton, cradling her, diminishing the distance between his wood and her puss.

“Shit,” Felix said between clenched teeth.

The heat in the room seemed to rise exponentially as beads of sweat manifested on Felix’s forehead. Peyton threw her head back, finding a resting place on his strong shoulder as he drove his dick in her long, hard, and fast. Peyton held her breasts, one in each hand, and tweaked her nipples as Felix’s thickness pulsed inside her womb. Their pace grew



frantic. Felix leaned into Peyton's back as the hold he had on her tightened.

"Mmm... mmm... mmm."

He pushed, and she rode him hard.

"Doctor, please," she said breathlessly, on the verge of cumming.

The muscles in Felix's strong thighs tightened as gism moved from the base of his manhood. As Felix exploded inside her, he bit down on Peyton's back, quieting the animalistic groans coming from his lips. That added bit of pain sent Peyton over the edge, and she spilled her own climatic juices down his still thick shaft.

"Felix, baby. Oh, my God! Felix."

The fuck remained fast-paced until Felix had nothing left to give. His hold on her finally relaxed as the two, both drenched in sweat, collapsed. It was only when Felix's manhood was completely soft did Peyton dismount, and he curled his body around her and laid her gently on the bed. Their breathing was still labored as the pressure in the room started to dissipate.

"Felix," Peyton said breathlessly. "We didn't use a condom." She smiled and then giggled softly.

It wasn't alarming to Peyton. She was in love with him, and he was in love with her. Even if they didn't say it aloud, they both felt it.

“I know. But that’s one way to lock you down.”

They both guffawed at the thought.

Felix planted a kiss on Peyton’s cheek. The two remained that way until sleep found them again. They lovingly rested in each other’s arms and, upon waking, lounged and loved on each other the rest of the day. Separating was difficult. Although they’d spent a great deal of time together, as it neared its end, both Felix and Peyton started to feel sad.

“I miss you already, again,” Peyton admitted as they stood near her car.

“I feel the same way,” Felix acknowledged. “It seems cruel that we have to spend so much time apart.”

“But duty calls. Bills call,” Peyton huffed, smiling as Felix smiled in return.

“We can fix that, though,” Felix suggested.

“And how do you propose we do that?” Peyton asked.

“We could move in together, thereby reducing the bills and having more time to spend together,” he said, hugging her up close to him.

“Partially,” Peyton corrected. “The demands of our jobs won’t change, and so true we could reduce the bills, but living together doesn’t guarantee us any more time to spend together.”

“That is so sad and probably so true,” Felix replied.

“What we can do is enjoy the time we spend together until we figure something out,” Peyton suggested.

“I want more spend together time,” Felix answered. “I don’t think that is too much to ask for, just like I didn’t think it was too much to ask for that we be exclusive.”

“I thought I answered that,” Peyton said, searching her remembrance of when Felix posed that scenario.

“No, you never did, leaving me to wonder if you’re just using me for my body,” he teased.

“Would that be such a bad thing? Or maybe it would be better if we were using each other?” Peyton chuckled.

“Using each other,” Felix repeated, leveling Peyton with an intense gaze. “Certainly something to consider,” he smiled.

And then Felix’s smile faded, and he looked deeply into Peyton’s eyes. “Call me when you get home. No argument.”

“I wouldn’t dare argue with you about that,” Peyton replied, her lashes kissing the height of her cheeks as her eyes sultrily peered into his. Peyton’s lips instinctively found their way to Felix’s as he leaned in and kissed her like he meant it like he missed her even before she left. And as

they separated and Peyton got into her car, her mind relived the velvet warmth of his persuasive kiss.



## Chapter Thirteen

The following weekend, Peyton was with her parents. She finally found time in her oh-so-busy schedule to pencil her father in for a round of golf. True, Peyton had to work long hours to get all her business handled to make time for them, but seeing her parents' faces when she walked into the clubhouse was worth it. She was still floating on cloud nine from the weekend she'd spent with Felix, so, despite the fact that Peyton was not a huge golf fan, she could get through it. Her parents' smiles and her memories of a wonderful time would help her get through it.

“Hey, mom, hey, dad,” Peyton greeted, taking a moment to hug them both.

“So glad you could join us,” her father said as he hugged Peyton.

The trio visited the golf shop as her father wanted to try out a new club and to make sure Peyton had a set she was comfortable with. Once they were all squared away, they exited the club and got into the golf cart reserved for them. It was a beautiful afternoon. The sun shone brightly, but it wasn't glaring, and there was the gentlest of breezes that kept the heat from being stagnant. The trio dismounted from the golf cart after it came to a stop. Their bag carriers rode in a cart behind them and joined the trio at the first hole.

“Are you ready for this loving beatdown I’m going to put on you?” Joseph braggingly asked.

“Don’t let him get inside your head, daughter,” Vivian clapped back. “This is all about girl power.”

The two ladies fist-bumped, solidifying their solidarity. Joseph smiled and shook his head. He had every intention of whooping them to show them he still had it. Joseph removed his signature club from the bag the caddy held and walked over to the first hole. Customarily, everyone fell silent as Joseph lined up his shot. It was serious business as he took his swing, hitting the golf ball high into the air and far down the green toward the first hole.

“Nice shot, dad,” Peyton smiled as she bent down and placed her tee in the spot he’d just hit from.

“There are plenty more where that shot came from,” he taunted as he stepped aside to watch his daughter take her swing.

Peyton planned to hit a few balls and have a good time with her parents. But her father’s competitive nature was not lost on her. She lined up her shot and took her time before striking the ball. Once the ball was floating high in the air, Peyton watched it to see how close to the tee it would land. When the ball landed closer to the hole than her father’s, she smiled proudly.

“Now, that was a shot,” Vivian said, giving her daughter a high five.

And when her mom hit an equally nice shot, getting even closer than either her husband or her daughter, Peyton gave her mother another high five. They followed the caddies down the greenway.

“So, how are things going with you and the doctor? You all are still a thing, right?” Vivian asked as she and Peyton walked a few steps behind Joseph and the caddies.

“Yes, we are still a thing,” Peyton admitted. “And things are going really well.”

“Commitment well, or have you all gotten there yet?” Vivian pursued.

“Interesting you raised that question because we just talked about that,” Peyton replied.

It felt good to speak so openly about her relationship. That’s always the kind of conversation she wanted to have with her mother, but the self-imposed restriction is what kept Peyton from it. But she decided to abandon those notions and have real conversations with her mother, no longer second-guessing her mother’s intentions. Peyton recognized that they were pure and that Vivian only wanted the best for her, even if her words were sometimes hurtful. Peyton decided to abandon sensitivity and embrace what her mother had to offer.

“Well, I know you may like him, but be careful and cautious before

committing to anyone, baby. You are the most important person in that equation, and I would hate to have to take him to task for hurting you.”

“I’ll be careful, mom,” Peyton replied.

They arrived at the first hole, taking into account where their individual balls had landed. They were all closer than they originally thought. Her father was up first, and he confidently walked to his ball and prepared to swing.

“You might want to take out your notepads for this one,” he taunted, confident that he could get the ball into the hole with one swing.

Everyone fell silent again, and all eyes were on Joseph. He lined up his shot after measuring it out. The smile he wore momentarily faded from his lips as he lifted the club high and swung it level, striking the golf ball. Immediately after the ball was struck, all eyes were on the ball’s movement, none more than Joseph’s. He was confident that he’d made a good shot, and as the ball neared the hole, his confidence only grew. The ball rolled smoothly toward the hole, and just as it was about to go in, with Joseph prepared to celebrate, the ball took an unexpected veer and missed.

“Oh no,” Vivian uttered, but the slight smile on her lips underscored her sentiment.

Joseph couldn’t believe he had missed. He’d line the shot up perfectly, and it was on track to go in. He walked over to the hole and looked around it,



bending down on his knees so he could see closer to the ground. There was no twig or stick that would have caused the golf ball to miss.

“Did you put a whammy on my ball?” Joseph asked.

“Who me?” Peyton asked, putting her hand over her heart as though she couldn’t believe the audacity of her father’s question.

“That was some bad juju you put on my putt,” Joseph mumbled, shaking his head. He still couldn’t believe he had missed the shot.

After both Peyton and Vivian landed theirs, he shook his head even more.

“I’ve come from behind before,” Joseph huffed. “This game is not over yet.”

“Hmph,” Vivian sighed. “I thought I heard the fat lady singing.”

Peyton smiled at her parent’s antics. It was all in good fun. They continued to play with the lead shifting between the three of them. The competition was heated, but they were all having a good time. As they walked toward the ninth hole, Peyton felt her phone buzz in her pocket. She pulled it out to see what message had been left for her.

*Hey, love. I wanted you to know I was thinking about you. Miss you. Felix.*

A warm smile spread across her lips as she quickly texted Felix back.

“It’s your turn, dad,” she uttered, noticing her father hadn’t approached the hole yet.

“What? You’re trying to rush this beat down?” her father teased.

“Last I checked, I am in the lead,” Peyton chuckled.

“Well, I’m about to fix that,” Joseph answered.

He lifted his cap from his head and wiped the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand. After repositioning his hat, Joseph walked over to his caddy to select his club. When he reached for the bag, Joseph’s eyes widened, and he grabbed his chest. Vivian and Peyton noticed at the same time that something wasn’t right.

“Dad!”

Vivian’s eyes were wide, and her mouth was open, but nothing came out. When her husband collapsed onto the ground, she dropped down to her knees right beside him, her soul shivering in response to what she was seeing. Her quivering hands went to her mouth, and then Vivian reached out to her husband.

“Joe?” She uttered as a single tear spilled onto her cheek.

Peyton stared at her father and watched him fall. He continued to clutch his chest as if that were where the pain came from.

“Call 911,” one of the caddy’s said as he dropped down on his knees next to her father.

Peyton reached into her pocket, her hands starting to shake, and pulled out her cell phone. She quickly unlocked and swiped the screen and dialed. It was an emergency.

“911. What’s your emergency?”

“It’s my father. I think it’s his heart! Please send an ambulance! Hurry!”

“Okay, ma’am. Give me the address, and we will send the ambulance.”

Peyton scratched her forehead, trying to remember the address to the golf course. *What is it? What is it?* She thought to herself as she searched her recollection. And then it came back to her. She rattled it off to the dispatcher.

“Stay on the phone with me until the ambulance arrives.”

Peyton agreed, but she didn’t take her eyes off her father. She paced back and forth with the phone pressed against her ear, her heart going out to her mother, who she wished she could console, but her thoughts were preoccupied with thoughts of how the ambulance was going to navigate to the 9<sup>th</sup> hole. Should she be trying to get her father to the entrance of the golf course, or should she trust that they would figure it out? What if they showed up to the club and talked to someone who didn’t know what had happened and got sent away? Her father would be left stranded on the ground in pain

with no help in sight.

“Hold on a second,” she said to the operator.

“Do you think someone should go up front so that when the ambulance arrives, you can guide them back? Peyton asked the caddies who knelt by her father’s side.

“I’ll go,” one of them agreed.

Peyton watched as he trotted back to the golf cart.

“How much longer, ma’am?” Peyton asked, her heart continuing to thump hard in her chest.

“Just a few more minutes,” the operator replied, trying to sound hopeful.

*Hang in there, Dad;* Peyton silently encouraged.



## Chapter Fourteen

The ambulance finally arrived, and they watched as the paramedics raced down the green. Vivian stood up with Peyton's assistance to give the paramedics room to attend to her husband. They listened as his vitals were called out. They watched as the paramedics attended to him. Time moved fast and incredibly slow simultaneously. Panic is all she felt, even with her father being attended to. Panic is all Peyton felt. She worried about her father, and she worried about her mother worrying about her husband. It all felt like too much, but Peyton knew she had to be strong for both of them. She just wanted her daddy to be okay. He had to be.

"Get the gurney," one of the attendees called out.

Peyton kept watching her father to make sure he was breathing, to make sure that they weren't getting the gurney because they had given up on him. When the attendee returned with the gurney, they watched as the EMTs lifted her father up and strapped him in.

"Who's riding with him?"

"Mom, you go," Peyton suggested.

"I don't want you driving by yourself," Vivian protested.

"We only have room for one, ma'am," the attendee said as they moved

toward the back of the ambulance.

“I’ll follow mom. You go.”

Although Vivian would have protested further, she went along with her daughter’s plan. Most important at that moment was getting her husband to the hospital. Vivian was assisted in the back of the ambulance. The caddy drove Peyton to the parking lot, where she got into her car. As the ambulance approached the entrance to the golf course, Peyton pulled in right behind them and followed them. The siren blared as they sped down the street. The sound faded to black as Peyton was overwhelmed with the tears she repressed, trying to be strong. She couldn’t believe something like that had happened to her father. She was in total disbelief and was scared that her dad wouldn’t be okay.

By the time she pulled into the hospital parking lot of Eastport General, Peyton had wiped her tears and was once again prepared to be strong for her family. She raced up to the emergency room entrance, where the paramedics were pulling her father out of the back of their truck. Peyton held her mother’s hand as they walked behind the gurney into the ER. She could feel her mother’s hand shaking in hers. Peyton wrapped her arm around her mother’s shoulders as they hurried behind her father. She heard the paramedic speaking to someone, but until they caught up with the gurney, Peyton realized who the paramedic spoke to.

It was Felix.

He listened to the paramedic, but then his eyes met Peyton's. His heart melted as her eyes misted over with fresh tears.

"Take him back to station three," Felix instructed. He would love to be with Peyton to help console her, but he was the attending physician, and his patient needed him. His eyes connected with Peyton's again.

"Please," she uttered.

He reached for her hand and held it for a second before he hurriedly ran to see about her father. He wasted no time in doing just that, assessing his patient's condition, ordering tests, and tracking vitals. Outside in the waiting area, Peyton and her mother had no choice but to wait and pray that everything was going to be okay. Her mother cried silently as they waited. There wasn't much for them to talk about, as their sole focus was on what was happening behind ER's closed doors. Every time the door opened, their attention was drawn to it to see if it was about Joseph. But the door opened many times, and it wasn't about him. They had no choice but to wait and wait some more.

An endless amount of time seemed to pass with no words. They couldn't give up, though.

And then the emergency room doors opened. Peyton looked up to see



Felix standing there. She tried to read his face to see whether he had good news or bad news, but she couldn't tell as he made his way toward them.

“Mom,” Peyton said as she helped to lift her mother to stand. They met the doctor halfway.

“Is he okay?” Peyton asked, her voice shaking. Vivian didn't say anything. She just looked and waited to see what the doctor had to say.

“He's doing okay,” Felix replied.

A sigh of relief passed between both of them. Vivian squeezed her daughter's hand as relief swept over her.

“He had a heart attack. We learned that he had two blocked ventricles. We were able to clear the blockage, but he's going to need to stay with us for a few days to run additional tests and make sure that he continues to do okay. Mr. Hall will be transferred to the third floor. You all will be able to go up and see him in just a little while.”

“Thank you so much, doctor,” Vivian sighed.

“You're welcome,” he replied.

When his eyes returned to Peyton, she didn't need to say anything. Her eyes said it all. She silently communicated her appreciation. Felix nodded and smiled in reply.

“I’ll be up to check on Mr. Hall later.”

As Felix exited, Vivian and Peyton turned to face each other. All the penned-up emotions they felt started to spill out, and they hugged each other in response.

“He’s going to be okay,” Peyton whispered into her mother’s ear.

“He’s going to be okay,” Vivian echoed.

They made their way up to the third floor. It was a long hall with many rooms. Peyton and her mother made their way to the nurse’s station. After a few moments, a nurse approached.

“How may I help you?” The nurse asked.

“We’re looking for Joseph Hall’s room.”

“Let me take a look. Hold on just a second,” the nurse replied.

She stepped away for a moment and returned a moment later.

“Mr. Hall is in room 306. Go down this hall and make a left. His room will be on the right-hand side.”

“Thank you.”

They followed the nurses’ instructions and made their way. After a courtesy knock on the door, Peyton pushed the door open, and they both walked in. The room was cool and quiet, with the exception of the various

beats from several of the medical machines positioned at the top of Joseph's bed. Smiles eased across the lips of both of them as they made their way into the room.

"Dad," Peyton sighed, seeing her father lying with his eyes open able to focus on her.

"Oh, Joe," Vivian said. "I was so worried about you."

She crossed the room and gently hugged her husband. He hugged her in return. They stayed together, rebonding for a while. Vivian loved him so much and had been so worried about him. To see her husband on the other side of what could have potentially been the end made her extremely grateful. Joseph felt much the same way. He thought his time had come, that it was the end. He was grateful to be on the other side of life and so grateful to see his family again. They still needed him, and he wanted to be there for them.

Peyton loved the love she witnessed between her parents. They'd always demonstrated what real love looked like, and she hoped that one day, she would have that kind of long-lasting love. Maybe Felix was the one? Just the thought of it made Peyton feel warm on the inside. A slight smile creased her lips, and as her mother raised up from hugging her father, she noticed.

"What's that smile about?" She asked. "Happy to see your father doing okay?"

“Of course,” Peyton replied.

Then, there was a knock at the door. And when it opened, Dr. Felix Rush walked in. The flush on Peyton’s face intensified as he sauntered in.

“I wanted to check on our client and see how he’s doing,” Dr. Felix explained.

Peyton and her mother stepped back so that Dr. Felix could move around the bed uninhibited. Although her father was still a bit out of it, he was able to respond to the doctor’s inquiry as to how he was feeling. As Felix checked Joseph’s vitals, Peyton couldn’t wipe the smile off her face, especially when their eyes connected. Vivian noticed. There was an increased tension in the room, one she readily recognized. And when she looked at the doctor and then her daughter, Vivian’s brow piqued.

“Is there something you want to tell me?” She asked, being sure to whisper quietly in her daughter’s ear.

The knot that had previously been there and dissipated so long ago returned. Peyton could have easily denied everything and given her mother the impression that she was totally off-kilter, but she refused to do that anymore. Her eyes drifted to Felix again, and he looked up and smiled as he continued to check her father.

“It’s him,” Peyton whispered in her mother’s ear, her eyes still focused on

Felix. “He’s the one.”

Vivian pulled back and looked into her daughter’s eyes. She was smiling. Vivian was smiling.

“It makes so much sense now,” Vivian replied.

“What does?” Joseph unexpectedly asked as he overheard what his wife said.

Vivian visually checked in with her daughter. Peyton’s silent permission was enough.

“It makes so much sense why our daughter is blushing the way she is.”

Joseph’s brows knocked together as he didn’t understand what his wife meant.

“Dad,” Peyton began as butterflies turned over in her stomach. “Dr. Rush and I are dating.”

Joseph’s brows unfurled, and one slightly pitched as his eyes moved to the doctor. Felix didn’t back away from what Peyton said. Instead, he discontinued his assessment of Joseph.

“Mr. and Mrs. Hall, your daughter understated what’s going on. I love her, and she loves me, at least, I think she does.”

All eyes were on Peyton. She felt them. It would have been the perfect

time to deny or run away, but her feet didn't move.

“I love you, too, Felix.”

It was an admission that more than warmed his heart. Hearing their daughter openly express how she felt gave Joseph and Vivian all the feels, too. Felix rounded the bed and walked over to Peyton. When their eyes met again, the butterflies disappeared, and all Peyton felt was genuine warmth. She acknowledged how she felt in front of the most important people in her life, and she was okay with it. She was more than okay. And when Felix wrapped his arms around her, pulling Peyton close, she knew that it was forever.

## *The End*

Thank you so much for reading, Dr., Please. I appreciate your willingness to take a step out of our contemporary comfort zone and read a story that's a little more dangerous, lol. I loved writing this book, and I hope you loved it, too! I would appreciate it, especially if you enjoyed the story if you would leave a review on Amazon and Goodreads. For Indie authors, reviews are the lifeblood of our work. They give other readers insight into the story and greater visibility for the authors. Thanks in advance, and I hope you will continue reading with me!

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