



# HATE

*at first sight*

AMAZON BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
MICKEY MILLER

# **HATE AT FIRST SIGHT**

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*To all the mamacitas out there who have helped someone  
repair their broken heart...*

*This one's for you*

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## **PREFACE**

Warning: This book contains very hot, spicy scenes that may trigger some readers.

Happy Reading!

## PROLOGUE

*She broke my heart, so I jumped on a plane  
It was all that I could do to keep from going  
insane  
I found myself in Costa Rica I was drinkin'  
Tequila  
At a beach side bar I found a little mamacita  
She smelled so sweet, with rum on her cheeks  
Her blonde hair blowin' in the ocean breeze  
I said, 'She broke my heart, now I'm here with  
you.'  
So tell me Pretty Woman what we gonna do?*



## AMELIA

**A**s the Uber pulls up to my office building in the loop in downtown Chicago, my mouth curves in a wide smile when I get the text from him.

Jansen: Hey. Hope all is well.

I laugh that Jansen is texting me now. It really, truly is the law of exes in action. The less you think about them, the more they try to get back under your skin.

It's December, cold and wintery, and that's exactly how I feel toward my ex-boyfriend now.

I'm not a petty person. But something in me feels off that he's sending me a text like this. I won't call what I'm feeling anger, exactly. But what am I even supposed to say to the guy I dated for five years, loved deeply, and wished had the balls to propose but he didn't?

I've heard it said that the child in us just wants unconditional love, the teenager in us wants revenge, and the adult wants your ex to be happy. So, something like that is how I'm feeling.

Jansen must have noticed my glow up in the past month since our breakup. All it took was a few weeks in the gym, a weekend trip to Florida with my sister, and an insta post with a slightly more provocative getup than normal. My sister is awesome at those angles. Chalk it up to being single for so long.

In any case, I ignore Jansen's message because I've got much bigger fish to fry today. I've been working at Wellington Media for half a decade and I'm convinced that today is the day I'll finally get the promotion I've been working so hard for. All the signs point to it. I orchestrated bringing in our top client of the year, who is slated to pay us millions over the next few years. I came up with our new content strategy in the post blog world.

I straighten my blazer and make sure my hair is in place before stepping out of the car. Before I head in, I text my little sister, Nora, a picture of my outfit for the day using the big reflective window outside as my mirror. I've decided to add a touch of color to my usual black, simple outfit. I want to show my boss that I'm ready for the next step in my career. And I want to do it with some flair, so I've got on a blue, neck high halter dress. It's not revealing, necessarily—it covers my curvy body—but definitely accentuates certain places. You could call it a post glow-up dress.

Nora texts me back almost instantly after I send her the pic.

Nora: You're going to CRUSH it girl!!! Get that promotion!

Amelia: Thanks!!! Celebration later?

Nora: I'll bring the wine you bring the promotion

As I walk through the front doors of the building, I can feel the usual energy of the day. Everyone seems to be rushing around, preparing for meetings. I get into the elevator and press the button for floor thirty-three—two floors from the top.

Before the doors can close, a tall man in a fitted suit steps in, then moves to the other side of the elevator to be as far as possible from me.

I feel like I have cooties or something.

I steal a glance at him. He's tall and handsome with blue-grey eyes, dark hair and long eyelashes.

Why does he look so familiar?

That's when it hits me. He's the CEO.

My heart starts to race. I've heard so much about Jack Wellington, but I've never actually seen him in person. He looks so serious, and his furrowed brow gives him a grumpy look. But despite that, I can't help but feel drawn to him. Maybe it's his commanding presence, or the way he carries himself with such confidence.

I clear my throat, trying to sound confident myself. "Hello," I say, hoping to break the awkward silence between us.

He turns to me, his eyes scanning me from head to toe.

"Hello," he replies in a deep, velvety voice. "You work in this building?"

I nod, suddenly feeling self-conscious. "Yes, on the 33rd floor."

He nods in acknowledgment, but doesn't say anything more. The rest of the ride is silent, and I can't help but steal glances at him every now and then. There's just something about him that's so intriguing, so alluring.

Not to mention his piney, sandalwood scent. It's so masculine. With his dimples and chiseled jaw he seems like more of a savage than a man who belongs in a suit.

As we reach my floor, I step out of the elevator, but before I can turn away, he speaks again.

"Wait."

I turn back to face him, my heart beating faster.

"You forgot your phone," he says, holding out my forgotten device. "Looks like it slipped out."

I feel my cheeks flush with embarrassment as I take my phone from him. "Thank you," I say, unable to hide the gratitude in my voice.

He nods, then steps back into the elevator, leaving me standing there, wondering if I'll ever see him again.

Stars apparently still in my eyes, I collide with one of my younger coworkers, Fred, as the elevator doors are closing.

“Oh my gosh,” he says. “I’m so sorry. But was that... Jack?”

“Yes it was.”

“He looks like a slightly younger Ryan Reynolds...Jack is what, thirty-three or thirty-four?”

“No idea. I didn’t even know he came into the office,” I respond.

“Word on the street is, he lives somewhere where the weather is warmer.” Fred sighs. “That man has the most obvious big dick energy I’ve ever encountered.”

“He does have some B.D.E.” I nod in agreement.

“What I wouldn’t do to...” He breaks off eye contact, his mind obviously wandering off.

“Fred?”

“Oh. Sorry. I really need to stay focused. Hot CEO guys are a weakness of mine.”

I laugh. “Mine too. Shoot. I could use some B.D.E. in my life after the breakup.”

“You and me both. I mean, no break up for me. But I can still use it. I can always use it. And hell, with Jack it’s not just energy. It’s been confirmed.”

“It’s been...confirmed?” I ask, puzzled. “Have you...”

Fred laughs heartily. “No, I haven’t *seen* him naked. Unfortunately. But he dated that famous singer a few years back and she blabbed about it on some talk show after they broke up.”

“Oh. I mean I’ve always been more of a ‘motion in the ocean’ girl.”

“Amelia. That’s great. I love that for you.”

I sigh. “I mean it’s not like I’d ever hook up with a hot CEO like that anyway.”

He shakes his head. “That breakup really did a number on your self esteem. He’d be *lucky* to have you.” He shakes his head and checks his phone. “Anyway I have to jet to a meeting. What are you doing on my floor anyway?”

“I have to visit my boss.”

“Ah. A promotion perhaps? Good luck. And remember. B.D.E.”

“Yeah, okay.”

“No, for real. In your interview today. Bring it!” Fred winks as he presses the button for the elevator and it’s back to the task at hand. Time to get promoted.

With my composure regained, I say hello to the secretary then take a deep breath and knock on the door.

“Come on in,” I hear my boss, Randy Rogers, say. I open the door and step inside.

I walk into the conference room with a spring in my step and a huge smile on my face. I’ve been working my butt off at this marketing firm for the past five years and I’m convinced that this is the moment I’ve been waiting for. I mean, what else could it be?

“Good morning, Amelia.” Randy greets me as I take a seat at the table.

I nod and return the greeting, my smile growing even wider. “Good morning, Randy. I’m so excited to be here today.”

He clears his throat and looks at me, then down at the papers in front of him.

“Amelia, let’s cut to the chase.”

“Yes, let’s!”

He still doesn’t look me in the eyes.

“I’m afraid I have some bad news.” Randy is normally gregarious. But his eyes can’t even find me.

My stomach drops. “Bad news?”

“I’m sorry to say that we’re going to have to let you go.”

I stare at him in shock. This must be a joke, I think. “Are you kidding?”

“I’m afraid not.”

My eyes unfocus and a rush of adrenaline hits me. “B-But I do great work. I’ve brought in new clients and always exceed my sales targets. I’m a net positive for the company. If this is about me forgetting my weekly reports that one time, I can assure you I was busy with—”

He cuts me off. “That was an oversight noted. But, look, we appreciate all that you’ve done. This isn’t coming from me. It’s from the top. The company is facing some financial challenges and we have to make some difficult decisions.”

*From the top.*

*Which means, from Jack Wellington.*

“This is utterly ridiculous. You didn’t explain to him that I’m your best employee?” I protest. “You just said it to me two weeks ago. ‘We wouldn’t have won the NCAA tournament campaign if it wasn’t for you, Amelia.’”

“I did my best, unfortunately...”

Randy prattles on, and quite frankly his explanation feels like complete B.S. to me.

“Did they just go down the line and fire random employees? I don’t understand.”

“Your weekly reports *were* delayed.”

“I forgot the weekly report that one time...” *Because I was reeling from my stupid breakup with Jansen.*

Tears prick at my eyes as I try to process what’s happening. I came in here thinking I was getting a promotion. Instead, this.

Randy hands me a cardboard box. “I’m sorry, Amelia. You can use this box to pack up your things. Turn in your security card on your way out. I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors. If you need a reference, feel free to use me.

I've got nothing but good things to say about you. And, trust me, this was as difficult for me as it was for you. I've really appreciated working with you. But, every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end, right?"

I shoot Randy a look. "Please do not fire me and also ruin *Closing Time* at the same time. I actually like that song."

"Sorry."

I block the tears momentarily and resolve to gather my composure.



I'M SITTING on my couch and staring at the blank screen of my laptop when Nora bursts through the back door of my apartment, a bottle of wine in one hand and a bag of food from my favorite Costa Rican restaurant in the other.

"Hey sis, I'm so sorry," Nora says, setting the food down on the coffee table and opening the wine. "Come in for a hug."

"It's okay." I nod, still in shock over getting fired from my job of five years.

Nora pours us each a glass of red then connects her phone to my bluetooth and puts on Nora Jones. My sister used to like her just because they had the same name. But it fits our occasion well tonight.

"Thanks for coming over. I can't believe they did this to me. I thought I was getting a promotion, not a pink slip." I take the first big sip of wine.

"It's tough," Nora says. She changes the subject and we gossip about one of our friends' recent breakups for a while. They were a Tik Tok couple. Now? She's documenting her 'single journey' and he's writing a breakup album. We wish we knew what really happened there.

"How's Hans?" I ask, inquiring about her new 'boyfriend' Ish.

“He’s...well...” She shrugs and her cheeks redden. “He’s really good. Like, *really* good. In the you-know-what department, at least.”

I tap my nose. “Are you referring to the department store, level D?”

She bursts out laughing. “Um, yeah. He’s like, not insecure at least. Something about former college baseball players. They always have big...hands.”

“And you know what they say about guys with big hands,” I joke.

I attempt to laugh at my own joke but I just end up biting my lip. My relationship PTSD kicks in and I remember how I never did date that minor league player, “Big gloves”, who gave me his number two years ago. Because I was dating stupid *Jansen*. And thought we’d get married.

She laughs. “Why are we talking about me? Sis, tonight is about you. What would Dad say, if he were still here?”

My chest warms, thinking about my father who passed away a couple of years ago. I can’t help but smile a little at the thought of him.

When Nora and I were teenagers—she’s only one year younger than me—he’d drilled life lessons into our heads.

“He’d say,”—I conjure up my best dad voice—“Amelia, you’re not just some random girl, you’re a Hansen and a Papadopoulos. Norwegian men don’t get to marry into Greek families unless they are complete badasses—like me. And Greek women don’t marry Norwegian men unless they are completely intoxicating—like your mom. That’s a lot of weight on your shoulders, kid. But you can handle it. Because you’re not a normal girl. You’re a Hansen.”

Nora laughs heartily. “I love your impression of him. Cheers, to Dad.”

“To Dad.” We raise our wine glasses and drink them down.

My emotions are already on edge and tears flit through my eyes just thinking about my mom and dad.



As the story goes, my dad met my mom on an airplane when he first moved to the United States at twenty-three for work. She was just coming back from studying abroad in Spain. He had a flight transfer in Barcelona he was pissed about. Turns out, that little inconvenience would become the reason he met the love of his life.

They talked the whole way through the flight and when they arrived to Chicago, he refused to let her go, despite her ridiculously stereotypical Greek family. It took years but they finally came around to him.

My dad and mom had planned to name me Sofia after my father's Grandmother, but when I came out of the womb, I had big brown eyes, so they went with Amelia, a more Greek name, instead.

I got her dark features—the black hair—which I've dyed blonde, dark brown eyes, and tanned skin.

Nora, on the other hand, got his blue eyes, fair hair, and generally more Nordic features. At a glance, you wouldn't even guess we were sisters.

"I know this just happened today, so you're still processing," she said. "but you've got to look on the bright side. Now you have the opportunity to do something you've always wanted to do. Take a break. Have a little fun. You're thirty-two years old. Single. You have some money saved. This is the start of a whole new era for you."

"A new era?"

She bites her lip. "Yeah. Your villain era."

I laugh. "What's the villain era?"

"It's just about living life unapologetically, all for you. Stop trying to play so nice and please everyone. What do *you* want to do? You don't have to settle. Not for that crappy boy, or—"

"C'mon. He wasn't so bad. Jansen was a good guy."

"Then why didn't he marry you? You were together for five years. Good guys don't string women along."

I sigh loudly.

“I know, I know! But I’m not going to start living my villain era. I mean, what if I never get hired anywhere else again? I’ve already applied for like ten jobs.”

She laughs and puts her hand on my knee. “It’s December. The next hiring cycle starts in late winter. Until then, you’re free as a bird.” She shrugs. “Maybe you could try that yoga retreat in Costa Rica you’ve been talking about.”

I perk up at the mention of the retreat. It has always been a dream of mine to become a certified yoga teacher and I had been browsing some three week retreats in January...

I take a sip and pull out my laptop.

“I think I need to stay grounded, and get my head out of the clouds.”

“You’ve got money saved up, though, right? You’ve made smart decisions.”

“True.”

“So why not just this once. Let yourself live on the wild side.”

“Nah,” I say, and I turn the TV on. “You want to watch Friends?”

“We could play the Friends drinking game.”

“What’s that?”

“Every time all six of them are in Monica’s apartment, someone says the phrase ‘I know!’, or Joey gets a new audition, you drink.”

“Ha! You’re on.”



I’M NOT sure how it happens—well I guess I do know how it happens—but when I wake up the next morning, Nora is still

on my couch, and there are three empty bottles of wine on my coffee table.

I plug in my phone, because it's dead, and when it gets a charge I check my email.

2:26 a.m. - Subject: Thank you for Registering for our Costa Rican Yoga Retreat!

Dear Amelia,

Thank you for registering for our upcoming Costa Rican yoga retreat! We are thrilled to have you join us for this rejuvenating and transformative experience. Your reservation has been confirmed, and we would like to provide you with some additional information about the retreat.

The retreat will take place for three weeks in January and will be held at Zen Yoga Haven in Playa de Corazones, Costa Rica. Please plan to arrive at the retreat center by 10 a.m. on the first day of the retreat.

You will potentially be assigned a roommate for the duration of the retreat, pending our last reservations

and enrollment. We will supply you with her/his name when it becomes available.

During the retreat, you will have access to daily yoga classes, workshops, and guided meditations. You will also have ample free time to explore the local area, relax on the beach, or simply unwind in the natural beauty of Costa Rica. We recommend that you bring comfortable yoga clothing, a yoga mat, sunscreen, insect repellent, and a refillable water bottle.

Additionally, please ensure that your passport is up-to-date and valid for at least six months beyond the end date of the retreat. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to us. We are committed to making your retreat experience as enjoyable and stress-free as possible. We can't wait to see you in Costa Rica!

Best regards,

Josefina and Chester

*Founders, Zen Haven Yoga  
Retreat Center, Playa de Corazones*

MY EYES widen and I laugh, as I hear my sister stir. “Did I actually do this when I was plastered last night?”

Nora looks at my screen and scans the email.

“Looks like it. Just enjoy the ride. You could have a roommate?”

“Guess so.”

“It says ‘her *or* him.’ Maybe you’ll get a hot yoga roommate”.

I laugh through my hungover haze.

I think of my dad and how he was so upset about that transfer flight in Barcelona. And how that ended up being the biggest blessing of his life. Maybe this is just my symbolic flight transfer.

“Shall I put on some coffee?” she asks. “I called into work today.”

I bite my lower lip. “Sure. Let the villain era begin.”

For some reason in that moment, Jack Wellington comes to mind. That man was chock full of villain energy.

I need to channel that.

“So which bikinis are you packing for Costa Rica?” Nora asks.

“All of them, I guess.”

“Just don’t forget the blue one. You look good in blue.”

## AMELIA

A few weeks later, I'm on a plane from Chicago to San Jose, Costa Rica, watching a lovely sunrise come up through the clouds. Something about the heavenly view on a plane always fills me with awe.

The last trip I took out of the country was five years ago, before I started my current job.

I mean, *my old job*. I have to keep reminding myself.

Before my father was gone, he would tell me that bad things come in threes.

I don't know if that's really true.

But after a breakup and getting fired, I'm on guard for one more ugly surprise this winter.

The plane lands and we deboard.

"Name?" the passport agent asks me.

"Amelia Hansen."

He ticks off a box then looks at me again.

"What's the purpose of your travel?"

"To forget who the hell I am and become someone completely new."

The man furrows his brow confusedly. "Eh, pardon?"

"I'm going on a yoga retreat," I sigh, rephrasing.

Not quite as fun sounding as a whole personal transformation, but it's more concrete. I suppose the agent isn't interested in the existential crisis I'm having.

"Ah, yes. Yoga. Okay. Please proceed."

I nod and take back my passport. When you're trying to change, it makes people uncomfortable. People don't like change.

I'm evidence number one for that. I hate change.

But after a tough year, I'm ready to adopt a new avatar.

I pick up my bags, but I don't see the surfboard I bought.

Because, you know, I'm in my thirties and the fact that I've never surfed feels embarrassing.

I approach the baggage counter, where a woman in her forties makes eye contact with me.

"Hi, it seems like my surfboard is missing."

"You are...?"

"Amelia Hansen."

"Okay. Let me look that up. Big surfer, eh?"

"Oh yeah," I nod, not wanting to go into great detail about the fact that I'd begged my ex to take me surfing for years, but he never did.

She clacks on her keyboard with her long nails. "Ah yes. Your surfboard didn't make your transfer in San Antonio. We'll have to ship it to you. Can you enter your address?"

"Of course."

Outside the airport, I'm greeted graciously by warm, tropical air. Much better weather here in January than back home in Chi-town.

As I wait for my ride, I look down at the list I made in the notes in my phone:

THINGS I'M LEAVING BEHIND IN 2022:

-WELLINGTON MEDIA MARKETING

-JANSEN

THINGS I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2023:

-FINDING A NEW JOB

-LEARNING TO SURF

-BECOMING A CERTIFIED YOGA TEACHER

-MY VILLAIN ERA

-DATING

I swallow. *Dating*. Ugh. Am I really looking forward to dating?

Nora has been 'dating' for 3 years and that isn't what I want. Frivolous relationships have never been my speed.

But that's what I'm looking at, I guess, now that I'm single again. I've got to go with the flow of the universe and not resist it.

Look, I want a family.

Can't I just fast forward to the part where I've met a great guy, we have a kid, are relaxed with a house in the suburbs, and going on family vacations once a year?

I'm jolted out of my thought trance by a well tanned, fifty-ish man with a gray and black beard who taps me on the shoulder.

"Are you Amelia?" the man asks in a gruff voice with a slight Spanish accent.

"Uh, yeah. You are..."

"I am Ronaldo."



“Oh.” Ronaldo. The guy the yoga retreat said would pick me up at the airport. “Hi Ronaldo.”

Ronaldo puts my suitcase into the back of the van along with the sign he’s carrying that says my name.

“So where are you from, Ronaldo?” I ask him as we ride through the Costa Rican capital of San Jose. Palm trees and colorful houses dot the roads.

“I’m from Costa Rica. My father is American and my mother is from here.”

We make small talk for a while and then I shut my eyes.

The sleep that eluded me on the plane finds me.



I FEEL the van turn onto a dirt road and I flutter my eyes open. I see bigger trees lining the drive now than in the city.

I open my phone by instinct to check my GPS.

“Uh, where are we going, Sir?”

“Short cut.”

My stomach lurches with anxiety.

I have an inherent distrust of strangers, which I think is normal.

I remind myself that Ronaldo’s not a stranger, though, he’s the driver that the yoga retreat *hired* to take me to the retreat center.

“So, tell me about this town,” I say. “Playa de los Corazones. What does that mean in English?”

“In English you would say, ‘Beach of the Hearts.’ It doesn’t translate so well because in Spanish we would say, ‘Oh, mi corazon!’ to someone we love. But you wouldn’t say ‘oh my heart,’ to someone in English.”

“I see.” The road narrows and the brush seems to get thicker and thicker. “You have a good grasp on English

translation.”

“This is la jungla del corazon,” he says. “The jungle of the hearts.”

I roll down the window, and I hear a strange noise.

“What is that animal?”

“Those are monkeys, of course.” I notice him glance in the rear view mirror at my face. “Are you scared?”

He must notice I’m clutching my heart.

“Of those little things? No. Of course not.” He laughs. “It’s okay to be scared. They’re very strong. But usually friendly. The jaguar is really the one you need to look out for.”

My eyes widen. “There are real life jaguars here?”

“Less now. Very rare. But yes. You may see them from time to time.”

The dirt road ends and we turn onto pavement, which relieves me in light of the fact that the GPS on my phone isn’t working anymore.

On the right, there is a humongous mansion we’re approaching.

Or, rather, it’s an estate. It’s surrounded by an eight foot fence with a taller gate lined with foliage.

Just as we’re about to pass it, the gate opens and Ronaldo slows to a stop.

“Who lives there?” I ask, “and why are you stopping?”

A baby blue jaguar convertible pulls out through the gates.

We’re close enough that I can see the definition of the driver’s chiseled face and wavy dark hair. The surfboard in the back of his convertible is a nice touch as well.

He’s shirtless with old fashioned ray ban sunglasses, looking every part a James Dean.

I mean, if James Dean...wait a second. Where do I recognize that face from?

The man looks eerily familiar.

He waves to Ronaldo before he peels out in front of us.

“Who’s that?” I ask.

“That is El Jefe, the boss.”

“El...jefe?”

“Se llama Jack Wellington. ”

My stomach coils.

“Jack...Wellington? No. He lives here?”

“Most of the year, yes. Why? Do you know him?”

I furrow my brow, recalling Jack’s annoyance at having to ‘visit’ headquarters. So he lives full time here?

“I kinda know him. Why’d you stop for him?”

I don’t mind being polite and letting other cars pull in front, but the gesture seemed odd.

Ronaldo turns back to me.

“It’s always wise to let Mr. Wellington go first when you see him coming. He likes to drive fast.”

I can’t tell if Ronaldo thinks Mr. Wellington is just another rich, gringo asshole, or if he actually respects him.

I came here to escape assholes, so I change the subject.

After a few more minutes, we turn onto a busier road and a small strip of shops that back home my friends would laugh at the idea of calling a ‘downtown.’ But this is it.

Ronaldo pulls up to a huge hotel where I’ll be staying tonight. There’s a restaurant downstairs.

“Perfect,” he says. “We’re here.”

I smile as he takes my bags from the back and brings them to the front desk.

I give him a tip and bid him adios.

The layout of this hotel is like nothing I’ve ever seen. The check-in area is entirely outside in the open air. The floors and

walls are mostly marble. It's absolutely stunning.

I check into my five-hundred-dollar a night room and shower off. It's expensive and out of my budget, but it was a deal I made with myself: take a more affordable red-eye, and I would get to stay at a luxury hotel for one night before I settle into the yoga retreat center for the rest of my stay.



WHEN I WAKE up from my nap, my stomach is rumbling so I head down to the hotel restaurant for lunch. I order practically the whole freaking menu, I'm so famished.

After lunch, I sunbathe for a while then find a shade-covered hammock to lounge in next to the pool.

My finger hovers over a dating app as I look at my phone.

I did tell myself before I arrived that this would be a 'no men' trip.

But after all, this is 'Beach of the Hearts,' right?

And you never know who you might find. I'm definitely in no position to be looking for a relationship, but I wouldn't say no to a date.

What the hell, right?

I open up my dating apps to see who is in this small little town with me.

Brad. 26. Blonde surfer guy with a goofy grin.

Sure, why not?

I mean, when in the land of surfer boys...might as well go on a date with one.

*Match.*

My eyes widen.

That was quick.

I message him and he responds immediately.

Amelia: Hey

Brad: lol hey hottie

Amelia: Are you on vacation or did you move here?

Brad: Extended vacation, you?

Amelia: Same, pretty much.

Brad: So...you want to meet up tonight?

Amelia: When and where?

Brad: Not sure. Any ideas?

I do a quick check of the restaurants around here and come back with a hit.

Amelia: Found a good one on the beach called Palmas en la Playa.

Brad: You're on, what time?

Amelia: How's seven?

Brad: Done.

I'm zoned into my phone when I hear a chuckle next to me, and I turn.

A man is blatantly looking over my shoulder and eaveswatching my dating app swiping.

"Are you just watching me over my shoulder and reading my conversation?"

The man smiles. A cocky grin crosses his face.

My heart slams in my chest as I realize something.

This isn't just any man.

This is Jack Wellington. My CEO.

Well, former CEO.

He's the guy with the baby blue Jaguar convertible. He's got the same ray ban sunglasses on. Same cocky swagger.

Damn. He looks even better in board shorts and no shirt than he did in a suit.

Tanned, rippling abs. A chiseled jaw.

"Yes," he says simply to answer my question about eaves watching.

I open my mouth to respond, but his terse, one word response catches me off guard.

"No denial? You're not even going to pretend to be polite?"

I notice he's sipping an old fashioned, and while it might be a little early for one of those, now I want one.

"No," he says, simply. "I was just curious."

"What were you curious about?"

"Trying to figure out why a woman as gorgeous as yourself would be using a dating app." He takes a swig of his drink and lets out a huff.

"What was that noise?"

"Nothing."

I try to sit up but I'm so comfortable in my hammock. "I definitely heard you make a noise. Why...are you even here? Don't you live in town?"

He smirks. "Yes. I do live in town. I'm not staying here."

"I-I'm going to report you," I inform him, looking around for a hotel attendant.

"To who?"

"To the owner of this hotel," I announce, more dramatically than I meant for it to come out.

He snorts and takes his sunglasses off, showcasing eyes that are only a shade darker blue than his convertible.

"I'm the owner of this hotel," he says. "Report away."

My heart rate doubles. Figures he'd be the owner of this place too.

“Seriously? Do you keep tabs on all of your guests like this?”

“You have a curious way about you. So I wanted to know what you were doing.”

I bite my lower lip. “I came here to relax. Not be critiqued about my technology usage.”

He nods, then takes a sip of his drink.

Then he laughs. *Laughs.*

“What’s so funny? There’s nothing funny about this.”

He snorts again and chuckles. “Sorry, it’s not you I’m laughing at exactly.” Jack puts his sunglasses back on and sits back on a lounge chair next to me with his drink. “Just the world we live in is funny.”

I stand up out of my hammock—with some embarrassing difficulty, put my hands on my hips and peer at him.

My mouth falls open, viewing this freaking specimen of a man from my new vantage point on my feet.

His muscles are big, rippling, and my eyes accidentally wander in between his legs.

*Okay. So maybe there’s a reason he’s got such a big...ego.*

Yes, ego.

That’s what I’m thinking about right now.

“Hi,” he smirks, then lets his sunglasses down, just revealing his eyes. “I know you can’t see them through the sunglasses, but my eyes are up here. If you want a show, that’s gonna cost you extra.”

My face turns beet red. Damn. Caught staring...

That hasn’t happened to me in ages.

Then again, I haven’t been single in ages.

“I’m...not falling for this,” I say, trying to divert the subject. “Not with what just happened.”

“Me neither. I just caught you staring right at my cock through my board shorts. Looks like the tables have turned.”

“Nothing much to stare at, anyway...”

He laughs. “Want to touch it and check exactly how much nothing there is?”

My body stiffens and I search for any comeback.

“Yeah? Well I bet you’re looking at my cleavage. You’re creeping on me.”

“I am, now that you mention it. They look natural, too, which is becoming rarer and rarer these days. You should be proud.”

I’m now totally red-faced. I’m not used to a man being so direct. “So what were you laughing at—before?”

“Ah, subject change then, is it? Fine, I’ll bite. I’m just laughing at the state of the world these days. A smokeshow like yourself will travel all the way down to Costa Rica, only to swipe on a dating app so you can be set up with Brad - twenty-six - surfer boy.”

Something coils in my chest. I decide not to acknowledge the fact that he just called me a smokeshow.

Though I admit, it feels good considering how sexless the last few months with Jansen were. “What’s wrong with that? That’s freedom,” I argue.

“Sure. But when a man tries to talk to you in real life it’s now ‘creepy and offensive.’ We’ve lost the art of real life serendipity. And personally, I think that’s a shame. Approaching people for conversation in the real world is becoming a lost art.”

I furrow my brow. “I mean, you’re not wrong,” I admit.

“You said I was, ‘creeping on you.’ Originally I just wanted to make sure you were having a good stay—which I do from time to time with my guests. But you intrigued me and I



admit it—I read your phone over your shoulder. It was half-accidental, but I’m owning the non-accidental half. I creeped on you. In real life. Like a man. Not like one of these app boys who probably can’t even look you in the eye in person, and judging by the way he had to ask you to name a time and a place, couldn’t handle a real woman.”

I look down at my phone, feeling my blood boiling.

Damn him.

Damn him for being...*right*.

“Brad could be cool,” I say defensively, although I don’t even know why.

“So you like younger men?” he asks.

“Ah, I...how do you even know my age?”

“Just answer the question.”

“Answer my question.”

He laughs.

“A woman like you shouldn’t be on dating apps. You’re never going to meet a real man there.”

“Yes, I mean, I might. Everyone’s on the apps these days.”

He smirks again.

“Do you know why they don’t advertise Jaguars on television? The luxury cars, I mean.”

I feel something bubbling through me...

Okay. It’s hate.

I hated him when he first talked to me in the elevator.

And I still do. I didn’t know why I had that visceral reaction, but now I do. He’s just an expert at getting under my skin.

“Why’s that?”

“Lean a little closer and I’ll tell you.”

I don't know why, but I obey. He whispers the answer in my ear.

“Because people who want the best don't settle for everyone else. They're not looking for the first swipe on an app.”

“I hate you!” I spew out. Oh god, this is word vomit. But on the other hand, it feels good to speak my mind... and... screw this guy.

“Hate is a strong word. I wouldn't throw it around so lightly...”

Clutching my phone in my left hand, I point into his sternum with the other.

“I don't come from money like you. You're the epitome of everything my father taught me to despise. You give opinions when they're not needed. You hit the genetic lottery and the financial lottery. What kind of man butts into a stranger's business like this? You think you're this special crusader who 'tells it like it is.' Now you're harassing women who are just in a little surf town to do a yoga retreat. There's nothing wrong with taking some time away from home, and a tropical paradise is a great place to do it. So, newsflash: you're not some crusader helping the world. You're just an asshole.”

His eyes widen and for a moment I think he might be on his heels. But then he responds.

“Now let me guess some things about you.”

“Uh, okay.”

“Let's see,” he squints. “You're in your early thirties. You came to this small retreat town in Costa Rica to 'find yourself.' What was it, a break up? Mmm, no, a job change?”

I fumble with my phone and drop it on the concrete. I hate the fact that he's so damn accurate.

There's no way he remembers me from the company, though...right?

“None of your business,” I say.

“Oh, it was both!” He nods, grinning. “That’s a big change for you. I bet you wanted to have a family with, ah, what was his name?”

“Jansen.”

“And what did Jansen do?” He taps his lips with his forefinger. “Let me guess. He’s a guy with a mid-level job and no real prospects or motivation to be reaching any higher.”

“He’s...” *Damn. Nailed it.*

I pick up my phone and stand back up, between Jack and the pool.

“Don’t make fun of him. He’s an alright guy.”

“Still defending the guy who broke your heart. You’re really one of the good ones. Sucks that he fumbled the bag.”

“Fumbled the bag?”

“Yeah, you know. He missed you. But he’ll come back mark my words. They all do when they fuck up. Most of them, at least. Especially with a girl like you.”

“Why do you assume *he* fucked up? And what do you mean, girl like me?”

He grins. “I’m right, aren’t I?”

I can’t believe the ire this man has stirred up in me. I’m not this person who argues back. I’m not going to get into the weeds that *I* was actually the one who broke up with Jansen. I suppose he did break my heart by not proposing for five long years.

“Okay, what I didn’t come here for was to be lectured by strangers who don’t even know the ins and outs of my own life path.” I realize he doesn’t even recognize me from our little encounter on the elevator. I was just some anonymous employee he fired. “So get lost. And please, don’t get on my bad side.” I add.

He doesn’t flinch, and stands up.

I put my hands on my hips and look him in the eye.

“Maybe you’ll get on mine,” he says.

It infuriates me further that I have to point my head up and look up almost a full foot to make eye contact with him.

“I’m going to get on your bad side? You have to be kidding me. I’m just enjoying my day. And guess what? You’re an asshole. You want to know why?”

“I know I am one. But please, tell me why.”

Our eyes lock. “You don’t even remember me.”

“Why would I remember you? Have you stayed here before?”

“No. I used to work for you at Wellington Media.”

“Oh?” He raises an eyebrow.

“Yeah. Ever hear of it?”

Now his eyes are searching me for clues, but I can tell our encounter wasn’t notable for him.

“I was the top employee performing there last year. Until my incompetent CEO fired me and...”

“Wait, you’re starting to look familiar,” he interrupts.

His jaw drops, and for once in his life, and he’s speechless. He puts a finger to his lips like he’s got an idea on the tip of his tongue.

“You’re...” He snaps his fingers. “Holy shit. You’re the smokeshow from the elevator in the blue dress.”

My heart coils in my chest again. Not sure if it’s anger, attraction, or some anxiety. Or maybe I’m flattered that he actually noted me.

“That’s me.” I offer a slightly silly, cheery grin. “The smokeshow in blue. Not like I have a name or anything.”

“Why don’t you tell me your name?”

“How about no?”

Our gazes catch and lock—through his sunglasses. We’re standing so close to one another, I can feel the heat from his

body. Annoyingly, I only see my own reflection in his sunglasses.

“You’re...a straight up asshole.” I inform him. “You think you’re this big shot. I see right through you. You’re full of shit. You have no clue what you’re doing, Mr. CEO. Mind your own business.”

He finishes his old fashioned, sets it down, and steps closer to me, right near the edge of the pool.

“I’m an asshole, for what? Getting my company to run more efficiently? Just having some fun with you at the pool? Making fun of your technology addiction? Get a grip.”

“Fine, Jack. My name is Amelia.”

But before I can think properly, I reach a hand out to poke him with my phone.

This also results in me awkwardly groping his massive chest.

“Get this out of here.”

He smacks the phone, and it bounces off his chest and slips out of my hand, heading toward the pool.

My jaw drops. “My phone!”

This next part happens in slow motion.

Adrenaline rushes through me, I lose my balance, and I end up slipping as I lunge toward the pool, trying to stop my phone from getting soaked. It’s one of the old, non-waterproof versions and if it lands in the water it’s done.

I try to regain my balance, but the concrete is slick, and next thing I know, I’m falling...possibly into the concrete, head first.

Then, suddenly I’m tumbling into the pool with my ex-CEO’s huge arms wrapped around my body. He catches me off-balance, and tackles me into the pool. I feel us both going into the water as he pulls us down.

But I see my six year old, non waterproof phone, with pictures of my dad, hit the water and fall down, down, down to

the bottom of the pool.

**JACK**

I bearhug her as we crash a few feet down into the water.

When I pull her up, she takes a huge breath.

We lock eyes for a few moments.

And then?

She slaps me across the face with her hand.

It's a solid, wet slap.

My jaw falls open at the surprise of that move.

I hold my hand on my cheek and grab her wrist.

“Did I just get...assaulted?” I say out loud, somewhat rhetorically.

“I think you mean me,” she says. “You tackled me.”

“I saved your life is what I did. You were about to tumble head first into that concrete edge of the pool.”

“My phone,” she cries out, searching in the water.

She picks it out from the bottom of the pool, and holds it up.

“It's waterproof, right?” I say.

She presses the screen repeatedly, but it's black. “Oh no, no no no!”

“See, this is what I'm talking about. Technology addiction. It's a problem. I might be into some outlandish bedroom stuff, but cracking skulls isn't one of them.”

She tilts her head a little.

“Or maybe you are into that?” I raise an eyebrow. “I mean, hey, whatever turns you on..”

“Who do you think you are?” she finally belts out. “You’re...I hate you.”

She’s taking huge, deep breaths, her chest heaving.

Damn. She’s dripping wet and I couldn’t be more turned on. She’s a hot one when she’s angry.

What did she say her name was?

Ah yes, Amelia.

My former employee.

Though I can’t believe she’s actually mad over the fact that I just saved her life by tackling us into the pool, so she didn’t take a spill on the concrete.

I rub my cheek.

“I’m the guy that just stopped both of us from hitting the pavement, headfirst. You should be thanking me.”

Her dark brown eyes are on fire, inches from mine now. She grabs hold of my forearm and, I admit, I immediately feel a spark roll through my body that I haven’t felt in a long time.

“Thanking you? Thanking you! Oh my God! You’re the most entitled man I’ve ever met. Why can’t you just leave me alone!”

I cross my arms.

“How dare you!” She waves her phone in the air. “This is destruction of personal property. This was not in the budget for this trip.”

“It’s 2023. How do you not have a waterproof phone?”

“That is only for when it gets a spill, not when it gets thrown in the pool.” She presses the screen repeatedly, but still—nothing.

“This is not a healthy relationship,” I say, pointing to her phone while keeping my eyes on her. “You’re crying because



of a piece of technology. Do you understand what's wrong with that?"

I do feel a little bad for her, though. I want to tell her I was really only trying to make a point. It seems silly now, though, to backtrack.

"It's not just a piece of technology. I had...pictures on there. Important ones."

"Of course they were important," I say, trying to lighten the mood. "All those photos of dinner at the latest restaurant."

She splashes me angrily. "No. There were pictures of my dad and I. And he's dead."

"Oh." Now the guilt wracks through me, I admit.

I frown. "You didn't back them up to the cloud?"

"No." She shakes her head. "I didn't."

She crosses her arms in her blue bikini and it makes her cleavage pop up even more.

And those gorgeous brown eyes...it's quite the combination.

Our eyes lock and this interrupts my train of thought.

She's got this mane of long blonde hair that I instinctively want to pull.

I feel my dick twitch under the water.

Wait...what?

How on earth am I getting turned on right now? This is not right.

Sure, she has these brown doe eyes that I notice immediately.

I have to remind myself she's just another technology addicted vacation babe. Like all the hundreds of vacation babes I've met coming through this town.

Look, I've had to train myself not to have feelings for them. After all, some of them aren't so bad. But this is just the type of town where everyone comes through searching for

something. And after a few days, or a week, or even a month after their little retreat is up, they inevitably leave, and head back home. So there's no need to get attached to them.

So yes, I'm a man and experiencing normal feelings of attraction toward a gorgeous woman, who happens to be my former employee.

It means nothing.

Also, I'm going to have to check on her performance.

She lifts herself out of the pool and, if I wasn't creeping before, now I'm full on staring.

She's got a hell of a curvy ass to go with those tits. Precisely the type of body that is my kryptonite. Her blue bikini bottoms do not leave one hell of a lot to the imagination.

*Down boy.*

"You look great in blue, Amelia. How about I call you Indy instead?" I joke.

She shakes her head, and it's clear my attempt at lifting the mood has failed.

"I'm getting out of here." She grabs a white towel from the towel stack. "You know, doesn't it feel empty sometimes?"

"How, empty? What do you mean?"

"Being a CEO and having no one to share it with. What are billions if you don't have someone by your side to make memories? My dad taught me that. Maybe you should think about how you're acting with people you don't know and stop being such a douche."

I lift myself out of the pool.

"Enjoy your stay, Indy," I call.

"This iphone is worthless now." She sighs and throws her phone on the chair. "You're such an asshole."

Hate to see her go, but damn is she sexy walking away.

I peer across the pool and see the bartender at the tiki bar watching me.

“What are you looking at, Matt?”

“Nothing, Boss.” He grabs a rag and starts to whistle and wipe down the already clean bar like he didn’t see a thing.

I grab the phone myself.

Maybe I can work some magic on it. I really need to do something about this temper of mine.



LATER IN THE AFTERNOON, I head out to the beach to catch some waves with my friend, Yoshimi, to clear my head.

Yoshimi was a childhood friend of my mom’s before my mom passed away—when I was a kid.

She’s fifty-six now, still a badass out here surfing. She’s a Playa de Corazones lifer, like me.

Yoshimi is also one of my mentors. She created an app that did extremely well in her corporate life, cashed out, and now she’s living the life. Our friendship is unorthodox but I wouldn’t trade it in for anything.

We float in chest-high water on our surfboards, our eyes peering west so we can see when the next good wave will come. Her long black hair touches the water.

I’ve just finished giving Yoshimi a synopsis of how my interaction went with vacation babe, AKA Indy, as I’ve officially nicknamed her.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” I ask her.

“Dammit, Jack,” she says, shaking her head. “Just when I think you might have turned a corner, you go and tell a story like this.”

“It’s a service. I’m helping her kick her app addiction.”

“You can’t just lecture people about their technology usage unprompted. That’s over the line.”

“She’s probably been spending five hours a day on her phone. She’s got a problem. This entire society has a problem and no one is owning up to it. She’ll thank me later.”

Yoshimi frowns. “There’s this thing called money, and it isn’t as easy for most people as it is for you. Now her phone is broken and she’s got to shell out for a new one. Not everyone is a gazillionaire CEO like you who can just buy a new phone every day like it’s no big deal.”

“I’m not a gazillionaire. Billionaire.” I huff.

Yoshimi rolls her eyes. A big wave comes but the timing of its crest isn’t quite right so we let it pass.

“You need to be kinder,” she sighs. “I’m your only true friend in this town. And when you tell me stories like this it makes me feel as though I’ve failed you, and that means I have failed your mother.”

“I’m kind,” I snap, almost accusatorily.

She raises an eyebrow. “Are you, though?”

“Sometimes,” I add. “Okay, maybe not all the time.”

“How’s business going, anyway?” she asks. “Did you get everything cleaned up during your trip to headquarters in December?”

“It’s going,” I huff. “I need a new CFO, though. Someone with vision and who understands the new mediascape. Someone willing to take calculated risks. I had to fire a whole lot of people. Felt bad about that, but if we don’t turn that ship around, no one’s going to have a job there and some people weren’t pulling their weight.”

“Letting people go is always stressful. How about your hotel business here?”

“Last year was extremely profitable, but I recently lost about five million overnight.”

“What the hell happened?”

“New hotel environmental laws came into play this year. So that big property I bought in Panama is effectively useless.

It was given back to the state.”

“No refund?”

“No refund. The government keeps all five million.”

“Ooof. That’s rough.”

Finally, the perfect wave comes and we ride it to the shore.

On the beach, Yoshimi’s fifteen year old son is curled up in a ball in the sand next to his surfboard.

Yoshimi gestures to me and then waves for me to come out for another wave.

“What’s up with the kid? Why’s he so morose?” I ask once I get back out into the water.

“Kevin has had a crush on this girl all year long,” she says, “and she just started dating someone else, so he’s upset.”

“Well he’s not going to win her over sulking like that.”

“Oh God. You’re not going to give him advice, are you?”

I snort. “No, I’m not the guy who he’d want advice from about women, anyway.”

Yoshimi knows that the last woman I was in a relationship with, I found cheating on me. And it wasn’t the first time. So I can no longer trust my judgment about the types of women I’m interested in. I have a problem. If I’m interested in someone, they’re probably not for me.

So I’ve sworn them off all together.

Nevertheless, seeing Yoshimi’s kid all emo like that doesn’t sit right with me, so when we ride another wave in, I walk with my board up to the teenager.

“Kevin.”

His eyes widen and he looks surprised that the guy with resting scrooge face is acknowledging him.

“Yeah?” he says.

Okay. Maybe Yoshimi is right. Maybe I do have a rep as an asshole. Especially seeing as how I spend a fair amount of

time around Kevin and he's still scared of me.

“Yeah, buddy. You want to hit some waves? I heard you're a goofy left-footed surfer like me.”

“Yeah. Yeah, sure!”

He jumps up and grabs his board and we head out.

I take Kevin out on the waves for almost an hour. I don't ask him about the girl. There's no reason to bring her up.

When you're a teenager with heartbreak on the mind, the best thing for you is the surf. When you've got sunshine on your face and the salty spray of water all around you and you've got to focus your mind on catching the next wave, you can't think about anything else.

The past dissolves. It's better than therapy.

“Dude, you crushed that last wave, that flip was killer!” I tell him after we've ridden a few waves in and I've given him some pointers.

I give the kid a high five and he smiles.

Yoshimi smiles, squatting in a yoga pose under a tree as we walk toward her.

“Mom, did you see that? Jaguar taught me how to do a flip and I did it!”

Kevin sees one of his friends and runs over to talk to him. I love how the kid calls me that. He rode once in my car and couldn't stop.

“See? You're capable of being kind,” she says to me. “You ought to try it more often. Doesn't it feel good?”

I stare off into the distance. “You two are like family. It's different.”

She gets out of her pose and puts her hand on her hips. We both turn toward the sunset.

“You've got to be nicer to the women you are interested in and not so angry.”

“I’m not angry,” I say through gritted teeth. “But I’m certainly not going on any dates.”

She rolls her eyes. “I set you up tonight. Did you really forget?”

I sigh. “Oh, that’s right. Do I have to?”

Yoshimi puts her hand on my shoulder. “It’s my former colleague’s daughter. She’s in town for that retreat. You already forgot.” She shakes her head.

I bite my lower lip and scan my brain. “Sorry, I’ve had a lot on my mind lately.”

“Well you can’t ghost her. C’mon. Just show her around.”

I sigh. Yoshimi is my moral compass, so when she says I need to do something, I do it.

“What’s her name again?”

“Her name is Kate. She’s from upstate New York.”

“Kate from upstate New York. Got it.”

“And you should really buy that poor girl from the pool today a new phone.”

I scrub a hand across my jaw.

I hate to admit it but she’s right. And I should see if I can get those pictures of her dad retrieved. That part I actually feel bad about, considering my own parents are long gone.

“Fine,” I grunt. “I just lost five million. Another couple thousand is nothing.”

She puts a hand on my shoulder. “You need to take a load off. You’ve been working way too hard trying to open all of the different locations of hotels. Plus heading back to the states to keep eyes on Wellington Media? I mean these last couple of days are the first times I’ve seen you surfing in years. If you were thinking clearly, you would have known about those environmental regulations before purchasing the land.”

“I have not been working too hard,” I snap. “If anything I’ve not been working hard enough.”

She laughs and rubs my forearm. “You do understand that you don’t have to work hard anymore, right? You need to take a load off. Take a freaking break. That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you for the past year.”

“I don’t need a break,” I snap. “Tomorrow I’m done surfing, and it’s back to the office.”

“Geez, with the attitude,” she says. “You’re at the level where if you come up with one good idea, you could make millions. Or if you keep doing what you’ve been doing, you’ll lose more millions. Really, you have enough money that you’d never have to work again.”

I let out a loud grumble. “So what are you suggesting, Yoda?”

She puts her hand on her hips and shakes her head. “You know I hate that name.”

“Sorry. But you’re getting really over the top mentor-y today.”

“It’s for your own good. You’ve got a real stick up your ass these days, you know. I think you need to learn how to meditate.”

I look at her and my eyes widen. “Meditate!” I start laughing. “I’ve never heard something so wild.”

She shakes her head. “It’s not wild at all.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“I’m suggesting...you take the yoga retreat that starts tomorrow, in town. That’s what Kate is here for. It’s three weeks. I just talked to the head yogis, Chester and Josefina. You know them, right? They had a last minute opening because someone dropped out at the last second. I asked them to hold it for someone I know. That someone is you.”

I try to stop myself from laughing. But I can’t help it. “I’m not spending—not *wasting* three weeks of my life learning how to stretch better.”

“You’re losing millions of dollars because you’re not thinking clearly. You need to work smarter, not harder.”



“Out of the question. Too much work to do.”

She shrugs. “Alright. I’m done helping you.”

Just then, Kevin comes running back. “Mom, when are we leaving?”

“Why the rush?” she asks.

“Because I want to get back here early tomorrow to hit the waves again. So I want to go to bed early tonight. Jaguar showed me some new moves I want to practice.”

“Alright. Let’s go.” Yoshimi sighs and eyes me as I leave. “Just think about it. They have one spot left. I think it could be good for you.”

“I’ll think about it, but it’s probably a no.”

But then I remember something.

Didn’t Indy say she was here for a yoga retreat?

## AMELIA

I spend a few moments reflecting on the balcony of my room before I get ready to head out for the night, sipping a strawberry margarita.

What a whirlwind the past couple of months have been. Two months ago, I had a boyfriend I thought I might be engaged to. When I gave him the ultimatum that I needed a ring, I really thought he'd have a 'come to Jesus' moment.

Then a few weeks ago I thought I was walking into a promotion—when it was just the opposite.

You never know when life is going to hit you with a one-two punch.

I watch a happy family of five walking through the corridor below. A mother, father, and three daughters who look to be in their twenties are laughing and giggling, likely coming from family dinner.

Meanwhile, I clutch the paper photo I have of my father that I always carry with me when I travel.

The hour of my date with Brad is soon approaching so I head inside the hotel room and give my sister Nora a call from facetime.

*With my laptop.*

Because, you know, my phone is gone. I didn't even bother to take it with me, I was so angry about Jack breaking it. What kind of a man does that?

I take a deep breath before Nora picks up so I don't take my anger out on her.

"I've never had a tropical date before. What do you think proper attire is?" I ask her.

"Hmmm. Maybe something beachy. Do you have a fun dress?"

I laugh. "Yeah, I've got a dress."

"What's the weather like there, anyway?"

"It's like seventy degrees and sunny all the time. It's paradise."

"Ugh, that sounds terrific. It's grey and gloomy and it's been snowing all day."

"Yeah...I'm not mad I'm here."

"So, who's the lucky guy tonight?"

I fill her in about Brad the surfer boy. I also throw in the detail about my phone getting tossed into the pool by Jack McDouche Wellington, my former CEO.

"I just cannot believe someone would be that entitled and such a jerk!" she says.

"Yeah! A complete douche," I agree. "It's like, borderline criminal."

"That's insane that you ran into him. Maybe the universe is trying to tell you something."

I sigh. "Like what?"

"That you should stand up to assholes? I don't know."

I shake my head. "I felt like I was back in first grade and Colby Jenkins was taking my toys out of the sandbox and chucking them on the lawn again. Like, grow up!"

"Ugh, Colby Jenkins."

"What an ass," I agree.

"Buuut..." She taps her nose.

"There's a but?"

“But he’s kind of right, in a way. You do use your phone a lot.”

“You can’t seriously be siding with Jack freaking Wellington. Nora, that was my old phone with all my pictures on there.”

“You yourself said you wanted to disconnect. Before you left, you told me you were taking an eat pray love break from men for three months. And now you’re telling me how you’re excited to hang out with surfer boy Brad? I’m just a little confused here.”

“Okay, that is not totally untrue.”

“If you want to find yourself, find yourself. If you want to go on some dates, go on some dates, by all means! But you confuse me when you say one thing and do another.”

I sigh.

She goes on, “You need to file a complaint or something, get your money back. Anyway, gotta go, sis. Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

I collapse on the bed after putting on my blue and orange, fun beachy wrap dress.

This Brad guy is definitely going to see an interesting side of me tonight, that’s for sure. I’m feeling feisty after my run in with Jack.

A stew of emotions brews inside me. There’s sadness, thinking about my father and those pictures.

Not like I don’t have more, but there were pictures of me with him on our trip we did to Yosemite.

Then there’s the anger at Jack. It’s not *him* I’m mad at, specifically. It’s the men like him. They have it all. Rich, handsome. Powerful.

He’s a CEO who lives in Costa Rica for goodness’ sake.

I glance at the time. Meeting Brad at seven.

I still have about thirty minutes to kill.

I think about lounging back at the pool, but the stupid phone killer has ruined the vibe of the pool for me.

I check my bag and see what else I brought.

I usually read from my kindle app on my phone but I at least did bring a paperback. A romance novel that my sister loaned me.

I pull it out and start reading.

It's...good.

Really freaking good. And spicy...

And the next thing I know, I'm reaching into my bag. I remember that I did bring a little something fun for myself to try and reactivate part of me that's long been dormant.

As I pull out the rabbit, I wonder why Jansen felt so intimidated by the thing.

He never liked when I used it. I suppose, sexually, we never did feel quite right together.

I turn it on.

*Okay, here we go.*

Hiking my dress up, I put down the book and lean back against the pillows on the bed.

Oh my.

It's been way too long since I've done this.

Good thing I decided to go with no panties tonight.

Somewhat surprisingly...I'm already soaked.

But there's a problem.

The man who pops into my fantasy is that asshole.

*Yeah, that incredibly handsome asshole,* some voice inside of me answers.

No.

Not Jack Wellington and his ripped abs, and deep voice.

Someone else, please.

Some girls like the whole ‘controlling asshole’ vibe but they’re not for me.

But those piercing blue hunter eyes...

A wave of pleasure rips through me.

And he did have some rock hard abs...

Oh God.

I’m getting close.

And how could I nearly forget about that, ahem, third leg...

There’s something utterly sexy being able to picture Jack Wellington in both a suit like a CEO, but knowing about the ripped body underneath.

I think there might be something in this Costa Rican water that is turning me *loca* because the more I try to push the man out of my mind, the more he pops in.

I don’t just see him, either, I feel him.

I feel how good it felt when his body was pressed against mine.

The way he wrapped his big arms around me and pressed his toned body into me.

Okay, F it.

I adjust my angle and just go with it.

When I felt his whole body—yes, everything—I understood part of why he has such a big ego, afterall...

“Fuck me,” I murmur “Yes, yes. Yes!”

This is new.

I’m getting angry and turned on at the same time.

It’s not just at Stupid Face McWashboard CEO’s abs.

It’s about how I’ve not been getting what I believe I deserve out of life.

I turn up the speed on the rabbit and my moans get louder.

I let go.

Something about thinking about him has me more turned on than normal.

My mind cycles through scenarios...

I find myself getting loud—louder than usual.

**JACK**

**4** *0 minutes earlier*

“YOU’VE GOT to be fucking kidding me!” I bark into the phone.

I’m pacing back and forth on the balcony of the suite I keep at the hotel.

“Who the fuck blocked the Jungla del Sur deal? Who?”

My assistant clears her throat. “Sir. You’re getting very loud with me.”

“I’m sorry, Griselda.” I take a deep breath. Griselda is my absolute angel of an assistant and the last person I’d want pissed at me. “Not mad at you. Just the situation.”

“Yes, you’ve been like this lately though. Have you thought about doing some yoga?”

I rub my temple. Maybe Yoshimi is right. Maybe my anger issues are starting to bleed into my business.

“I’ve considered it.”

“Good. I think it would help you. Anyway, let me see who blocked the deal.” I hear her clicking away. She’s based in our hotel corporate headquarters in the capital city in Costa Rica, San Jose. “Well, Save the Trees Inc. is part of a subsidiary... let me cross check it.”



Yoshimi is right. I have too much going on. I'm like Elon Musk with my hand in all these different companies I've started. I can't even keep track of them. I'm losing focus.

She continues typing. Even the beautiful palm trees of the jungle can't contain my fury. I hear a monkey howling. That's damn right.

"Looks like it was Halsted Capital. Ever heard of them?"

My blood curdles when I hear their name.

"No way," I bark. "No fucking way."

"What? What?!"

I think the vein in my forehead is in danger of exploding. "That mother fucker is trying to create a gold mine in the rainforest. A literal gold mine."

"So, Save the Trees Inc is..."

"A ploy. Save the Trees is a shell organization so they can pretend to be doing good for the environment." I grind my teeth. "Meanwhile, they're blocking my sustainable hotel chain."

I feel like I might actually explode.

And not in the way that I thought about exploding earlier with Indy.

"Thank you for your help, Griselda. We'll keep an eye on this."

"What are you going to do?"

It's the second million dollar "L" I've taken this week.

"I'll figure something out. Oh, and another thing. I add. "I need to have a cell phone ordered ASAP. A brand new one."

"Why, Sir? For you?"

"Just get the nicest one you can find. New number. New sim card. Can you put 12 months of prepaid service on it? Use my card."

"Of course, Sir."

“Also, I’m sending you an old phone. I need you to see if you can get that computer place in the capital to fix it.”

“Yes Sir, of course.”

“What are the revenue numbers for Wellington Media last quarter?”

“In the positive to the tune of three hundred thirty two million profit.”

My lips quirk in a small smile.

“Some good news.”

“Looks like whatever you did while you were traveling to Chicago worked.”

“Excellent news.”

I hang up with her and head out on my balcony for some fresh air.

Sitting on my balcony, I consider smoking a stogie, but opt instead for a good old fashioned cerveza.

Yoshimi could not be more right. What am I doing right now? I’m all over the place.

I pull out my wallet, and pull out the picture of Fay and I. It’s one of my favorite pictures.

We were twenty-two. Smiling like idiots, drunk as hell after being out all night at the bars in college.

I can get mad all I want about my ex-girlfriend cheating on me. But the truth is, I wasn’t in it. The truth is, she knew I was still in love with Fay when we were together.

A single tear rolls down my eye.

Why did Fay have to die like that? It’s such fucking bullshit. I don’t even like thinking about how it all happened.

After twenty-five, I was never the same and that’s the truth. Fay would be disgusted with me for being an asshole to random strangers like Amelia.

I need to be better. It’s true—I’ve lost perspective of the things that matter.

But after Fay was gone, nothing seemed to matter. Maybe nothing *has* mattered since then. I've become a ruthless businessman, almost a shell of that young man she fell in love with before she died. That man didn't give a shit about money. For almost ten years it's been all I care about. Maybe because I know money isn't going to die tragically.

I take out my phone and pull up my company app so I can see Amelia's stats in her time at my company.

Damn. She really did have great numbers and reports. Forgot her report one time. That's no big deal.

I look at her background on LinkedIn.

Damn. Yale Business school? And she's not one of those conceited people who throws it in your face, like all of my buddies at Harvard.

Studied abroad in France. Wow.

And not Paris, like everyone else. She went to Marseilles.

She's well rounded.

And just like that, I realize how shallow of a fuck I was for being exclusively turned on by her curvy body in that blue bikini. And I'm wanting to have a more in depth conversation with her about life.

I put my phone away and take one more look at the picture of Fay and I, drunk on life.

"I need to do better, Fay. Sorry," I whisper, then put the photo back in my wallet.

I take the last swig of my beer. I need to do better not for her, but for me.

After that, I head down to the floor to survey the scene.

"Anything out of the ordinary, tonight?" I ask Antolin, the floor manager.

Antolin and I usually meet up after my surfing session, before dinner, where he gives me a breakdown of how everything is going at The Big Iguana, my hotel.

Antolin is my confidant at this location.

We stand next to each other on the second story balcony that overlooks the restaurant.

“No, nothing out of the ordinary,” he says. “We do have a few rowdy tourists who are getting a bit drunk at table eight.”

“Excellent.” Drunk tourists spend lots of money, as long as they don’t get out of hand.

Antolin and I walk slowly downstairs.

The first thing I see, behind reception, is an eye sore. A board behind the desk.

“Why is that surfboard just sitting there at reception?” I ask Antonlin. “I know we’re a surfing resort, but we’re high class. We’re not a hostel.”

“We had a special delivery come in,” he says, “Ronaldo picked it up on his second ride this afternoon. I think the bellhop called in sick today, so no one has taken it up yet. Sorry about that.”

Maybe some bosses would let little details like that go. But I’m a man of detail.

“Who’s it belong to?”

“Room 234. A Miss Amelia Hansen. I’ll find someone to bring it up.”

“I’ll bring it up,” I say before Antolin has a chance to radio to the bellhop. “I’m heading upstairs anyway.”

Antolin gives me a funny look. He’s not used to me doing the low level tasks.

“If you insist, Sir,” he says.

I pick up the surfboard.

“I’ll head up now with this surfboard to 234. Always good to add that personal touch of customer service here, you know?”

“Claro, Jefe.”

I head upstairs to 234 with the board.

Standing a few feet from the door, I take a deep breath.

I dial Yoshimi.

“Hey, can you just listen and make sure my apology seems authentic if I rehearse it real quick?”

“Is it authentic?” she asks.

“Yes, of course it is.”

“Give it a try.”

I clear my throat. “Okay, here we go. Hey, Amelia, I feel like crap after getting your phone ruined. Especially the part about your dad’s pictures being saved on there. Also, it’s not safe for a female to be traveling and not have a phone. Your stay is complimentary, and your new phone is being overnighted here, stat. Until then, if you need anything, let me know personally. I know you probably think I’m the biggest of dicks you’ve ever met. I’m working on that. And hopefully, I didn’t ruin your vacation.”

She’s silent.

“Is it okay?”

“Maybe leave off the part about you being the biggest she’s ever known. This is an apology. It’s not about you. For once, let it not be about you.”

“It’s...you know. It’s a good size though,” I joke.

I can practically hear Yoshimi rolling her eyes. “Jack.”

“I’m kidding,” I say. “I actually didn’t notice that innuendo. No dick jokes during the apology. Got it.”

She sighs. “Other than that, yes. It passes. I gotta go. Good luck!”

I pick up the surfboard, head over to the door, and knock.

No answer.

I knock again, louder this time.

I can hear some sort of noise inside but I can’t quite make it out.

What is that?

It's a strange sound. A slight buzzing, like a razor.

Concerned, I put my ear to the door.

I hear Amelia's voice. And she's moaning.

In pleasure.

*Nope. That's not a razor.*

Did she meet with Brad already?

Something coils in my insides. Jealousy, I think.

Honestly? This is an abuse of power. I should just let her be, but instead, I whip out my master key and open the door, my heart pounding with curiosity.

My eyes widen in absolute shock at what I see.

She's got a dress on, pulled up above her waist. Her legs are spread wide open though.

I wait for a moment, jaw open, waiting for another man to come through the bathroom or something.

But there's no surfer boy around, just her.

And it's the hottest damn sight of my life.

"Fuck you, Jack," she mumbles.

Dear God, *Indy*.

I've made up my mind that I would, in fact, like to get to know you.

But it's like that, now, is it?

## AMELIA

**R**ight as I'm reaching the—ahem, peak—there's a knock at the door.

I ignore it. For some reason this turns me on more, knowing that someone is just outside the door. I get louder.

Another knock, harder. Maybe someone is at the wrong door. They'll figure it out.

I'm lost, away in fantasyland. I can't even concentrate on my book, and the protagonist is pretty hot.

Stupid Jack Wellington keeps popping into my mind.

"Fuck you, Jack," I mumble.

My heart drops to my knees as the next wave of pleasure rips through me.

Oh God.

I'm getting close.

Suddenly, my jaw drops and an added wave of fear-filled butterflies tears through my body.

"Oh my God."

I see Jack Wellington's blue grey eyes staring at me.

"What. The..." I manage to say.

I mean I must have been so far away in dream land that I didn't even sense him.

Holy surfboards, why is the man of my fantasies now here with a surfboard?

The surreal part is that I'm basically naked—just my dress is on, pulled up to my stomach. I'm giving him a free show here.

“Had a...surfboard delivery for you and...I thought you might be in trouble based on the screams...uh, fuck. Sorry. Jesus, Indy. Ah, that doesn't look like trouble you're in.”

He grins.

“Trouble. You thought I was in...trouble.”

“When I heard the screams...and now...fuck you look so sexy.”

My mouth hangs open and I search for a quippy response to him but I've got nothing.

I've never been walked in on like this, in such a compromising position.

He doesn't turn away though. His eyes lock on mine and he smirks.

Smirks.

“You shouldn't...be...here,” I manage to moan, weakly.

I should be telling him to screw right off.

But the truth is, the way he walks in with his strong jaw and his big frame, in the state I'm in...

My mind just feels muddled.

“Do you want me to leave?” He asks. “Because, fuck, Indy.”

His voice. The way he speaks. I want him to just ignore everything I'm saying right now.

“I don't...let people see me like this. You shouldn't be here. Really.”

The door closes behind him.



“I definitely shouldn’t,” he says. “But this is the best fucking show I’ve ever seen.”

“Screw you,” I finally mutter with some resolve. “This show isn’t for you.”

He takes another step toward me.

“Then why are you calling out my name while you’re doing it?” He smirks.

“Oh, fuck,” I whisper.

I want to stop. But if I do, then I feel like that will be one more battle he’ll have won, somehow.

“Do you have any idea how tempting you are right now, Indy?” His voice is low. Throaty. That rasp is killing me.

“I’m literally going to kill you,” I tell him through my moans, though my voice is shaky, just above a whisper as I continue to use my toy. “I don’t care whether you own this hotel or not. You’re not allowed to be here.”

He smirks again and I can’t believe this is really happening. “You want to kill me? Is that why your cheeks are red? Because you want to...kill...me?”

I hate how he’s so cocky that he’s not deterred by my words at all. “Or is there something else you’d like to do with me? Could involve death. Perhaps...*le petite mort*.”

I lean my back against the pillows of the bed.

“You need to leave. I-I...I have a date with Brad soon.”

“You must be expecting Brad to be a real disappointment if you have to pleasure yourself before you see him.”

“Oh, God,” I mutter.

I hate to admit that I am so turned on by his cockiness.

He steps closer to me so that he is standing right next to the bed and runs a hand through my hair. “I guess you’re not understanding. So let me repeat myself.”

His blue-gray eyes lock on me like he’s a hunter and I’m his prey. “Do you have any idea how tempting you are right

now?”

I swallow down the ball of nerves in my throat.

Every moral fiber of my mind is telling me that this is absolutely, completely wrong.

If the scene isn't clear enough, I've got my legs open. Dress on. The rabbit buzzes against my clit. Refusing to stop despite his intrusion.

And, honestly?

Now that his musky scent is around me, my arousal increases tenfold.

I look at the mirror across the bed and see my pink cheeks heating up.

Jack's cheeks have taken on a ruddy reddish hue.

Ironically, one of my thoughts while seeing all six feet plus of him in board shorts—which is convenient because his abs and his toned arms are great to imagine pressed up against me—is that he'd look damn good in a suit.

“I'm not doing this,” I manage to peep out. “I've never had a one night stand.”

“What if we fuck for thirty-six consecutive hours? Would that still be a one night stand?”

“Fuck, you need to get out,” I mutter breathily. But I keep pressing the rabbit against my clit.

“You want me to leave. Okay.”

*I want to ride your stupidly sexy billionaire face is what I want.*

That's what I try to say, because, yolo.

What comes out, however, is something like:

“Mmmmmm.”

His hand still in my hair, he leans down, nibbles my ear and whispers, “I don't think you want me to leave. I think you need a hand with this.”

I flip the rabbit between my legs and run my other hand over his chin.

In a moment of insanity, I whisper, “Only if you know what you’re doing.”

He smirks, sending a shiver down my spine.

I’m damn near surprised at my own courageous words.

It’s the pile on of bad vibes I’ve had this year. Relationship loss, job loss...I’m tired of being someone who doesn’t take what she wants.

Jack doesn’t need any more than that as a sign to start.

“Indy, I know exactly what I’m doing.”

“Indy?”

“Like indigo. The color. Shortens to Indy.” He whispers in my ear, “I wanted to taste you the moment I laid eyes on you in that blue bikini. You’re so fucking sexy.”

Suddenly, he wraps his arms around both of my legs and pulls me toward the side of the bed.

He is quickly between my legs where he starts with his tongue, right on my clit.

I mean the rabbit was good but...

Holy shit this man is voracious.

He twists his tongue and runs his hands up my legs, wraps them around and grabs my ass.

I arch my hips up and into him.

“Damn, you’re good,” I mutter.

“I’m just getting started,” he grins.

He grabs for the rabbit, and tongues me while using the vibrations on my clit.

My toes curl and I dig my nails into his shoulders.

He growls. “Mmmm. I like it when you’re rough with me, Indy.”

“Gonna...holy crap you’re going to make me cum,” I mutter.

My entire body feels like goosebumps are consuming me.

And then... he stops.

“What the hell are you doing?” I ask.

He wipes his mouth, being covered with me, then licks me off of his fingers while he keeps his light gray eyes on me.

The gesture is feral. And sexy.

And the smile he has from tasting me makes it ten times better.

“Stand up,” he commands.

“On the...bed?”

He nods.

I do as he says.

“But why...”

He lays down on the bed, face up.

“Now sit.”

My eyes widen at where his fingers are pointing to...

His face.

*He wants me to ride his face.*

I don’t argue.

I just do.

I kneel down and he guides me onto his mouth.

“That’s a good girl,” he says. “Now fuck my face.”

I start moving slowly and tentatively.

He lifts me up by his waist. “You call that fucking? Thrust your hips like I know you can.”

I proceed to thrash against his tongue, his lips, his mouth.

I can feel the vibrations of his feral growl vibrating through me.

Then he puts the rabbit back on my clit and undoes every fiber of my being.

My ability for any coherent thought ceases. I just let this sexy Jack take me away to never never land.

My orgasm comes crashing through me without warning. I reach back for stability.

I instinctively put my hands between Mr. Beach Billionaire's legs.

Dear God, I didn't know they had anacondas in Costa Rica.

I gasp, holding onto him. He pauses for a moment.

"Scared?"

"No," I mutter. "Not scared."

Just inexperienced, maybe. My last boyfriend, well...he was fine but he was not hung like whatever *that* is.

And the thought of being fucked by him with that makes me even wetter as he continues licking me.

His grip tightens around my hips, his tongue touching just the right part of me.

Pleasure rolls through my entire body and I cum again.

I let out a loud moan as I do, my movements increasing.

Finally, drenched in sweat, I pull myself off of him.

My eyes are hooded and he's grinning, still laying back with my juices on him.

"Holy shit." I try to catch my breath.

I look over at him.

"I'm good," he says, wiping me from his mouth. "You can say it, it's alright."

"So I came. Big deal. Can you let your ego not be the main focus of every conversation for even a single second?"

He bites his lower lip. "Man, I thought after I made you come that hard you'd at least lose the attitude. Guess you need

one more.”

He takes my hand to trace the outline of his package.

My eyes widen.

“It’s so damn big,” I let out.

He grins. “No lie there.”

Whatever we just did was one thing.

But going all the way is another.

“Alright,” I say, pulling my hand back.

“Alright, what?”

“Alright, thanks for the surfboard delivery. Time for you to go.”

“Right.”

“I’m serious. I have a date.”

He jumps to his feet.

“You’re actually going on your date? After that?”

“Look, this was fun but I don’t really know you.” I cock my head and smile. “Plus there’s no way that thing is fitting inside me. More importantly, I’m the kind of girl who keeps her commitments.” I escort him out the door where he lingers for just a moment.

“Oh, and if you ever come into my room without my permission again, I’m going to post about it on Twitter, Instagram, and tell the Better Business Bureau. This was fun, but this should be a one time thing. Obviously...our physical attraction is there. But I don’t date assholes. Night!”

His mouth is wide open as I slam the door shut in his face.

He’s speechless.

And so am I.

My heart is pounding through my chest with the guts it just took.

The yoga retreat might be tomorrow but my personal growth is already starting.

Because the old me would never have just gone through with an encounter like that.

And that was the best O I've had in my life.

My lips curve up in a huge, genuine, mischievous smile, that I didn't think would return for a long, long time.

*Well Jack Wellington, I might hate you.*

*But at least you know how to put a smile on my face.*

*Even if it's because I kicked you out.*

**JACK**

**B**ack in my suite, I let the warm shower water run down my back as I obsess over her words.

*Should be.*

She didn't say it 'was' a one time thing.

Just that it 'should be' a one time thing.

That little phrase aside, *what in the name of Moses just happened?*

Fact #1: Indy is hot as hell.

But fact #2: I'm not the kind of guy who just offers to let random women ride my face.

It's been three years since I've so much as kissed a girl, let alone did something like *whatever the hell just happened.*

I let the conditioner rinse out and try to refocus.

I would have canceled, but if she is going on a date, then so will I.

What is her name again?

Kate. I snap my fingers together. Kate from upstate.

All I really want to do is go another round or two with Indy.

I can't believe I just did that.

I went in there, with all the intentions of genuinely sparking some conversation with her about her study abroad.



About life.

And all she wanted was to use *me* for my body.

I was used.

I know, as a man, I should be happy about that.

But the way she kicked me out. The way she took control. That's not something I'm used to. No one does that to me.

And to tack on, what a..what a...

What an unbelievably great body she has.

Curvy as hell, just the way I like. Her brown eyes still have that innocent, doe-eyed quality.

And...fuck.

Now I'm getting hard again.

"Down boy. Down," I say.

Yes, I talk to my family jewels.

And if any guy says they've never talked to theirs, well, they're either lying or they're really fucking boring. I don't have a dog to keep me company, but I have my cock.

I fist myself, and fuck if the thought of Amelia isn't all I can think right now.

Those gorgeous brown eyes...the way she tasted.

"Fuck yeah, Amelia," I grunt.

I think about her, about those amazing natural tits. Those luscious lips...

Her sweet, sultry voice. How she challenged me.

It's been so damn long since a woman has been a challenge.

I imagine kissing on her ear, sucking her earlobe while I reach around and play with her hard nipples. How turned on would she be, how would she feel with my big cock inside of her as I thrust into her, holding her tight.....

It doesn't take long before I come undone, my orgasm coating the marble shower wall.

*Fuck me*, I want that in real life.

I haven't wanted that for a long, long time.

After I dry off, I put on the tropical equivalent of a city suit coat and tie: White pants, loafers, and a Hawaiian short sleeve button down. A glance in the mirror confirms I look a little like James Bond from the Sean Connery era, except with blue eyes.

Maybe some men would be a little salty after a woman comes on their face and then quickly kicks them out of their room.

Me?

Quite frankly, I've been needing a little spice in my life. And the fact that it came in the form of a five and a half foot blonde spitfire whom I walked in on taking care of herself?

And then despite the fact that I was there, she just kept going.

How absolutely bold of her.

I liked how feral she was, too. Once she finally let herself go.

I've been in the same routine for so long. All I think about is business, so the fact that she was able to entice me out of this rut is fine by me.

Still.

She's giving me a fucking complex. Maybe I'm not the hot shit twenty-five year old I used to be, but I look damn good for thirty-four. And I've done well for myself.

And she still kicked me out.

I hear her voice in my head again.

*This should be a one time thing. I don't date assholes.*

'Should be.' Not 'will be.'

I smirk. That's an opening for more, as far as I'm concerned.

I head back downstairs and check in with Antolin while I wait for Ronaldo to come by to give me a ride to Palmas en la Playa.

Palmas en la Playa is the best Italian restaurant in Corazones. Just to the south of the town, it's located right on the beach with the water lapping up to the tables at high tide.

I meet Kate in front of the restaurant. She's got brown hair and dark eyes. On the taller side and wearing a black dress.

A few heads turn as she walks toward me.

"Mr. Wellington," she says.

"You must be Kate."

"Good guess."

"Shall we?"

I hold the door open and lead her through.

They give us a table right next to the water.

"Kate, you look absolutely stunning tonight," I say as I take a sip of my wine. No lies told. She's got modelesque good looks.

I need to practice my anti-assholery.

She giggles and flutters her eyelashes at me. "Thank you, Jack. You're looking pretty handsome yourself."

I try to pay attention to Kate. By all means I should be all over her. But through the years I've learned to become more attuned but I've not been this distracted in a long while. I can't help but think about Amelia and the way her lips had felt on mine.

And not the ones on her face.

*Okay, getting turned on on a date, thinking about another woman. This hasn't happened before.*

I have to shake my head to clear the thought of Amelia out of my mine. Shit, her taste is still on my tongue.

“So, Kate, tell me about yourself,” I say, trying to focus on her.

“Well, I’m from upstate New York and I’m here for a yoga retreat,” she says, twirling her fork in her pasta.

She keeps going on and I try to pay attention but Amelia is all I can think about.

*Kate from upstate with the pasta on her plate.*

*Comes to Costa Rica and goes on a date.*

*Jack thinks she’s cool but has another fate*

*To keep thinking about Amelia, even though him she hates.*

Okay, I’m absolutely insane. I’m making rhymes to pass the time, spacing out as she goes into great detail about the guy she used to date.

I let a slight laugh slip out at my own internal monologue.

“Jack, is something funny?”

“Sorry,” I say. “It was, uh, just an old joke I thought of. Be right back.”

I get up to go to the bathroom and splash water on my face, to refocus.

When I return to the table, the server comes by to refill our water glasses when I glance over at the table next to us, where I see Amelia on a date with Brad.

I feel myself getting jealous. I’m pretty sure my nostrils even flare.

“Jack, are you okay?” Kate asks, touching my hand.

“Uh, yeah, I’m fine,” I say, shaking my head again. “So, you were saying, you’re here for a yoga retreat?”

*Focus. Don’t be an asshole.*

“Yes,” Kate says, a little awkwardly. “It doesn’t start until tomorrow, but I came a few days early. I’ve been able to relax and clear my mind here. It’s especially nice in January when it’s so cold back home.”

“Oh, the weather here is the best. Not as good in May though—that’s when the rainy season hits! So, tell me, what is your favorite yoga pose? And how did you get into yoga?”

At this point I’m just asking questions so that I don’t have to talk. She goes on for a while, then notices.

“Jack, is everything okay?” Kate asks, looking concerned.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I say, forcing a smile. “Sorry, I’m just a little distracted tonight.”

Kate looks at me sympathetically. “Is there something on your mind that you want to talk about?”

I hesitate for a moment, considering whether or not to tell her about Amelia. But in the end I decide against it. I don’t want to ruin the evening by bringing up another woman.

“No, it’s nothing,” I say. “I’m just a little preoccupied with work, that’s all.”

Kate nods understandingly. “I understand. It can be tough balancing work and personal life. Especially for, uh, someone like you. A CEO.”

“It’s stressful, yes.” I nod, feeling guilty for not being completely honest with her.

We share oysters and fish and wine at dinner, and she asks me about the possibility of going back to see my place tonight. She’s heard about my estate.

Fair enough. It’s pretty much impossible to miss it if you spend a day in this town.

“Nothing that great about it, honestly,” I say, holding an oyster in front of my mouth. “It’s just a big mansion.”

She bats her eyes flirtily. “Well, I’ve never toured a big mansion. So I wouldn’t mind checking it out. Unless you’ve got other plans?”

“Maybe we could go back to my hotel for one more drink,” I acquiesce.

“That works, too. In a moment? I just have to use the bathroom and I’ll be back.”

Standing outside, I give the yoga retreat owners a ring.

“Jack,” Josefina answers. “Long time no chat. To what do I owe the pleasure?”

We know each other from years of living in this small town together. She and her husband Chester have been running their retreat going eight years.

“Hey Josefina,” I say. “So I was thinking. Would you happen to have a spot left for your yoga retreat?”

“You? Doing a yoga retreat? Are you serious?”

“I am. I’ve been having some, uh, business difficulties and Yoshimi recommended it to me.”

“Oh. I see. Hang on for a moment.”

“Okay. We have one spot left. But Jack.”

“Yes?”

“If you really want to take this seriously, I’m going to need you to stay on premise. It will help you clear your mind from your current environment.”

“Seriously? I live in town though.”

“Do you want to half ass this or whole ass it?”

I sigh, looking out at the beach.

“What the hell. Who’s my roommate going to be?”

“It will probably be the last person who signed up back in December. A nice young woman named Amelia.”

## AMELIA

They seat Brad and I at a small table in the sand, the ocean crashing against the shore just a few feet away. Brad had taken his shirt off for the occasion, no doubt to show off his muscular surfer's body, but for once I just wasn't feeling it.

I can't get my encounter with Jack out of my head, how he tackled me with my phone into the pool like he was the boss of my life.

Followed by his walking in on me in a very compromising position.

And last but not least, there was the way he commanded—*commanded!*—me to ride his face in my hotel room before I kicked him out.

“So, Amelia, what do you do for work?” Brad asks, taking a sip of his drink.

I tear my gaze away from the ocean and try to focus on Brad. “Oh, I work in marketing. It's pretty boring, to be honest.”

*Worked*, I guess. Details.

But I don't feel like getting into that. “What do you do?”

Brad smiles. Clearly he only asked me so that he could talk about himself. “I'm a surf instructor. I get to spend my days on the beach teaching people how to ride the waves. It's pretty awesome.”

I nod, trying to feign interest. “That sounds fun. Do you have a lot of students?”

“Yeah, I have a pretty good business going. I’m lucky to be able to do something I love every day.” Brad grins, flexing his muscles unnecessarily.

I can’t help but roll my eyes inwardly. I’m not into Brad’s surfer boy vibe, no matter how ripped he is. All I can think about is Jack and how naughty and exciting our encounter had been.

I can’t believe I did something like that, but now that I’ve done it?

I can’t deny, I loved the thrill of it.

“So, Amelia, do you come to Costa Rica often?” Brad asks. “Or is this your first time?”

“Uh, yeah, I come here a lot,” I reply, my mind still far away from the present moment.

Brad chuckles. “Well, if you ever want to learn how to surf, just let me know. I’d be happy to give you some lessons.”

“Oh, that sounds nice,” I say, trying to sound genuinely interested.

Brad nods. “Yeah, I’m really into fitness and staying in shape. I’ve been surfing my whole life, too. It’s such a great way to stay in shape and clear your mind.”

I nod, trying to hide my boredom. “That’s great. I’m more of a yoga person myself.”

Brad’s eyes light up. “Oh, I love yoga! I’ve been practicing for years. In fact, I even taught a few classes back in college.”

“Oh?”

He goes on and on for about ten minutes, about yoga, and his practice and how much it’s meant to him.

Doesn’t ask me a thing about myself.

Not that I care to brag, but at least get to know me a little.



I feel my eyes roll back in my head. Why does he have to talk about himself so much? I can't even get a word in edgewise.

As Brad continues to talk about his various fitness routines, I can't stop my mind from thinking about Jack Wellington.

And right then, as my eyes wander, I see *him*.

Jack.

Jack takes a sip of his drink, and then stares at me.

The tension in the air grows thick. I mindlessly run a finger back and forth on my napkin while my heart pounds furiously.

“Amelia, are you even listening to me?”

I snap back to attention. “Oh, sorry. What were you saying?”

Brad sighs. “I was just telling you about the time I caught the biggest wave of my life. Did you hear anything I said?”

“Oh, right. Keep going.”

He's very attractive and his surfer boy schtick probably works well on a lot of women.

Just right now, not me.

Jack catches my eyes again. He's looking at me like he's a feral wolf and I'm his prey.

I can't help it—my lips quirk in a small smile.

Jack's date gets up, and he gets up to approach me.

“Oh my God. It's you!” Jack says. “So funny seeing you here again.”

“You two know each other?” Brad looks confused.

“We went to Yale together!” he says. “Well, technically I went to Harvard. But you know, Ivy league connection at all. We went to the same sports events and both majored in business.”

A chill rolls down my spine.

*Jack did his research.*

“Such a coincidence to see you,” I say. “I’m on a date, so...you know. See you around!”

Jack puts his hand on my shoulder, and my heart flutters.

“Yeah,” he winks at Brad. “Take care of this one for me. And if you want to grab some drinks back at The Big Iguana, be my guest.”

He offers a grin to the table, but before he leaves, he leans down and whispers in my ear.

“I’m not done with you, Indy. So while you’re bored on your date with surfer boy, why don’t you imagine me kissing your ear from behind, reaching around to play with your hard nipples. Imagine how that would feel to have my huge cock inside of you, thrusting, making you gasp for air.”

He drags his hand down the length of my back.

*Holy hell.*

My heart flutters as he lifts his hand off of my back.

“Just some old Yale gossip I had to tell her, Surfer Boy.” Jack raises his voice. “See y’all later, if you want.”

“Seems like a nice guy,” Brad shrugs, looking around for our server.

“Super nice,” I say, my voice dripping with sarcasm.

And right then I’m glad I’m not wearing panties tonight.

Because they’d be drenched.



BRAD IS AT LEAST A GENTLEMAN, and walks me back to my hotel room.

We skip over drinks, as I’ve had enough run-ins today with Jack.

I sink onto the bed that is still messed up from my tousele with Jack and pull out my laptop to email Nora.

Email. Because, you know, my phone is soaked through. I should have picked it up and tried the old bag of rice trick, but I was too fumed up when it happened to think straight.

“Hey, I’m back from the date. Nice guy. But...just not for me unfortunately.”

I hesitate for a moment before hitting send. I don’t mention to her the fact that possibly the sexiest man I’ve ever seen barged into my room.

And then proceeded to ruin my date that night by making me come harder than I have in recent memory.

It’s not something I’m ready to share with anyone, not even my little sister.

I lay back on the bed and let out a sigh. Maybe Jack was right when he said I spent too much time on my phone, because I’m not used to having downtime like this without a distraction.

I head out onto the balcony with a cocktail from my mini bar and take some time to think to myself.

This trip is supposed to be about taking some time to reflect on the direction of my life.

I pull out an old journal I brought. It’s where I update my life goals every year. I look at what I wrote almost ten years ago.

*By the time I’m in my thirties, I’ll be successful, leading a team, married with three kids and have a house in the suburbs.*

I laugh at that. I don’t feel old at thirty-two, but I also know I absolutely cannot go through another five year, sexless relationship that ends in heartache. I suppose I’ve got to learn to be more forthright and upfront with people, romantically.

But then again, I’ve also got to be okay with the fact that maybe my happy ending is different from what I once thought I needed.

That hurts my heart, but it's also a very freeing thought.

No matter what happens, I'll be okay.

And the whole leading a team thing? Well, I didn't get that either.

A silly grin pulls at my face.

I mean, a freaking *billionaire hotel owner* demanded that I ride his face today.

*My former CEO.*

And you know what? He might be an asshole, but he's hot as hell and that was the best orgasm of my life.

It occurs to me, it is only 9pm. I'm in Costa Rica, all dressed up, and alone in my hotel room. If I had my phone, I might just play candy crush.

I need to start looking at the bright side of my life, and view it as one big adventure.

I glance at the romance novel I was reading but that just seems like torture right now considering how hot and bothered it made me earlier, and without the release I was given from Jack this afternoon.

I decide to head down to the hotel bar, maybe I will meet some new friends. Ideally, I can avoid Jack.

But as I walk in, I see Jack still on a date with the gorgeous woman from before. She's wearing a black dress that shows off her killer figure perfectly. I watch them together, laughing and flirting.

What the hell—didn't he say he wanted me to cancel *my* date? And now, here he is?

Did Jack just invite Brad and I to have a drink with them to mess with me, and parade this bombshell in front of me?

I order a mojito at the bar. I'm here to have a good time, not mope about my non-existent love life. As I'm sipping my drink, Jack looks up and sees me. He waves me over to their table.

At first I ignore him. But I'm all alone at the bar, no one else here to make friends with.

A manager comes over to me.

"Miss Amelia?"

"Yes?"

The man, with the nametag 'Antolin,' says with a Spanish accent, "Mr. Wellington requests your presence with his party."

I reluctantly make my way over.

"Amelia, I'm glad you could join us," Jack says with a smile.

"Oh, I'm not joining you. I thought you had some news... or something."

"Nonsense." He pulls out a chair for me. "This is Kate. Kate, this is Amelia, a guest of the hotel who I, uh, met earlier today by the pool."

*Met.*

Yes, we definitely *met*.

I sit.

Kate gives me a friendly smile and we exchange polite greetings, but I can tell she does not want me here. I can't help but feel a twinge of jealousy as I watch them together. Kate has her hand on top of Jack's knee, she is all over him.

"How was your date with that online surfer boy?" He wiggles his eyebrows.

"It was great," I lie, not wanting to admit my disappointing evening. "How about yours?"

"It is going great," Jack says, grinning at Kate. "We had a really nice dinner on the beach."

"It was absolutely *delicioso!*" Kate exclaims, patting her stomach. "Honestly, one of the best meals I've had in my life. Oh my God, I had like twelve mouthgasms."

“Twelve...*mouthgasms*?” I repeat, raising my eyebrow as I make eye contact with Jack. He shoots me a sly smile.

“Yeah, you know. Like when the food is so good it’s practically an orgasm in your mouth?” Kate laughs. “Oh my God, that sounds dirty, doesn’t it?”

Jack winks. “Amelia’s just shy. She loves mouthgasming. And when other people mouthgasm.”

I feel my cheeks heating. I shoot Jack a dirty look, but his eyes flit toward the entrance. “Wait. Where do I recognize that guy from?”

I turn and see the man. My face falls when I realize it’s Brad.

*Terrific.*

Brad makes a beeline toward us.

“Hey, Amelia. I thought you were going to bed for the night? Oh, what’s up man.” He gives Jack a headnod, recognizing him from earlier.

Jack grins. “Hey. What did you say your name was?”

“Brad.”

“Brad. Nice to meet you. Have a seat.”

He pulls out another chair, so now we’re all seated around a table.

Jack’s eyes flit to me for a split second, causing my body to heat.

“Brad’s...a surfer,” I say, trying to shift the conversation in his direction. “Brad was just telling me about his surfing competition in...where was that?”

“Panama,” Brad nods, and then goes off on a surfer tangent about the difference between the waves in Panama versus Costa Rica, and something about the moon. Honestly, he talks like he’s high all the time. I think he might be.

Our server comes and brings a round of drinks.

“Very cool. I’ve heard they have nice, beginner waves in Panama,” Jack says, stealing a pointed glance at me. “Tequila lime okay with you all? I took the liberty of putting in an order for everyone.”

Wow. *Savage, Jack.* Nice dig with the beginner waves.

“Jack, didn’t you mention earlier that you did a surfing competition in Hawaii?” Kate says, putting her hand on top of Jack’s.

“That was a long time ago, before I was too busy heading a multi-billion dollar company to take surf trips every summer.”

Jack smiles and takes a sip of his drink.

I stare at his eyes for a moment, though, and I’m not sure if I’m imagining it. But I feel like there’s this depth behind him.

I can’t help but feel a little envious of Kate, getting to touch Jack like that. I try to push the thought out of my head and focus on the conversation at hand.

“Wait, What? You used to do surfing competitions? Was that before or after you graduated from Harvard?” I say, baiting him. He started it with the Yale-Harvard rivalry. Now it’s on the table.

To my surprise, the smile falls from his face. “After. I lived in Hawaii for two years and was a total beach bum in my early twenties.”

“Then what happened? Why’d you move?”

“Long story.”

“Okay. Well, we’ve got time.”

Jack clears his throat. “So how wild is it that you’re all here for the same retreat?”

“Are you going to answer the question?” I ask.

All of a sudden, there’s a thick tension in the air.

Brad and Kate sort of look between one another.

“No,” He says. “It’s called a subject change. Anyway.”

I scoff. “You really are an asshole, aren’t you? We’re just having a conversation here. Four people. And you’re so great you don’t have to answer the questions you want to.”

Kate and Brad look stunned.

Like no one has ever challenged this man in his life. I didn’t get pulled over from my calm drink at the bar to be pushed around.

There’s an awkward standoff between the two of us.

Jack takes a big swig of his drink and doesn’t say much.

“Yeah, I’m not really much of a surfer,” Kate finally says. “But it sounds like fun. I’m more into yoga and meditation.”

“Clearly it’s working, whatever you’re doing,” Brad says, flashing his eyes at Kate.

“I’m really looking forward to the classes and getting to know everyone,” Kate says.

“Same here,” I say. “I’m excited to advance my skills and see what works for me.”

“Me too,” Brad says, looking over at Kate. “I’m always up for trying new things and meeting new people. Especially when it involves getting in touch with my inner self. So Kate, have you ever been surfing?”

“No, never,” she grins.

“Well I’d love to take you sometime. After class or whatever.”

I can’t help but roll my eyes at Brad’s attempt at flirting with Kate. It’s clear that he’s enjoying shooting his shot with whichever woman is around. And you know what? Good for him. Honestly, I’m relieved his focus is off of me. I don’t have any romantic feelings towards Brad and I can’t pretend otherwise.

But as the night goes on, I find myself looking more and more at Jack. I can’t help but wonder if he’s still thinking about...whatever that was we shared, too. I can see the way he looks at me, the way his eyes linger just a little too long when



our gaze connects. And I can't shake the feeling that he's not as into Kate as he is into me.

Finally, we about finish our drinks.

"You know what? I'm going to head back to the hostel I'm staying at. See you all at the yoga retreat tomorrow then?"

"Brad," Jack says. "I regret I have some business to take care of tonight, and I can't do the gentlemanly thing and walk Kate home. Would you be a good sport and do the honors? I'd really appreciate it."

"Uh, yeah, I guess."

"It's okay. I can walk home alone."

Jack shakes his head.

"I'm afraid I can't allow that. This is a safe town but you just never know, once the sun goes down. Thanks, Kate, I had a wonderful time."

Jack hugs Kate goodbye and we watch Brad and Kate head out on their walk through the small town in the dark.

"You're gonna let Brad steal your girl just like that?" I joke.

"I think we both know she's not the one I want."

"Well that is unfortunate for you...because this afternoon was a fluke. I'm not usually like...that."

"You mean you don't invite handsome strangers into your hotel room every day and ride their—"

"Jack!" I cut him off. "Come on now." I nod toward Antolin, who is within earshot. "Besides, I did not invite anyone. You barged in as I recall."

Jack just grins.

He takes my hand as I get up, then places his onto the small of my back as we walk toward the steps, his touch is light but I can feel it heat my entire body.

"I'll walk you to your room."

"Why didn't you want to answer my question?"

“Why is it so important to you?”

“It’s important because I don’t understand you. You’ve got all the money in the world, it seems. You own hotels and media companies, yet you used to be a surfing bum? Like a literal surfing bum? Also, why are you single? It makes no sense to me.”

For the first time since I’ve met Jack, I think I see a genuine smile cross his face.

“I was a genuine, honest-to-God, surfing bum. Me and...” he clears his throat. “I basically lived in a shack for two years in Hawaii but that didn’t matter at all to me since we were—I was hitting the waves every day.”

“Then what happened, did you inherit Daddy’s money?”

He laughs. “You’d know how ridiculous that is if you knew my dad. He was a dirt poor farmer. Back in those days I was a surf instructor by day and a bartender by night.”

“A Harvard beach bum.”

“What about you? Why are you single?”

My stomach coils.

“You hit the nail on the head. Long relationship. Didn’t work out. I kind of came here to lick my wounds, to be honest. Enough about me though, how did you go from beach bum to billionaire owner of a media company and...hotels?” We head past the pool where we fell in earlier, then up the stairs. “That’s not a common life path.”

“Indy, it’s a damn long story, like I said.”

We finally reach the room and stop.

“I’m not going anywhere,” I say, cupping his face. “You can tell me. I mean hell, we were already pretty intimate.”

His hand slides down the seam of my dress and he presses me up against the brick wall.

“Indy. Just don’t worry about it. I don’t like to talk about the past, okay? The past is the past. We’re here now. You’re

looking so hot. All I want to think about is what is happening here, with you in this moment.”

I grab his jaw lightly with my thumb and forefinger. “So you like it when I ride your face but you don’t like it when I ask you big questions. Makes sense.”

“It’s not like that...exactly.”

“Do you do that a lot? Be honest,” I ask him. “I’m no fool. You’re a Harvard educated CEO with...that.” I gesture toward his pants. “The full package. You probably do that with a lot of guests.”

“I don’t, I assure you. You are an outlier.”

“I’m not like you think. What we did earlier...that’s not me. I was in a long term relationship that was quite sexless for the last few months and, well, I don’t put on shows for strangers. It’s just not my thing.”

He grins again. “Not a stranger, like I said.”

I shake my head. “That wasn’t me.”

“Who was it then? Do you have an evil—and very fun and tasty—twin?”

Something coils inside me as he slips his hand down to my ass.

“Like I said, I came here for a yoga retreat, to get *away* from all of this.”

He doesn’t ask, he takes a kiss from me pressed against the wall and I let out a desperate moan.

His lips brush mine, and he presses his body into me.

I can feel him—*all of him*—as he leans the weight of his tall, muscular body into me. His fingers interlock in my hands, and he slides them up against the brick wall above my head.

I’m reluctant to give in fully to him, despite the way my body wants to cave and let myself go.

My stomach flips. Jack has ignited something inside me that I haven’t felt in a long, long time.

He pulls back, our breath shaking a little as we stare at each other. “Was that our first kiss?” He asks.

I grin, pushing him back so I can step away from the wall. “Yes. Because there was no kissing with what we did earlier. Goodnight, Jack.”

I head into my hotel room and shut the door.

I can feel him outside, stunned. There is not a single doubt in my mind that he is a man who is not used to hearing no.

I sink into my chair for a moment to cool off.

I don’t think I’ve been as attracted to a man...possibly ever.

But I’m not making the mistake of inviting in a man who is basically a walking red flag.

Well...not making it *again*.

Not even if I have to fight how turned on I am from that kiss.

After a minute, my racing heart slows and I let out the breath I was holding in, finally hearing Jack’s footsteps as he walks away.

I have to remind myself that despite our attraction, he’s not the man for me.

**AMELIA**

**T**he next morning I wake up to the sound of a loud knocking.

“Go away,” I mumble.

The knocking comes again. Louder this time.

“I said go away, Jack. Never again.”

“This is housekeeping,” a woman’s voice says in a Spanish accent.

I roll over in bed. What time is it?

I pull the curtains open and sunlight streams in, which doesn’t make sense to me.

I’d set my alarm for eight a.m. the night before.

...Right?

I check the digital clock.

Eleven Twenty-five.

Whoa!

“Housekeeping!” the voice says again.

I open the door and smile. “I’m so sorry. Looks like I somehow overslept. Give me about ten minutes.”

I gather up my things and head to the front desk to check out. The staff member behind the desk has jet black hair with a name tag that says Antolin.

The manager from yesterday.

I eavesdrop on the conversation he's having on the phone.

"Yes, Mr. Wellington," he says into his phone. "Of course, Sir. Whatever you need, Sir. Yes, I will cover for the next three weeks. I've told you, I've got things under control."

Antolin hangs up the phone and heaves a heavy sigh.

"Hello, Miss, how may I help you?" he asks me, attempting a smile.

"I'd like to check out. And could you also call a taxi?"

Just then, Ronaldo, my driver from yesterday, sweeps toward me.

"Did someone say taxi?"

As Ronaldo loads my things into the car, he gestures toward the front seat, letting me know that I can sit up close to him if I feel more comfortable.

"Do you just wait here all day?" I ask him, getting in front.

"Some days I have long rides planned. Others are slow. Where are you headed this time?"

"Just to the Zen Haven Yoga Center. Do you know where that is?"

"Of course. A local trip this time. Very easy."

"So Ronaldo," I ask him as we drive over the bumpy dirt road. "What else can you tell me about Mr. Wellington?"

"Mr. Wellington?" I feel like Ronaldo's playing dumb.

I pat Ronaldo's shoulder. "Cut the crap. What's he really like?"

The grin on Ronaldo's face disappears for a moment.

"He's a rich man. And a powerful man. Is he a bad man? I don't know. Some people don't like him here."

My heart kicks into overdrive.

"A bad man? How could he be a bad man?"

Ronaldo turns on another dirt road and we're already at the gate of the yoga retreat center.

I give him a smile and a generous tip, accepting my bags in return.

Ronaldo laughs. “I think it’s better if you find out for yourself. I have a policy of not talking poorly about people. Why are you so curious, all of a sudden?”

*Because his tongue was inside me and, quite frankly, I wouldn’t mind having more of him inside me.*

“No reason, really. Just seems like he’s kind of a known guy around town, and I thought it would be helpful to know more as I am staying here for a while.”

“If you’re curious about things, hija, you should ask him yourself.”

A wooden white and orange sign with the name *Zen Haven Yoga Center* frames the entrance to the Yoga Retreat.

Sometimes photos can be deceptive, but this place is a dream. It absolutely matches the photos from online.

It’s a few blocks from the beach.

And as I pass through the gates, I can hear monkeys in the trees.

*Real monkeys.*

This warms my heart.

Where my old apartment was in the city, I always felt so separated from nature. But here, it’s like I’m integrated into it.

There’s a pool on the side of the two story building.

A woman with graying brown hair opens the door of the first story building as I tentatively approach.

“You must be Amelia.”

“That’s me,” I smile. “How did you know?”

“Welcome! I’m Josefina, your co-hostess.” She hugs me and kisses me on the cheek. “I knew because everyone else has already checked in this morning.”

“Sorry I’m late. I slept through my alarm.”

“No worries, Amelia. Put your things down and come upstairs to the studio. We’re doing our first class right now.”

Once I pass through the upstairs and into the yoga studio, I find a sea of eyes looking back at me.

There are at least twenty or so other yogis...

Here for enlightenment.

A man whom I recognize from the website as being Josefina’s cohost and husband sits in a lotus position, in front of the class some students are standing, and others are seated.

He stands up when I enter. “You must be Amelia! You missed part one of the orientation where we say everyone’s names, but never fear. It’s a friendly group! Class, everyone say, ‘hi, Amelia!’”

“Hi, Amelia!” everyone says in unison.

“Hi,” I offer a wave back.

I walk in front of the class, suddenly feeling nerves like I’m a freshman in high school and know no one here. Brad and Kate sit in the back of class and wave at me.

“My name is Chester. Nice to meet you, Amelia.”

He shakes my hand, bows a little, and then kisses both of my cheeks, a rather unorthodox greeting but I suppose I’ll get used to the closeness with this yoga stuff.

“Okay, why don’t you head to the back. Your partner has a mat set up for you back there. You’re just in time—we’re taking a short break and we’ll start the rules orientation shortly. The only stuff you missed were ice breakers.”

“Thank you, Chester,” I say and start heading that way. The eyes of smiling strangers watch me as I step between their mats. Kate and Brad are off to the side, and they both wave to me as I walk by.

When I arrive to the only available mat, my heart stops.

The color runs out of my face.



Because in the back corner, seated in the lotus position, is the arrogant, pompous man that I've been both incredibly intrigued by, and should be trying to get away from.

"Hello, Amelia." The man's voice is low, guttural, and—I hate to admit—effin sexy. And I already detest him.

I hate to admit that wearing only a tank top and shorts, Jack looks incredible.

He offers that pompous, half smile of his.

"There's this new invention, you know," he says. "It's called a clock. Helps you be on time. You should try one."

I try to steady my breathing and keep my voice cool as I respond, ignoring his dig.

"Well I usually set the alarm on my phone, but that option is under water."

He's wearing a smug look that makes me want to slap him. There's also something else in his gaze, something that makes my heart race and my body heat up.

He leans in and whispers close to my ear. "Studies do statistically show that you sleep better when you aren't looking at screens before bed."

I shake my head. "Thanks, Harvard. Studies also statistically show that you're an asshole."

We notice a man standing next to us's ear perk up, probably trying to piece together what our dialogue is about.

"Or, maybe you slept well because you were..."

The man is now actively looking and listening at us.

"Finally able to get into that special yoga pose."

"I don't recall that," I say.

"You know. The one your boyfriend couldn't quite make happen for you."

The man, who has longish hair and green eyes, approaches us.

"Which pose are you talking about?"

“It’s called the flying raven pose.” Jack says.

I internally roll my eyes. Here we go.

“My name is Brian, by the way.” We tell him our names.  
“What’s that pose look like?”

“It’s Amelia’s favorite pose. She’ll gladly demonstrate it for you. Amelia? Show him.”

My cheeks turn beet red.

I shoot Jack a look that lets him know I’m going to get him back for this.

“Actually, Jack should demonstrate flying raven pose. He’s so good at it.”

I bite my lower lip, stifling a laugh.

“If you’re feeling shy, I certainly will. It’s like this.”

Jack gets down on all fours and leans back a little bit.

“Now you’ve really got to get into it here. Just let it go.”

He then kneels with his knees spread.

Jack actually *mimics* me riding his face. It’s all I can do to keep myself from laughing uncontrollably.

“This is the heart of the flying raven pose. Just like this.”  
He grins.

Brian looks at Jack puzzledly.

“And it makes you...sleep better?”

Jack stands up. “Oh yeah. About ten minutes of this a day will make you sleep like a baby. Like you’ll sleep twelve hours straight through.” Jack shoots me a look. “Right, Amelia?”

I clear my throat. “I can’t deny it.”

Brian glances between the two of us. “Are you two married?”

“Oh, no, no, no,” I say more quickly than I mean to. “I just ran into Jack at the hotel yesterday when he was practicing his downward dog. So we exchanged a few poses.”

“I’ve never heard of flying raven pose,” Brian says. “But I’ve been having issues sleeping, that is part of why I’m doing this retreat. Maybe I’ll give it a try.”

“You absolutely should. And if you need anyone to give you pointers, ask Amelia. I’m not sure why she’s being shy right now because she’s really good at it.”

I take a deep breath. As much as I came here to relax, I can feel the attraction between us growing stronger by the minute. And I can’t deny the slight smile I’m feeling at Jack’s ridiculousness.

I’m not sure how much relaxation I’m going to get during this trip, though, if things keep up like this. I can feel the vein in my neck throbbing as I try to tamp down my anger at this man for interrupting my three weeks of peace and quiet.

“Okay everyone.” Josefina speaks in her commanding yet calming voice. “We’re going to start the orientation, so please quiet down.”

Luckily all I missed earlier today was the brunch and an intro meditation.

“We’re so grateful to have you all here,” Josefina is saying at the front of class. “That said, we do have a few rules we need to abide by.”

She flips over a poster board to reveal a page marked ‘Zen Haven Yoga Center rules.’ If you’ll turn to page four in your handbooks, you can follow along.”

We hear a shuffling of pages in the classroom as everyone turns their handbooks.

I do a cursory survey of the packed room. There are about twenty-five or so yogis here. And of those twenty-five, I’d venture that about nineteen or more are female.

And I’d also venture all of them check out Jack at some point while I’m sitting cross-legged next to him.

Josefina continues her spiel. “Okay, so we want you to have fun here. The most fun. And to have the most fun and get what you want out of this trip, it’s good to have some

guidelines for your three week stay here. First of all, we prefer that you sleep on the premises here at the retreat. We know that some of you might even live in town, but to get the full effect, we've noticed through the years we've done this that people who live at Zen Haven have a more enjoyable experience and get more out of their time here. We make all of your meals so that you can use that extra time to read, to reflect, and to just meditate."

Jack clears his throat loudly enough that everyone can hear. "Might be good to get away from the mansion for a while, I suppose."

A few people chuckle, and there are some eye rolls.

Well, apparently they all know who he is.

"Okay, great," Josefina continues. "Now page five. The most fun page."

Another loud turning of pages.

"Which brings us to rule number two," Chester goes on. "There is no drinking and no weed or drugs allowed on premise. We need to be mindful of the people going through various addiction battles. No mind altering chemicals are allowed, aside from the delicious Costa Rican coffee we serve every day. And the natural high you'll get every day sweating it out with us during class."

"I know you said no weed, but what about ganja?" a young woman with dreadlocks says in the front of class.

Everyone laughs, but they don't address the comment.

"And rule number three," Josefina says with a smile. "No dating or commingling between you all. We get it, there's lots of fun romantic tension here. The rooms are coed. But please, no hooking up. So, to be clear. No sex. No hooking up here. Unless you're married. Or you'll be kicked out. Got it?"

One married couple in the corner holds hands and looks at one another lovingly.

I notice another man from the side of the room is checking me out.

I try to ignore it and focus on Josefina's instructions but my mind keeps drifting back to Jack.

I'm a little shocked at how attracted I am to him.

I sneak a glance over at him hoping he won't notice. But of course, he does. Our eyes meet and I feel a jolt of electricity run through me. I quickly look away, trying to compose myself.

I can't believe I have to spend the next three weeks pretending like I'm not completely head over heels for this man. I don't know if I can do it. I'm going to have to keep my distance and try to resist the temptation but it's going to be hard, especially when he keeps looking at me with those piercing blue eyes.

I just have to keep reminding myself of the rules. No hooking up. No commingling. No sex unless you're married. I can do this. I can resist the temptation. I hope.



AFTER THE ORIENTATION, Josefina and I walk up a spiral staircase that leads to an outdoor lounge.

"It's basically like a big, high end apartment in the middle of the jungle with a pool," she says.

She points to the pool outside. It looks like an Instagram influencer's wet dream, no pun intended.

"Not too shabby," I say.

She shows me around the floor.

"So here you guys have a big fridge, some couches, a lounge. There are four separate rooms in here with twin or queen beds."

"Okay, cool."

"Normally, we do try to keep everyone with their preferred gender but for this retreat, we actually ran out of space. So you're going to be with a guy. He's a gentleman, and a friend

of a good friend of mine and Chester's, so I'm sure he'll respect your space or I wouldn't have allowed this situation. But you two were the last two to sign up for the retreat so we had to put you together. He just signed up last night. Is that okay?"

I'm not super hot on the idea of a male roommate, but hey, if she knows him, I'm sure he's alright.

"Yeah," I shrug. "I mean, that's fine."

I can't believe my luck when I see him lounging on one of the twin beds, a smug grin on his face.

"Hey, Jack!" Josefina says with a huge grin. "Thanks so much for being open to this roommate situation. I think this stay is going to be really, really good for you and your business meditation practice. This is Amelia and I get a really good vibe from her. Didn't I already see you two talking in the back?"

"Yeah, Amelia and I are familiar with each other. She stayed at my hotel last night."

I think about protesting, what exactly am I going to say?

*I, uh, rode Mr. Wellington's face last night. Do you think there's any way we could implement a roommate switch?*

"I think you two are going to get along great," she says. "Dinner is at five thirty. We're giving you all of the afternoon to get settled. I think some people are heading to the beach to surf. See you later. Namaste."

Once she leaves, I feel the vibe shift completely when it is the two of us alone.

"Well, well, well," he says, his hot blue eyes raking over my body. "Looks like we're roommates. It's like fate is trying to bring us together."

I grit my teeth and try to push past him, but he stands up and blocks my way.

"What do you think you're doing?" I demand. "Did you set this up to mess with me?"

“Mess with you?” He laughs. “I barely even want to be here myself. I think yoga is a bunch of bull, but I’m desperate for change and my good friend told me I need to step away from my business and learn to meditate. And now I’m just trying to make the most of our unexpected situation,” he replies. His voice is quieter than usual, and there’s a hint of seriousness. “Besides, we did have a pretty steamy night together the last time we were in a room alone.”

I feel my cheeks flush as memories of the previous night flood back to me.

“That was a mistake,” I say, trying to push past him. “And one that won’t be happening again. I’m here to think and reflect and not hook up.”

*Even if they are as ridiculously attractive as you.*

“Fine,” he says. “Leave me alone, then. I’m reading.”

I check the title of the book he’s reading.

*The Substitute?*

“Seriously? You’re reading a romance?”

“Yeah. Apparently I’m not sensitive enough. I figure maybe I can learn something from these emotionally deep, yet masculine, protagonists.”

“So...do we share a shower?”

“The only shower is outside. Kinda cool, actually. It’s basically in the jungle,” he says without looking up from his book.

I look around.

It’s a small room.

“Where exactly outside, though?”

“You’ll figure it out. Use that Yale degree.” He winks.

I shake my head. *This asshole.*

I grab a towel and head outside and find the shower.

Looking up, I see a monkey who is watching me high in a tree above.

Does that count as a peeping tom?

Showered off, I am about to head back into the room where Jack is in the exact same position where I left him.

That's when an idea hits me.

I don't need my degree in marketing psychology to see that Jack is a classic case of a walking, human red flag.

Well, I've decided that there's definitely one thing he can't have, and that thing is me.

When I got my heart broken by the guy I dated before Jansen, I still had my dad to cry on his shoulder. He would explain to me that there were assholes and good guys, and nothing in between.

I gave assholes up a long time ago. I dated my share of assholes before Jansen. They had red flags and I always fell for them. Not this time.

Wearing only a towel, I glance over at him as I consider my next outfit.

He's got gray sweats on and no shirt.

*Gray freaking sweats.*

My eyes almost pop out of my head looking below his waistband. Is he...hard? What could have possibly gotten him hard at this time?

Is that just how he naturally sits or is he playing some kind of mind-game with me?

Scratching his abs, he notices my eyes looking downward.

“What?”

“What?” I recoil.

“What are you looking at?”

“I'm just thinking.”

“About what you want for dinner tonight? I can think of what I want.”

He licks his lips and lets his eyes drift between my legs.



My heart pounds furiously. This is seriously an unfair match. I need to up my game.

“No, obviously not that.”

I turn around.

“When you were just blatantly staring at my... merchandise?”

I let my towel fall, and grabbing my bikini bottoms, I put them on quickly. “I know you think this is some kind of funny game.”

Screw it. He’s already seen me. Might as well look him in the eye and put on a little show.

He looks so relaxed watching me.

“You’re pretty hilarious to me, Indy.”

I put my bikini top on, then turn around.

I sigh. “I don’t like guys like you. That’s what you’re not understanding.”

“Guys...like me. What does that mean exactly? You don’t like hot guys?”

“No, I mean pompous assholes. Thanks for proving my point by the way. No normal guy would refer to themselves as ‘hot’. That’s so weird.”

“Indy. I’m fucking with you. You really need to relax.”

“Well stop it, whatever you’re doing,” I say. “To be blunt, we can’t be intimate. You heard Chester and Josefina.”

He snorts, standing up. “Then the solution is simple. We will have to get married. That way we can have some fun.”

I push him. “That is hilarious.”

Jack takes my wrist and pulls me towards him, his lips inches from mine.

“It didn’t feel like a mistake to me. It felt like the best thing I’ve done in a long time. And I’m not a stranger. I’m your ex-CEO.”

“It’s not really comforting that you fired me, honestly.”

My body feels like it’s on fire as he leans in and presses his lips against mine. I try to resist but I can’t deny the pull I feel toward him. I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him back, our bodies moving together in a frenzy of passion.

I push him away and we finally break apart, panting and gasping for breath.

“I can’t do this,” I said, my voice shaking. “Seriously, Jack. We can’t do this, okay! I hate you.” Maybe that’s wishful thinking. I don’t *hate* him. But I definitely have a reason to dislike him.

“You hate me? Tell me why.”

“Honestly? You’re everything I can’t stand in a man, if it were all rolled into one. Pompous, arrogant, think you’re God’s gift to women because you’ve got an abnormally large bank account. And abnormally large...other things.”

He cocks his head. “And you...hate that, because...?”

“You had me fired!” I protest, my attempt to change the subject.

I expected him to be angry or defensive at my words, but instead he just nods.

“I am all of those things,” he agrees. “But that doesn’t change the fact that there’s a spark between us. A spark that you can’t deny, no matter how much you try to push me away.”

I feel my frustration rising even more at his calm acceptance of my insults. “You’re just agreeing with everything I say to make me angrier, aren’t you?”

He grins. “No, I don’t want to make you angry. But it’s also the truth. I am arrogant and I do think highly of myself. But I also own it and I don’t apologize for it. That’s something you could learn from me, Amelia. Own your flaws and embrace them rather than trying to hide them.”

I can’t help but feel a strange attraction to his confidence and self-assurance. It’s not something I’m used to in a man

and it's almost intoxicating. But I push the thought away, reminding myself that I can't let myself be drawn in by his charms.

"I don't need to embrace my flaws," I say haughtily. "I'm perfect just the way I am."

He raises an eyebrow. "Is that so? You think you're perfect? Then why are you so afraid to admit that you enjoyed what we did together?"

"I told you..."

"You can't deny that while it was naughty and unexpected, I bet it made you feel alive."

I feel a flush spread across my cheeks as I think about it. It had been naughty and unexpected, but also I had enjoyed it. But I can't let him know that.

"I didn't enjoy it," I lie. "It was a mistake and it won't happen again."

He steps closer to me, his eyes locked onto mine. "Oh, it will happen again. And you'll enjoy it just as much, if not more. Because deep down, Amelia, you like being naughty with me. You can't resist the thrill of breaking the rules."

I want to argue with him, to deny his words, but I can't find the words because part of me knows he's right. I do like the thrill of breaking the rules and being with him is the ultimate forbidden fruit. But I can't let myself give in to that temptation.

I can feel his eyes on me, watching my every move. And I know that this isn't the last time I'll be faced with the temptation of Jack and his irresistible charm.

"I'm sorry, Jack," I say softly. "We can't do this. You're my roommate and you heard the rules about this retreat. I need this experience, I don't want to be kicked out.."

He looks disappointed, but he nods in understanding. "Truce?"

"Truce."

We back up to create space and shake hands.

“I’m still curious why you were late, though,” he says.  
“Everything okay?”

I stare at him for a moment, perplexed.

“What?”

“Did you just ask me a genuine question?” I put my hand on his forehead. “Can I take your temperature?”

Jack laughs.

“I think it’s just jetlag.”

He nods back. “I’ll let you get a nap in then.”

With a final, regretful look, he turns and leaves the room.

“Oh, and Amelia,” he says.

“Yes?” I’m surprised at the emptiness entering into me even before he leaves. As much as I hate the man, there’s something about him that makes me enjoy being around him.

“If you ever want to talk about why you’re really here on this trip, let me know.”

He closes the door behind him. I sink down onto the bed, feeling a mix of sadness and relief. I know that I made the right decision but it’s still hard to resist the pull of desire.

A month ago, I was a lonely girl who’d lost her boyfriend and her job and her sense of direction.

Now, I’m knee deep in feelings for a mysterious billionaire...who is somehow my roommate at this yoga retreat.

I think about just lying down in my bed a bit to rest, but I’m intrigued when I see a heart shaped locket on Jack’s bed.

Does this man have someone he already loves?

I decide not to dwell and instead focus on unpacking my own things. As I lay out my clothes and toiletries, I can’t help but wonder more about this mysterious billionaire. He seems so tough and closed off on the outside, but there’s a hint of

vulnerability when I told him the photos had my father in them.

I shake my head, reminding myself that it doesn't matter. I'm here for the yoga retreat, not to get involved with someone.

I need to focus on myself and getting back on track with my own life.

But I can't shake the feeling that this retreat might be more eventful than I had originally thought.



## JACK

**Y**oshimi and I hit the surf later in the afternoon on the first day of the yoga retreat.

“How was your date with Kate?” she asks.

I take a big, deep breath of the salty sea spray.

“Did you know that the salty air is actually healthy for you? Something about stimulating the respiratory system...”

Yoshimi interrupts, “Uh oh. You’re avoiding telling me about the date. That means it didn’t go well.”

I chuckle. Even though it’s only been one day, I feel like so much has happened.

“Kate was great. But Kate and I just didn’t have a vibe.”

“Well, she must have said something to you about the yoga retreat to convince you to go.”

“Actually it was something you said. I signed up for the yoga retreat yesterday after we talked.”

But I didn’t know Indy would *end up being my roommate*.

This is either the best—or the worst—coincidence of my life. In any case, it’s certainly the strongest temptation I’ve felt in a good long while.

I bite my lower lip.

“How do you feel about it so far?”

“I think this is a very bad idea,” I say. “I don’t want to be away from my business for so long.”

Yoshimi nods in understanding. “Yeah, I can see how that would be tough. But maybe this retreat will be good for you in other ways. You never know, you might have a great time. Plus, a break from work could be good for you too.”

I sigh. “I guess you’re right. I just hope this isn’t a huge mistake.”

“You’ll at least have some amazing stories to tell when you come back. Plus, I’ll be here to listen to all of them.”

I chuckle. “Thanks, Yoshimi. You are always looking out for me.”

We surf for a while, enjoying the peacefulness of the ocean and each other’s company.

As the sun starts to set, I head out on the surf for a walk at sunset to be alone with my thoughts.

I walk by a happy family of four sitting together on the beach. A young boy and girl play in the sand together while the husband and wife sit nearby, holding hands and watching them build a sand castle.

I’ve wanted that at points in my life before.

But for years any attempt to have a family has taken a back seat as I built my business from the ground up. And then, somewhere along the line, I lost that desire entirely.

Eventually I decided maybe I don’t even want a ‘traditional’ family. Yoshimi moved here with her son and maybe they are enough of a family to me.

But the years have really flown by.

I’ve been building my business for eight years, I can’t help but wonder if it will ever be enough.

I feel the weight of the world on my shoulders as I sit down on the sand, letting the waves crash at my feet. I’ve rationalized that I’m building hotels and employing thousands of people. I can’t slow down, I am responsible for them. For their families, I have to keep working.



I close my eyes and try to clear my mind, but all I can think about is the constant pressure to be more and more successful.

I open my eyes and look out at the ocean, wondering if there will ever be a time when I can just relax and enjoy life.

Yoshimi's right.

I really need to just stop trying so hard to make things happen, and just let the world be what it is, and provide for me.

When I *don't* try to make things happen, some of the best things that have ever happened in my life do happen.

Like when I walked in on Amelia in her room to bring her her surfboard.

Just thinking about her brings a soft, genuine smile crossing my lips.



DINNER at the yoga center has already finished by the time I return, so I head up to the second floor to do some meditation and journaling on my own. Time to stop half-assing this thing, I have decided to really give it a chance and hope that it can help me separate life from work for a change.

Although if you overtry meditation, isn't that also not how you're supposed to do it? Isn't meditation the absence of effort? Questions for Plato.

Unfortunately, any peace and quiet I hoped to find is interrupted when I see Amelia in yoga pants and a sports bra—stretching her legs with the help of one of the other participants

My heart rate immediately elevates.

“Hey man,” the guy says to me with a hand still on her thigh, flicking his chin up. “What's up?”

I try to play it cool, but I can feel my blood boiling. If anyone's hands should be on her thigh, it should be mine.

"I came here to meditate. And you are?" I say, not even trying to be casual about it. Who does this guy think he is, touching her like that?

Amelia glances over at me and gives me a small, knowing smile. "Oh, this is Harold. He's from Boston and he's already a certified yoga instructor, so he's just at the retreat for a refresher. He was just showing me some stretches, my quads have been so tight."

I can feel my fists clenching at my sides. Yoga instructor, my ass. He's probably just trying to get in good with Amelia so he can make a move on her.

Some alpha tool trying to make a statement and mark his territory.

"Well, don't let me interrupt your... instruction," I say through gritted teeth.

Amelia gives me a weird look but I just brush past her and head to the balcony, which I'll use as the meditation area since I'm not going to get any peace in the main room. I can't believe she's playing games, but I guess this is how it's going to be.

As I sit down to meditate, I can't help but eaves drop on their conversation through the window. I hate the sound of Harold's deep voice and the way she's laughing at everything he says.

If I'm being honest with myself, it's like a knife to my heart. I thought she had more class than to blatantly flaunt a flirtation with another guy, in front of me. Not that Amelia owes me anything, but still.

If this was the jungle, I'd have thrown him over the side of the second story of the retreat center.

I try to close my eyes, take deep breaths, and calm myself, but apparently my jealous streak is bad and I can't focus on anything else.

After what feels like an eternity, I finally hear the sound of them leaving the room. Finally, I can actually concentrate.

But as I'm about to close my eyes and finally begin my meditation, the door opens behind me.

"Hey, can I join you?" Amelia says, poking her head outside.

I try to compose myself and give her a casual smile. "Sure, come on out."

She closes the door behind her and sits down on a mat across from me. "Is everything okay? You seemed kind of upset earlier."

I can feel my face turning red. "Uh, no, everything's fine. I just have a lot on my mind, you know?"

Like the thought of that prick's hand on your thigh. This is insanity.

Amelia gives me a skeptical look. "Are you sure? Because it seemed like you were upset when you saw me stretching with Harold."

I try to laugh it off, but it comes out as more of a forced chuckle. "No, no, I wasn't upset. I just, you know, didn't expect to see you stretching with another man."

Amelia's eyes widen. "So...you were jealous?"

I try to play it cool but I can feel the heat rising to my face. "No, I'm not jealous. I just, you know, care about you and I don't want to see you getting hurt. That guy gives me weird vibes."

Amelia gives me a sympathetic look. "Aww, that's so sweet. But you don't have to worry about me and Harold. We're just friends. He's actually married."

I can feel the relief washing over me. "Oh, well, that's good to know. I guess I just jumped to conclusions."

Amelia gives me a teasing smile. "Yeah, you did. But it's okay. I know you care about me and just want to protect me. That's what friends are for, and we are friends, right?"

“Friends. Right. Roommate.”

*Friends.*

I nod, feeling a little sheepish. “Yeah, you’re right. I’m sorry if I overreacted.”

Amelia squeezes my shoulder. “It’s all good. Now, let’s get back to our meditation and forget about all of this drama.”

I nod and we both close our eyes, trying to find the peace and relaxation that we were seeking.

After ten or fifteen minutes of that, we head down the stairs together, and walk across the retreat center to our dorm.

“You’re right, you know,” I say as we head down the stairs. “We’re better off as friends. We should pretend last night never happened.”

*Friends.* I have to force the word out of my mouth. As big of a boundary crosser as I am, I get the feeling that Amelia needs this retreat not to be about some guy, and I have to respect that.

“Agreed. Last night was a mistake,” she says. “I’m not a girl that kisses a man on the first date, let alone...whatever that was. It was insane. Okay? So let’s forget it. We’re friends.”

“Just friends,” I agree.

As we walk back into the main room, I feel a twinge of disappointment at her words. I know she’s right, but there’s a part of me that feels a strong connection to her. Even though I’ve only known her for a day or so, I’ve found myself constantly thinking about her.

I push those thoughts to the back of my mind as we return to our room to get ready for bed.

I feel my resolve conflicted. It’s everything about her. The way her full lips move as she talks, the way her curves fill out her yoga pants... it’s all too much for me to handle. I want to kiss her, to feel her soft lips against mine, to explore every inch of her voluptuous body.

I slip into my pajama pants and climb into bed, trying to focus on the book I'm reading. Amelia, on the other hand, takes her time getting ready, and putting on her nightgown.

As I watch her out of the corner of my eye, I can't help the strong attraction I feel for her. She's beautiful, with long, flowing hair and piercing brown eyes. I know I shouldn't be thinking these things, but I can't help it.

Finally, she climbs into the twin bed on the other side of the room close to mine, and we both turn off the bedside lights. The room is plunged into darkness, and for a few moments, we lie there in silence.

"Jack?" Amelia says suddenly, breaking it.

"Yes?" I reply, turning to face her.

"I just wanted to say that I'm sorry about last night," she says softly. "I don't want to make things awkward between us. I admit it—I wanted you badly. I...I enjoyed what you had to give me. But I don't want to lead you on. I came here to find myself."

"It's okay," I say. "Really, I understand. Let's just forget about it and move on."

But as I say the words, I can feel the tension between us growing. I know that she feels it too, because she suddenly turns to face me, her eyes searching for mine in the near-darkness.

"Jack," she says, her voice barely above a whisper. "I don't want to be just friends."

Jesus. This girl is the most confusing woman I've ever encountered.

"Indy, you gotta stop."

"Stop what?"

"Stop confusing the fuck out of me with this 'Let's be friends only,' no wait let's be more than friends. I'm a straightforward man and it's confusing. I respect your boundaries."

I grind my teeth together. What the hell am I getting myself into with this yoga retreat, roommate with a woman?

Should I just go back and stay at my mansion?

Somehow, that doesn't seem like it would give me the experience I'm looking for, either.

"You didn't respect them at all when you came in last night."

"And you like that? You want me to cross your boundaries?"

Silence. She gets up and turns a light on, so we can see each other.

"So what do you want, really?" her voice asks.

Before I can even respond, I feel her lips pressing into mine in the low light. The touch of her lips sends a jolt of electricity through my body, and I find myself kissing her back, pulling her close to me.

My body lights on fire, touching her lips. I run a hand down her back. It's so sweet, such a contrast to our absolutely feral hookup.

We kiss for what feels like an eternity, both of us knowing that we shouldn't be doing this, but unable to resist. When we finally pull back, we're both out of breath and our hearts are racing.

"Amelia," I say, my voice low and husky. Now I'm the one whose conscience is kicking in. Yoshimi is the one person in my life who I don't want to disappoint, and breaking the rules, and getting kicked out of this retreat would do just that. "It's going to be freaking obvious to everyone in this retreat if we carry on. We shouldn't be doing this."

"I know," she says, a hint of sadness in her voice. "But I can't resist you."

We stare at each other for a long moment, both of us unsure of what to do next.

“I’m sorry if I’m confusing you,” she says. “Friends. Really. I mean it.”

I nod, running my hand over her backside. “Alright, Indy. For real this time. Just friends.”

And then, with a sigh, we both turn away from each other and try to go to sleep, knowing that we’ve crossed a line that can’t be uncrossed.

I feel like I’ve come to this yoga retreat to learn how to meditate. But really?

I’ve signed up for three weeks of torture.





## JACK

**W**hen I wake up the next morning, Amelia is already out of the room.

Which is good. I don't want to have to watch her get ready.

*Too tempting.*

That smile.

Her voice.

Those curves. The memory of the feel and the taste of her riding my face.

*Fuck me.* I've got a real problem now. And that problem is my obsession with this girl who—honestly?—personally I don't see eye to eye with her. But damn if she isn't the hottest thing I've seen in years. Hell, maybe ever.

I bite my lower lip as my boner pokes through my boxers. Something in her ignited a spark in me that I haven't felt in forever.

With the sounds of the breeze from the palm trees, I start to stroke myself, and I start thinking of all the things I want to do to her.

*You want to use my face, ride me for pleasure? I like that. You've never been with a man like me, Indy. So I hope you're ready for when I use you. Cuz there's a reason I have a big ego. And it's not my billions.*

With a huff, I get up and stare down at my painfully hard, throbbing erection. With her scent in the room it doesn't seem

right to rub one out.

It's good that she's not here, though. She'd have to potentially see the embarrassingly strong boner tent I'm pitching this morning.

I smirk. Fuck, who am I kidding? I wish she was here to see it.

But if she wants to be just friends and be all wishy-washy with me? Well, I'm going to accept that and move on.

I wrap a towel around myself, then head outside to take a cold shower to cool my body down. I throw on some yoga gear, then head over to the main kitchen area in the adjacent building.

I'm here for mindfulness, I remind myself as I pour my morning coffee in the common area kitchen. Mindfulness, and some solution that's going to kickstart my next business venture.

Fucking mindfulness.

Honestly, I wonder to myself if yoga is just a complete scam.

*Okay Jack, let's try this without the attitude. Come on, man.*

With the fresh aroma of the coffee filling my nostrils, I head out to be near the pool and have some tranquility for the morning.

"Good morning, Jack," Chester, the head yogi, says to me as soon as I sit down.

"Morning," I grunt.

"Everything alright?" he asks, seeming concerned. He probably senses my 'aura' or some bullshit like that.

"Why wouldn't it be?"

He leans in. "Yoshimi told me you're here to work out some business problems you've been having. What's the trouble, exactly?"

I notice that Amelia is within earshot, reading a book on the couch nearby.

I hesitate for a moment before speaking, not wanting Amelia to overhear. But Chester seems genuinely interested and I decide to trust him.

“It’s my company,” I say quietly. “I started the hotel chain from scratch and it’s been successful, but lately I feel like I’m just going through the motions. I’m not sure what the next step is, and I’m having a hard time making decisions. I feel like I’m stuck.”

Chester nods thoughtfully. “That sounds like a common problem among successful people. They get so caught up in the day-to-day that they lose sight of the bigger picture. That’s where meditation and yoga can help. It allows you to clear your mind and find a sense of clarity and focus.”

“I’m hoping that’s what I can get out of this retreat,” I say. “I just want to be able to think clearly and make the right decisions for my business. I’ve been working so hard and putting in so many hours, but it’s not making a difference. I just feel like I’m spinning my wheels, you know? That’s why I thought maybe some meditation and yoga could help me clear my mind and come up with some new ideas.”

Chester nods understandingly. “I see. It can be frustrating when we feel like we’re putting in so much effort but not seeing the results we want. But sometimes, it’s not about putting in more effort. It’s about finding a new perspective and approaching things in a different way. That’s what yoga and meditation can help with. By quieting the mind and finding inner peace, we can gain clarity and tap into our own inner wisdom and creativity.”

I nod, feeling a glimmer of hope. “That’s exactly what I was hoping for. I just need to find a way to see things differently, to come up with a fresh approach. Do you think this retreat will be able to help with that?”

“I believe it can,” Chester replies with a smile. “But it’s not just about the physical practice of yoga and meditation. It’s also about letting go of our stress and worries, and finding a

sense of balance and harmony within ourselves. It's about finding a sense of peace and contentment, regardless of what's happening in the outside world. That's the real key to finding solutions to our problems and living a fulfilling life."

I take a deep breath, feeling a weight lifted off my shoulders. "That's exactly what I needed to hear. Thank you, Chester. I'm looking forward to learning more from you and finding some peace and clarity during this retreat."

"You're welcome, Jack. I'm glad I could help," Chester says. "But I have to ask, have you ever thought about finding a romantic partner? Someone to share your journey with and support you on your path to finding balance and harmony?"

I shake my head. "To be honest, Chester, I don't think that's something I'll ever be able to have. I have a lot of issues that make it difficult for me to form meaningful relationships with people."

Chester frowns, looking concerned. "I understand that it can be tough, but I don't think you should give up hope. Everyone has issues. A romantic partner can provide a lot of support and help you achieve your goals, both personally and professionally. Take me, for example. I wouldn't have been able to create this yoga center without the help and support of my loving wife, Josefina. She's been with me every step of the way and has been a constant source of love and encouragement. Not to mention fulfillment. And fun." He wiggles his eyebrows.

"I see what you mean. But to be honest, I'm not even sure if I want kids or a traditional family life. I'm not sure what I really want out of life."

"That's okay," Chester says. "It's not uncommon to feel uncertain about what we want out of life, especially at your age. But I think the key is to keep an open mind and be open to new experiences and opportunities. Who knows, you might find that a romantic partner and a family are exactly what you need to help you achieve your goals and find happiness."

I nod, feeling a little more hopeful. Maybe Chester is right. Maybe I shouldn't give up on the idea of finding a romantic

partner just yet.

As we continue to talk, I become aware of a presence behind me. I turn to see Amelia standing a few feet away, pretending to be interested in a display of yoga mats. It's clear that she's been listening in on our conversation, and I feel a little embarrassed. I'm not used to discussing my feelings and personal issues with others, but it seems like Chester has a way of getting people to open up.

After a few more minutes Chester leaves, and I try to focus on the business book I'm reading. But Amelia's big brown eyes keep flashing at me, drawing my attention away from the pages.

I'd love to have a full blown conversation with her, but I'm also trying to respect the "quiet hours" rule. We're supposed to not speak unless spoken to. I don't want to be rude and ignore her completely, but I also don't want to encourage her too much.

She reaches out and touches my arm.

"Hey. You want to go for a quick walk to the beach before class?" She flashes her eyes at me. "Friend."

I look up at her, trying to gauge her intentions. It's hard to tell with Amelia, she's always so hard to read.

Except, you know, when she's riding my face.

I decide to go for it, anything is better than sitting here in silence.

"Sure," I say, closing my book and standing up. "I could use some fresh air."

We walk down the stairs and out onto the beach. It's a beautiful day, the sun is shining and the water is crystal clear. Amelia looks hot even in her short shorts and tank top, her light hair blowing in the breeze.

As we walk, I notice the way she keeps glancing at me. It's almost like she's trying to figure me out.

"What's on your mind?" I ask, breaking the silence.

“I overheard you earlier,” she admits, looking down at the sand. “Talking to Chester about not wanting a traditional family and kids. I must say, it’s interesting to hear your genuine views on relationships. It’s cute.”

I feel a pang of guilt wash over me. I hadn’t meant for her to hear that.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean for you to overhear that,” I say, rubbing the back of my neck. “It’s just something I’ve been thinking about a lot lately. I’m not sure if I want a traditional family and kids or not.”

“Why not?” she asks, looking up at me with those big brown eyes.

I shrug, feeling vulnerable. “I don’t know. It’s just something that’s been weighing on my mind. I guess I’m not sure if I’m ready for that kind of commitment.”

She nods, seeming to understand. “Well, I can relate to that. My fiancé and I just took a break because he wasn’t sure if he wanted a traditional family and kids either.”

“You’re on a break? Or you broke up?”

She shrugs. “We said maybe we’ll revisit things at some point. We left it open. We don’t speak really. It’s been over a month now since the breakup.”

“What do you want?” I ask, curious.

“I want a traditional family and kids,” she says, a hint of sadness in her voice. “But it’s not up to me, it’s up to my partner as well. And if they can’t commit to that, then it’s not meant to be. I feel for you. I’ve had to start to accept that as well, that maybe I don’t get to have kids. But at the bottom of my heart, I’m hopeful.”

I nod, feeling a sense of respect for her. It takes a lot of courage to admit what you really want and to be willing to walk away from something that isn’t right for you.

As we continue walking, we come across a teenager selling coconuts. I buy one, and give him a healthy tip. He’s so appreciative, thanking me profusely.

“You’re so lucky to have such a pretty girlfriend,” he says, smiling at Amelia.

She blushes, but quickly clarifies, “Oh no, we’re just friends.”

“Ohhhh,” the teenager says, looking at me. “Why not? Do you have another boyfriend?”

Amelia offers a curt smile and we continue on.

“What happened last night was a mistake, I don’t normally sleep with men on the first night,” she says to me.

I feel a sense of confusion wash over me and I decide to confront her as we head back to the yoga retreat center.

“You’re asking me if I want a family and kids and now you’re saying we’re just friends? I’m not sure what to make of it.”

Amelia seems determined to set things straight. “Look, I’m here to reflect and figure out what I really want. I didn’t mean to confuse you last night by kissing you.”

“To be fair, I kissed you.”

“Whatever happened, that was a mistake. And that means being just friends with you, okay? If anything is going to happen...these things take time. I’m pumping the breaks.”

I nod, still feeling a bit confused but respecting her decision.

Okay, ‘a bit confused’ is an understatement.

I’m completely mind-fucked by this woman.

Something tells me, she’s confused, too.

I play it cool, though and say, “Okay, friends it is.”

Surfers pass by with boards, and she touches my shoulder. “Oh, one more thing. I heard about the business problem you were telling Chester.”

“You are quite the little eavesdropper.”

She rolls her eyes. “You have no room to talk. You’re an eaves-room-enterer. Not to mention a pool-phone-destroyer. I

haven't forgotten about that, by the way. And even though I'm being nice right now it's only because..."

She stops mid-sentence.

"Do go on," I say. "I want to know."

"Because I find you interesting. And despite your temper you have a good vibe."

"How do you like not having a phone?"

"I actually don't mind it—wait, we're talking about you, not me. So tell me about your business problems."

"Why?"

She shrugs. "Why not?"

"What do you know about business?"

She puts a finger up. "First of all, that's offensive. Second of all, I'm not saying I have a solution. It just helps to talk things out sometimes."

"Fine. I'm trying to extend my hotel chain to different countries, but I keep running into red tape. A lot of it has to do with issues with environmental law. And my hotels are very environmentally friendly, mind you. But my efforts to expand have been failing."

I feel like I'm spinning my wheels. I feel silly, all of a sudden. I'm a billionaire businessman asking this free spirit yoga girl for advice.

Well, okay, she does have an MBA.

Amelia smiles and pats my arm comfortingly. "Don't feel silly. Everyone needs help sometimes, and I'm happy to listen. Have you considered hiring a team of environmental lawyers to help navigate the red tape? It might be worth the investment if it allows you to expand your business and continue being environmentally friendly."

I nod, considering her suggestion. "That's actually not the worst idea. I'll have to look into it."



Why haven't I thought of that? Maybe Yoshimi's right. Maybe stepping away from the business for a time will end up being a good thing for me.

When I get back to the center, I shoot Antolin an email to send me a list of the best environmental lawyers in Central America. Amelia gets ready, and today she's wearing all blue outfit of Lululemon yoga pants and a blue sports bra.

"Why are you staring at me?" she asks.

"The 80s called. They want you to audition for one of their workout videos," I joke.

"Yeah?" she bites her lower lip. "How does my ass look?"

She turns around and gives me a great view.

All of the available blood in my body goes right to my dick.

"I see what you're doing. Tease me, flirt, and tempt me. Look, we're friends. I can't comment on how hot your ass is anymore."

She giggles. "You're right. I do enjoy teasing you. Can you blame me?"

I swallow down the knot in my throat.

As I watch her leave, I honestly wonder if I can handle three weeks of being here. She's like honey dangled in front of me if I were a bear.



IT'S the first full day of classes today and in the morning, we have a two-hour long class. It seems like a lot, but we spend the first half hour doing very low impact stretching, breathing, and meditation exercises, getting our bodies warmed up. Then, we work progressively more difficult poses until we're all sweating and breathing loudly.

Today's 'peak pose' is the handstand.

To my surprise, Amelia snaps into one, no problem.

Brad runs over and offers help.

No surprise there. Vitas, one of the other guys at the retreat, is also checking out Amelia all throughout class.

I stare at Amelia as she effortlessly holds her handstand. Her toned legs and arms are on full display, and I can feel the sweat starting to form on my forehead just from watching her.

Brad and Vitas may be trying to get her attention, but all I can think about is how hot she looks right now.

As she gracefully lowers herself back down to the mat, I feel a twinge of jealousy towards Brad and Vitas.

I try to focus on my own poses, but my mind keeps wandering back to Amelia. There's something utterly sexy about a woman with the awareness of her body that Amelia has.

Respect the friendship, I try to tell myself.

After our afternoon classes, I'm making a sandwich for a snack in the kitchen, before I hit the surf at sunset when I hear Amelia come up behind me.

"Hey, how was it today?"

I shrug. "Morning yoga was good. I don't really need to learn how to teach yoga, so the afternoon wasn't as productive. I like learning more about each pose though. How about you?"

"Well now that my corporate career has come to a halt, maybe I'll start my own yoga studio," she says, and reaches into her little athletic bag. "I have a friend from college who is in this environmental lawyers association. I had her make a list of all the lawyers who might specialize in the kind of law that you could need. Thought that might help your business quandary."

"Oh. Thank you so much. That's actually really useful."

My eyes lock on hers.

I'm suddenly curious more about Amelia and her life.

"What's life like, back home? Do you like it?"

She shrugs as she pours herself a cup of water from the faucet. “I don’t know. Born and raised in the Chicago area. My ex—he was a good guy in a lot of ways. I didn’t see the breakup coming. Thought I was going to get married to him, to be honest. It would have been a good life.”

I smirk, lean in and whisper. “How were his getting-his-face-ridden by you abilities? Was I better?”

She punches my shoulder playfully. “Shut up. You know, it’s nice when you actually talk to me like a human being and aren’t such an asshole.”

“Well I guess I better stop toning it down.”

“This is you toning it down?”

“That’s right.”

“What do you really want to say?”

I lean in and whisper again. “I want to say how I don’t give a shit about any of these questions I’m asking you. I just want to fuck you.”

She shudders. “You already know you’re hot. If you were actually a kind man, I might consider going on an actual date with you. But you’re not.”

Just then, Brad walks up the stairs. “Surf’s up, y’all. What’s going on?”

Brad looks slightly suspicious of the two of us.

“I was just telling Mr. Wellington how my ex didn’t make enough money for me to be a stay-at-home mom anyway. So now, I can just be a freelancing marketer and a yoga teacher. It’s the new economy. You’ve got to hustle.”

“Damn, you’re so rad, Amelia.”

“You’re rad, too, Brad,” Amelia says, deliberately corny, with a wink, and then looks at me.

I think she’s proud of that rhyme.

“Thanks.” Brad continues. “I just wanted to say I’m going to give Kate, Claudia, and a few of the girls surfing lessons in

a half hour down at the beach. You should come by. Speaking of rad, it's going to be totally rad." He looks over at me. "Oh, you can come too, if you want, Jack."

"Thanks for the invite. I think I will."

"Yeah, Brad is quite the surfer," Amelia says flirtily. "He's ridden many big waves. And I'd love for him to show me how to ride big waves."

"Oh we'll find some big ones," Brad adds.

Amelia shoots me a look and I see the game she's playing. This woman is devious. And you know what? I dig it. Maybe I need a little crazy in my life.

"Sounds totally rad, Brad," I wink. "You head down to the beach. I'll join you all in a little bit."

I see Amelia stifling a laugh.

Be...kinder? That's her problem with me.

I don't know if I can pull that off.



## AMELIA

“Okay, ladies, are you ready to catch some waves?” Brad asks us as we stand on the sandy beach, staring out at the ocean.

“I think so,” Claudia replies, adjusting her wetsuit.

“I’m so excited!” Kate gushes, bouncing up and down on her toes. Funny how she and Brad ended up having more of a vibe than Brad and I did.

I, on the other hand, am feeling a bit nervous about trying something new. Surfing has always seemed like such a cool and exciting activity, but the thought of actually getting on a board and riding a wave makes my stomach do flips.

“Don’t worry, Amelia,” Brad says, giving me a reassuring smile. “I’ll be right here to help you every step of the way.”

I feel a little flattered by his attention. Despite the fact that our date did not go well, Brad is undeniably handsome, with his tanned skin, muscular build, and sun-bleached hair. And he’s been flirting with all of us throughout the lesson.

As we paddle out into the water and start practicing on our boards, I notice a figure in the distance, riding the waves with ease and grace. It’s a man, and he’s damn good at surfing. As he gets closer, I realize with a start that it’s none other than Jack.

Figures.

I can’t take my eyes off of him as he glides across the water, his muscular arms flexing as he expertly maneuvers his

board. He's easily the best surfer out here, and I admit I feel a little envious of his skills.

I remind myself that—yes the man is hot as hell and certainly skilled with his tongue—but I'm not ready to actually form a romantic connection with him.

*Hm.* Interesting.

Maybe I was using my date with Brad as a defense mechanism since I'm still so hurt from my five year relationship with Jansen that didn't pay off. So I decided to swipe on the apps on my phone. I mean, really, I'm thirty-two. Am I going to seriously date a twenty-six year old surfer boy with no job?

Jack, on the other hand...

There's a man I could see myself falling for. But honestly? He's an asshole and he scares me. And then there's those playboy vibes.

And like I told him, I'm at the point in life where sure, would I want a fun ride with him? Yeah. But I don't want to go getting emotionally attached to someone I could never be with in the long haul because they're too much of a dick.

I laugh out loud at the ridiculousness of my own brain, giving me pointers on my life. Maybe Jack is right. Maybe I'm getting too attached to my phone.

Brad seems to notice my distraction and nudges me with his elbow. "Hey, Amelia, are you ready to give it a try?" he asks, grinning.

I snap back to reality and nod, trying to shake off my distracted flow of thoughts. "Yeah, I'm ready," I reply, determined to give it my best shot.

Brad gives me some pointers and helps me get up on my board, and before I know it, I'm riding a wave! It's a small one, but it's still an incredible feeling. I whoop with excitement as I glide across the water.

As we continue to surf, I feel a little self-conscious next to Jack, who seems to be effortlessly catching every wave that

comes his way. But I try to focus on my own surfing and have fun, and before I know it, the lesson is over.

“You guys did great!” Brad exclaims as we paddle back to shore. “I’m so proud of all of you.”

“Thanks, Brad,” Kate says, giving him a flirtatious smile. “That was so much fun!”

“Yeah, thanks for the lesson,” Claudia adds, grinning.

“No problem, ladies,” Brad replies, winking at us. “I’m always happy to share my love of surfing with others.”

As we gather our things and head back to our cars, I feel a little disappointed that the lesson is over.

But I’m happy that I’ve resolved that keeping Jack at arm’s length is the best thing for me right now.

As we’re wrapping up, I see Jack walking in from the surf with a young teenage boy, who is standing with a volleyball.

The boy is watching some girls his age play volleyball on the beach.

Intrigued, I walk over and introduce myself.

“Amelia, this is Kevin.”

“Nice to meet you, Kevin,” I say.

“I’m helping him learn to surf,” Jack adds.

“Are those your friends?” I ask, looking in the direction of the girls playing volleyball.

“Yeah,” Kevin says. “I don’t know how to play though.”

“Well, I played college volleyball,” I offer. “I can show you a few things if you’d like.”

Kevin looks a little awkward and shy, but he agrees, and we start walking over to the court.

“Wait, you played ball at Yale?” Jack asks.

“What, like it’s a big deal?”

“I always had the biggest crush on the volleyball girls.”



We spend the next hour playing volleyball and I teach Kevin—and Jack—a few basic fundamentals. I can see Jack watching from the sidelines and I can tell he's impressed.

As we're wrapping up, Kevin is all smiles. He's laughing and having a great time.

"Thanks for showing me how to play, Amelia," he says.

"No problem, Kevin. It was fun," I reply.

I can see Jack walking over and I can tell he's happy to see Kevin so happy. It's clear to me that Jack is attracted to me and I can't help but feel a little flattered.

"Thanks for helping out, Amelia. You're really good with kids."

"I love teaching people new things," I say, smiling. "It was my pleasure to help Kevin out."

"You're more than just a pretty face," he winks. "I don't care what everyone says about you."

"Are people talking smack about me?" I recoil.

"I'm kidding."

"Oh. Okay. Well I have dinner with the girls today."

"Sounds good. I'm going to head up to the meditation room for a bit," he says. "Catch ya later. *Amiga*."

We part ways for a while, and when I get back to my room that night, there's a surprise waiting for me on my bed that makes my jaw drop.



## AMELIA

I t's a brand new iPhone.

I pick it up and examine it, turning it over in my hands. It's the latest model, with all the bells and whistles. I'm in a bit of shock.

I look around my room, trying to figure out where it came from. And then I see him. Jack is leaning against the doorframe, a smug look on his face.

"What's this?" I ask, holding up the phone.

"It's a peace offering," Jack says. "I wanted to make it up to you for...you know. Not feeling bad about ruining your phone in the pool and trying to cure your technology addiction when I didn't even know you. That was over the line. I let my temper get the best of me. And like you say. Even if I'm an asshole I need to be...kinder. If that makes sense at all."

I shake my head, trying to process it all. "I don't know what to say," I tell him.

"You don't have to say anything," Jack says. "I just wanted to do the right thing. I know I was an asshole at the pool, and I'm sorry."

I look at him, trying to decide if I should accept his apology. On one hand, a brand new phone is a pretty big gesture. On the other hand, he's still an asshole.

I take a deep breath and decide to give him the benefit of the doubt. "Thank you," I say, holding up the phone. "I really appreciate it."

“You’re welcome,” Jack says, a genuine smile spreading across his face. “I’m glad you like it. I know it can’t make up for what I did, but I hope it’s a start. Trying to turn over a new leaf and all that.”

He holds a tiny black object in his hand. “I also got you this.”

“What’s this?”

“I had a tech specialist retrieve the photos from your old phone of your dad. Again, I know you think I’m just some asshole. But I actually did feel bad about that. And gestures speak louder than words.”

Tears prick at my eyes as he hands it to me. “Holy shit. Thank you.” I wipe them away, not wanting to show my emotions to him. “There was a trip we went on, my father and I, to Florida together. I know that might seem silly but he’d never been and my sister and I drove down with him—he wasn’t much for flying by that time. And now...sorry. I’m ranting.”

“Indy. It’s okay. You can rant. I’m interested. I like hearing what you have to say.”

We stand there for a moment, looking at each other. I take a deep breath to center myself.

He comes closer and leans against the wall.

Feeling drawn to him, I get up and walk over toward him, and grip his bicep.

“Did you get sun burned today?”

“Nah,” he says. “That’s just my normal tan. You looked good on the waves by the way. I’m impressed you got up on your first go-round with the board.”

I smile and give him a playful punch on the arm. “Thanks, Jack. You’re not so bad yourself. I’ve been wanting to ask, have you ever thought about teaching me how to surf?”

He grins back at me. “What, Brad didn’t do it for you?”

“Brad was good, sure. But I thought you could give me some extra tips?”

“Sure. We could hit the waves together next week if you want.”

I nod eagerly. “Definitely. I can’t wait.”

We stand there for a moment longer, looking at each other. I can feel the tension between us, and I can see the way his eyes keep drifting down to my chest. He’s purposely not even trying to hide his attraction for me. I know he wants me, and I want him too.

It’s wrong. It’s so wrong, especially considering that I know I can’t cross the line with this man again.

But I simply can’t resist the urge to flirt with him a little bit.

I mean, when am I going to be single, roommates with a hot billionaire on a yoga retreat again?

“You know, Jack,” I say, reaching out to touch his arm again. “I was thinking about getting a new swimsuit for the weekend. Do you have any preferences?”

He raises an eyebrow and grins. “I’m sure whatever you choose will look amazing on you. But I think you know what color I like best on you, Indy.”

I giggle and twirl around, giving him a little show. “Well, I was thinking something low-cut. You know, to show off my assets.”

I can see the way his eyes light up at the suggestion, and I know I’ve got him hooked.

I walk over to my closet and start rummaging through my swimsuits, making sure to give him plenty of glimpses of my body as I do.

“What do you think of this one?” I ask, holding up a bright red bikini against my short shorts and sports bra.

He licks his lips and nods. “That one’s definitely a winner.”

I grin, jump to the bathroom, slip it on, then come back in and twirl around for him to get a good look. “Do you like it?”

“I love it,” he says, his voice low and husky. “You look gorgeous as hell in it.”

I walk over to him, standing close enough that I can feel the heat radiating off his body. “Thanks, Jack. You know, I’ve been thinking about you a lot lately.”

He raises an eyebrow. “What exactly have you been thinking about?”

I lean in closer and whisper in his ear. “I’ve been thinking about what it would be like to, ahem...do you like you did me.”

I can feel him tense up as I speak, and I know I’ve hit a nerve. He clears his throat and takes a step back. The grin falls from his face.

“Amelia, Jesus. What the fuck?”

“What?” I giggle.

“I’m starting to think you might be insane. What have we said about crossing lines? You told me this was a mistake.”

I pout and playfully push against his chest. “Come on, Jack. You know you want me. I can see it in your eyes.”

Is this wrong? Am I wrong?

I just want to know...if he wants me the way I want him.

He sighs and runs a hand through his hair. “I do want you, Amelia. But we have to think about the consequences of the entire fucking yoga retreat hearing the noises you’ll make.”

He takes one more look at me, then puts on a hat. “Now I’m going for a walk to clear my head. You need to cut it out.”

“Or else what?”

He grins. “Or else I’m going to murder you in your sleep.”

My heart hammers. “Um...what?”

“Yeah. The serial killer vibes you’re getting? They’re real.”

“I can’t tell if you’re joking.”

He laughs, and winks. “Kidding, Amelia. The only death I want to make you feel is *la petite mort*.”

Something about Jack speaking French—even a tiny phrase like that—makes my skin tingle.

“Good night, Jack.”

“Sweet dreams.”



WHEN I WAKE up early on the third day of the retreat, I feel refreshed and ready to tackle the day’s yoga classes. That morning, I walk to the beach and meditate. The sun is just starting to rise, casting a warm glow over the lush green trees and sparkling blue ocean.

Funny enough, I spot Jack on the beach from a distance, and he’s giving surf lessons to Kevin.

This warms my heart. I thought all the guy cared about was his business and money. It’s nice to see he actually has people he cares about.

Obviously he’s not giving this boy surfing lessons for the money.

Like Brad, who charged us twenty bucks each.

That morning as I take my spot on my mat, I notice a face near me in the class who I haven’t been introduced to yet. Her name is Vylana and she’s from Denmark. We strike up a conversation during downward dog and I learn that she’s on the retreat to find some inner peace and relaxation. I can relate to that, as I came here with the same goal in mind.

After class, Vylana and I decide to grab a smoothie at the juice bar in the town. As we sit outside enjoying our drinks in the shade of the balcony of the retreat center, she asks me about my roommate at the retreat.

“Oh, you have a roommate?” she asks, looking intrigued.

“Yeah, his name is Jack,” I reply nonchalantly.

Vylana’s eyes widen in shock. “Your roommate is the billionaire? That must be so exciting!” she exclaims.

I laugh and nod.

*The billionaire.*

I guess Jack’s reputation proceeds him. “It’s definitely a new experience for me,” I admit. “He’s actually really nice and down to earth, despite his wealth.”

Vylana seems to be taking it all in, a dreamy look in her eyes. “I know who you’re talking about. I’ve always had a bit of a crush on him,” she confesses, blushing. “He’s super hot, too. Yeesh. You see his handstand pose?”

I pause for a moment, feeling a pang of guilt wash over me. I haven’t told Vylana about my own feelings for Jack, or the fact that we shared a passionate kiss—and more—just a few days ago.

On the other hand, she’s mostly a stranger, so why would I share my romantic feelings with her?

Just then, Brad swings by.

“Hey, are ya’ll going to the party this Saturday?”

“Party? What party?” I ask.

Brad grins. “So it’s going to be a full moon this weekend. A bunch of us are going to pregame somewhere and then head over.”

“Are you planning on going?” I ask Vylana, grateful to distract her from the topic of Jack.

She nods excitedly. “I heard it’s going to be amazing! I can’t wait to dance under the moonlight and let go of all my stress.”

I smile, feeling a sense of excitement building inside me as well.

“Plus,” she grins. “The pregame is at Jack’s mansion.”

“Oh.”



Jack walks by, stretching his muscles as he prepares for his own yoga class. Vylana's eyes light up as she watches him, and I feel a twinge of jealousy. Just then, a beautiful Spanish woman named Claudia who is in our class approaches Jack and starts flirting with him. Vylana's face falls, and I feel a sudden urge to protect my new friend.

I reach out and touch her arm gently. "Hey, don't worry about it," I reassure her. "There are plenty of other guys here at the retreat."

She laughs. "I mean, there are six guys here. One is gay. And Brad is way too young for me. Plus he keeps flirting with Kate. I think they might be breaking the rules. That leaves Vitas and Francis. For my money? I'm going for Jack."

"Maybe you'll meet someone even better at the full moon party."

Vylana smiles and nods, seeming to take comfort in my words.

As we finish our smoothies and head back to our rooms, I reflect on the complex dynamics at play here at the retreat. From my own feelings for Jack to Vylana's crush on him and the appearance of the flirty Claudia, it's clear that love and attraction are always present, even in a place where we're supposed to be focusing on inner peace and self-improvement.

But as I slip into my bed that night, I remind myself that ultimately, it's all about finding balance and enjoying the present moment. And with the full moon party just around the corner, I know that I'm going to have a lot of fun, no matter what happens.



## AMELIA

Saturday night, we assemble the crew to go to Jack's mansion and have some drinks before the full moon dance party, which is up at the top of a hill in the jungle.

There's surfer boy Brad and Kate, who have become quite close over the first week.

I can't prove that they've hooked up—and Brad continues to flirt with me—but it wouldn't surprise me if they had.

Even if they did, they won't admit it since it would violate the 'no commingling' rule.

There's also Harold and his wife Analise from Boston, who are a darling couple.

Vitas, a gorgeous Serbian man who has been giving me eyes all week is here, but I haven't even spoken a word with him yet.

Then there's of course my new friend Vylana, from Denmark, who I've discovered is a complete badass. Not only is she doing this retreat, but she's an olympian swimmer. We've become better and better friends since our first encounter.

The only hiccup is I'm a little worried she's going to make a go of it and try to kiss Jack tonight.

Which, I suppose, would be fine, considering that I told Jack very clearly that we could only be friends.

Even after we crossed the line. *Again.*

We all walk over together, and Jack's personal assistant greets us at the gate of his mansion. I'm curious to know more about what Jack's life and place is like, away from the retreat.

As we walk through the gates and up the long, winding driveway towards Jack's mansion, all of the women in the group start flirting with him.

"Jack, this place is amazing!" Kate gushes as we walk through the grand entrance of the mansion, touching his arm.

"Thanks, I'm glad you like it," Jack replies with a smile.

Analise can't seem to keep her eyes off of Jack, and I feel a twinge of jealousy. "This is such a beautiful home," she coos. "I could see myself living here someday."

Kate eyes Harold. "Better get on that get-rich quick scheme of yours," she says, and Harold laughs a little awkwardly.

Even Vylana can't seem to resist flirting with him. "This place is incredible, Jack. You must have great taste in interior design," she says with a wink.

I try to push down the envy and remind myself that I made it clear to Jack that we could only be friends.

"Yeah, the mansion is really something," I chime in, trying to sound casual. "I can't wait to see the rest of it."

As we walk through the grand foyer, Jack points out the various artworks and antiques that decorate the walls and shelves.

He tells us about the history of each piece and how he acquired it, and I can tell he takes great pride in his collection.

But as he talks, all of the women seem more interested in flirting with him than listening to his stories.

Vylana keeps batting her eyelashes at him and touching his arm, while Kate and Analise seem to be competing for his attention.

I have to suppress a laugh as I watch them all trying so hard to win Jack over.

Finally, we make our way to the sitting room where Jack offers us all a drink.

I opt for a glass of wine, while the others seem to be going for stronger cocktails.

As we sit and chat, the flirting only intensifies.

Vylana keeps leaning in close to Jack, while Analise keeps touching his hand and laughing at everything he says.

Harold is flirting with me, asking me if I've had a good time so far, which gives me a weird vibe.

Even Kate, who I thought was interested in Brad, seems to be trying to get Jack's attention.

I shake my head in amusement as I watch them all vying for Jack's affections. But as the night wears on and the full moon rises higher in the sky, I start to feel a little left out.

Maybe I should have been more proactive in trying to get Jack's attention too, or not shut him down the last time he tried to kiss me.

But rules are rules, right? No hooking up at the yoga retreat. Jack looks so unbelievably attractive though.

Vylana comes over and whispers in my ear. "Alright, wish me luck. I'm going for it."

My heart sinks. I've been steering clear of Jack and trying to follow the rules for the past week. And here comes Vylana, brave and cute and with no problem breaking the rules to get what she wants.

She walks over and whispers something in Jack's ear. He nods, and gets up to follow her somewhere.

Meanwhile, Brad starts to flirt with me.

I thought I'd already buried this hatchet. But Kate doesn't seem as into him tonight...

"You're looking really freaking cute tonight, lady," he says.

I sigh, and adjust my crop top and skirt. “Brad. You and I don’t have a vibe. I’m sorry. Plus, you’ve been flirting with Kate all week.”

My heart burns thinking about what Vylana and Jack are up to. He wouldn’t...kiss her?

No. He couldn’t.

He said that what he and I did wasn’t a regular thing for him.

But my imagination wanders now that he’s off with Vylana.

I try to smile and have a good time, but I can’t concentrate.

“Amelia, yeah, sure, but...are you sure about that?” Brad asks. “You’ve got a real cougar thing going on.”

My eyes widen. “Cougar? I’m thirty-two, Brad. Ugh.”

I take a deep breath and try to push the thoughts to the back of my mind.

“Brad, I think it’s best if we just stay friends. I appreciate your interest, but I’m just not feeling it,” I say, trying to be as kind as possible.

Brad’s face falls and he looks disappointed, but I can’t let that guilt me into staying with him. I deserve someone who truly cares about me and who I have a real connection with. Not someone who wants me to fulfill some weird fantasy.

I turn away from Brad and head inside, my emotions getting the best of me. I need a moment to compose myself and find a place to cry where no one will see me.

I rush through the mansion, turning down hallways and passing through rooms until I finally find an empty bedroom. I shut the door behind me and collapse onto the bed, letting the tears flow.

I don’t know how long I lay there, sobbing into the pillow, when I hear the door to the bedroom open.

“Amelia, are you okay?” a voice asks.

I lift my head to see Jack standing in the doorway, a look of concern on his face.

“I’m fine,” I say, wiping at my tears. “I just needed a minute alone.”

Jack comes over and sits on the bed next to me, offering me a tissue. “It’s okay to cry, you know. It’s a natural way to release emotions.”

I nod, grateful for his understanding.

“Is everything okay with Brad?” he asks.

I sigh and tell him about my conversation with Brad and how I had to let him down.

“I just want to find someone who truly cares about me and who I have a real connection with,” I explain. My stomach tightens.

Jack nods. “I know how you feel. It’s not easy to find the right person, but it’s worth it in the end. Don’t settle for less than you deserve, Amelia.”

I nod, feeling a weight lifted off my shoulders with Jack’s words. At the same time, the advice is so...neutral. Like he’s not going to come in here and try to kiss me?

“Thank you, Jack,” I say, sniffing.

“Anytime,” he says, patting my shoulder. “Now let’s get you cleaned up and back to the party. You don’t want to miss all the fun.”

I nod and follow Jack out of the bedroom, feeling a little bit better and ready to enjoy the rest of the evening.

Jack turns back, and notices the sly smile on my face. “What?” he asks.

“Nothing,” I say.

“You still hate me, don’t you.”

“Have you complicated this yoga retreat? Sure. Do I hate you? No. Far from it.”

“Good. Okay so I just called a couple of cars to pick up our crew. We’re going to head to the full moon party. It’s up at the top of the mountain. You ready to have some fun?”

“Yeah,” I say. “I’m ready.”

As we walk out of the villa, I steal glances at Jack. His tall, muscular frame exudes confidence and power, and the way he carries himself with such ease and grace is absolutely mesmerizing.

But it’s not just his physical attractiveness that draws me in. There’s something about the way he looks at me, like he sees right through me and knows exactly what I’m thinking. And the way he speaks, with such intelligence and wit, it’s clear that he’s not just another rich playboy.

I’m a little intimidated by him, but at the same time, I find myself inexplicably drawn to him. I can’t wait to see what the rest of the night has in store.





## JACK

**A**s the music thumps and pulses around me, I lounge on a hammock a healthy distance from the heart of the action.

I nurse my drink and try to ignore the throngs of people gyrating on the dance floor.

I'm happy everyone else is having a good time, though.

As the full moon rises high in the sky, the jungle party reaches a fever pitch. I can't help but feel a little out of place as I sit on the sidelines, watching the dancers move to the beat of the house music from the DJ.

Dancing was just never my thing. I'm a billionaire businessman, used to the solitude and control of my office, not the chaos of a jungle dance party.

And, honestly? Being friend zoned by someone I'm interested in isn't something I'm used to.

Plus, after seeing how good Amelia was with Kevin on the beach...some deep instincts of mine have been dredged up. Ones that I haven't felt in a good long time.

So I'm keeping to myself tonight.

But then I see Amelia.

She wears a crop top and matching skirt that shows off her toned, curvy figure, and her long, blonde hair flows around her shoulders as she moves to the music.

It's hard to take my eyes off of her curvy figure. I sip my drink and watch.

That's when a tall man pulls up by my side. "Why don't you get out there?"

I turn to greet the man. He's in his thirties, tall and, I have to admit, ruggedly handsome.

"Wait. Are you...Jake Napleton?"

"That's me. You're Jack Wellington, aren't you?"

"Guilty as charged."

Jake Napleton is a well known staple in the Chicago sports scene, seeing as he was the main reason they won a World Series a few years back.

"What are you doing here?"

"Man I never skip a good dance party. Plus my wife loves this tropical stuff and I have to say, I agree. I also love her pretty damn hard. Hoping for another kid tonight, if you know what I mean." He winks. "You gonna get out there, or what? I see you eying that hottie."

I clear my throat. "I'll dance with her soon. Just enjoying the ambiance for now."

"Just don't wait too long to make your move." He winks again and heads out to dance with his wife, a gorgeous woman in her thirties with a huge rock on her hand.

When the next song ends, Amelia approaches me.

"Hey, what are you doing over here all alone?" she asks, her voice sweet and concerned.

"Just enjoying the show," I reply, trying to play it cool.

"Come on, Jack," she urges. "You can't just sit here the whole night. You've got to dance at least once."

I shake my head. "It's not my thing, Indy. I prefer to watch."

She pouts, her full lips making it hard to resist her charms. "Please, just one dance? I promise, if you don't like it, I won't

talk to you again for the rest of the night.”

I’m tempted. Not just by her voice, but by the way she looks at me, her dark eyes burning with desire.

And, let’s be real, the way she looks in that outfit is ridiculously sexy.

“Okay, one dance,” I relent.

Amelia grins and grabs my hand, leading me onto the dance floor. As we move to the music, I can’t help but get caught up in the rhythm, and before I know it, I’m actually enjoying myself. Amelia’s body presses against mine, her hips grind against me as we move together.

As the music reaches its crescendo, I lean down and my lips linger inches from hers.

When we finally pull away, panting and gasping for air, Amelia’s eyes are filled with happiness and desire.

“I knew you could dance,” she says with a smile.

I’m about to ask her if she wants to dance again, even though I just said one song, but before I can do that, Vitas comes over and dances by us, and then taps Amelia on the shoulder. “Hey, you mind if I dance with you?”

She shrugs, while her eyes stay fixed on mine. “Sure. This grump only wanted to dance for one song.”

Before I can protest, she’s dancing with Vitas to the next beat.

I watch with a mixture of frustration and jealousy as Vitas and Amelia move together, their bodies perfectly in sync with the music. I know I shouldn’t let it get to me, but I can’t help the way I feel.

As the song comes to an end, Vitas and Amelia return to the side of the dance floor, laughing and chatting like old friends. I feel a twinge of resentment towards Vitas, even though I know it’s not his fault that Amelia chose to dance with him instead of me.

But I can't let my emotions get the best of me. I take a deep breath and approach Amelia, determined to win her over. "Hey, that was a great dance," I say with a smile. "Would you like to dance with me again?"

Amelia's face lights up as she nods. "I'd love to." She takes my hand and leading me back onto the dance floor. As we move together, I feel grateful for this second chance, and I resolve to make the most of it.

I grin, not able to resist the chance to hold her in my arms a little longer. As we dance, I can feel the tension between us growing, the electricity of our attraction crackling in the air. I can't stop thinking about how good it feels to have her body pressed against mine, how perfect her lips tasted when I kissed her.

I know I should probably hold back. I should keep a space between us, but in this moment, I can't resist the pull of her magnetism. So I let myself get lost in the music and the feel of her in my arms, determined to enjoy every moment of this dance.

As the song comes to an end, I spin Amelia around and pull her close, gazing into her eyes as I whisper, "Come with me."

She hesitates for a moment, but then follows me, her hand warm and soft in mine.

"Where are you taking me?" she asks.

"Somewhere we can be alone," I say.

I take her hand as we head deeper into the jungle. The sounds of the party fade away, replaced by the rustling of leaves and the chirping of insects. I can't resist the urge to pull her close and press my lips to hers, tasting the sweetness of her mouth and feeling the softness of her curves against my body.

She lets out a soft moan as I kiss her, and I can feel the heat rising between us. I wanted nothing more than to strip her naked and feel her skin against mine, to explore every inch of her body and give her the most intense pleasure she had ever experienced—if we can top our first encounter.

My hand slides up her thigh and under her skirt, and she slips her hand over mine.

“Jack. The retreat. The rules. Everyone is here.”

“Let them know,” I grin. “I’m going to make you scream so loud everyone will know you’re mine.”

Still, she hesitates. “I’m not usually a rule breaker.”

“I make the rules, now.”

“Oh?” she grins. “What are the rules?”

“The first rule is that you press that ass right up against me.”

With her palms pressed against a tree, she pushes her ass up against the front of my shorts, teasing me.

I curl her skirt up and fist her hair and kiss her hard, my hands exploring her thighs and her stomach.

She reaches back and touches my abs, her eyes dropping below my belt.

She runs her hand over the outline of my cock.

“Jack,” she whispers. “I want this inside me.”

I press her hair behind her ear.

“Amelia,” I whisper. “You’ve looked so fucking sexy tonight. I’ve been thinking about this all night. All week. Ever since we did this for the first time, last week.”

“I want you inside me,” she repeats as I stare into her darkened brown eyes. “I want to make you come like I did when I...you know.”

I smirk. “You mean when you rode my face like a good girl?”

She giggles. “Yes.”

“I want you to ride my face all night again.” My voice is gravelly. “And then I want to listen to your screams while I fuck you so good you forget that your name isn’t actually Indy.”

She rubs her hand over my cock, again and again. My erection strains against the fabric of my pants as she grinds against me with her flesh.

I reach my hand around to her front, between her legs.

“Oh Jack, yes. Yes. Right there.”

I kiss the back of her neck and feel her wet and hot, driving me insane with her cute, sexy little moans.

I exhale a hard breath as I feel her legs start to shake. “Jack...you’re making me cum again...fuck you’re good. Don’t stop.”

I palm her ass with one hand and finger her with the other as she presses her palms into the big tree in front of us.

She shakes and pants and finally, I feel her breath slowing as she comes down from her high.

Turning around, she glances up at me.

“I’m dying to taste you,” she says.

She slides a hand under my waistband and wraps her fingers around my cock.

“Oh yes. Yes...”

And right at that moment...

“Uhhh. Babe,” I say, my eyes widening at what’s behind her on the tree.

“Babe. Let go.”

“Shush,” she says, her voice forceful. “You think you’re the only one who knows how to make someone come with their mouth and see stars?”

“No, babe, stand up.”

I grab hold of her and spin her body around.

“Oh my God,” she mumbles, seeing the big monkey not eight feet from us.

“I think he’s a voyeur,” I say.

The monkey stars at us for a few moments.

“Not funny. I’m super scared of monkeys. What do we do?”

“We get the fuck out of here!”

I take her hand and we run back toward the dance floor, giddy and smiling.

When we get back to our crew, we see everyone dancing.

“Let’s just enjoy the rest of the night out here with the music,” I say. “I know how much you love to dance.”

She smiles and heads out to dance on her own, a wild child.

Man, it’s true that she might be another free spirit.

But I freaking like it.

As I watch Amelia on the dance floor, so carefree and spontaneous, it drives me crazy. She dances with such abandon and joy, I feel a twinge of something else. Something deeper.

She’s surrounded by a group of friends, all laughing and having a great time as they watch her light up the crowd with her dance moves.

Vylana is twirling around Amelia, her long blond hair flying behind her. Kate is swaying her hips to the beat, while Vitas, who has made it no secret that he’s attracted to Amelia, is trying his best to keep up with her. And then there’s Claudia, the attractive Spanish girl, who is laughing and chatting with Amelia as they dance.

As I watch them all, I feel a sense of longing. I want to be out there on the dance floor with them, moving and grooving to the beat. But at the same time, I don’t want to intrude. Amelia is having such a good time, and I don’t want to ruin it by trying to join in.

But then, something inside me snaps. I can’t just stand here and watch anymore. I want to be a part of it. I want to feel the music pulsing through my veins, to let go and just be in the moment.



So, with a deep breath, I step out onto the dance floor and start moving to the beat. At first, I feel self-conscious and awkward, but as I let go and just let the music guide me, I start to feel more and more at ease.

And then, out of the corner of my eye, I see Amelia watching me. She smiles and gives me a little nod, and suddenly, all of my doubts and insecurities disappear.

Maybe I am a billionaire businessman with a list of problems longer than I care to think.

But tonight, I'm just a guy, dancing at a jungle dance party under the full moon, having the time of his life.

As the music continues to play, I lose myself in the rhythm, and for a little while, everything else falls away. It's just me and the music, and it feels like nothing else matters.

Jake Napleton is even out here now. He gives me a thumb's up while he's grinding with his wife.

"I knew you'd get out here."



## AMELIA

**J**ack and I walk along the beach, the sand cool and soft under our feet and the full moon casting a silvery glow over everything,

I feel a sense of peace and tranquility wash over me. The sound of the waves crashing against the shore and the salty sea air filling my nostrils soothes me.

I feel myself start to relax after the fun—though hectic—night we’ve had.

It’s truly been a night to remember forever.

We’re both still in our dancing clothes, me in my skirt and crop top with a red bikini underneath, and Jack in just his board shorts, shirt off now, draped over his shoulder. I sneak glances at his toned, muscular physique as we walk. His washboard abs and medium brown hair look great in the moonlight, and I feel a flutter of attraction for him.

We had danced until four in the morning, and even though we should be exhausted, we’re both wide awake and energized, still buzzing from the night’s events. As we walk, we fall into easy conversation, reminiscing about the night and laughing.

I laugh and shake my head. “You’re still kind of a douche though, you have to admit.”

He grins at me. “Ah, my dance moves more than make up for it.”

I smile at that. “You’re not so bad on the dance floor. I was surprised.”

As we walk, I wonder what the future holds for us. We’ve only known each other for a week, after all, and yet it feels like we’ve been through so much together already.

Well technically we’ve known each other longer than a week if you count when Jack fired me.

Now here we are, walking along the beach in the moonlight, holding hands and talking about our future.

And then, out of nowhere, Jack mentions something that catches me off guard. “You know, I’ve been thinking lately. I like you, Amelia. Like I really like you. And I’m excited to continue getting to know you.”

I’m speechless for a moment, overwhelmed by the suddenness of his declaration. But as I think about it, I realize that I feel the same way. I can see a future with Jack, and the thought of building a life with him and starting a family together feels right.

“Okay. I like you, too,” I admit. “I have to ask you something, though. Who was that heart shaped locket for?”

He swallows, and I feel his hand start to sweat.

“You really want to know?”

“Yes. I saw it by your bed one night, mixed in with your things. And I thought, for as much of a douche as you are, why do you carry that around?”

He chuckles lightly, then stops walking and turns to me.

“Right out of college, I fell in love with someone. We went to Hawaii together to be surfing bums.”

“Oh. What was her name?”

“Fay.”

“What happened to her?”

“Well, after two amazing years together, we moved back to the mainland of the United States to start our life in Chicago.”

“And then?” I brace myself.

“Out of nowhere she dies in a car crash. Honestly, I was never the same after that.”

I give him a big hug, and squeeze. “Oh my God! Jack.”

He goes on. “For a year I tried to deal with my depression. I went through the gauntlet. Then my mom died, shortly after. It compounded. I would go weeks without sleeping. I’d do anything to take my mind off the pain. Then I found myself in Australia doing this surfing competition. I almost died, and I didn’t care. I didn’t care if I lived or died, Amelia.”

“Jack,” I mutter, squeezing his hand. Tear prick at my eyes.

“When I got back Chicago I started my company. Poured every ounce of energy I had into my work. Nights. Weekends. I didn’t give a fuck. I just didn’t want to face the pain of losing her. We were in love, so in love. And you can’t get those youthful moments of love back. After two years of living in Chicago and my company crushing it, I was still in pain, so I tried to escape it by moving to Costa Rica full time.”

“It’s okay, Jack. It’s okay to feel pain sometimes. We all do. I can relate.”

“Now, here we are. I’ve still never been in love again. And I don’t want to be. And then you show up. And I can’t stop thinking about you.”

He spins behind me and grabs my shoulder. His eyes feel like they’re eating me up.

“I don’t know how this mindset shift happened so fast. But Amelia I just get this feeling around you. I feel happy. And that’s something that hasn’t happened to me in a long time.”

“I know,” I swallow, thinking about the good times—despite his current state—that I had with Jansen. Jack feels so different. And I’m still trying to comprehend what this is.

A smile spreads across my face. “I think that sounds amazing, Jack. I can see a future with you too. It’s early though. Let’s take things slow.”

“Slow.” He grins back at me, a look of happiness and relief on his face. “That’s great to hear, Amelia. I can’t wait to see what the future holds for us.”

As we start walking again, we can’t keep our hands off each other. When we finally reach the spot where Jack had left a blanket earlier, we both collapse onto it, exhausted but happy.

The sound of the waves crashes against the shore, soothing us as we look out at the stars. I can’t believe how lucky I am to be here, with this amazing man by my side.

“I know I drive you crazy with my business talk sometimes,” Jack says, a hint of apology in his voice. “But I promise, I do have a kind heart.”

I smile at him, leaning my head against his shoulder.

“I know you do,” I say softly. “And your dance moves aren’t too shabby either.”

We laugh together, the sound carrying out over the water. I can’t believe how much fun I’m having with Jack, and I know that this is just the beginning of...something.

I’m not sure what, and maybe it’s best not to put labels or expectations on it.

As the night wears on, we lay on the beach on top of a blanket, watching as the sun slowly began to rise in the sky. The sounds of the monkeys and the birds fill the air, a perfect soundtrack for our lazy morning make-out session.

My hand slides down to Jack’s thigh and I tease him.

“Oh, is that how it is?” He says, his voice deep and rough with sleep.

I nod, grinning up at him. “Mmhmm. I’m not done with you yet.”

He growls, rolling over on top of me and kissing me hard. I moan, wrapping my legs around his waist as he grinds against me.

“I could stay here with you forever,” I murmur against his lips.

“I could too,” he replies, his voice low and rough with desire. “But I think we should make the most of this moment. It’s not everyday you get to make love on a beautiful beach like this.”

I laugh, running my hands over his muscular back. “You’re right. Let’s make it a night to remember.”

He captures my lips in another passionate kiss, his hands roaming over my body as we press our bodies together, still with our clothes on, losing ourselves as the dark night sky becomes lighter. “It already is a night to remember. I think we both know that.”

I feel like this moment is more than just physical pleasure. There’s a deep connection between us, a spark that could turn into something much more.

“Amelia,” Jack breathes against my neck, his lips trailing kisses down my collarbone. “I think I’m falling for you. Like really.”

My heart skips a beat at his words. I’ve had feelings for Jack for a while now, but I didn’t know if he felt the same way.

“I think I’m falling for you too,” I whisper, kissing him softly on the lips. “But Jack. I still feel like this is fast. I don’t know you. Like don’t you have any secrets?”

He shakes his head. “None.”

“Promise.”

“I promise.”

“Really. It’s okay. As long as you tell me now.”

“I mean, there was this one time.”

“What?”

“I met this hot curvy yoga girl who had a date with some surfer guy. I delivered her surfboard...and she did a flying raven pose on me until she truly *flew*.”

I roll my eyes knowing he's talking about me.

Inside, though, I'm scared. These sound eerily similar to the declarations of love Jansen used to make. And I know now how that worked out.

Or didn't.

"What about your father?" He asks.

"What about him?"

"You said he passed away a few years ago? You still had the photos on your phone."

A wave of emotion rolls through me. "Yeah. They were from his last days. He was diagnosed with cancer. It was hard to see him get so weak. Sometimes, I think..."

He wraps behind me and squeezes my shoulders. "It's okay if you don't want to talk about it."

I don't tell Jack, but I'm thinking how maybe I kept Jansen around because he knew my father. And I liked having that connection.

"Just thinking about my father and how he said the best times of his life were raising my sister and I. He was...a super hero to me. Sometimes I still can't believe he's really gone."

"I'm sorry, Indy. I know what it's like though. I've been without parents for years now."

He smiles against my mouth, his hands tangling in my hair. "I don't want this night to end," he murmurs.

"Me neither," I reply, pulling him closer.

I think about asking him about the locket I saw when we were first rooming together.

But I don't want to ruin the moment. And it seems like the serious vibe has passed.

We play with each others' bodies until early hours of the morning, our bodies and hearts becoming one. As the sun begins to rise, we lay tangled in each other's arms, watching the sky turn from dark to a beautiful shade of pink and orange.



We are absolutely obliterating the ‘no commingling’ rule. Although, technically this wasn’t on site at the yoga retreat.

“I never want to leave this spot,” I say, snuggling closer to Jack.

He kisses the top of my head. “We don’t have to. We can stay here forever.”

I laugh and shake my head. “As much as I would love to, I think we should probably get back to reality eventually. Or at least put some clothes on. You know, since it’s daylight and people will start to walk by.”

He sighs. “You’re probably right. But this night will always be one I’ll never forget.”

“Me too,” I say, pressing a soft kiss to his lips.

He pulls something from his front pocket.

“Hey, I want to give you something,” Jack says, holding up a silver ring with a heart design.

“What’s this? You’re not asking me to...”

“Marry you?” He laughs. “No, definitely not. I just want you to know I’m serious about you, that I’m not some playboy who does this with every girl who comes down. Can I put it on you?”

I extend my right hand, and he puts it on my ring finger.

“It actually fits. Wait, I don’t understand though. You got this for me?”

He shakes his head. “It was my Great-Grandmother’s ring. I’ve carried it around for years to remind myself that, good, real love, actually can exist in this world, still.”

“Awww.” My heart warms listening to Jack’s normally hard exterior come down for a moment. “That’s incredibly sweet of you.”

We lay there for a few more minutes, enjoying the peace and quiet of the early morning. Eventually, we reluctantly gather our things and head back to the house, already planning our next beach adventure.

But when I arrive in the room, something is off. I can't tell what—but my sixth sense kicks in.

“Does the room look different?”

“Uh, yeah it does. Where's my stuff?” Jack asks. “Someone moved it. I'm going to go and talk to Chester.”

Jack goes and finds Chester, who comes and sees us.

“Hi you guys!” he grins. “I've got a huge surprise for you. They just went to get breakfast but...let me text them.”

My gut wrenches for some reason. I have a bad feeling.

A minute later, we hear a cab pull up in front and my sister Nora jumps out.

I smile, but I'm wondering why Chester said, ‘They.’

“Hey, Sis!” I say excitedly. “Oh my God why didn't you tell me you were coming?”

She shrugs. “I thought I'd surprise you.”

“This is, uh...”

“I'm Jack,” Jack says, shaking Nora's hand. “Pleasure to meet you.”

“You're the phone drowner,” she notes, pulling her hand away.

“He got me a new phone,” I point out.

Still, Nora eyes him suspiciously.

“And I brought you one more surprise,” she says. “He's bringing the bags.”

As she finishes speaking, I see a familiar figure walking towards us, carrying a suitcase in each hand.

It's Jansen. My heart sinks as I realize that Nora must have invited him here without telling me.

“Amelia,” he says, walking up to me. “Hey.”

My heart throbs. Only, I can't tell if it's in pain, or just general surprise.

I glance at Jack and I wish for the life of me I could read Jack's face, but I can't. He's absolutely stoic.

"Hey, Jansen," I say, as I give him a hug. He gives me a kiss on the cheek.

I feel a mix of anger and betrayal wash over me.

Why would she think it was a good idea for us to be in the same place, after he had hurt me so badly in the past?

I feel trapped all of a sudden.

Then again, I'd always told Nora that if Jansen came back with a ring, I'd hear him out.

But that's what I said...

*Before I met Jack.*

"It's a little irregular, but considering the circumstances, we've moved Jansen into your room, Amelia. Your sister explained everything." Chester offers a wrinkled grin.

Nora hugs me. "I know things haven't been going your way. Maybe they can turn back around now."

"What a nice...surprise," I say, trying to summon any politeness I have left.

This is certainly a twist.



## AMELIA

“Hey,” Jansen says, a small smile playing at the corners of his lips.

It’s been over a month since we last saw each other, and the feelings that rush back to me are almost too much to bear.

“Hey,” I reply, my voice barely above a whisper. We stand there for a moment, staring at each other, neither of us sure what to say or do next.

Finally, Jansen breaks the silence.

“Can I come in?” he asks, gesturing towards the room.

I nod, stepping aside to let him pass. He sits down on the edge of my bed and lets out a deep sigh.

“I can’t believe I’m here,” he says, shaking his head. “I never thought I’d see you again.”

I sit down next to him, my heart racing in my chest.

“What are you doing here, Jansen?” I ask, trying to keep my voice steady. He turns to look at me, his blue eyes piercing into mine.

“I came to see you,” he says softly. “I came to see if there’s a chance for us.”

Tears well up in my eyes as I take in his words. I have to admit, a part of me has always had a soft spot for Jansen, even after we broke up.

But at the same time, I've been falling for Jack over the past week at the retreat. It's only been a week, but I feel like I know him so well already.

I mean, those were some serious words we exchanged this morning.

"I don't have a ring yet," Jansen continues, taking my hand in his. "But I know I love you, Amelia. I quit my job and everything to come here and see if we have a chance. I know I hurt you before, and I'm so sorry for that. But I've done so much thinking, and I want to spend the rest of my life making it up to you."

I can't hold back the tears any longer, and they spill down my cheeks as I look into Jansen's eyes. I don't know what to say.

I care about Jansen, but I'm not sure if I'm in love with him. And I don't want to hurt Jack either.

"I don't know, Jansen," I finally manage to say. "I care about you, but I'm not sure if I'm in love with you any more."

"You're...not sure?"

I shake my head.

"Is there someone else?"

I take a deep breath. "I have been seeing someone, yes."

I don't know if *seeing* is the word I'm looking for exactly. But falling. Totally.

He holds a hand up. "That's totally within your right. Don't tell me who. I don't want to know. It's...okay."

I laugh. "Yeah, I know it's okay. We broke up. You didn't want to get married, remember? You didn't want to have a family. And those things are important to me."

I take a deep breath and consider his words. I don't want to hurt either of them, but at the same time, I want to explore my feelings for both of them.

"I want those things, too."

“I’ll stay at the retreat with you, Jansen,” I say slowly. “And we’ll see how things go. But I don’t want to lead you on. I’m just not sure right now.”

I feel like there’s something there I need to explore.

“I understand,” he says. “And that’s totally justified.”

A year ago, I would have married Jansen in an instant. I felt like I was desperate, almost begging him for a ring.

Now I no longer feel that way.

The holidays were hard without him this year. I shed tears.

But it really is true what they say.

When you truly stop looking, you find exactly what you want.

I’ve got some deep thinking to do. Good thing I’m at a yoga retreat.



THAT AFTERNOON, Nora and I sit down at an oceanside bar and shoot the breeze with our toes in the sand.

I’m happy the setting is so relaxing. Because I am *not* okay right now.

After the incredible, really, magical night I spent with Jack last night, I’m bowled over by a surprise I didn’t see coming. Nor did I want.

Now she’s trying to defend him and his actions. If she weren’t such an amazing sister in general, I would be hearing none of it. But I’m always willing to hear what Nora has to say.

“Nora, you know how much he hurt me,” I say, trying to keep my voice steady.

“Sis, you know I love you. But didn’t you...break up with him? What do you mean, ‘he hurt you?’”

Okay, technically? She’s correct.

“I broke up with him because he couldn’t commit. And I deserve better.”

“You’re right.”

“Did we not have this conversation before I broke up with him?”

“I know, I know, we did.”

“So..?”

“It’s just...” she sighs. “It’s just, Jansen can be charming, you have to admit. And I think about Aunt Martha sometimes.”

My stomach sinks at the mention of Aunt Martha.

She doesn’t have to tell me what happened with her, I know exactly what. But Nora continues anyway.

“She had a good guy who wanted to marry her when she was in her late twenties...he was a pro football player. An offensive linemen. He was gregarious and fun and, hell, even rich.”

“I know the story of Aunt Martha.”

“Yes but you need to hear it. And then she ended up breaking up with him, to ‘find herself.’ She dated nothing but bad boys and never got married. Remember when she was dating Marvin? We all warned her he wasn’t marriage material. And he proved her right.”

“Okay, enough,” I say, cutting her off. “I get the lesson. Aunt Martha never got married and to this day it breaks her heart, and now she’s lonely. I’m not Aunt Martha, sis. Give me some credit. I’ll be fine. Can you trust my judgment? Sheesh. What happened? Last month you were so supportive.”

“I just know you want kids and a family and the whole nine yards. Jansen called me up and we had a heart to heart. He was gushing so much, said he’d done some soul searching, and he knew what he wanted. And that something...was you. And a life. He understood that he messed up and that a connection like yours couldn’t just be remade. And he begged me to help him with his little plan to come down here. I



thought, ‘well, that could be fun.’ And I’d been planning to surprise you with a visit anyway. So, here we are.”

I feel my heart tinge.

“Why couldn’t he have known this two years ago?! Even two months ago? And why are *you* telling me this?”

“Look, I’m just trying to explain myself. I get your perspective, it’s like I came out of nowhere. I should have given you a head’s up. But Jansen wanted it to be a surprise and I went along with it.”

The cool ocean breeze wafts over my face. I try to take a little lesson from the meditation classes we’ve been doing, and just let my emotions ‘be what they are.’

But right now, I have to admit I’m overwhelmed.

“I can’t just forget about that and be okay with him being here. And as for Jack...”

My mind drifts to Jack and I can’t help but grin goofily. Jack has surprised me, time and again. At first I thought he was just a shallow playboy with an out of control sex drive. But despite his arrogant pompousness, and general grumpy attitude toward life, he seems...actually normal. And deep.

And kind, even.

“Did you sleep with him?” Nora asks. “He really did not seem happy when he saw Jansen and I.”

I swallow. “Not...exactly.”

*Does riding his face count?*

“Not exactly?” She raises an eyebrow.

“We’ve, uh, just been working on some new yoga poses together. Have you ever heard of the flying raven?”

“The flying raven? What are you talking about?”

“Okay, we rounded...second...or third.”

“You hooked up with the CEO who drowned your phone!? With the pics of Dad.”

Okay, I may have been angry when I told Nora the first version of that story. “He saved me from hitting my head! He has a soft side, I swear!”

“Jack Wellington, the CEO who *fired you*, has a soft side?”

I nod, thinking about our deep chats on the beach. “He does, I swear.”

Right at that moment, the sound of a motorcycle revving interrupts our conversation. We both turn to see Jack speeding by on his motorcycle, a vision in leather and sunglasses.

An attractive woman rides behind him with a helmet, short shorts, and a tank top.

“*That guy* has a soft side?” Nora shakes her head. “You’re acting crazy. You know that, right?”

*Who the hell is that?* I wonder. If he was dropping ‘family’ this morning, why would he be with another woman today?

Okay, now I am a little mind-screwed.

The waitress, who has been eavesdropping on our conversation, shakes her head disapprovingly. “*El gringo siempre esta loco.*”

“See?” Our server agrees with me. “He’s crazy.”

“Why would you say that? You’re supposed to support me.”

“Amelia, I do want to support you. And running around with a guy like that? Do you really think he’s marriage material?! He’s the owner of a hotel chain. He’s a billionaire with a million options. You’re going to end up roadkill. Hurt. I’m trying to protect you.” Nora sighs and reaches for my hand. “I’m really, really sorry, Amelia. I don’t mean to cause any problems. I just wanted us to have some fun, relaxing vacation time together. And I thought maybe Jansen had changed, that he could be a part of that.”

Our waitress chimes in as she comes over to our table. “That man on the motorcycle is trouble. I wouldn’t let my daughter near him with a ten foot pole.”

Nora lowers her voice and turns back to me. “I honestly can’t believe you slept with him. He’s hot. I mean, if you’re going to have a vacation fling, well, you did well. But understand what a fling is, and what it means to actually get married and have a family with someone who you’ve known for five years.”

I nod, feeling a twinge of guilt. “Yes, I did.” I grin. “It was...freaking hot.” Nora smiles and pats my hand reassuringly.

“You’re technically single now, Amelia. You have the right to be with whoever you want, as long as it’s consensual and healthy. That’s just dating these days. It can get messy, but as long as you’re honest, well, that’s fine, I suppose. But be careful. I don’t want you to end up with a hurt heart.”

“Nora,” I say, patting the top of her hand. “I’m a big girl. I’ll be okay.”

She nods. “I know you will. Now can we order a second round and enjoy ourselves for a bit?”

“Yes! What are you doing this whole week?”

“Well, I didn’t really want to crash you and Jansen’s reunion party...so I’m going to head up to the mountains for a few days. I hear it’s amazing up there.”

“Oh! Monte Verde? Yeah, I almost booked a retreat there before I opted for the beach.”

She laughs. “Maybe I’ll even meet a guy.”

“What happened to Hans?”

“Wasn’t in the cards,” she laughs. “He was fun but I’m over it. He didn’t want something serious. And I do. His loss.”

My stomach tumbles with anxiety as I consider the possibility that maybe she could be right.

Maybe Jack is just a phase for me that I needed to get out of my system.

Because if he’s riding with strange women on motorcycles...Nora might be right.

I drink, and I think.



## AMELIA

**O**n Monday evening before dinner, Jansen and I head out to the surf.

“So, how’ve you been?” I ask him.

“Good, you know, I’ve been trying to put everything in perspective. Like, what’s more important: my love for you or my fear of sand crabs?”

I laugh at his joke. “I think it’s safe to say that love should come first.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” he says, shaking his head. “It’s just that seeing you again, it’s like everything has come back into focus.”

As we continue walking, I can’t help but notice Jack surfing on the waves. He looks absolutely furious, as if he’s ready to take on the entire ocean.

“Whoa, look at Jack,” I say, gesturing towards him. “He looks like he’s about to snap.”

Jansen glances over at Jack and rolls his eyes. “Yeah, that guy is always so intense. I don’t know how you can stand being around him. He’s like a walking hurricane warning. I bet he’s just mad because he lost his favorite surf wax or something.”

But I can’t help the way my heart races every time I see Jack. He’s just so... rugged and masculine. And the way he doesn’t back down from a challenge, it’s like he’s not afraid of anything.

As we continue walking, we overhear someone telling Jack that it's too rough to surf today. He could drown.

But Jack just looks first at me, then looks his fellow surfer in the eye, and says, "Do I look like I give a shit? I've faced bigger challenges, like trying to find a parking spot at the mall on Black Friday."

I can feel myself getting turned on by his boldness, but Jansen looks grossed out by the bugs in the sand. "Ugh, I can't stand these things," he says, waving his hand in front of his face. "They're like the vampires of the beach."

I clear my throat. It's like Jansen is talking about anything but the elephant in the room.

"Hey, so. We need to talk about something," I finally say.

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I just want to have clear communication since we're not together. I think it's best if we take a break from everything physical while we're working out our issues," I suggest.

Jansen nods in agreement. "Yeah, you're probably right. Let's just focus on talking and getting to know each other again. And trying not to get eaten by sand crabs."

As we continue our walk along the beach, I can't help but wonder what the future holds for Jansen and me.

Shades of his sense of humor and why I feel for him is there. But still, something feels, without a doubt, different now. It would be silly to say that Jack isn't a factor.



AFTER THE BEACH we have dinner, and then I head back to the room.

The common outdoor showers are located on the side of the building, under the trees. I always prefer outdoor showers, personally. There's just something about them that makes you feel more like you're more ingrained in nature.

“You going to watch the video tonight?” I ask Jansen, peaking my head in before.

Jansen nods, his eyes glued to his phone. “Yeah. I’m looking forward to it. I could use some more anatomy knowledge under my belt.”

“Sounds good,” I say, wrapping a towel around my body. “I’m going to head to shower off and then I’ll see you there.”

Jansen lays on the bed as I leave, looking at his phone.

Maybe Jack is right about the whole technology addiction thing. Because in that moment, I feel myself suddenly less attracted to him. Who goes to a tropical paradise and browses other people’s lives?

I head out to the pool deck and then turn to go to the shower heads. As I’m heading that way, I see Jack out of the corner of my eye.

With his black wet suit still on the lower half of his body, his ocean-wet hair is a mess and he looks absolutely delicious, all muscled and tanned. Damn, he looks hot.

I stare as he leans his surfboard against the wall. He’s grumpy as hell.

“Hey,” I say, reaching out and putting my hand on his bicep. Electricity runs through me.

“Hey.”

“How were the waves today?” I say.

“Amelia. Cut it out.”

“Cut what out?”

He ever so gently wraps his hand around my throat and leans down. “Stop tempting me.”

I giggle. “Why? Am I making it...hard...for you?”

*Screw it.* Jack’s out here taking women on motorcycle rides. I decide I’m going to mess with him a little bit.

I run a hand down his ridged abs until it lands between his legs, over his shorts.



“Indy...” he whispers. “What do you think you’re doing?”

I giggle. “I’m being naughty.”

My heart hammers. I don’t know what inspired me to cross that line with him. He’s just so damn intoxicating.

I take my hand off, run it up his abs, and pull away just slightly.

I feel his hands squeeze around my neck, just enough to show the power he holds over me.

“Come with me,” he says gruffly, his voice sending shivers down my spine.

“What?” I ask, taken aback. “Why?”

“We need to talk,” he says, his eyes piercing into mine.

I hesitate for a moment, not sure what to do.

“Follow me.”

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea.” My body trembles.

“That’s not a question, Indy.” He takes my hand.

And with that, my resolve crumbles. I can’t resist the pull of his commanding presence, and I find myself following him to the outdoor shower area under the jungle trees.

As we walk, I can feel my heart racing with anticipation. I don’t know what he wants to talk about, but I’m getting more and more turned on by the second.

We finally reach the showers and he turns to me, his eyes burning with intensity.

“What do you want to talk about?” I ask, my voice trembling slightly.

“I saw you with Jansen,” he says, his voice low. I’m no mind reader, but his tone feels laced with jealousy.

I look up, sheepishly. “I’m not sure what to say to that.”

He runs a hand down my back side until his fingers reach my thigh, not covered by the towel. He cups my ass, and I let out a moan I have to stifle.

His blue gray eyes look darkened, looking up at them.

“What don’t you understand about the fact that you’re mine now?”

Heat pools between my legs. Goosebumps raging throughout my entire body.

“Maybe...the shower isn’t the best place to have this ‘talk,’” I say, regretting my decision to be playful a few moments ago.

He raises an eyebrow. “Did I ask you?”

I lower my eyes, sheepishly.

“Drop the towel,” he says. I do, and I throb when he presses his hard body against me.

He takes a step back and gives me an up-and-down.

“You’ve got such incredible eyes.”

“Eyes. Is that what you’re looking at?”

Jack grins. “Okay, fine, sure, you’ve got great tits. Maybe Jansen was obsessed with them. But I’m looking at everything. You fascinate me, Indy. What goes on inside here, mostly.”

He taps my temple, then trails a hand down my bare skin.

I feel my cheeks flush with heat as he takes me in his arms and presses his lips to mine. His mouth is hot and hungry, and I can feel the urgency in his touch as he kisses me ferociously, the water from the shower cascading down our bodies.

I wrap my arms around his neck and pull him closer, deepening the kiss as the heat and steam of the shower envelops us. His hands roam over my body, exploring every inch of my skin as he kisses me with an intensity that takes my breath away.

I give myself over to the moment, losing myself in the heat and passion of Jack’s embrace as we continue to kiss passionately, the water beating down on us as we lose ourselves in each other.

As we continue to kiss and touch each other, I wonder if this is wrong.

“Jansen is here,” I protest. “I thought we were going to talk.”

But Jack senses hesitation and pulls back slightly, looking into my eyes with a fierce intensity.

“Amelia, if he really loved you, he would have never let you go.” His eyes are serious. His voice is low and firm. “You deserve to be with someone who loves you and cherishes you, and that’s exactly what I plan on doing. But right now...”

“Oh, God,” I moan, my resolve slipping away.

With those words, he presses me up against the wall of the shower and begins to kiss my neck, sending shivers down my spine. The monkeys of the Costa Rican jungle howl into the night, adding to the wild and passionate atmosphere of the moment.

I moan softly as Jack’s kisses feel amazing against my skin, and I give myself over to the moment completely. I know that this shower will be one that we will always remember, and I’m more than happy to lose myself in the heat and passion of Jack’s embrace.

“I really...have to get to class,” I mutter, pushing him away.

Jack laughs. “Class?”

“Yeah.”

He runs his hand through my hair. “Can wait, Indy.”

Jack consumes me with a kiss, then lifts me up and sets me down on a concrete shower ledge. I enjoy the feel of his big hands on my flesh. I wrap my legs around him as he stands between them, our bodies pressed together in a steamy embrace.

I love the feel of his hard abs against my soft body, and I can feel the heat and desire coursing through me as we continue to kiss and touch each other. The water from the

shower beats down on us, creating a steamy and sensual atmosphere that only adds to the intensity of the moment.

We continue to kiss and explore each other's bodies, our hands and lips roaming over every inch of each other's skin.

"Amelia," he whispers, his voice throaty. "Think you can be quiet?"

My heart hammers in my chest.

"Why are you asking me?"

"Because I want Jansen to hear you. I want him to know you belong to me now."

"But..."

Jack kisses my neck, breasts, and makes his way down my stomach with his mouth. God he feels good.

"Jack...Jansen is still in the room, I think. Not a good idea to..."

And his mouth is between my legs. His tongue laps my throbbing wetness.

"God almighty. You've got to stop, Jack. He'll hear."

Jack looks up at me for a moment. "You think I give a fuck about some small dicked loser you used to date? Who couldn't see what he had when he had it? You're mine, now, Indy. Understand?"

I attempt to protest, but something coils inside me as he rubs his scruff between my legs.

He slides his hand underneath my ass as he laps me up. My mouth falls agape, and I grip his head with both hands, pressing my hips up and into him.

I try to stop it, but a moan escapes my mouth. Jack is invigorated, and lets out a loud growl.

"That's it, Indy. You're getting close, aren't you."

"Yes," I mutter, feeling my muscles contract.

*Fuck.* I'm going to scream if I don't stop this madness and I don't know how.

Using all my strength, I push him off of me, and slide back onto the ground.

As I do, I feel his huge, throbbing erection press into my stomach.

He folds a towel and puts it down on the concrete floor of the shower.

I look up at him while I fist his cock, wet from all the moisture.

“Get on your knees, Indy.”

I obey, my heart pounding. I can't help myself. I want to make him feel the same way I do.

“When's the last time you took a big cock in your mouth?” he asks, running a hand on my chin. “I bet it didn't take two hands and a mouth like it does to cover my length.”

The freaking asshole. He wants me to say it. He wants to hear me.

I'm so turned on though, I obey.

“Jansen wasn't that big,” I mutter. “Average at best.”

He laughs. “Well if you're scared, you can leave now.”

“Such an asshole,” I mutter.

Figures that the billionaire who has no problem taking me in the shower when my ex-boyfriend is right next door is hung like a porn star.

Lucky him, though, the guy I dated in high school was no Jansen, so to speak.

I start by running my tongue along his sides.

“Look at me,” Jack growls, and I do, but it's hard to concentrate on everything.

As long as he is, I've got to grip him with both hands to cover his entire length. I run them back and forth. and Jack lets out a guttural moan.

“That's it, Indy. Fuck, yeah. Good girl.”

I take his hard cock into my hand, lick up the side of his huge shaft, and down the other before licking around the throbbing head. I then seal my mouth over his cock, swallowing him to the back of my mouth as I hollow my cheeks and suck. Using my hand to also rub up and down and I bob over him.

His head tilts back in pleasure...both hands pressed on the shower walls he lets out a moan so deep so wanting it makes me drenched. As much as I want to hate him for his cockiness...I want to please him more. I slip a hand and cup his balls massaging them while I take him to the back of my throat over and over...I can feel his cock twitching against my tongue.

He holds my hair, pulling slightly. Holding me right where he wants me. Hips bucking, thrusting his cock even further down my throat. I can't stop wanting to please this man. I can feel my wetness running down my leg.

"Take me deep," he mutters, grabbing hold of my ears.

I take him all the way to the back of my throat, loving his low moans. "You're fucking mine now."

I gag as I try not to pull my head off of him.

"Jansen fuck your mouth like this? With his small fucking dick?"

I try to mutter, "no," but nothing comes out but a vague murmur.

"Yeah. You don't need two hands for him, do you?"

*The cocky asshole.*

*But he's not wrong...*

I come up for a moment, gasping for air, and then sweep back onto his dick again.

He stops suddenly and pulls me up from the shower floor, and spins me around, then directs my palms onto the ledge. He runs his fingers between my folds.

”You’re drenched Indy...makes me think you liked being on your knees for me”.

The asshole is right...but I’ll never admit it.

“Fuck you,” I mutter.

“You want me to...fuck you? Alright then.”

I feel him press the head of his cock against my entrance... running it back and forth coating himself in my juices....

“This may hurt a little...but I get the feeling you might like that too.”

He then drives his cock in and the pressure is so intense it takes my breath away. He holds steady for a moment letting me adjust to his enormous cock...I feel him start to thrust and the pressure instantly turns to pleasure.

I let out the biggest moan as he hits a place in me no man ever has over and over again...I don’t ever want him to stop. As I get closer and closer to climax, my walls grip him tightly making him moan loudly. I don’t care if my ex can hear us...I don’t ever want this man to stop fucking me.

“How badly have you wanted me to fuck you since I saw you?”

“I...I hated you when I first saw you,” I remind him.

The rush of pleasure I feel from it is unlike anything I’ve ever felt.

“Indy,” he growls.

“What?”

“Shut the fuck up and come on that dick like a good girl,” he whispers against my skin.

*Oh God.*

My stomach flips, and the pulse in my clit throbs. Jansen pales in comparison to *this man*.

Jack pulls my hair back as he slams into me.

There’s a loud *smack* of skin on skin.

I don't care any more.

The release is everything I've been wanting for *years* and not getting. Lackluster, bullshit excuses from Jansen on why he couldn't perform *and* why we couldn't get married.

Jack is penetrating me deeper than I ever thought was possible.

He stays slow and rhythmic, letting me adjust to his length and width.

"That is a fucking *ass* you've got there, Indy. Fuuuuck," he mutters. "I could fuck you all day and all night."

He bucks into me like a bull.

"Who does your pussy belong to, now, Indy?"

"Mmmm," I mutter.

"Who."

He thrusts,

"Does,"

*Thrust,*

"Your beautiful pussy,"

*Thrust.*

"Fucking,"

*Thrust.*

"Belong to?"

"You," I mutter, all of the muscles in my body contracting in pleasure. "It belongs to you."

I let out a small gasp, my stomach completely in knots from the pleasure of the moment.

Not to mention the absolute *wrongness* of this. The naughtiness. This is a side of me no one's ever brought out in me.

My face burns up, and the edges blur.



No. I've never come from just penetration in my life.  
But...

I feel the rush of pleasure building.

And like a waterfall, it pushes over the edge. My orgasm crashes through me like I've never felt before in my life.

I lose all sense of time and space, and moan loudly as my orgasm crashes through me.

"Fuck yeah, I love when the pussy that belongs to me gets all tight when I make you cum."

"How did you know..."

Jack lets loose, fucking me from behind with a power and strength I've never once felt.

Another orgasm, not as big as the first but still powerful, rips through me.

"Oh fuck, Indy," he mutters.

He pulls out and spins me around.

"On your knees," He mutters.

I do as he says, and I open my mouth as he fucks my face with reckless abandon.

His moans must rip through the entire retreat center.

I try and swallow as he comes like a rocket. One rope. Two. Three. *Four*.

I gag and I can't swallow it all, so it drips out of my mouth and down the sides, on to my tits.

We're both left there, panting, just out of range of the steamy shower water.

I stand up, he wraps his arms around me, and we kiss as the water streams down our bodies.

"Jack," I mutter.

"Yes?"

I want to ask him what the hell this was. If this was the hottest moment of his life, too.

Instead, my brain and my body are raked with confusion.

My body knows this was the hottest moment of my life.

My pesky brain, though, reminds me about real life.

“The anatomy video. We’ll be late.”

“Yeah.” He smacks my ass. “Playtime’s over.”

“Playtime’s over,” I repeat.

“Guess it’s time to get you back to your little boyfriend. You really going to marry him?”

“I’m going to tell him, Jack. Just give me some time.”

“Time for what?”

I heave a sigh.

“Truth is, I’m scared as hell right now, Jack. I really like you. But I don’t want to rush. I’m going to tell Jansen. I am. I just think, honestly, that he’s in a delicate state right now.”

Jack runs his hand on my neck. “Indy. Come on.”

“I will,” I say. “I will. Just...give me some time.”



## AMELIA

I sleep in my bed every night that week.

Jansen stays on his side of the room.

And apparently, people didn't know it was me and Jack in the shower.

But there is a running joke now that Chester and Josefina like to have really loud shower sex in different positions, because they weren't at the yoga video showing either.

That week, Jack finds me every night, after dinner, and beckons me to the shower in the dark.

Our nightly naughty time.

Meanwhile, I know I need to have a chat with Jansen but I keep putting it off.

He's being so sweet during the day, keeping the boundaries that I've asked for.

My mind is on fire. I'm a train wreck. I've never done anything like this... But Jansen himself said he doesn't want to know.

But the way Jack takes me.

The way he owns me...

The truth is that I like it.

He brings me into another world. One that I didn't know existed.

I feel lost, though, because the man confuses me, not acknowledging me during class as much anymore.

And meanwhile, Vylana and Claudia have been bringing back their flirty charms with him.

That morning at breakfast, I find myself having coffee and chatting with Josefina, the host of the retreat.

In a former life, she'd been a nun.

“Good morning Sunshine,” she says to me chirpily. “What’s new in your world?”

My stomach clenched. I wasn't very well going to tell her about Jack and my ahem, nightly pleasure sessions.

So I shrug and sip my coffee, playing with a deck of tarot cards.

“Not much.”

Josefina slides onto the couch next to me.

“Want me to read your cards?”

I hesitate for a moment, then nod. Maybe a tarot reading could give me some insight.

Josefina took the deck from me and shuffled them expertly, her long, elegant fingers moving smoothly over the glossy cards.

“Close your eyes and think about your question,” she said, and I did as I was told.

I focus on Jack and our *whatever*.

Then I think of Jansen. The good times we've shared.

How despite the multiple orgasms I've been having with Jack...

They aren't everything.

I think of the warning my sister gave me based on her interaction with Jack. Who was the woman he was on the motorcycle with?

“What’s your question?” Josefina asks.

“My question is, um, why do I still feel stuck?”

“Hmmm.” I hear her shuffling the deck. After a few more moments, she tells me to open my eyes.

When I open them, Josefina has laid out the cards in a spread on the table in front of us.

She studied them for a moment, her brow furrowed in concentration.

Then she looks up at me, her eyes serious. “Amelia, it looks like you have a big confrontation coming your way, romantically. It seems to be coming from another world, or possibly another realm entirely. Oh my. Oh, wow.”

I gasp, my hand flying to my mouth. “What do you mean? What kind of confrontation?”

Josefina took a deep breath and pointed to a card in the spread. “This card represents a powerful force entering your life, someone or something that will challenge you in a significant way. It could be a person, or it could be an event. But whatever it is, it will have a profound impact on your relationships...”

I stare at the card, my heart racing.

“You’ve got a big decision coming up,” she says. She holds up the first card, the hanged man.

“The hanged man appears when someone’s got a decision to make, but they’re staying in purgatory.”

*Super accurate.*

“And then, this card, the lovers...And the treasure at the end. What’s stopping you from finding the treasure? Oh. The hanged man in the past...lingering into the present. And...I see an issue of trust?” She eyes me.

“I feel like this should be an easy decision,” I say. “But there is a trust thing.”

*Jack and I can’t last.*

*Right?*

“What should I do?” I ask, my voice shaking.

Josefina reached out and squeezed my hand. “It’s hard to say for sure, but the best thing you can do is to be prepared. Trust your instincts, and remember that no matter what happens, you have the strength and resilience to handle it. You are a powerful woman, Amelia, and you have the ability to navigate this situation with grace and wisdom.”

I nod, trying to take her words to heart. I knew she was right, but it’s hard not to feel overwhelmed by the weight of what’s coming my way.

But I was determined to face it head on, no matter what.

“Maybe you should go see the turtles,” she adds.

“The turtles?”

“Yes, they’re being born tomorrow. It’s an incredible event. Only happens once a year for about two days. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime event, really. I heard Jack talking about how he’s taking a group.”

My eyes drop at the mention of Jack. “Oh, right.”



IT’S STILL dark at four a.m. the next morning when I hear the door open.

Through a crack, I see Jack enter, dressed in board shorts.

“It’s turtle time,” Jack whispers.

“You are not seriously taking me to see turtles. It’s sleep time.”

“You’re awake. Unlike...this guy.”

I look across the room and see Jansen passed out on top of the covers. There are a couple of open beer cans next to him.

Jack walks in and views Jansen. He’s breathing heavily, still wearing his jeans. Jack picks up a can of beer.

“Still full. What the hell was he up to last night?” Jack asks in a husky voice.

“I’m not sure. I was up late chatting with some of the girls so he didn’t get back until after two a.m.”

Jack puts the beer can down. “We’re going. They’re only born once every year, and this is the time. Apparently it’s one of the coolest things you can ever see in your lifetime. It’s a spiritual experience.”

Jansen blows out a loud breath.

“Come on, Yale.”

“I’m tired. Seriously.”

“Wow. I didn’t know you get so cranky in the morning.”

“I get cranky when I don’t get my sleep.”

Jack steps toward me until he’s standing right at my beside. He cradles my cheek. “Indy. I’m not asking you. I’m telling you.”

My body heats at his touch. I hate that he has such a way with me.

“No, Jack, come on. I’ll go next year.”

He laughs. “You’ll be here next year?”

“Maybe I’ll come back.”

He shakes his head and takes the sheet away.

“Jack. Come on now. That’s not nice.”

“When did I ever say I was nice?”

Damn. Got me there.

“Jack, just...”

He runs his hand down my thigh slowly, nimbly, deeply, making my heart flutter.

My eyes land on the well-endowed visual right in front of my face.



“Come on, Indy,” he whispers, softer and sweeter this time. “I’m not being mean. I know you’re tired. I am too. But this is really something you’ll regret if you don’t see it.”

As exhausted as I am, and as much as I’d love to catch a few more hours of Z’s before yoga today, soft Jack is my freaking kryptonite.

“Here,” he says, getting into bed behind me. “I’ll cuddle you for a few minutes and then let’s go. Deal?”

Without waiting for me to confirm, he slides behind me close to the wall so all I can see is Jansen, passed out.

My mouth spreads mindlessly into a smile as his finger drags down the length of my spine, and back up, underneath the baggy t shirt I’m wearing.

“Fuck me, Indy, cut it out.”

“Cut what out?”

“You’re wiggling your ass into me and it’s making me hard.”

“Am not,” I giggle, wiggling more into him.

“Indy…” he groans against my neck.

“You know what happens to naughty girls.”

“Oh? What’s that?”

I feel his hand on my ass, sliding my panties down my thighs.

“They get fucked with a big dick.”

I feel my insides flip.

“Jack, no. Not in front of Jansen. No.”

He tosses my panties to the side. “What? You never hooked up with someone in the college dorms, Yale? Jansen’s so drunk he’s got his clothes on still.”

“Jack…please…”

He pulls me by my hips, knotting my shirt behind me so he can use it to steer me from behind.

“Please fuck you with my big dick? Is that what you’re saying?”

I move into position for him.

“This is so wrong.” I can feel the heat building between my legs. It might be wrong, but I don’t know if I’ve ever been this turned on.

He smacks my ass.

He reaches his hand around my hips and fingers my clit, using his other hand to comb his fingers through my hair, causing me to moan.

“Better keep it down.” His voice is gruff. “I honestly don’t give a fuck if Jansen sees me marking you—actually it would make me happy—but I don’t want to wake up the whole damn retreat.”

His low voice saying these words undoes me, causing me to mewl louder.

“Amelia,” he snaps.

I buck up off my hands, rearing back against his hard chest while he fingers me from behind.

“Jack. When you talk like that. Fuck. I can’t control myself.”

He kisses my neck while I’m still on my hands and knees, then

“Judging by how wet you are, you don’t mind being wrong. And actually? I think you enjoy being my naughty little plaything.”

“Only...for you,” I manage to say.

I raise my arms up and he pulls my shirt off.

He lets out a low, guttural grunt.

“I know. You’d never do this shit with Jansen, would you?”

“No,” I whisper. “We never...”

He pushes me back onto my hands and knees, and I feel his throbbing head behind me, teasing my opening.

“Never what?”

“Never had sex...”

He teases me, toying with my opening.

“Relax, baby. You never had sex with Jansen? I’m confused.”

“We never had sex...without a condom.”

“Holy fuck. Are you shitting me?”

“No. I always made him wear one.”

“Why don’t you make me wear one?”

“I’m not on my cycle right now...And honestly? I don’t know. I don’t know if you’d fit with a condom.” He teases his tip back and forth on me. “So you’re saying Jansen’s little dick doesn’t do it for you.”

“It’s not that...I mean it is bigger,” I giggle. “But it’s just...you.”

“What about me?”

“I like being bad with you. I can’t explain it.”

“You like it when I take you raw.”

“Yes.” I whisper.

“You like being bad with me. Do you still hate me?”

“Jack, please. Just fuck me.” I reach my hand back and run it down his muscled abdomen. “Please.”

Finally, he presses inside of me.

“Fuck, Indy,” he groans. “You’re so damn tight.”

“You’re so big, careful,” I say.

“You know I’ll be careful with you,” he responds immediately. “You’re fucking precious, Indy.”

Leaning down, he kisses my neck gently as I get used to his size. Jack starts slowly, carefully, moving and letting me

feel him fill me up.

*Damn.*

I've always truly thought that phrase about 'it's not the size of the ship but the motion in the ocean' was true...

But what if they have both?

Jack makes Jansen seem embarrassingly anticlimatic...

I feel like I know nothing.

I let out a small gasp as he thrusts again, my muscles contracting, trying to fight against him.

*Fuck he feels good.*

"Do you like it when I fuck you with my huge cock, Indy?"

Jack is driving me insane.

For some reason I don't respond. Maybe because the answer is obvious.

After a few more thrusts, he smacks my ass, hard. "Indy."

I let out a loud moan, and adrenaline bursts through me. I look over at Jansen and see him stirring.

"When I ask you a question, I expect a fucking answer."

"What was...the question..." I say through the foggy eyes of pleasure.

"Do you like it when I fuck you with my eggplant? Or do you like Jansen's tiny peanut better?"

"Oh God that's so mean though...be nicer."

He speeds his tempo.

"Nicer? I told you. I'm not a nice guy. Fuck it. Let's wake that fucker up so we can scar him for life and he can see who really owns you."

He pounds furiously and I expand to meet the demands of him.

“You think I’m joking?” His voice is low and gravelly. “Let’s wake him up so he knows what it looks like when a bigger, better man takes what he wants. Takes you how he wants. Makes you come harder than you ever have.”

His palm smacks my backside and I let out another moan.

“He’ll have flashbacks to it for the rest of his life.”

“Jack...”

With his hands on my hips, I can feel him utterly ruining me.

“You’re mine and you know it, baby. Say it.”

“Say what?”

“Say you’re mine.”

He fists my hair, and the edges blur. The tips of my fingers, along with my entire body, tingle.

For some reason, I can’t bring myself to say it.

He stops.

“Please don’t stop. Keep going,” I gasp.

He pulls out, and I’m left with a feeling of emptiness when he steps onto the side of the bed.

Dragging me by my hair, he pulls me over to the side of the bed.

“Open your mouth, Indy.”

I open and he slides inside of my mouth.

“Fuck, that mouth,” he groans.

He fucks my face relentlessly, but I don’t even gag. Finally, he pulls away to let me breath.

“How the hell are you taking every inch of me?”

“I don’t have a gag reflex. Although with you...I might.”

“Indy...fuck.”

I put both hands on his cock...and my mouth too.

Something I'd never be able to do with Jansen. He never had the length for it...

"Oh my fucking God, Indy. You're so good. Say it."

I try to speak but it comes out a little mumble.

"A little hard to speak with me in you, eh?"

He spans my ass, and I let out a moan.

"How does it feel to finally suck a real man's cock?"

I look up with tears in my eyes...obedient. Trying not to show how intimidated I am by how big he is. How much I'm tempted to gag. He reaches down and grabs my throat. "Holy fuck. I can feel myself in your throat. Indy, no one's ever been able to take me like this. Oh fuuck..." He moans and starts to cum. "Take it. Take it all. Take that big dick."

All I can muster is a faint "mmm" as I take ropes of his hot liquid down my throat.

When he's done, he lets me off of his cock, and I gasp for air.

"You are a good fucking girl."

Jansen lets out a snore. And we both laugh.

"Jansen ever fuck your face like that?"

"Jansen's not...the biggest..." I admit. "Maybe half of your size?"

My hand is still on his cock, stroking him. To my amazement, he starts to get hard again.

"What?" Jack grins. "You thought we were done?"

He flips my body and positions me on my hands and knees, just how he wants me.

For a moment he pushes in, then pulls out.

"Jack. Don't stop. Stop teasing."

"Not until you say it. Tell me you're mine."

I don't even feel guilty any more. The pulse in my clit throbs for the big man behind me.

“I’m yours,” I mumble.

“Mmm,” he grunts, and starts up again.

Reaching around, he fingers me at the same time, and I can’t take any more.

“Come all over my big cock like a good girl,” he says.

I let out a moan so loud, forget waking up just Jansen.

They’re going to hear on the beach.

Right at that moment, I hear Jansen stir.

*Fuck me.*

Jack doesn’t relent.

“That’s right. Cum for me just like that,” he orders, intensifying the experience.

My orgasm pulses through my body, until I feel like I’m crashing.

“Own who you are. Own what you like, Indy. Just like I own you.”

My jaw falls agape as Jansen stirs.

This is it.

Not that it would be the end of the world if he saw me like this.

“I love it.”

“Think anyone else could make you cum like this?”

“No.”

“Fuck, little Indy,” he groans, and I snap back in. “Coming.”

I feel him let go inside me and another orgasm throbs through me.

*No man has ever been able to do this to me.*

Panting, he finishes, all inside me.

When we're done, he moves to the bed and I collapse onto his panting chest.

"That was the hottest thing ever."

Jansen lets out a big snore, and we both laugh at the awkwardness of the moment.

"Oh, shit," Jack says, jumping up and grabbing his shorts.

"What?"

"The turtles!"

This is the moment that I fall for Jack Wellington.

Watching him put his board shorts on after he just fucked me like that to take me to see turtles being born.

As we leave, I look at Jansen and I know I have to do the right thing and tell him the truth when he wakes up.





## AMELIA

**J**ack, Vylana, Brad, Kate and I pack into the back of a pickup truck. It's a one hour ride to where the turtles are hatching at sunrise. Our guide is Ricardo, who tells us in great detail about the annual miracle we are witnessing while we're on the drive through the jungle.

As we drive, Vylana sits closer and closer to Jack, laughing at all of his jokes and touching his arm every chance she gets. I can feel the jealousy boiling inside of me, knowing that it's my fault that Jack and I have stayed a secret, yet here is Vylana, flirting with him right in front of me.

I try to push the feelings aside and focus on the beauty of the jungle and the excitement of seeing the turtles hatch, but it's hard to ignore the tension between Vylana and I. I wonder if Vylana knows how I feel about Jack, and if she's doing this on purpose.

As we arrive at the beach, Ricardo sets up a small campsite for us and we all gather around the bonfire to wait for the sunrise so we can see the turtles hatch.

While the sun begins to rise and the turtles start to emerge from their eggs, I try to push my feelings aside and enjoy the experience. But as Vylana and Jack continue to flirt and whisper to each other, I overhear their conversation.

“So Jack, I heard you own a private jet. Have you ever taken it on a romantic getaway with someone special?” Vylana asks.

“Well Vylana, I have to admit I have. But I’m more interested in hearing about your adventures. Have you ever been on a private jet?”

“Oh, I’ve been on plenty of private jets. But there’s just something about flying with the right company that makes it even more special.”

“Hey Amelia, are you okay?” Kate asks, tapping me on the shoulder. “You seem a little distant.”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I say. “Just a little distracted. So Ricardo, tell us more about the turtles. How long does the hatching process usually take?”

“It can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days for the baby turtles to hatch and make their way to the water,” Ricardo says. “It’s a miraculous process to witness, and we’re lucky to have the opportunity to see it.”

“Well Jack,” Vylana says, “I’m sure it would be even more magical with you by my side. Do you think you could whisk me away on your private jet to witness something like this again?”

Jack laughs. “I’m flattered Vylana, but I think I’m more interested in spending my time with someone else on this trip.” He winks at me.

“Oh,” Vylana goes. “I didn’t know.”

Ricardo tells us to stand back as we stand in a huddle, a safe distance from where the baby turtles are hatching.

“Legally, this is as close as we can get.”

I can’t help but notice Vylana is on her tippy toes, with part of her hand clenching Jack’s shoulder.

I thought we’d be friends, but this girl just does not quit.

I remind myself that this is all in my head, and that Jack and I were just making out this morning in our room.

I think it’s just going to be all happy turtle babies hatching, but then Ricardo points out the hawks that will be trying to eat

the vulnerable turtles as they make their delicate journey toward the water.

As the baby turtles begin to hatch from their eggs and make their way towards the water, the tension in the air is palpable. Vylana, standing on her tippy toes and clutching onto Jack's shoulder, seems just as nervous as the rest of us.

It's not just the hawks that are causing tension. My thoughts are also consumed with Jack, who I had just been making out with this morning in our room. The memories of our intimate moment are still fresh in my mind, but I try to push them aside and focus on the present.

As we watch, a hawk flies towards the turtles, clearly looking for an easy breakfast. The sight fills me with dread, and I feel a sense of helplessness as I watch the vulnerable turtles scurry towards the water.

Despite the danger posed by the hawks, the turtles continue on their journey, determined to reach the safety of the ocean. It's a heart-wrenching scene, and I feel a deep emotional connection to these tiny creatures and their struggle for survival.

As the turtles finally make it to the water, I let out a sigh of relief and allow myself to fully embrace the sense of awe and wonder that I had been suppressing. It's a truly incredible moment, and one that I will never forget.

A little later, we wrap up camp and get ready to head back for our nine thirty yoga class, Vylana turns to me with a gleam in her eye. "Hey, Amelia. What do you say we go beg Jack to take us for a ride on his private jet this weekend? I bet he's got some amazing places he could take us. I've always wanted to see Bali, or maybe even the Maldives."

"Maybe."

I feel a pang of guilt in my stomach. Vylana is such a free spirit—and I need to make a decision between Jansen and Jack. I feel like I'm on a dating show.

I just wish I had more time.

The sun is rising behind us, casting a warm glow over the beach. Vylana heads back to the truck while Jack and I stand together. The rest of the group is already heading back to Ricardo's truck.

"You've got to tell him, Amelia," Jack says, his eyes fixed on the horizon. "Are you seriously considering him? You can't. You can't marry him. Tell him it's time to let you go."

"Why?" I ask, feeling a mix of nerves and determination.

"Because I'm falling for you," he says, his voice soft and sincere. "And not just in the 'own your pussy' way. I want to stop this casual thing we have going on and start something real. I don't want to waste any more time. As hot as it is to fuck you next to some guy who never knew how to love you right...I want you all to myself."

I grin at his mention of this morning, then hesitate, knowing he's right but feeling unsure of how to move forward.

"Jack, I feel like I barely know anything about you! Aside from yeah, we have amazing sex. But there's more to a relationship than that."

"What else do you want to know? I'll tell you anything."

I take a deep breath and think for a moment. "Do you have any kids from previous relationships? You just don't seem like the type to have zero baggage."

"No kids from previous relationships, no," he says, swallowing hard. He looks out at the shoreline, where an eagle swoops down but a turtle makes it into the water just in time. "What else?"

I think for a moment.

"I live in the United States!" I say, my voice laced with frustration. "I mean, what are we going to do? Move there?"

"Amelia, I'm not an easy man to love," he says, his eyes locked on mine. "I get that. And for the first time in my life, with you, I feel like I'm comfortable. Attracted. Connected. I've never even thought about having a traditional family before. With you? I could see it. And I could see it being

happy. But I can't do this if you're not in it. If there's even a shred of thought in your mind that you could be with Jansen, or anyone else, you need to get the fuck out of my life. Because I'm falling for you. Hell, I already fell. I never expected to fall like this. But with you, I see something deeper. If you want that, let me know. We'll figure it out. The ball is in your court. But you have to stop coming up with reasons we can't be together."

Without waiting for my response, he turns and heads down the path toward the truck. And in that moment, I realize that I do have to tell Jansen it's time to let us go. No more hanging in limbo, no more waiting to make a decision. The time is now.

We ride the truck back and I feel my resolve strengthening. No one else can do this for me. Only I can. It's my decision alone.

But when I get back to the room, Jansen isn't there.



## JACK

**F**riday night, Yoshimi and Kevin and I decide to meet up for dinner, so I scoot out from the yoga retreat early.

“Jack!” the kid says. “I got a girlfriend!”

“Oh, do you now?”

I chuckle and pat him on the back. He sees one of his friends and runs off to their table for a little while. I’m happy to see him flirting with a girl now, because that means he’s certainly recovered from his little heartbreak.

Yoshimi raises an eyebrow at me. “So. Let’s get down to the good stuff. What’s going on with you and Amelia?”

I sigh and take a sip of my drink. “It’s complicated. Her ex is back in the picture and I don’t know what to do.”

“Wait, what?!”

“Yeah, you know, her ex traveled here to try and win her back.”

Yoshimi’s eyes widen. “That’s a little insane.”

“Yes it, is. But man, I think he knows he fumbled the bag.” I shake my head. “Idiot. She’s mine now.”

“Jack!” She laughs. “You can be such a dick.”

“It’s true though.” I chuckle. “I mean, I’m starting to fall for her, but I don’t want to get in the way if she’s still interested in him. I can respect her putting an end to her past.”

“You get that more than most.”



“Yes. But if she’s not all in with me, I can’t be all in with her.”

Yoshimi nods sympathetically. “It’s tough when you have feelings for someone and you’re not sure where you stand. Remember, you deserve to be with someone who wants to be with you, not just someone who’s convenient.”

I nod, taking her words to heart. “Thanks, Yoshimi. You always know just what to say.”

She smiles and takes a bite of her food. “So, changing the subject, have you found any solutions to your business problems yet?”

I shake my head. “No, not yet. But I have an idea. I’m thinking of taking the whole crew on a private jet trip to my private island for a beach bonfire with live music and dancing under the stars. Maybe that will help clear our heads and come up with some fresh ideas.”

“Good.” She leans back in the booth. “Back to the girl.”

“That was a quick subject change.”

“Well I just keep thinking. It’s just surprising to me, Jack. I’ve known you a while, and you’ve never spoken about anyone like this, since, you know. Fay.”

I clench my fist under the table at her mention.

“I know it’s sudden,” I say. “But when I’m with Amelia, it just feels right.”

“So you feel it in your gut.”

“Yes. Like everything else falls away and all that matters is the two of us. Shit, even saying that I know it sounds absurd. Also, her business idea was a game changer. I never thought I’d find someone who could inspire me like that. I haven’t told her any of this yet, of course.”

Yoshimi smiles. “I’m happy for you, Jack. And I understand what you mean about falling for someone and feeling like everything else falls away.”

“Enough about me. What about your new man?”

“The guy I’ve been seeing? He’s such a great guy.”

“Can you see a future with him?”

“For the first time in a while, I think that answer might be yes.”

“Exciting.”

“Yes. It’s scary and exciting at the same time.”

I nod, taking another sip of my drink. “I’m happy for you too, Yoshimi. And I know Kevin will be okay. He’s a smart kid, and I’m confident he’ll continue to do well. And of course we’ll visit. You guys are family to me.”

I knock on wood, because I still have to make sure Amelia is totally, one hundred percent down for this.

I mean I think she is. But maybe she’s not. Maybe I’m just a rebound for her. *Women*.

But the way we feel when we’re together, I know she *has* to feel that, too.

“Wait a sec. Did you just say...come visit?” I ask.

“I mean you’ll move to the U.S., right?” Yoshimi gives my arm a reassuring squeeze. “We’ll always be here for you, Jack. And I’m sure this girl will be worth it. Just make sure you’re both on the same page and take things slow. You don’t want to rush into anything without really thinking it through.”

I nod, grateful for her wisdom. “Thanks, Yoshimi. I’ll try to be more mindful of that. And thanks for being such a great friend. You always know how to put things in perspective.”

“Hey, what are all these years for if not for wisdom?”

“Some people get older but not wiser, though.”

“True,” she agrees.

We watch as Kevin makes a big gesture with his arms, telling some sort of story. Clearly his confidence has increased since he learned a couple new surf moves.

Yoshimi is jumping to the logical conclusion that I’d move for Amelia. I mean, what are my other options? What am I

going to do, just let her go back home? Ask her to stay here?

As I think, I realize something.

I love her.

How crazy is that? But I've always operated by my gut. And I just know. I can feel it.

"Just make sure you're giving her space."

I chuckle, and decide to lighten the mood a little. "So I should *not* bang her in the shower to mark her as mine when her ex is within earshot?"

*Or in the bed when he's passed out next to her...*

I'll spare Yoshimi that visual though.

"Jack!" she laughs. "Oh my God. You really are one of a kind. What's gotten into you, it's been like three years since you've even been with a girl. And now all of the sudden... you're all in?"

"That's the way I am. I'm all in, or nothing at all."

"Aww, Jack. It feels like you're really growing up."

"I think so. I never thought I'd even consider moving for love. But this girl, she just gets me."

"So why haven't you told her all this?"

"She's got to get rid of her ex, still."

"Is that a deal breaker for you?"

"Is it a deal breaker for me that she can't tell someone else who wants to wife her up to go pound sand? Yeah. I'd say it is."

"What are her deal breakers?"

I think for a minute.

"She did ask me if I have any kids."

She raises an eyebrow. "And what did you say?"

"I told her I've never been married, no kids of mine. Which is true."

“You think that’s the full truth? What about your...you know. Your dark side.”

I scoff. “Is that really necessary?”

She puts her hand on my shoulder. “You should tell her. Just tell her everything. If she really loves you she’s got to accept all of you. I can’t tell you what ”

My eyes fix in the distance. “You’re right. I will. Tomorrow. I’m staying at my place tonight instead of the yoga retreat to clear my head.” I sigh. I’ve been staying in a cot inside Josefina and Chester’s room, since Jansen got here, which is a little ridiculous. I want to get a full night sleep. And I’ve got to give Amelia room to do her thing.

“Careful,” she says. “Sometimes, tomorrow is too late.”



## AMELIA

**O**n Friday night, a group of us yogis heads out to dinner together.

Notably absent, for me at least—are Jack and Jansen.

Jack apparently has a business dinner or something. Jansen, however, is just M.I.A.

This has me slightly worried. We're in a foreign country. He quit his job and is clearly in on a search for some kind of existential post breakup thing, and also trying to prove something to me.

On the other hand, Jansen is a grown man in his early thirties who can take care of himself. I'm not here to babysit him.

Still, it's odd to me I haven't gotten a text or anything from him.

Nora is back from her weeklong adventure in the mountain region of Costa Rica. She's telling me all about her trip as we stand off to the side of the bar.

“And then I went to La Fortuna. That place is Ah-mazing. You should check it out sometime. How was your week anyway?”

“Well, I've got to tell Jansen we're over,” I say.

She takes a huge sip of her drink.

“Wow,” she exclaims. “You've decided.”

“Is that ‘wow, good,’ or ‘wow, bad?’” I ask her.

“Time will tell, I guess.”

“I trust Jack, I do. You think I shouldn’t?”

“I’m not here to tell you what to do. I’m just here to support you no matter what.”

I nod flimsily. “You’re team Jansen, aren’t you? Why?”

She shakes her head. “I’m team Amelia. Whatever you think is best, I’m here for it.”

That night there’s still no sign of him, and I fall asleep worried.

Jack stays at his mansion too, so he’s not there either. I’m grateful for the night of sleep alone with myself and my thoughts.

Tomorrow, though, I’m going to be straight with him and tell him exactly what he needs to hear, what I’ve been putting off telling him.

Not just for Jack, but for me.

It’s over between us.



WE KEEP it relatively quiet to the rest of the yoga retreat what we’re doing, but on Saturday at around noon, Ricardo and another driver will be picking us up soon.

Jack pops in my room as I’m getting ready a few minutes before noon.

“Hey. You tell him yet?”

I shake my head. “Weirdly, I haven’t seen him.”

I’m waiting with Vylana, Kate, and Brad.

Jack has even invited Chester and Josefina.

Jack checks his watch.

I admit it: I've been mostly avoiding Jansen since he arrived here. The fact that he arrived all the way here is way more than coincidence and, honestly, it creeps me out a little.

A car pulls in front of the retreat as we're waiting. We all look, unsure if this could be one of the drivers sent to pick us up.

Low and behold, Jansen pops out of the car.

He looks tired and disheveled, with rings under his eyes.

"Jesus," Vylana says under her breath to me. "He looks like he's been doing coke all night."

Jansen staggers toward us.

"Amelia," he says. "We need to talk."

"We definitely do. How about Monday?" *You know. After I have the experience of a lifetime.*

"Yeah," Kate exclaims. "We're heading with Jack to his private island today!"

"Jack's...private island? No, no, no. Come with me."

Jansen waves me over to a secluded area, out of earshot of the rest of the crew.

"I just disappeared for days and you're not curious where I am?"

"I am definitely curious where you've been. But I'm also living my life. You just keep making everything about you, you, you! So, what, Jansen? Why are you here?"

Jansen takes a deep breath. "I know I messed up. I know I hurt you. And I'm sorry. I came here to tell you that I still love you, Amelia. And I want you back. I bought a ring and everything, but I chickened out at the last second and called your sister to find out where you were. I want to marry you, Amelia. I want the whole nine yards. I just... I love you and I miss you."

I stare at him in shock, not sure what to say. Part of me wants to scream and tell him how much he hurt me, how much



I've struggled to move on. But another part of me remembers the good times we had together, the love we shared.

"I don't know what to say, Jansen," I finally manage to say. "I've been trying to move on, and I've been developing feelings for Jack."

Jansen's face falls. "No. You can't."

My hair stands on end. "What do you mean, 'I can't'? I'm a grown woman. I can do whatever the hell I want."

"He's...evil."

"Jansen, what's going on?" I ask, my voice laced with concern. I can hear the fear in his voice and it's starting to make me uneasy.

"Amelia, listen to me. Jack is not who he says he is. He's full of lies and I've been trying to figure out the truth about him. But he's dangerous, Amelia. He's had me kidnapped and beaten up because I was getting too close to the truth."

"No," I shake my head. "I don't believe it."

"Don't be naive. Where do you think I got this black eye? These bruises?" He lifts up his shirt.

*Damn.*

I feel a surge of panic rise up within me. "What are you talking about, Jansen? What truth? And what do you mean he had you kidnapped and beaten up?"

"Amelia, I got a weird vibe from him, so I did some investigating. I have some news for you. Jack has a girlfriend, her name is Yoshimi, and they have a son together. I was trying to protect you, but I got caught up in this mess with Jack. Please, just stay away from him. He's not who he says he is."

I feel my heart racing as I try to process everything Jansen is telling me. Could it be true? Is Jack really full of lies and deceit? And if so, what does that mean for me and my involvement with him?

“Jansen, I don’t know what to do,” I say, my voice shaking. “I don’t want to believe that Jack is capable of all of this, but at the same time, I can’t just ignore what you’re telling me.”

“I know it’s a lot to take in, Amelia. But please, just trust me on this. Stay away from Jack and let me handle it.”

I take a deep breath, trying to calm my racing thoughts. “Okay, Jansen. Okay, so am I going to get on an airplane right now?”

“That’s the absolute *last* thing you want to do with a guy like this.”

My mind swirls with confusion and fear. I can’t believe the man I thought I knew could be capable of all of this. But at the same time, I can’t ignore the warning signs that Jansen has given me. I need to figure out the truth about Jack, and fast, before it’s too late.

I go back to where everyone is waiting.

Vylana notices my worried vibe. “Everything okay?”

I shake my head. Just as she says that, Jack pulls up in an SUV and gets out. “Who’s ready for one helluva weekend?”

“Jack,” I say, loud enough so everyone can hear. “We need to talk.”

“Okay...sure. What about?”

“Is Yoshimi your girlfriend?”

He recoils. “What? What are you talking about?”

Josefina and Chester hear the commotion and they come out to talk to us.

“Just answer the question.”

“Okay, no. Absolutely not. Yoshimi has never been my girlfriend and won’t be.”

I look over to Jansen, then back to Jack. “Kevin’s not your son, then?”

His face turns red. “Well, that’s a complicated question.”

“No, it’s not. It’s a yes or no answer.”

A dramatic pause ensues between everyone.

“Yes,” he says. “With many shades of gray, though.”

My lips quiver. I look back at Jansen, then at Jack.

*No. Jansen couldn’t be right. I thought...I thought he was just making up an entire lie.*

“Kevin’s your kid?”

“Indy, if we could just talk alone for a while...”

“No,” I say. “That’s enough. I’m not going anywhere this weekend. I’m not going with you.”

“But Amelia—”

Chester hears the commotion and opens the gate to see what’s going on with us. “Jack. What’s going on here?”

“Chester, I was just trying to explain something to Amelia.”

“Oh? About what?”

I don’t hold back. “So you lied to me? You said that you don’t have a son and you do? You said you don’t have any major secrets. You promised, Jack.”

I’ve never seen Jack at a loss for words, but that’s how he looks right now as he runs a hand through his thick head of hair.

“I think you’d better go,” Josefina says. “This is supposed to be a place of no drama. I’m not sure what’s going on here but it looks pretty darn close to a violation of the commingling clause.”

“Ame—” Jack starts to say.

But I head inside, go to my room and lock the door.

I grab my pillow and hold it tight.

“Amelia. Just—“

“Go away Jack. You lied to me. You *promised*. Just go away. I don’t want to be with someone who throws around

words like ‘promise.’”

I hear mumbling with Josefina and Chester talking to Jack, and then the sound of a car door slamming, and a car driving away.

So much for next week’s surf lesson with him.

This was not the twist I wanted to our story.



## JACK

2 *months later*

I SCREAM as I lift the weights, trying to push myself harder. I'm not sure what I'm trying to accomplish, but I just need to feel something. Anything. The pain in my muscles is the only thing that can distract me from the emptiness inside.

Suddenly, I hear a voice. "Jack? Jack, are you okay?"

I look up to see Yoshimi standing in the doorway, concern etched on her face. I quickly release the weights and sit up, trying to compose myself.

"Yeah, I'm fine," I say, panting heavily as I sit up. "Just a light little workout."

"A *light* workout?" Yoshimi's tone is unconvinced. "You were screaming. And you were lifting way too much weight. Are you trying to kill yourself?"

I shrug. "I don't even care anymore."

Yoshimi's face falls. "Oh, Jack. What's happened to you?"

I look away, unable to meet her gaze. "I just don't see the point, you know? I have everything I could possibly want - money, success, a beautiful mansion - but it's all meaningless. I feel like I'm just going through the motions, like I'm not really living. So I don't care any more whether I live or die."

"A bit dramatic...don't you think?"

“Fine. Maybe,” I admit. “But I really fucking liked that woman. How many women have I really liked in the past few years?”

“True.” She glances at the coffee table close to me and sees my copies of Hemingway’s first book. “Are you reading Hemingway...while you’re working out?”

I shrug. “Yeah.”

She picks up *The Sun Also Rises* and thumbs through it. “That’s only going make you more depressed.” Yoshimi gives me a funny look and comes to sit next to me. “You’re not alone, Jack. We all have those moments where we feel lost and empty. But you can’t give up. You have to keep fighting.”

I shake my head. “I don’t know if I have the strength to fight anymore. Fay broke my heart. Amelia won’t pick up my calls.”

She takes my hand in hers. “You’re one of the strongest people I know, Jack. You’ve overcome so much in your life. You can get through this too.”

I sigh. “I wish I had your optimism. Amelia blocked me everywhere. What am I supposed to do, go back to her on my knees, begging for forgiveness for something I didn’t even do? If she would have just let me explain. If I wouldn’t have locked up...”

“I don’t understand. What does she think you did that was so bad?”

I don’t feel like getting into the details with her. It’s too painful. Plus, I don’t want Yoshimi to feel guilty.

For years I didn’t think I’d feel that real light-hearted, frivolous yet deep love, and I felt it.

“But it feels like no matter what I do, I can’t escape this darkness inside of me.”

“Then let me help you,” Yoshimi says softly. “Tell me what’s going on. Maybe together we can find a way out of this.”

I hesitate, not sure if I'm ready to face my demons. But there's something about the way Yoshimi is looking at me, with such kindness and understanding, that makes me want to open up to her.

"It's just been a tough few months," I begin. "I've been feeling like I'm not good enough, like I'm a failure. I know it's ridiculous - I've achieved more than most people could ever dream of - but it doesn't matter. I feel like I'm constantly disappointing everyone, especially myself."

Yoshimi nods sympathetically. "I know how that feels. It's hard to shake the feeling that you're not measuring up, even when you're doing your best. But you are good enough, Jack. You are more than enough. You just need to believe it."

I shake my head, overwhelmed by the weight of my own inadequacy. "I don't know if I'll ever be able to believe it. I feel like I'm stuck in this endless cycle of self-doubt and disappointment."

"You don't have to be," Yoshimi says gently. "There are things you can do to help yourself. Like seeking therapy, or finding ways to manage your stress and anxiety. And you don't have to do it alone. I'm here for you, and I know there are other people who care about you too."

I let out a bitter laugh. "Like who? I've pushed everyone away. I'm a hermit, holed up in this mansion for weeks at a time. I'm not even sure I have any friends left."

Yoshimi's expression softens. "Is this about Amelia? Jack, I know you were devastated when she left, but you can't let it consume you like this. You have to find a way to move on and heal."

I close my eyes, the pain of Amelia's departure still fresh in my mind. "She was the only woman I've ever loved. I can't love again. I'm done with love."

"Oh, Jack," Yoshimi says, her voice laced with sadness. "Love isn't a finite resource. Just because you've loved and lost doesn't mean you can't love again. You're still young, and there are so many amazing people out there waiting to be



loved by you. Like that supermodel I was telling you about. She's gorgeous and successful, and I think you two would hit it off."

I shake my head, not wanting to hear it. "I'm not interested in dating anyone, let alone a supermodel. I don't think I'm ready for that yet."

"I understand how you feel," Yoshimi says. "But you can't let fear hold you back from living your life. You deserve happiness, Jack. You deserve to find love and joy again. You just have to be brave enough to take the chance, even if it's just one date with a supermodel."

I sigh, knowing she means well but not sure if I'm ready to start dating again. "I appreciate the thought, Yoshimi, but I just don't think I'm ready for that yet. I'm still trying to get over Amelia and the pain of our breakup."

She takes my hand and gives it a squeeze. "I understand. It's okay to take things slow and not rush into anything. But just know that I'm here for you, and I'll support you however I can. We'll get through this together, okay?"

I look into her eyes, filled with compassion and determination.

"I need a plan."

"Where is she?"

"Well," I chuckle. "Applying for new jobs according to her Linked In. Since I fired her."

"You fired her?"

"Remember in December when I went back to the U.S. mainland to make cuts to Wellington Media since it wasn't profitable?"

"Yeah. Well I didn't know it at the time, but I'd fired her."

I chuckle. After I racked my brain, I even recalled that Amelia and I actually met at one point in the elevator.

"Where's she working now?" She asks.

“You know what,” I say, standing up. “That’s a good question, Yoshimi. Maybe I should find out.”

I make a few calls, and next thing I know, I’m on my way back to the United States.



## AMELIA

I 'm back home in Logan Square, Chicago, finishing putting my things into boxes because I'm getting my own place when my sister texts me. I turn down the Bon Iver I've had cranking at epic levels and let her up the stairs.

She's got a big smile on her face and a bottle of wine in her hand.

"Sis. I told you...it's Sunday. It's my first day at my new job tomorrow. No wine."

"It's hard to believe you're finally moving out of here!" She says as she comes inside. "What's it been, three years that you've lived here?"

"A little over three."

"So why are you moving again? You don't like the neighborhood? Or they raised the rent?" She moves around the kitchen looking for something. I instinctively grab the wine opener from one of our boxes.

"Honestly I just want a fresh start. This one isn't bad, but it's got too much 'Jansen energy.' I'm throwing away the bed, too."

"I feel that. How's your love life in the post-Jansen era anyway?"

Yeah, Jansen and I broke up.

This time, I made sure he knew that it was for good.

I never found out if he'd made up the story about Jack. He swore it was true.

I figure, when in doubt, sometimes you've just to go move on and go for a completely fresh start.

"Nosy and asking about my love life, as usual. Is this wine like...usually strong?" I say as I hold the glass up to my nose.

"Nope. It's two buck chuck from Trader Joes. Well...?"

"It's non-existent." I take a tiny sip of my wine.

"Maybe you're pregnant. Your sense of smell does seem pretty sensitive."

I nearly spit out my wine.

"Are you kidding me?" I ask her. "I haven't even been on a date in months!"

Nora just shrugs and takes another sip of her wine. "You never know," she says with a grin, twisting a some locks of her hair with her fingers. "How long ago was Costa Rica?"

"I never slept with Jansen again," I reiterate. "That's not possible."

"I wasn't talking about Jansen," she says. "I thought that was obvious."

I roll my eyes and keep cleaning. I've been so busy since I got back—and stressed, since I've been jobless and applying to jobs—that I haven't exactly been thinking about that possibility.

But as I think about it, it's been since before my Costa Rica trip that I had my period. I put down my glass of wine. "Shoot. Maybe I should at least get a pregnancy test."

"Do you have any of the other symptoms? Are your boobs swollen? They actually do look a tad bigger..."

"Uggh. I'll get a test tonight. I'm not taking it until tomorrow though."

Speaking of Jack, Nora asks if I've spoken to him since everything went down. I tell her no, and she looks at me

skeptically.

“I mean it, Nora,” I say. “I don’t want to have anything to do with him. Jack lied to me. He lied *to my face*. I can’t forgive that.”

“I told you he was bad news.”

Nora nods sympathetically, but I can tell she’s still curious about what happened between us. I don’t blame her - it’s not every day that your sister dates a billionaire CEO.

Nora helps me pack up the last of my things. Tomorrow, the movers are going to come to help me move in my new place.

“So what’s the name of your new company again?” Nora asks.

“Franzen & Frida Media.”

“Who’s the CEO?”

“I have no idea, actually.”

“Maybe you should keep an eye on that this time, you know?”



THE NEXT DAY, I grab a coffee before I head into work, but I also stop at a pharmacy and pick up a pregnancy test.

I was going to wait until after work to take it, but after some thought, there is a distinct possibility that Jack and I...

I mean, sweet lord, I’ve never had a man take me like he did.

He *owned me*. And he definitely finished inside.

Since I’ve always been on the pill I didn’t think he’d be able to. But who knows?

As I walk in, I grin at a text from Nora.

Nora: You are going to crush it, Sis!

I get a little bit of déjà vu from a message like that. The last time she sent one like that, I ended up getting fired...

I greet the secretary on the first floor. “Oh, you’re Amelia Hansen?”

“That’s me!”

“Your office is going to be on the second floor. But the CEO is doing a meet and greet with the new hires this morning. I’ll key in the code in the elevator so you have permission to go to the top floor.”

“So I’ll be seeing Mr. Franzen, then?” I ask as she opens the elevator door, and puts in the code so that I can go up to the top floor.

“I see you’ve done your research. But no—we were just bought out a couple of weeks ago.”

The elevator doors close before I can ask her who the new owner is.

I try to google the answer using my phone but there’s no service in the elevator.

I refocus myself, straightening my pencil skirt and touching up my hair in the mirror.

Then, the doors open, revealing a floor that could only belong to a CEO. The space is open yet private, with modern art on the walls, a receptionist’s desk that looks like it belongs in a boutique hotel, and people moving about with intent. The smell of fresh flowers fills my nostrils, and I feel intimidated.

I make my way to the receptionist’s desk, where a woman with a sharp bob and a well-tailored suit greets me with a smile. “You must be Amelia Hansen. Welcome to the company.”

“Thank you,” I reply, my voice barely above a whisper. I feel like a mouse in a room full of lions.

“Mr. Wellington is expecting you in his office. Right this way, please.” She stands up, gesturing for me to follow her.

My insides curdle. “Did you just say Mr. Wellington?”

“That’s correct,” she says.

I take a deep breath and try to gather my thoughts as I walk behind her. My first day at a new job always makes me nervous, but this is different.

It couldn’t be the same Mr. Wellington. Not possible.

The receptionist opens a door, and I find myself in a spacious corner office with floor-to-ceiling windows that offer a stunning view of the city. The room is tastefully decorated, with a modern aesthetic that feels both luxurious and welcoming.

“Good morning, Amelia. I’m glad you could make it,” says a deep voice from behind a sleek black desk.

I turn to face the man who just spoke, and my breath catches in my throat. Mr. Wellington’s—Jack’s—dark hair and grey eyes that seem to look right through me. He wears a well-tailored suit that showcases his broad shoulders, and I feel a little envious of the woman who has the pleasure of ironing it every morning.

“Hi, Mr. Wellington. It’s nice to meet you,” I say, trying to keep my voice steady, still in earshot of the receptionist.

“Please, call me Jack,” he says, standing up and offering me his hand.

I shake his hand, feeling a jolt of electricity run through my body at the contact. I can’t tell if it’s nerves or something else, but I try to keep my composure.

“I’m looking forward to working with you,” I say, trying to sound confident.

“The pleasure is mine,” he replies, his eyes locking with mine in a way that makes my heart skip a beat. To the receptionist, he adds, “That’ll be all, Miriam.”

As I sit down in the chair across from him, I can’t help but feel drawn to him in a way that makes me uncomfortable. There’s something about him that makes me want to forget all of my professional aspirations and give in to my deepest desires.



But that's impossible. For so many reasons.

"Jack...I should go. I can't work for you. I'm going to quit."

I stand up, teary-eyed. "How the hell are you here right now? I cared about you, and you lied to me."

"Indy, wait." He rushes from behind his desk and stops me before I can leave.

"Just have one drink with me. Let me try to explain. You've never given me that chance."

I sigh. "Okay, fine. One..." I think about the fact that I could be *pregnant*. Oh God. "I'll take a whisky."

He heads over to his office bar—of course his office has a bar—and pours me one.

While he's doing that, I reach into my purse, find the claddagh ring, and put it back on his table.

He hears, and turns to watch me.

"You're giving that back to me?"

"Yes."

"Keep it." he waves .

"I can't. It was your grandmother's. How could I keep it?! Really. It wouldn't be right."

Jack walks over to me with a drink.

"Woodford Special Edition, on the rocks," he says.

I'm reminded of how tall and imposing he is. In a suit, he makes my heart pound in a totally different way than when he was the ripped guy in board shorts.

"Damn that smells good," I say, as I take the rocks glass from him. I don't take a sip yet.

"Why don't we sit." He directs us to the couch in the corner of his office, overlooking Lake Michigan as well as the Chicago city skyline.

“Kevin is my biological son.” He swirls the ice cubes around in his glass.

“So you dated Yoshimi? Or you used to date her? I don’t understand. That’s quite the age gap.”

He looks me dead in the eye. “Yoshimi was always a good friend of my mom’s, before she passed. So, about fourteen years ago, Yoshimi was post divorce and trying to have a kid. She couldn’t find a sperm donor. Do you know how hard it is to find one? Especially, one who you like? Anyways, it was a strange conversation. But I ended up being the donor for her child, Kevin. So, Kevin is technically my son.”

My mouth falls open. “You didn’t...do it the old fashioned way?”

He lets out a hearty laugh. “As in did I have sex with Yoshimi?”

“Yes.”

“No we did not do it ‘the old fashioned way.’ We did it the artificial way.”

“Jack, I...”

“You?” He leans in and touches the top of my shoulder.

“I have to puke,” I say.

He quickly stands up, opens the door, and directs me to the women’s bathroom, where I proceed to puke up my breakfast.

*Uh-oh.*

I rifle through my purse until I find the test.

I can’t believe I haven’t considered this possibility until just yesterday when my sister suggested it.

But I take it, and then head out of the bathroom without seeing the result. Jack’s waiting with a concerned look when I come out.

“Everything okay? The whisky was old, yes, but that’s supposed to make it good.”

“It’s not the whisky.”

He opens the door back up and offers a polite smile to the receptionist, who is giving the two of us a puzzled look.

“By the way, how on earth are you the CEO right now?” I ask him, holding his eyes.

“I bought this company.”

He presses me gently against the wall once we’re in the door again, his hand resting on my hip.

“You *bought* this company?”

“Yeah.”

“When?”

“Two weeks ago when I found out they hired you.”

“How much did that cost?”

He shrugs. “Few hundred million.”

“You bought this company...to talk to me?”

“What else was I going to do, corner you on the street? Stalk you?” He grins. “Plus I like to do things with flair. Catch you off guard.”

“Well congrats. You definitely caught me off guard.”

He lifts his hand away from my hip, and spins away from me. The ring I left on his desk sparkles, reflecting the rising sun.

“Here’s the thing,” he says, staring out the window, probably to purposefully give me a full view of him and how sexy he looks in that suit. “You ignited something in me, Indy. Something I thought was dead and over. I never thought I’d love again.”

He picks up the ring, and walks over to me. “So if you don’t love me? If you can’t get past the fact that I told you a grey lie—that I planned to clarify—well, you might as well hang on to this.” He walks over and hands me the ring, placing it in my palm. “I’ve loved and lost before you. But after this heartbreak I think I’m going to cash in my chips. I don’t want

to try. You've wiggled your way under my skin. And I love you. I know that might sound insane."

"It doesn't," I mutter, a whisper so low he probably can't hear me.

"I love you, Indy," he continues. "So yeah, I bought this company to surprise you. Sorry for firing you at the other place, by the way. Last month I did a return-on-investment analysis and it turned out you were actually one of the most profitable employees we had. Way to bring in that NCAA deal. Very nice."

I feel my body start to tremble, overwhelmed by the emotions I'm feeling.

"I, I don't know what to say."

With a crooked index finger, he points my chin up at him. "Tell me you love me too. Because I sure as hell love you. And I want to do this dance. I'm serious. I was always trying to make you mine." He slips a hand down the side of my skirt. "What do you say Indy?"

I pull out the stick from my purse.

"I say we look at this together."

His eyes widen. "Holy shit. You're..."

We look at it together. The "+" sign comes through.

His jaw drops.

"It's yours," I tell him.

"I know," he says without hesitation.

"How do you know I didn't sleep with Jansen? I mean I didn't. We never got back together. I knew he was exaggerating the whole 'I was attacked by Jack's henchmen' thing. I never bought it. I was just shocked that he actually found out the truth about something."

Jack grins, his eyes darkening a smidge as he firms his grip on my ass. "I knew that you could never go back to Jansen once you got ruined by me."

I moan into his mouth as he kisses me.

Suddenly, he pulls away.

“I want to show you something.”

“Oh?”

He nods, and takes me to the elevator. We pass the crowded lobby and head to the elevators at the back. We wait for a few seconds before the doors slide open, revealing a polished interior with a gleaming brass panel of buttons. Jack presses the button for the 27th floor, and the elevator starts moving smoothly upwards.

As we rise, my heart races with anticipation. What could he possibly want to show me on the 27th floor?

The doors open with a soft ding, and Jack takes my hand, leading me down a corridor lined with sleek glass offices. I see a few people milling about, typing on their computers or talking on the phone.

Jack stops in front of a door with a shiny gold plaque that reads “Director of Marketing.”

“Jack, what is this?” I ask, looking up at him in confusion.

He grins at me, his blue eyes sparkling. “I’ve made you your own office, babe. Director of Marketing. You’re going to kill it.”

My eyes widen in disbelief. “What? Why?”

“Because you’re amazing,” he says simply. “Amelia—Indy. Meeting you was the first time I felt like I could move on in life, from my past. I know that sounds crazy. I know what we did felt, honestly? Fucking wrong at times. Marking you in front of your ex.”

“Jack...I mean...that was just hot.”

“But that’s just icing on the cake. Indy, you’ve made me excited for life again for the first time in a long time. Someone once told me ‘What are billions if you don’t have someone by your side to make memories?’ I’ll never meet your dad, Indy. But he raised one hell of a woman. And I love you.”

I run up to him and pull him into a tight hug.

Tears prick at the corners of my eyes as I take in the immaculate office space. A large desk sits in the center, flanked by a comfortable-looking chair and a sleek computer. A wall of windows lets in natural light, and I can see the cityscape stretching out below us.

“When did you do all this?” I ask, still in shock.

“Last weekend. I wanted to surprise you,” Jack says, grinning.

I throw my arms around his neck, pulling him into a passionate kiss. “Thank you,” I whisper against his lips. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Say you’ll take the job,” he says, a hint of a smirk playing at the corners of his mouth.

I laugh, pressing another kiss to his lips. “I accept. Director of Marketing it is.”

We stand there for a few moments, taking in the view and the newly created space that will be mine in just a few short months. And in that moment, I know that Jack is the one. The one who will stand by me through thick and thin, who will support me and love me, no matter what. And I can’t wait to start this new chapter of our lives together.

“You’re mine now, Indy. You’re having my kid. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“Good. I’m not letting you go. Ever. I love you. I really do.”

“I love you, too,” I say, as he puts his hand on my belly.

“Thank God you got hired here by the way. We really need someone who knows their shit.”

I sigh. “Life’s about to change.”

“Oh yes it is...how do you feel about private island weddings?”

## EPILOGUE

**T** *hree years Later*

AS AMELIA and I walk down the beach, we can hear the sound of our friends and family cheering for us. I turn to take in the scene, and I can see our loved ones standing on the sand, watching us with smiles on their faces.

I spot Yoshimi clapping enthusiastically. She's here with her son Kevin, who looks a bit out of place in his formal suit. Chester and Josefina, the head yogis from a yoga retreat, are also here, dressed in flowing white linen. And there's Amelia's sister Nora, who has flown in from across the country to be here for our special day.

As we approach the group, they all start to congratulate us and offer their well wishes. Yoshimi pulls me into a bear hug, telling me how proud she is of me. Kevin shakes my hand, looking a bit overwhelmed by the whole affair.

Chester and Josefina offer their congratulations, and Josefina even offers to lead us in a yoga session the next morning to help us start our married life off right. Nora hugs her sister tightly, telling her how beautiful she looks.

As we mingle with our loved ones, I feel so grateful for the people in my life. They've supported us through thick and thin, and now they're here to celebrate with us on our special day.

As the night wears on and the stars twinkle above us, Amelia and I dance together under the moonlight, surrounded by the people we love. And I know without a doubt that I've made the right choice in marrying this incredible woman.

As Amelia and I sit on the beach, sipping champagne and watching the waves roll in, we start to reminisce about the things that brought us together in the first place.

"You know," I say, "one of the things that really attracted me to you was your intelligence. I love how you're always reading and learning new things."

Amelia smiles at me. "And I was drawn to your ambition," she says. "You have such a drive to succeed, and it's inspiring."

We go back and forth, listing off all the things we love about each other. Amelia's kindness, my sense of humor, her sense of adventure, my loyalty. It feels good to remember what drew us to each other, and to appreciate each other anew.

Vanessa toddles over to us, her little arms held out for a hug. We scoop her up and hold her between us, watching as she giggles and babbles.

"I can't believe she's already two," Amelia says, a note of wonder in her voice. "It feels like just yesterday we were bringing her home from the hospital."

I nod, watching as Vanessa reaches out to touch the sand with chubby fingers. "She's growing up so fast," I say. "But I'm excited to see what kind of person she'll become."

Amelia leans her head on my shoulder, and we sit in companionable silence for a moment, just watching our daughter play.

"I'm so grateful for you," Amelia says, breaking the silence. "For our life together, and for Vanessa."

I squeeze her hand. "I feel the same way. I wouldn't want to do this with anyone else."

Yoshimi walks over toward us.



“You two can take a break for a while if you want. It’s your honeymoon.”

“Vanessa, Aunt Yoshimi is going to watch you for a while. Mommy and Daddy are going, ah...” Amelia gives me a look.

“We’re going to see some turtles. We’ll be right back.”

I take Amelia’s hand in mine, and she’s dying laughing as we walk back to the hotel.

“Turtles? Really? At this hour?”

“What else am I supposed to call a quickie?”

She laughs. “Who said anything about a quickie? Vanessa’s in good hands.”

I put my hand on Amelia’s shoulder and slide it down her back until I’m palming her cheek, and I squeeze. She looks up at me. “I’m in good hands too, apparently.”

I’m already getting turned on. My wife has the best ass ever.

Leaning toward her, I bite her ear a little. “Now that you mention it, I think your flying raven pose is getting a little rusty.”

“Oh, God Jack,” she whimpers. “But we did it last night.”

We turn, walking up the stairs, and I run my hand through her hair as I unlock the door. “I know. We haven’t even done it yet today. So you better run.”

She laughs as I wrap my hands around her belly from behind.

“Caught you, Indy,” I whisper, as I slip my hand slowly down her stomach until it lands on her clit. My hard length is already pressing up against her backside.

THE END

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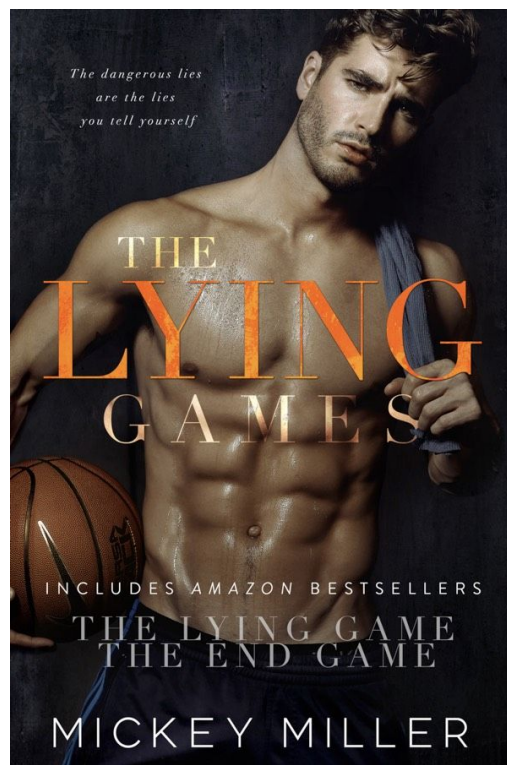
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## THE LYING GAME - PREVIEW

### *Carter*

“Where’s your leotard, man?” Chandler ribs me as we sit on our mats.

“Dude, screw you. You said this was going to release the tension. Not piss me off more.”

“It will. Fuck, I’m about to release some tension right now if I’m not careful.”

I follow Chandler’s gaze as his fiancée Amy walks into the room. The guy is so damn in love, and it’s completely disgusting.

Amy enters the room wearing hot pink yoga pants and a white top. She’s on the shorter side, maybe just a hair over five feet tall. When Chandler sees her, his face lights up and his entire demeanor changes.

“Hey Squirt,” he growls, ignoring the other people who are trying to come in as he blocks the entryway to give Amy a long kiss. He walks back over to me, and Amy sets up her mat directly in front of Chandler.

“Hi Carter,” she smiles. “I heard you have some tension you need to get worked out.”

I scoff and say jokingly, “You told her? That was confidential.”

Amy, on all fours, is making a very suggestive pose as she aims her ass right at Chandler, who is sitting cross-legged on

his mat.

He winks at me, leans over, and whispers. “We’re going to work out some tension later tonight. I can’t wait.”

I roll my eyes again, half at how pathetic Chandler seems, and half jealous that he’s so into Amy.

“Fuck you, dude, you’re disgusting,” I whisper.

Chandler just smirks. “She’s wearing the pink pants. That means she’s extra randy,” he says as though he’s a scientist who has made this painstaking discovery over years of experimentation.

I scrunch up my face. “Did you seriously just use the word ‘randy?’ And how the hell do you know that?”

He scrubs a hand across his jaw, and glances back and forth to make sure no one is within earshot.

“Pink is the same color as the pussy.”

“So because she’s wearing pink, she subconsciously is hornier. Got it. What did you get your degree in, again?”

“Psychology.”

“Oh.” I shrug. I don’t know. Maybe he has a point.

Space is tight in the studio, and Chandler and I are easily the tallest and biggest guys there. We barely fit on our mats. Chandler doesn’t seem to mind, as this means he gets an up close and personal view of Amy in her pink pants.

I get up to fix my mat, and when I sit back down I have to blink a few times when I notice who—also in pink pants—is directly in front of me.

“What the . . . Laces?”

Lacy is right in front of me. And Leotard Larry is to her left. “Oh my God. You do yoga?”

Before I can say anything, the instructor dims the lights and calls out. “Okay, class, let’s bring our hands to center.” Her voice is quite soothing.

Lacy turns toward the front of the class. I swear I see her sneak a glance at me by looking at the walled mirror in front of us. "Let's examine our intentions for the class," the teacher continues. "And also take a look at the baggage we're bringing today. Are we angry, sad, or tense? Let those negative emotions fall away."

I close my eyes and do my best to let the world fall by the wayside.

I open my eyes for just a moment, and I see her.

My heart starts to hammer.

This is bullshit. She was all worked up after she saw me in the shower yesterday. She was moaning in my goddamn ear while I was doing pushups, for goodness sake. And now she's got pink pants on, and she's hanging out with Larry again?

Just who does this Fabio motherfucker think he is?

My mind flashes back to straddling Lacy, my hard cock resting on her stomach. She knows what she does to me. But even more, she knows what I do to her.

So she wants to take that energy out with Leotard Boy? This is bullshit.

"Downward dog. Sir?" I feel a tap on the shoulder. It's the instructor. I notice everyone else is already out of the sitting position and into a downward dog.

"My bad," I say.

"You look tense. Let everything fall away. Your body will thank you."

She walks away, and as I get into position I do a double take, because Lacy is in downward dog three feet from my face.

Shaking her pink ass right in front of me.

I bite my lip, and my heart rate speeds as I get into downward dog.

Anger surges through me. "You've gotta be kidding me," I mutter to myself.

I glance over at Chandler, and he's sneaking a look at Amy, who is blowing kisses back to him. She even rolls her eyes back in her head like she's having an orgasm, and Chandler cracks up.

"Absolutely disgusting," I whisper.

He winks. "Just remember what I said about pink."

After sun salutations, we do a few warrior poses and then someone requests hip openers. "Of course," the instructor says. "Let's get into puppy pose, then."

She models the pose in the front of the class. I rub my left eye, because there is no other way to describe what she is doing—in my dirty mind—other than doggie-style sex practice pose.

*Puppy pose.*

Lacy breathes out in front of me, and the noise sounds starkly similar to how she moaned in my ear yesterday. Except this time, she's on her knees, sticking her ass straight up in the air, and putting her head low to the ground, arms out in front.

I feel my dick twitch, and that's when I realize this class is a total loss if what I wanted was to get the tension out. My balls will be aching even more after this.

I close my eyes and zone out, doing my absolute best to concentrate on the poses, and not the fact that Lacy is almost right on top of me in the cramped yoga studio.

Taking a deep breath, I try to lend my attention to the actual yoga exercises and be 'mindful.'

Or something.

But when I open eyes for a brief moment, she's staring back at me.

As soon as my gaze finds her, she turns back toward the front.



When class ends, Amy insists that we stay for the wine portion of the happy hour. I resist, but she insists, and next thing I know I have a glass of pinot noir in my hand and I'm introducing Amy to Lacy.

"Oh my gosh!" Amy says. "You have pink pants too." Amy glares at Chandler. "I told you pink was in."

Chandler chuckles. "You only wear pink when you are . . . in the mood."

"In the mood for what?" Lacy asks.

Amy sighs. "It's just Chandler's stupid theory. That I wear pink when I'm horny. It's a bunch of bull, though."

There's an awkward pause as everyone considers the implications of the pink. I nod, admiring that Amy doesn't hold anything back. I met her a few times over the past season, and even though I don't approve of my guy friends taking the plunge and getting married, Amy is so damn smiley and bubbly all the time that I can't help but like her.

"Anyways, how rude of me," I add. "Lacy, you should introduce your boyfriend. You guys, this is Leo."

"It's Lance, actually," he says, shaking hands with the group. He gestures to another guy standing next to him with black hair and eyes, also wearing full-on yoga pants. "And this is my—my friend, Joseph."

Joseph does a weird eye-roll, and shakes hands with the group too.

I notice an odd energy in the air, but I can't quite put my finger on it.

"So, Carter," Leo says. "It's Lacy's birthday this Friday."

"Oh. And?" I arch an eyebrow.

Joseph lets out a loud sigh, which is weird. What does he care that I don't give a shit about Lacy's birthday?

"And," Leotard continues, "we want to have a party for her with the rest of the dance crew."



“Great. It’s a free country, so you can definitely do that,” I inform him.

“Well,” he pauses, clearing his throat. “We want to use your penthouse. We figure it’s the best spot.”

“Oh my gosh!” Amy smiles, her eyes wide. “That would be so fun! You’re new to the city, right?”

Lacy nods.

“Wait,” Amy pokes Chandler. “What about the yacht you and Carter rented for the summer?”

“Um, you have a yacht?” Leotard echoes, jerking his head back.

I clench my fists. At the beginning of the summer, Chandler and I both got big contracts, and we decided to celebrate by going halves on a party yacht that we can use on Lake Michigan.

“We’re not using Empire for a silly little birthday party,” I say, using the proper name of the yacht. “It’s more for team events. You know, bonding and stuff.”

Lacy shoots me a look of death when I shut her down.

Amy gasps, putting her hand over her mouth. “That’s a great idea! We can invite the team! And Lance, how many dancers would be coming?”

“Well, we’d invite the whole summer camp. There are forty of us, although not all forty would come, probably.”

“Wait a minute,” I say, holding up a finger as my wheels start to turn. “Forty dancers—I’m guessing mostly women—on one boat?”

Lance nods. “Yes, I’m the only guy this summer.”

I slap my hand on the bar table. “You know what? That sounds fucking great, actually. I’ll invite the team, and maybe some other guys.” I slam my wine, and my mind races with possibilities all of the sudden.

“Lacy’s birthday is on June twenty-first. It’s the longest night of the summer. Fuck it, have everyone pack an overnight

bag! I'll hire a captain and crew for the night, and we'll bring this motherfucker out on the lake! It'll be a night to remember!"

"Oh my gosh, really? You'd pay for all that?" Amy asks.

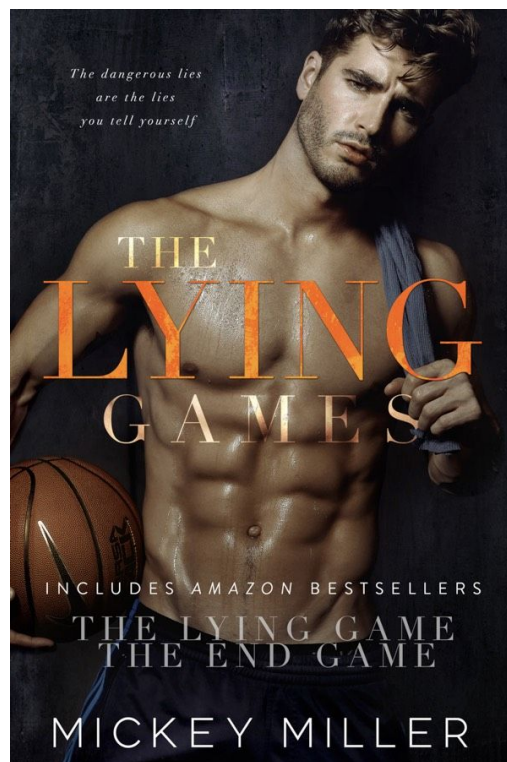
I wave her off. "Of course I will. You know, you're right. I've been a scrooge lately. Like you said, Lacy's new to the city. We should give her a proper welcome." A huge grin spreads across my face.

Lacy's face turns to a look of terror.

I wonder if she realizes what I just realized.

Amy leans on Chandler's shoulder, then speaks as though she's just read my mind. "Forty dancers. A dozen or so professional basketball players. Free drinks on a yacht all night. That sounds like paradise. What could go wrong?"

—  
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